

Biodiversity is the wealth of wildlife in the world around us, from wildflowers and insects to mammals and birds. It includes all the woodlands, meadows, wetlands and other natural habitats, as well as man-made places such as plantations, fields, canals – even ‘wasteland’ can be valuable for wildlife.

Biodiversity literally means ‘the variety of life’, but there are several more complicated definitions, such as: ‘Biodiversity – or Biological Diversity – is the variety of life in all its forms, levels and combinations including ecosystem diversity, species diversity, and genetic diversity’.

Biodiversity matters because it impacts on all our lives, both directly and indirectly:

- Wild plants and animals have provided most of our foods, drugs and medicines.
- Natural systems help control flooding, recycle wastes.
- People enjoy nature and wild places, encouraging eco-tourism.
- It is widely believed that all species have as much moral right to exist as we do.
- No one knows just what other benefits may be lost when species become extinct.



Human life itself depends on the relationships between all living creatures and their environment. The quality of our lives is greatly enriched by the natural environment, yet a lot of human activity is having a negative impact on biodiversity across the world. In the UK, urban development, intensive farming, increasing transport and pollution has led to huge losses of several habitats and species.

At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, 159 countries signed the Biodiversity Convention, committing them to “conserve the variety of animals and plants within their jurisdiction”, with further items agreed at the Johannesburg Summit in 2002. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan was launched in 1994, providing a nationwide framework for species and habitat conservation (www.ukbap.org.uk) and encouraging local people and local organisations to work together to ensure that biodiversity is seriously considered as a key part of our local environment.

Biodiversity and schools

School grounds provide an ideal opportunity to introduce children to the natural environment and to biodiversity in a practical way. They offer a safe and potentially exciting facility for outdoor education that can complement classroom-based activities.

Biodiversity provides direct links to the science curriculum, providing knowledge, skills and understanding across the key stages in the following areas:

- Life processes
- Humans and other animals
- Green plants
- Variation and classification, inheritance and evolution
- Living things in their environment

Pupils learn that the variety of plants and animals that exist makes it important to identify them and assign them to groups; that different plants and animals are found in different habitats; that habitats support a diversity of plants and animals that are all interdependent; that the distribution and relative abundance of organisms in habitats can be explained using ideas of interdependence, adaptation, competition and predation.

Further information

Lots of Eco-Schools choose to address biodiversity as part of their Action Plan. Visit the Case Studies section for more details. It's also worth visiting the Links and Resources section for further information on how to increase biodiversity within your school grounds. The National Initiatives section outlines the importance of Learning Outside the Classroom, and how biodiversity and school grounds offer valuable ways to engage young people in their local environment, providing a much more creative and stimulating learning environment.