



**WITNEY**  
TOWN COUNCIL



## WTC-Nature NOW Spring 2024 Summary of impact

Total number of sessions held at Ducklington Lake	6
Total number of adults attending	22
Total number of children attending	48
Average number of children attending a session	17
Overall, the number of attendees was very similar across both sessions in autumn and spring, with seven new adults joining us and an increase in Witney-based children and carers in the spring round.	
As with the autumn 2023 round of sessions, participants learned about the Nature NOW sessions through the WTC and NatureNOW Facebook pages, previous contact with NatureNOW/Where the Fruit Is training or local friend/childminder networks. Adults attended from Witney Town, Carterton, Standlake, Stonesfield, Burford, and Witney—Oxford Witney Hotel residents.	

### Summary of sessions

- As before, Carl Whitehead supported the sessions with access to the site, etc. He also timed conservation work to be carried out on Thursday mornings that would interest the children, e.g. installing bird boxes and animal rubbing/art posts around the lake - this was very well received and helped build on community links with local families/carers. Two Witney families reported returning with other family members at the weekend to complete all the rubbings on the walk.
- Sessions were only held at Ducklington in the spring due to the ease of parking and accessibility. Most adults needed to attend with buggies and small children walking. Extensive and unpredictable flooding at the Mill Meadow site made Ducklington more reliable.
- Nature play resources on seasonal themes were provided; these were kept simple to inspire the children's imaginations and encourage them to explore around the lakeside.
- As before, sessions were staffed by two qualified Forest School and Forest Kindergarten Leaders-Trainers at each session, who had previously worked on the OCC-Nature NOW projects 2020-2022. Again, this was well received and helped build community links with local families/ carers.



### Feedback from participants

Feedback was collected through an online survey and a paper questionnaire during sessions. Feedback was very similar in the second round, with adults citing the children's *physical development*, including increased confidence in the outdoors, confidence with physical play, increased willingness to get muddy and engage with natural resources, and confidence in meeting and engaging with other adults and children.

Developing a nature connection was also mentioned, with carers noting that children were more willing to venture further this time and explore around the lakeside with resources, increasing their physical stamina and enjoying the familiarity of being in a natural



space they recognised. Spending time outdoors and finding the animal rubbing posts around the lake were frequently commented on in feedback.

Again, adults commented on the benefit of getting out with the children to meet with other carers and their children, whatever the weather. Carers noted that children gained social skills and significantly increased their confidence by returning to the familiar green space with adults and children they recognised from previous sessions.

*"My little bunch has really enjoyed their Nature Now Thursdays. It's lovely to see them grow in confidence and explore the activities you have provided. We hope to see you all in the future!"*

*"Being outside here (has given us) more confidence in the garden."*

*"(we have most enjoyed) meeting up with others and the children experiencing bigger outdoor groups."*

### Where Next?

Unfortunately, the Spacehive grant eligibility did not fit with our business model. We are keen to explore the possibility of WTC supporting our work with teenagers, linking them with community groups, and enabling them to have purposeful roles caring for local wild spaces whilst gaining the *Level 1 Award in Forestry in the Community*. This new qualification is aimed predominantly at secondary school-aged young people, typically those struggling with mainstream education, who wish to gain a qualification and develop life and work skills offering a path into land-based community conservation careers. We have successfully piloted this qualification for the Royal Forestry Society through partnerships with the National Forest and schools in Leicestershire, with young people planting and maintaining woodlands. In Phase 2, we plan to work with Oxfordshire secondary schools alongside colleagues like Carl Whitehead, his team, and volunteers on community woodland and conservation projects. To read more,

<https://rfs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Forestry-in-the-community-Sarah-Lawfull.pdf>



