

Hampshire School Nature Watch

Nature Watch 2008 - a resounding success!

A record breaking 27,500 children from almost 200 schools signed-up to take part in the 3rd annual **Hampshire School Nature Watch**.

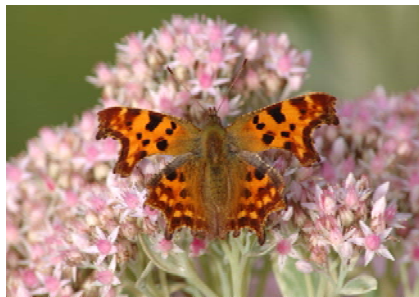
Nature Watch is a fun survey carried out by children in their school grounds. It's a great way to discover the natural world and find out about curriculum themes such as food webs, living things and habitats.

The following results show the abundance of selected animals, plants and habitats in Hampshire schools. Many thanks to everyone who joined this year's survey – the results show that school grounds are teeming with wildlife!

Nature Watch forms part of Hampshire County Council's *Corporate Biodiversity Action Plan*

📄 www.hants.gov.uk/biodiversity

✉ ecology.group@hants.gov.uk



HABITATS

Habitats in school grounds

Most schools have a good variety of habitats in their grounds. This means that schools provide excellent places to see wildlife. The 2008 survey showed that:



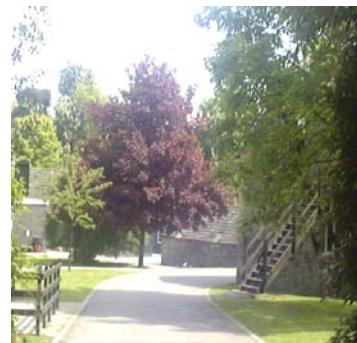
91% of schools have a **hedge**



94% of schools have **short grass**



87% of schools have **long grass**



95% of schools have **woods and trees**

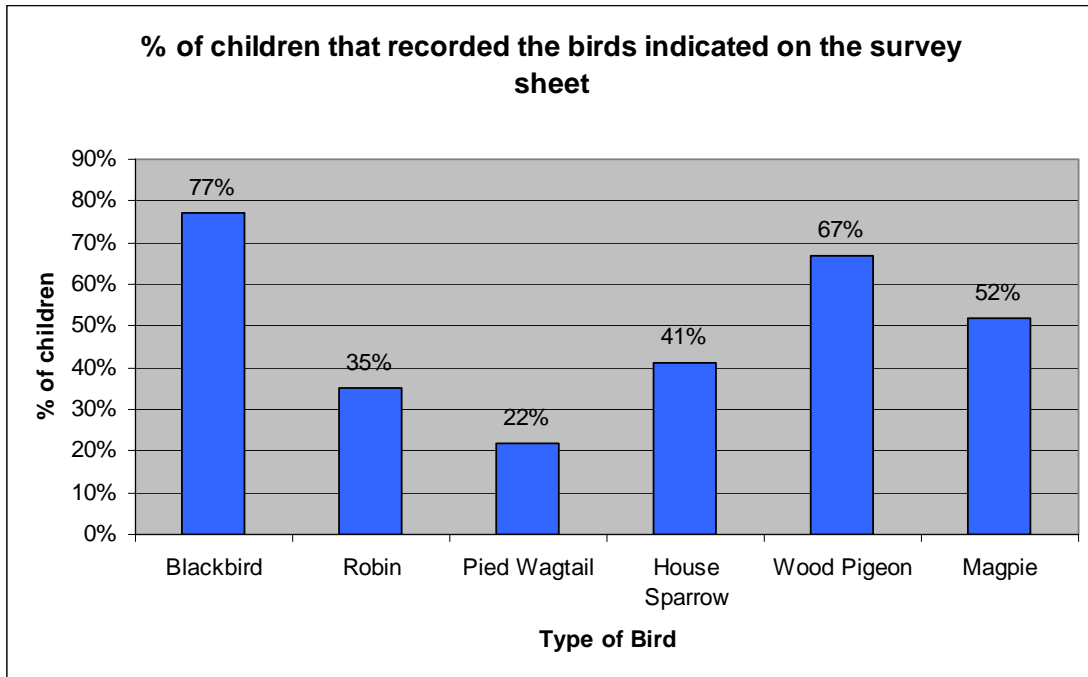


86% of schools have a **flower garden**



66% of schools have a **pond**

BIRDS



Birds

The blackbird was the most common bird recorded in school grounds. Surprisingly, the male bird lives up to his name and is black, but the female is brown! Blackbirds have beautiful melodic songs, often compared to the songs of the nightingale.

