Ecosystem Services in Everyday Life

An exercise about how different species create the conditions for our lives

Analysis and discussion activity (approx. 15 minutes)

Exercise Description

In this activity, students identify which ecosystem services different species groups provide — and which services would be most severely missed if those species disappeared.

INFOBOX: Ecosystem Services

Ecosystem services are the benefits that natural ecosystems provide and that are essential for human health, wellbeing, and survival. They are commonly grouped into four categories:

1. **Provisioning services** – e.g. food, fresh water, timber, bioenergy, and medicinal resources
2. **Regulating services** – e.g. pollination, climate regulation, water purification, and flood protection
3. **Cultural services** – e.g. recreation, outdoor experiences, nature-based wellbeing, and cultural heritage
4. **Supporting services** – e.g. photosynthesis and nutrient cycling (which underpin all other ecosystem services)

1. Divide students into groups of 2–4.
2. Ask each group to select three cards featuring different species groups from the game and identify which ecosystem services those species provide. Good cards to choose include bees, mosses, fungi, grasses, trees, and whales. Alternatively, you can assign cards to each group to ensure variety across the class.
3. Ask students to choose which of their three species groups would be most missed if it disappeared. Have them list the consequences — both for the ecosystem and for people.
4. Close with a whole-class discussion where each group presents their chosen species group and shares their findings from steps 2 and 3.

Bonus Activity

Ask students to discuss how human actions affect nature's ability to provide ecosystem services. Encourage them to consider both positive and negative impacts, and to think about what changes or measures could help strengthen ecosystems and the services they provide.

Purpose of the Exercise

To understand the connections between biodiversity and ecosystem services, and how humans and all species are interdependent.