

LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY



# Social Return on Investment analysis of the health and wellbeing impacts of **Wildlife Trust** programmes



## Protecting Wildlife for the Future



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## **Executive Summary**

From 2015-17, researchers at the School of Sport, Rehabilitation and Exercise Sciences, University of Essex carried out a three-phased programme of research on behalf of The Wildlife Trusts.

In 2015, Wellbeing Benefits from Natural Environments Rich in Wildlife (Bragg et al.) reviewed the existing literature, to investigate whether nature-rich environments had any specific impacts on people's health and wellbeing. The researchers found that environments rich in wildlife, and increasing people's contact with them, resulted in:

- Improvements to health through increased physical activity.
- Reductions in stress and anxiety.
- Increased positive mood and self-esteem.
- A better and healthier social life.

In 2016, 'The Contribution Made by The Wildlife Trusts to the Health and Wellbeing of People' (Wood et al.) collected information from projects across the Wildlife Trusts movement to document their contributions to people's health and wellbeing. It concluded that The Wildlife Trusts provide significant and important contributions to both the promotion of good public health and to Green Care - the nature-based activities run by The Wildlife Trusts being used to treat illnesses or as part of a programme of therapy.

In 2017, *The Health and Wellbeing Impacts of Volunteering with The Wildlife Trusts* (Rogerson et al.) reported on changes in 139 participants' attitudes, behaviour and mental wellbeing over the course of 12 weeks of taking part in nature conservation volunteering activities.

This evaluation reported that the mental wellbeing of more than two-thirds (69%) of all participants had improved after six weeks. Participants also reported significantly enhanced feelings of positivity, increased general health and pro-environmental behaviour, higher levels of physical activity and increased contact with greenspace.

In 2019, The Centre for Health Promotion Research at Leeds Beckett University undertook a Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis of the findings of this latter report. The analysis found:

- A SROI value of £6.88 for every £1 invested, for people with low wellbeing at baseline, who were part of a targeted programme.
- A SROI value of £8.50 for every £1 invested, for people with average to high wellbeing at baseline, who were part of a nature conservation volunteering programme.

This latest research into the economic impact of volunteering with The Wildlife Trusts shows the importance of engaging with nature to prevent avoidable health problems and illnesses from developing or getting worse.

A return of £8.50 for every £1 invested in Wildlife Trusts volunteering programmes strengthens the argument for a communitybased approach to health, and investment in green exercise and volunteering programmes. This will deliver improved health and wellbeing at a population scale, reducing the current burden on the National Health Service.

A return of £6.88 for every £1 invested in programmes that are designed to improve mental, physical and social wellbeing is also significant. It strengthens the argument for 'nature on prescription' to be standard practice for GPs and NHS mental health providers, supported by specifically allocated NHS funding.



## **About Social Return on Investment**

Social Return on Investment (SROI) allows an organisation to quantify the value they are providing for the communities they work with. The SROI tool provides guidance for allocating a financial value to a wide range of outcomes even if they were not originally measured in financial terms. SROI calculations are often used to guide strategic direction and open dialogue with potential partners and investors. A SROI calculation is presented as a ratio representing social value for every £1 spent. In recent years the SROI framework has been used to present monetary values to programmes that utilise nature as an intervention for mental health and wellbeing. SROI calculations are useful for improving services, facilitating strategic direction, maximising resources and communicating with stakeholders. An analysis of previous SROI calculations on programmes that utilise nature as an intervention for mental health and wellbeing found that SROI ranged from £2.35- £10.70 per £1 invested (Bragg & Leck 2017; NEF consulting, 2017; RM Insight 2014).

The New Economics Foundation describes the principles of Social Return on Investment as follows:

"SROI is an outcomes-based measurement tool that helps organisations to understand and quantify the social, environmental and economic value they are creating. Developed from traditional cost-benefit analysis and social accounting, SROI is a participative approach that is able to capture in monetised form the value of a wide range of outcomes, whether these already have a financial value or not. A SROI analysis produces a narrative of how an organisation creates and destroys value in the course of making change in the world, and a ratio that states how much social value (in £) is created for every £1 of investment."

There are six steps involved in a SROI (see Box 1). We used the steps of SROI methodology to undertake an evaluative SROI (i.e. based on data collected from an existing project, that has yet to start) but as the evaluation was already complete we could not undertake step 1, and step 2 and the "evidencing outcomes" part of step 3 was undertaken by the evaluation team at the University of Essex. We have found financial proxy values for the outcomes at six weeks. We chose six weeks as there was more data available for this time point than for the 12week timepoint. We completed steps 3, 4 and 5.

