



# SUPPORTING WELLBEING THROUGH NATURE DURING THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID- 19)

LET'S GO  
OUTSIDE AND  
LEARN

This small survey shows that during the Coronavirus (COVID- 19) crisis access to nature has been important for health and wellbeing of respondents.



*We are grateful for support from the Heathrow Community Trust for funding to support this project and to the South West London Environment Network for their help and support.*

Let's Go Outside and Learn  
CIC Ref 9435120 [www.lgoal.org](http://www.lgoal.org)

*“Spending time in my garden or walking in nearby parks and by the river is soothing and can be inspirational.”*

*“Walking in Crane Park, along the rough paths, is very uplifting; the paths twist and turn and beckon you onwards. There is rarely anyone else on the paths, it's like my secret place.”*

*“Our daily walks have been the highlights of most days. They are our reset button and a source of inspiration, calm and delight.”*

Improving wellbeing through nature

Has spending time outside helped you cope during the corona virus lockdown?

We want to hear from individuals and households about how you are spending your time outside and how it differs from your previous practice?

Follow the link to take part:  
[www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/V6KMPGX](http://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/V6KMPGX)

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South West London Environment Network

HEATHROW COMMUNITY TRUST

## FORWARD

This insightful piece of work illustrates how valuable our local parks and open spaces are. Many of us have relied on these spaces during lockdown for daily fresh air, exercise or just as a place to try and relax and find solace among the trees. There are important points here too about the value of regular exercise, and about time spent with family, and the many pressures people have faced in their daily lives. We are fortunate to have such lovely parks to enjoy – and in challenging times, this survey serves also as a reminder that we must collectively take care of them so that they remain a wonderful resource for us all, continuing to provide invaluable habitat for other species and giving a boost to our mental and physical wellbeing.

**COUNCILLOR JULIA NEDEN-WATTS**

**CHAIR OF THE ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY, CULTURE AND SPORTS SERVICES COMMITTEE,  
LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES**

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## INTRODUCTION

This survey took place at a time of unprecedented events when people were required to limit the time that they spent outdoors in order to protect their health due to a pandemic. The data was gathered between May 20<sup>th</sup> 2020 and 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 at a time when the government advice was to stay at home as much as possible, work from home if you can, limit contact with other people, keep your distance from people not in your household (2 metres apart), do not leave home if you or anyone in your household has symptoms of the disease for 14 days.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> March the British public were instructed that they must stay at home, except for certain very limited purposes which included "one form of exercise a day". On 10<sup>th</sup> May the UK government updated its Coronavirus (COVID-19) message from "stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives" to "stay alert, control the virus, save lives". The guidance on the outdoor exercise and open-air recreation was changed to permit meeting with no more than one member of another household. This was the situation when the survey opened on 20<sup>th</sup> 2020.

There was a further relaxation on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020 when gatherings of people from more than one household limited to six people outdoors and are prohibited entirely indoors. Restrictions were still in place when the survey closed on 1<sup>st</sup> July with a promise of further easing later in the month.

The project had been planned and was beginning to recruit participants when the coronavirus measures were put in place. The project sought to understand how urban nature can best be used as a wellbeing resource for adults and children living in Richmond. It aimed identify the potential benefit for people in Richmond, who are at risk of being isolated, to improve their wellbeing by engaging with outdoor learning activities. A further phase of the project sought to work with a group of participants to design outdoor activities.

The scope of the project was changed in order to incorporate the situation that we found ourselves experiencing in order to understand how people were making use of nature to support their wellbeing at a time when everyone was isolated. We also wanted to understand how respondents had changed their behaviour and developed resilience through spending time outdoors in nature.



## OTHERS STUDIES

There have been few studies in the limited time since the onset of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) that consider the impact that nature has on health and wellbeing, though there are many comments in the press regarding the increased appreciation of nature at a time of lockdown with some articles noting the benefits that it brings:

Beth Collier ([The Ecologist](https://theecologist.org/2020/jun/30/covid-19-and-our-relationship-nature), 30th June 2020) Covid-19 and our relationship with nature

<https://theecologist.org/2020/jun/30/covid-19-and-our-relationship-nature>

Rachel Shabi (The Guardian) [Sanctuary in the city: how urban parks saved our summer](https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2020/aug/09/sanctuary-in-the-city-how-urban-parks-saved-our-summer)

[www.theguardian.com/travel/2020/aug/09/sanctuary-in-the-city-how-urban-parks-saved-our-summer?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2020/aug/09/sanctuary-in-the-city-how-urban-parks-saved-our-summer?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other)

The completed studies that we are aware of are that explore these themes are:

1. The RSPB report **Recovering Together**<sup>1</sup> which shows that nature is important for health and wellbeing. The study found that:

74% of respondents in England agreed that they had noticed more nature in their neighbourhoods since the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in the UK than they would normally at this time of year.

- 71% of people agreed that time spent in/surrounded by nature has been more important to them since the onset of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis in the UK.
- 76% agreed that nature has been an important source of comfort/relief for them.
- 77% agreed that visiting nature has been important for their general health and happiness.
- 81% agreed they had felt happier whilst/after spending time visiting nature.
- 71% agreed they had sought out places where they could enjoy nature while taking their permitted daily exercise.

2. The ongoing **People and Nature Survey**<sup>2</sup> polled 2,000 people during spring 2020, and showed that urban green spaces e.g. parks and playing fields were the most visited type of green and natural space.

- They found that during the period 1st–31st May, 60% of adults in England said that they had spent time outside in green and natural spaces in the previous two weeks. Since the beginning Coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions, 36% of adults reported spending more time outside.
- The People and Nature Survey showed that just over a fifth of adults (22%) reported that they had not visited any green and natural space in the previous month (down from 26% in April).
- The national survey reported that the main reasons for not spending free time outdoors were staying at home to stop Coronavirus (COVID-19) spreading and/or related to Government restrictions (63%) and poor physical health/illness (11%). Half (50%) were worried about contracting or spreading Coronavirus (COVID-19) while visiting green and natural spaces; 39% were prevented from getting outside because of concerns about over-crowding and not being able to keep a safe distance from others; and, almost a fifth (18%) reported concerns about lack of facilities such as public toilets, baby changing areas or benches. Some of the respondents reflected concerns about overcrowding but most felt that they were able to socially distance.

3. The ongoing UCL Covid-19 Social Study (2020) **Understanding the psychological and social impact of the pandemic**<sup>3</sup> is focusing on the following questions:

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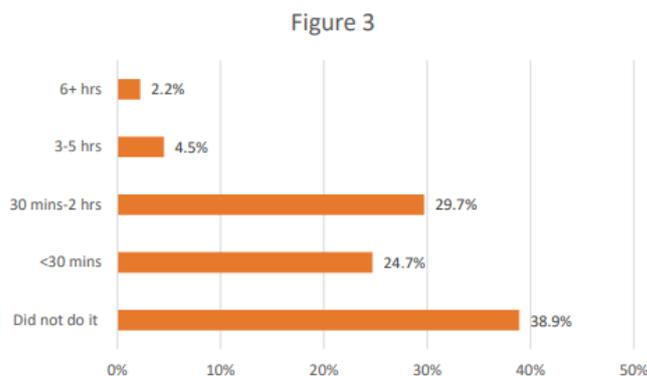
<sup>1</sup> RSPB Recovering together: A report of public opinion on the role and importance of nature during and in our recovery from the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis in England (June 2020) [https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/recovering-together-report/recovering-together-report\\_nature-and-green-recovery\\_rspbyougov\\_june-2020.pdf](https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/recovering-together-report/recovering-together-report_nature-and-green-recovery_rspbyougov_june-2020.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Natural England People and Nature Survey: How are we connecting with nature during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic? (2020) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-monthly-interim-indicators-for-may-2020-experimental-statistics/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-monthly-interim-indicators-for-may-2020-experimental-statistics>

<sup>3</sup> UCL Covid-19 Social Study (2020) Understanding the psychological and social impact of the pandemic <https://www.covidsocialstudy.org/>

- What are the psychosocial experiences of people in isolation?
  - How do trajectories of mental health and loneliness change over time for people in isolation?
  - Which groups are at greater risk of experiencing adverse effects of isolation than others?
  - How are individuals' health behaviours being affected?
  - Which activities help to buffer against the potential adverse effects of isolation?
- One of the measures that they have been tracking is the use of exercise and compliance with government guidelines for daily exercise. In Week 2 of the study they found:
  - Many adults did not appear to be following government recommendations to exercise. One in four people in the survey sample reported engaging in no exercise at all in the past weekday. Even amongst the youngest age group (18-30 year olds), 4 out of 5 in our sample report not doing any moderate or high intensity activity.
  - People with diagnosed mental and physical health conditions are doing the least physical activity, with very limited engagement either with moderate/high intensity exercise, as well as more limited engagement with gentle physical activity either at home or outside the home.
  - Older adults are engaging more than other age groups in gentle activity such as going for walks, but are engaging least in exercise at home or moderate/high intensity exercise outside the home.
  - People living alone and people with lower household income are also engaging less in all kinds of physical activity.
  - 36% reported that they had gone out for a walk or other gentle physical activity for at least 30 minutes, whereas 39% report not having done so.
  - In June they reported that "Exercise levels have remained consistent since lockdown was announced, with 4 out of 5 adults reporting doing some form of physical activity in the home or outside of the home." [https://b6bdcb03-332c-4ff9-8b9d-28f9c957493a.filesusr.com/ugd/3d9db5\\_9dec89d6b9c24e45819db478998dc3af.pdf](https://b6bdcb03-332c-4ff9-8b9d-28f9c957493a.filesusr.com/ugd/3d9db5_9dec89d6b9c24e45819db478998dc3af.pdf)

### Going out for a walk or other gentle physical activity



- In August Public Health England published **Local action on health inequalities: Improving access to greenspace**<sup>4</sup> which shows that living in a greener environment promotes good health and wellbeing and helps manage poor health. The document includes policy recommendations at a national and local level including:
  - Establish interventions, such as green social prescribing initiatives, that will support people who do not use greenspace to begin using it. Programmes to support social engagement or to facilitate participation in activities coupled with improvements to the physical environment, are an effective approach to enable people to start using these spaces and to continue to use them.
  - Work with local NHS systems and professionals to promote the role greenspace plays in both individual and population health outcomes. This will support the health service's ambition to take

<sup>4</sup> Public Health England (September 2020): **Improving access to greenspace** A new review for 2020 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/904439/Improving\\_access\\_to\\_greenspace\\_2020\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/Improving_access_to_greenspace_2020_review.pdf)

more action to prevent poor health and to use green assets, through initiatives such as social prescribing, as part of the overall plan to achieve this aim.

The study concluded that *“Greener environments are associated with better mental health and wellbeing outcomes including reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and fatigue, and enhanced quality of life for both children and adults. Greenspace can help to bind communities together, reduce loneliness, and mitigate the negative effects of air pollution, excessive noise, heat and flooding.*

*Disadvantaged groups appear to gain a larger health benefit and have reduced socioeconomic-related inequalities in health when living in greener communities, so greenspace and a greener urban environment can also be used as an important tool in the drive to build a fairer society”*

5. In May 2020 the Centre for Wellbeing published a study titled **How to help people come together and adapt, while maintaining physical distance?**<sup>5</sup> The key findings of this study were that places have a role in improving wellbeing and reduce loneliness.
- Places like parks, community hubs or museums can provide 'safe' spaces that reduce stigma and encourage authentic connections. The places and spaces an activity is held in give us a sense of meaning and identity that can impact our wellbeing.
  - There is strong evidence that participatory arts, sport, and cultural activities can improve wellbeing when they:
    - bring together participants with shared interests, experiences and values in the same physical spaces
    - create opportunities for participants to maximise the meaning of places for themselves
    - ensure inclusivity and are aware that potential divisions - such as class, gender, ethnicity, age and disability - can be reinforced through the place or space an activity is held in.
  - Our attachment and connection to places can be enhanced by evoking memories for participants. This depends on the history of the place and its meaning for the person. Sensory stimulation - sights, sounds, smell, touch - plays an important role in this.
  - Nature-based activities seem to be especially important to enhance the therapeutic and sensory benefits of physical activities.
  - Such safe spaces can reduce loneliness and increase wellbeing by challenging stigma and creating relationships who are free from personal criticism and harassment.

This study fits in with others that have taken place during the lockdown period asking people about the impact of nature on their wellbeing. Other studies<sup>6</sup> are looking at the impact that the lockdown has had on nature. Several of our respondents made comments relevant to this.

