

Scottish Natural Heritage

Teaching in Nature

Baron's Haugh RSPB Reserve

Baron's Haugh RSPB Reserve covers over 120ha and consists of a lovely mix of woodland, wetland and grassland habitats, along with riverside scenery. It also has a rich cultural history, with remnants of the old country estate and industrial heritage. It is close to Motherwell and has a good network of paths, making it accessible to local people, including schools and nurseries.

The site manager Stephen Owen, who was fairly new to Baron's Haugh, saw the potential of the site for education and welcomed the opportunity to get involved in Teaching in Nature. He felt it would be a good way to start making connections with local schools wanted to see if engaging schools via the Teaching in Nature project could save him some much needed time to spend on other reserve tasks.

Seven teachers and early years practitioners (EYPs) from five nurseries in North Lanarkshire engaged with Baron's Haugh through their Teaching in Nature professional development. Stephen's main role was to introduce the group of teachers to the site as part of their collaborative planning session. Many of the participants had concerns at the start of the project; about safety and discipline outside, toileting and adverse weather, so they welcomed the opportunity to meet colleagues to share hopes and fears and devise solutions and learning activities.

The activities the teachers and EYPs delivered included; sensory activities; using magnifying glasses, binoculars and cameras; den building; looking for signs of wildlife; and creative activities with natural resources, such as collages, clay designs, stick men and leaf frames. The children enjoyed the freedom to explore the wild spaces and use fallen trees and tree trunks for climbing and hiding. The practitioners noted a great interest in natural objects such as sticks and leaves and the use of language and new vocabulary to discuss and compare texture, size and colour. One teacher, from Clydeview ASN Nursery, noted that learning outdoors was a particularly valuable experience for some of her pupils, who are so often 'wrapped in cotton wool'.



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**Stephen Owen,
Reserve Manager**



One year on and at least 4 of the participants had visited Baron's Haugh with their pupils. St Brendan's Primary Nursery Class are located within walking distance of Baron's Haugh and made at least 4 visits in the year that followed their TiN experience, only constrained by the adult:pupil ratio required. Firtrees Nursery now uses Baron's Haugh regularly as part of their Forest School programme and Glencairn Primary Nursery Class had also returned.

All the staff who responded to our 'one year on' survey, said their confidence in taking learning outdoors had increased, from either a 2 or a 3 out of 5 prior to Teaching in Nature, to either a 4 or a 5.

In addition they had all shared their experiences and supported colleagues in their outdoor learning, e.g: visiting Baron's Haugh with colleagues to help them plan; sharing their experiences of overcoming challenges such as inclement weather and toileting and giving presentations to parents and colleagues. Clydeview Primary Nursery staff were involved in an event aimed at Teacher Educators, sharing their experiences of the challenges in taking ASN pupils outdoors. Their colleagues in the rest of the school have been taking a leaf out of their book and are also trying to get outdoor more.

Since Teaching in Nature, Stephen has started to develop really close links with local primary schools, who are becoming very proactive in using the reserve. This has included classroom linked topics, John Muir Award activities and involving pupils in conservation tasks on site. He says "Teaching in Nature was the catalyst, helping to create the initial positive links." To other site managers considering giving Teaching in Nature a go he said "Really it is very minimal work – just a couple of guided visits for the teachers and providing a little support afterwards if needed. More than worth it for the potential benefits!"

[Teaching in Nature](#) combines a collaborative and practical approach to professional development in outdoor learning. It supports groups of teachers to work together to use a nearby place that is special for nature to plan, implement and evaluate challenging and fun outdoor learning experiences for their pupils. An evaluation of the 2012/13 Teaching in Nature project found that 80% of respondents had continued to take learning outdoors in the year that followed and 73% had supported a colleague to take their class outdoors.

If you'd like more information on [*Teaching in Nature*](#) or advice on how to use the approach in your context, contact: sharon.cunningham@snh.gov.uk



"I can't believe we have existed so closely to such a beautiful place and never made use of it... I felt that the curricular areas were endless."

