



Physical activity

in nature

The importance of physical activity to a person's wellbeing is well understood but there is a growing evidence base that supports the promotion of exercise and leisure in an outdoor setting for an even greater impact on wellbeing. There are lots of traditional sports and activities that typically take place outdoors but what about activities that are more accessible to those unable or uninterested in taking part in 'sports or exercise'. Here, nature comes into its own with lots to offer in many energising, beautiful, peaceful or awe inspiring surroundings.

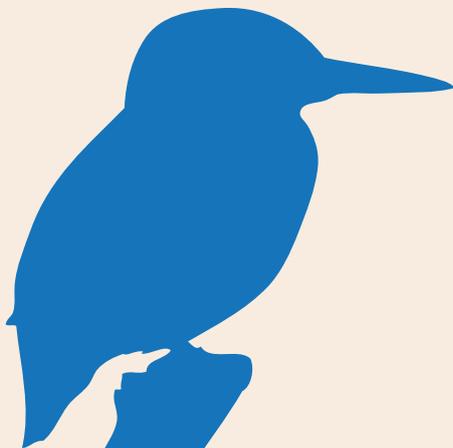


Exploring

Activities that encourage 'health by stealth' are perfect for those that might hesitate at the thought of 'exercise'. Here the focus is on having fun, whether that's playing hide and seek, seeking out wildlife or discovering new places.

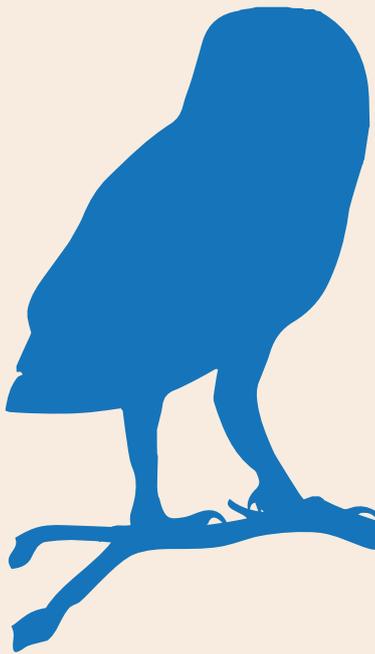
A natural scavenger hunt

Can be a short activity in a predetermined place or more sedately over a longer period where participants are encouraged to explore their local green or blue spaces in their own time to find natural objects. You can be quite prescriptive and pull together a list of specific objects like a pinecone or a purple leaf. You could be open to interpretation and focus on feelings and emotions like finding something that brings a smile to your face or something that makes a sound in the wind. Consider asking for a description or a photo instead of collecting an actual object.



A bug hunt

Much like the natural scavenger hunt this a great way to get people moving whilst they take the time to notice the small and wonderful. Hunts can include nets to gently brush through bushes or grass to capture and observe some of the UK's smallest wildlife or they can be an exercise in checking off bugs from a list that can be more easily seen and identified. Ready-made spotter sheets for insects and all sorts of other creatures can be found [here](#).



Wildlife watching

Doesn't have to be a static activity, a walk in a natural space will also provide an opportunity for you to see lots of different creatures and species. Invest in ID cards or books and head out for a gentle walk, a quiet park bench, a pub garden or a riverbank are all great reward destinations after a nature walk.

Mindfulness and relaxation

Mindfulness and relaxation activities have become increasingly popular since lock down, when suddenly being outside felt like a luxury and spending time outdoors became an essential tool in the upkeep of the population's wellbeing. Seeking time outdoors whether that's walking your dog, going for a run or sitting mindfully for a while has become embedded in many people's daily and weekly routines. The opportunities to take part in mindful movement continue to rise but you don't need to necessarily hire an instructor or take part in classes, some simple activities already exist and are easy to replicate after some initial research.