#### Box 1: The six steps of SROI

- Establishing scope and identifying key stakeholders. Clear boundaries about what the SROI will cover, and who will be involved are determined in this first step.
- 2. Mapping outcomes. Through engaging with stakeholders, an impact map, or theory of change, which shows the relationship between inputs, outputs and outcomes is developed.
- Evidencing outcomes and giving them a value. This step first involves finding data to show whether outcomes have happened. Then outcomes are monetised – this means putting a financial value on the outcomes, including those that don't have a price attached to them.
- Establishing impact. Having collected evidence on outcomes and monetised them, those aspects of change that would not have happened anyway (deadweight) or are not as a result of other factors (attribution) are isolated.
- 5. Calculating the SROI. This step involves adding up all the benefits, subtracting any negatives and comparing them to the investment.
- 6. Reporting, using and embedding. Easily forgotten, this vital last step involves sharing findings and recommendations with stakeholders, and embedding good outcomes processes within your organisation.



## **Methods**

The inputs and some further information on outputs and impacts were obtained from follow-up (via participating Wildlife Trusts) with the evaluation team, who provided an anonymised dataset, and with the individual projects.

## Valuation

Financial proxies for social values were found using the global value exchange tool **globalvalueexchange.org**, the social value calculator **hact.org.uk/value-calculator** and a spreadsheet resource from the Greenspace Scotland SROI review **greenspacescotland**. **org.uk** with additional references as required.

The values we have used are listed below, together with any assumptions made. A table summarising the approach is in the Appendix.

## Wellbeing

The data showed that 18 of the 19 people with low wellbeing at baseline and 12 of the 24 people with average to high wellbeing at baseline who reported wellbeing data at both baseline and six weeks using the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (a.k.a. WEMWBS) showed an improvement in score. We found four potential values for this. The first was "relief from depression and anxiety" from the Housing Associations' Charitable Trust social value calculator. We used the value given for adults outside London, in the age range which included the mean value of 43 years from the evaluation report. This was given as £36,706 per person. We have used this value in a previous SROI analysis (Bagnall et al, 2015), as have others (e.g. Social Value Lab, 2011), as there was no financial value for emotional wellbeing, and this was felt to be the closest proxy. Using this value would make the analysis comparable with earlier SROIs that used wellbeing as an outcome.

However, for this analysis, we did find two new resources which give financial values for changes on the shortened WEMWBS scale (a.k.a. SWEMWBS). One of these we could not use (Trotter & Rallings Adams, 2017), as it gave values for individual SWEMWBS items and we only had aggregated (total) scores for WEMWBS. The other (Collins, 2016) gave values for movements within the total SWEMWBS score. We adjusted these values to 'fit' to changes in WEMWBS scores as follows:

 the average change in WEMWBS score in the evaluation was three points, in the middle range of possible scores.  for people with low wellbeing at baseline, the average change in score was an increase of six points and for people with average to high wellbeing at baseline the average change in score was an increase of one point.

We therefore took a similar change in the middle range of SWEMWBS (for people with low wellbeing at baseline from point 16 to point 19; for people with average to high wellbeing at baseline from point 18 to 19) and applied the financial proxy value from Collins (2016).

Due to relative properties of each scale, we halved the financial proxy derived for people with average to high wellbeing. This gave a value per person for similar increases in WEMWBS score of £12,929 for people with low wellbeing at baseline and £1,877 for people with average to high wellbeing at baseline.

We think this is probably a more realistic value to apply to emotional wellbeing, but it does give total values that are lower than earlier SROIs of similar impacts, as these could only use the proxy of "relief from depression and anxiety". However, this higher value may be the correct proxy to use if the majority of participants did have diagnosed mental health issues.

An existing SROI spreadsheet generated by Greenspace Scotland attributed two much lower financial values to improvements in emotional wellbeing: one was the cost of an intensive course in confidence and selfesteem (£1400 per person) and one was the cost of attending counselling sessions for eight weeks (£320 per person).

We have used the value calculated for SWEMWBS/ WEMWBS for the main analysis but applied the highest and lowest values in the sensitivity analysis.

## Feelings of health

Of the 19 people with low baseline wellbeing who answered the question about feelings of health at both baseline and six weeks, 13 showed an improvement. Of the 23 people with average to high wellbeing at baseline who answered the question about feelings of health at baseline and six weeks, 10 showed an improvement. We only found one reasonable proxy financial value for "feelings of health" which was "good overall health" from the HACT social value calculator. We used the value given for adults outside of London, in the age range which included the mean value of 43 years from the evaluation report. This was given as £20,922 per person.