6. The Centre for Wellbeing followed this up in August 2020 with a briefing entitled **How has Covid-19 affected loneliness?**<sup>7</sup> which highlights findings from the Covid Social Study, The survey consulted over 70,000 people from March 2020, asking questions about their experiences and wellbeing, including asking people about loneliness. The findings were that:
- People in the UK, who felt most lonely prior to Covid now have even higher levels of loneliness. This increase began as physical distancing and lockdown measures were introduced in the UK, in March 2020.

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<sup>5</sup>Centre for Wellbeing (6<sup>th</sup> May 2020) How to help people come together and adapt, while maintaining physical distance? [https://whatworkswellbeing.org/blog/places-spaces-and-loneliness-what-matters-for-participatory-art-and-sport/?mc\\_cid=c975bde8f8&mc\\_eid=0942ac703e](https://whatworkswellbeing.org/blog/places-spaces-and-loneliness-what-matters-for-participatory-art-and-sport/?mc_cid=c975bde8f8&mc_eid=0942ac703e)

<sup>6</sup> Elliot Fisher, **COVID-19 and Perceptions of Nature**

<sup>7</sup>Centre for Wellbeing (August 2020) How has Covid-19 and associated lockdown measures affected loneliness in the UK? <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/COVID-LONELINESS-2020.pdf>

- Adults most at risk of being lonely have one or more of the following characteristics: they are young, living alone, on low incomes, out of work and, or with a mental health condition.
- The impact on wellbeing from people at risk of loneliness is likely to be compounded by other economic and social impacts experienced by the same people, such as those experiencing job losses and health anxieties.

The report concluded that alleviating loneliness has been shown to work through:

- Well-tailored interventions, that take into account things like access to technology, people's interests and where they live
- reducing the stigma of loneliness
- supporting relationships.

However they concluded that more evidence of the effectiveness of different interventions particularly for younger age groups is required, whilst also addressing the underlying drivers of loneliness.

## METHODS

Due to social distancing requirements the methodology for the project was changed so that data was collected via an online survey. Working in partnership with the South West London Environment Network the survey was promoted via social media throughout the period that it was open.

Organisations that were originally being targeted for inclusion in the project were targeted through email and fliers asking them to pass on information to their members. These groups included Multicultural Richmond, Richmond Mind, Ruils, Skylarks, Richmond Carers Centre. Several schools and organisations working with special needs children and their families were also contacted to encourage them to take part. These included St Edmunds School in Whitton, Skylarks Charity, TAG youth Club in Ham, Phyz and Children's Centres in Richmond.

A follow up survey is underway which considers the design of outdoor learning sessions. This has been sent to 45 respondents who said that they would be interested in taking part.

## RESULTS

### Who answered?

There were a total of 117 responses over a month period in 6 weeks in May-June 2020 just as government and local restrictions were easing.

Promoted via social media, and targeted emails to Richmond based groups working with audiences who traditionally face barriers to spending time in natural environment.

Question 1 : Who are you answering on behalf of:

#### Who are you answering on behalf of:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Myself	81.20%	95
My household	17.95%	21
Other (please specify)	0.85%	1
<b>Answered</b>		<b>117</b>
<b>Skipped</b>		<b>0</b>

Most responses were on behalf of individuals but there were just under 18% of respondents who answered on behalf of their wider households.

Question 24: Age of household members

#### How many in your household are.....?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Under 18	33.96%	36

18-24	16.98%	18
25-34	15.09%	16
35-44	22.64%	24
45-54	31.13%	33
55-64	31.13%	33
65-69	18.87%	20
70+	20.75%	22

**Answered 106**

**Skipped 11**

There was an even spread of age groups included in the households represented in the respondents with 34% households including children under the age of 18. Almost 40% of respondents were over the age of 65.

Question 22 : What is your gender?

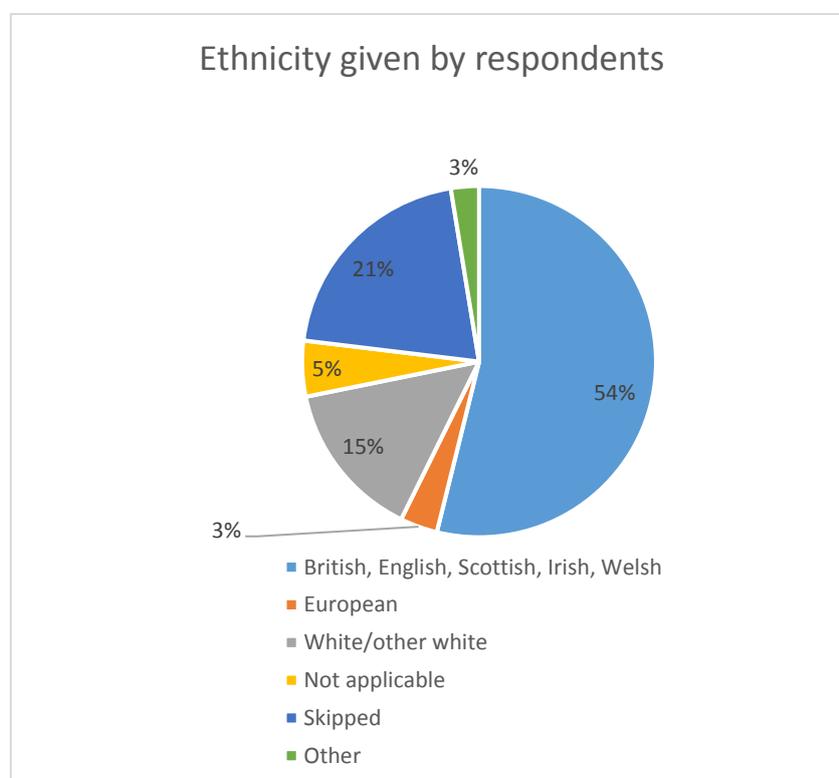
### What is your gender?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Skipped question	18%	21
Female	65%	75
Male	16%	19
Non-binary	1%	1

Most (65%) of the respondents were female, with a large number of respondents also skipping it.

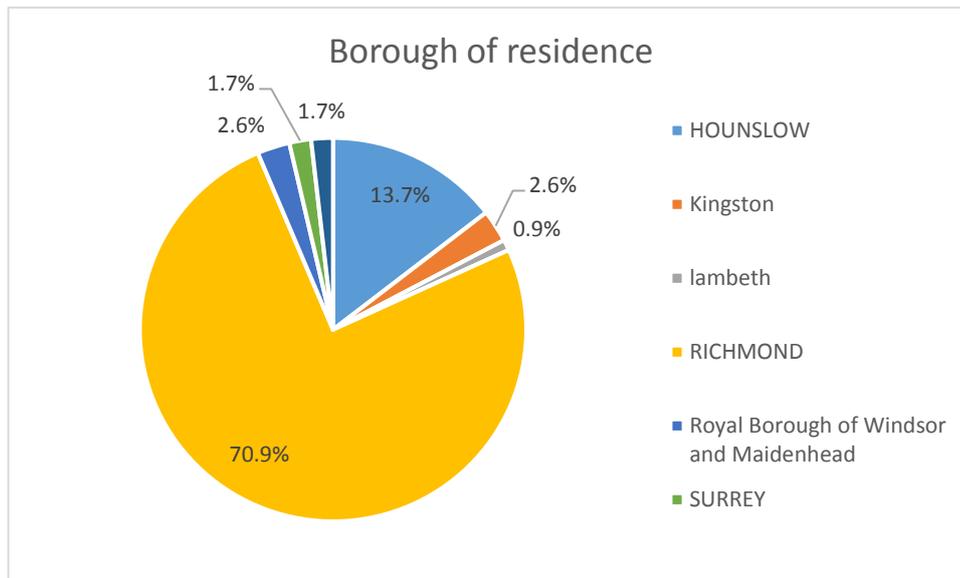
Question 23 : What is your ethnicity?

Most respondents (54%) described themselves as British, English, Scottish, Irish or Welsh and many described themselves as White 15%. 21% of respondents skipped the question and 5% said that it was not applicable.

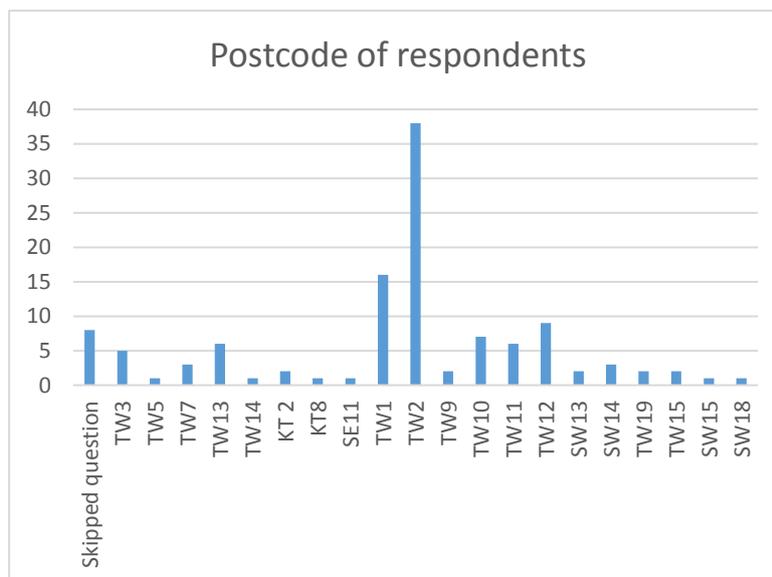


Question 19 : What is your postcode?

Most 70.9% of respondents lived in LBRUT and 13.7% lived in Hounslow. There were some from neighbouring London Boroughs.



Most respondents live in TW1 and TW2 postcodes. There is limited or no representation from other Richmond postcodes: TW3, TW4, TW7, TW8, TW9, TW10, TW11, TW12, TW16, SW13, SW14.



## Time spent outdoors

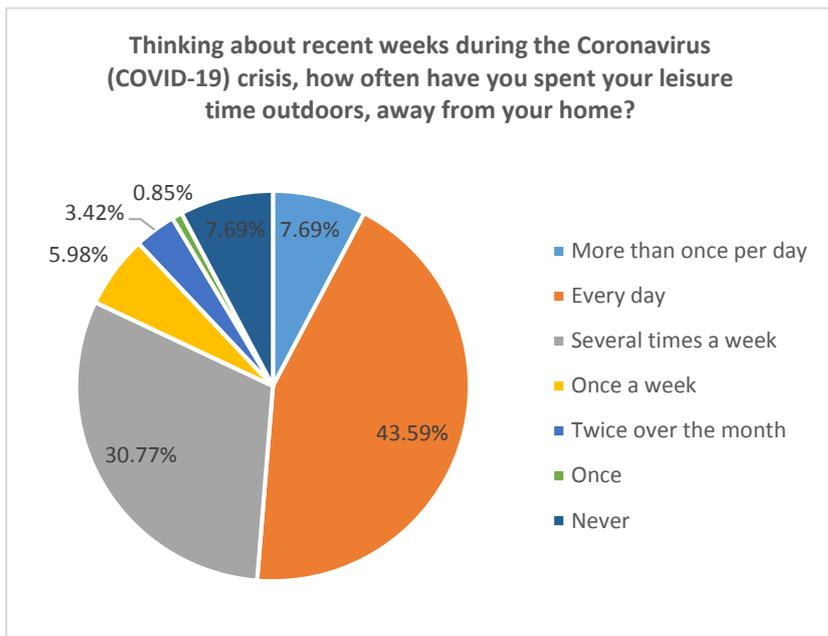
Question 2 : Thinking about the last 12 months before Coronavirus (COVID-19)virus, on average, how often have you spent your leisure time outdoors, away from your home?

Almost a quarter of respondents (24.79%) spent time outside every day, half the respondents (47.86%) spent time outside several times a week, and a large proportion (15.4%) once a week. Therefore a total of 88.03% of respondents spent their leisure time outdoors at least once a week before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis.

This is higher than the national average reported in the Monitor of Engagement for Natural Environment MENE (2020)<sup>8</sup> which tells us that nationally 65% of people visit the natural environment at least once a week compared with 88.02%

<sup>8</sup> Natural England (2019) **Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment** : The national survey on people and the natural environment Headline report 2019: Analysis of latest results (March 2018 to February 2019) and ten years of the survey from 2009 to 2019

of respondents in this survey. Nationally 16% visit less than once a month or never compared with 3.42% of respondents.

