

NATURE DISCOVERY DAYS

LAND

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WHY?

'And God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.' Genesis 1:31

Senegalese conservationist Baba Dioum has said, *'In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught.'* Sharing nature with people and forming connections which lead them to love the natural world themselves, is a key part of conservation, which will build up a future generation of people who care for God's earth.

Children love to get in touch with nature and this has been proved to have a positive impact on their spiritual, mental and physical wellbeing. Learning about familiar plants and animals is a great way to make this connection, so read on for some ideas for a 'discovery' morning or day.

HOW?

A '**discovery session**' is a fun way to spend time finding out about God's amazing creation whilst exploring the hidden corners of your churchyard or other outdoor space. There's no wrong way to go about discovery. You might bring magnifying glasses or field guides to share. Your finds can be recorded to contribute to a formal survey or you can just chat about your results. If you are going to record it try to identify the species (e.g., a 'robin' rather than a 'bird'). Observing a bird creates an opportunity for a conversation about what it is likely to be as you look for and record features which will help identify it, even if you can't work out what it is!



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Easy surveys to do with children include:

- Birds. The RSPB produces a step-by-step guide aimed at helping children and families enjoy a citizen science wildlife survey, or get involved in the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch (annually in January): <https://www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/for-families/family-wild-challenge/activities/do-a-wildlife-survey/>
<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/>
- A butterfly survey with Butterfly Conservation (monthly throughout the year): <https://www.gardenbutterflysurvey.org/>
- Spend ten minutes sitting and looking at a flower to identify the bumblebees and pollinators which visit, and send your results to the UK Pollination Monitoring Scheme or Blooms for Bees: <https://ukpoms.org.uk/>
<http://www.bloomsforbees.co.uk/>
- Trees are an easy place to start – they don't tend to run away whilst you are looking at your guide! The Woodland Trust produces a series of handy swatch pocket books to help identify a range of wildlife and plants including birds, butterflies, trees and 'poos and clues'. There is also an app to help you identify trees: <https://shop.woodlandtrust.org.uk/swatch-guide-books>
<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/how-to-identify-trees/>
- For a more wide-ranging survey, Caring for God's Acre produces a starter pack with information about the species you are likely to discover: <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/starterguide-2/>



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Some other 'discovery session' activities to try include the following:-

MINI BEAST SAFARI

Use a spade to dig up some earth and place it in a tray or jam jar and then examine for minibeasts. Encourage participants to look for more minibeasts under stones, logs and hedges, and along walls and then share them with the group: <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/15-Wildlife-Safari-Mini-beast-Mania.pdf>

COLOUR HUNT

We more readily or easily come across things if we are looking for colours, not objects. Either invite everyone to look for all the colours of the rainbow or give everyone a different colour to find. Ask them to share what they have discovered: <https://theimaginationtree.com/paint-chip-colour-scavenger-hunt/>

MAKE THINGS

You could create a bug mansion together for the church garden or churchyard: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-bug-mansion>

or a bee hotel to take home:

<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/bees/make-a-bee-house>

or a Toad Abode:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/nature-on-your-doorstep/garden-activities/makeafrogandtoadabode/>

WATCHING

Encourage a group to lie down in a circle and watch the trees, sky, birds and insects. After a while, ask everyone to think of a word to describe what they see, hear, smell or touch.



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UNNATURAL OBJECTS TRAIL

Create a trail around an outdoor space and place 'unnatural objects' that you wouldn't expect to find in that area such as an orange, plastic toys or some ribbon. Choose some objects which are brightly coloured and easy to see, as well as some which are brown or green and harder to find. Send the children off in pairs at intervals and ask them to count how many objects they find. If you do this with enough items, it's likely they won't find them all!

MORE FORMAL GROUPS

If you are hosting a more formal group such as a school or perhaps Guides or Scouts working towards badges, do look at the A Rocha UK and Caring For God's Acre education packs. These are aimed at helping children aged 3 – 14 years to enjoy exploring nature and to care for God's planet:

<https://arocha.org.uk/education-plans/>

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/education-pack/>

LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

Richard Louv has written a thought-provoking book entitled *Last Child in the Woods*, published by Atlantic Books in 2005. Richard directly links the lack of nature in the lives of today's wired generation (he calls it 'nature-deficit') to some of the most disturbing childhood trends, such as the rise in obesity, attention disorders, and depression: <http://richardlouv.com/books/last-child/>

The Field Studies Council produces a range of inexpensive short identification guides to help you spot things – whether at home or the beach, on the moors, or in burial grounds: <https://www.field-studies-council.org/product-category/publications/>