



GREEN AND BLUE SPACES FOR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING





Welcome

Natural environments and accessible green and blue spaces play a direct and indirect role in health and wellbeing. They can mitigate climate change impacts and support active recreation, providing valuable opportunities for healing, relaxation, and growth.

This e-bulletin includes a range of projects and initiatives that are actively promoting the benefits of green and blue spaces across Wales.

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Practice

RSPB Nature Prescriptions – Connecting people to nature to improve wellbeing and health!

Dr David Llewellyn,

Nature and Wellbeing Manager, RSPB Cymru



An increasing body of evidence shows that connection to nature can have profound positive impacts on health and wellbeing, with mental, physical, and indeed, social benefits. From reducing stress and improving mental health to boosting physical health and fostering social connections, nature is a powerful, accessible, and cost-effective resource for improving quality of life.

RSPB Nature Prescriptions are an innovative way for health and associated professionals to support and encourage patients and clients to

engage and connect with nature to improve their wellbeing and health. They are co-created with and delivered by a wide range of professionals, including GPs, social prescribing link workers, wellbeing connectors, occupational therapists, community rehab teams and others.

They began through a collaboration between local GPs and the RSPB in Shetland in 2018 before a successful pilot in Edinburgh. Its evaluation showed three-quarters of recipients felt they benefitted their wellbeing,

whilst the GPs involved were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about using them.

The prescriptions are being extended in Scotland and increasingly so in England, and we have just started here in Wales. Co-production work has already begun with health and third sector partners in Cardiff, Newport and parts of Powys to produce locality-focused booklets which encourage people to connect with nature in a way that is personal and meaningful to them, at a time to suit them.

These booklets take the form

of a calendar of simple prompts and suggestions to help people undertake accessible, self-led activities to notice and engage with the nature around them in their vicinity. Based on the pathways to nature connectedness, these can be as simple as listening to birdsong, noticing the patterns on a leaf, or observing cloud formations.

As such, RSPB Nature Prescriptions can complement more typical green social prescribing activities, by addressing challenges such as limited mobility, motivation, time, cost, and other potential barriers. However, we will also include additional information with links that will encourage people, as and where possible, to explore local green spaces and get involved in outdoor activities available in their areas, with an emphasis on these being accessible by walking, cycling or public transport.

Through the co-design process, we ensure prescriptions are tailored to meet the needs of intended users. Further to the co-design work, there will be short practical training sessions for those intending to use them to support people, so they are confident in doing so. We have devised a simple evaluation to enable us to monitor their impact.

We believe that everyone, no matter where they live or challenges faced, has the

right to access the benefits of nature. The cost of the work to develop, produce and print the prescriptions is fully funded with no costs involved for partners or recipients.

We are still welcoming more partners in Newport, Cardiff and Powys and we are looking at opportunities in other areas of Wales. If you work for an organisation supporting people's health and wellbeing and you're interested in offering RSPB Nature Prescriptions, please contact David Llewellyn - [david.llewellyn@rspb.org.uk](mailto: david.llewellyn@rspb.org.uk)



Practice

Wales. Made for Bikes: How Cycling in Nature Supports Wellbeing

Caroline Spanton,

Chief Executive, Beicio Cymru

BEICIO CYMRU

Wales is a nation built for cycling. [‘Wales. Made for Bikes’ is Beicio Cymru’s vision](#) to connect people with the incredible landscapes Wales has to offer—from mountain trails to coastal paths, lakes, and forests. Cycling in natural environments not only supports physical fitness but also plays a crucial role in mental wellbeing. Studies show that being active in green and blue spaces reduces stress, anxiety, and depression, promoting overall health. Our initiative promotes cycling as a way to explore, connect with nature, and embrace an active lifestyle, ensuring that more

people can access the benefits of Wales’ outdoor spaces. Through *Wales. Made for Bikes*, Beicio Cymru is championing the country as a world-class cycling destination, ensuring that people of all backgrounds and abilities can experience the joy of riding in nature. Cycling is more than just a sport; it is a way to connect with the environment, strengthen communities, and support public health. Research highlights the significant impact of cycling in natural spaces on mental health. Exposure to green and blue spaces has been

