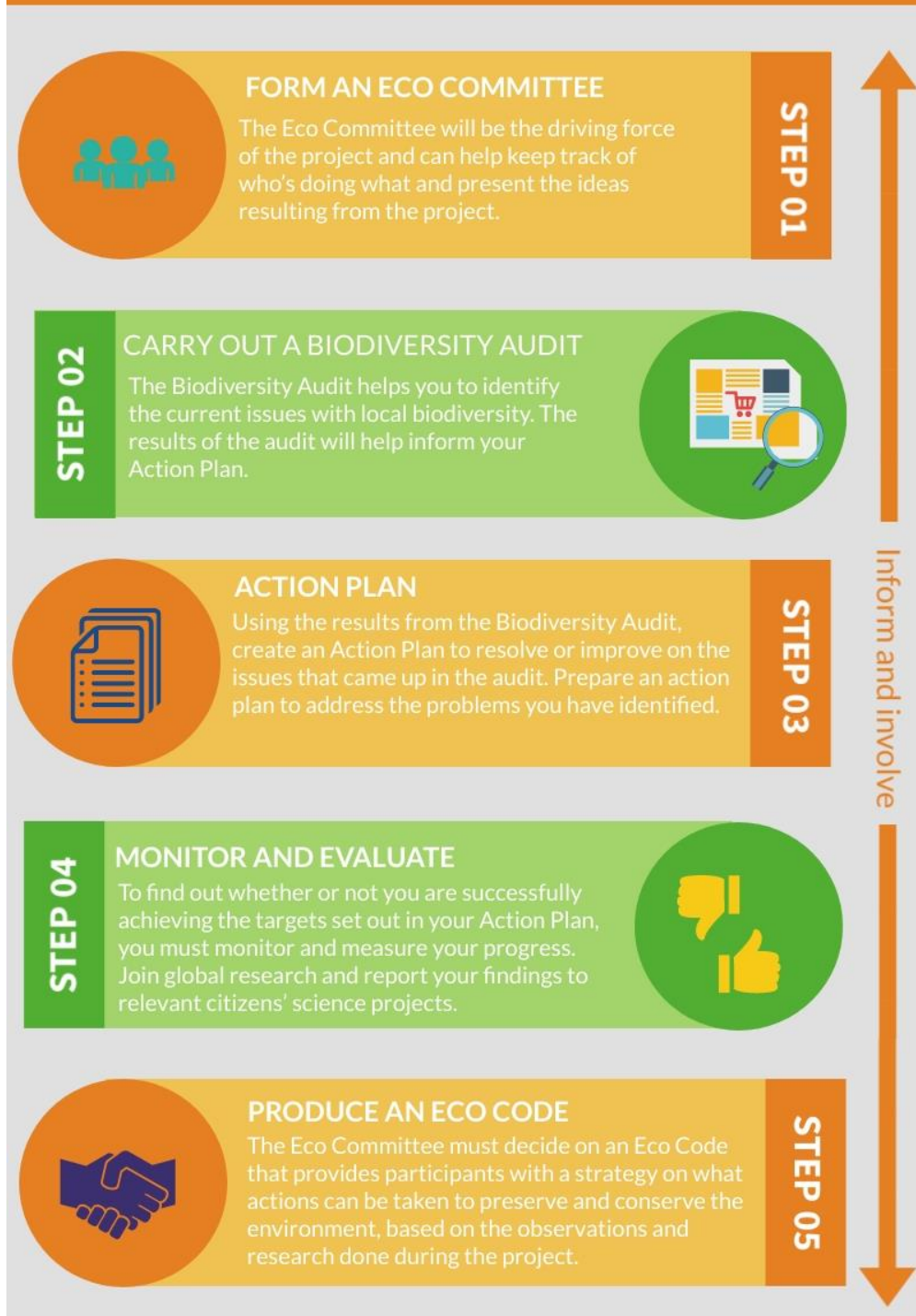


Connect with Nature!

STEPS



Introduction to Connect with Nature

Observing local biodiversity and connecting with nature have become increasingly important and also a popular activity during COVID-19. Being outside and connecting with nature reduces stress and anxiety and makes it easier for students to concentrate and engage.

Integrating the Eco-Schools Seven Steps to meet the Challenge of COVID 19

The steps are designed to be adapted to the circumstances different countries/regions are facing. The activities could be done either at home, online or at school. The steps hold ideas for activities but are merely suggestions, so please adapt them to the recommendations and guidelines in your area.

We estimate that going through the suggested steps for this theme will take around 40-50 hours over the course of 7-9 weeks.

Linking the curriculum

Teachers would find links between these steps and the existing curriculum. What subjects are covered: geography, biology, social/cultural studies.

Topics like biodiversity, agriculture, plants and animals, arts and crafts, etc. can be easily linked to this theme.

