

WILD WAYS WELL AND BRILLIANT BIRDS



Today's Wild Ways Well task is to go for a walk in your local greenspace and keep an eye on the birds... 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 our feathered friends. Birds live in all sorts of different habitats and just a short walk can lead you to birds that you would never see in your back garden.

We can **connect** with birds simply by watching them through a window or a pair of binoculars – Bird watching like this is one of the UK's most popular hobbies. We can also use books and the internet to access a huge variety of different ways of enjoying birds from webcams to works of art. You can join online groups or comment social media pages to let others know how you got on with these activities.

We can **Keep Learning**, there are hundreds of web pages devoted to the birds and an equal number of books and television programmes. This week we are looking at birds in our local patch, why not look online and find out more once you're back indoors?

Birds are all around us and play a vital role in the ecosystem – as well as just being fun to watch – but we rarely **Take Notice** and look very closely at them. It's amazing how much we miss out in nature when we just walk through without paying attention to what is around us.

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. You can also give back to birds by feeding them or by helping to conserve them.

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Wild Ways Well



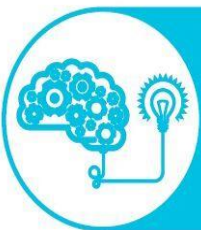
BE ACTIVE – Take part in health walks and practical outdoor activities. Explore your local paths, woods and greenspaces.

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



GIVE – Your time to be in nature. Give something back by sharing experiences and undertaking conservation tasks.

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



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

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.

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.

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.

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Birdwatching for Beginners



Birdwatching is one of the most popular hobbies in the UK but it isn't a modern phenomenon, it's been going on a lot longer than you might think...

30,000 years ago in a cave in Chauvet in France an ancient birdwatcher drew a picture of an owl – interestingly the artist must have been a real birdwatcher as the image correctly shows the owl's ability to turn its head almost backwards to look behind it!

Other ancient bird images in Australia depicting giant flightless species that are extinct today, might be as much as 60,000 years old.



Aristotle wrote about birds in the 4th century BC, through observation he made a lot of discoveries about birds, their nests and their eggs – though he did struggle a bit with the concept of migration.

Pliny the elder in the 1st century AD gave us the (unfortunately wrong) idea that Ostriches bury their heads in the sand to hide from danger.

Leonardo da Vinci was fascinated by birds, he thought that by studying the structure of birds, their anatomy, their feathers, their modes of flight, people might one day be able to replicate it. He used his observations to design gliders and parachutes that may even have worked.

In the 17th century **Francis Willoughby** wrote '*Ornithology*' the first modern scientific treatise on birds. In 1901 **Edmund Selous** wrote '*Bird Watching*' and was perhaps the first person to ever consider birdwatching as a hobby to be an end to itself.

Nowadays millions of people get great pleasure from the simple act of watching birds in their local 'patch.' There is something very relaxing about watching their busy lives.

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Listen to their song



A great way to find out what birds are living near you is to listen for their songs – you'll hear a lot of birds before you see them. Thinking about learning bird song can be quite daunting but there are lots of easy ones you can start with.

Stand in your green space, close your eyes and just listen. **Take a piece of paper and write or draw the bird sounds you hear on it.** Listen for similarities, if one bird is singing you'll often hear another of the same species singing back to it – this is two males competing over territory. Can you see them? Or can you see the female nearby listening to the singing competition? Listen deeper, calm your breathing and filter out all the non bird noises... What do you hear?

First think about all the birds who simply say their names while singing! Lots of birds were named after their song. For example the **crow** (which says its Scots name "**craw**" as it flies). **cuckoos, curlews** and **chiff-chaffs** are others (the German name for the Chiff-Chaff is "**Zip-Zap**" which is maybe even more accurate!) Even the humble **duck** is saying its own name when you really listen to a Mallard '**quack**'.

Now focus on the common notes you hear all the time. A short, but very repetitive '**plink**' coming from the garden fence is almost certainly a **chaffinch**. The noise of a **squeaky dog toy** from a tree is a **Blue Tit**; the high pitched sound of a **poorly oiled gate**, squeaking as it swings in the wind, is a **coal Tit**; and the constant two tone call of "**tea-cher, tea-cher**" is a **Great Tit**. Once you hear the noise, look and see if you can find the bird making it.

Other birds are noted for when or where they sing. A **loud repetitive three note song** coming from the top of a tall tree is probably a **Song Thrush**. The bird singing a **complex, beautiful song** on top of the lamp post outside your house at dawn might be a **Blackbird**. The **explosively loud, long song with a 'chirr' in the middle** coming from low down in the undergrowth – and you can never find the singer – is sung by a tiny **Wren**.

