



# Wild Ways Well and Nature Signs

Today's Wild Ways Well task is to go for a walk in your local greenspace and find some flowers, Paying particular attention to Daisies... Remember to follow the guidelines on Social Distancing, stay 2m apart from other people and only walk in your local area – and remember to wash your hands!

You'll **Be Active** by carefully walking outdoors (observing social distancing) keeping your mind busy and occupying your time looking for all the natural signposts that nature leaves around you.

We can **Connect** with the natural world by opening up our senses. Sit in a quiet spot and listen for the sounds of nature changing as you are accepted into the woodland, look for the signs of animals reacting to people. You can also connect to our ancestors by using some of the same natural signs that they did

We can **Keep Learning**, by utilising the same skills that people and animals use to find their way around and to detect the best places to live and feed. There are hundreds of books and websites devoted to natural navigation, we can check these when we get home.

These natural signs are all around us but we rarely **Take Notice** of what nature is trying to tell us while we are out and about. Taking a few moments to spot these things can be very rewarding.

We can **Give** by giving ourselves a break from the drama of the current events and focusing on the little things around us that give us pleasure and by sharing these with others, in person or online. We can give back by learning to give more value to the natural environment and the ways it can help us.





# Wild Ways Well



**BE ACTIVE** – Take part in health walks and practical outdoor activities. Explore your local paths, woods and greenspaces.

Spending time outdoors, amongst nature, makes people feel better about their lives.

The Wild Ways Well project encourages people suffering from, or at risk of, poor mental health to get outside for some daily exercise and experience nature.

**CONNECT** – Meet new people. Connect with the people, the wildlife and the nature that's all around us.



Remember to observe Social Distancing, stay 2m apart and only walk in your local area.

Whilst out amongst the trees, parks and reserves you have a chance to slow down, relax and take your attention away from current events.

**TAKE NOTICE** – Note the changing cycles of life. Use your senses. Listen to birds, smell the flowers, live in the moment.



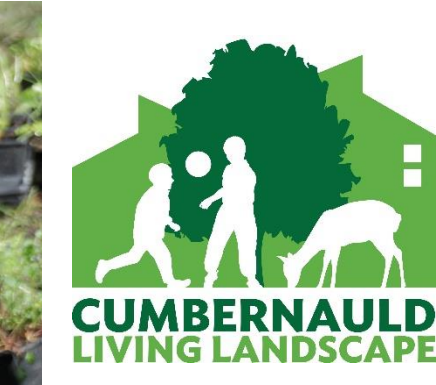
This guide will help you to try out some environmental and conservation related activities designed to fit in with the internationally recognised Five Ways to Wellbeing mental health framework.



**LEARN** – Identify plants and wildlife, try new crafts, learn new skills. Discover things about nature and about yourself.







## Natural Navigation

Nature is one big system, all the individual elements interacting with each another to create the world we see around us. We can use the ways these forces all interact with each other to tell us lots of things about the world around us.

In Cumbernauld the prevailing wind direction is from the South West, this means that over the long term all the plants and animal life have adapted to winds mostly coming from this direction.

The wind shapes not just individual trees but whole woodlands, and even communities. It dictates where animals feed and where they build their homes – and has a similar effect even on human communities.

Finding our way in the outdoors is something we take for granted nowadays in the age of smartphones and GPS but learning to do things the way our forebears did can be very rewarding – and fun! Learn to find North by looking at lichen; tell the time using the sun; find the driest place to have your picnic by spotting where rabbits like to eat; or spot predators in the distance by watching the wildlife around you.

These were all once vital skills – and I'm sure you know many others. Imagine you were lost in the woods, how would you find your way home?

Humans have always had to find their way around the environment by opening their senses and tuning into nature, but this is a skill that many of us have lost. However your senses are still there, you are part of this wide, complex ecosystem and, with a little practice, these ancient skills and knowledge can reinforce your place in the world and remind you that we are all part of nature.





## Wind

In Cumbernauld, while it is very difficult to know where the wind will blow from on any given day, we know that the prevailing (most likely) wind direction is from the south west (SW). This means that over the long term all the plants and animal life have adapted to wind mostly coming from this direction.

We can look to the trees for our first clue of this. Lone trees will often have a noticeable lean to the north east (NE) (away from the prevailing wind). In groups of trees you can see this same effect in the very top branches, which will tend to point NE. Branches on the SW side will tend to grow tightly together, with no outlying stragglers – and branches on the NE will be looser, with more straggly branches poking out. We can even see this effect on whole woodlands – trees on the SW side of a wood will be shorter than trees on the NE, giving woodland a wedgelike shape.