### Nature-relatedness

Of the 19 people with low baseline wellbeing who answered all the questions from the nature-relatedness scale at both baseline and six weeks, 15 showed an improvement in score. Of the 22 people with average to high baseline wellbeing who answered all the questions from the nature-relatedness scale at both baseline and six weeks, nine showed an improvement in score. We chose a financial proxy value of "Gardening (as hobby)" from the HACT social value calculator. We used the value given for adults outside of London, in the age range which included the mean value of 43 years from the evaluation report. This was given as £847 per person.

An existing SROI spreadsheet generated by Greenspace Scotland attributed two much lower financial values to nature relatedness, using the equivalent cost of visiting a local nature reserve (£3.70). We have chosen the higher value as we think that working in nature is more similar to gardening, involving active interaction with nature, than to a more passive interaction from visiting a nature reserve.

## **Physical activity**

Of the 19 people with low baseline wellbeing who answered a question about levels of physical activity at both baseline and six weeks, 15 showed an increase. Of the 24 people with average to high baseline wellbeing who answered a question about levels of physical activity at both baseline and six weeks, 10 showed an increase. We chose a financial proxy value of "frequent moderate exercise" from the HACT social value calculator. We used the value given for adults outside of London, in the age range which included the mean value of 43 years from the evaluation report. This was given as £3,076 per person.

## Time given by volunteers

Five out of the nine projects provided us with an estimate of the time spent by volunteers working on the projects. This came to a total of 19,424 volunteer hours. Guidance on how to apply a value to volunteer hours ranges from National Minimum Wage (£7.83) through £11.38 for self-employed workers, to £21.47 for staff in one of the Nottinghamshire projects. We have chosen £7.83 for the main analysis but applied the higher values in the sensitivity analysis. If the volunteers are doing work that would otherwise have been done by existing staff, then the equivalent value is likely to be £21.47 per hour. We multiplied each result by 1.8 to reflect the fact that the total hours are calculated from only five of the nine projects.

### Social Return on Investment value – before adjustments

Table 1 (overleaf) shows the initial SROI obtained from Wildlife Trusts volunteering programmes. The SROI calculations in this report are retrospective from the outcomes and impacts obtained from the University of Essex evaluation report "The Health and Wellbeing Impacts of Volunteering with The Wildlife Trusts" (Rogerson et al., 2017). We followed the same methods in the SROI analyses and split the data into two groupings; those who started out with low levels of wellbeing, and those who started out with average to high wellbeing. This made sense as these groups tend to get different benefits from the intervention. These different groupings could largely be placed into two types of intervention:

- Targeted Projects where participants attend because of a health or social need (e.g. a mental health problem, loneliness or inactivity), and tend to start with low levels of mental wellbeing.
- General Volunteering Projects where participants attend for a variety of reasons – from concern for the natural world, learning a new skill, gaining a qualification or wanting to make an impact on the local community / environment.

**SROI = benefits/ inputs:** For people with **low wellbeing** at baseline, **SROI = £11.78** social value for every £1 invested (before adjustments).

For people with **average to high wellbeing** at baseline, **SROI = £14.55** social value for every £1 invested (before adjustments)

#### Table 1.

	Impact on participant	Unit**	Unit Value	Benefit	Cost of running the project	SROI+
Targeted Projects	Wellbeing - improvement in WEMWBS score*	36	£12,929	£465,444		
	Increased feelings of health	26	£20,922	£543,972		
	Increases in nature relatedness	30	£847	£25,410		
	Increased levels of physical activity	30	£3,076	£92,280		
	Hours given by volunteers	4534	£7.83	£35,501		
			Total	£1,162,607	£98,654	£11.78
General Volunteering Projects	Wellbeing improvement in WEMWBS score*	20	£1,878	£7,550		
	Increased feelings of health	17	£20,922	£355,674		
	Increases in nature relatedness	16	£847	£13,552		
	Increased levels of physical activity	16	£3,076	£49,216		
	Hours given by volunteers	442	£7.83	£3,461		
			Total	£459,453	£31,584	£14.55

\*mean increase of six points \*\* no. of people with improvement at six weeks / no. of hours +before adjustments

## Adjustments

## Duration and drop-off

Before the calculation can be finalised, a decision has to be made as to how long the changes produced by the projects will last. Some outcomes may last longer than others and may also be dependent on whether the activity is continuing or not. We think that benefits related to emotional wellbeing and feelings of health are likely to continue if the activity continues.

