



Marshall's Arm

The woodland, streams and meadows of the nature reserve offer wonderful opportunities for pre-school children to experience the natural world of the great outdoors.

This environment provides natural challenges : slopes, hills, steps, bridges, tree roots and branches encourage children's confidence in their physical skills.

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Allow time during any visit for children to make their own discoveries and to share them with the group. Children with special needs will enjoy and learn from the outdoor experience. Heron's Gate at the bottom of Saxon's Lane provides wheelchair access. (RADAR key required)

Help children to respect the country-side code by using the picture cards (see Nature Detectives material) to record their observations, rather than picking flowering plants.



Using the senses

*On each visit the children can be encouraged to use **all** of their senses.*

LISTENING

Choose a spot, close your eyes and listen to the symphony of sounds around you;

the wind in the leaves, the rustle of the gentle breeze, the fury of a stormy day or the stillness of a calm day,

the songs of birds in the trees, some sweet sounding some harsh, the drumming of the woodpecker, cawing of the crows, the chattering magpies and the 'teacher, teacher' call of the tits,

the water in the stream as it trickles through the woods or splashes over the weir.

On a misty day the sounds will be muffled and eerie

TASTING

Pick blackberries. Wash them when back at setting and eat as they are or stewed with apple.

Drink elderflower cordial.

Taste wild garlic leaves .

Talk about bees and make honey sandwiches.

LOOKING

Look up at the sky and watch the clouds, their shapes, colours and their speed as they travel. Can you see a rainbow?

Stand under different trees, are they tall and thin or wide and bushy?

Look up through the branches, watch the leaves as they move in the breeze and see the layers of colours.



Look for shadows, cast by the trees or by your body as you walk through the woods.

On a misty day, the woodlands will take on a different appearance

SMELLING

After a shower of rain the woods will smell earthy.

Rubbing leaves between your fingers will release their herby smell. (Try elder)

Smell the different woodland flowers especially the pungent wild garlic.

Moss and Fungi smell damp and musty.

TOUCHING

Feel the wind in your hair and blowing across your skin.

Let the rain or drizzle fall on your hands and face.

Feel the warmth of the sun or the sharpness of the frost

Catch snowflakes in your hands.

Feel the bark of trees, the smoothness of the beech , the rough chestnuts and the ridged oak.

Are there tree roots showing? Trace them down into the ground with your hand.

Explore the textures of different types of leaves. Are they smooth and glossy , rough or hairy?

Gently stroke the soft mosses.

Let mini-beasts walk across the back of your hand and feel them tickle your skin.

Feel the changes in temperature as you go through the wood.

SEASONAL WALKS

SPRING

I Spy New Growth

- On your walk look out for signs of green shoots pushing through the dull, brown soil and first buds and fresh green leaves bursting on the twigs as Spring comes to the woodland.
- Identify the leaves, flowers and blossom that you might see today (<http://www.naturedetectives.org.uk> for Spring flowers ; leaf hunt)

Birds

The woods are full of birds as you will hear and hopefully see. Watch for **jays**, **blackcaps**, **wrens**, **bullfinches** and flocks of **long tailed tits**. Near the water and wetlands look out for **wagtails** and **yellow hammers**. In the reeds you may see **buntings** and **warblers**. You might be lucky enough to spy a **kingfisher** darting along the river bank, an unmistakable flash of blue and orange.

(lots of resources here <http://www.rspb.org.uk/youth/learn/earlyyears/>)

Spring is a very busy time for birds so watch for the following indications

- Birds collecting materials for nesting, twigs, dry grasses, moss, cobwebs etc.
- Birds darting back and forth in the tree tops, building their nests.
- Birds catching insects or gathering seeds to feed their young.
- Ducks on the water with their ducklings, searching for food.
Look for swans, mallards, coots and moorhens.
- Some of our dead trees have holes where woodpeckers have made their homes. You may be lucky enough to see a great spotted woodpecker taking food to its chicks.
- Look out for broken, empty egg shells where chicks have hatched.
- Swans may be building large nests in the reeds.

Bird's nest challenge

Collect a variety of natural materials from the forest floor. Use these back at your setting to build a bird's nest.