Mindful movement practices

Yoga, Thai Chi or Qigong are now regularly seen in outdoor spaces. Just as you used to see joggers it is not unusual to see someone sat on a bench gently stretching or sat on a mat doing yoga. There are lots of starter videos or articles online that can help you develop a simple 5 minute routine or play full sessions directly to your group, here are just a few:



Qigong

Aimed at teachers supporting young people this demonstrates some really simple Qigong moves that everyone can benefit from.



Thai Chi

Basic Thai Chi moves put into a simple 5 minute daily routine.



Yoga

Photos with instructions for 8 yoga poses for beginners.

Forest bathing

Also known as the Japanese art of shinrin yoku, forest bathing is a simple method of being calm and quiet amongst trees. Although it can be an exercise in being still many choose to use its principals whilst taking gentle exercise and walking in woodlands or forests. There are lots of articles and guides online, [Forestry England](#) is a good example.

Mirroring movement

A simple play activity that involves copying someone's or something's movements. If mirroring a person, stand facing each other, choose a lead and have that person begin making slow, simple movements with their body. The follower needs to closely observe the lead and shadow their movements. This can also work in groups with the lead stood in front. If mirroring an object from nature, trees or tall plants are a great choice. In this case it isn't about directly mirroring its movements but instead noticing the tree and what it is doing – is it rooted to the ground, standing tall, branching out, reaching for sunlight and swaying in the breeze.

Active Journeys

For those looking for a faster or more active pace of outdoor activity explore local hiking, Nordic walking, wild swimming, canoeing or paddle boarding groups. The scenery can be awe inspiring.

If you enjoy walking the [Rambling Association](#) run Wellbeing Walking Groups which are led by experienced leaders on short, fully accessible routes. Great for any groups that want to get out and about and further afield or stay local with [Cheshire Ramblers](#). Or invite a friend for a regular morning or evening walk and watch the changes throughout the seasons in your own communities and spaces.



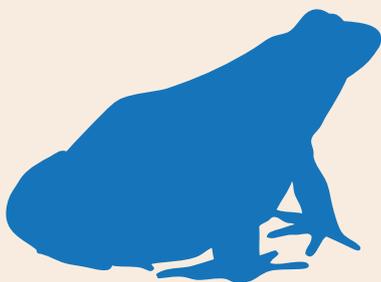
Moving for nature

If you are fortunate enough to have access to an outdoor space an obvious physical activity with something for every ability and interest is gardening or volunteering for nature. Even half an hour pottering in a garden keeps you moving and burns calories whereas digging a ditch or planting trees is a full body workout.

Gardening

Whether for pleasure or food gardening can easily be adjusted or adapted to help nature too. Wildlife friendly gardening and growing is simple to introduce and can be done on a small or large scale. From choosing insect friendly plants to putting in a pond or creating a wildflower meadow there is lots of help available.

- [The Wildlife Trust](#) – wildlife gardening
- [The RSPB](#) – gardening for wildlife
- [The RHS](#) – wildlife gardening
- [Gardeners World](#) – wildlife gardening



Volunteering for nature

Also known as conservation volunteering, this can mean anything from building bird boxes for local swift streets, to litter picking or schemes to helping an organisation dig ditches for planting or removing Invasive plant species. A google search of conservation organisations or your local volunteering service will advertise opportunities or alternatively community or neighbourhood groups are likely to have their ear to the ground and know what's going on locally. "Friends of ..." groups look after local green spaces, why don't you search for you local Friends of Group on Facebook. If you want to start doing more for nature or want to find out how to take action for nature get in touch with us, we would be happy to help!

Download more activity ideas at:
cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-connection-toolkits



Top tip:

When the weather permits move existing exercise activities outdoors, this simple step can a real extra buzz to the group from the moment you step outside.

Looking for more ideas and inspiration

Why not try a [ready-made sensory-scape challenge](#).

Why not organise a trip to an art or sculpture trails, there are many around the [country](#) or search for 'Art Trails in Cheshire' on [google](#) for local options?