If you can see the trees roots, you will often note another growth pattern – the strongest, bulkiest roots will be on the SW side, anchoring the tree against the prevailing winds, just like guy ropes on a tent.

A field of grass can tell us the wind today – and yesterday! The longer stems of grass will point in the direction of today's winds, but look closer and you'll find the shorter stems beneath will tend to point in the direction of the prevailing winds

Animals also have to deal with the wind, and they know how to find the most sheltered spots. You can use this knowledge to help you in your navigations, a quick look at an isolated bush or tree might show that one side has more flattened grass, browsed leaves or sheep/rabbit droppings than the other. This will likely be the side that is most protected from the wind and rain – the NE in Cumbernauld. Likewise animal burrows will be dug so that the prevailing wind doesn't blow right down them.

An old folk belief is that cows in a field will stand with their tails facing the prevailing wind – if there is any truth in this then it may be because facing this way ensures the wind will carry the scent of any predators approaching the cow from the rear where it cannot see them.





## Sunlight

As we are in the Northern hemisphere the sun is highest in the Southern sky. The life giving light that plants depend on therefore is most plentiful to the south.

Trees will tend to grow towards the light and this causes them to grow in a lopsided fashion, with branches tending towards vertical on the north side and trending towards horizontal on the southern side.

Leaf growth gives another clue. There will be more leaf growth on the south (sunny) side of the tree making the tree look bulkier on that side – but conversely the individual leaves will be larger and darker on the north side.

You can also see this effect in other organisms. Take a look at a rock or a tree trunk and you should see that the brighter coloured lichens and healthier plants will be on the south side (in fact even the bark of a tree trunk will likelier be darker and thicker on the north side).

Likewise we can use a ditch, stream or depression in the ground as a natural navigation aid by comparing the vegetation growth – the southern side of a ditch or pond will be more lush and have more variation in the types of flowers than the northern side.

Finally, if you're really lost, you could always try taking a look at the flowers, many, like the tiny little daisies that are often all around, will grow with their flowers facing towards the Sun. Others will grow asymmetrically, with the sunniest side looking stronger, with more flowers, or with flowers which open earlier.

Just to confuse things, there are other plants, like Ivy, which when it is young, actually tries to grow away from the sun, looking for the shade of a tree to grow upon. Only when an ivy is older, and has successfully colonised a tree, will its leaves go looking for sunlight.

To find out what direction to go simply look where nature is pointing!



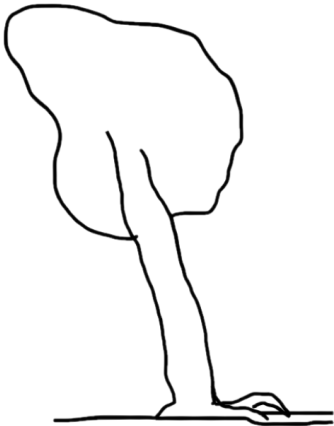




Using the information on the previous two pages, work out for each of these drawings, which direction is (roughly) North.



The direction of the sun has made the difference on opposite slopes of this ditch...



This lone tree's growth has been affected by the prevailing winds



This tree is growing in a sheltered woodland, away from winds.





## People

The species which has the biggest impact on the landscape is undoubtedly Humans. Often the signs of human presence in an area are very obvious but if you look you can often find subtler clues that people are, or have been, around.

Felled trees are an obvious sign of people (or beavers!) but there are many things you can tell from what is left behind long after human loggers have left. Most trees don't respond too well to being cut down, but some actually thrive. Spotting a group of mature trees with multiple straight stems is a sure sign that human coppicers have been at work. Pollarding (where the stems are harvested higher up the tree) leaves similar signs.

Nettles thrive in fertilised ground so coming across a small patch of nettles in the middle of nowhere is often a sign of somewhere people have historically been. Perhaps there was a midden, an animal pen, or even a burial on the spot long ago.

Pineapple weed is a low growing yellow flower which gives off a scent much like pineapples when it is crushed – it is also highly resistant to being stood on and thrives on paths – a line of pineapple weed therefore can mark old pathways long after they are out of use.

Likewise, foxgloves, thistles, and poppies grow best in areas where the ground has been historically disturbed – in fact wildflower meadows in woodland in general are a good sign of humans. It was likely people who cut down the trees to make the clearing and domesticated grazing animals that suppressed the grass, allowing the wildflowers to grow.

An even better sign is to look for plants which shouldn't be there at all. Species like Snowdrops are not native to Scotland and don't spread well on their own. When they were first introduced they were often planted around monasteries and churches – so a patch of snowdrops in a wild wood is a clue that there was once a religious building nearby.