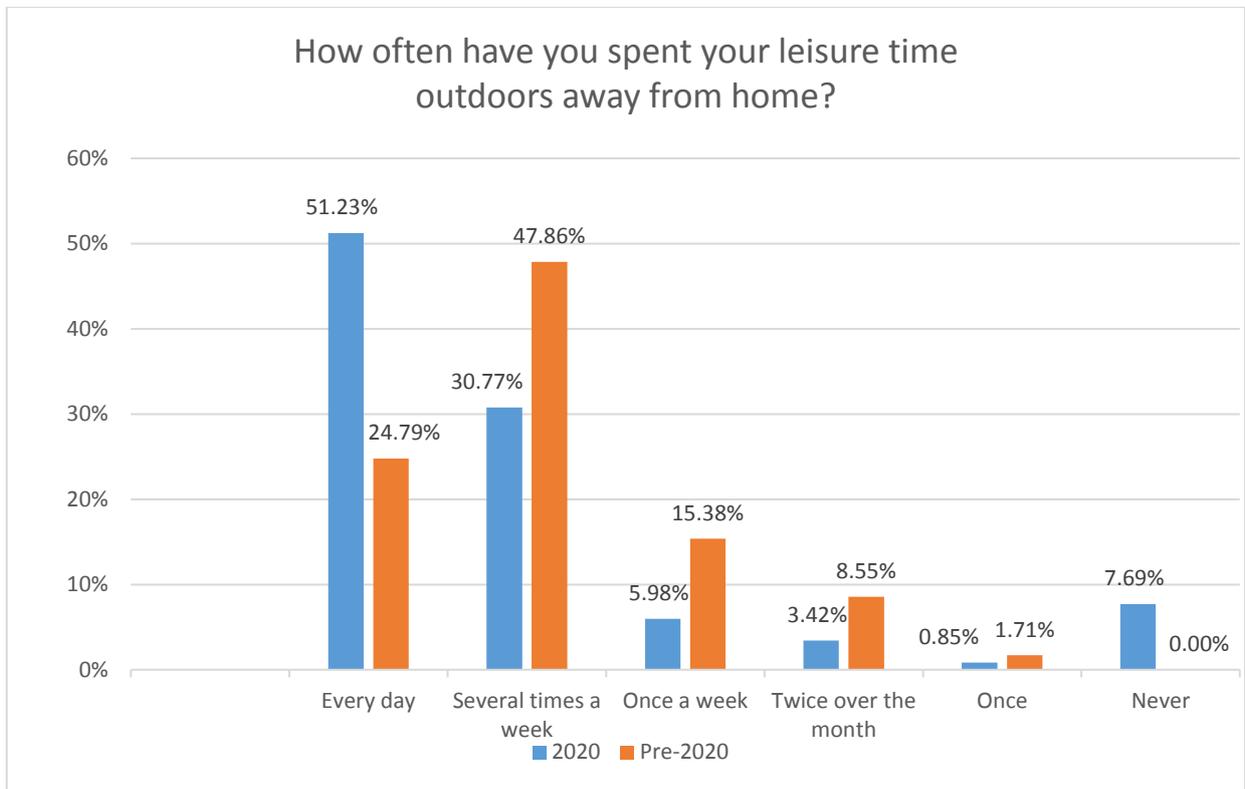


Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Every day	24.79%	29
Several times a week	47.86%	56
Once a week	15.38%	18
Once or twice a month	8.55%	10
Once every 2-3 months	1.71%	2
Once or twice	1.71%	2
Never	0.00%	0
<b>Answered</b>		<b>117</b>
<b>Skipped</b>		<b>0</b>

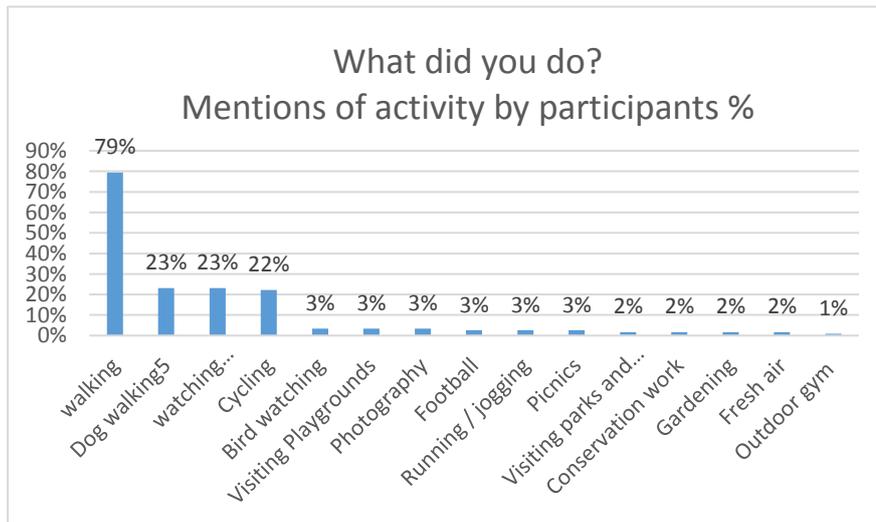
Question 5 : Thinking about recent weeks during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, how often have you spent your leisure time outdoors, away from your home?

During the Coronavirus (COVID - 19) emergency 51.28% of people spent time outside every day, with 7.68% respondents spending their leisure time more than once a day outdoors. A total of 30.77% spent time outside several times a week and 5.98% spent time outside at least once a week.

The proportions of people visiting outdoor environments every day was greater over the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis than previously by 25.49% of respondents. During the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis 7.69% of people never spent their leisure time outside and, 0.84% i.e. one person had visited once. This compares with the 0% before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) of who never spent time outdoor and 1.71% who visited once. This increase in numbers could be explained by the shielding group who were advised by the government not to spend time outdoors in public spaces. From question 15 we learnt that 8.84% of respondents do not have a garden or shared outdoor space.

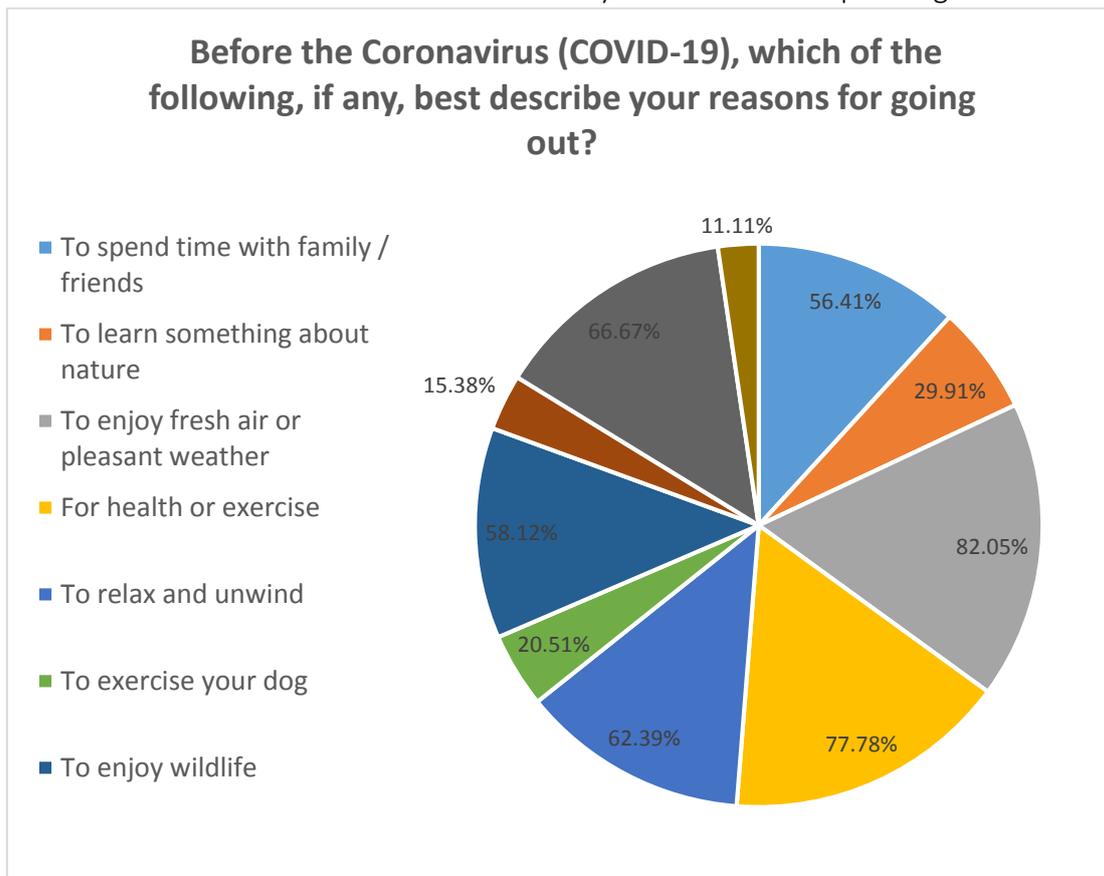


Question 3 : Before Coronavirus (COVID-19) what did you do? Please include a couple words e.g. cycling, walking with dog, picnic, visiting playground, sporting activity, watching wildlife. There were a huge variety of different activities mentioned by respondents with walking mentioned by 79% of respondents.



The survey also asked about motivations for visiting the natural environment.

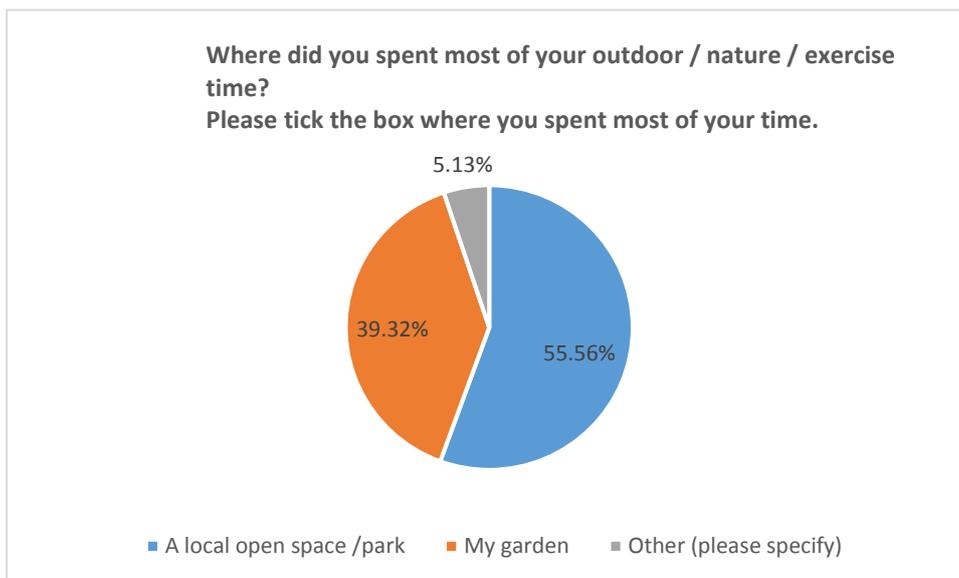
Question 4 : Before the Coronavirus (COVID-19), which of the following, if any, best describe your reasons for going out? Tick all the activities that best describes your reasons for spending time outdoors.



Other reasons given by respondents were:

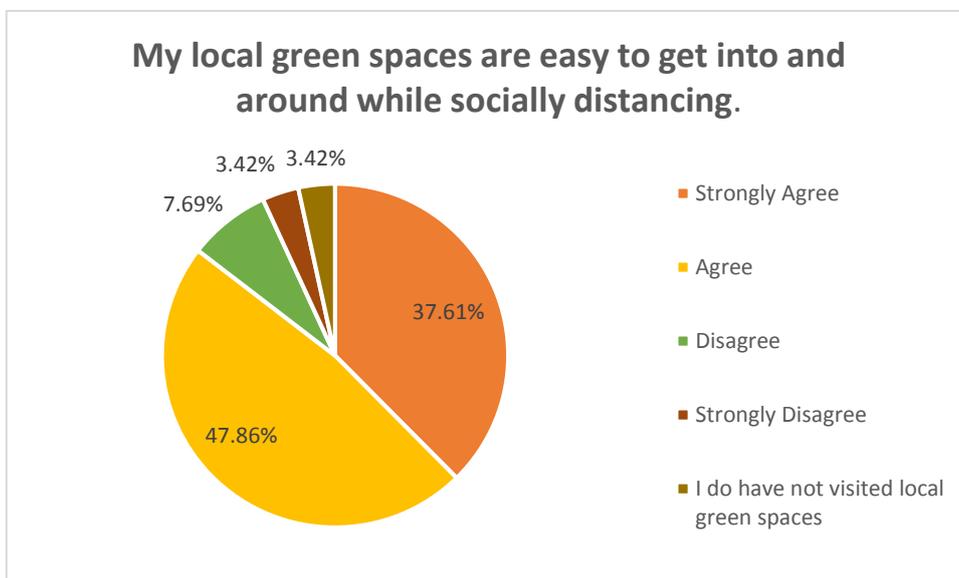
- To be socially connected.
- To get the kids energy out / Play time with young family
- Voluntary conservation work
- To paint or draw or photography - wildlife and landscapes
- To commute to work
- To explore new places
- I have been too ill to enjoy this type of activity, trips out are limited to essential shopping trips
- To ground myself by connecting with nature. To allow some space into my over-active mind.