Frogs and Toads

Now is the time to look for frogs hopping and toads creeping across the footpaths as they make their way to the river. Walking near the boggy ponds, look out for frog spawn and tadpoles. Toad spawn is laid in ribbons unlike the clumps of frog spawn. Watch the tadpoles wriggle and the frogs' strong back legs as they swim. (*Nature detectives - There is a picture of a frog to colour.*)

Sing along to "Five little speckled frogs".

Butterflies

Some butterflies can be seen in the reserve in Spring.

Look out for :

- Small tortoiseshell, their caterpillars can be found on stinging nettles.
- Comma, similar to the tortoiseshell but with ragged wings.
- Speckled Wood, a brown butterfly whose caterpillars eat grasses.
- Holly blue whose caterpillars eat holly and ivy flower buds.

Other Minibeasts

Have a minibeast hunt.

(SEE http://www.naturedetectives.org.uk/download/hunt_minibeasts)

Squirrels

Look and listen for scampering grey squirrels as you walk through the woods. They will be hunting for buried acorns and scraps of food left from picnics.

You could sing a circle song to the tune of "The farmer's in his den".

The squirrels in his drey

The squirrels in his drey

E-i-addy-oh

The squirrels in his drey.

- The squirrel wants a doe
- The wife wants some kits
- The kits want some nuts.
- We all hide the nuts.
- We all go to sleep.
- We all wake up to play.

A Squirrel

Whisky Frisky, Hipperty hop,

Up He goes to the tree top.

Whirly twirly round and round,

Down he scampers to the ground.

Furly, curly, what a tail,

Tall as a feather, broad as a sail.

Where's his supper? in it's shell

Snappy, cracky, out it fell.

Back at your setting

- Talk about the colours and shapes of the flowers you saw on your identification sheet
- Creative art work using paint and collage materials in the spring colours of yellow and green.
- Put out nesting materials as well as bird food.
- Grow sprouting seeds. e.g. alfalfa, mung beans, cress, which can then be eaten.
- Make a 'Frog life cycle' zig-zag book.
(<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/amphibians/books/froglifecycle/>)
- Make bird finger puppets to accompany “Two little dicky birds.”
(See <http://www.gruffalo.com/section.php?section=html/gamesandactivities.html>)
- Build a bird's nest using clay or plasticine instead of mud.

*(Lots of really good downloadable material at
www.naturedetectives.org.uk)*

*and ,
froggy stuff at
<http://www.kidzone.ws/lw/frogs/activities-books.htm>*

Bluebell Walk

Our woods are at their most beautiful in May when a stunning carpet of bluebells adds new colour and perfume to your walk.

Suggest to the children that they look at a **whole bank** of bluebells taking in a view of blues and greens as the flowers cling to the banks under the trees. Notice the dappled light as the breeze blows through the leaves.

Taking photographs would provide a useful reminder as well as an addition to a wild life diary.

The children could look closely at each flower and leaf. A magnifying glass would be helpful.

Notice that the flowers are growing at the top of a long, thin, leafless stem and that they droop from one side and grow in pairs on the stem.

Most of the flowers that you see will be blue but look out for white and sometimes pinkish ones.

The tube shaped flowers curl back to form the bell shape that gives it its name. How many petals are there?

Look inside the flower to see the 3 short and 3 long stamens with cream anthers covered in dusty pollen.

The leaves, which grow from the base, are glossy and strap - like, some standing upright but others bent over.

The bluebell grows from a bulb under the ground. Try not to trample through the flowers as this will damage them. Do not pick them or pull them up because we want to enjoy seeing them grow next year.

Can you smell a faint scent from the flowers and do you like it?
(*There is a picture of a bluebell to colour in Nature Detectives*)

A game to play in the woods.

“In and out the dusty bluebells.”

(*Outdoor Fun and Games for Kids. Jane Kemp and Clare Waters.p16*)

Back at setting.

- Blue and green paints and collage materials for a group picture.
- 3-d bluebell using egg box cups cut as flowers, drinking straw stems and card for stems. Provide the materials and let the children work out the method.
- Make bluebell hats.



Story Trail



The reserve makes an atmospheric venue for a story trail.

A few suggestions are given here

but there will be many others that you

and the children will discover as you explore for yourselves.