## Make a Sundial

For thousands of years people have used the sun to tell the time, and we can do so in the same way, by making a sundial.

You'll need

- Sun! – a sunny spot where you can check the time.
- A Clock Face – you could use paper, card, wood, a paving slab or even just a patch of ground.
- Something to make a shadow (technically called a 'Gnomon') – you could use a stick, a pencil or a tall stone.

You might also need some clay, plasticine or mud to hold your Gnomon in place; a pen, chalk or rocks to mark the hours.

Find your sunny spot and place your clock face in it. You'll have to fix it in place so it can't move. If you're using a paving slab or patch of earth you could draw your clock face with chalk, or arrange some pebbles.

Place your gnomon in the middle of your clock face and at exactly Mid-day draw a line from your gnomon to the top of the clock face following the shadow (this should point directly North). Come back every hour and, using the shadow, draw a new line and mark it with the correct time. You'll need to get out the next morning and draw your lines for before mid-day.

You should end up with a pattern that looks roughly like the one below. Congratulations, you can now tell the time just like our ancestors did – as long as it is sunny!







## Noticing Nature

Next time you go out for a walk in nature, why not try a small experiment... take a small amount of food – a handful of peanuts, some bird seed, a crust of bread - and leave it somewhere.

How long do you think it will take an animal to spot this new feeding opportunity?  
How long would that same piece of food lie in the area before a human noticed it?

Animals have to pay attention to natural signs because for them it is a literal matter of life and death. The slightest moment of inattention could lead a loss of a vital feeding opportunity – or worse could lead to a predator making a meal out of you!

On your walk, keep an eye – and an ear – out for the signs that nature is paying attention.

Listen for the alarm calls coming from areas in front and to the sides of you. These are short, loud calls made by birds and mammal species like squirrels, that alert others that there is danger around – in this case you! See if you can spot the birds and animals making the calls. Sometimes the alarms will lead to flight, look for the birds flying away out of your path, or the deer running for safety. Animals watch each other so often when you see one bird fly away, you'll spot others in the area doing the same thing. Deer will often freeze, trusting in their camouflage to fool you, but even they will run when they are sure they've been spotted.

Now why not see if you can spot these sentinels before they spot you? Walk quietly and carefully, stop in places where the wind is blowing into your face (so your scent is being carried back the way you came) and scan the area. Can you see a deer peacefully browsing? A Squirrel eating on a tree stump? A bird foraging through the undergrowth with its back to you?

Sit somewhere comfortable and watch carefully – can you predict when the next person will walk by on the trail by looking for the alarm signs of birds and animals?