Outcomes which may continue to have a value in future years cannot be expected to maintain the same level of value, so we assume that the value will reduce or "drop off" each year.

It is difficult to find statistics on volunteer retention rate, but evidence from two studies suggests that it is around 80% (at 6-12 months from recruitment (Pahl et al., 2010; Hall et al., 2016).

### Deadweight

A reduction for deadweight reflects the fact that a proportion of an outcome might have happened without any intervention. The HACT social value bank states that 27% of people experiencing a health improvement would have achieved it anyway. Therefore a 27% reduction in the total social impact is made.

## Attribution

Attribution takes account of external factors, or the contribution of others, that may have played a part in the changes that are identified. We think that without these projects being funded by the Wildlife Trusts, the participants would be unlikely to have been referred into them. Attribution is difficult to calculate, but as a conservative estimate, 80% of the benefits could be attributed to the projects.

## Displacement

Displacement applies when one outcome is achieved, but at the expense of another, or another stakeholder is adversely affected. In relation to the Wildlife Trusts projects, obvious sources of displacement could have arisen as a result of staff being diverted from other interventions. However it is difficult to calculate the effect of this.

## Sensitivity analysis

As the previous sections indicate, estimates of this kind are inevitably subject to uncertainty. Adjusting for the issues above (deadweight: 27% reduction; and attribution: 20% reduction) brings the SROI to £6.88 for people with low wellbeing at baseline, and £8.50 for people with average to high wellbeing at baseline.

There are also a range of social values that could be applied for the impact of wellbeing improvement. Until recently, there was no social value available for emotional wellbeing and in previous analyses we and others have had to use the proxy of "reduction in depression and anxiety", which has a higher social value than that which has now been calculated for emotional wellbeing. If we were to be consistent with previous SROI analyses and use this proxy instead, the SROI increases to £11.94 for people with low wellbeing at baseline and £21.38 for people with average to high wellbeing at baseline (after adjustment for deadweight and attribution). On the other hand, some other SROI analyses have used much smaller value proxies for emotional wellbeing, and choosing the lowest of these would reduce the SROI calculated considerably (to £4.20 for people with low wellbeing at baseline; and £7.92 for people with average to high wellbeing at baseline, after adjustment). The people referred into the activities may have diagnosed mental health issues, so the higher proxy value may be the correct one.

Higher or lower value proxies could also have been chosen for "nature relatedness" and physical activity.

It is also possible that volunteer time should not be accounted for, if the activities that the volunteers do would not otherwise be done by paid staff.

The SROI value should also be balanced against the likelihood of 20% drop-off per year due to volunteers leaving the programme. The benefits to their health and wellbeing may be maintained, particularly if they go on to develop their skills in other projects or in paid work, but equally, they may not be. For people with **low wellbeing** at baseline, Table 2 gives a point estimate for SROI of **£6.88** for every £1 invested, but the true value is likely to lie somewhere between £4.20 and £11.94.

For people with **average to high wellbeing** at baseline, Table 2 gives a point estimate for SROI of **£8.50** for every £1 invested, but the true value is likely to lie somewhere between £7.92 and £21.38.

#### Table 2 Sensitivity analysis

Revised assumptions	Social return
People with low wellbeing at baseline (unadjusted SROI £11.78)	
Reductions of 27% for deadweight and 20% for attribution	£6.88
Use highest social value proxy for Wellbeing (and adjust for deadweight & attribution as above)	£11.94
Use lowest social value proxy for Wellbeing (and adjust for deadweight & attribution as above)	£4.20
People with average to high wellbeing at baseline (unadjusted SROI £14.55)	
Reductions of 27% for deadweight and 20% for attribution	£8.50
Use highest social value proxy for Wellbeing (and adjust for deadweight & attribution as above)	£21.38
Use lowest social value proxy for Wellbeing (and adjust for deadweight & attribution as above)	£7.92

### Discussion

For people with low wellbeing at baseline the SROI is positive - between £4.20 and £11.94 for every £1 invested - even when the most conservative assumptions about social value are applied. For people with average to high wellbeing at baseline the SROI is more positive still, even when the most conservative assumptions are applied, as the less targeted interventions used are less costly.

Many assumptions have been made in the production of the SROI, so it is helpful to look at similar examples in the literature to compare the SROI value they have found with ours.

