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Survey Report

**Birdwell Primary School**

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. Some species and items will be in both **red** and **bold**.

Dear Julie,

Thank you for a warm welcome to your school. It was much appreciated.

In terms of biodiversity your school grounds show much exciting promise with **Woodland**, **Grassland**, **Deadwood** and **Hedgerow** habitats. The only habitat missing is **Wetland** and we should discuss the possibility of a pond, maybe placed in between the brick planter and **Woodland** 1. This way it could be topped up with water from the school building. Many schools have them and we have installed 5 **ponds** recently with **pond** dipping platforms and, in some cases, fencing. We have 3 more **ponds** in the pipeline. Everything is funded by us except the fencing, which, in my opinion, is not really needed and only creates an unnecessary extra hazard. However some schools feel safer with them. The **ponds** are carefully thought out and not a danger. The school would have to have a policy of supervised quiet, small group study activity when using the **pond**. Work could involve the National Curriculum objectives outlined in our Advice Booklet.

Following on from this theme the school needs to consider using some of the **woodland** areas for supervised, quiet, small group study activities by limiting access so that species can feed and breed. **Woodland** flower species (eg **English Bluebells**, Wood Anemones, and snowdrops) would be allowed to develop and children could study pollination and flower structure at first hand. Some **woodland** areas would remain as constructive 'play' areas. If I sound a bit 'tasky' regarding these issues please forgive me. I am a former head teacher and teacher trainer who loves to develop/enhance children's learning possibilities.

As we moved into the playground area **House Sparrows** (a red listed species) could be heard distantly. For this reason we would recommend installing a **colony nest box** for them on the Eastern side of the main building. It was good to hear that House Martins (amber listed species) also nested on the school building.

As we moved to the large, rectangular school field it was immediately apparent that ground maintenance contractors have used herbicide sprays extensively to edge the

field with bare earth. There is no good reason for this and **grass and wild flowers** should be left to grow up to a metre from the field edge. We could, after discussions with you, select certain parts of the field edge, dig out the top soil and grass, and re-seed with a pure wild flower mix (3kg cost £300, which we would provide). Children could be involved with sowing the seed (Autumn is the best time). 6 Solitary Bee boxes could be placed in the wild flower areas. The world's population of **bees** is rapidly declining and governments are very concerned about the future pollination of our crops.

3 **Tree Sparrow** and 2 Solitary **Bee** nest boxes could be placed in **Woodland 1** next to the car park.

3 **Tree Sparrow** and 2 **Bee** boxes could be placed in **Woodland 2** next to the car park gate.

The main tree species in these 2 woodlands are Alder and Silver Birch. Goldfinches were feeding in the Alder Trees. A caterpillar food source essential for nesting birds would be in the **woodland** next to the school field where Oak trees are thriving.

6 **Bat** boxes could be placed on the two large Beech trees on the school field.

In **Woodland 3** (hide and feeding station area) an **insect** hotel could be constructed in the corner, using wooden pallets as a base. The top soil and turfs cut away from the **Wild Flower** areas could be used in and around this structure.



Any **Deadwood** in the school grounds should be used to create habitat for invertebrates which are the bedrock of a healthy biodiversity. Large fallen trees should be left to rot naturally. Because of the proximity of the feeding station no bird nest boxes should be placed here. However 2 **Bee** boxes could be placed.

**Woodland 4** has an important Hawthorne and Elderberry **Hedgerow** habitat on the field perimeter. 2 Tree Sparrow nest boxes could be placed here. Consideration should be given to planting a significant number of native **English Bluebells** in several of the **woodlands**. We could finance this item. Our Bluebells are under severe threat of hybridisation with Spanish bluebells bought in garden centres.

**Hedgehogs** have declined in numbers from 30 million in the 1950s to 1 million today. They are in danger of extinction and many of our schools are thinking of running local community campaigns to help this iconic British species. They are largely a suburban species and school grounds can be ideal places for them to forage and hibernate. However, the fencing and walling of both school grounds and nearby gardens is not helpful to a creature that can travel 2kms per night in search of food. Consideration could be given to creating intermittent spaces under the fence line so that **Hedgehogs** can travel freely to new feeding areas. If this was done we could provide **3 Hedgehog boxes** to be placed in appropriate areas on the school perimeter. There are already long grass areas where Hedgehogs may be hibernating. These should be maintained.

**Woodland 5** is a wonderfully 'wild' area with Beech and Ash trees. **4 Tree Sparrow, 2 Bee** and one of the **Hedgehog** boxes could be placed here. Leaving thistles and nettles to grow will help butterflies as will the planting of buddleia plants. The use of a moth trap available to us may be of some interest to children.

The 'Forest School' area has some good wildlife possibilities away from the central area where children congregate. Here there are small trees (one of which is Sweet Chestnut), Blackthorn, Hawthorn and Bramble shrubs. It is a good area for **Hedgehog** hibernation. **4 Tree Sparrow, 6 Bee** and one of the **Hedgehog boxes** could be placed here.

## **Conclusion**

We would provide all new nest boxes, pond, wild flower seeds, Bluebell bulbs free of charge, present them at a whole school assembly (not the pond!), 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.

Maintaining a healthy biodiversity is probably the most important challenge human beings will need to face in the future.

Once again, thank you for welcoming me to your school. We look forward to working with you.

Kind regards,  
Colin Graham  
Project Leader.  
Biodiversity in Schools