



GOING WILD FOR WELLBEING PROJECT NEWSLETTER



Issue 1. | August 2021

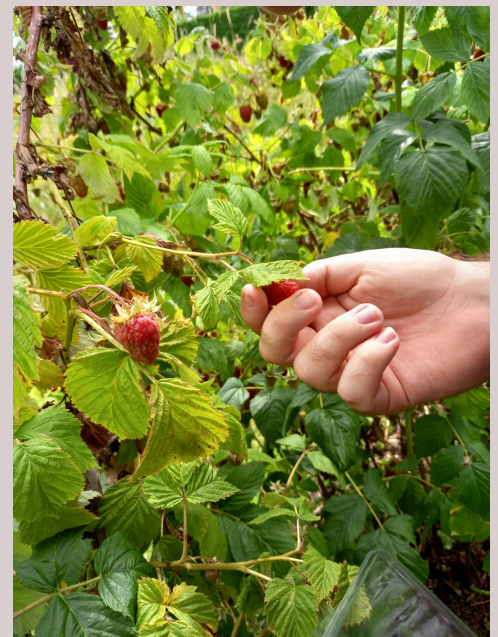


A Warm Welcome

The Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust Wild Skills Wild Spaces (WSWS) team have had a busy and exciting few months with the launch of their ecotherapy programme back in June 2021. In the first edition of our newsletter find out about what we've been up to; read testimonials from some of our participants; and get some helpful hints and tips to help you stay on top of your own health and wellbeing.

We have successfully delivered the first of many 12-week ecotherapy programmes from our partner site, Cultivate Newtown. Participants have been busy growing vegetables, harvesting fruits for the community shop and to take home, pruning fruit trees, foraging and learning to cook over open fire. With organic produce comes an array of wildlife, and so far participants have spotted butterflies, beetles and bees in abundance, and even slow worms, amongst many other things. While friendships have been forged and attendance on this programme high, we're delighted to announce that many participants are being re-referred onto other programmes from September. As part of the programme, we're able to offer our participants lead volunteer opportunities and they can also form friends of groups across some of our nature reserves. We continue to take referrals (see details on p. 2 on how to get involved).

Cultivate Community Gardens Newtown



Harvesting fruit at Cultivate Community Gardens



Campfire pancakes with foraged Jam



A participant pruning apple trees



The WSWS programme incorporates a range of activities to improve health and wellbeing through reconnecting people with nature and the environment, while making a positive change for wildlife in their communities – these methods are proven to reduce low level mental health concerns.



Hapa Zome - Japanese art of leaf printing



Youth Sessions at Severn Farm Pond Nature Reserve

A Safe Haven for Everyone

At Severn Farm Pond in Welshpool, we have welcomed two different groups of young people, aged 11-18, onto the programme who have been working really hard to make the reserve a safer and more inviting place for members of the community to enjoy.

So far, they have erected dead hedges for wildlife (using greenwood tools they made themselves), cleared paths, weeded some very wild herb beds and cut back overgrowth that had become dangerous. They have gained valuable skills such as fire-lighting, shelter building for survival and learned how to identify important plants for insects.

The groups continued into the school summer holidays, which some young participants have expressed can often be a lonely time for them. One stated: "it's been really cool to be trusted with fire and tools; these are the sorts of things I am interested in, but we don't get to use them in school and my parents don't have the tools or outdoor space at home, so I would normally just be sat alone all day playing on my games console."



Dead hedge made from old coppiced Hazel



Making tools using Ash (cut from a dangerous, overhanging branch due to Ash die-back)

Read What Lisa, Professional Service Co-ordinator from mental health charity, Ponthafren Association had to say

We have referred a number of people, aged 18 and up, onto the Wild Skills Wild Spaces (WSWS) project. These individuals suffer from a range of mental health conditions, most commonly anxiety and depression. The project has been brilliant for us as referrers as we often struggle to find 'safe' places that don't involve arts and crafts for clients - men in particular - to explore social interaction. This has enabled them to work on activities that engage them, such as bushcraft and food growing, with a small, consistent group of different people. It has also taught them skills, and built their confidence and self-esteem through socialising and goal setting.

