EVERY CHILD

Making nature part of growing up

A special report by The Wildlife Trusts
For the past 200,000 years children have grown up with a largely outdoor life. We are hard-wired to be part of the natural world.

Children are happier, healthier and more creative when they’re connected to the natural world.1

Wild places can improve our mood, and increase our sense of self-worth.2

Wild places teach children about taking risks and making rational decisions.1

Children with easy access to nature are more able to cope with stressful situations.1

Being outdoors in nature encourages exercise

Playing and learning in wild places can help children to develop meaningful relationships with family and friends.1

The open spaces at Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust’s Gibraltar Point are perfect for exploring
40 years, children have become increasingly separated from nature. It’s a natural disaster in the making.

Nature, we miss you

October 2015 YouGov poll of parents and children, commissioned by The Wildlife Trusts

- **37%** of children have not played outside by themselves in the past six months
- **60%** have never seen a peacock butterfly
- **71%** have never seen a lizard in the wild
- **Over 50%** have never found frogspawn in a pond in the wild
- **37%** have never seen a hedgehog
- **Only 50%** of children say their school has an outdoor nature area
- **Less than 50%** have been to a wild place with school to learn about wildlife in the past year
- **75% of parents** are concerned that children don’t spend enough time interacting with nature and wildlife
- **Only 10%** think their child spends more time outside than they did
- **92%** think access to nature and wildlife is important for children in general

Facts and figures from YouGov Plc. Online survey, 16-20th Oct 2015. Sample size 1,082 children and 4,224 adults, of which 1,070 were parents of children aged 18 or less. Figures are weighted and representative of all GB children aged 8-15, and all GB adults aged 18+.

MENTAL HEALTH

£713 million
Estimated Primary Care Trust expenditure on child and adolescent mental health disorders in 2011/12

PHYSICAL EXERCISE

Government recommends that children should exercise for an hour a day

- **75%** of boys exercise less than an hour a day
- **84%** of girls exercise less than an hour a day

ACCESS TO NATURE

Fewer than 10% of children play in natural areas. When today’s adults were children the figure was 40%
Along with the overwhelming majority of parents,7 we believe that a childhood separated from nature is a diminished experience. Not only is the unwild child deprived of the wonder of a butterfly’s wing, or the smell of a forest after rain; there are also grave risks to physical and mental health. A study of 345,143 medical records showed that living within a kilometre of a green space reduces the risk of 15 major illnesses, particularly anxiety and depression, and even more so for children.10 There is also compelling evidence that children who grow up with nature are more likely to protect it when they are older.11

The Wildlife Trusts are one of the UK’s leading providers of outdoor learning for children. Through schools we work with more than 300,000 children and thousands more attend our regular nature clubs. But we could, and need, to do more. “Contact with nature should not be the preserve of the privileged,” says Sir David Attenborough. “It is critical to children’s personal development. We will be physically, mentally and spiritually impoverished if they are deprived of contact with the natural world.”

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The Wildlife Trusts offer all kinds of activities for children aged 2-7

“Nature tots has provided both my daughters with so much. They have more confidence – I can now go on dog walks with them without any fuss at all. They’ve learned to chop, saw, drill, build and even light a fire. There is plenty of running around and being imaginative with play, like designing their own bridges over ditches and creating see-saws out of a log and plank. They’re learning to explore and gain independence, and also respecting the woodlands and understanding how to stay safe. It is by far the highlight of the week for them, meeting new friends and with lots of fun and laughter.”

Georgie, mum to two daughters, aged two and four
Attending Nature Tots
Sussex Wildlife Trust

4,400 schools and education establishments working with The Wildlife Trusts
We reach over 300,000 school children a year

“We put sand down across a gap in the fence and got some fox tracks. We saw birds, and I saw a squirrel. It ran up one tree and jumped right across to another one.”

Bailey, Forest School pupil
Moston Fairway reserve
Lancashire Wildlife Trust

“I never knew puffins were so small. They came right up to us – they weren’t scared of us at all.”

Sam, on a school trip to Skomer Island
Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales

178,000 people visit a Wildlife Trust nature reserve as part of a school, college or society
Volunteering provides support, improves employability and teaches new skills

“I try and promote awareness of wildlife at school. We do things like make bird feeders or sell cakes to raise money for the Wildlife Trust. I also help out at the Wildlife Watch Group, working with young children in my area. We go to the woods or a park and show them the wildlife that is there.

“The general decline of many species is very worrying but it’s also that there is a disconnect between people and nature.”

Sorrel Lyall, 16
Volunteer,
Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust
There are many ways we're helping to put the wild into childhood

**Wildlife Watch**

We have 150,000 members aged 5-16. They receive a welcome pack, regular magazines and emails, and can take part in awards, local groups and family-friendly events.

