



Nature Days Activity Guide

For Early Years

About this Guide

This guide is provided to all teachers who attend our Nature Days training course. It serves to aid teachers in running a Nature

Day of their own— an exciting and educational day of outdoor activities for early years students. If you're low on time, a single activity may also be run independently and will still earn Dinja Waħda points.

To prepare for a Nature Day, a location must first be chosen. Suitable activities can then be selected from this guide using the location key. However, activities need not be confined to those provided—feel free to invent your own as well.

Each teacher involved must have a printed copy of this guide in order to familiarise themselves with the activities and prepare any resources required. It is also recommended that the guidebook is brought on the day to help facilitate the delivery of the activities.

These activities help children to develop a range of skills from throughout the Early Years curriculum, such as creativity, confidence, and cognitive skills. The most direct curriculum links are provided for each activity.

Throughout this guide, 'simplify' and 'stretch' tips are given to assist you in adapting each activity to suit children of different ages and abilities.

The amount of time it takes to complete an activity may vary greatly. If the children are especially engaged in an activity, allow them to take their time as this is where they will benefit the most.

Dinja Waħda

Dinja Waħda is BirdLife Malta's major educational initiative in its commitment to protect wildlife and its habitats.

Dinja Waħda taps young people's innate fascination with nature and seeks to develop it into a sense of responsibility towards the natural world. Through Dinja Waħda, children are made aware of people's impact on the environment.

The overall aim is to trigger in children behavioural changes that will lead to future adults who will treat our planet better than we do today.

Each time you take part in a Nature Day, your school will earn 50 Dinja Waħda points. Don't forget to send a feedback form and photos.

Location key

These symbols indicate suitable locations for each activity.



Coast



Park or
Garden



Woodland



School
Grounds



Countryside

Outdoor Code of Conduct

When doing outdoor activities, it is important to establish with your students a set of behavioural guidelines. This is both for their own safety and for the protection of the surrounding environment. Instead of simply listing rules, try having a group discussion in which the students come up with their own. Encourage them to question why we follow these rules.

In particular, we would recommend trying to steer students towards the following ideas; take your litter home with you, try to keep quiet, wash your hands before eating, and don't pick plants or remove wildlife.

Get in Touch

We're here to help if you need any assistance, and we'd love to hear about any new activities you've come up with.

So please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Email: education@birdlifemalta.org

Phone: 2134 7645 (Extension 503)

Curriculum Links

Spending time outdoors and interacting with nature is greatly beneficial towards a child’s development, bringing various benefits to health and wellbeing. Our Nature Day activities build on this, also helping children to develop their cognitive, interpersonal and motor skills.

All of these activities address a range of skills from throughout the curriculum. Below are listed the most direct links for each activity.

Learning Outcome	Skills developed	Activity
1. Children who develop a strong sense of identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive relationship with peers and adults. • Participation, responsibility and risk-taking. • Leadership and perseverance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pinecone Challenge—p6. • Trust in Nature—p11. • Rubble Walls—p12.
2. Children who have a positive self-image.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagination and creativity. • Confidence and independence. • Being prepared to try things out and use a range of strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet a Tree—p5. • Trust in Nature—p11. • Rubble Walls—p12.
3. Children who are socially adept.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teamwork and collaboration—sharing roles and taking turns. • Empathy and respect. • Decision making and being aware of the consequences of choices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tree Collages—p9. • Trust in Nature—p11.
4. Children who are effective communicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using various means and media to communicate—music, art, drama, dance. • Coherent in Maltese, and aware of English. • Wide vocabulary. • Aware of basic concepts - shapes, colours, numbers and patterns. • Aware of the use of symbols as a means of representation. • Engage with digital literacy (cameras and computers) to retrieve and organise data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colour Hunt—p4. • Pinecone Challenge—p6. • Tree Collages—p9. • Colour Detectives—p10. • Trust in Nature—p11.
5. Children who nurture positive attitudes towards learning and become engaged and confident learners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grouping, classifying, organising and sequencing. • Making predictions. • Interest and curiosity towards the surrounding world. • Conduct simple research—investigation, examination and observation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colour Hunt—p4. • Meet a Tree—p5. • Pinecone Challenge –p6. • Caterpillar Hunt –p7. • Ant Trails –p8. • Tree Collages—p9 • Colour Detectives—p10. • Trust in Nature—p11. • Rubble Walls—p12.



Colour Hunt

Curriculum links: Children explore and examine their surrounding environment. They also become aware of colours and the use of symbols as a means of representation.

