

Sunbathing good for your mood, and the environment

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Sunbathing, swimming and snorkelling can lift your mood without posing much risk to the environment, according to a new survey.

Scientists from Plymouth University asked coastal experts and visitors to rocky shores about the effects of common seaside pursuits on both their [mood](#) and the environment.

The results, published in the journal of Ocean & Coastal Management, suggest that wildlife-watching and paddling can also lift your spirits without posing much of a threat to local ecology.

At the other end of the spectrum, scoring poorly on the environment and doing less for your mood, are dog-walking, fishing and having a picnic.

Of all the activities put to participants, rock pooling was thought to pose the biggest potential threat, but it's also seen to have uplifting qualities.

The team, led by Kayleigh Wyles, hope the research can help those charged with managing the coastline to strike a better balance between environmental risks and the personal wellbeing of visitors to the coastline.

'Most of the research in this area has focussed on one activity and looked at its effect on one aspect of the environment,' says Wyles. 'But that doesn't give you the full picture.'

'This research is a first step towards understanding the overall risk that recreational activities pose to the environment, and the benefits that they bring to visitors.'

'It's no good just banning these things because they could be bad for the environment; you have to consider their effect on people as well.'

Wyles suggests that, in many cases, education could hold the key.

'We need to use management tools that allow people to enjoy the environment, but minimise the damage,' she says.

'With rock pooling for example, it's only damaging if it's done in the wrong way. If you were to put a sign up asking people to turn the rocks back as they found them, and to leave the animals in the water, then you might get the benefits to the person without the risk to the [environment](#).'

The survey was carried out on 25 coastal experts, working for conservation charities as wardens or educators, and 97 coastal users. The results were broadly consistent between the two groups.

A similar questionnaire was filled out by 44 academics at an international conference of marine ecologists. Here, the results differed slightly, with fishing seen as the most environmentally risky activity, while dog walking and picnicking performed better on both measures.

Wyles and the team will now focus their research on harder measurements, to build a more robust picture of the pros and cons of seaside pursuits.

More information: Wyles KJ, Pahl S, Thompson RC. "Perceived risks and benefits of recreational visits to the marine environment: Integrating impacts on the environment and impacts on the visitor." *Ocean and Coastal Management*, 2013.

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