

# ELENA



*Learning with living animals*



Lifelong  
Learning  
Programme

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from the European Commission.

[www.elena-project.eu](http://www.elena-project.eu)





# Learning

## *ELENA: Experiential Learning and Education for Nature Awareness*

### What is *ELENA*?

*ELENA* is education with living animals. The core is keeping animals in the classrooms or meeting them on the school grounds.

*ELENA* is learning through real experiences.

*ELENA* is joy and fun.

*ELENA* is the assumption of responsibility by emotionally motivated students.

*ELENA* engages students' thinking on environmental actions and a conscious life.

*ELENA* aims to raise nature awareness, responsibility and to enhance children's connection to nature around them. It aims to bring students back to nature through direct personal contact with the various species.

### *ELENA* in numbers



- 9 partner organizations from Germany, Hungary, Romania and Georgia
- Project Leader: Bavarian Academy for Nature Conservation and Landscape Management
- Approximately 70 scientists and practitioners involved
- The aim is to train 850 teachers in "Tiere live"/ "Education with living animals" by multipliers
- Duration: 3 years
- Project-budget: around € 400,000 funded by the European Commission

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### How does *ELENA* support me?

*ELENA* provides teachers with modules, detailed instructions for both indoor and outdoor activities with living animals, "learning-by-doing" methodology and system thinking games and a network of experienced teachers and experts.

There is a chapter for each animal with technical information, concrete activities, which can be executed with the animals plus appendixes, like work or information sheets.

*ELENA* is based on the "Tiere live" approach:  
[www.anl.bayern.de/projekte/tierelive/](http://www.anl.bayern.de/projekte/tierelive/)

### Who is *ELENA* for?

*ELENA* is made for everyone who is interested in supporting experiential learning, the learning process through real experiences using all the senses.

*ELENA* covers a variety of subjects (e.g. biology, maths, languages or social sciences), and it is also suitable for professionals in environmental education, voluntary trainers in conservation education or simply for those who are interested in enjoyable learning.

### *ELENA* contact

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[www.elena-project.eu](http://www.elena-project.eu)  
[www.facebook.com/elena-project.eu](https://www.facebook.com/elena-project.eu)





# with living animals



The **ELENA** aim:  
Raise Nature Awareness with living animals –  
not only in Schools!

In the staff room



Are you social like an ant?  
--> see page 7

Are you funny like a chicken?  
--> find page 8

Are you curious like a dog?  
--> follow the traps on the following page

The **ELENA** Principle:  
Face to face with nature –  
real experiences during a human lifetime





## Short Stories about ELENA

The best stories are taken from real life; convince yourself – read the anecdotes and experiences from the ELENA practice!



### Fears fly far away

(ELENA-Team)

A butterfly sits still on a girl's hand. A calm and peaceful picture that would have been almost impossible six weeks before when this girl did not even want to enter the classroom knowing that butterflies and "ugly" caterpillars were all inside. Only six weeks, but what a difference. From the object of fear, butterflies have become something the girl takes care of.

### Boy finds his butterfly again

(ELENA-Team)

"Yesterday I just saw my butterfly again. It must have been mine. He was sitting on the same spot where I released him last year."

Of course technically this young boy is a bit off the mark in classical knowledge of biology, because it is highly improbable that it really was "his" butterfly. So we should focus on the two main messages of his story instead: after a year he still remembers a school activity and he is definitely deeply connected with "his" butterfly!



### What can you do on your balcony? – Start composting!

(ELENA-Team)

A teacher recalled the case when his students were quite concerned where to release the earthworms after the activity. But before he could even reply a boy shouted: "Nowhere! I'll take them all! I'll start my own compost on our balcony and I will show them their new home."







## The tough and the fluffy

(Teacher)

“Wow, it is so light and so soft!” said the boy as he lifted the chicken carefully, with a broad open smile on his face. This magic of the first moment continued during the whole “Chicken in Schools” activity. Maybe it was only by chance that one of the most restless boys in class cared most for the chickens... but maybe it was not.

## Around ants

(ELENA-Team)

After the ant activities a boy said:  
“I will never kick an anthill again!”

## The rise of an ant expert

We got a phone call from a teacher: “I’m deeply sorry, but I need more information about ants. One of my students asks me about them more and more during nearly every school hour and I am unable to answer him sufficiently – could you help me?”