“I enjoy doing things like tool work, games we play, seeing my friends, exploring, awards, important people coming to see us, trips to new places and raising money for wildlife. I really like when we get to chop branches. We thin out the trees so light can come through to the ground to help new flowers grow.”

Jake, 10

Newcastleton Watch

Scottish Borders

“I have had a lot of great experiences and I enjoy the activities. I have made lots of new friends during the times I have been. My favourite was when we were at Weobley and everyone stuffed their faces with blackberries. It was so fun.”

Polly, 8

Herefordshire

**Nature Clubs**

We have 250+ groups that meet regularly, run by our brilliant volunteer leaders. Find your nearest one at wildlifetrusts.org/natureclubs

“I enjoy the Saturday Club because it is different every month. I like the activities and making things like mini bug hotel, music instruments made from natural things and the butterfly collage we made last spring. I like learning about nature and animals and our group activities are good fun.”

Luke, 8

Saturday Club

Belfast

**Wild Play**

Wildplay gives young children the chance to play safely outdoors with time to explore, get messy and make discoveries.

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**Pre school**

We create opportunities for young children to explore the outdoors safely. Several Wildlife Trusts run groups such as ‘Nature Tots’ for under fives. At Brockholes the Lancashire Wildlife Trust runs weekly pram walks so parents can spend time in nature with very young children.

Find out about your nearest Wildlife Watch, Nature Club, WildPlay or Nature Tots at wildlifetrusts.org/schools or visit your Wildlife Trust’s website.
Young People

Young adults need nature too, especially when they have faced hardship. Our work helps boost confidence and prospects.

Michael Gosling, 21

took part in the project and helped to reinforce his love for the natural world. While sitting in the sun on the bench he made Michael reflects: “Taking part in this project has opened up chances for me to go to new places I wouldn’t normally have been able to get to living in the city centre.”

Michael, 21
Coventry

Beach Schools

These take the outdoor learning ethos to the coast with exploring, den building, scavenger hunts and natural art.

“I think it’s really good to encourage kids to get outdoors and see what’s on their doorsteps. Kids need to be shown what’s there, and then if they get to experience it properly, hopefully they’ll be able to take care of it more as they get older.”

Ann, mum of two, Milton, Portsmouth

Forest Schools

Our Forest Schools provide regular opportunities for children to achieve, and to develop confidence.

“It’s great, Bailey has loved the activities. Now we know it’s here and it’s a nice quiet spot, we’ll come down as a family so he can explore”.

Mr Evans
Coastlands School

Many Wildlife Trusts offer Forest or Beach Schools. Find your local Trust via wildlifetrusts.org

Players help support a number of our Forest Schools around the UK. They have also helped the production of this report

We’re part of The Wild Network – thousands of people and organisations dedicated to giving children #wildtime outdoors

The Wildlife Trusts reach huge numbers of children via primary and secondary schools, in classrooms and in wild places.

“In most schools a visit to Skomer Island would just be a slide show. The pupils are very lucky to get the chance to have real life experiences like this.”

Bailey’s Dad
Broadhurst Primary School, North Manchester

to the many people and organisations who support The Wildlife Trusts’ work with children and young people.
The causes of our separation from the rest of the natural world are many and complex. But nevertheless future generations need to love wildlife – for its own sake and for theirs.

Turning this problem around will involve a lot of people working together, so we’re keen to hear what actions you think we (and society) should be taking.

■ Join in the conversation
Share your ideas for how we can create future generations that love wildlife.
#everychildwild
wildlifetrusts.org/
everychildwild

■ Support your Wildlife Trust’s work
Becoming a member helps to support our work with schools and children in your local area:
wildlifetrusts.org/joinus

■ Find your local children’s nature club
Our long established Wildlife Watch network has more than 250 local groups:
wildlifetrusts.org/natureclubs

■ Take a child you care for somewhere wild
Play and explore – try one of our family-friendly nature reserves:
wildlifetrusts.org/familyfun

Help bring nature back to childhood

Your opinion counts. How can we reconnect our kids with nature?

The Wildlife Trusts have been campaigning for nature and sustainability as a core principle of schooling, as part of our call for a Nature and Wellbeing Act.

But we need to hear your voice. What do you think should happen to reconnect children – and adults – with the plants, animals and habitats we live alongside?

Share your views with us
at wildlifetrusts.org/
everychildwild
■ Take our online survey at wildlifetrusts.org/
everychildwild
■ Join in the conversation: #EveryChildWild #WildTime
■ Read how nature helps children, share your own stories: mywildlife.org.uk

REFERENCES

Pics: Matthew Roberts (1, 2, 7, 14), James Beck (8), John Ferguson (15, 18), David Shapiro (10, 15), Eleanor Church (12)
We believe every child has the right to:

- Explore the natural world near where they live
- Develop a personal connection with nature from an early age
- Live within safe walking distance of a local green space
- Learn about our total reliance on nature at school.