Skills

It is important to focus on skills that students acquire in the process – framing questions, scientific investigation, research, communication skills, goal setting and framing success indicators, negotiation, team-work, active citizenship, systemic thinking, critical thinking to find creative solutions, taking responsibility, agency, etc.



1 - Form an Eco Committee

The Eco Committee will be the driving force of the project and can help keep track of who's doing what and present the ideas resulting from the project. The committee must meet regularly (in person, online or outside, depending on the situation and guidelines in your area).

- At school: in the class or groups form an Eco Committee with both teachers and students.
- At home: form an Eco Committee with family, neighbours, friends that are nearby.

2 - Biodiversity Audit

The Biodiversity Audit helps you to identify the current issues with local biodiversity. The results of the audit will help inform your Action Plan.

Create a list of things from nearby nature or even at your home (could be insects, herbs, flowers, trees, birds, food grains, seeds). Find as much information as possible on the items on the list and, if possible, take or find pictures of them as well. Be sure not to disturb or harm any life forms that you observe. Examples of guiding questions for creating the list could be:

- What is the common name?
- Is it rare or common to the area?
- What are the key characteristics that you can observe and why does the organism have them?
- Is the item native to the area or has it been introduced? If the latter, when and why/how was it introduced and where did it come from?
- If the organism is only seen in some seasons, then what are its migration paths?
- Is it something humans consume or use for medicine, building or something else?
- What is the food chain or food web that you can create from your observations?

Possible sources of information

- Ask local experts and people around you, if possible
- Use apps such as **eBird** (a website and an app where you can enter bird observations and learn more about the different species), **nest watch** (an app-based project that tracks nesting birds in North America), **Insect Identification** (an app that helps you identify insects and also allows you to make your collection of insects you've found), **PlantNet** Plant Identification, **LeafSnap** or **PlantSnap** (apps that help identify plants or trees by taking pictures of them/their leaves, fruits, bark).

Share the facts with others on Social Media using the hashtags [#connectwithnature](#) and [#ecoschoolsstayactive](#), or tell neighbours, family and friends interesting facts about the results of the audit.

3 - Action plan

Using the results from the Biodiversity Audit, create an Action Plan to resolve or improve on the issues that came up in the audit. Prepare an action plan to address the problems you have identified.

Asking the following questions can help in preparing an Action Plan! If any of the species are endangered, learn more about why. What change has occurred that has had an impact on the species? What actions are required to help the survival of the species? Maybe planting more native endangered trees could help, but when is the right time of year to do that? Where should they be planted? Who do we need to contact to do that? Where do we get seedlings? Should we sow wildflowers to help pollinators, and when is the right time of year to do that? Where should it be done? Who do we need to contact?

You can use the following format to develop your action plan, and we have illustrated one for guidance.

Problem Statement	Actions that can address the problem	How will you implement the identified action?	What will success look like?
Decreasing population of bees and pollinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decrease the use of chemical herbicides, pesticides, etc. Allow spaces on the sides of roads for wild flowering plants to grow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness campaign on the importance of bees and threats facing them Creation of pollinator gardens 	More natural spaces left undeveloped for the growth of wildflowers
Lack of awareness of local biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness campaigns Label trees or share pictures and information on social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentations and discussions about local species 	Increased interest in local biodiversity
Lack of nesting spaces for birds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artificial nests Plantation of tree species that attract birds Create micro-ecosystems for birds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshop to make nests for different birds Tree plantation 	Increased bird sightings

4 - Monitor and evaluate

To find out whether or not you are successfully achieving the targets set out in your Action Plan, you must monitor and measure your progress.

Join global research and report your findings to relevant citizens' science projects, such as:

- The Dragonfly Swarm Project: <https://thedragonflywoman.com/dsp/>
- On eBird, you can also report real-time bird watching: <https://ebird.org/home>
- On Inaturalist, you can record observations, share them and discuss them with others: <https://www.inaturalist.org/>
- The GLOBE Program: <https://www.globe.gov/>
- Merlin app for identifying birds and making a "life list" of birds you have seen: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/save-list-of-birds-merlin-app/>

Also, try to Google citizens' science projects to see if there are any specific projects relevant to your area

The evaluation follows from monitoring. Evaluating the success of your activities will allow you to make changes to your Action Plan if required.

5 – Produce an Eco Code

The Eco Committee must decide on an Eco Code that provides participants with a strategy on what actions can be taken to preserve and conserve the environment, based on the observations and research done during the project. The Eco Code should list the main objectives of the Action Plan and should be prominently displayed in the school, home or neighbourhood. Social media like WhatsApp, Facebook, etc. could be a good idea to create a wider acceptance.

Inspire others around the world - please write to us to share how you are meeting the challenge!

Eco-School Global

Kristina Madsen, International Coordinator of Education

Email: kristina@fee.global **Telephone:** +45 6124 8087

Website – www.ecoschools.global