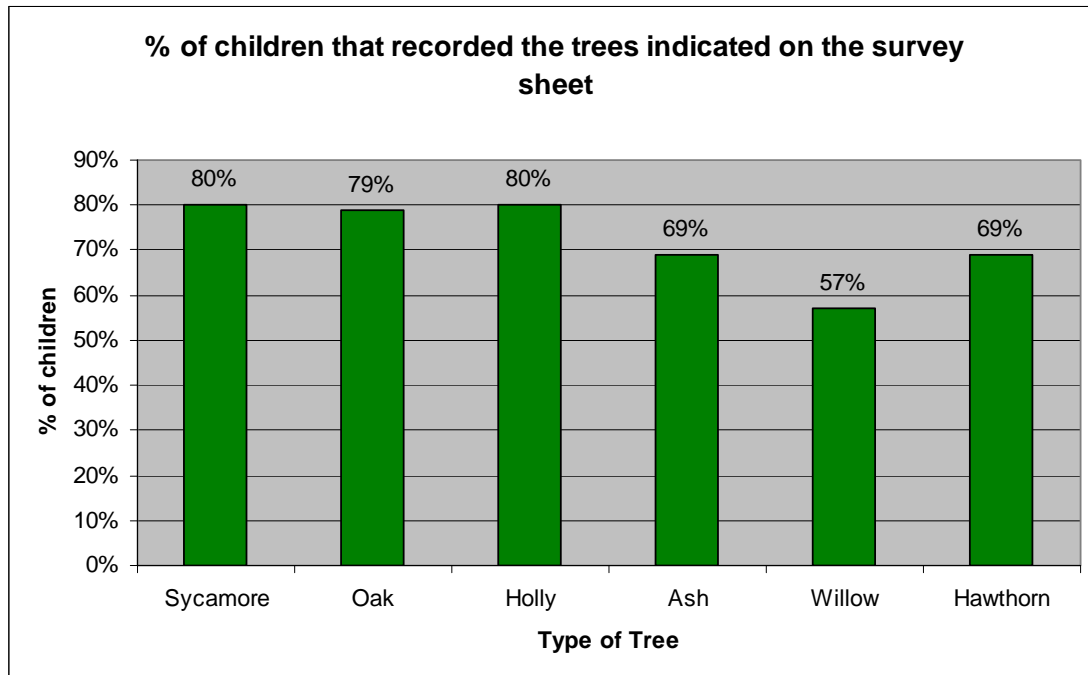
You can see blackbirds all year round, eating insects, worms and berries. Male blackbirds establish a territory in their first year and keep it for their whole lives, defending it against all other blackbirds. They nest within their territory but can look for food outside it.



Blackbirds have 2 or 3 broods each year, each with 3 to 5 young. The young birds leave the nest in 13 or 14 days when fully feathered, and then learn to fly within 1 week!

Over the last 25 years blackbird numbers have declined 20%. Schools can help blackbirds by making sure that they have hedges and shrubs for them to nest in, preferably shrubs with berries for food. It is also important to make sure that any hedge trimming is done outside the main breeding season of March to July so nests are not disturbed.

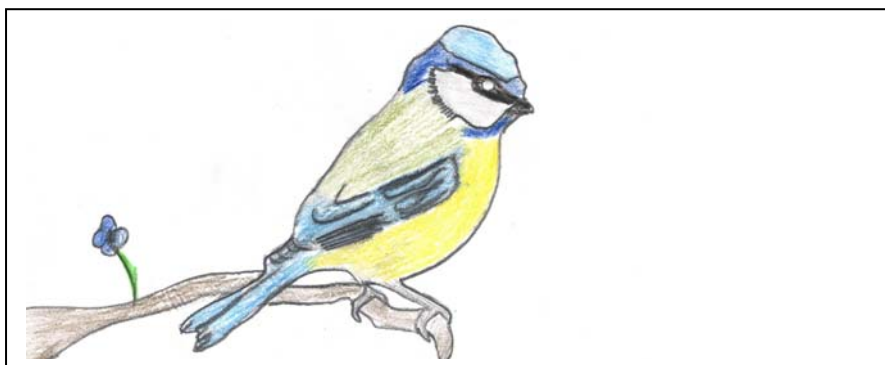
TREES



Trees

The survey results show that there is quite an even mix of tree types found in school grounds.