Try making up your own names for the birds you hear, name them after their tunes!



Nesting Tales



Lots of birds build nests to raise their young in – but every species builds a different kind of nest depending on their lifestyle, the resources they can access and their place in the wider ecosystem. Remember all birds nests are fully protected by law.

There are lots of stories told about how birds came to make nests, this is one version – can you think of others?

All of the birds agreed that the Robin makes the best nest, it was soft and round and cup shaped and hidden away in a secret spot, so one day they all got together to attend a lesson. *“First you need to find a nice warm, flat place”* said Robin, and that was enough for the Owls and the Woodpeckers, who knew the best place was a hole in a tree. The Ducks hadn’t been paying attention so they thought the lesson was over and they flew off with only the vague idea that they ought to scrape a flat space on the ground.

Robin tutted as they flew off, if only they would listen, he thought.

“Next you need to collect some sticks...” on hearing this the proud Eagles (who felt they shouldn’t really be listening to a Robin anyway) flew off and built their nests from platforms of pointy sticks and branches in high places. The Magpies, who thought they were too clever to listen to a Robin, agreed and to this day they make a messy pile of sticks in a tree.

Robin sighed. *“Just sticks will be very uncomfortable, next you need to add a lining of mud and soft moss or grass.”* The little song birds were getting impatient, they had to get back to their singing so they thanked Robin and flew off, sure they had learned enough.

The Sparrowhawk watched them go... *“If I wait just a little longer to build my nest”* she thought *“then there will be lots of new fledged songbirds for my children to eat”*.

The Robin watched the Sparrowhawk follow the songbirds and said *“and finally you have to make sure your nest is well hidden and that no one sees you come and go.”* but there was no one left in the class to listen.

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colourful creatures



Spring is a great time of year to spot the beautiful colours of birds as they are in their best breeding colours to show off and attract mates. It is usually the male birds which are the most colourful. You can see all of these birds on a walk round Cumbernauld – can you spot a full rainbow on a walk?



Robin



Blue Tit



chaffinch



Oystercatcher



Great Tit



Dipper



Duck (Mallard)



Great Spotted Woodpecker



Migration



For some birds Spring is a time of incredible journeys as they migrate from their winter feeding grounds to find mates and breed. We know now some of the amazing feats of endurance and navigation that allow species like Arctic Terns to migrate 50,000 miles in a single year. But it wasn't always that obvious...

For a long time scientists struggled with the concept of where birds went in the winter.

Aristotle, regarded as one of the founders of science, theorised that **some hibernated in the clay beds at the bottom of rivers and others transformed from one species to another.**

Pliny the Elder was another ancient scholar who wondered where the birds went, and he got closer to the truth, writing his belief that every year **the European Crane flew from down to the furthest reaches of Africa where they did eternal battle with tribes of pygmies, riding rams and she-goats and armed with arrows...**

Mediaeval scholars explained Geese appearing from out over the sea each year by stating that they **grew on the limbs of giant floating plants and were dropped like seeds. Every year the geese would lay barnacles on the rocks which would then wash out to sea and grow into these giant seaborne trees.**

The next big leap is to Charles Morton in the 17th century. By watching birds, taking notice of their lives and learning their habits he reasoned that the previous beliefs weren't true.

Morton believed that each year birds migrated to "obtain what is more suitable to them or to avoid what is offensive". But where did they go? **To Morton it was obvious. They were clearly migrating to and from the Moon.**

He estimated that the Moon was about 200,000 miles away and that it would take them 60 days to fly there at 125 mph. They would sleep on the wing and live off their fat reserves. Once there they would find a thriving community of Moon life that was much like Earth.

We have to move on to Francis Willoughby in the late 17th century to get the final word.

Francis took one step extra over most of the scientists before him – he actively travelled to make his observations and came up with this, almost throwaway explanation.

"To us it seems more credible that they fly away into hot countries, viz, Egypt, Ethiopia, etc."

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Look out For Birds



Spotting birds 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 bird with red feathers | 1pt |
| • A bird with yellow feathers | 2pts |
| • A bird with green feathers | 5pts |
| • A bird with three different colours | 10pts |
| • A bird with nest material (sticks, moss, etc.) | 5pts |
| • A bird's nest (remember not to disturb it) | 10pts |
| • A bird singing (Just hear it) | 1pt |
| • A bird singing (see the bird as well as hear it) | 2pts |
| • Two male birds singing at each other | 5pts |
| • A tree with a bird sized hole in it | 5pts |
| • A bird on a feeder | 1pt |
| • A bird having a drink or a bath | 5pts |

Total _____

(Award yourself an extra point for each multiple you get)

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