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Survey report: Athersley South P.S. A Healthy Biodiversity

Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Species and Habitats (see website) are in **bold** print and suggested nest boxes/feeding stations to be placed in the school grounds are in **red** print.

To Linda, Emma and Sarah,

Thank you for a warm welcome to your lovely school on a cold, windy day. The school grounds are already encouraging wildlife. Despite a near gale force wind a variety of common birds were seen feeding in the young, but maturing **woodland** surrounding the grounds. Trees and shrubs such as Elderberry, Ivy, Wild Rose, Gelder Rose, Hazel, Larch, Oak, Apple, Rowan, Field Maple, Cherry and Alder are providing a rich food source of **invertebrates**, seeds and berries for birds and small mammals. The school grounds are next to those of Richard Newman PS which was one of our pilot schools and so a potential wildlife relationship with them could be developed.

My observations of the school grounds with possible improvements for wildlife are as follows:

1. The School Entrance and Car Park Area.

The perimeter fence nearest to the main entrance (car park area) has an area of Wild Rose, Elderberry and Sycamore where **2 Tree Sparrow** nest boxes could be placed. The undergrowth in this area could be allowed to develop to provide food for birds and small mammals. This would not look untidy if the grass cutting outside it continued. In fact it would encourage wild flowers. The poplar with ivy would be a good place for **1 Tree Sparrow** nest box.

Further along the fence line is a Russian Vine which is excellent for nesting Blackbirds. The bare fencing has ivy at the base and this should be allowed to develop to encourage **invertebrates** and to make it visually more acceptable. **Invertebrates** are the bedrock of a healthy biodiversity.

The large Black Poplars (+ 1 Lombardy Poplar) behind the caretaker's house (play group) could accommodate **8 Bat Boxes**.

2. The Playgroup Area.

The Pallets and logs in the **woodland** area near the Playgroup could be used to build 2 insect 'hotels'. One could be left to recover while the other is studied. It is important to preserve the wildness of this **woodland** area by encouraging children to stay on footpaths to study trees and plants. There are already Wood AVens in this area and so additional **English Bluebells**, wood anemones, snowdrops etc would create a natural **woodland** flower carpet. These can be bought cheaply on the internet.

3. The Foundation Year.

The 'Enchanted Hollow' is a wonderful discovery area for children and is obviously used daily in good weather. Because of this little further development can take place here. The trees and shrubs provide a rich food source for birds but nesting will be extremely difficult given the amount of activity taking place.

A Bee Box could be placed in the sensory herb garden. Lavender could be grown to attract bees and butterflies.

However, the area beyond the sensory herb garden and past the footpath is ideal to develop. Here a **bird feeding station** could be placed on the grass next to the trees, thereby giving an escape route from Sparrow Hawks. Children could observe from the fence line. Away from the feeding station up to **4 Tree Sparrow** nest boxes could be placed. One of them, perhaps the nearest to the school building, could have a wireless **camera** installed to allow children to view and record nesting progress. We need to look into the financial viability of this item.

4. The School Field.

The wild flower meadow is an exciting innovation and it should be allowed to grow and develop in the Spring and Summer. One small part of it could be re-dug, removing the top soil and adding sand. This would provide the poor soil environment that some smaller wild flowers need. Re-seeding this area could then take place. We noticed 1 ragwort plant which may need removing, although there is no significant evidence that it harms humans. It is poisonous to horses. **4 Bee boxes** could be placed in this **meadow**.

The Eastern side of the school field has a young mixed deciduous woodland in which **5 Tree Sparrow boxes** could be installed and **4 Bee boxes** placed. Also **2 Hedgehog boxes** could be placed. Spaces under the perimeter fencing need to be made to allow **Hedgehogs** to enter and leave the school grounds. **Hedgehog** numbers have plummeted from 30 million to 1 million in the last 50 years and the school could be involved with a local community campaign to help them.

An Apple Tree is providing much food for Blackbirds and Thrushes. No herbicides are being used and so **Song Thrushes** could be using these excellent school grounds.

The newly planted **woodland** areas (Elm Project) are excellent innovations and the Scrap Shed area is a well planned area for study. Insect 'hotels' could be built here.

The pond area is not ideal for learning. However some water meadow plants could be grown here. Consideration could be given to the creation of a small marshy area in the wild flower meadow.

A **Bee box** could be placed in the Key Stage 1 vegetable garden.

A House Sparrow (now a red listed bird) colony nest box could be placed on the school building.

Regarding the edges of the school field consideration could be given to the new grass cutting regimes being adopted by Barnsley Council (contact Trevor Mayne, Biodiversity Officer at TrevorMayne@barnsley.gov.uk . These will help wildlife without interfering with play areas.

We would provide all new nest boxes free of charge, present them at a whole school assembly, help with their installation, set up a mapping and recording system and follow up with nest box cleaning and recording nest box contents in the Autumn. All activities will involve children and the school community. Please share this report with appropriate staff, governors and children and let us know whether you wish us to proceed.

Thank you once again for a lovely, blustery morning in your happy school. I look forward to seeing you on Tuesday 4th February 9.30am.

Kind regards,

Colin Graham (BBT and Biodiversity in Schools)