Question 6 : Thinking about recent weeks, during the Coronavirus (COVID - 19) crisis, which of the following best describes where you spent most of your outdoor / nature / exercise time. Please tick the box where you spent most of your time.

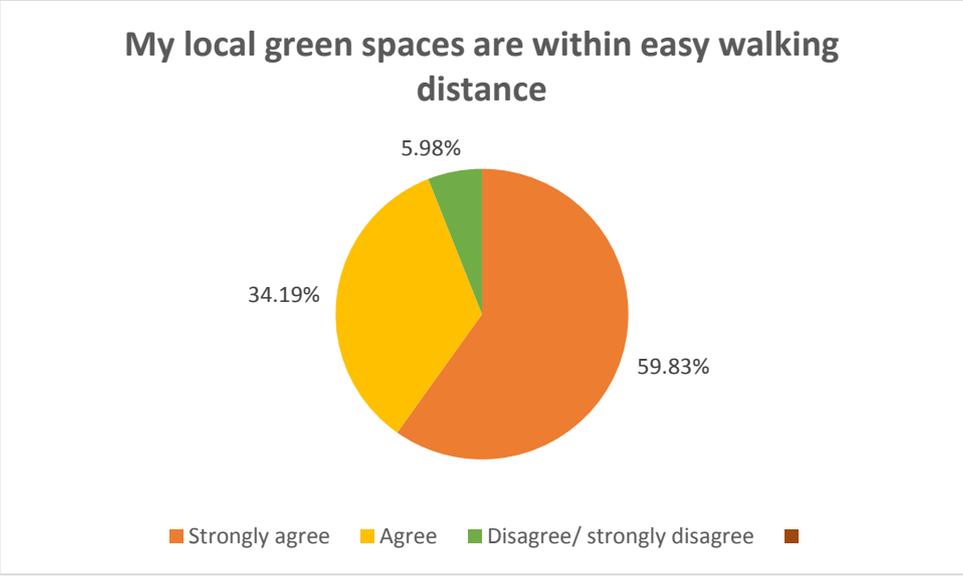


Other places mentioned include: neighbourhood streets, our family allotment, walking the dog on local roads, cycling on the road and cycle paths. Two people told us that they are shielding and unable to go out.

We also ask whether local respondents felt that green spaces were safe to visit and socially distance. Most respondents (85.47%) either agreed or strongly agreed that it was possible to socially distance while in a park. 11.11% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

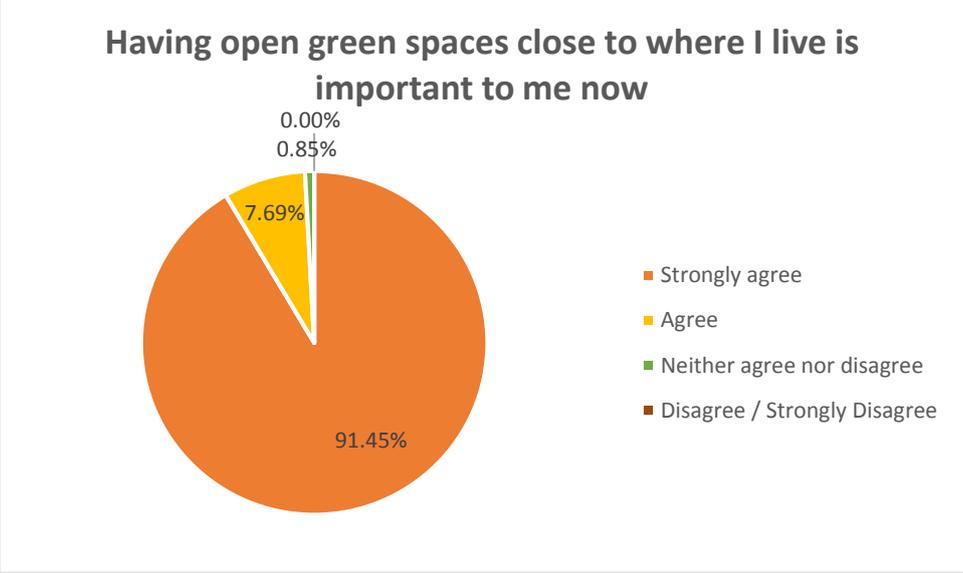


We wanted to understand whether people felt able to get to their local green spaces by walking easily. This shows that most people (94%) responding to the survey felt that their green spaces were within easy walking distance.



Most people (91.45%) strongly agreed that having open green spaces close to where they live was important to them at the time of the Coronavirus (COVID-19).

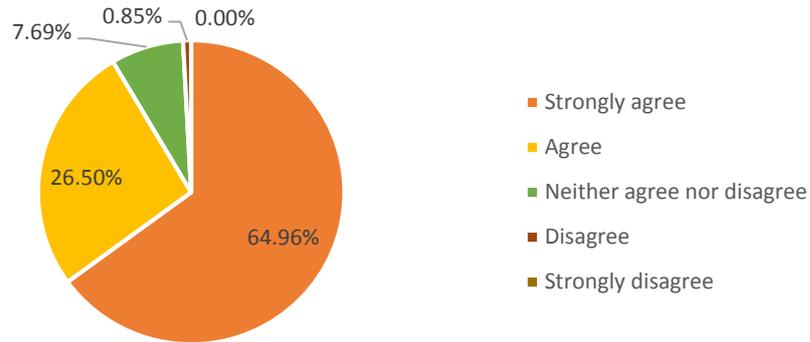
Question 12 : Having open green spaces close to where I live is important to me now



Question 9 : Spending time outdoors (including my own garden) was an important part of my life before corona epidemic.

We wanted to understand how important respondents felt that spending time outdoors was to them prior to the corona epidemic. We compared this data with data for the MENE for 2019 A total of 91.46% strongly agreed / agreed with this comment. The MENE tells us that nationally this figure is 89 % (p7).

**Spending time outdoors (including my own garden) was an important part of my life before corona epidemic.**



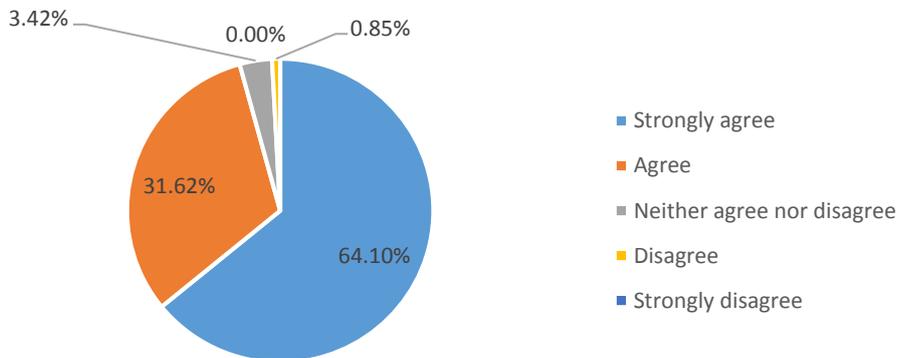
Question 10 : Spending time outdoors (including my own garden) is an important part of my life now.

**Environmental concerns**

Question 11 : Before the Coronavirus (COVID - 19) I was concerned about damage to the natural environment.

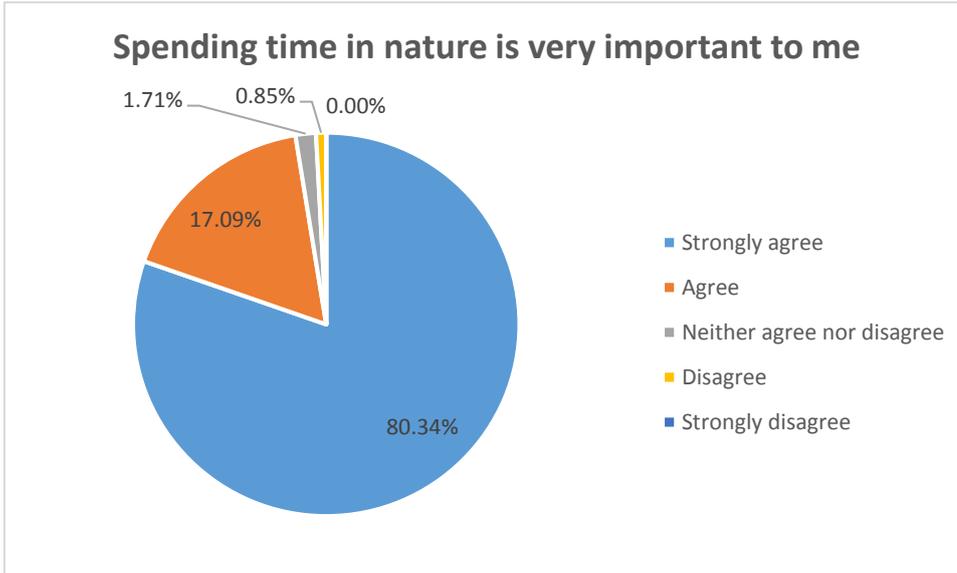
We also asked whether respondents agreed or disagreed with a statement about damage to the natural environment. The MENE tells us that 90% of people express concern. (p7) In the survey 95.72% or respondents said that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

**Before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) I was concerned about damage to the natural environment.**



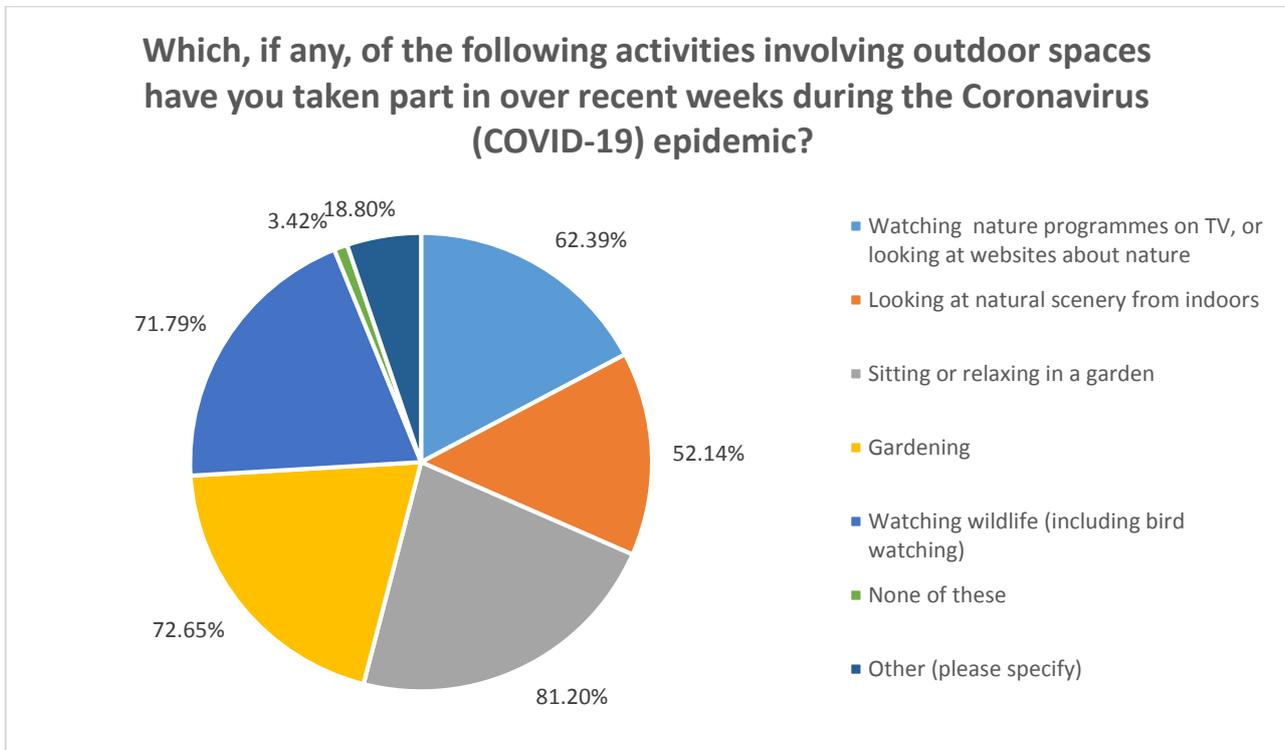
Question 13 : Spending time in nature is important to me.