The Woodland

Owl Babies by Martin Waddell and Patrick Benson.

"I'm a wide eyed owl" poem

The Bridges

The Three Billy Goats Gruff. Traditional

The Log Pile

Five little speckled frogs.

The Steps

Song **"The grand old Duke of York"** Traditional.

Collect wood and sticks to play as an accompaniment while you march.

The Bog

Room on a broom by Julia Donaldson and Alex Scheffler.

The Bog Baby by Jeanne Willis and Gwen Millward.

In the deep wood

The Gruffalo by Julia Donaldson and Alex Scheffler

Game: **What Time is it, Mr. Wolf?** Traditional.

The Little Mouse, the Red Ripe Strawberry, and the Big Hungry Bear by Don Wood

On the meadow

The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle.

Poem: **Little Arabella Miller.**

Song: **Over in the meadow** by Olive A Wadsworth.

We're Going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury

By the Arm (near the dipping platform)

Rosie and Jim by Ragdoll Productions (UK) Limited.

Song: **Row Row Row Your Boat.**

Five little ducks.

Down the stream the swans all glide



Suggestions for props and visual aids

- Puppets.
- Masks.
- Dressing up clothes.
- Water trays for toy frogs and/or ducks.
- Musical instruments.

Gruffalo Masks and other activities at

<http://www.gruffalo.com/section.php?s=html/gamesandactivities.html>

Very Hungry Caterpillar Resources at

<http://www.kiddyhouse.com/Teachers/Literature/huncater.html>



Summer

Start your summer walk with a game in the woods or meadow, with the whole group or in teams. Talk about the colours you see around and decide which to chose. e.g. yellow.

“What is Yellow” (To the tune of Frere Jacques.)

Leader: What is yellow?

All: What is yellow?

Leader: Can you tell?

All: Can you tell?

Leader: Buttercups and sunshine,

All: Buttercups and sunshine,

Leader: Dandelions as well,

All: Dandelions as well.

Next chose another colour to search for or, as a variation, try textures, sounds or smells.

ACTIVITIES

Collect leaves, twigs, seeds, mosses, grass etc in an egg box to take back to your setting. Talk about the different textures, let the children find their own descriptions as well as introducing new words.

Mini-beast hunt

Encourage an interest in tiny creatures by hunting and spotting as many different ones within a set time.

Talk about the creatures you might find and make the sounds or do the actions for each.

Use the Mini-beast chart (*Nature detectives*) to record your finds.

Use magnifying pots to view your finds more closely before returning them to where you found them.

(Use Nature Detective identification sheets from
www.naturedetectives.org.uk)

Songs and rhymes

(from This Little Puffin)

Incy wincy spider.

Here is the bee hive.

Little Arabella Miller.

Under a stone where the earth was firm.

A tiny tiny worm.

Encourage children to watch

(When the opportunity arises)

- a spider spinning its web
- flies trapped in web
- a ladybird as it lifts its wings to fly away
- how woodlice curl up when touched
- ants carrying their eggs
- a wriggling worm
- snails peeping out of their shells and crawling along leaving a silvery trail
- the beating wings of butterflies.



Let the children gently feel the creatures as they crawl across their hands. Listen to the sounds they make, wasps and bees humming, snails crunching leaves and flies buzzing.

Marshall's Arm has many different species of dragonfly and damselfly, including the rare hairy dragonfly. Look out for these around the grass and meadowland. In the damper areas you may find amber snails, marsh damselflies and fen spiders.

Pond dip

- An adult could use a shallow tray to fill with pond water and using a net skim just under the surface of the pond, tip the trapped creatures into the tray. The children can then observe their catch. Amongst your finds may be water beetles and water boatmen skidding across the surface, water snails and ram's horn snails, damselfly nymphs, leeches which stretch and shrink as they move, as well as tiny water fleas and mites.
- The children could draw what they have found and imitate the actions.
- Carefully return the weeds, creatures and water back into the pond.

Plants

- A variety of grasses can be found on the meadow in summer such as meadow foxtail and Yorkshire fog. Look out for yarrow with its clusters of small creamy coloured flower heads, meadow buttercup and clover. In the damper areas lady's smock, greater willowherb which has hairy stems and leaves as well as purple pink flowers can be found. Sedges, reedmace, the tall pendulous sedge and bulrush border the river and Arm.

