

## **We all intrinsically think that nature must be good for our health and happiness. A recent analysis of a large-scale nature challenge scientifically shows how important feeling part of nature is to our physical and mental health**

• **By Jeremy Coles**

There are a growing number of studies and campaigns putting forward evidence that a connection with nature makes us healthier and happier people, something that few of us nature lovers would argue with. And now a recent evaluation of the UK's first month-long nature challenge, which took place last year and involved people "doing something wild" every day for 30 consecutive days, shows scientifically and statistically how significant it really is.

At the time of the challenge participants were also asked to take part in a survey about their perceived connection to nature and feeling a part of it; how they interacted with nature, and how they felt about their health and happiness, before the challenge started, at the end of the challenge and two months after it had finished.

"Intuitively we knew that nature was good for us as humans, but the results were beyond brilliant," said Lucy McRobert, nature matters campaigns manager for The Wildlife Trusts. The study showed that there was a scientifically significant increase in people's health, happiness, connection to nature and active nature behaviours, such as feeding the birds and planting flowers for bees – not just throughout the challenge, but sustained for months after the challenge had been completed.



Planting flowers for bees, and other nature activities, continued after the challenge finished (credit: Andy Jones / The Wildlife Trusts)

Impressively, says McRobert, the number of people reporting their health as "excellent" increased by 30% and this improvement in health being predicted by the increase in happiness, this relationship is mediated by the change in

connection to nature. It adds to a growing body of evidence that shows definitively that we need nature for our health and wellbeing.

For example, children exposed to the natural world showed increases in self-esteem. They also felt it taught them how to take risks, unleashed their creativity and gave them a chance to exercise, play, and discover. In some cases nature can significantly improve the symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), providing a calming influence and helping them concentrate.

And for people suffering from physical illness or mental health disorders, such as depression and anxiety, interacting with nature can help people control their symptoms or even recover, alongside conventional medication. “Nature isn’t a miracle cure for diseases,” says McRobert, “But by interacting with it, spending time in it, experiencing it and appreciating it we can reap the benefits of feeling happier and healthier as a result.”

Recent analysis found people with a stronger connection to nature experienced more life satisfaction, positive affect and vitality at levels associated with established predictors of satisfaction, such as personal income.

This year there will be a guide to doing 30 Days Wild for care homes and the physically and mentally disabled, focusing on ideas for 30 Random Acts of Wildness that can be easily and safely carried out with this audience, engage them with nature and hopefully improve their quality of life.

So shouldn't we all be spending more time outside interacting with nature?



Last year's 30 Days Wild was a large scale challenge with simple and fun activities (credit: Matthew Roberts / The Wildlife Trusts)