We asked if spending time in nature was important, as opposed to spending time outdoors. A total of 97.43% of respondents told us that they either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Less than 1% disagreed.



Question 14 : Which, if any, of the following activities involving outdoor spaces have you taken part in over recent weeks during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic?

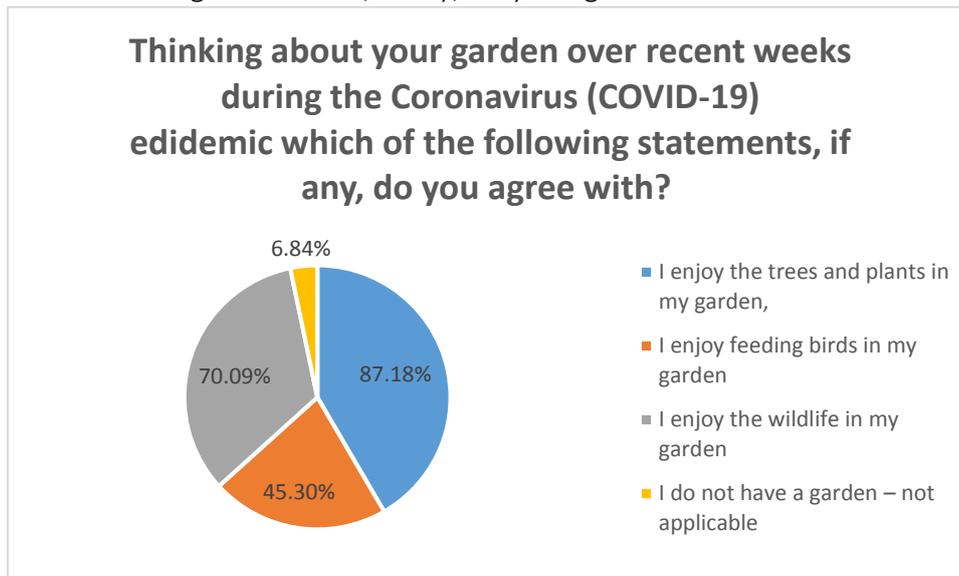
This question explored how respondents spent their time outdoors during the weeks of the 2020 lockdown. Respondents were asked to choose from a series of options. (As there were a series of tick boxes the total is greater than 100%) Spending time in the garden, watching wildlife, gardening, watching nature programmes on TV, and looking at natural scenery from indoors were all popular options with more than 50% of respondents saying that they had taken part in this type of activity. 3.42% (4 people) of respondents said that they had done none of these.



The survey gave the opportunity to give other activities that respondents had taken part in. These activities fell into several distinct categories:

- Environmental activities outside - identifying trees, stopping on walks to watch, looking at & Learning wild plant names, watching birds and insects & being more aware of their rhythms, watching plants change with the seasons, listening to birds (not watching), Watering sapling trees in parks, Wading in the River Crane
- Environmental activities based inside - Joined more nature and bird sights on FaceBook, looking at bird Apps, used webcams around the world at zoos, islands, also era of animal colonies, virtual visits to gardens and wild life
- Visiting other parks/nature areas nearby was mentioned by 3 people
- Using nature as inspiration was mentioned by several people with drawing (2) and photography (3).
- For exercise - Exercising more regularly outdoors (3), Horse riding, Walking / Dog walking (5), Cycling through green areas (4) Play time with young family

Question 15 : Thinking about your garden over recent weeks during the Coronavirus (COVID - 19) epidemic which of the following statements, if any, do you agree with?



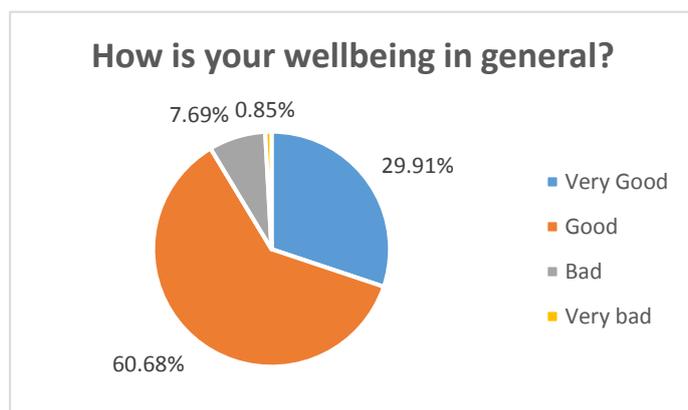
The response shows that most people taking part in the survey enjoyed spending time in their garden over the period of lockdown. We learnt that 6.84% (8 out of 117 people) did not have access to a garden.

### Impact of nature on wellbeing

Question 16 : How is your wellbeing in general? Most people said that their wellbeing was good or very good (90.59%) with only 8.54% saying that it was bad or very bad (0.85%).

One person commented “No different from before the virus.”

Four people talked about their health problems sometimes with positive outcomes as a result of being confined to the house: “It has improved due to not having to expend all my energy trying to get around”, “As I am nearly 77 years of age & have arthritis and physical issues. My wellbeing is not perfect, but I can relax and enjoy the reduced pressure that lockdown has provided (but there remains a fear of catching CVD-19)” Several of the comments indicate increased anxiety as a result of the Coronavirus (COVID-19).



- Anxious
- Better before covid19

- Mood up and down a bit of a covid rollercoaster
- I was highly anxious at the start of lockdown but am now feeling more relaxed
- some days are a lot harder than others.

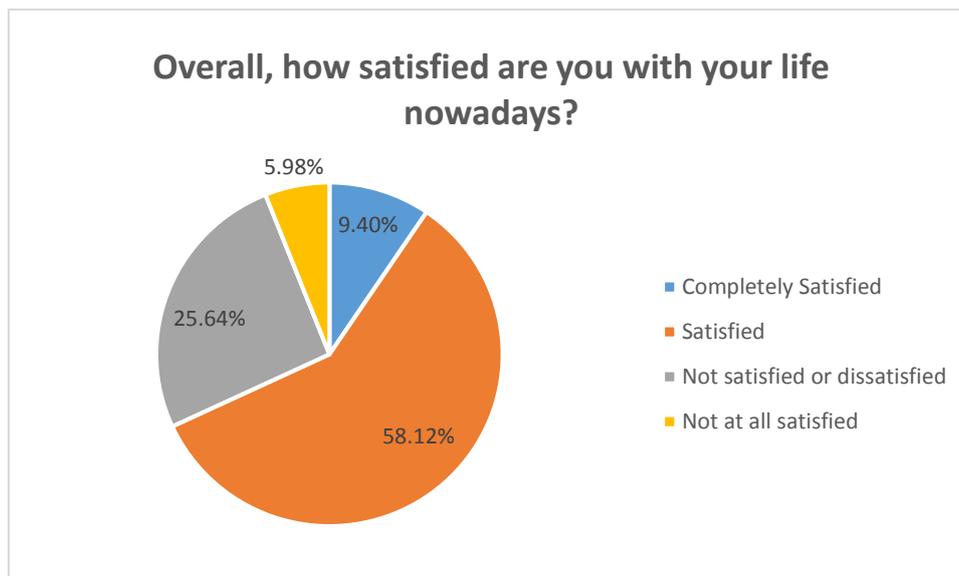
Other respondents commented on the positive impact to their wellbeing of spending time in nature:

- Mental health in lockdown saved by local walks in greenspace - by river and in parks
- Lack of structure to my day and poor sleep patterns. Nature is where I recover and rebalance.
- Most days are OK, some days I can be low, these are the days when going for a walk in the local nature reserve has made all the difference. I'm also fortunate that I have also been able to work.
- Anxiety has been very heightened during lockdown – the park & my garden have been integral in managing this.

Question 17 : Use the space to tell us how your wellbeing has benefited from spending time with nature over recent weeks during the Coronavirus epidemic. If your wellbeing has not benefited please tell us what activities have benefited your wellbeing or what you feel would benefit your wellbeing  
All respondents answered this question which was unstructured. The responses were sorted into different categories to allow some analysis. The complete set, sorted into their different categories can be found in **Appendix 2** at the end of the document.

- Three % of respondents felt that the question was not applicable or suggested **other activities** which benefited their wellbeing. The example given was craft activities.
- Some respondents (6%) made general comments to show that spending time in nature had a **positive impact** on their wellbeing. One person made a negative comment “Shielding - so very restricted”
- Other respondents (3%) commented on how nature and being out in it had **inspired** them
- Some (4%) found it important as a **social space** or a place to meet friends
- For others (9%) being outside was a place that they could use for **exercise**
- There were a number (8%) of comments which indicated that the pandemic had given them an **opportunity to spend more time in nature** observing it.
- The **impact of the pandemic on nature** was mentioned by 8% of respondents. There was a comment on a negative impact from one of the respondents: “Since the lockdown my wellbeing has deteriorated due to the high volume of people in my local parks. It upsets me to see the wildlife trampled to death. Even with clear signage to keep off, or keep out of waterways, they are completely over run with children stamping on everything. It’s quite distressing. These people don’t care about nature, they just have nowhere else to go.”
- Having an **opportunity to get outside** was seen as a positive benefit to their wellbeing by 13% of respondents. One person commented that they did not feel safe outdoors “Shared spaces were too crowded to distance safely during the lockdown. People did not adhere to 2m rule”.
- The **positive impact on mood** of spending time outside was mentioned by 17% of respondents
- Nearly ¼ (23%) of respondents commented on how being **close to nature** helped their well-being:

Question 18 : Overall how satisfied with your life nowadays?



Most respondents told us that they were satisfied or very satisfied (67.52%) with their lives but 35.42% were not with almost 6% not at all satisfied. The comments suggested a number of themes:

- anxiety:
  - Pandemic causing anxiety
  - very frightened
- a) frustration:
- Completely bored as not able to travel, visit galleries and museums and not able to celebrate birthdays etc with the family.
  - I would be more satisfied if this government of ineptitude was not in place.
  - I wish we had a private garden or green space on our doorstep. The road outside has got busier again and put up a mental barrier for me to making the journey out to the park or allotment. I had so enjoyed the peace and quiet on the roads allowing the sounds of nature to be heard again and cleaner air I wish it could always be like that!
  - I'm locked down and can't do any of my normal activities or see family and friends
- b) Looking for positive:
- Like most I'm finding lockdown hard, but am aware how privilege I am, particularly because of my access to green space. So those things balance each other out.
  - I have much to be grateful for: I have no financial worries and a comfortable home, but being suddenly deprived of job, social life, family contacts and volunteering work makes me feel useless: I feel that I have been thrown on the scrapheap. My life is being preserved, but without many things that make it worth living.
  - Our under 45s have sacrificed, freedom, education, jobs and mental wellbeing to protect we oldies despite having very little risk from Covid19. They will also be paying for this over the next decades. We need to now take our responsibilities and support them both by helping them back to normal life and paying for more
- c) Hoping for better times:
- I feel one must just get along with what there is, look for the small pleasures, but would like to live the life I had before virus.
  - Will be satisfied once freed from the constraints of social distancing.

The Covid Social Survey<sup>9</sup> asked people to answer: How often do you feel that you lack companionship? How often do you feel left out? How often do you feel isolated from others? The survey also asked, “How often do you feel lonely?” There is no standard accepted score for which a person would be considered lonely, but they found significant variation between individuals and groups. Analysis of the data identified the characteristics of people at higher risk of loneliness. The study found that the important risk factors for adult loneliness are:

- Being young (18-30)
- Living alone
- Having low income
- Being unemployed
- Having a mental health condition

Other characteristics carry a small increase in the risk of being lonely, both before and during the pandemic.

