



Section 6


Embedding care for our outdoor spaces into our experiences

6.9 Dead wood spotting

Deadwood is a whole tree or part of a tree that has died and is beginning to rot.

A “snag” is a standing dead tree. They are used by lots of birds – woodpeckers make holes in them... can you find out why?



As the inside of a tree breaks down, it can become very crumbly and powdery.

 See if you can find any wee beasties helping the process.

Deadwood stores carbon, helps prevent soil erosion and 40% of woodland wildlife species are dependent on deadwood. It also supplies nitrogen, an important nutrient, releasing it into the soil.




As branches used to edge paths decompose, they become homes for many tiny creatures and fungi. The children must know this is inedible.

Stumps come in all shapes and sizes. Some have points, others have holes. Flat ones have usually been cut down.

 Can you see any faces in your stumps?
 Have you a grumpy stump?

A **stumpery** is a garden full of stumps! They became fashionable in the Victorian era. Why not turn a stump into a mini garden in your outdoor space?

Fallen deadwood can be dead good for playing too:

 I wonder what's underneath a tree... Stable fallen trees are good for exploring roots. Get the magnifiers ready!
 Some lichens love deadwood. How many different sorts can you find on just one stump or stick of dead wood?
 A bed of moss is growing on top. I wonder who would like to sleep here?

6.10 Animal allies

Dead, dying or injured animals

If you are worried about an animal, phone the **SSPCA** immediately: 03000 999 999. Use **what3words** app on a mobile phone to give the location of the animal. Let your landowner know if a large mammal has died of natural causes.

Any large dead bird with no obvious injuries may have died of Avian flu and should not be handled but reported in line with **guidance**.

When dead or dying wild animals are encountered, respond in ways that are sensitive and allow for spiritual conversations as well as the practicalities. Be attentive to the needs of any child who may be grieving the loss of a loved person or pet.

Be prepared for a range of discussions: about life and death; the linking to deaths of a pet or known person; what happens with dead bodies; how things rot and decay; how this creates food for decomposers; how some creatures die while others will be born and grow.

Being aware: Protected species and wildlife crime

Wildlife crime describes the illegal theft or harming of animals, plants and habitats, either in rural or urban areas.

Ask your landowner if there are any wildlife sensitivities on your site. You could seek advice from a local countryside or wildlife ranger too.

When you find animal homes such as nests, holes or dens make sure you stay away from them.



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Avoid choosing or using sensitive areas where your group may inadvertently cause damage to a protected species.

Linking to the UN Sustainable Development **Goal 15 Life on Land** Lerstrup et al (2018) suggests that embodied experiences of a variety of animals in a green setting creates a foundation for young children to later understand ideas about biodiversity and ecological processes. This knowledge, connectedness and care they feel for individual animals at an early age may later be extended to whole species and ecosystems leading to a life-long affection and willingness to care for, protect, and restore the varied ecosystems and their diversity of life.

“If children grow up not knowing about nature and appreciating it, they will not understand it, and if they don’t understand it, they won’t protect it, and if they don’t protect it, who will?”

(‘**Conserving Wonder**’,
Sir David Attenborough)

Exploring

Let’s go on an expedition! I wonder what we could discover:

- Animal tracks, traces and signs that they have been here: eggs shells, chewed cones or leaves, feathers, bones, owl pellets, animal poo, traces of fur, hair or fluff, the presence of a nest, rubbings or other marks on trees, paw prints and many other things!
- We may see or hear them from afar, if we move quietly or stay very still. Can we show each other how to do this?
- Where’s a good place to find animals? Under logs and stones, in grass, in dead wood, the soil?
- What’s a good way to find an animal? What will we need to look at them more closely? Who or what can help us work out what we have found?



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Discovering

Let's share and learn from each other and the animals we discover:

- How to find, catch and handle small creatures safely: caring for the creature and ourselves. This could include: placing them down, counting them, watching, then letting them go, holding the animals firmly but gently, passing animals from hand to hand without damaging them, putting them in observation jars, feeding them.
 - 🗨️ Which animals should always be left alone and why?
- Where they live, how they reproduce, take care of their offspring, what they eat and what eats them, where they sleep, how and where they survived winter, how they died, what they may be thinking, and so on.
- Wanting to care for them:
 - 🗨️ Is it better to leave them where we found them?
 - 🗨️ What can we do, make or give to the animal to ensure they are okay?
- Use other people as well as texts such as ID charts, digital apps and books for information and experiences.

Creating

Discovering an animal often leads to reflections, questions, conversations and creations. These can spark interest within children.

- 🗨️ What was the "find of the day" and why was this so special?

- Support children to draw, take photos or use their imaginations to capture the moment such as making nests, small world play using feathers, fluff and other animal residues.
- Imagining and talking about being animals, acting out animal roles, dramatizing life cycles.

Through short, wee stories develop your children's understanding of the interdependence of species, e.g., the bird drops a seed. The seed grows into a plant that provides food for the bird and other animals. It also provides nesting material that helps the bird.

Reflective thoughts

- Imagine if all animals, other species and entities such as stones, were part of our families: siblings, cousins. How would this affect our perceptions of "other-than-human" species? Reframing how we think about and relate to animals can help improve our understanding of equity and sustainable practice
- Considering how we talk about animals; Avoid using 'he' for any animal or bird we spot. Can we tell if it's a 'he' or 'she'? How can we tell? If we can't, maybe 'it' is better?
- What values and rights could children learn through their animal encounters? By extending the concept of values and rights to other species, we can better understand why these matter. For example, when we talk about equity, do we consider other species as equal to humans?



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“Small creatures were valued because they provided direct experiences of animal life cycles and were a means of learning about ecosystems and natural phenomena like the weather, seasons, life and death.”

(Lerstrup et al. (2021, p67))



Find out more

- Care Inspectorate (2018) **Animal Magic**
- **Out to Play** Section 6.4
- **NatureScot** - resources suitable for early years and advice on wildlife crime and protected species
- **Outdoor and Woodland Learning Scotland** website has lots of relevant resources
- **Silverhaar** has wee songs and stories about animals
- **Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**
- **Police Scotland Wildlife Crime**

6.11 Food and composting

Why this matters

Composting enables children to see how decomposers such as worms, slugs, other invertebrates, fungi and microbes play a part in breaking fruit, vegetables and other items into organic matter. Compost conditions the soil providing nutrients for plants. The compost bin becomes a home for many decomposers. This helps improve the biodiversity in our outdoor space. It saves money and energy too. Have a look at **6.2**

Why soil matters

Building on prior learning

- Finding a worm outside and wondering where a good place would be to put it.
- Start small - make compost in a bottle or in a bag!
- Creating sequencing books using photos of your children doing each stage of the composting cycle makes it personal and relevant to the children involved.
- Many tiny creatures live in a compost bin. During the warmer months, put a bit of the compost under a powerful magnifier or microscope to see what is happening at a micro level.