An evidence review commissioned by Natural England found that SROI analyses for nature-based initiatives for people with mental health issues ranged from £2.35-£10.70 per £1 invested (Bragg & Leck, 2017). An evaluation of SROI for an allotment project working with adults with mental health problems and children at risk of social exclusion found an overall SROI value of £1.94 for every £1 invested (RM Insight, 2014). A SROI analysis of The Conservation Volunteers' impact on social value returned a value of at least £2.38 for every £1 invested (NEF consulting, 2017). A SROI calculation on the Coventry and Warwickshire Mind 'Gardening in Mind' allotment programme which combined growing food and taking care of the allotment found that every pound invested in the project generated £2.04 of social value (Ireland, 2013).

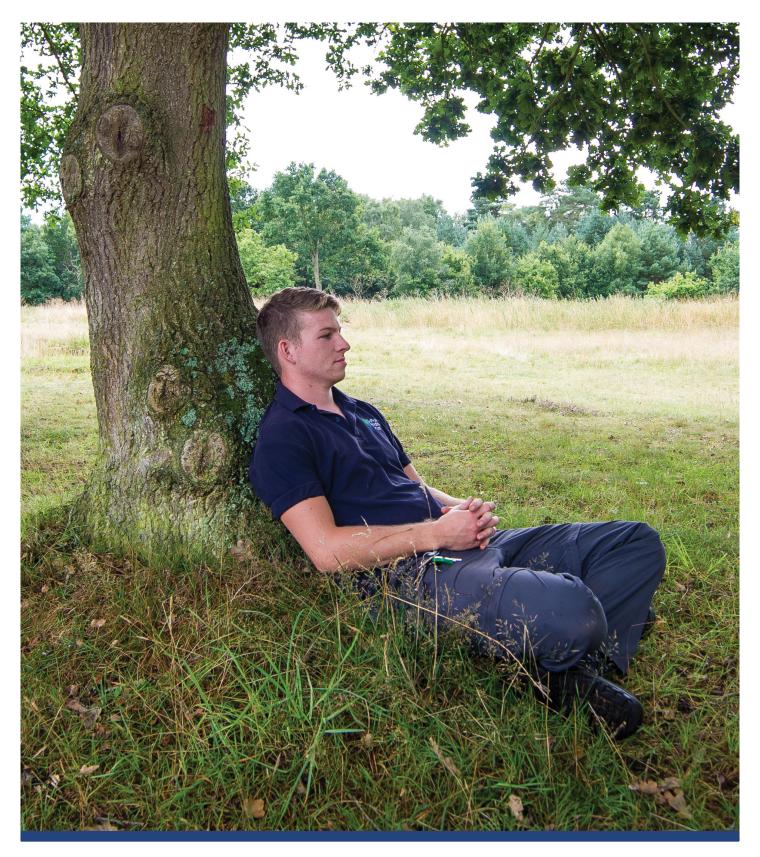
From these calculations, on broadly similar activities, we can see that the SROI ratios calculated for this report are strikingly similar. This suggest that the conservation activities managed by The Wildlife Trusts across the UK are in line with many national programmes.

A SROI analysis of the Craft Café programme - an intervention aiming to reduce social isolation and loneliness experienced by older people - found a SROI of £8.27 for every £1 invested (Social Value Lab, 2011).

An evaluation of SROI for a programme of led health walks in Glasgow (Carrick, 2013) found that every £1 invested would generate between £7 and £9 of benefits, but this included walk leaders as well as service users, and the walk leader experienced more benefits.

## Conclusions

The psychological health and wellbeing benefits of being active in natural environments are well documented. This report demonstrates that the conservation activities managed by Wildlife Trusts across the UK have significant social return for people with all levels of wellbeing at baseline. The impact demonstrated by these programmes coupled with the evidence from research suggests that conservation activities should be encouraged as part of psychological wellbeing interventions.