## Girls in the rain - The chicken stable

(ELENA-Team)

It was pouring with rain when we met the two young girls standing beside the chicken coop in the school yard. So we asked them if it was their duty to clean up the coop within the ELENA Chicken Activity at school. To our great surprise they looked at us bewildered and answered in the most natural way: “No, we simply wanted to check what kind of breed the brown chicken was.”







# Choose your

## Reptiles

### Indoor activities

- Physiology
- How to build a terrarium
- Changes under the heat lamp

### Outdoor activities

- Species Diversity
- Characteristic habitats

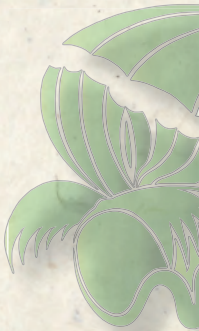
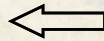
language versions:



and more...



see page 8



## Earthworms

### Indoor activities

- Diversity, physiology, movements
- Building an earthworm farm
- Sensory performance
- Nutrition and humification

### Outdoor activities

- Determining earthworm density

language versions:



and more...





activity!



## Wolves/Dogs

### Indoor activities

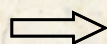
- Behavioural training with the dog
- Bite prevention

### Outdoor activities

- Observation of the wolf in zoos
- Role-play: the wolf as a conflict species

language versions:

and more...



see page 8



## Ants

### Indoor activities

- Keeping and observing
- Making an ant farm

### Outdoor activities

- Testing feed preferences
- Nest-observing ant activity
- Swarm intelligence

language versions:

and more...



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## Bees and Wasps

### Indoor activities

- Building nest boxes

### Outdoor activities

- Diversity and Breeding of bees and wasps
- Be(e) friendly schoolyard
- Endangered pollinators
- Helping them with flower diversity

in:  

## Butterflies

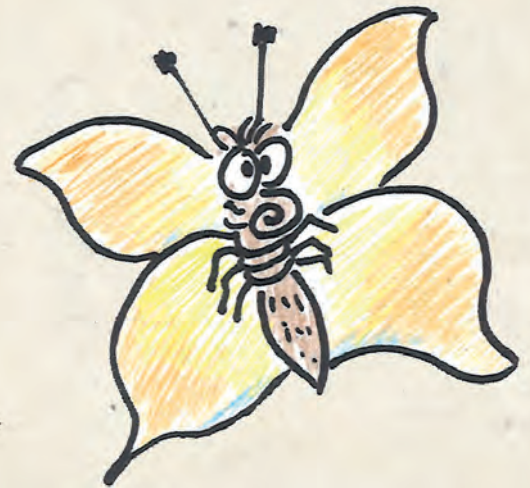
### Indoor activities

- Indoor keeping: from caterpillar to butterfly
- Silk moth and the Georgian silk road

### Outdoor activities

- Watch butterflies in their habitat (diversity, autecology)
- Moths "live"

in:   



## Chickens

### Indoor activities

- Diversity
- Laying eggs
- Experiments with eggs

### Outdoor activities

- Chickens live (henhouse on schoolyard)
- Build a chicken coop

in: 

## And more:

Beavers



Hedgehogs



Snails





## FAQs – Frequently asked questions

**Here you find the most common questions and the best possible answers to eliminate uncertainties. If you have any further questions, please ask an expert or experienced teacher in the *ELENA* network.**

### Where to find the animal and where to release it?

For the corresponding contact partners, please refer to the relevant chapter. Generally, we must distinguish between animals removed from their natural habitat and any domesticated animals (pets). Please always check the description of the activity in order to make sure you do not disturb or collect any endangered or protected species. Please remember to collect only a single specimen or a few specimens even of very common species. Always try to release wild animals at the exact same site from which they were originally taken. In the case of domesticated animals make sure that they are adapted to working with children or humans in general. Be sure to follow the main hygienic precautions in relation to domesticated animals in order to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of teachers and students. Always refer to the safety measures complying with the current law in your country or in schools (e.g. vaccination or necessary certificates).

### How does *ELENA* fit into the curricula? How to convince my headmaster?

The Experiential Learning Approach in *ELENA* activities are based on various scientific results of Psychology and Didactics. You will see that the activities strengthen various competencies of the students (see page 11). Each activity will feature specific recommendations on how to incorporate the activity into your lesson and into the national school curricula. For further background information please turn to the introduction chapter on the *ELENA* homepage/downloads!

