

Habitat Heroes

How can you help your habitat hero at school or home?

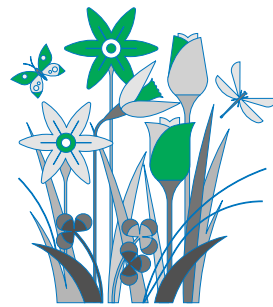


Actions:

This is a list of actions that might help biodiversity in your school, **you do not need to do all of them**. Pick one or two actions that might help with a chosen Habitat Hero.

All of the Habitat Heroes are connected to each other. Some are food sources for others, some might be habitats for a hero. If you provide a Habitat that helps one of our Habitat Heroes, you may also be helping others. Read the list below and see how each action might help your Habitat hero?

- **Planting Wildflowers:** Consider letting an area go wild; getting involved in “No Mow May”, “Too Soon June” or other pollinator friendly actions to increase our native wildflowers. The National Pollinator plan has a “How To Guide for Schools”.
- **Leave ‘untidy’ areas:** Some of the plants we call weeds play important roles in the insect world, as habitats, food and nesting sites. Plants like nettles, brambles and ivy in a wild corner can really help biodiversity.
- **Plant Butterfly and Bee borders:** Lots of different plants provide food for butterflies and bees. Consider a sensory garden that includes bee friendly planting. Plant for all 4 seasons, some flowers only come out in spring while others prefer, summer, autumn or even winter.
- **Bee Nesting Sites:** Some of our bees need ground nesting sites or hollowed out holes in wood...we have 15 species of native solitary bees, that cavity nest in this way, and 62 species that are mining bees. Adding sand and rock piles and/or small bee hotels with hollow branches can be a great help to our bees.
- **Log piles:** log piles are a great way to increase the insect life in the school providing cover for bugs, snails, spiders and even frogs or small mammals. Not only are they a good habitat for insects and fungi (mushrooms), but they also act as for restaurant for birds and animals to eat from.
- **Stone walls or Rockeries:** Maybe your school has a stone wall or even a rockery. These areas are full of unexplored biodiversity. When un-managed they can be full of life. Ferns and small plants will take root in the cracks, lichens will grow on the rocks, and you might be lucky enough to see our only native reptile, the common lizard.



Habitat Heroes

How can you help your habitat hero at school or home?



- **Plant Native trees:** planting native trees is an excellent way to help biodiversity and help our climate at the same time! There are trees that suit every size of school grounds. It is important to know how high they'll grow and what kind of cover they'll give. You can find out more about our native trees and how and when to plant them at leafireland.org. Why not learn about their An Choill Bheag (small woodland) education programme.
- Native trees provide flowers for pollinators, food for birds and animals, shelter for birds, animals and insects, food for humans, materials that we need and use (even sport equipment), oxygen that we need, and they even take CO2 out of our atmosphere.
- **Plant Hedgerows:** perhaps you don't have space for a little woodland in your school. Maybe consider planting a native hedgerow instead. Plants like wild roses, wild cherry, elder, blackthorn, hawthorn and brambles as well as apple trees, could make up a hedgerow in your school grounds. Our native hedgerows provide food, shelter and a natural corridor for wildlife moving across our countryside. Having a varied height to your hedgerow will allow birds of all different types nesting sites, as some birds prefer higher nests than others.
- **Dead Hedges:** It might sound strange, but a dead hedge is a wonderful habitat that is full of life. Dead hedges provide hiding places and nesting habitats for all sorts of creatures, as well as food for insects. A dead hedge is an upright structure of woody plant cuttings woven between vertical stakes. The stakes are usually the sturdier branches cut from trees or shrubs. It is a way of making a log-pile into a nature corridor and provides the same shelter as a living hedge.
- **Bat boxes:** Bat boxes should be close to hedgerows or groups of trees as these are used as flight corridors for bats. Boxes should be fastened securely to the tree or wall, as high as possible from the ground (at least 4 - 5 meters). You could make your own bat boxes or bird boxes in woodwork classes, or ask your local men's shed to make them for you. You can learn more about bats by visiting batconservationireland.org.

