

## WOW! – Aberlady Primary School’s ‘Wood of Wonder’



During a week in mid-March, primary 4 and 5 students and staff at Aberlady Primary School joined forces with Aberlady Bay Local Nature Reserve volunteers and parents to do something special for the wildlife in their school grounds. This week was the culmination of several weeks of background research and planning. The results were fantastic for both the wildlife area and for all the people involved!

### The Big Idea

It was the brainchild of form teachers Clare Dalgety and Lisa Craig, with the support of Head Teacher Pam Currie, who wanted the kids to be able to do something to conserve wildlife as part of their John Muir Award.

Clare and Lisa contacted East Lothian Countryside Ranger Service where their local Ranger was only too happy to help!

### What To Do?

As a starter, we visited the area a few weeks earlier to explore the different plants and minibeasts we could find there already so we knew what we were dealing with. We found a nice mix of 30-year old trees (as it turns out, planted by East Lothian’s, and Scotland’s, first ever Ranger, Archie Mathieson), a few wee shrubs, some fairly boring ‘playing field’ grass and not much else.

The children were tasked with coming up with ideas for the area as well as a new name. The P5s mapped the area and all the children researched the plants we could put in and their benefits to wildlife.

Going well beyond the requirements of their John Muir Award, the WOW project saw the children involved in:

- Making a woodland trail
- Planting bulbs of woodland plants
- Planting up a bog garden
- Creating a bug hotel
- Putting in a wildflower meadow
- Planting a hedgerow
- Making a hazel hurdle fence
- Building an outdoor classroom



## The Hard Graft



The first Monday of WOW creation week saw Aberlady Bay Local Nature Reserve volunteers making a start with lots of the preliminary heavy work such as: digging out and lining the bog garden; turf-stripping the wildflower meadow; lifting in logs for the path edging and pointing over 200 stobs to hold them in place. On the Tuesday the P4 and P5 classes got involved with the woodland trail and bug hotel and all helped with the hazel fencing on the Wednesday. The Reserve volunteers returned on Thursday to finish the heavy work while the kids planted bulbs in the woodland area, planted up the bog garden, planted a wee hedgerow and sowed seeds for the wildflower meadow. Even the PE classes doing running reps around the school stopped to pick up woodchip to put on the woodland trail on their way past!

## Making The Connection

The Wood Of Wonder will need further care and attention. The school is having a water butt fitted to the main building, from which children will take water down to the bog garden to keep it wet through the drier months. Rather than connecting a pipe for this, the hope is that a better connection is made by kids looking after the area and understanding what is needed to keep these wetland plants alive.



It was important that the P4s and P5s were involved in all aspects for the WOW project. Having planted bulbs in the woodland, plants in the bog garden and sown seeds in the



wildflower meadow, it is hoped that this gives a degree of ownership of the place and a self-engendered desire to protect it for the future. That said, it should still be a place of fun and the woodchip woodland trail should serve as a route to whizz round on whilst safeguarding the plants.

The project culminated in a launch when the children put on an amazing two days' of drama, presentations and guided tours of the Wood Of Wonder for parents and other pupils.

## Was It Worth It?

It was a very ambitious project which required a large investment in time, however, the overwhelming positivity from all involved and the rest of the school more than justified this investment. There is a myriad of possibilities for children at the school to make use of this space for their learning and exploration of wildlife, from looking for minibeasts in the woodchip at breaktime to studying their lifecycles in the outdoor classroom. There is also much potential for future classes to come up with ideas to further develop this area, making the Wood Of Wonder even more wonderful than it is now.



It was a great project in bringing together people of a diverse range of ages and backgrounds within the community. It was lovely to see children working with and even interviewing Nature Reserve volunteers, for example.

The benefits of outdoor education have been much documented in the past but it is particularly gratifying to see the results for real. Examples include: one parent you commented that her son had been sleeping much better during this week; children who sometimes struggle to concentrate within the classroom were very focussed on tasks



outside, particularly when planting out bulbs; one parent came home to tell their dad that they wanted to put plants in their garden, and they knew which species!

The buzz throughout the whole school generated by this project, from the children through to the Parent Council, was really noticeable and its legacy should last a long time. WOW indeed!

John Harrison  
Nature Reserve Warden



  
**East Lothian**  
Council