shown to lower stress levels, improve mood, and increase social interaction, all of which contribute to a healthier and happier population. Cycling also provides a sustainable form of transport, reducing carbon emissions and promoting active lifestyles. In Wales, our diverse landscapes make it possible for everyone—from beginners to experienced riders—to enjoy outdoor cycling. Initiatives such as community cycling hubs, off-road trails, women and girls friendly groups, and safe cycling routes in urban areas are making cycling more accessible than ever. Whether

it's exploring the Afan Forest trails, cycling the scenic routes of Llyn Padarn, or commuting along the Taff Trail, *Wales. Made for Bikes*. ensures that cycling is a key part of the nation's wellbeing and sustainability strategy. The *Wales. Made for Bikes* initiative has inspired more people to take up cycling for leisure, commuting, and sport across Wales. Our work has supported the development of safer cycling routes, encouraged investment in cycling infrastructure, and created opportunities for individuals and communities to engage with the outdoors. Promoting cycling in natural spaces has enabled more people to incorporate physical activity into their daily lives, reducing social isolation and improving mental wellbeing. Collaboration with partners has strengthened advocacy for policies that prioritise active travel, making it easier to access green and blue spaces by bike.

The benefits of cycling in nature extend far beyond physical fitness—it is a powerful tool for enhancing mental wellbeing, fostering social connections, and promoting environmental sustainability. By making cycling more accessible and investing in safe cycling routes, we can ensure that more people benefit from green and blue spaces in

Wales. We encourage individuals, communities, and policymakers to support cycling-friendly initiatives. Whether you're a beginner or a seasoned rider, get on your bike and explore the incredible landscapes Wales has to offer. **Find out more:** Visit beiciocymru.org to learn more about Wales. Made for Bikes and how you can [get involved](#).



Practice

Championing Nature for a Healthy Future – Public Health Wales’ Biodiversity Action Plan 2024-2027

Helen Bradley,

Project Support Officer, Public Health Wales

Public Health Wales has recently published its second biodiversity action plan which outlines the work that it will undertake as part of its duty under the Environment Act. The plan is focused on the importance of biodiversity for health and well-being and the actions Public Health Wales will take to be a champion for nature.

The plan says that people in Wales do not have equal access to nature and green spaces and that those in the most disadvantaged areas have least access. Several studies have highlighted the connection between access to green spaces and pregnancy outcomes and worse health for people from the most disadvantaged areas.

Ensuring that people in disadvantaged areas have greater access to green spaces may be an overlooked resource for addressing health inequities, with research showing that just a 10 per cent increase in exposure to green spaces in urban settings can reduce health problems and improve well-being.

Through its programmes and partnerships, Public Health Wales is working to enhance access to green spaces, as well as promoting biodiversity and ecosystem resilience by reducing our carbon emissions, waste and impact on the environment.

Sumina Azam, National

Director of Policy and International Health for Public Health Wales, said:

“There is a wealth of evidence to demonstrate that increasing access to green spaces has a positive impact on the health and well-being of everyone in the community. Public Health Wales’s latest biodiversity action plan looks at how we can expand access to green spaces to help reduce health inequalities and support a nature-rich future for Wales.”

The report can be found here: [Championing Nature for a Healthy Future – Public Health Wales’ Biodiversity Action Plan 2024-2027](#)



Research

Wild Skills Wild Spaces

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To support the wellbeing challenges faced within Wales, nature on prescription/green prescription has become ever more present. Such nature-based approaches and contact with nature have been shown to facilitate wellbeing (Lynch et al., 2020). While exposure to nature has positive benefits for peoples' health and wellbeing (Sumner et al., 2022).

Seeking to support the mental health of people living in Powys, Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust developed

a nature-based wellbeing programme called Wild Skills Wild Space (WSWS). Beginning in April 2021 and running for 24 months, WSWS aimed to deliver and evaluate a range of nature-based activities designed to improve the health, skills, and wellbeing of local communities in Powys. Over 12-week periods, Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust simultaneously ran weekly nature-based programmes for adults and young people.