### I feel uncomfortable, because I do not know much about this animal. What should I do?

Please, choose an animal that somehow fascinates you. Do not torture yourself with animals that you find disgusting, even if the activity seems to be easy to apply. Your own fascination will be reflected by the students. Before starting the activity there is no need to become an expert. Be sure that you read and understand the general introduction and advice for animal keeping and the specific needs of the animals. Make your additional investigation by following the links named in the Activity description. Get familiar with the animal by testing the activity in your home; e.g. use your family as a test. Invite an expert or experienced teacher to work together within the first lectures.

### Do I need a special insurance for myself or the student, when I introduce animals into the class?

If you have the permission of your headmaster and the parents, normally you do not need a specific insurance. If you feel uncertain, ask your headmaster for details. Of course it is prohibited to use a known dangerous or poisonous animal anywhere.

### What kind of permission do I need before I start?

For implementation in schools, you certainly need the permission of your headmaster. Once receiving the permission to bring living animals into the school, it is highly advisable to ask for the permission of the parents. Remember to take a look at the specific module's description. In some cases (e.g. animals with a higher risks for allergies, like bees, or of biting, like dogs/snakes) you should inform the parents and ask for their permission. In general terms, it is never a disadvantage to have the permission of the parents in advance. It is also advisable to inform everybody who might come in contact with the animals.





### How to ensure children's welfare?

We all know of the positive benefits of interactions with animals, but children's welfare is our primary concern. Checking for allergies or fears is highly significant. In some cases the permission of parents must be granted (e.g. dogs). Always try to motivate the children to overcome fears or disgust, but never force a child to do something disliked. *ELENA* material gives you advice regarding the legal basics and technical implementation.



### How to ensure animals' welfare?

In order to ensure animals' welfare, it is important to have extensive knowledge about the species and to share the handling rules with your students. Even though the students will be mainly responsible for the animals, you must always check whether they do their best to ensure the well-being of the animal.



### How can I integrate the animals into the everyday life of the school?

*ELENA* material includes the necessary instructions concerning keeping animals and technical information, contact persons and legal advice. The animals must not be the subject of the lessons on a permanent basis. The students should take over the responsibility for animal welfare and must look after them every day.

### The animal does not react in the described way. What to do?

Animals act on their own will and nothing is foreseeable in all details. The spontaneous interaction with a living animal is the central key of experiential learning. Be open; it is okay not to have all answers to all upcoming questions – just like in real life. Nevertheless always check the following points:

- A. Check health conditions first: are there any signs that the animal is hurt, moves slower than normal, acts more aggressively or is shy/defensive? -> If so, please
  - a) check the food and water supply, if it is sufficient.
  - b) detect if the animal is stressed e.g. by noise, unwanted contact. In all cases take the animal out to have a break or feed it. If you still feel unsure, please contact an expert or a veterinarian in any case.
- B. Check the actual species by asking an expert. It could happen, that you caught a similar looking species, but which reacts completely differently (e.g. earthworms living in litter do not dig in the ground)
- C. If anything specified under A or B occurs: Enjoy the surprise with your students; try to investigate with them why the animal is behaving in a "strange" way.

### How to reflect on the activity with students?

The end of any activity shall be the beginning of the next. But normally you are restricted by time. Therefore it is necessary to pick up the path again and reflect on the activities together in class. Try to motivate the students by asking, for instance, if anybody repeated the activity at home. Always create space to reflect on their experience by asking: Do you remember the behaviour of the animal...? Who misses the animal? Does the animal change their attitude in any way? How?





# Skills and Competencies

**Delegating responsibility to the students of taking care of a living animal promotes various social skills and competencies. Take a look:**

## 1. Experiential learning through direct contact with living animals



Living animals act spontaneously – they do not care about expectations or predictions. So the students have to react, which means they have to evaluate the situation and to apply their existing knowledge. Therefore direct contact with living animals is a powerful bond, which inspires students to make use of their organisational and evaluation skills. Self-reflection is also a key competence, as the children's own behaviour affects the animals' behaviour. At the same time various other skills and competencies are promoted by learning through real experiences: curiosity, open mindedness, problem solving, but also teamwork and communication.

## 2. Connected to the real world



**Breakfast with pollination support by bees!**



**Now imagine your breakfast without bees!**

Feeling responsible for an individual living animal motivates the students to take a closer look at their surroundings: they will find similar species and the diversity of life in the real world. Combining indoor and outdoor activities links the animal activities to the real world, thus raising nature awareness.



The concept of experiential learning, the systemic understanding of the interconnectedness shall increasingly become the part of education and national school curricula. *ELENA*-type cross-border cooperation between educational and environmental systems can be a potential driving force and a good example that the partners are ready to share.



## Teachers of the year

## The ELENA Partner



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