

Sustainability

I was born in 1958 and brought up in London. As a child, I didn't pay much attention to wildlife. It was only while an undergraduate that I started to identify plants and observe birds. I rather regret to say that a cat (rescued from a Scottish island) that I had while a student at Cambridge managed to catch no less than ten different species of mammal (including a serotine and a long-eared bat), all within the grounds of Trinity College.

I got married in 1982 and Jenny and I moved into the house in which we still live in 1983. Sad to relate, the subsequent years, despite our quite large, wild garden (in which we use neither fertilisers nor pesticides) has seen a slow, apparently inexorable decline in the wildlife both of our garden and the village in which we live. There have been some enhancements; I remember when I first, to my incredulity, saw a juvenile otter crossing the road a mile from our home, and there are still badgers. But the swifts no longer scream, the cuckoo is never heard, the newts no longer live in our pond and we haven't even had any bats or hedgehogs in recent years. (Time was when we spent our autumns feeding up hedgehogs so that they were large enough to survive hibernation.) On our honeymoon, we walked round the local fields and I remember us identifying arable weeds that are now national rarities.

Sustainability is about more than the conservation of wildlife, but I am a biologist by training and it is increasingly being appreciated how important wildlife and nature are not only for other species but for our own physical and mental well-being. So, here are some ideas for 4-19 year-olds. These ideas could helpfully be mediated by schoolteachers, parents and others (e.g., Girlguiding and The Scout Association, conservation organisations and other environmental charities):

1. Plant three native trees.
2. Make a list of the bird species you can see from your home.
3. Lie on your back outside, where is safe, for ten minutes without saying anything, just listening.
4. Get sponsored to raise funds for your local Wildlife Trust
<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org>.
5. Keep a nature diary for one month, making an entry each day.
6. Start a petition demanding some change to increase sustainability (e.g., an end to the use of peat for compost, or more government funding for nature reserves) and send the list of names and addresses with your demand to your local MP
<https://members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP>.
7. As your teacher(s) what three things they do to for sustainability and write the answers down.
8. Undertake some research to find out what influence humans have had on nature in your life time.
9. See if you can raise the funds to join Wildlife Watch
<https://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk> for a year.
10. Improve your knowledge of bird song: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/bird-songs/what-bird-is->

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Michael J. Reiss