The evaluation of WSWS was

conducted by a team from the Centre for Health, Activity and Wellbeing Research (CAWR) at Cardiff Metropolitan University. The evaluation used a mixed methods approach including a pre- and post-WSWS participant survey, and interviews with participants, deliverers, and referrers.

Throughout the programme, 232 participants (adults = 96; young people = 136) were referred onto WSWS with 214 (adults = 78; young people = 136) attending at least one

session. Participants who took part in the WSWS programme came from a variety of backgrounds and ages, and were referred onto the programme from primary care, secondary care, third sector organisations, and educational settings.

Results

Results from the quantitative analysis demonstrated that scores for wellbeing increased overall and across numerous categories. Particularly apparent were the wellbeing scores for adults, those referred from mental health services, and those with low mental health scores prior to WSWS, all of which significantly improved bringing the wellbeing scores into alignment with the general population within Wales and Powys. Participant scores for connection with nature were relatively high pre-WSWS and this level was maintained post-WSWS with a minimal increase for the majority of categories.

Feedback from interviews highlighted positive experiences particularly relating to WSWS having supported participants' social confidence, mental health and wellbeing, and sense of purpose. Such experiences were facilitated via a safe and inclusive environment, enjoyable and engaging sessions, being in nature, and

social interaction.

Conclusion

WSWS has supported individuals and the community which they are within. Particularly apparent is the enhancement of people's wellbeing through improved social confidence and opportunities to interact in a safe and non-judgemental environment within nature. Such aspects are vital in the current climate with concerns about loneliness, cost of living, and the environment.

Additional information:

Link to CAWR WSWS full report, available in English and Welsh:

<https://doi.org/10.25401/cardiffmet.25003607.v1>

WSWS website: [Wild Skills Wild Spaces \(WSWS\)](#) | [Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust](#)

Funding: Wild Skills, Wild Spaces was funded through the Sustainable Management Scheme - Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government

WSWS is a partnership between Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust, Powys Teaching Health Board and Cardiff Metropolitan University

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Practice

Exploring Wales Through Multisport: How Welsh Triathlon is Inspiring Active Lifestyles

Ffion Sanders,

Communications Officer, Triathlon Cymru

Wales’ stunning landscapes provide the perfect backdrop for outdoor activities, and Triathlon Cymru is at the forefront of encouraging people to embrace the benefits of green and blue spaces. Through swimming, cycling, and running, we are helping individuals of all ages and backgrounds stay active, improve their health, and connect with nature.

A Growing Passion for Multisport

With over 11,000 race starts at sanctioned events in 2024, multisport participation in Wales is thriving. Our 74 affiliated clubs offer structured opportunities to engage with outdoor physical activity, from serene coastal swims to scenic

countryside rides and vibrant running trails.

Making Triathlon Accessible to All

We are dedicated to breaking down barriers and ensuring everyone has the opportunity to take part. In 2024, we hosted a college-based event with over 400 students, more than 40% of whom had additional learning needs. By providing a supportive and inclusive environment, we empower young people to embrace outdoor activity, many for the first time.

Bridging the Gender Gap

Triathlon Cymru is making great strides toward gender equality in multisport. Our initiatives are helping us

get closer to a 50/50 gender split in event participation, ensuring that women and girls feel confident and encouraged to take part in outdoor sports.

Enhancing Mental Well-being Through Sport

Multisport is about more than just physical fitness, it also plays a vital role in mental well-being. Many of our clubs champion mental health awareness, including Ferndale Triathlon Club, which integrates multisport with a weekly evening walk, open to all abilities and backgrounds. This fosters a sense of community and provides a safe space for movement and connection.

Inspiring the Next Generation

At Triathlon Cymru, we believe in the power of storytelling. By sharing the experiences of those who have found joy, confidence, and improved well-being through multisport, we hope to inspire even more people to embrace an active outdoor lifestyle. Through our national approach and strong community engagement, Welsh Triathlon is making a lasting impact on health and well-being across Wales. As we continue to grow, we look forward to expanding our reach and encouraging more people to explore Wales’ beautiful landscapes through multisport.

