

RESEARCH AIM:

What impact do school visits to wetland centres have on children's attitudes to nature?

Method

- Researching 500 pupils aged 8-9 at 20 schools who are visiting a WWT Centre and doing a pond dipping session
- Pupils tracked at five points, from before the visit to one year after
- We used a combination of paper surveys, focus groups and interview
- We worked with a mix of schools, with a range of levels of deprivation and some rural, some urban.

Findings

MEMORY & ENJOYMENT OF VISIT

87% of pupils said the visit was fun, 84% agreed it was interesting

91% children said they remembered their visit after twelve months

"This is the best trip I've been on in my whole life."
PUPIL, SLIMBRIDGE

KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

89% of pupils said they'd learnt something new

Many children could remember how to pond dip and the names of some of the species they saw during their visit.

"To see them in their habitat rather than just imagining them in your head, now we can remember it."
PUPIL, MARTIN MERE

UNDERSTANDING & APPRECIATION OF NATURE

"[Wildlife is] like a jungle full of animals like they are all dangerous."
PUPIL, LONDON

Children from suburban or rural locations seemed much more likely to have regular interaction with and appreciation of local British wildlife.

Those in urban areas were more likely to talk about exotic or endangered species.

"My nan caught two hedgehogs and we fed them."
PUPIL, MARTIN MERE

The visit helped pupils develop a greater awareness around how to interact with animals, especially how to approach and feed birds. It also helped many overcome a fear of the unknown.

INTEREST & ATTITUDES TO NATURE

Children attending high free school meal schools appear to have marginally greater changes in terms of attitudes towards wildlife and the natural world in the short term. But this is a temporary shift, with attitudes and opinions returning to pre-visit levels after six months.

"I don't think one trip on its own is going to change children's views...changing someone's attitude in one sitting isn't going to happen."
TEACHER, MARTIN MERE

"Before I went on the trip to the Wetlands Centre I didn't really care that much but after seeing all the pretty things that nature holds it made me have a bit more understanding about nature."
PUPIL, MARTIN MERE

"It was interesting but it didn't make me feel any different about wildlife."
PUPIL, MARTIN MERE

There is little long term evidence that pupils are more interested in helping nature after their visit.

This suggests we are not successfully communicating our conservation messages.

After 12 months 62% of children said their visit had made them more interested in wildlife and nature.

THE NEXT PETER SCOTT?

One or two children in each class seem to have had a genuine change of heart around wildlife as a result of the visit.

"I want to understand what nature's really like... I want to start looking after nature a bit more."
PUPIL, LONDON

"I didn't like wildlife before because I didn't know what they do. Once I'd seen them... I want to learn more about them."
PUPIL, MARTIN MERE

SUSTAINING IMPACT

Big, weird or new experiences make the strongest memories
Children seem to sustain interest and activity relating to nature in the longer term more when:

- They remember the visit
 - They do related work back in class
 - They do activities relating to nature at home or in their neighbourhood.
- This happens less for children from poorer backgrounds or urban areas.