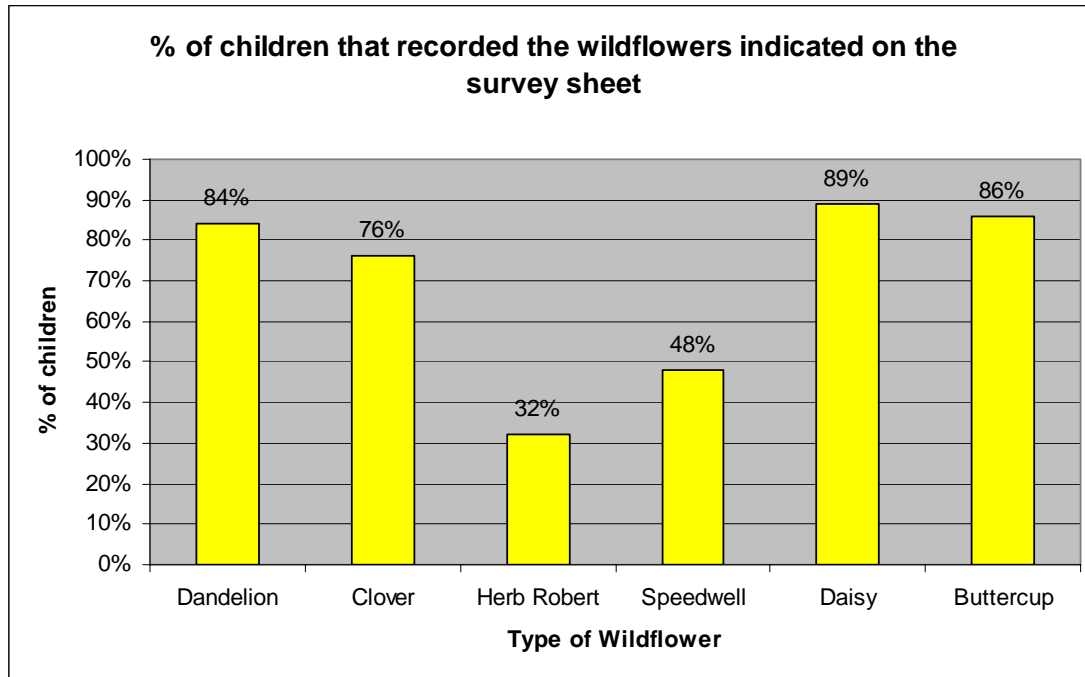
Trees are very good for wildlife. They provide a home for many insects and an attractive place to nest for lots of types of birds. The abundance of insects associated with trees - from caterpillars and spiders to aphids and beetles - provides food for many birds, particularly important when they are feeding their young.



Trees are also good for the environment. Trees 'lock-up' carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and produce oxygen. It is estimated that a mature tree can 'fix' 17 tonnes of carbon dioxide in a year. So a hectare of woodland can absorb the carbon emissions of about 100 cars.

Trees are the longest living and largest organisms in the world!