<https://www.welshtriathlon.org/>



Practice

Green Prescription: How Nature-Based Wellbeing Programs are Transforming Health Across Wales

Hannah Brigham,

Communications Project Officer, Coed Lleol/Small Woods

Social prescription is a growing approach that connects individuals to community-based support, often through nature (known as green and blue prescribing), to improve mental and physical health in a holistic way. In Wales, Coed Lleol / Small Woods is at the forefront of this initiative, offering nature-based wellbeing programmes to promote health, reduce isolation, and address mental health issues. This preventative approach has proven effective in fostering healthier communities and encouraging greater connection to nature.

Since 2010, Coed Lleol has been offering free 6-week outdoor health and

wellbeing programmes across Wales, particularly for individuals facing mental health challenges and loneliness. [Research](#) shows that time spent in nature helps reduce blood pressure, improve sleep, and increase positive emotions. Coed Lleol's research supports the effectiveness of social prescribing, with 90% of participants spending more time outdoors and over 60% reporting improved wellbeing after participating in the programmes.

A [2024 feasibility study](#) with Bro Ddyfi Community Hospital in Machynlleth highlighted significant enthusiasm from both the community and hospital staff for nature-based

wellbeing activities. These activities complement, rather than replace, clinical services and address various health needs, especially mental health, mobility, and chronic illness.

Coed Lleol's programmes have made lasting impacts, with participants reporting improvements in mental health, greater connection to nature, and reduced feelings of isolation. The sessions combine physical activity, nature exposure, and social engagement, offering an alternative to traditional treatments. Activities such as nature walks, foraging, heritage crafts, and volunteering foster social networks, provide a sense

of purpose, and encourage a deeper connection to the natural environment.

One participant in Blaenau Gwent shared, "My mental and physical wellbeing improved big time, because mentally I knew it was my break. It was my three hours I could just completely switch off from being a mum, a carer and responsible adult, and I could just focus on myself."

We call on policymakers, healthcare providers, and community leaders to recognise the value of nature-based solutions in promoting health. By creating a resilient and effective infrastructure patients can be referred to community-based interventions as part of a broader strategy to improve wellbeing and reduce reliance on an already strained Health Service.

The message is clear: integrating social prescribing into communities and exploring nature's potential to heal can significantly enhance wellbeing. Nature-based activities, like those offered by Coed Lleol, have the power to make a lasting impact on individuals and communities.

Watch this video to find out more about what we do - [How does nature transform our health? | Coed Lleol \(Small Woods\) - YouTube](#)

Visit our website <https://www.smallwoods.org.uk/en/coedlleol/>



Practice

Benefitting People and Nature: UWTSD's Wildlife Pond

Daniel Priddy,

Head of Sustainability

In a stride towards sustainability and wellbeing, the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) has unveiled a new wildlife pond on its Carmarthen campus. This initiative was funded through Local Places for Nature programme and completed in 2024, it has transformed a once drab, concrete-surrounded pond into a vibrant aquatic habitat, offering a sanctuary for both biodiversity and the university community.

The project aimed to enhance the ecological value of the campus while providing a tranquil setting for relaxation. Prior to the transformation, the area, visible from the library, was a concrete patch

Koi Merebark,

Sustainability Manager

with an unplanted walled pond that lacked ecological function and aesthetic appeal. With input from landscape designers and informed by previous ecological appraisals, the university created a new biodiverse wildlife pond. The pond now features locally sourced mix of native and ornamental oxygenating, floating, marginal plants and provides a water source for fauna. In addition to the pond, an accessible decking area was created alongside, providing an elevated space for relaxation and observation. This decking is surrounded by a variety of plants chosen for their textures, scents, and colours. This engages multiple senses and provides a therapeutic environment

Oliver Hurrell,

Sustainability Administrator

for students and staff. The sensory garden enhances the experience of visiting the pond.

