Nature Auditors: Observe, Assess, Improve

Badge overview:

Students and teachers investigate how welcoming their school is for nature, becoming more aware of the nature already around them and how human choices and everyday activities can help or limit it.

Badge goals:

By the end of this activity, students will

1. Become more aware of the nature and habitats in their school grounds.
2. Observe and record habitats and features systematically.
3. Identify some trees and shrubs found in the school grounds.
4. Recognise ways that school design and everyday human activities can affect nature.
5. Identify areas where nature is supported and areas where it has less opportunity to thrive.
6. Suggest practical ways to make their school more welcoming for nature.
7. Communicate their findings to others.

When & Where to use this badge:

Teacher Tip

This activity can link with

- **Environmental Studies** (local habitats and biodiversity)
- **Science** (observation, evidence and investigation)
- **Geography** (mapping and land use)
- **Mathematics** (counting, measuring and representing findings)
- **Art** (mapping, visual communication and displays)
- **Languages** (describing findings and presenting ideas)
- **ICT / Media** (photography, video and digital communication)

Flexibility

- Students can join the audit at different break-club sessions, with each group adding to the shared school survey.
- The audit can focus on the whole school grounds or on one area at a time.
- Students can use the full survey sheet or select the features most relevant to their school.
- Measuring and species identification can be included where appropriate but are not essential.
- Teachers can adapt the number of sessions, groups and recording methods depending on their school context.

Steps to complete:

Step 1 Look & Think

Teacher Instructions

- Explain that students are going to become Nature Auditors and investigate how friendly their school is for nature.
- Before going outside, ask students to think about what a school needs to provide for nature. For example: food, shelter, nesting places, plants, water, shade and places where wildlife can move and hide.

- Explain that nature-friendly features can be small and easy to overlook. A tree, a rubble wall, a patch of wildflowers, a planter or even a pile of twigs can provide something useful for wildlife.
- Introduce the **Habitats around our school** survey sheet. Explain that students will record what they actually find rather than what they expect to find.
- Remind students that they are auditing the school grounds, not judging the people who use them. The aim is to understand how the way a school is designed and used affects nature.

Step 2 Audit

Teacher Instructions

- In small groups, students walk slowly around the school grounds and look carefully at the different habitats and features they find.
- Use the survey sheet to record the features present and mark their locations on the school plan. The original survey resource uses coded categories from A–R and includes features such as wildflower patches, grassy verges, trees and shrubs, walls, planters, bare soil, ponds, dead logs, twig piles, bird tables, bug hotels and nest boxes.
- Use **Nature Identification Sheet 3: Trees and Shrubs** to identify plants where possible. The sheet includes a range of trees and shrubs found in Malta, with photographs and Maltese and English names.
- Students should also look beyond the checklist and notice anything else that might help or hinder nature.

Students record

1. What nature-friendly habitats and features they find
2. Where they are located
3. Which trees and shrubs are present
4. Other things they notice that could help wildlife
5. Things that might make it difficult for nature to thrive
6. Any features or habitats they would like to see more of

Step 3 Assess

Students compare what they found and consider:

- Where does nature have space in our school?
- Where is nature thriving?
- Where is there little or no space for nature?
- What have people provided deliberately for wildlife?
- What happens because of the way we design, use or maintain the school?
- What could be changed to make the school more welcoming for nature?

Students can use their completed survey and school plan to identify the school's strengths, gaps and opportunities.

The point is not to produce a numerical score. It is to help students see the school differently and recognise that the choices people make – about space, planting, maintenance and everyday use – influence what nature can live there.

Step 4 Tell the Story

Students use their audit to create a simple picture of how nature-friendly their school is. Students should include what they found, what surprised them, what human choices they noticed, and what they think could be improved.

They could:

- Create a “Nature Audit of Our School” display
- Annotate their school plan to show nature-friendly areas and areas for improvement
- Create a “What we found / What could change” display

- Make an infographic
- Produce a short video or photo story
- Present their findings at assembly
- Create a “Did you know?” awareness message
- Make a simple proposal for one change that could help nature