WILDFLOWERS

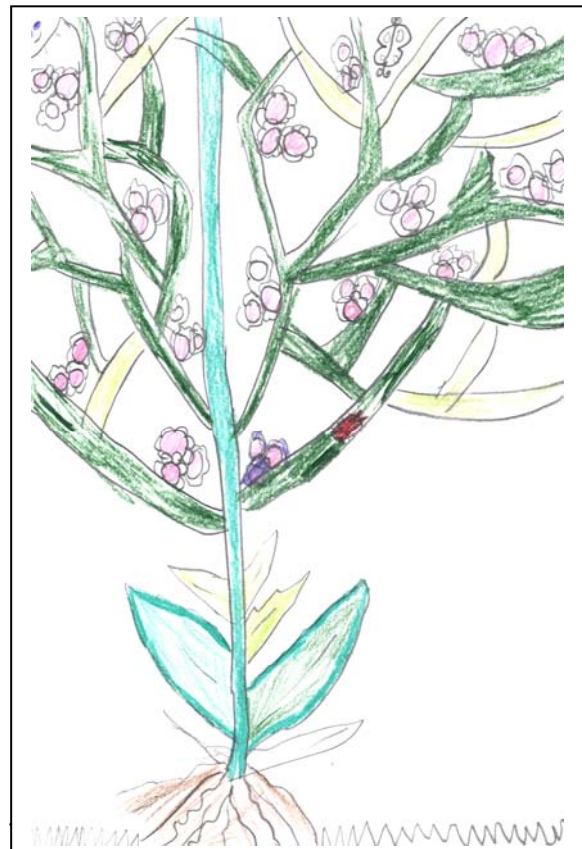


Wildflowers

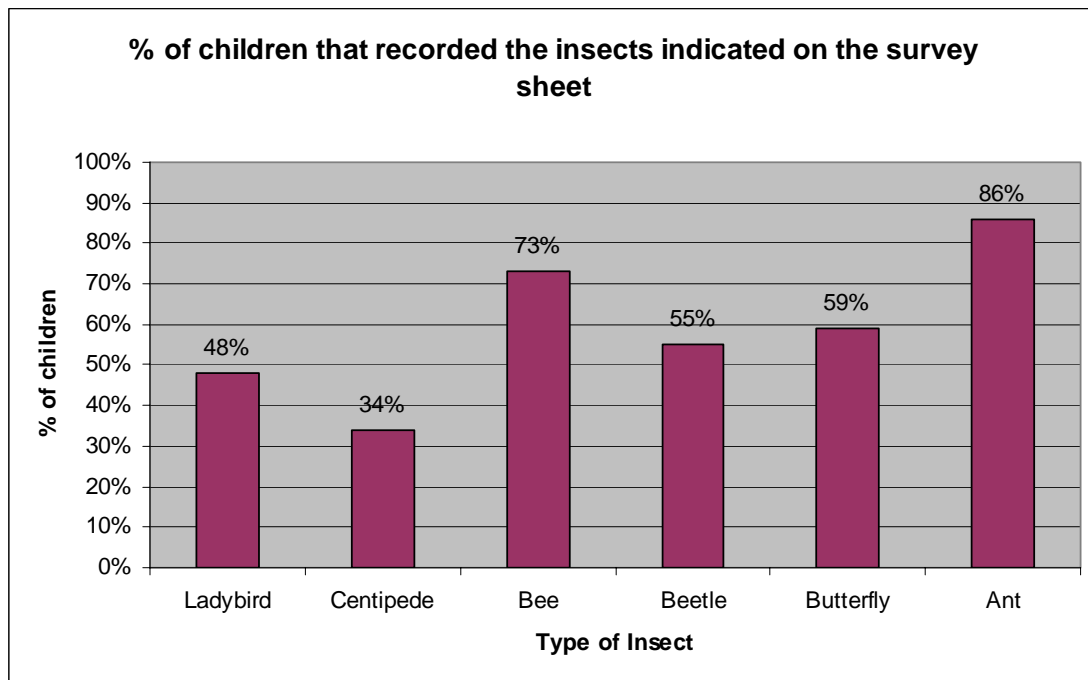
More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of schools in the survey have dandelions, clovers, daisies and buttercups in their grounds. These are common, yet beautiful wildflowers that make school fields more colourful in spring and summer. Herb Robert and speedwell were found less often - perhaps because they are harder to spot, but also because they are a little more rare.

Different wildflowers prefer different growing conditions. To see a wide variety of flowers it is best to look in lots of places in the school grounds - shady places under trees, damp places, in amongst long grass, even on walls or in cracks in paving. Wildflowers can be found just about anywhere.