Academic research consistently highlights the benefits of natural environments, particularly blue spaces like ponds and lakes. These areas are linked to stress reduction and improved mood. Studies have shown that proximity to water can lead to improved mental and overall wellbeing, making the new pond a valuable addition to the campus.

Since its completion, the wildlife pond has quickly become a beloved space for students and staff. Many spend their lunches nearby or

take a moment for reflection by the water. Wildlife cameras have been installed to monitor visiting species, and the university eagerly anticipates observing how the pond and its plant life mature this coming spring.

UWTSD's wildlife pond project highlights the profound impact that even small-scale blue or green spaces can have on both nature and the community. By integrating these spaces into the built environment, institutions can enhance biodiversity while providing significant wellbeing benefits. This initiative serves as an example of how thoughtful design and ecological considerations can transform urban spaces into thriving natural habitats that benefit both nature and people. UWTSD not only maintains its estate in a way that promotes biodiversity and environmental sustainability but also seeks to educate the next generation of students with this passion by delivering courses in Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change (BSc), Energy and Environmental Sustainability (BEng) and Sustainable Construction (MSc). More information can be found at www.uwtسد.ac.uk

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hapus

Ar gyfer ein
lles meddyliol

For our mental
wellbeing

Commentary

Supporting our Mental Wellbeing through Nature

Hapus Team,

Public Health Wales

There is strong evidence that time spent in nature is good for our mental health and wellbeing, life satisfaction and happiness. (1, 2)

Taking action to look after nature has been shown to build a sense of connectedness to ourselves and our communities (3). And access to nature in urban populations has been found to reduce the need for antidepressant medication, particularly for people on low incomes (2).

It's not just about being in nature, but how we experience and connect with it. Nature is all around us and even short amounts of time connecting to nature can benefit our mental wellbeing.

Moments with nature

Recent research has considered the impact of being “near-by” nature and spending “moments with” nature rather “minutes in” nature. (3) Nature is full of beauty, which can take our attention if we allow ourselves time to stop and notice. Moments spent appreciating nature can be calming and spark feelings of awe and wonder, which are good for our wellbeing.

Five pathways to connecting with nature have been identified. These involve: using our senses, reflecting on how nature makes us feel, noticing nature's beauty, exploring the meaning nature provides, and feeling compassion for nature.

Using these pathways can help to boost our mental wellbeing, help us feel more connected to the natural world and inspire us to look after nature.

So, let yourself be distracted, notice the sights, the sounds. It doesn't have to be a long country walk to get the benefits. Taking time to listen to the birds, notice the stars, watch the seasons change, plant a flowerpot or put up an insect house, can all help us feel connected to nature.

Get inspired by exploring how people across Wales connect with nature to improve their mental wellbeing – visit [Get inspired - Hapus](#).

Nature can help people of all ages improve their mental wellbeing.

Up to the age of 11 we have a strong connection with nature, but as we grow older this connection weakens. Actively spending moments with nature helps to strengthen this connection (4)

Time spent in nature is linked to a range of health benefits for all ages (5, 6)

For adults:

Improved mental wellbeing
Reduced social isolation
Reduced stress
Higher life satisfaction
Improved self-confidence

For children & young people:

Reduced stress
Improved resilience
Reduction in hyperactivity and inattention
Greater emotional wellbeing

Hope for the future

Concern about the climate and nature crises can negatively impact our mental wellbeing. Taking action to help look after our natural world can help to tackle these crises and help us cope with feelings of distress for the natural world. (7, 8)

Doing things like walking or cycling instead of driving, planting wildflowers, reducing waste or joining local initiatives like tree planting or

litter-picking are all positive actions we can take. Taking steps like this can help us find hope for the future and help protect nature.

Explore a selection of tools, resources and opportunities to help boost your mental wellbeing through Nature. [Wellbeing tools - Hapus](#)

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Practice

#ShePaddles Cymru

Lydia Wilford,

Paddle Cymru Development Officer

She Paddles Cymru is an initiative designed to encourage and support women and girls in Wales to participate in paddle sports. This project came about as we had only around 25% women and girls in our membership and this needed to change. It was important to create a space for women and girls to start or progress in paddle sport where they feel safe, confident, and listened to.

