

# Change Choices Good, Better, Best

## Biodiversity in our school



## Stepping Up to Sustainability

### Stepping Up to Sustainability – how can we live more sustainably and make positive lifestyle choices?

In 2011, WESSA launched the 'Stepping Up to Sustainability' concept. With the support of various partners, USAID and other funders, eleven 'Sustainability Commons' have been established across South Africa.

Each of these 'Sustainability Commons' will practice sustainable living by:

- reducing, sorting and managing waste better,
- installing renewable technologies,
- conserving and teaching about water management, as well as,
- providing experiential courses on biodiversity.

The goal is simple - to put into practice the lifestyle choices we all need to make! These innovative concepts are set to expand as we all 'step up to sustainability' and seek to change our environmental footprints into environmental handprints of practice for a more sustainable future!



## Biodiversity

*We are an integral part of nature*

Biological diversity - or biodiversity - is the number and variety of living organisms on Earth, the millions of plants, animals, and micro-organisms, the genes they contain, the evolutionary history and potential they encompass, and the ecosystems, ecological processes and landscapes of which they are integral parts. Biodiversity thus refers to the life-support systems and natural resources upon which we depend.

South Africa is the third most biologically diverse country in the world. It occupies only 2% of the world's land surface yet is home to nearly 10% (more than 23 000) of the planet's plant species and 7% of the reptile, bird and mammal species. It is thus of major global importance for biodiversity conservation. The remarkable richness of this biodiversity is largely a result of the mix of tropical and temperate climates and habitats in the country.



#### Did you know?

In South Africa, the first week in September each year is always celebrated as National Arbor Week.

#### Did you know?

Different countries may have different 'common' names for plants and trees but the scientific names are identical in all countries.

#### Did you know?

Bats are night creatures and most of them come out only at night to hunt. Although they can see fairly well, they are not equipped with the special eyesight that other night-hunting animals such as owls and cats have. Instead, bats fly and guide themselves using a sonar system.

## Good Change Choices

### Biodiversity



**Plant an indigenous tree during National Arbor Week.** As sources of building material, food, medicine, and simple scenic beauty, trees play a vital role in the health and well-being of our schools. Every Arbor Week celebration highlights two or three specific trees.



**Create walk-free zones.** Create seasonal walk-free zones where no-one walks, thus giving the vegetation and grass time to heal and get well established. Zones can change weekly, monthly or even annually.



**Manage the school's detergent use.** Many schools pour detergent-mixed water onto grass, gardens and other outside areas, thereby damaging or killing the vegetation. Consider using eco-friendly detergents.



**'Wild' corners.** Keep a section of your school grounds 'wild' and undisturbed. Grass and wildflowers can provide valuable shelter and food for wildlife. Damp rotting logs are the perfect home for many small animals.

## Better Change Choices

### Biodiversity



**Plant an indigenous garden.** Plant an indigenous garden in your school or adopt an area where the school can grow indigenous plants. The garden will encourage indigenous birds and insects and can also be used for soil studies and the Natural Sciences.



**Put up tree name plates on your indigenous plants.** Adding name plates (common and scientific) will increase everyone's knowledge of trees and plants. Visitors to the school are also sure to enjoy and benefit from the visible tree names.



**Make and put up a bat box.** Construct bat boxes and place them in the school where there is minimum disturbance. Studying their habits can be incorporated into the Natural Sciences, Geography, Biology and general environmental studies. Bats also help control mosquito and other insect populations – they can eat up to 1000 insects in an hour!

## Best Change Choices

### Biodiversity



**Develop an environmental policy for your school.** A school environmental policy is a statement of intentions and principles for improving a school's educational and environmental performance.



**Create a bird sanctuary.** Developing a 64m<sup>2</sup> sanctuary for birds will greatly affect variety and density of bird populations as well as frogs and insects. The sanctuary can consist of ponds, trees, bush and undisturbed grasslands. Most schools already have the area and vegetation available, all that is needed is renovation.



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For **environmental resources** to support better lifestyle choices, contact WESSA Share-Net, 033-330 3931 ext 124 or 144; e-mail us at [sharenet@wessa.co.za](mailto:sharenet@wessa.co.za) or visit our website [www.wessa.org.za](http://www.wessa.org.za)

Main funding agent of the WESSA 'Stepping Up to Sustainability' project.

#### Did you know?

New species of animals are being discovered all the time! Scientists have discovered a frog the size of a pea, the smallest found in Asia, Africa or Europe, on the Southeast Asian island of Borneo.

#### Did you know?

Owls are depicted in cave paintings in France that date back 15 000 to 20 000 years. Owls also are used in Egyptian hieroglyphics.

#### Did you know?

There are more than 20 300 indigenous species of flowering plants that occur in South Africa.

#### Did you know?

Vegetation, unable to rehabilitate itself, will die which can then lead to soil erosion.

Practice the  
lifestyle choices  
we all have to make!!