Many wildflowers provide pollen and nectar insects. It is good to encourage wildflowers to grow in the school grounds - they help wildlife and they are a reminder of the natural world and the changing seasons.



INSECTS



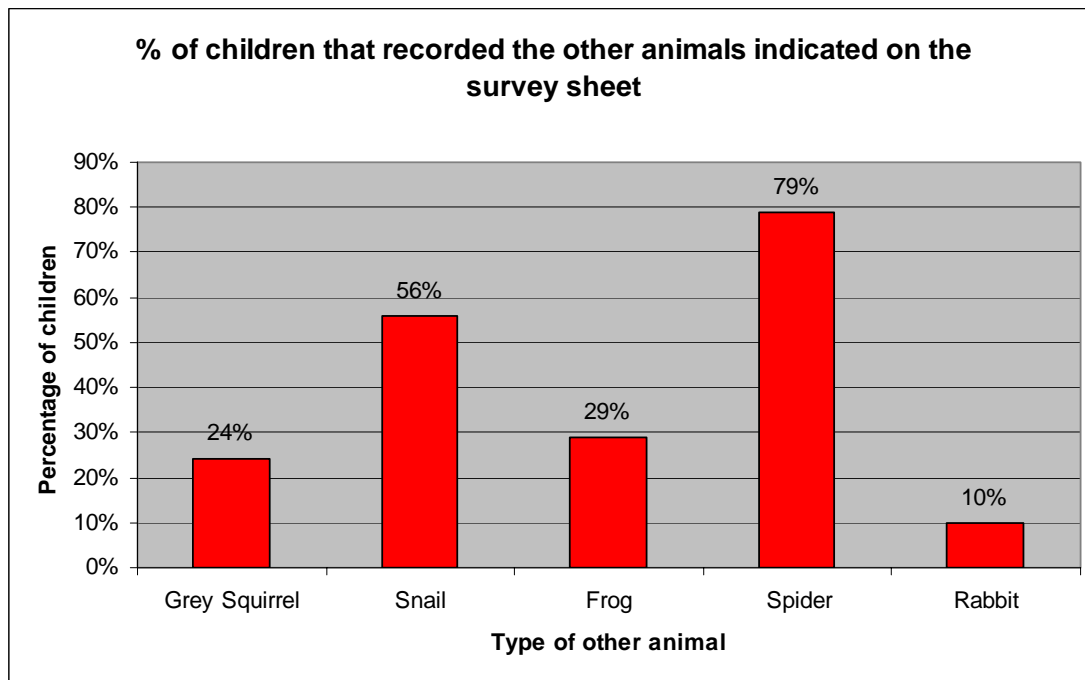
Insects

Ants were the most commonly recorded insect. They are amazing creatures - relative to their size they have the largest brain of any insect; there are more ants in the world than any other creature; the combined weight of all ants on earth is greater than that of humans! Ants live in large colonies, usually hidden underground or under stones.

Insects and other invertebrates play a vital role in nature. They pollinate plants, aerate the soil, turn dead plants into valuable compost, provide a meal for birds and mammals, and some eat less-welcome creatures such as aphids and red spider mites.

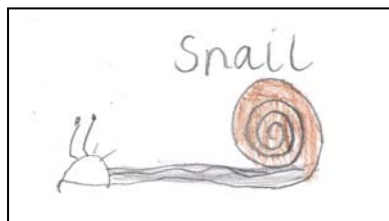
There are more than 27,000 types of insect in Great Britain. They make up more than 95% of species on earth.

OTHER ANIMALS



Other animals

The most common 'other animal' seen during the survey was the spider. Spiders have 4 pairs of legs and usually 8 eyes! They have spinners at the tip of their abdomen which can produce silk to build webs. Spiders shed their skins as they grow, sometimes 10 times before they are fully mature. There are about 600 species of spider in Britain.



More than half of schools recorded seeing garden snails. They prefer moist weather and were abundant in June 2008! Snails are most active at night and shelter by day under logs, stones and leaf litter from predators such as hedgehogs, rats, mice and frogs.

The least recorded animal in the survey was the rabbit - only seen in 10% of school grounds. Rabbits live together in underground tunnels, usually in the countryside. Schools with open fields nearby are more likely to have rabbits in their grounds.