This project had been developed to increase the participation of women and girls in paddle sport while at the same time building a community of support where women can come together and feel comfortable to learn at their own pace and ask

questions in a nurturing environment, share advice and stories. This offers a place for females to develop skills, techniques, and safety knowledge. This program has had a huge impact on so many of the participant's mental health and well being giving them a place to take part in something they may not have done if it was a male-dominated environment. We have created many role models with a strong team of volunteers who are highly skilled coaches and leaders to support all events we run. A huge bonus about this project is the access it gives everyone to nature. The project started in 2020 with taster sessions all around Wales so women and girls could try paddle

sports, it has now developed into 3 festivals a year ranging from whitewater to beginner level. We also now have club champions where we have 11 Welsh canoe clubs that run women-only sessions with a she paddles Cymru lead in their club. This has meant we can be running regular activities all around Wales.

This project has made a huge difference in so many women's lives, during the 3.5 years that the project has been going Paddle Cymru female membership has gone from 800 to 1750.

Here are some quotes from our last event:

"It's great to see so many

women growing and gaining confidence in their sport"
Anne, GB Rafting

"I know you all work sooo hard to put this event together and create such an incredible atmosphere for women to thrive! These weekends are so much more than the epic program of activities and coaching. We all gain so much joy." Participant

"These are my people this is my tribe" Participant

We are a female-inclusive program not female exclusive as we have many wonderful males that help us facilitate our journey. Our sessions are always women and girls-only participants and we have many inspirational female volunteers and coaches but we also have some fantastic male coaches too. We will be continuing our work and bringing on more clubs, centres', and delivery partners to run more regular sessions. It has been an absolute honour to watch so many women thrive within paddle sports. We are now at 37% women and girls within our membership but want to get to 50/50.

<https://www.paddlecymru.org.uk/shepaddles>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2641598402765375>

Videos



Supporting postnatal weight management

We explore the need to develop the evidence base, discuss a behavioural science perspective and consider next steps for developing policy and practice to support postnatal health and wellbeing.

[Watch](#)



Public Health Wales' International Public Health Forum

The International Health Forum promoted the experiences of colleagues across Public Health Wales, shared their learnings from engaging in international health activities and research and provided time to discuss opportunities for the future to engage in international partnerships working and networks.

[Watch](#)



WHIASU@20

The landscape of Health Impact Assessment (HIA) has changed massively over the last 20 years, and the Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (WHIASU) have been right at the heart of it since its founding in 2004.

[Watch](#)

Explore our video library on our website

[View all our videos](#)

News & Resources



[New curbs on unhealthy food promotions to tackle Wales' rising obesity levels](#)

14-02-2025



[Major boost for women's health research in Wales](#)

14-02-2025



[£13.7 million to transform services and cut ADHD and autism waiting times](#)

07-02-2025

[All News](#)

[Tackling the Inverse Care Law: Reducing health inequalities in Wales through General Practice and place-based partnerships](#)

Public Health Wales

[Fiscal Levers to Address Obesity](#)

Public Health Wales

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Next Issue

ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING FOR BABIES, CHILDREN, AND YOUNG PEOPLE



Good mental health and emotional wellbeing of babies, children, and young people is crucial for their development, happiness, and success in life. Early intervention, nurturing relationships, and support systems play a vital role in fostering resilience and providing children with the foundation for healthy mental wellbeing. By investing in mental health from the start, we lay the groundwork for a brighter, healthier future for our children and young people. Together, we can create a society where mental health and wellbeing is prioritised for every generation.

For our upcoming e-bulletin we are inviting contributions from projects and initiatives focused on enhancing mental health and wellbeing support for younger generations across Wales. These can be national, regional or local initiatives, policies or programmes. Our article submission form will provide you with further information on word count, layout of your article and guidance for images.

Please send articles to publichealth.network@wales.nhs.uk by 20th March 2025.

[Contribute](#)