One client, with whom I've worked for 2 years, was unable to make eye contact or hold a conversation. We struggled to find anything suitable for him to take part in that captured his interest. However, when I spoke to him about Wild Skills Wild Spaces he was visibly excited to take part. Since starting the programme not only does he thoroughly enjoy it, his confidence has increased and he's even now started getting involved in other community groups, such as a local five-a-side football team.

The client is really enjoying the project.

Participant testimonial

“Ecotherapy has given me a safe and positive place to pursue my interest in wildlife and the outdoors. Being able to learn new things each week and develop and practice new skills with the help and guidance of the team of staff is brilliant. It has really helped with my mental health and my social anxiety. It's provided a safe place where I feel comfortable engaging with others and being in social situations I would otherwise avoid. I really look forward to my time with the team of staff and fellow participants.”

Anon.



Staff Training and Continuous Professional Development



Sustainable Woodland Management

Connecting people of all ages to the natural materials of their environment enhances connectedness with nature, attachment to a special place in nature and ultimately the satisfaction found in caring for nature.

Humans need to feel connected with nature in order to commit to its protection. Greenwood working is one way to do this!

Wood-loving ancestors of ours may have been the first true conservationists, working their resources in a way that was renewable and sustainable, not only preserving trees, but enhancing the richness of the surrounding wildlife.

Working with wood exercises creative prowess and problem solving, which is proven to ease feelings of anxiety and depression.

On a more mindful level, the concentration required to craft even the simplest of features means that you spend much of your time in the present, focusing on the grain, shape and aroma of the wood in hand.

Green Ash has a wonderful cucumber aroma.



Greenwood worked items



Splitting, sawing, shaving and sharpening.

Last month the WSWS team were busy training in the basics in green woodworking, using Ash that had been felled on the reserve last season, due to the tree being diseased with Ash die-back. As the Ash timber had been kept in the shade with its bark intact, it was green enough to split and process into working blocks for making small hand items, such as beetles (mallets), spoons, spatulas and benches - a great example of using local timber in a sustainable way in order to give back to nature and wildlife.

We're keen to share these skills with participants who are referred to the WSWS 12-week ecotherapy programme.



The Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust WSWS and Living Landscapes teams enjoy a joint training course at Severn Farm Pond Nature Reserve

This hugely successful project is all about **boosting mental health through its '5 ways to wellbeing', which are connecting with nature, being active, taking notice, learning and giving back.**



Severn Farm Pond Nature Reserve in Welshpool



Flora and fauna identification



Our referral pathway is always open

How do I get someone involved?

If you think this could benefit someone you know, email us at ecotherapy@montwt.co.uk for a referral form. Once we've received your completed form, one of our team will be in touch with you and the participant by phone or email with further information before sign-up. We will also keep your referral pathway updated throughout the process.

We take referrals from primary and secondary healthcare, such as:

GP's and nurses
Powys Teaching Health Board
Child and Adolescent Mental health Service.
Adult Mental Health Services
Integrated Autism services, (IAS) etc.
Statutory Services - Powys County Council (PCC)
Youth Intervention services
Family Intervention services

Email us: ecotherapy@montwt.co.uk

Stay up to date with the project by visiting us on:



[Website: home | Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust \(montwt.co.uk\)](http://montwt.co.uk)

4 top tips for connecting with nature and wildlife.

1. First, find a quiet spot outside where you can simply 'be' in nature – whether that's under a tree, next to a stream, on the beach, in your garden or at a local park.
2. Leave your phone at home so you have no distractions.
3. Tune in to your senses, what you can hear, see, smell and taste in the air, and notice what you're experiencing, from the shapes within nature to the sounds of birds and other animals.
4. Then ask yourself how it makes you feel and make a mental note – remember there's no right way to connect, it's just a feeling from within.



GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES

Bwrdd Iechyd
Addysgu Powys
Powys Teaching
Health Board

CardiffMet
cawr
Centre for Health, Activity
and Wellbeing Research

MetCaerdydd
cyigll
Canolfan Ymchwil ar gyfer
Iechyd, Gweithgarwch a Lles

