



Nature & wellbeing resource for communities in Avalon & the Poldens



This resource has been developed in partnership with **Somerset Wildlife Trust and Step, Ride, Thrive** – a local project that brings together active travel, nature connection and community health and wellbeing. The resource aims to support you to discover and connect to nature in new ways, through the **senses**, by being **curious** about the natural world, and through **being active** – including by **walking, cycling and wheeling**. Step, Ride, Thrive is led by **23 local parishes** within the Avalon and Poldens Local Community Network, with funding from Somerset Council's Public Health team and the Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC).



Welcome to your '**Introduction to nature and wellbeing for communities in Avalon & the Poldens**' resource. I hope you find it interesting! It isn't designed to be an exhaustive document, rather a starting point to whet collective whistles and get thoughts and conversations started. Whether **deepening your own relationship with nature & wellbeing** or **organising with your community** you will always be best placed to know what might work best. I hope you find some **inspiration** and **joy** in these pages, to maybe seed something new for yourself personally, or to nurture a project or event in your community, bringing **nature and wellbeing for all!**

Sal Ball, Wilder Wellbeing Officer, Somerset Wildlife Trust



**Somerset
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AN INTRODUCTION TO NATURE & WELLBEING



There is overwhelming evidence that spending time in nature is good for us! Alongside personal physical, emotional and cognitive benefits, spending time in nature and helping nature can also bring communities together, building relationships between neighbours and generations in our shared love of the natural world and wildlife.

Nature & wellbeing in communities – 5 hints & tips

If you are inspired to hold any nature & wellbeing activities – with a local group in your community or with friends and family – these are a few pointers to help you feel confident:

- **Let nature do the talking!** Keeping activities straightforward helps us feel more confident and gives the natural world space to shine. The simpler the better is a good rule of thumb.
- **Being comfortable in nature.** No-one can relax and enjoy nature's bounty if they are cold, wet or worried. If outside, have a plan for the weather. Give thought to what factors might get in the way of people having a good time. Consider physical, emotional & environmental safety in any planning.

- **We are nature!** Holding in mind that we are included in nature and not separate can help people build an emotional relationship with nature that can bring wellbeing benefits for all, nature included.
- **We don't have to be experts in nature or wellbeing.** In fact, listening and learning from each other is the real joy of nature & wellbeing conversations. This is especially true in communities, where there is so often a wealth of experience to hear and stories to be shared.
- **Include everyone in nature & wellbeing.** If people can't get out in nature, bring it in to them. Explore love for Somerset wildlife while making space for stories of nature farther afield. If you are lucky enough to feel included in nature, make it your mission to (gently) help others rekindle their own joy & connection.



Good Nature?



We asked people why they felt time in nature is good for their wellbeing.

They said:

Exciting

Selected for something special

Appreciate when not in nature (cosy)

Solitude- balance - listening

Spiritual self in nature

Slows down my ADHD brain

Honoured, glorious, smiles

Exhilaration - cold, muddy and wet

Calms me down, contrast

Cheap/free

Engaging in the environment

Innate sense

Look up at the sky!

Natural microbiomes - we are part of nature

Healing and wholeness

Freedom - kids, safety, life in perspective

Glow, knowledge, nostalgic

Different brain stimulation

Exhilaration - reconnect with self

Favourite place - able to breathe again

Find a place where I am woodland

Quality of fresh air & oxygen. Soil

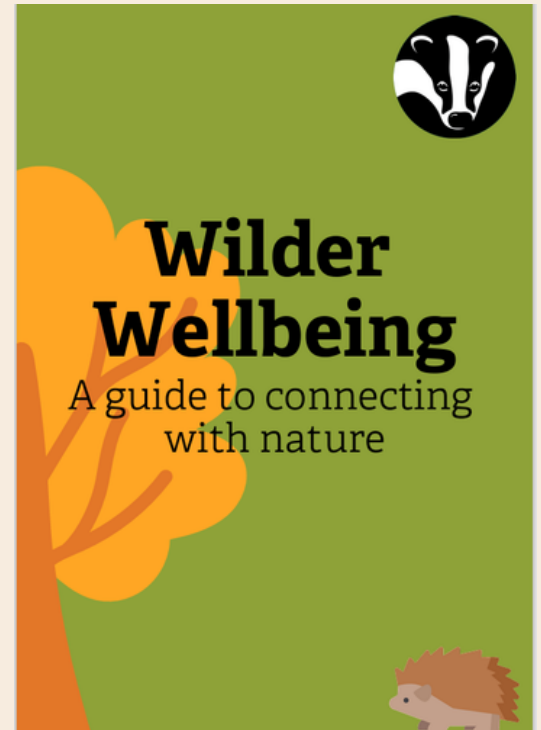
We belong in nature!



The 5 ways to wellbeing (in nature!) model

The **5 Ways to Wellbeing** are a well known, evidence based approach used across social and health care. They are practical, accessible, and provide another model to lean into when thinking about nature & wellbeing. We can do this by simply adding ‘...in nature’ to the simple daily steps suggested.

