



WORDS FROM THE WOOD

Week 6- 4th May 2020

Tips and ideas for learning and connecting outdoors during Covid-19...

Changing Nature...

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We are now in the month of May, the height of Spring and there have been dramatic changes in the nature around us in just one month. Where there were just buds on some trees, they are now in full leaf shading the ground beneath them. The tiny nettles and cow parsley that were just peeking up from the ground have now shot up to chest height, probably even taller than some of our youngest Forest Schoolers! This is one of the amazing parts of Forest School, that children and adults get to connect with nature all year round and learn the patterns of the seasons. It is also a way of appreciating that as things change in nature they also do in our personal life and we can draw parallels with this, making it easier to take on board those changes. We also learn that things will change again at some point and may bring new wonders and excitement. In this newsletter we will be looking at these changes in nature and life cycles. There are also some photos of the changes you may see in our Forest School sites. Many cultures celebrate this time of year and we have a bank holiday this Friday to celebrate the end of a terrible war, so maybe you can do some celebrating by getting outdoors and joining in with a 'Camp at Home' in your dens or tents.

Frog News

At our Ridgeway Forest School site, we are very lucky and there is a pond for us to go and spot frog spawn and tadpoles. The pond got very full this winter and just as we had to stop sessions, some frog spawn was spotted right in the middle of the pond. The tadpoles have now hatched and the farm owner has kindly sent some photos for us to see, they are looking quite big! Soon they may start to grow legs and lose their gills to become little froglets

At CSF school you have an amazing pond called a Spring pond as it is often dry and empty, but then when the winter rains come it fills up and although there is not lots of life in it, we have seen some big newts swimming around it in May. This winter it got VERY full and flooded the areas around it. I wonder what it is like now? Exciting News!- I have just heard that some tiny ducklings have been spotted in the pond. That is such a positive thing to have come as a result of it being quieter at school.

At St Amands you have a very healthy wildlife pond that has lots of life in it, those of you that are still going into school may have had a chance to take a peek and see what is there. If you can get to any pond or stream to take a look at what is in it here is an idea for turning a plastic bottle into a pond viewer, which cuts out the reflection and makes it easier to see. Or why don't you make a simple pond from an old bowl, this is a great wildlife addition to any garden or outdoor space and helps nature in so many ways.



How to build a mini wildlife pond

wildlife
watch



You will need:

- an old bucket or watertight container



- spade



- sand



- old bricks, rocks and pebbles



- native pondweed (eg. curled pondweed)



- 1 Dig a hole deep enough to hold your container.

- 2 Remove any sharp rocks and line bottom with sand.

- 3 Sit the container in the hole and fill the gaps with loose soil.

- 4 Build a pile of rocks and bricks in bottom, scatter pebbles and add pondweed. Fill with rainwater.

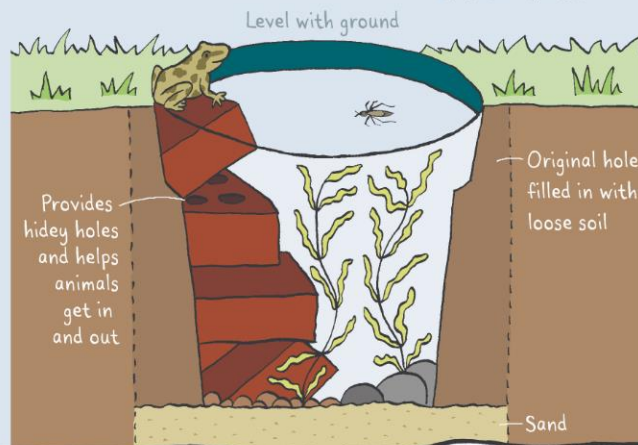


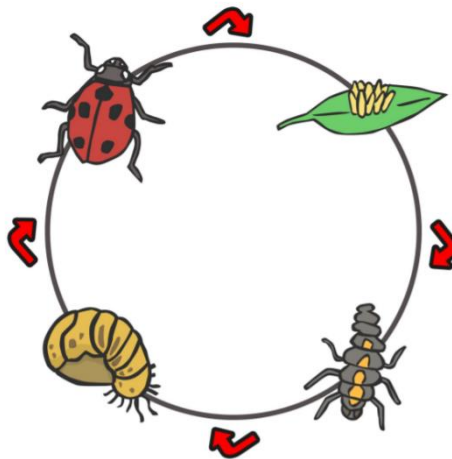
Illustration: Carinne Welch © Copyright Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts 2015

