



How big is my ecological footprint?

Introduction

Each of us uses some of the Earth's resources every day. How much we use depends on the way we satisfy our needs and wants and this creates our life style. If we consider the following questions, it will help us find out what our habits are:

- ❖ How much water do you use on a typical day?
- ❖ What do you eat and how much?
- ❖ How much food do you waste?
- ❖ How do you get about and how far do you travel?
- ❖ How many clothes and shoes do you wear and how often do you replace them?
- ❖ What else, other than food and clothes do you buy?
- ❖ How much energy and material do you require to keep dry / warm / cool?
- ❖ How much rubbish do you produce?
- ❖ How much land and energy do you need for playing and sports activities?

The answer to these questions reflects the demand that each of us places on nature. The load or demand that we each place on the Earth's resources has been called our 'ecological footprint'. An ecological footprint is a measure of how much of the Earth's biologically productive land and water is needed to produce our food, material goods and energy and to absorb our waste.

Calculating your ecological footprint helps you understand your own impact on the Earth's systems and can help you live a more sustainable lifestyle. It serves as a simple guide to living, working and playing in ways that don't cost the Earth.

Calculating an Ecological Footprint

An Eco-Footprint calculator is used to estimate how much of the Earth's biologically productive land and water is needed to support our own lifestyles.

The calculator is divided into eight categories that represent the many ways that we consume resources each day. This is not a scientific survey but it does give a good idea of the impact of your lifestyle on a typical day. This is a simple estimate of consumption. Some of the aspects such as size of house or number in family are not under everyone's control. The calculator is meant to give a snap-shot of lifestyle. The information we collect can help to monitor the impact of changes that we can make in the way we live and the choices we make.



The Project Aims

Measuring dependence on Nature on a typical day can give a new understanding of the connections between personal lifestyle choices and the health of the planet.

The aim of the project is to create a demonstration pilot to show how much each of us consumes some of the earth's products and services every day. How much we take depends on the ways in which we satisfy our needs and wants, and the many habits that together create our lifestyles. We can ask ourselves many questions, and our answers reflect the demand we place on Nature. Many schools and individuals have already participated in calculating their ecological footprint.

Reasons for the Project

Earth's biologically productive land and water are needed to produce food, material goods and energy and to absorb our waste. Encouraging individuals to calculate their ecological footprint gives them a concrete understanding of their own personal impact on the earth's systems and offers a means of assessing the suitability of lifestyles. More than that, engaging students in an ecological footprint analysis elicits curiosity, enthusiasm and genuine interest in taking action and reducing the demand placed on nature. The analysis focuses on lives and gives a clear message that choices can make a difference.

Project Involvement and Structure

The project was based on the following areas of focus:

- Design and production of lifestyles surveys, questionnaires and the footprint calculators in project packs.
- Creative recording of results data on average-sized paper footprints and then through the construction of giant carbon footprint-reducing collages.
- Organisation and delivery of climate / carbon footprint creative workshops.
- Project presentations to a variety of community groups on the theme of climate change and lifestyles.
- Visual exhibition of the giant footprints and resulting art work.



Project Achievements and Benefits

The project helps to promote lifestyles that are healthier both for the individual and for the planet. It also educates and raises awareness of the causes and possible solutions to climate change. It enhances creativity and results in large visual art work which can be enjoyed and which carries a vividly important message to encourage us to reduce our carbon footprint.

Thousands of individuals benefited from the initial project, not only those who were directly involved, such as schools and community groups, but also those who viewed the exhibitions which generated curiosity, interest and discussions. The project was accredited by *Awards for All* and has also gained the very prestigious international *Green Apple Award* to be presented at a ceremony at the House of Commons in November.

Gabrielle Back, Project Organiser