About this activity: Children hunt for coloured cards hidden throughout their surrounding environment, and learn to identify what each card is attached to. This can be played with groups of various sizes, and can even be made into a game where teams compete to see who can find the most coloured cards. This is a great way to start a Nature Day as it gives children the opportunity to explore and discover their new surroundings, so encourage them to search everywhere.

Materials needed: Coloured card, scissors, and an appropriate means to display cards in the surrounding environment (e.g. string, rubber bands, or adhesive tape).

Instructions:

1. Choose 3 or 4 distinctive plants or habitats which are numerous in the site where you will be holding your Nature Day and assign a colour to each. These could include, for example; palm trees, rubble walls, olive trees, hedges, or ponds.
2. Cut out several cards of each colour, about the size of a playing card. Before the children arrive, display these cards to label the features they represent.
3. Children then search all around the site for the coloured cards, counting as many as they can. Encourage them to try and find them all.
4. Each time a child spots a coloured card, they must inform a teacher. Teachers can then explain to them what feature that coloured label represents. Ask the children to describe this plant or habitat to help them remember what it looks like.
5. For each plant or habitat, teach the children some simple facts (e.g. Olive trees can live for hundreds of years, and the leaves of palm trees can be used to weave baskets) and invite them to interact with it (e.g. count the oranges on an orange tree, feel the roughness of a palm tree trunk, or look for animals on a rubble wall). Inspire their curiosity and imagination by asking questions about (e.g. why does the tree grow so tall? Why do insects like to live in the rubble wall?).
6. Each time they see the same colour again, ask the children if they remember what it represents and what else they can remember about it.
7. At the end, check with the students what they have learned—can they remember all the names? How many facts can they recall?



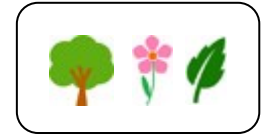
Simplify

Use larger cards, or display them more visibly.
Focus simply on learning the name of the plant or habitat.

Stretch

Get the children to find additional, unlabelled examples of the plants or habitats they've learned about.

Meet a Tree



Curriculum links: Children are encouraged to be inquisitive, whilst developing their imagination and creativity.

About this activity: Children ‘make friends’ with a tree and use a range of senses to get to know it, thus helping them to feel more connected with nature. This activity is very versatile as all it requires is access to trees and plenty of imagination.

Materials needed: None. Except for stretch activity, which requires plain paper and coloured crayons.

Instructions:

Ask your students to find their favourite tree in the outdoor space, either independently or in small groups. Ask them to think of a name for their tree and discuss what they like about it. If it has low enough branches, they can even introduce themselves by ‘shaking hands’ with the tree. Next, guide them through the following steps, in any order.

- Look up at the tree—is it tall or short? What do you see in the canopy (e.g. birds, fruit, pinecones)?
- Crouch down under the tree—what can you see on the floor below it (e.g. ants, worms, insects, fallen leaves, exposed roots)?
- Hug your new friend—Can you get your arms all the way around?
- Close your eyes and run your fingers up and down the trunk—How does it feel? Is it rough or smooth?
- Stand quietly under the tree and listen—what can you hear (e.g. birds singing, leaves rustling in the wind)?
- If within reach, pick a leaf and crush it—what does it smell like? Does it smell good or bad?

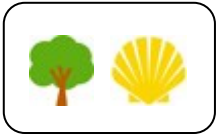


Simplify

The entire group can pick a shared favourite tree and work through the activities together.

Stretch

Children can produce bark rubbings by placing a piece of blank paper over the tree bark and rubbing the long edge of a crayon against it.



Pinecone Challenge

Curriculum links: Children collaborate in a shared activity in which they gain familiarity with concepts of size, shape, colour and numbers, and practise the vocabulary to compare and contrast these.

About this activity: Children gather pinecones and sort them according to their various properties. This activity is best held in autumn or winter, when more pinecones will have dropped. In a beach setting, stones or shells may be used instead.

Materials needed: None.

Instructions:

First, ask the children to gather as many pinecones as they can and put them all in a big pile. Allow sufficient time to do this as this is a great opportunity for them to discover and explore their surroundings. Ensure it is made clear that pinecones should only be gathered from the ground, not picked from trees. You can then work through these activities in any order.