- Non-white ethnicity
- Low educational attainment
- Being female
- Living in urban areas

The study concluded that increased loneliness for some people is particularly concerning because the risk factors of loneliness are common to other important wellbeing risks and an increased loneliness is likely to compound other impacts on our wellbeing from the health, economic and social changes that people have experienced. The study also highlighted that alleviating loneliness has been shown to work through well-tailored interventions.

## DISCUSSION

### Getting out

The small survey shows us how much people valued the access to nature and parks / open spaces during a time when everyone was physically isolated from everyone except their closest family members. In total 91.45% (Qu. 12) of the respondents strongly agreed that having access to green space was an important part of their life during the pandemic. In answer to Question 10 most people agreed (98.29%) agreed that spending time outdoors (including a garden) was an important part of their life during the pandemic (with 87.18% strongly agreeing with the statement). We also asked spending time in nature, as opposed to spending time outdoors, was important. A total of 97.43% of respondents told us that they either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Less than 1% disagreed.

In their comments, respondents told us that they valued the opportunity to get out and used their time outdoors as an opportunity to socialise even when distanced. Others pointed to the importance of exercise.

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<sup>9</sup> Centre for Wellbeing (August 2020) How has Covid-19 and associated lockdown measures affected loneliness in the UK? <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/COVID-LONELINESS-2020.pdf>

## Getting out

*Spending time in my garden or walking in nearby parks and by the river is soothing and can be inspirational.*

*Walking in Crane Park, along the rough paths, is very uplifting; the paths twist and turn and beckon you onwards. There is rarely anyone else on the paths, it's like my secret place. I hope it does not become popular.*

*Our daily walks have been the highlights of most days. They are our reset button and a source of inspiration, calm and delight.*

Some respondents told us that they valued the additional time available to them to appreciate nature. For some the opportunity to exercise in nature was a positive benefit for their wellbeing.

## Time to appreciate nature

*"Calming down, taking time to appreciate the things around me, silence (no planes!), watching plants grow and thrive"*

*"Watching wildlife/being in nature has been hugely rewarding over this period of crisis. It's the first time in my adult life where I feel I've had time to properly see the wildlife around me & to learn more about it. It has been hugely rewarding."*

## Exercise

*It's been important to take a walk outdoors during the lockdown for physical and mental wellbeing.*

*Walking for an hour almost every day for the last 3 months*

*Being able to use open spaces to exercise and unwind after work has greatly reduced my stress levels*

*Spending time outdoors, both in my garden and in parks has allowed me to relax and feel less cooped up. Parks have also been great for getting exercise, which has been important, as without a commute it's easy to spend all day sat down.*

*My morning walk has become essential to my sanity and I now walk much further than I used to*

Other respondents commented on the positive impact that the pandemic had on nature and the benefits that that brought and that they found nature inspiring.

## A place to socialise

*"It has kept me going, brought happiness. Provided things I can share with others I can't see via photos"*

*"I've felt less anxious and able to meet friends in lovely surroundings"*

*"My well-being has benefited mainly with meeting up with a friend. Motivates massively and breaks that aloneness, which confess has is very hard."*

## Benefits to nature

*In addition to spending time in the garden ...I have also appreciated the lack of planes, contributing to greater awareness of birdsong, less pollution, peace.*

*The quiet, lack of traffic background noise, has been calming and the range of birdsong one now hears is very relaxing*

*I've valued my time in nature even more. .... Experiencing several parks without cars has been magical and I hope their return is limited only to access.*

## Nature as an Inspiration

*Spending time in my garden or walking in nearby parks and by the river is soothing and can be inspirational.*

*Walking in Crane Park, along the rough paths, is very uplifting; the paths twist and turn and beckon you onwards. There is rarely anyone else on the paths, it's like my secret place. I hope it does not become popular.*

*Our daily walks have been the highlights of most days. They are our reset button and a source of inspiration, calm and delight.*

## Use of green space and gardens during pandemic

Respondents told us (Qu5) that during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency over half of respondents 51.28% spent time outside every day, with 7.68% respondents spending their leisure time more than once a day outdoors. A total of 30.77% spent time outside several times a week and 5.98% spent time outside at least once a week. 7.69% had not been outside. The respondents told us (Qu 6) that over half of them (55.56%) had spent most of their time outdoors visiting parks, many (39.32%) had spent time in their gardens and some (5.13%) had visited other green spaces. We know from comments elsewhere that this includes allotments.

Question 14 sought to explore what people had done while they were outdoors. Spending time in the garden, watching wildlife, gardening, watching nature programmes on TV, and looking at natural scenery from indoors were all popular options with more than 50% of respondents saying that they had taken part in this type of activity. 3.42% (4 people) of respondents said that they had done none of these.

Many people also mentioned the value of taking exercise in open spaces.

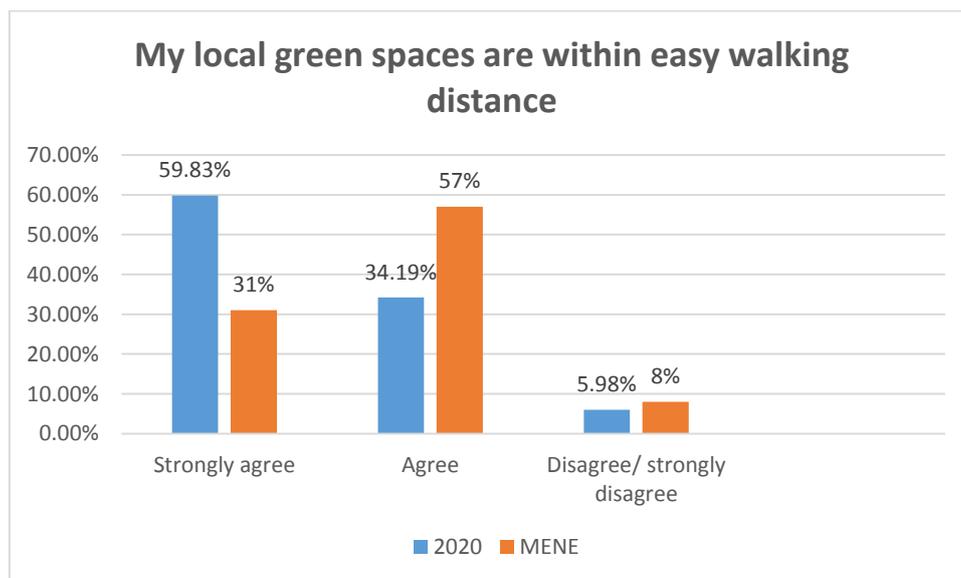
## Access to green space

The response to Question 15 shows that most people (87.15%) taking part in the survey enjoyed spending time in their garden over the period of lockdown. We learnt that 6.84% (8 out of 117 people) did not have access to a garden.

Most respondents (85.47%) either agreed or strongly agreed that it was possible to socially distance while in a park. 11.11% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. There were some comments that showed that there was anxiety amongst some respondents when visiting parks.

*“Shared spaces were too crowded to distance safely during the lockdown. People did not adhere to 2m rule”*

We wanted to understand whether people felt able to get to their local green spaces easily by walking. The survey data was compared data with data from the MENE for 2019<sup>10</sup>. This shows that more people (94%) responding to the survey felt that their green spaces were within easy walking distance while the national figure was 88%.



ONS data shows that 44% of Londoners live within a five-minute walk of a public park<sup>11</sup> and that London has the highest percentage of its population within easy reach of a public park.

For the postal areas where most respondents lived (TW2) 5%<sup>12</sup> of dwellings have no garden or shared outdoor space and this rises to 14% in TW1 postal area and is as high as 17% in some other the other postcodes covered by the survey. One in five households in London (21%)<sup>13</sup> does not have access to gardens, so it is likely there will be a proportion of residents who were shielding who were not able to spend any time outdoors at all during this period.

<sup>10</sup> [Natural England \(2019\) Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment : The national survey on people and the natural environment Headline report 2019: Analysis of latest results \(March 2018 to February 2019\) and ten years of the survey from 2009 to 2019 p12](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/828552/Monitor_Engagement_Natural_Environment_2018_2019_v2.pdf)

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/828552/Monitor\\_Engagement\\_Natural\\_Environment\\_2018\\_2019\\_v2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/828552/Monitor_Engagement_Natural_Environment_2018_2019_v2.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [Office for National statistics \(2020\) One in eight British households has no garden](https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/oneineightbritishhouseholdshasnogarden/2020-05-14?utm_source=Green+Infrastructure+Partnership&utm_campaign=522798bef6-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_08_31_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f4eb0dc7a3-522798bef6-103372473)

<sup>12</sup> [Office for National statistics \(2020\) One in eight British households has no garden](https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/oneineightbritishhouseholdshasnogarden/2020-05-14?utm_source=Green+Infrastructure+Partnership&utm_campaign=522798bef6-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_08_31_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f4eb0dc7a3-522798bef6-103372473)

<sup>13</sup> [Office for National statistics \(2020\) One in eight British households has no garden](https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/oneineightbritishhouseholdshasnogarden/2020-05-14?utm_source=Green+Infrastructure+Partnership&utm_campaign=522798bef6-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_08_31_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f4eb0dc7a3-522798bef6-103372473)

Lack of personal outdoor space was an issue for some respondents. We do not know whether these people were able to leave their house to visit parks and open spaces during this period.

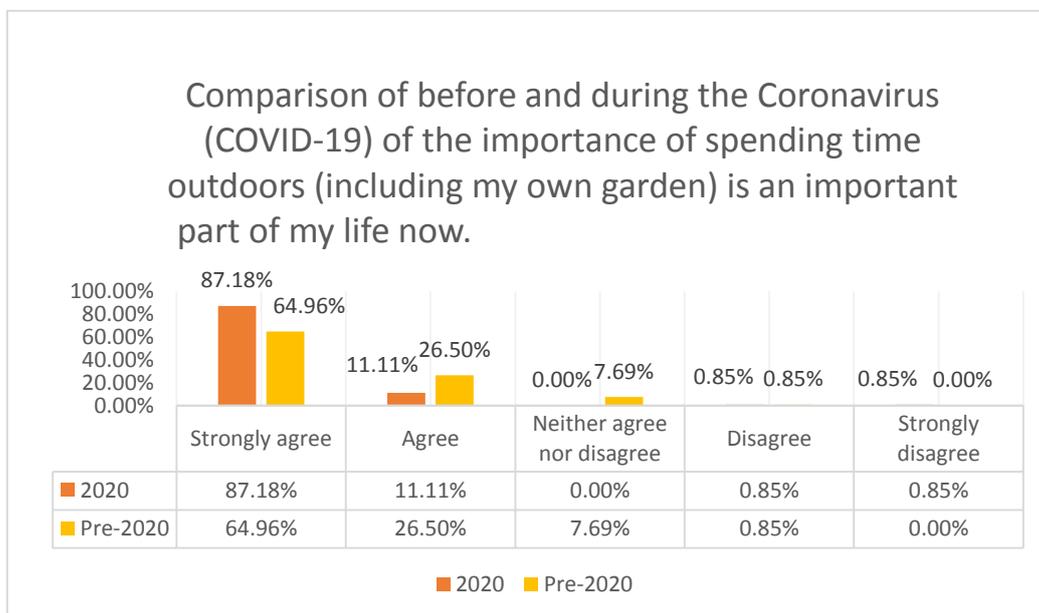
## Changes in behaviour

As part of the survey we wanted to understand if there were any changes to behaviour as a result of the national requirements to stay isolate. Question 9 asked if spending time outdoors (including a garden) was an important part of life before corona epidemic.

### Importance of time spent outdoors

A total of 91.46% strongly agreed / agreed with the comment that spending time outdoors (including a garden) was an important part of life before corona epidemic and 98.29% of respondents told us that spending time in outdoors was an important part of their life now. This is an increase of 6.83%. Data from the MENE for 2019 tells us that nationally this figure is lower at 89 % (p7), which shows that the level amongst the survey respondents was already higher than the national base. This may indicate some level of bias in the sample group already predisposed to spending time outdoors.

The respondents told us that spending time outdoors was more important now (increase by 6.83%). Further research to understand whether the experience informed future beliefs and understanding would be an interesting avenue of research.

