

Wildlife recording is good for people, as well as for science

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Wildlife recording. Credit: Dr Michael Pocock

Science is not the only beneficiary of nature-based "citizen science" projects—taking part also boosts the well-being of participants and their connection to nature, according to research published today (February 9)

in the *People and Nature* journal.

The study, "Nature Up Close and Personal: A Well-being Experiment," is the first large-scale study to measure the well-being benefits to the volunteers taking part in [citizen](#) science projects—such as the wildlife recording activities providing data that are vital to assess environmental change. It was conducted during the pandemic restrictions of 2020 by the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH), the University of Derby and the British Science Association.

Five hundred volunteers from across the UK were randomly assigned to carry out a 10-minute nature-based activity at least five times over eight days: a [pollinating insects](#) survey, a butterfly survey, simply spending time in nature and writing down three good things they noticed, or a combination of both. The groups were surveyed both before and after taking part to assess differences in their connection to nature, well-being and pro-nature behavior.

The researchers found that all volunteers showed increased scores in well-being and feeling connected to nature after completing their activities. Participants' comments included: "It gave me permission to slow down"; "It made me more aware of nature in all aspects of the environment" and "It reminded me that small things can make a big difference to my mood."

In addition, those writing down three good things they noticed, either alone or when combined nature recording activities, reported they were more likely to adopt pro-nature behaviors beyond their involvement in the project, such as planting more pollinator-friendly plants in their gardens, or creating shelters for wildlife, showing that taking part in citizen science has even more benefits for nature.

Dr. Michael Pocock, ecologist and academic lead for [public engagement](#)

with research at UKCEH, said, "Being in and around nature is good for our well-being, and we've shown that focused, active engagement with nature is just as important—whether that is 'mindful moments' in nature or taking part in citizen science."

He added, "This has been a valuable exercise for us in exploring how we can make citizen science even better. We now know that if we design future projects with additional nature-noticing activities, for example, we can enhance people's own connection to nature, while still collecting valuable data."

Co-author Professor Miles Richardson, who leads the Nature Connectedness Research Group at the University of Derby, said, "People connect with nature in different ways, so it's great to see nature-based citizen science can provide another form of active engagement that can strengthen the human-nature relationship. When combined with noticing the positive emotions nature can bring, citizen science can help unite both human and nature's well-being."

There are many nature-based citizen science projects run by different organizations across the year. UKCEH welcomes support from anyone interested in volunteering to get involved with recording wildlife via the [iRecord website](#) and free-to-use apps for butterflies: [iRecord Butterflies](#) and the [UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme](#). Records from these [citizen science projects](#) are used in vital scientific research to understand changes in our wildlife.

More information: Nature Up Close and Personal: A Wellbeing Experiment, *People and Nature* (2023). [DOI: 10.1002/pan3.10432](https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10432)

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