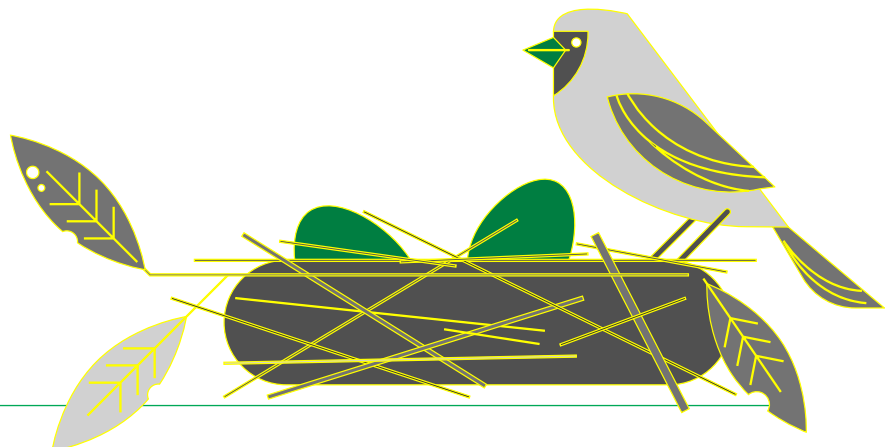


Habitat Heroes

How can you help your habitat hero at school or home?



- **Add Bird boxes:** You can encourage birds to nest on your grounds by adding bird boxes. Nest boxes should be placed in locations birds would visit, with cover to hide their activity from predators, and at a good height (2-5m off the ground). Trees, hedges and plants like Ivy near the boxes will encourage use. Some birds like swifts or house martens need special types of nest boxes that can be attached to the outer school wall. You could make your own bird boxes or feeders in woodwork class or ask your local men's shed to make them for you. Read about the different types of birdboxes at www.birdwatchireland.ie
- **Add Bird feeders:** Hang feeders within view of a window, so you can observe the birds feeding. Keep meals regular, keep food fresh and out of the reach of predators like cats. Limit food to peanuts, mixed seeds, sunflower seeds, coconuts and fruit. This will attract all types of birds. Do not use processed food, which might harm birds. Keep clear of feeders wrapped in plastic netting, birds often get trapped in these.
- **Bird Baths:** Living in Ireland which is known for its rain you might not think we need to help birds with water, but in dry or cold times a bird bath can be very important. Birds will both use them as sources for bathing and drinking. Again, think about predators when placing the bird baths- don't place them too low to the ground or out in plain view. Keep near cover of plants and do consider placing it in view of windows so you can observe the birds that visit.
- **Hedgehog highways:** hedgehogs can travel between 1-2km every night looking for food and mates. No single garden or school grounds can provide everything a hedgehog needs. You can help the little wanderers by making "hedgehog highways". Create a hole about 13cm x 13cm in your garden wall or fence to allow them to travel.
- **Biodiversity Friendly Management:** reducing or stopping the use of pesticides and insecticides on school grounds. Look at your school's policies around pest controls, things like slug pellets or rat poison can find its way into some of our habitat heroes by accident. If we use more friendly ways of tackling pest problems this won't happen.
- We can make our own compost and use that compost for growing projects. We can conserve water using water recycling butts and use that rainwater in our gardens and ponds. You could make your own leaf mould and use as mulch.



Habitat Heroes

How can you help your habitat hero at school or home?

- **Create a wetland area:** This could be a pond a bog garden or a rain garden.
- **Add a pond:** this one of the best features you can add to your school garden. It offers a source of drinking water as well as a home for lots of biodiversity. The pond does not need to be very large in fact even a sunken basin can create a water habitat for wildlife. It is important to add features like a small wooden ramp that will prevent any small mammals from drowning if they fall in.
- **Add a bog garden:** If a pond it is not quite right for your school garden perhaps you could consider a bog garden with wetland plants. There is a lot of biodiversity in Ireland's boglands, and they help to take CO2 out of our atmosphere and fight climate change. Bog gardens are also a way of upcycling old leaky ponds. You can make one in the same way that you would dig out a pond and line it to keep the water in, but instead fill it with water rich organic compost and wet loving plants. If you would like to learn more ask a green schools biodiversity officer for advice.
- **A rain garden:** a rain garden is a shallow area of ground, a dip or dug out area that is planted up with water loving plants and connected to a water source like a gutter or channel from a roof downpipe. There are a number of native plants suitable to go into bog or rain gardens such as Bog Beam, Creeping Jenny, Yellow Flag, Marsh Woundwort, Marsh Marigold, Water Mint and Purple Loosestrife.