There is this lovely 5 Ways to Wilder Wellbeing resource developed by the Wildlife Trusts here: [wilderwellbeing](https://www.wilderwellbeing.org/).



- **Connect** with others about our experiences of being in nature.
- Be **Active** in the natural world where we can, whatever the weather!
- Take **Notice** of nature all around us, taking time to savour through our senses.
- **Learn** about nature and be curious about the natural world all around us.
- **Give** by taking care of our natural habitats, at home and in our communities

5 pathways to nature connection model



The **5 Pathways to Nature Connection** describe steps we can take to build a stronger relationship with nature and reminds us that we are included in, and part of nature ourselves. The steps are simple, intuitive and lend themselves beautifully to both personal connection & community experiences, where a sense of coming together is key!

If you feel inspired by the 5 Pathways to Nature Connection there is this short handbook [The Nature Connection Handbook | Finding Nature](#) to explore, and if you want a deeper dive here's a link to an Online Nature Connections course offered by the Uni of Derby [Nature Connectedness: For a new relationship with nature - Free courses - University of Derby](#).

- **Contact pathway** - Using our senses to become embodied & grounded in the nature around us.
- **Beauty pathway** - Looking out for beauty and remembering that beauty is in the eye of the beholder!
- **Emotion pathway** - Inviting joy and inclusion, welcoming equally whatever feelings arrive.
- **Meaning pathway**- The stories, histories, folklore we tell about nature.
- **Compassion pathway** - For ourselves, each other and taking action for nature.

Some 'contact' pathway ideas

Find a beautiful **local river spot** & draw or paint what you see. Take time to **connect with the water** - notice the wildlife it sustains, and tune in to its babbling and bubbling. You could do this as a **solo activity** or with a **small group**.

If you are involved in a gardening club in **your community**, invite people to explore with their noses and hands. You could hold a blindfold 'challenge' to identify produce using other senses.

*Remember that not everyone has the same sensory experiences so consider how to adapt for people (for example) with sight and hearing loss.

Go on a **mindful walk**, slowing down and appreciating nature through your **senses** - there are some guidelines you can follow/adapt on the next page, if you would like.

*This idea can be easily adapted for groups held indoors, by bringing nature inside for people to explore through their senses

My ideas here:



Taking a mindful walk in nature.

Duration: 10 mins – as long as you like!

Observe

Start walking to your first chosen point. How does your body feel?
Does it feel heavy or light, stiff or relaxed?

Notice

What can you see? It might be an insect on the ground, a particular plant, people walking past or a bird in the sky.

Listen

What can you hear? Can you hear any natural sounds? How many different natural sounds can you hear? Keep listening as you walk to the next point.

Smell

What can you smell? Take a moment to notice different smells coming and going as you walk, some of which may be nice, some may be less pleasant.

Touch

What can you feel on your skin? Is it the warmth of the sun, cool rain or a cold breeze? Can you feel your feet touching the ground or your arms swinging?

Take time

Take a few more minutes seeing, listening, smelling and touching. Notice how things come and go as you walk to another point.

Come back

Now walk back to your start point. As you walk back notice how your body moves and the way your feet touch the ground.

Some thoughts on inviting people to go on a mindful walk:

- This is an invitational activity – people can join in, adapt to suit their mood & personal requirements and also take a pass as they wish.
- The idea is to slow down rather than cover lots of ground – the ‘walk’ can take place anywhere in nature, no matter how small the space is.
- There is a reminder that as people we are also part of and included in nature, and so human noise and interaction is likely and okay, especially in more urban nature areas.
- If facilitating a walk hold awareness of any risks in the area, such as dogs in a public space and not touching anything that may cause harm (e.g. nettles). As a simple rule of thumb, it is best not to taste anything, to be on the safe side.
- For a self-guided experience, you can cut up the steps and staple them together to be explored one at a (mindful) time



Some 'beauty' pathway ideas



Hold a '**nature senses treasure hunt**' in your community, inviting people to notice beauty in nature they can see, hear, smell and (safely) touch as they explore the area.

**As a rule of thumb, don't invite people to taste natural items as we can never be sure what their reaction to foraged foods might be*

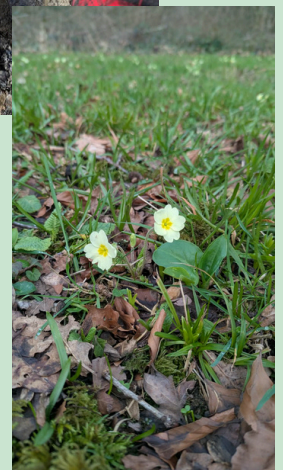
Find ways to connect with nature that embrace the seasons!

"One of the great things about wet weather and muddy ground is that the usually invisible movements of more elusive or nocturnal wildlife can be glimpsed as foot and paw prints impressed into mud" Imogen - SWT nature & wellbeing volunteer.