Birds

- Watch them having dust baths or water baths and drinking water.
- Cormorants, herons and kingfishers swooping and diving into the water to feed.
- Ducks floating on the water dipping their bills to feed or diving under water.
- Wagtails and yellow hammers enjoy the meadow margins and water's edge.
- Swans, moorhens and coots live in the open water.
- Many birds can be seen roosting or nesting in the reeds.

Action rhyme

Here is the heron straight and tall, nodding his head above us all,
Here is the long snake on the ground, wriggling over the stones he found
Here are the birds that fly so high, spreading their wings across the sky
Here is the spider scurrying round, treading so lightly on the ground
Here is the hedgehog, prickly, small curling himself into a ball .
Here are the children fast asleep.
And here at night the owls do peep.

More songs and rhymes from “This Little Puffin”.

Two little dicky-birds.

Two little blackbirds.

I have made a pretty nest.

I’m a wide eyed owl.

Back at your setting

- Finger- mouse puppet.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/mistermaker/makes/fingerpuppet/>
- Egg box caterpillar or spider.
- Life cycle of a butterfly zig-zag book. (Print sheet to colour, cut out and place in correct order.
(<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/butterfly/books/butterflylifecycle>)
- Make a wormery.
- Make a woodland display with your collected items.
(Scholastic “Our world displays” ideas for Animal Homes and The Woods displays.)
- Creepy Crawlies.
(Belair Early Years’ “ Science”)
- Make a bees and honey group picture. Make honey sandwiches

Autumn

Trees

- Look at the trees, and the colour of leaves you can see.
- Listen to the crunch of leaves and the snapping of twigs under foot.
- Collect fallen leaves on a strip of double sided sticky tape. How many different colours can you find?
- Talk about the various shapes of leaves.
- Arrange the same types of leaves in order of size.
- Rub the leaves in your hand. What can you smell?
- Collect leaves and seeds to take back to class.

Recording what you find.

Using the *Nature detectives resources* (<http://www.naturedetectives.org.uk>)

Autumn watch sheets record the leaves, fruits and seeds that you find on your walk.

“Who lives in the wood?” Looking at each layer of woodland.

“Hunt for big old trees”.

Songs and rhymes from “This Little Puffin”

Five little leaves so bright and gay.

Here is a tree with leaves so green.

Come little leaves.

The autumn leaves have fallen down.

Mosses

Look out for banks of moss in damp places and around old logs and tree stumps. Collect different types to make a moss garden.

The moss will have a damp earthy smell.

Squirrels

(See Spring Walk)



Birds

Watch them

- Sitting in groups on high branches or telegraph lines.
- Flying in flocks across the sky.
- Sitting on tall grasses in the meadow.
- Look out for ducks and swans on the river or the Arm.
- You may see geese flying in formation over the reserve, listen for their honking call.

Songs and rhymes.

Five little ducks.

Have you seen the little ducks?

Down the stream the swans all glide.

Fungi

If you are unsure about picking fungi compare bought button mushrooms and flat cap mushrooms.

Back at your setting

- Leaf prints.
- Sort leaves into colours, shapes, sizes and textures.
- Group picture of tree. Stick on collected leaves .Reference “Science Early Years” The life of a tree.
- Make woodland creatures out of seeds, twigs, leaves etc.
- Make a moss garden. Place some soil or compost, stones and tree bark in a shallow tray and arrange your selection of mosses. Remember to keep it watered.
- Plant bulbs.
- Make a mushroom spore print.



Winter

The woods will look quite different in Winter.

Trees

- Look at the shapes of the trees now that the leaves have fallen.
Can you match the trees with the pictures?
(Tree identification –*Nature detectives*)
(<http://www.naturedetectives.org.uk>))
- Look at the branches of the trees.
(Identify the winter twigs -*Nature detectives*.)

Game : Feely Bag

Put several natural items in a bag eg acorn, moss, sycamore seeds, twigs, rough stone, smooth stone etc. Sing the song and pass round the bag. The child left holding the bag feels inside and tries to guess what it is.

Feely bag game to the tune of Little Brown Jug.

