

Session Plan – Cley Habitat Trail (KS1 & KS2)

This session lasts one hour and is suitable for a maximum of fifteen children.



Learning Objectives

- Children understand that natural landscapes change over time
- Children understand that human uses of landscapes have shaped them through history
- Children understand that each organism has specific habitat requirements and that some have become rare through habitat loss
- Children understand that in the case of rare habitats they often need to be managed to prevent them changing

Personal Development Objectives

- Children feel empowered to contribute to the conservation of natural landscapes

Curriculum Links

KS1 – Geography

Pupils should be taught:

- 3a. to identify and describe what places are like
- 3c. to recognise how places have become the way they are and how they are changing

KS1 – Science

Pupils should be taught:

- 5a. to find out about the different kinds of plants and animals in the local environment
- 5b. to identify similarities between local environments and ways in which these affect animals and plants found there
- 5c. to care for the environment

KS2 - Geography

Pupils should be taught:

- 2b. to use appropriate fieldwork techniques
- 3a. to identify and describe what places are like
- 3e. to identify how and why places change

KS2 – Science

- 4b. how locally occurring plants and animals can be identified and assigned to groups
- 5a. about ways in which living things and the environment need protection
- 5b. about the different plants and animals found in different habitats

Safety considerations

Refer to relevant risk assessments for the site and session. At Cley, care must be taken to ensure children cross the main road in a safe and supervised manner.

Introduction

Explain to the children that they will be visiting an important nature reserve. In order not to disturb wildlife and other visitors they must behave respectfully and stay quiet at all times. Explain that they will be visiting several habitats in turn, each of which is home to rare creatures and which are managed by NWT to help these creatures survive.

History of NWT Cley Marshes

NWT was formed in 1926 to purchase Cley Marshes for bird conservation. Historically the Glaven valley was an internationally important port and the marshes that make up the reserve itself were created in the 17th Century when the banks around it were built to prevent the tide coming in. This meant the only water coming into the reserve was freshwater from chalk springs. Being freshwater fed, the marshes had more value for raising livestock. Since 1926 NWT has been protecting 400 acres of freshwater and brackish habitats which the reserve covers. However, the marshes may soon turn back into saltmarshes as rising sea levels mean the banks can no longer resist the tide. The north bank which separates the reserve from the sea is being allowed to return to its natural profile.

Open water Habitats

Stop at the bridge and explain that the freshwater coming onto the reserves comes from chalk springs in the ridge above the reserve. Explain how the chalk was laid down on the bed of a shallow sea more than 75 million years ago. Discuss the importance of open water habitats here and in the scrapes for species such as otter, water vole, kingfisher, avocet, little grebe, dragonflies.

Freshwater Grazing Marsh

Explain how drainage and modern agriculture have almost completely removed wet grassland from our landscape. Explain that grazing animals prevent succession to scrub,

churn up grass and mud, and create good conditions for insects, making the habitat better for nesting waders and wintering waterfowl. The cattle do not belong to NWT but are on the reserve during spring and summer as part of a tenancy agreement.

Reed-bed

Discuss the colonization by reed of open water – wind pollination, seed dispersal by wind, pioneer community. Explain that traditional landscape use meant that there were many areas of reed-bed so specialist species, such as bittern, bearded tit and marsh harrier, used to be widespread. Drainage and loss of reed-harvesting mean that today there are few reed-beds. NWT manages reed-bed by cutting them to mimic traditional harvest and is involved in the creation of new reed-beds. Each year 2-3,000 bundles of reed are sold from NWT Cley Marshes.

Scrapes

If time allows and the children are not also doing Brilliant Birds, go into the hides to see the scrapes and discuss their importance for breeding waders such as avocets and for large numbers of wintering waterfowl. Also discuss the work involved in maintaining the hides, the boardwalk and the visitor centre and the benefits the reserve has for the local community.

Conclusion

Summarise what the children have learned about the habitats at Cley and the rare creatures which inhabit them. Repeat how important nature conservation is for everyone's wellbeing. Encourage them to express what they feel about NWT Cley Marshes and about nature conservation.

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