- As a group, sort the pinecones into piles according to size—One pile of big ones, one of medium, and one of small. Where there is confusion or disagreement, take examples from each pile and discuss whether it is larger or smaller than the one in question.
- Line the pinecones up end-to-end from largest to smallest. If you have a large group of children, or have collected a lot of pinecones, you may find it easier to divide up the pinecones and do this activity in smaller groups. You can even turn it into a game, with an added element of competition—give each group an equal number of pinecones and ensure they all start in unison, then see who finishes first.
- Discuss the different shapes of pinecone you have found. For example, they may be long and thin, round, or egg-shaped. Then, ask the children to sort the pinecones into piles according to shape.
- Discuss the different colours of pinecone you have found. What different colours are there (perhaps dark brown, reddish brown, light brown or grey)? The differences may be fairly subtle, so make sure the children have plenty of opportunities to compare examples and decide, for example, which is darker and which is lighter. If there are enough distinctly different colours, get the children to sort them into piles according to colour.
- Create simple shapes by laying the pinecones on the ground. See if the children can 'draw' a square, circle, rectangle and triangle.



Simplify

Use fewer, more generalised categories when sorting. For example, omit the medium size option. And instead of sorting into individual colours, simply divide into dark and light.

Stretch

Extend the drawing activity by creating more complex pictures, such as a tree or a butterfly.

Caterpillar Hunt



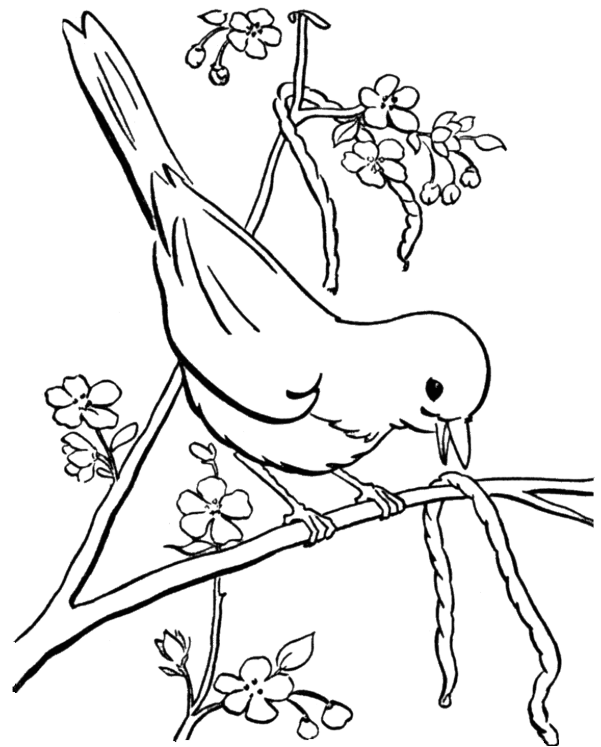
Curriculum links: Children conduct simple investigative research through which they broaden their knowledge and practise grouping by colour.

About this activity: Children learn about the concept of camouflage through role play as birds on the hunt for caterpillars to eat. This is an active game that can be held in any setting.

Materials needed: 3 or more colours of string, of which at least one must be a similar colour to the surrounding environment (e.g. a dull brown or green would be suitable for a woodland). A pair of scissors.

Instructions:

1. Cut the string up into lots of small pieces of 2-5cm in length. Make sure there is an equal number of each colour.
2. Hide the string at low levels and on the ground, ensuring that the children don't see where it is hidden. You may wish to do this before the children's arrival, or whilst they are distracted with another activity.
3. Explain to the children that they will be role-playing as hungry birds and that pieces of string will represent the caterpillars that they eat.
4. Allow a set period of time (e.g. 10 minutes) for the children to find as many string 'caterpillars' as they can and bring them back to you.
5. As a group, sort all the gathered string 'caterpillars' into piles according to colour, then count how many there are of each.
6. Discuss the results, introducing the idea of camouflage to explain it.
Perhaps they managed to find fewer of the colours that camouflage well. Even if not, ask which colours were they thought were easier to find. Explain how some animals use camouflage to hide themselves from predators.

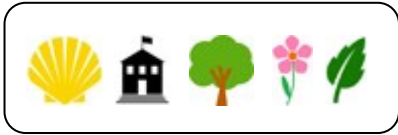


Simplify

Try cutting larger 'caterpillars' and distributing them more noticeably, e.g. laid on open surfaces rather than hidden amongst foliage.

Stretch

Try making it into a race. Divide the group into teams competing to see who can find the most 'caterpillars' within the given time. This also gives them practice at effective teamwork.



Ant Trails

Curriculum links: Children conduct simple investigative research, making predictions and gaining knowledge through observation.

About this activity: You may not come across many larger animals, so this activity is a great way of encouraging the children to notice and appreciate the smaller ones. Children explore the natural world through a simple experiment on the trail-making behaviour of ants. This is best in warmer weather, when there are more ants around.

Materials needed: None. However, you may find a magnifying glass helpful.

Instructions:

1. Search the local area for a trail of ants. If you have access to the site beforehand, putting a little sugar or some biscuit crumbs down a few hours in advance may help to attract ants.
2. First, take a few minutes to observe the ants—what are they doing? Where are they going? What colour are they? How many legs do they have? If you have a magnifying glass, use it to get a closer look.
3. Ask the children to predict what they think will happen when an obstruction disturbs their route.
4. Carefully place a small obstruction (e.g. a stick or a pencil) across the path of the ants and ask the children to predict what they think will happen.
5. Watch to see what the ants do next—observe first their initial confusion, and then what solution or alternative they find.
6. Discuss the results. Explain how ants make their trails by leaving scents behind them so that other ants know where to go.
7. You may then wish to remove the obstruction and continue making observations.



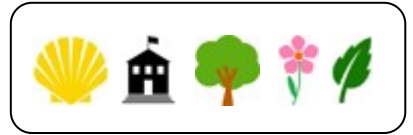
Simplify

Omit the placement of an obstruction, spending extra time instead on thoroughly observing the ants' natural behaviour.

Stretch

Use a fun game to demonstrate the principles they have learnt. One child hides, leaving a trail of objects (e.g. stones, leaves or pinecones) on the ground, and then the others must find them by following the trail.

Tree Collages



Curriculum links: Children collaborate with their peers towards a creative activity.

About this activity: Children gather resources from their surrounding environment, then use these to collectively produce a collage of a tree on the ground.

Materials needed: None.

Instructions:

1. Discuss with the children the common components of a tree—the roots, trunk, branches, leaves, and other possible parts such as fruits, flowers or pinecones.
2. Send the children to gather resources from the surrounding area. Resource collection should not cause any damage to the environment itself so ensure that, for example, leaves are collected from the ground and not picked from trees. Try to use natural resources such as stones, seeds, leaves, sticks and pinecones.
3. Find a space of at least one square metre and work as a group to produce a large collage of a tree on the ground.



Simplify

Focus on the two main components—the trunk and the leaves.

Stretch

Children can take photos of the tree collage using a digital camera or smartphone, then upload and review them upon return to school.



Colour Detectives

Curriculum links: Children gain familiarity with colours through simple research. Examining their environment may help to foster an interest and curiosity in the wider world.

About this activity: Children act as 'detectives', searching their surroundings for different colours, which they check off one-by-one on a bingo-style sheet. This is a very versatile activity as it can be carried out in any setting and is easily adapted to different abilities.

Materials needed: Printed copies of the colour bingo sheet (see below) and pencils.

Instructions:

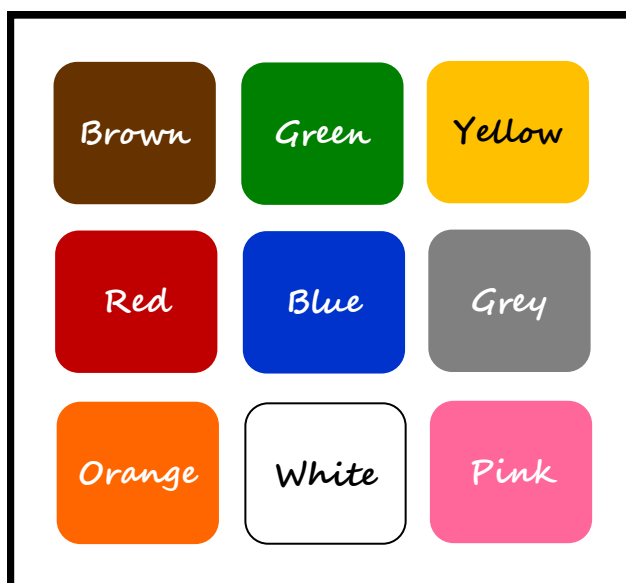
Before the Nature Day, ensure you have printed enough colour bingo sheets and pencils for each child. You can photocopy our examples below, or you may create your own to suit the children and the setting.

Children use the sheet to see if they can find all the listed colours in their surroundings. This may be carried out individually, in small groups, or as a whole class. It can even be made into a competition where the winner is the first to find them all.

Make sure to clarify that they should simply tick off each colour when they find it, and should not pick plants or bring things back.

Before they begin, ask the children to predict which colours they expect to be most common, and which will be the hardest to find. Briefly discuss the reasons for these predictions.

