

Action for Conservation – Joshua’s story

“My brother, Oli, and I heard about the Action for Conservation summer camp (available to ages 12-16) through an advertisement put on the school website by Mrs Vatcher in February.

The application question was quite simple: you had to identify an environmental problem affecting your local area, and how you could tackle that problem and raise awareness about it. We chose to write about microfibres. These are microscopic threads of plastic that are released from synthetic clothing when washed, which end up in the oceans and our water supplies. Given that most of our clothes are made from synthetic fibres and we consume a lot of fish and meat that will inevitably contain high levels of microfibres (they cannot be digested and so will accumulate in organisms’ bodies), we thought that this was a pertinent matter to address.

We received news that we had been offered places on the camp in April and in late August we found ourselves taking the train to Stackpole, Pembrokeshire. The week-long camp would be focused around conservation, raising awareness, and reconnecting with the environment.

The week was jam-packed with activities, and some of the most enjoyable activities in my opinion, was our involvement in hands-on activities with the National Trust rangers. These included citizen science projects like identifying insect species and removal of invasive flora in the surrounding forests. We were introduced to concepts such as re-wilding, where an area of land is left untouched and allowed to develop on its own; and tactics for raising awareness among the general public and corporations about their impacts on the environment. I also really enjoyed the nature walks we went on, where we undertook a variety of tasks, from tree identification to listening to bats and stargazing at night-time. We also spent one or two afternoons on the beach, which was freezing but great fun! However, my definite favourites were the “sit-spots” - 10-minute breaks where we would find a spot, sit and just reconnect with nature. It was meditative and made me think about our place in the natural world and our responsibility to protect it.

The week came and went very quickly, and we were all sad to see each other go. However, we are now all ambassadors for the AFC charity, and during the coming year we will take part in lots of environmental activities across the country. We have already taken part in The People’s Walk for Wildlife in September, and in October we took part in the youth Communicate + conference in Bristol, discussing how to raise awareness on environmental issues.

We also made pledges on the camp, and during the coming year we’ll try to fulfil them, be they hands-on or research-based. Mine is investigating the possibility of collecting and reusing (or recycling) microfibres shed from clothes during washing. I have already contributed to crowd-funding for and bought a Cora Ball. This is a device that catches microfibres in the washing machine, which can be then be shaken off into the bin.

I would thoroughly recommend the camp for those passionate about the environment; it was truly a life-changing experience!”

Joshua M U5