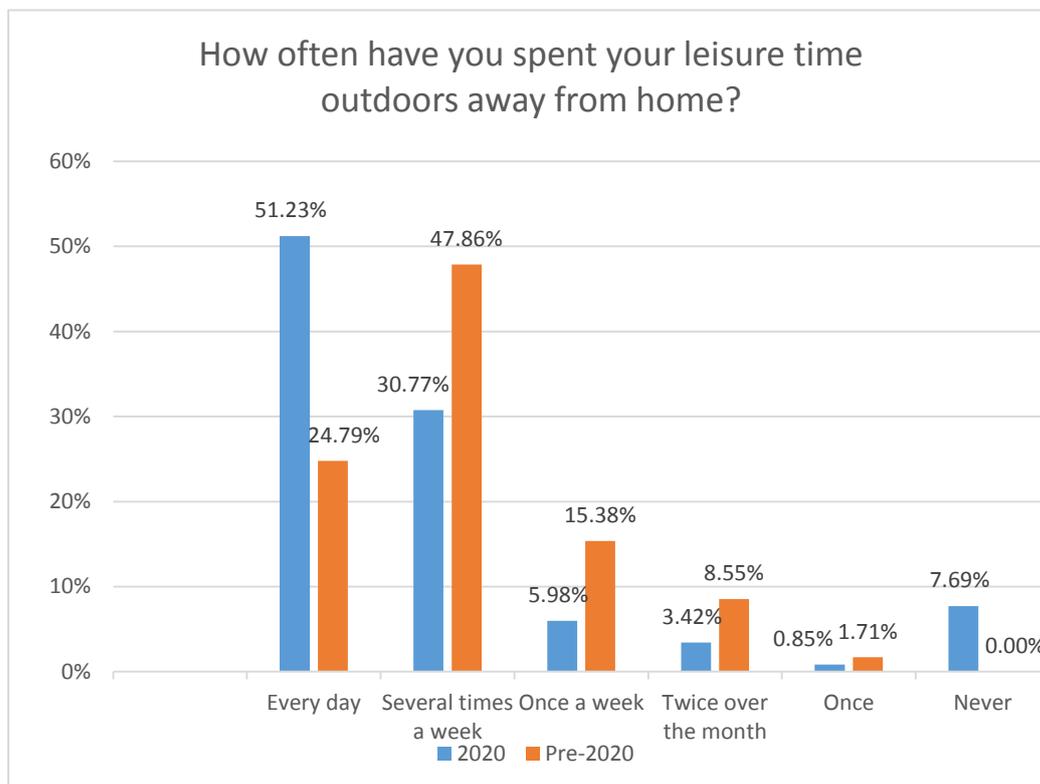


### How often

Before Coronavirus (COVID-19), almost a quarter of respondents (24.79%) spent time outside every day (Qu 2), half the respondents (47.86%) spent time outside several times a week, and a large proportion (15.4%) once a week. Therefore a total of 88.03% of respondents spent their leisure time outdoors at least once a week before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. The Monitor of Engagement for Natural Environment MENE (2020)<sup>14</sup> tells us that nationally 65% of people visit the natural environment at least once a week compared with 88.02% of respondents in this survey. Nationally 16% visit less than once a month or never compared with 3.42% of respondents.

<sup>14</sup> Natural England (2019) **Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment** : The national survey on people and the natural environment Headline report 2019: Analysis of latest results (March 2018 to February 2019) and ten years of the survey from 2009 to 2019

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/828552/Monitor\\_Engagement\\_Natural\\_Environment\\_2018\\_2019\\_v2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/828552/Monitor_Engagement_Natural_Environment_2018_2019_v2.pdf)



The data shows a change in behaviour due to the impact of the pandemic. The survey found that 88.03% of people spent time outside at least once a week. The survey shows that more people (26.44%) are spending time outdoors on a daily basis, but 7.69% of people did not leave their homes throughout the period.

The People and Nature Survey<sup>15</sup> polled 2,000 people during Spring 2020, and showed that urban green spaces e.g. parks and playing fields were the most visited type of green and natural space. They found that during the period 1st–31st May, 60% of adults in England said that they had spent time outside in green and natural spaces in the previous two weeks. Since the Coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions began, 36% of adults reported spending more time outside.

The People and Nature Survey showed that just over a fifth of adults (22%) reported that they had not visited any green and natural space in the previous month (down from 26% in April). This is much higher than the Richmond based survey where 7.69% of people reported that they did not leave their homes for the period. This may be explained by the fact that the survey was carried out over a longer period and later (May-July) once there were less restrictive guidelines in place.

The national survey reported that the main reasons for not spending free time outdoors were staying at home to stop Coronavirus (COVID-19) spreading and/or related to Government restrictions (63%) and poor physical health/illness (11%). Half (50%) were worried about contracting or spreading Coronavirus (COVID-19) while visiting green and natural spaces; 39% were prevented from getting outside because of concerns about over-crowding and not being able to keep a safe distance from others; and, almost a fifth (18%) reported concerns about lack of facilities such as public toilets, baby changing areas or benches. Some of the respondents reflected concerns about overcrowding but most felt that they were able to socially distance.

Lack of facilities was mentioned by one of the respondents to the Richmond based survey.

<sup>15</sup> [Natural England](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-monthly-interim-indicators-for-may-2020-experimental-statistics/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-monthly-interim-indicators-for-may-2020-experimental-statistics) People and Nature Survey: How are we connecting with nature during the coronavirus pandemic? (2020) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-monthly-interim-indicators-for-may-2020-experimental-statistics/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-monthly-interim-indicators-for-may-2020-experimental-statistics>

*There are not enough resting places or toilets for me to enjoy public spaces*

The Covid Social Study<sup>16</sup> tells us that 36% reported that they had gone out for a walk or other gentle physical activity for at least 30 minutes, whereas 39% report not having done so. They also tell us that:

- People with diagnosed mental and physical health conditions are doing the least physical activity, with very limited engagement either with moderate/high intensity exercise, as well as more limited engagement with gentle physical activity either at home or outside the home.
- Older adults are engaging more than other age groups in gentle activity such as going for walks,
- People living alone and people with lower household income are also engaging less in all kinds of physical activity.

Both studies paint a good picture of the barriers to engaging with the natural environment during the period of lockdown, which is supported by the Richmond study.

- Poor physical health/illness
- People with limited mobility
- Poor mental health
- People living alone
- People living with lower household income
- People with limited access to local green spaces due to distance
- Worry about contracting or spreading Coronavirus (COVID-19) while visiting green and natural spaces;
- Concerns about over-crowding and not being able to keep a safe distance from others;
- Lack of facilities such as public toilets, baby changing areas or benches.

These barriers have implications for the future provision of access to natural spaces for people at risk of isolation.

#### Activities

Question 4 explored the motivation for spending time outdoors before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. To enjoy fresh air, wildlife, health and exercise were all given as important reasons for spending time outside. The MENE supports this finding with 56% (77.78% in this survey) of people suggesting that health and exercise were the main motivation for visiting the natural environment 38% (58.12%) to relax and unwind, 21% (56%) to spend time with family, and 15% to entertain children.

Comments from the survey suggest that many of these remained the motivation during the period of the survey, many mentioned gardening as an activity that was beneficial for their wellbeing during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

#### Connected to nature

Many respondents (23%) mentioned the importance of feeling a connection with nature over the period of the lockdown and considered that it had helped their wellbeing.

#### Connected to nature

*When the lockdown first happened and we weren't meant to travel by car to a park I found it so hard. In fact I did drive to a local park because I felt hemmed in. It was just joy to be able to walk amongst the trees by a river watching birds. Realised how important outdoor space was to me.*

<sup>16</sup> [UCL Covid-19 Social Study](https://www.covidsocialstudy.org/) (2020) Understanding the psychological and social impact of the pandemic <https://www.covidsocialstudy.org/>

*I feel more connected with my local area and healthier and happier spending more time in my local green space. Getting outdoors was fundamental to our positive mental health during lockdown*

*More relaxed, aware of the world around me. Helped make the experience more positive and bearable*

*My well-being had been maintained and improved by spending time in nature. I found this particularly important while we were only allowed out once a day. During this time I wanted to be as close to nature as possible.*

*Nature was essential for me in this lockdown. The possibility of exercise once a day gave me a normality otherwise I couldn't have. Usually I go walking with or without sticks that helped me to stay in contact with nature and the the possibility to stay in the fresh air. That's vital for me.*

*Watching spring develop is calming. You have no control over the trees and flowers, they will bloom when they are ready. This knowledge helps create a calm mind-set.*

*My mental health is aided greatly by spending time in nature. It eased the stress and tension and brain fog from spending so much time in a small flat with the family and trying to work from home. An hour or more was needed to make a lasting difference and spending a full day outdoors had really lasting benefits.*

*It is incredibly grounding - giving a sense of the wider world continuing in a normal way*

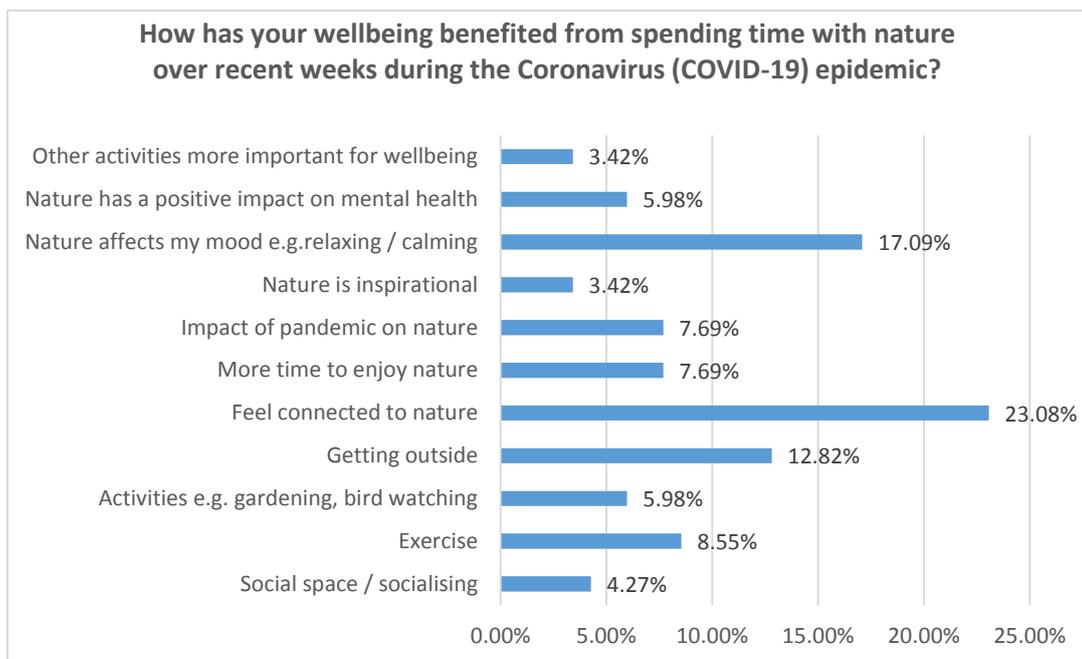
The Nature and People survey confirm these comments. In this survey a large majority of adults (85%) agreed that 'being in nature makes me very happy' with 74% taking more time to notice and engage with everyday nature, such as listening to birdsong or noticing butterflies.

In the national survey forty one per cent of adults reported that 'nature and wildlife is more important than ever to my wellbeing'; and 41% reported visiting local green and natural spaces has been even more important to their wellbeing.

## **The role of green and natural spaces for health and wellbeing**

The survey sought to investigate links between wellbeing and nature during a period of isolation. We asked how satisfied respondents were with their life (Qu18). Over half 58.12% said that they were satisfied and almost 10% were completely satisfied. 6% were unsatisfied. Question 17 asked how wellbeing benefited from spending time in nature over the weeks of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic. This was an open ended question and during analysis

Question 17 asked about the link between spending time in nature and personal wellbeing. Different themes were identified. The importance of feeling connected to nature was the theme that nearly a quarter of respondents identified with.



These findings are supported by the people and nature survey which found that the large majority of adults (85%) agreed that 'being in nature makes me very happy', and 41% reported visiting local green and natural spaces has been even more important to their wellbeing.

A number (17%) discussed how spending time in nature had a calming and relaxing impact. They discussed how they used it to alter their mood during the lockdown.

### Calming and relaxing impact

*Being outside has calmed my mood and stopped me worrying as much and have more energy.*

*Being outside enables me to feel much calmer and lifts my mood.*

*It's made me feel like I can breathe and relax.*

*Nature helps me relax and take a break from work.*

*Walking helps numb the pain and provides mental pleasure*

*Being outdoors made an immense difference. I felt much better, fitter and mentally relaxed after every walk.*

*Keeping me calm and relaxed, and takes some of the worry away of not being able to see family.*

*I can see a huge difference in my irritability/mood and enthusiasm depending on how much time I am able to spend outside and in nature*

Some (3.42%) respondents told us that other things were more important and some respondents told us that their wellbeing has suffered.