Here's a bag to feel inside,
Something's there that likes to hide.
Hard or soft, large or small,
Can you guess its name at all ?

Birds

- Look out for birds feeding on the remaining seeds.
- Birds are easy to spot on the bare trees.
- Birds will fluff up their feathers to keep warm.
- Collect feathers to discover how water runs off to keep them dry for flying.

Song: Creatures of the night..

A song about night time animals, to the tune of "The Wheels on the Bus".
Sing the song and do the actions

The bat in the woods goes flap, flap, flap
flap, flap, flap
flap, flap, flap

The bat in the woods goes flap, flap, flap,

All night long.

Other verses or add your own:

The badger in the wood goes scratch, scratch, scratch

The owl in the wood goes hoot, hoot, hoot.....

The fox in the wood goes howl, howl, howl.

Animal Homes

Think about the animals that live in Marshall's Arm Reserve and try to name their homes. What about those that live underground?

Badgers

Look out for mounds of soil or sand and large holes where badgers have made their homes. You may also see where they have chosen to use as their toilet, this keeps their setts clean. Look for paw prints in muddy ground.

Moles.

You will probably not see a mole but you will find small heaps of soil which they throw up as they burrow underground. They eat insects and worms which they find by smell and by using their sensitive whiskers. They have very small eyes as they live underground. Moles have velvety coats and large front paws that they use like spades to dig tunnels.

Hibernation.

Think about animals that hibernate, why and where they sleep. Look for piles of branches and logs, these make good habitats for animals particularly in the winter.

A game to keep you warm : Follow my leader.

Make up actions appropriate to your walk. Fluttering leaves, waving branches, scampering squirrels, hopping rabbits, flying birds and any the children suggest.

Back at your setting

- Use an old wooden fruit box to make a bird feeder.
- Make bird cake.
- Provide winter colours for painting, grey white and black plus silver glitter for frost.
- Make a display of animal homes.
(Scholastic "Our world displays" Over ground, underground)



Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum Links

Personal, social and emotional development .

- Explore the reserve independently, in pairs or in a group.
- Use time and space to be reflective.
- Take the lead or join in an activity.
- Develop confidence in using materials and equipment.
- Be aware of personal health and hygiene.
- Show respect for the natural environment.
- Choose appropriate clothing and footwear for the walk.

Communication, Language and Literacy.

- Listening and commenting as they journey through the reserve.
- Poems, stories, games and songs in appropriate areas.
- Following trails and making route maps.
- Reference books, information boards and signs to consult.
- Recording observations.
- Using natural and found materials for mark making.
- Links to Phase One of “ Letters and Sounds ” phonics teaching programme.

Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy.

- Collect a variety of natural materials to count, compare, measure, sort in sizes and shapes etc.
- Estimate sizes and distances.
- Outdoor songs and games involving various number operations.
- Use of space for environmental art and den building.
- Look for form and pattern in the natural environment.

Knowledge and Understanding of the World.

- Recognise the changing patterns of the seasons and the weather.
- Discover the life cycles of animals and plants.
- Explore animal habitats.
- Compare the different environments that the woodland, meadow and wetlands provide.
- Use all senses to investigate the natural world.

Physical Development

- Time and space to enjoy outdoor activities.
- Physical challenges which present themselves in the woodlands .
- Songs and games to encourage movement.
- Construction can be large scale as in den building or small as in environmental art with natural materials.
- Explore different ways of moving, having observed the variety of creatures on the walks.

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This Little Puffin. Penguin Books. ISBN 0 14.

Our world displays. Scholastics. Victoria Farrow ISBN 0-439-01738-6.

Science. Belair Early Years. Jean Evans. ISBN 0-94788-262-6.

Senses. Scholastic. Barbara J Leach. ISBN 0-439-98463-7.

Outdoor Fun and Games for Kids. Jane Kemp and Clare Walters. ISBN 978-0-600-61661-0.

Bobby Shaftoe – Clap your hands. Sue Nicholls. A and C Black. ISBN 0-7136-3556-8.

Scholastic “Our world displays” Over ground, underground

Story books are listed on page 12

Web site for lyrics and music for pre-school songs:

<http://kids.niehs.nih.gov>

Nature Detectives - all kinds of excellent wildlife resources

www.naturedetectives.org.uk