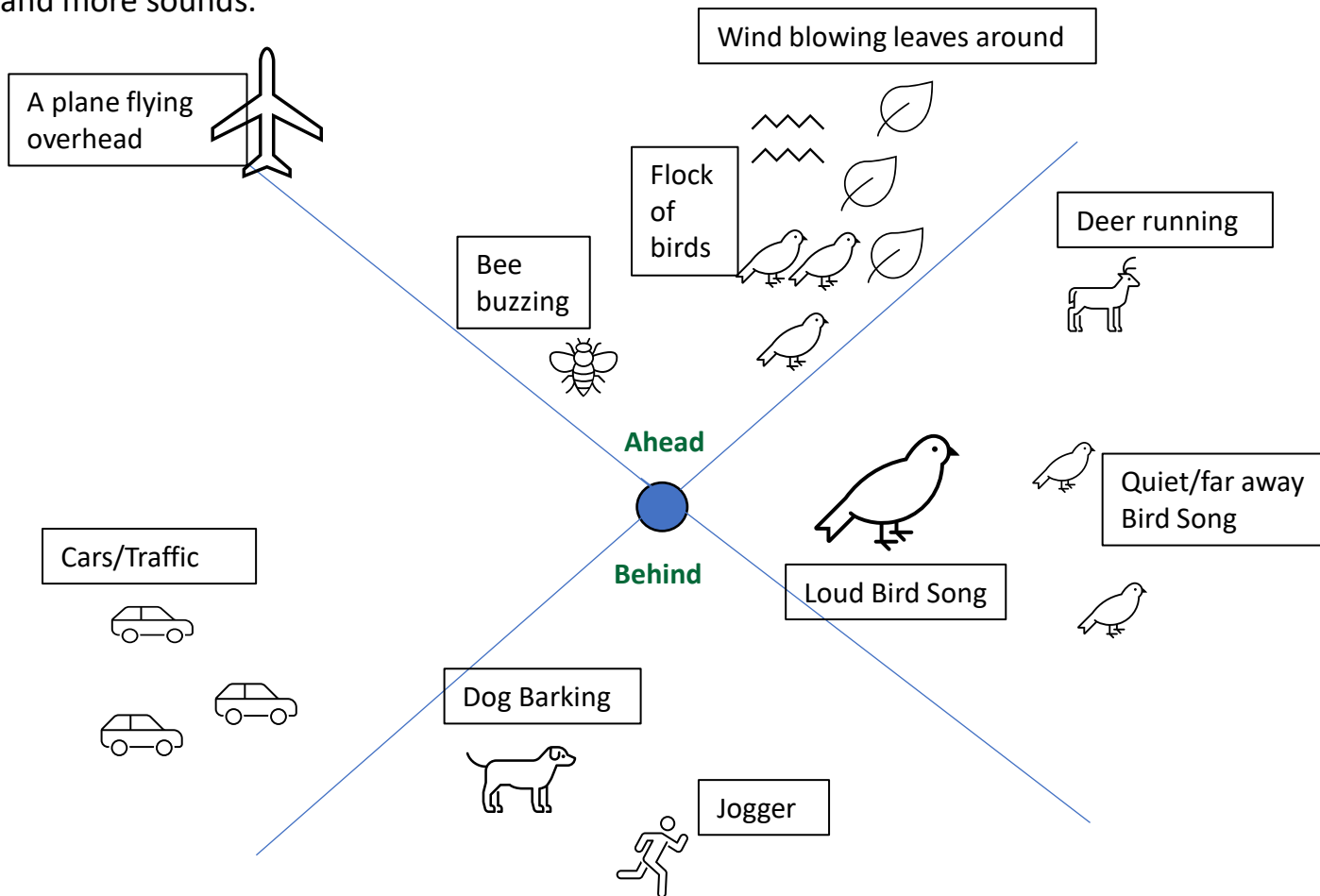




## Sound Mapping

Try to tune your senses in like an animal on watch. Find a quiet spot to sit for a few minutes, close your eyes and open your ears. Use a blank piece of paper to make a map of the sounds around you. Draw a small circle in the middle of the sheet and imagine this is your head viewed from above. Now mark on the paper all the sounds you hear and the direction they come from. You could draw pictures to represent the sounds, show on the paper where they come from in relation to you and how far away they are.

Really listen to what is going on around you, as time passes you should find you notice more and more sounds.



















# Look Out For Daisies

Spotting wildflowers is a great activity that anyone can try – and its almost as easy from your window or doorstep as it is on a walk! See how many of these things you can spot this week.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • A tree showing signs of the prevailing wind      |  1pt     |
| • A tree showing sings of the sun direction        |  1pt     |
| • A flower pointing South                          |  5pts    |
| • The north side of a rock                         |  5pts   |
| • An old footpath                                  |  5pts  |
| • A Coppiced or pollarded tree                     |  10pts |
| • A bird that is unaware you are there             |  5pts  |
| • A deer that is unaware you are there             |  10pts |
| • Hear an alarm call                               |  1pt   |
| • A Butterfly                                      |  1pt   |
| • The south side of a ditch (by looking at plants) |  5pts  |
| • A patch of nettles                               |  2pts  |

Total \_\_\_\_\_





## Links

Go further with your Wild Ways Well activity by trying these links once you come home

**Cumbernauld Living Landscape** [www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk](http://www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk)

**Wild Ways Well** [www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/project/wild-ways-well](http://www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/project/wild-ways-well)

**Activities** [www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/get-involved/activities/](http://www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/get-involved/activities/)

**Facebook** [www.facebook.com/CumbernauldLivingLandscape](http://www.facebook.com/CumbernauldLivingLandscape)

**Twitter** [www.twitter.com/wildcumbernauld](http://www.twitter.com/wildcumbernauld)

**The Conservation Volunteers** [www.tcv.org.uk/scotland](http://www.tcv.org.uk/scotland)

**The Scottish Wildlife Trust** [www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk)

**SamH** [www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk)

**NHS Five Ways Well** [www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing](http://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/mental-wellbeing/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing)

**MIND coronavirus and your wellbeing** [www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing)

**Lanarkshire Green Health Partnership** [www.elament.org.uk/media/2229/19-ways-to-stay-connected-2.pdf](http://www.elament.org.uk/media/2229/19-ways-to-stay-connected-2.pdf)

**Make a sundial** [www.bbc.co.uk/norfolk/kids/astronomy/sundial\\_make/sundial\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/norfolk/kids/astronomy/sundial_make/sundial_01.shtml)



[cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk](http://cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk)