

GROWING UP WILD.

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On Saturday April 16th 2016 Epping Forest Field Centre opened its doors to over 100 Rainbows, Brownies, Guides and their leaders for a *Growing Up Wild* day of exploration and adventure. *Growing Up Wild* is a 3-year initiative for members of LASER (London and South East England Girlguiding) to connect with and embrace their natural environment. There are 17 'Paw Prints' in total that act as badges to collect. It is all about inspiring girls to get outdoors in all seasons and discovering something new in their local area, so Epping Forest – a wonderful place to discover and learn – is the perfect location. This short article reports on the day.

GROWING UP WILD – A DAY OF EXPLORATION AND ADVENTURE

Growing Up Wild is a good example showcasing the importance of the Year Of Fieldwork – being outdoors, raising awareness of fieldwork and the benefits and value of discovery. All of the girls that attended live within 10 miles of Epping Forest, and yet many of them had never explored what is on their doorstep. Through completing such a wide range of activities, the girls developed lots of transferable skills. These included: tree, plant and invertebrate identification; teambuilding; navigation; and how to use their senses to explore a new locality.

Despite the rain and the quagmires that emerged between sites, the girls persevered and took part in six exciting and engaging activity sessions, earning themselves two *Growing Up Wild* Badges ('In the Mud' and 'In the Spring'). The activities included: a sensory adventure; pond dipping; minibeasting; mud mayhem; mouse houses; and plants and trees.

Mud was the key theme throughout the day and soil painting was the main activity in Mud Mayhem. This session ended with a spectacular muddy handprint in their booklets! Sensory Adventure consisted of creating a nature's palette of all the colours of the Forest and meeting a tree whilst blindfolded. Trees were recognized by leaves and bark, while minibeasts were identified in the pond and under logs based on their characteristics. Finally the girls got the chance to create a 'Mouse House' from natural materials to see if they could keep their mouse (bottle of warm water – with ears!) insulated.



FIGURE 1. Some of the day's activities included soil painting on Epping trees for Mud Mayhem; marking the end of the session with a spectacular muddy handprint in their booklets; and meeting a tree blindfolded as part of a sensory adventure.

The girls were given a booklet to record their adventures throughout the day: the creatures they found in the different habitats; the leaves they identified; the senses they used; and the trees they met. They received different coloured, nature themed stamps, for completed activities, an easy way to monitor their progress towards receiving their badges. As well as the structured activities, additional challenges were listed in their booklets to encourage them to delve further into Epping Forest and earn extra stamps for their efforts. They were tasked with a sensory focused scavenger hunt, a leaf bingo tally and an Epping Forest Field Centre quiz!

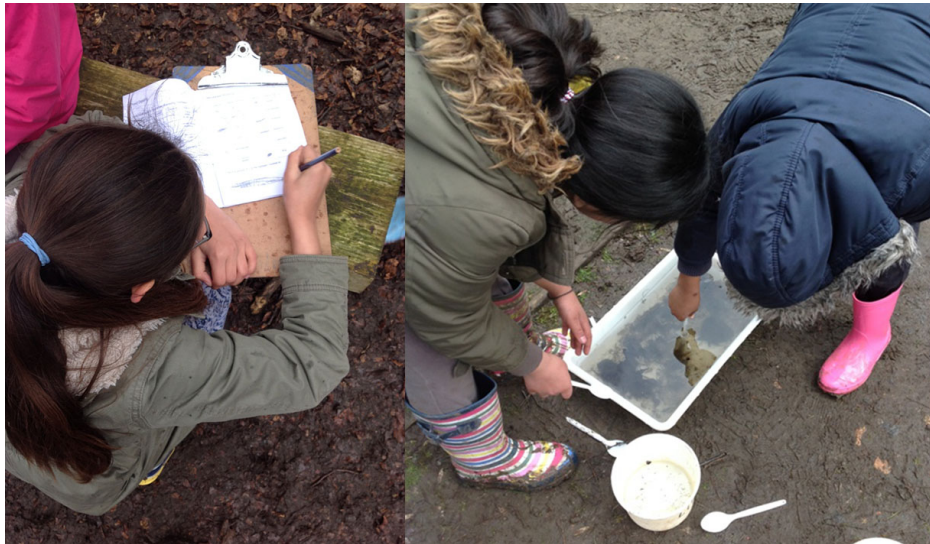


FIGURE 2. The girls made a record of the creatures they found while hunting for minibeasts and also discovered that a wide range of invertebrates lived in the pond.

After six hours, six activities, two badges achieved and lots of skills learned the girls returned to their parents with muddy uniforms and smiles all round. The day was incredibly successful with evaluations describing it as 'muddy...fun...amazing...exciting and adventurous'. Some of the participants described it as 'something different' adding that they had 'enjoyed learning a lot about nature'. Leaders were similarly impressed, comments included 'excellent in all respects...entertaining and learning through fun by default'.

This was the second *Growing Up Wild* event held at Epping Forest Field Centre since the beginning of the initiative and within days another experience was booked for over 200 participants in October 2016. The next event will focus on exploring 'In the Woods', 'In the Autumn', and 'Animal Homes'. Through word of mouth following the big event, we have also had a flurry of uniform group bookings for specific activity sessions.

Through our specific events and individual unit bookings, we will have helped over 500 local learners Grow Up Wild by the end of the Year of Fieldwork! At Epping Forest Field Centre we are committed to delivering first-hand experiences to a wide range of learners. Of the 20,000+ learner experiences we provide each year, our individuals and family activities including our uniform group provision, birthday parties, holiday activities and adult courses, make up over 2,000 learners.

Growing Up Wild is not just for members of LASER, all members of Girlguiding can take part and enjoy the area around them whilst earning new badges. So go explore, go discover, GO WILD!