Butterflies & Ladybirds

The frog life cycle has frog spawn, which hatches into tadpoles, which turn into froglets and then the adult frogs, which then lay some more eggs.



Of course, other animals have interesting life cycles to observe too, such as the butterfly and ladybird. If you can keep an eye out on a patch of nettles you may now start to see the eggs and black caterpillars of the Peacock butterfly. Watch this fascinating video of the transformation of the black caterpillars into the beautiful peacock butterfly (not in kids version so there are adverts) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6Rz68DhgKc> I find ladybird larvae and their transformation amazing too, look at this picture from twinkle. Can you make your own life cycle picture on paper, wood or stones? Maybe you can do a different animal, like the duck.



What can you Spot?

There is so much wildlife to spot in May, much of which has travelled a long distance to get to our country. Keep an eye out for Swallows and Swifts, they fly all the way from Africa. I haven't seen any yet, but they have been spotted. Another bird that will have come back from Africa is the Cuckoo. It is famous for laying its eggs in other bird's nest, but did you know that they lay them in the same breed of bird's nest as they themselves were hatched in? If you are lucky you may hear it's call, which is similar to a wood pigeon but is actually the same sounds as it's name 'Cuc-koo'.

An animal you will probably not spot, but can help, is the hedgehog. The numbers of hedgehogs in the UK has gone down by a third since the millennium, which is incredible. This week is hedgehog awareness week so please do visit the website Hedgehog Street to find out what you can do. One of the best things you can do is make your garden accessible to hedgehogs as they need your garden for food. So, make sure you leave a gap under fences or even make a hole in it. Some people even make ramps to go up and over walls!

<https://www.hedgehogstreet.org/about-our-hedgehog-street-campaign/>

I am going to put out a footprint tunnel and some cat food to see if the hedgehogs that come into our garden are around, they may even have a nest and babies in the hedgehog house we made, but we mustn't look or disturb them as the babies will die. Plants to look out for on a walk, garden or green space are the white cow parsley; yellow buttercups, foxgloves; red poppies and the big daisy called the Ox-eye daisy. See the Buttercup below, which is great for seeing the different parts of the flower and the Cow Parsley, which is easily mixed up with the poisonous Hemlock.



If you want to capture the beauty of some of these flowers that are plentiful then you can press them. For this you will need a newspaper or kitchen roll and a heavy book. Open the book at the end and lay a layer of newspaper on it, then lay your flowers on top, spreading them as flat as possible. Next you need another layer of newspaper on top and then close the book, making sure the heavy part is the top part to apply pressure. After 3 weeks you can take a look to see what has worked and use them to make cards or bookmarks.

Dandelion Trumpet

The dandelions are still around and are a great example of a quick flower life cycle. At the moment you can easily see several parts of their life cycle, all at the same time- the emerging plant; the flower and then the seed head, often called a dandelion 'clock', because people like to think you can tell the time by the number of times you have to blow to get all the seeds off. In my video this week I look at the dandelions in my garden and show you how to make a dandelion trumpet, great fun when it works, but don't be disappointed if it doesn't, I have made many that don't! Just try another one, maybe slightly differently.

https://youtu.be/amA_8cabqOg

What changes at Forest School?

All of our Forest School sites have not been visited by us for 6 weeks now and you can see how big the plants have grown and how the light has changed with more leaves on the trees in the photos below for CSF Forest School. Can you spot the ducklings and look how much water is still in the pond?





Don't forget to come on holiday with us this bank holiday Friday and camp at home using the den ideas from last week. You can pop up photos on our public Facebook page Oak Leaf Forest School or join our private one Words from the Woods...

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