Visit a **beautiful nature spot** and journal about your experience of this **special place**. You could also write a **poem**, for example a haiku:

*Golden sun dips low
Mirror lake reflects the sky
Silence fills the air.*

My ideas here:



Some 'emotion' pathway ideas



Hold a **dawn chorus event** at your local hall, library, school or community hub. Invite people to bring chairs and sit peacefully together outside and gently let the morning unfold as the birds bring their song. As this is an early morning activity you could offer breakfast and the chance to chat.

*is it possible to record your local dawn chorus and share with people who couldn't make it to the event in person via a community website or facebook group?

Are you part of a local singing group? Why not organise a singing session, **blending the joy of singing with being in nature**. For our ancestors, singing chants and songs outdoors would accompany different activities and mark times of celebration, as well as grief and loss

My ideas here:

Become a nature connector!
Take time to ask neighbours a little about their relationship with nature – what brings them joy.

- **Listen**, without jumping in, staying curious and non-judgemental
- **Be mindful** of body language that might show more what they are feeling & remembering than their words alone.
- **Reflect** back to them what you have learned by listening to them, and your gratitude for their sharing.
- **If you would like**, you can swap and tell your nature story next!



Some 'Meaning' pathway ideas



Are you involved with a local film club, book group or society? Can you include a nature element in your activities and events. Maybe organise a **'festival of nature'** where community activities are focussed for nature and wellbeing over a particular week, month or season

Folklore or history walks.

Research the stories and myths associated with local landmarks such as Glastonbury Tor, the Isle of Athelney or Cadbury Castle - and visit those sites with the stories in mind.

Many parishes have trees or whole woodlands that hold special place in collective memories. Are there ways to **'make friends with your tree'**? This could involve personal reflection, art & photography, storytelling, inviting local children to write postcards to your tree, researching the place in local history your tree has, and how to care for it. Hold a day of **celebration** for your tree!

My ideas here:



Some 'Compassion' pathway ideas

Through connecting with and caring for nature, we can be reminded of our place in the world and kinship with all life. To **deepen your connection** to nature and yourself, you could listen to a mindfulness meditation in a **special nature spot**.

There are often myriad people offering nature inclusion & wellbeing in communities. From allotment groups to forest schools for toddlers & everything in between, people are doing amazing things that deserve shouting about! Spend some time **mapping** & getting to know each other, maybe **bringing people together** to share their experiences finding new ways of working together for community & nature wellbeing.

Following the **5 pathways** brings us to a point where our love of nature helps us feel motivated to show **compassion** for nature by taking action.

Communities can be **powerful** when we come together - planting trees, picking litter, building bat boxes. The possibilities are endless when we feel included in nature!

For more inspiration on taking **action for nature** check out <https://www.somersetwildlife.org/team-wilder/team-wilder-resources>

My ideas here:



Some Somerset Wildlife Trust resources

In terms of **Somerset Wildlife Trust** signposting, it is always worth having a look at our **Team Wilder map** to see if there are local nature groups/activities people may want to be involved with if they are wanting to explore further. [Team Wilder map | Somerset Wildlife Trust](#). You may be able to add your own activity too.

There is also a **Facebook group** dedicated to communities doing fab things for Somerset nature where lots of interesting events and opportunities pop up. [Team Wilder Somerset | Facebook](#)

And the **SWT events page**, which has lots of one off activities for people who might want to get involved while not being able to necessarily offer their time on a weekly/voluntary basis [Events | Somerset Wildlife Trust](#).

We have a searchable **Nature Reserve** page [Nature reserves | Somerset Wildlife Trust](#), where people can find the closest beautiful location to visit managed for nature by SWT, with useful 'know before you go' information about many of them.



Books and apps

Want to read further and get more ideas?

Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory 1989

Reconnection Prof Miles Richardson (Nature Connections)

Good Nature Prof Kathy Richardson (The science of nature-based wellbeing)

Into The Forest Dr Qing Lee (Shinrin-yoku/forest bathing)

Be Nature – A guide to growing relationships with nature, Dr Matteo Giusti, Louise Shorthose, Kirsty Porter

Into Nature – The Mindfulness Project

Merlin bird ID App:

<https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>

inaturalist App

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

Nature Journaling

App

<https://www.encounter-nature.com/welcome>



A final thought on compassion for self

Many people find it a challenge to rest and take time for themselves. Below is a 5 minute 'senses grounding in nature' invitation that maybe we can all lean into when the busyness of it all feels like a lot to be dealing with.

And... breathe!

What can you **see** in the nature around you? What are the colours and the movements you notice?

What **sounds** in nature can you hear? What sounds are the closest? The furthest away?

What can you **feel** or **sense** around you? The breeze on your cheeks, your feet on the ground? What else are you aware of?

Taking some breaths in through your nose, what can you **smell** of this place? Take a moment to smell what you see (maybe a leaf or the earth, if you like).

Sipping the air, as if through a straw, what does this place **taste** of? Can you get any sense as you let the air play over your mouth and tastebuds. What do you imagine the taste might be?



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