

# Reconnecting with nature key for sustainability

January 15 2020

---



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

People who live in more built up areas and spend less free-time in nature are also less likely to take actions that benefit the environment, such as recycling, buying eco-friendly products, and environmental volunteering.

The finding of a new study led by the University of Exeter indicates that policies to preserve and develop [urban green spaces](#), and support [urban](#)

[populations](#) reconnect with nearby nature, could help meet sustainability targets and reduce [carbon emissions](#).

The study, published in *Environment International* and funded by NIHR Health Protection Research Unit in Environmental Change and Health, analysed survey responses from more than 24,000 people in England. The team looked at people's exposure to nature in their local area, their recreational visits to [natural environments](#) (parks, woodlands, beaches etc.), and the extent to which they valued the natural world.

The team, including collaborators from the University of Plymouth and Public Health England, found that many green choices were more common in people who lived in greener neighbourhoods or at the coast, and among those who regularly visited natural spaces regardless of where they lived. The relationships were the same for men and women, young and old, and for rich and poor.

Lead author Dr. Ian Alcock, of the University of Exeter Medical School, said: "Over 80% of the English population now live in [urban areas](#) and are increasingly detached from the [natural world](#). Greening our cities is often proposed to help us adapt to climate change—for example, city parks and trees can reduce urban heat spots. But our results suggest urban greening could help reduce the damaging behaviours which cause environmental problems in the first place by reconnecting people to the natural world."

Co-researcher Dr. Mat White, of the University of Exeter Medical School, said: "The results are correlational so there is always the issue of untangling cause and effect, but our results based on a very large representative sample are consistent with experimental work which shows that people become more pro-environmental after time spent in natural vs. urban settings."

The paper is entitled 'Associations between pro-environmental behaviour and neighbourhood nature, nature visit frequency and nature appreciation: Evidence from a nationally representative survey in England'. Authors are Ian Alcock, Mathew White, Sabine Pahl, Raquel Duarte-Davidson and Lora Fleming.

**More information:** Ian Alcock et al, Associations between pro-environmental behaviour and neighbourhood nature, nature visit frequency and nature appreciation: Evidence from a nationally representative survey in England, *Environment International* (2020).  
[DOI: 10.1016/j.envint.2019.105441](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2019.105441)

Provided by University of Exeter

Citation: Reconnecting with nature key for sustainability (2020, January 15) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-01-reconnecting-nature-key-sustainability.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.