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	TOTAL COST:	£98,654		TOTAL COST: <b>£31,584</b>				Selected value		£465,444			
	£18,666 (Lancs 7 MvPlace) (	งวน	Men in Sheds)					S Total value(s) v		£465,444 £	£1,321,416	£50,400	£11,520
Inputs	£5,000 (Tees Valley Wildlife Skills)	£28,358 (Tees Valley Inclusive Volunteering)	£21,610 (Tees Valley Life Skills)	£15,475 (Avon My Wild City)		-	Benefits	Source of unit value(s)	Low wellbeing at baseline (n=38)	From Collins <b>livrepository.liverpool.</b> <b>ac.uk/3006576/1/SSRN-id2869251.pdf</b> equivalent financial value to a 3 point increase in middle of SWEMWBS scale (from point 16 to point 19) for those with low WB at baseline.	From HACT social value calculator "relief from depression & anxiety" for adults outside of London mean age 43	Intensive course on confidence and self esteem (from Greenspace Scotland SROI)	From Greenspace Scotland SROI: cost of attending counselling sessions for 8 weeks
	£9,469 (Notts	Recovery)		E811 (Notts Wednesday Voluntee-	(g)1111			Unit value(s)		£12,929	£36,706	£1400	£320
	£8,167 (Avon WB High	intervention)	£1,322 (Avon WB Medium intervention)	£7,614 (Glouc Lower Woods)	£7,684 (Glouc Stroud Conservation)			Number with improvement at six weeks		18/19 = 95% = 36/38. Mean increase in WEMWBS = 6 points.	4		
	Costs for projects providing targeted	r d	for 46 participants who returned questionnaires)	Costs for projects providing general interventions (fixed	for 46 participants who returned questionnaires)			Measure		Wellbeing (improvement in WEMWBS score)			

# Appendix

13\ SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT ANALYSIS OF THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPACTS OF WILDLIFE TRUST PROGRAMMES

Feelings of health	13/19 = 68% = 26/38	£20,922	From HACT social value calculator "good overall health" for adults outside of London mean age 43	£543,972	£543,972
Nature relatedness	15/19 = 79% = 30/38	£847	From HACT social value calculator "Gardening (as hobby)" for adults outside of London mean age 43	£25,410	£25,410
		£3.70	Equivalent cost of visiting a local nature reserve, from Greenspace Scotland SROI	£111	
Physical activity	15/19 = 79% = 30/38	£3,076	From HACT social value calculator "frequent moderate exercise" for adults outside of London mean age 43	£92,280	£92,280
		£4,896	From HACT social value calculator "Walking" for adults outside of London mean age 43	£146,880	
Time given by	4534 hours	£7.83	National minimum wage	£35,501	£35,501
volunteers		£11.38	Self-employed (WCVA)	£51,597	
		£21.47	Wildlife Trust staff	£97,345	
TOTAL BENEFITS (low WB at baseline): £1,162,607	(low WB at ba	seline): £1,	162,607		
	Number with improvement	Unit			Selected
Measure	at	value(s)	Source of unit value(s)	Total value(s)	value
Average to high wellbeing at baseline (n=39)	ing at baseline (n	=39)			
Wellbeing (improvement in WEMWBS score)	12/24 = 50% = 20/39. Mean increase in WEMWBs score = 1 point.	£1,877.50	From Collins <b>livrepository.liverpool.</b> ac.uk/3006576/1/SSRN-id2869251.pdf equivalent financial value to half of a one point increase (from point 18 to 19) for those with average to high WB at baseline.	£37,550	£37,550
		£36,706	From HACT social value calculator "relief from depression & anxiety" for adults outside of London mean age 43.	£734,120	
		£1400	Intensive course on confidence and self esteem (from Greenspace Scotland SROI)	£28,000	
		£320	From Greenspace Scotland SROI: cost of attending counselling sessions for 8 weeks	£6,400	

14\ SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT ANALYSIS OF THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPACTS OF WILDLIFE TRUST PROGRAMMES

Feelings of health	10/23 = 43% = 17/39	£20,922	From HACT social value calculator "good overall health" for adults outside of London mean age 43	£355,674	£355,674
Nature relatedness	9/22 = 41% = 16/39	E847	From HACT social value calculator "Gardening (as hobby)" for adults outside of London mean age 43	£13,552	£13,552
		£3.70	Equivalent cost of visiting a local nature reserve, from Greenspace Scotland SROI	£59.20	
Physical activity	10/24 = 42% = 16/39	£3,076	From HACT social value calculator "frequent moderate exercise" for adults outside of London mean age 43	£49,216	£49,216
		£4,896	From HACT social value calculator "Walking" for adults outside of London mean age 43	£78,336	
Time given by	442 hours	£7.83	National minimum wage	£3,461	£3,461
volunteers		£11.38 £21.47	Self-employed (WCVA) Wildlife Trust staff	£5,030 £9,490	
TOTAL BENEFITS (Average to high WB at baseline): £459,453	(Average to hi	igh WB at <b>k</b>	aseline): £459,453		





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