

“Cultivate knowledge...”

Junior Foresters

Programme

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Since 1976, the Agence des espaces verts, the Île-de-France Région Parks département has been implementing the Île-de-France Region's "green" policy.

This has three aims: first of all to reinforce nature's place within the city by increasing the number of open spaces open to the public; secondly, to help maintain agricultural land in peri-urban areas and promote organic farming; and lastly, to bolster the preservation of biodiversity in the Île-de-France region. It has also initiated a vast awareness and environmental education campaign aimed at Île-de-France schoolchildren and the general public to make each person aware of the incredible diversity of the region's natural heritage and help them learn to protect it.

Environmental education: Schools head for the countryside!

It was the Ministry of Education circular of 2004 that officially introduced environmental education into the classroom. The aim was for children to acquire "the knowledge, values, behaviour and practical skills re-

quired to take part in a responsible and efficient way in managing the quality of the environment." This opening up of schools to the outside world is proof of a new global and cross-curricular outlook on education.

The birth of the project: From seed to sapling

Aware that the attachment to nature is made at a very early age and that children are the eco-citizens of tomorrow, the AEV didn't wait for the circular to start its environmental awareness campaign in schools. As early as the beginning of the nineties, it started sowing the first seeds of a huge project to show schoolchildren in the Île-de-France region the vastness of the region's natural heritage. Labelled "Junior Foresters", the AEV's ground-breaking initiative, unique in France, finally saw the light of day in 1992, thanks to

the cooperation of the Forestry and Education Departments. The programme was initially implemented in Bondy Regional Forest in the Seine-Saint-Denis *département*, where it was a huge success. And the idea produced offshoots. . . . Buoyed by the experience and knowledge gained over the years, the AEV extended its environmental education programme to several other forests in the region and today the programme involves more than 7,000 children across the entire Île-de-France region.

A life-size programme that provides a change of air!

Observe, understand, protect: objectives that are taking root

The “Junior Foresters” programme has three objectives:

OBSERVE: train children to see, develop their curiosity and help them open their eyes to the natural environment around them;

UNDERSTAND: teach the budding naturalists about the essential basics of living beings and their needs and the relationships between them and draw their attention to the riches and fragile nature of biodiversity;

PROTECT: create a strong bond between the children and nature so they begin to acquire the first notions of an environmental consciousness and ensure they protect nature.

A reasoning for all seasons . . .

The programme is based on a fundamental principle of education: the participative approach.

The basic idea is to give children the opportunity of building their knowledge themselves by getting them involved and placing them as much as possible in the context. Working together in this way, the children acquire the knowledge more easily. The “Junior Foresters” receive a complete education, both theoretical and practical. The team leaders alternate workshops in class with excursions to forests close to their schools. The perfect balance between intellectual effervescence and trip to the countryside!

Listen to the plants grow!

The curriculum, spread over the entire primary cycle, increases in complexity at the child’s rhythm and as his/her receptiveness develops:

- For children in reception class, as yet lacking abstraction capabilities, the eco-team leaders take a sensorial, emotive and creative approach;
- In lower primary classes, action is the byword! The greater curiosity and associated enthusiasm enables more discoveries to be made, fauna and flora in particular;
- Lastly, in upper primary, more time is given to thought, including expanding on the notion of ecosystem and making the budding citizen aware of the impact his daily actions have by instilling a sense of collective responsibility.

A very cool diploma

At the end of the school year, an AEV representative presents each pupil in form six with a “Junior Forester” diploma to mark their five years studiously following the environmental education course. It’s a symbolic gesture to congratulate the children for their commitment and one that makes them into youngsters open to the world and committed to the protection of nature areas.

The eco-team leaders: king and queens of the great outdoors!

All our eco-team leaders share a boundless passion for nature. They also have in common an infectious vitality, a sense of responsibility and a desire to pass on their knowledge. They have received extensive training in the fields of ecology and teaching skills. Each one has developed his or her own speciality in relation to his or

her field of studies or centres of interest: protection of nature areas, biology of ecosystems, fauna, flora, forest management... Varied profiles therefore that constitute the richness of the team, enabling it to come up with a multitude of new ideas at working group meetings and discussions.



Themes: cultivating diversity

At each new school year, the eco-team leaders come up with new, action-packed activities. They submit to the teachers a whole range of activities, both in class and outside, enabling children to discover the natural environment in countless ways.

The content of the activities is adjusted year-on-year to adapt to the educational projects and programmes in force. Enough knowledge to fill a satchel!

- 🍃 A sensory exploration of the forest
- 🍃 Animal tracks and traces
- 🍃 The water cycle
- 🍃 Pond-dwellers
- 🍃 Refuse collection
- 🍃 The Forest Challenge quiz
- 🍃 The “Mysteries of the Forest” treasure hunt
- 🍃 From flower to fruit
- 🍃 How do plants travel?
- 🍃 Fascinating bugs
- 🍃 Feathered heads
- 🍃 1000 leaves of 1000 shapes

Sowing the seeds for the future

The effectiveness of the “Junior Foresters” programme is mainly due to its duration: the activities are not proposed on a one-off basis, they’re part of a proper curriculum spread out over five consecutive years.

Thanks to this participative approach, the youngster is the principal player in his exploration and learning

processes. And we know that the lessons that we remember all our lives are those that we learn through experience: the child who had fun learning about nature is certain to become an adult with close a bond with and a respect for nature. Good reasons, therefore, to hope that the “Junior Foresters” of today will one day become the best ambassadors for the preservation of our natural heritage.

“The ‘Junior Foresters’ programme immediately interested me, since it gives the child a chance to learn while being involved with his/her environment and to construct his/her own knowledge.”

MARIE VILLARD, TEACHER

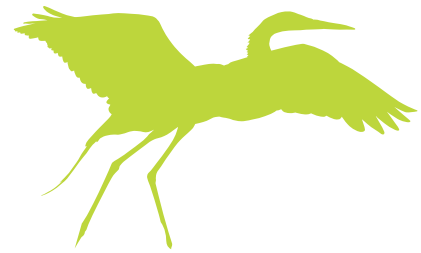


“I’m very interested in nature and I love taking part in the ‘Junior Foresters’ programme this year. Our planet is in danger and we have to do something. And the forest trips are great!”

MATHIS, FORM 6 PUPIL

FRANCE HAMY, HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AT THE AEV (PARKS DEPARTMENT)

“The joy of discovering is a wonderful vehicle for captivating children and for instilling notions of eco-citizenship and respect for the environment.”



“This programme answers the needs for education on the environment. It helps children become aware of nature and their living environment through a global, cross-disciplinary teaching that takes in all subjects. With the group leaders, we were able to set up an innovative school project firmly targeting today’s issues.”

LILIANE PAYS, SCHOOL PRINCIPAL



**“ The Earth
is a seed beginning
to grow ”**

**Interested in the “Junior Foresters” programme?
Contact us to find out more about it
and on how to become a member!**

**Agence des espaces verts de la Région Île-de-France
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