Upon their return, go through each colour discussing what they found and where they found it.



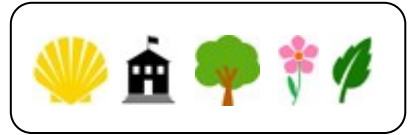
Simplify

Design a colour sheet with fewer colours, and try to focus on those more commonly found at the location.

Stretch

Create a sheet with more colours to be found. Or ask the children to find light and dark examples of each colour.

Trust in Nature



Curriculum links: Children are encouraged to take up challenges and be creative in a collaborative activity. They also develop their ability to communicate coherently using a wide range of vocabulary.

About this activity: A blindfolded child is presented with natural items found in the environment by their peers. They must then use their other senses to assess its qualities and guess what it is. This activity may be carried out in the school ground if you gather a selection of natural resources beforehand.

Materials needed: Scarves, handkerchiefs, or any scrap fabric that could be used as blindfolds.

Instructions:

This activity may be done in pairs or as a group, where each child takes it in turn to be blindfolded.

Whilst a child is blindfolded, the other children gather natural objects from their surrounding environment. These may include, for example; sticks, stones, pinecones, leaves or shells. They then present these, one by one, to the blindfolded child who must try to figure out what it is by answering the following questions.

- Is it big or small?
- Is it light or heavy?
- What is its texture like (e.g. rough, smooth, bumpy, scratchy)?
- What shape is it (e.g. long, round, pointy)?
- Is it hard or soft?
- What does it smell like?

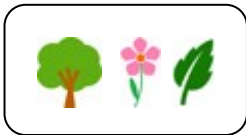


Simplify

Present the child with two items at a time and tell them what they are. They must then determine which is which.

Stretch

Challenge the children further by limiting the amount of time they have to identify the object.



Rubble Walls

Curriculum links: Children take the lead in an investigation through which they learn to develop a range of strategies and to persevere when faced with difficulties.

About this activity: Children examine a rubble wall for signs of plants or animals. This can be carried out at any rubble wall, however the larger the better as this allows the children more to explore. A rubble wall in a natural setting such as a woodland or countryside is preferable as there is likely to be more to find.

Materials needed: None. However, you may find a magnifying glass helpful.

Instructions:

Allow the children plenty of time to examine a stretch of rubble wall, looking for any signs of plant or animal life that they can find. Begin by discussing examples of what they may see and where they might find them. Explain that they shouldn't be discouraged if they don't find much at first—many of the smaller things are easily overlooked but will be found eventually if they keep looking. Encourage them to inspect the wall from a range of perspectives—from the top to the bottom, and within the cracks between stones, as well as considering what may be flying about in front of or above the wall.

Here are some of the things to keep an eye out for:

- Plants.
- Moss.
- Lichen.
- Tree Roots.
- Ants, beetles and flies.
- Bees.
- Wasps or wasp nests.
- Spiders or spider webs.
- Snails.
- Slugs or slug trails.
- Caterpillars.
- Lizards.
- Skinks.
- Geckos.
- Butterflies.



Simplify

Instead of individually, try carrying out the activity as a group.

Stretch

Ask the children to count the number of things found, keeping a tally as they go. For an even further challenge, try keeping a separate tally for each category; plants, animals, and evidence of animals (e.g. spider webs, wasp nests and slug trails).

Dinja Waħda Points



To make sure that your students get regular contact with nature we're rewarding schools for small activities as well as full Nature Days.

Great locations to host a **Nature Day** include Buskett Woodland, the beach or local countryside. It is important for your students to experience a large nature area outside of the school ground so if you organise this trip you will receive **50 extra Dinja Waħda points**.

We understand that trips out are limited so you can also use your school grounds or a local park to allow frequent use of the guide. Each time you run an outdoor activity with your group you will receive **20 Dinja Waħda points**.

When you run an activity or organise a nature day please take photos and let us know what you have done by emailing dinjawahda@birdlifemalta.org.

Lifelong Learning through Nature



Lifelong Learning through Nature is a collaborative partnership project between BirdLife Malta, the Ministry for Education and Employment (Malta), the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK), BirdWatch Ireland, and the Polish Society for the Protection of Birds.

The key objective of the project is to highlight the importance of learning outside the classroom and connection with nature. Innovative ideas, resources and teacher training will be developed, trialled and implemented in Malta with input from all project partners. Following a review the lessons learnt will then be shared and relevant programme ideas will then be developed and expanded to be implemented in both Ireland and Poland.



Erasmus+

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication [communication] reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.