*My wellbeing is less than previously as I can't do much nature conservation work because of government restrictions.*

*Since the lockdown my wellbeing has deteriorated due to the high volume of people in my local parks. It upsets me to see the wildlife trampled to death. Even with clear signage to keep off, or keep out of waterways, they are completely over run with children stamping on everything. It's quite distressing. These people don't care about nature, they just have nowhere else to go.*

## CONCLUSION

This small survey of 117 respondents has shown that during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, to July access to nature has been important for health and wellbeing of respondents.

- 97.43% of respondents told us that spending time in nature was important, 87% said that they had enjoyed the plants and trees in their garden. 70% said that they enjoyed the wildlife that they found there.
- Most people (91.45%) strongly agreed that having open green spaces close to where they live was important to them at the time of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and 94% of people said that their local park was within walking distance.
- Respondents told us that they sought out places that local parks where they could enjoy nature while taking their permitted daily exercise.
- Most people (87%) reported that parks were easy to access and to socially distance
- Over 55% visited parks regularly during lockdown.
- Many (23%) of the respondents told us about the importance of feeling connected to nature during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis
- Many respondents reported that they noticed more nature in their local area since the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak than they would normally at this time of year, and some told us that they had enjoyed watching the season's progress.
- Many respondents commented that spending time outside helped to relax and soothe them during and /or after their visit
- 25% of respondents told us that they had spent more time outdoors each day in/surrounded nature than prior to the Coronavirus (COVID-19)
- Some respondents told us that nature has been more important to them since the onset of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis in the UK.

There were two significant themes from the survey that it is worth drawing out:

### **Inequalities**

The study has highlighted the barriers and inequalities to the benefits to be gained from accessing green space and that there is a need which should be addressed to ensure that everyone in the local community to benefit.

While the survey showed that many people benefited from access to green spaces, and were able to use green spaces to support their health and wellbeing, we also learnt that 8% of respondents reported that they had not been out at all over the period of lockdown. Of concern are those that were shielding and did not have a garden or shared outdoor space. They had no access to the natural environment at all during this period except through media channels and what they could see through their windows.

From the survey we learnt that 10% of respondents did not have private gardens and were reliant on public open spaces.

### **The need for well-maintained accessible nature-rich green space**

The response of all respondents has highlighted the need for well-maintained accessible nature-rich green space near to peoples' homes and the importance of them to an urban population.

From the survey and especially from the comments of respondents, we understand more clearly how parks and green spaces can be used improve the health, wellbeing, and general resilience of local people. We also know that the participants understand and took the opportunity to use local green spaces to benefit their health and wellbeing in this way at a time when access outdoors was severely limited.

The survey shows the importance of having a dense network of well-managed and accessible green spaces that are nature rich available to access in the urban environment. It also shows the importance of feeling close to nature in an urban environment and the perceived benefits that this can have on an individual's health and wellbeing at a time of isolation and crisis.

The strongest impression from the comments from respondents was that at a time of isolation from the outside world, and at a time of chaos and uncertainty the respondents used access to nature to create meaning and purpose in their lives in order to cope better with negative feelings.

This has implications for the provision of activities in parks and open spaces going forward over the next few months and in the future.

Frances Bennett

July 2020

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**



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## APPENDIX 1 SURVEY QUESTIONS

The survey asked a series of questions some open ended but most included a pick list of answers.

1	Respondent ID
2	Collector ID
3	Start Date
4	End Date
5	IP Address
6	Email Address
7	First Name
8	Last Name
9	Custom Data 1
10	Who are you answering on behalf of:
11	Thinking about the last 12 months before Coronavirus (COVID-19), on average, how often have you spent your leisure time outdoors, away from your home?
12	What did you do? Please include a couple words e.g. cycling, walking with dog, picnic, visiting playground, sporting activity, watching wildlife
13	Before the Coronavirus (COVID-19), which of the following, if any, best describe your reasons for going out? Tick all the activities that best describes your reasons for spending time outdoors.
14	Thinking about recent weeks during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, how often have you spent your leisure time outdoors, away from your home? Please tick as appropriate
15	Thinking about recent weeks, during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis, which of the following best describes where you spent most of your outdoor / nature / exercise time. Please tick the box where you spent most of your time.
16	My local green spaces are easy to get into and around while socially distancing
17	My local green spaces are within easy walking distance
18	Spending time outdoors (including my own garden) was an important part of my life before corona epidemic.
19	Spending time outdoors (including my own garden) is an important part of my life now.
20	Before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) I was concerned about damage to the natural environment.
21	Having open green spaces close to where I live is important to me now
22	Spending time in nature is very important to me
23	Which, if any, of the following activities involving outdoor spaces have you taken part in over recent weeks during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic?
24	Thinking about your garden over recent weeks during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic which of the following statements, if any, do you agree with?
25	How is your wellbeing in general? Please tick as appropriate
26	Use the space to tell us how your wellbeing has benefited from spending time with nature over recent weeks during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic. If your wellbeing has not benefited please tell us what activities have benefited your wellbeing or what you feel would benefit your wellbeing
27	Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Please tick as appropriate
28	Postcode

29	Thank you for taking part in our survey. If you interested in helping to design outdoor activities in nature to help improve the health and wellbeing of local people? Please include email contact details so that we can get in touch.
30	Name
31	Gender
32	Ethnicity
33	How many in your household are.....?
34	Please add any other comments

## APPENDIX 2 RESPONSES TO QUESTION 17

**Tell us how your wellbeing has benefited from spending time with nature over recent weeks during the Coronavirus (COVID - 19) epidemic. If your wellbeing has not benefited please tell us what activities have benefited your wellbeing or what you feel would benefit your wellbeing**

This open ended question was an opportunity to talk about how wellbeing had been impacted. The comments were split up into different themes to all for some analysis. The responses are included in full for reference in the following themes

### Positive comments

		Number of respondents
Social space / socialising	4%	5
Exercise	9%	10
Activities e.g. gardening, bird watching	6%	7
Getting outside	13%	15
Feel connected to nature	23%	27
More time to enjoy nature	8%	9
Impact of pandemic on nature	8%	9
Nature is inspirational	3%	4
Nature affects my mood e.g.relaxing / calming	17%	20
Nature has a positive impact on mental health	6%	7
Other activities more important for wellbeing	3%	4

### Negative comments

These were included in the themes analysis but separated out here for reference

100%

117

### Social space / socialising

It has kept me going, brought happiness. Provided things I can share with others I cant see via photos  
I've felt less anxious and able to meet friends in lovely surroundings

My well-being has benefited mainly with meeting up with a friend. Motivates massively and breaks that aloneness. Which confess has is very hard.

getting exercise and seeing other people. Enjoying all the birds, waterbirds and their babies

More recently a friend has visited twice & sat outside here, which shows the social benefits of a garden.

### **Exercise**

It's been important to take a walk outdoors during the lockdown for physical and mental wellbeing.

walking, watching wildlife

My morning walk has become essential to my sanity and I now walk much further than I used to

fresh air, getting out, exercise

Spending time outdoors, both in my garden and in parks has allowed me to relax and feel less cooped up. Parks have also been great for getting exercise, which has been important, as without a commute it's easy to spend all day sat down.

Daily walks as a way to clear my mind

Our daily walks have been the highlights of most days. They are our reset button and a source of inspiration, calm and delight.

Being able to use open spaces to exercise and unwind after work has greatly reduced my stress levels

Exercising every day. Thinking more about meals and cooking from scratch, pending more time with family

Walking for an hour almost every day for the last 3 months

### **Activities e.g. gardening, bird watching**

Being able to spend time in my garden is a fundamental part of my wellbeing.

Taken up gardening. Physical and mental benefits.

My wellbeing is less than previously as I can't do much nature conservation work because of government restrictions.

Worked and sat in my garden. Watched BBC spring watch live.

Good opportunity to work in the garden and to sit in it

Since lockdown I have become much more into gardening and encouraging birds and insects to my garden

Taken up gardening. Physical and mental benefits.

### **Getting outside**

An escape from the house. Exercise. Fresh air. Watching leaves and blossom come out in the spring.

As both retired and living alone I find it important to go out and always feel better on my return

I am 70, live alone, furloughed from my job and cut off from friends, travel and social life for an unknown length of time.

Gardening gives me something to do and something to look forward to, and being able to make the short drive to my local park (also a nature reserve) and spend time enjoying the wildlife has been my safety valve when I start to get stir crazy and wonder if I will be compelled to spend the rest of my life shut away "for my own protection."

Hard to say, good weather and time to be outside is good for wellbeing

Getting out into nature has made me happy and removed the feeling of being cooped up with not a lot to do. I always enjoy being out in nature and watching nature do its thing.

It's been important to get out away from the four walls of home

Shared spaces were too crowded to distance safely during the lockdown. People did not adhere to 2m rule

Being able to go outdoors during our lockdown as opposed to other contries has kept our mental wellbeing good and fitness good

Having a garden & access to green space has been a lifesaver during corona. I'm so grateful that the parks remained open

Easy access to open spaces, Springtime genetally

Physical health benefit from walking & cycling. More importantly for me the mental health benefits of being outdoors, in beautiful (semi-wild) spaces. My anxiety would have been MUCH harder to manage without Crane Park, Pevensey Nature Reserve & my little garden.

Being able to leave the house and go somewhere green and peaceful

getting outside the house, into open fields clears your mind and gives a sense of freedom. It is important to go places outside of your garden/ousehold, even if it is only a small walk away to keep a sense of normality.

Very much, it has been very important for my well-being to be able to access green space close to my home. I would have found life much more depressing had I not been able to go out to parks and green spaces

If I had not been able to get out it would have been awful. I am very lucky.

### **Connected to nature**

When the lockdown first happened and we weren't meant to travel by car to a park I found it so hard. In fact I did drive to a local park because I felt hemmed in. It was just joy to be able to walk amongst the trees by a river watching birds. Realised how important outdoor space was to me.

Mental health, reduces stress, watching the seasons

I feel more connected with my local area and healthier and happier spending more time in my local green space. Getting outdoors was fundamental to our positive mental health during lockdown

Relaxing watching variety of birds in garden and other people exercising (I've been told to shield)

Every time I've been in a negative mood or lacked motivation, being outside in nature has improved it

Feel more connected with what's around me which is reassuring and satisfying.

With daily walks in Richmond Park it has been great to watch the trees turn from their winter to summer foliage and watch the geese and ducks bringing up their new families.

Walking with dog benefited me greatly because feeling more free outside

Wildlife and being outside raises my spirits

More relaxed, aware of the world around me. Helped make the experience more positive and bearable

It has kept me sane seeing the season change during lockdown

My well-being had been maintained and improved by spending time in nature. I found this particularly important while we were only allowed out once a day. During this time I wanted to be as close to nature as possible.

Nature was essential for me in this lockdown..the possibility of exercise once a day gave me a normality otherwise I couldn't have. Usually I go walking with or without sticks..that helped me to stay in contact with nature and the possibility to stay in the fresh air. That's vital for me.

Spending time outdoors with nature has helped me cope with the stresses of life

Watching spring develop is calming. You have no control over the trees and flowers, they will bloom when they are ready. This knowledge helps create a calm mindset.

I find being outdoors watching the wildlife around me is very relaxing, whether I'm in my garden or out in green spaces/parkland

I always feel so much better after being out in the sun listening to the birds.

I feel more positive, waiting for hip surgery so mobility limited but garden helps, love seeing birds & foxes & the leaves come out over the weeks

My mental health is aided greatly by spending time in nature. It eased the stress and tension and brain fog from spending so much time in a small flat with the family and trying to work from home. An hour or more was needed to make a lasting difference and spending a full day outdoors had really lasting benefits.

I've benefited from watching nature, having windows open for fresh air, and relaxing

I have felt more relaxed and at one with nature while walking in a park or by a river locally. Even in my own garden, I got more pleasure from doing simple things just sitting there with a book, "zoom" on phone or a coffee - and watching the birds & my 2 cats...!

Being in the garden and walking locally to enjoy the scents and sight of spring flowers

Always enjoy time in our garden and particularly the wild abundance of birds

It is incredibly grounding - giving a sense of the wider world continuing in a normal way

Being in nature in the sunshine has been paramount in being beneficial

Mental health had stayed good due to being able to spend time in local parks and watching the wildlife

Time outdoors is valuable for fresh air and admiring nature

### **More time to enjoy nature**

As it provided before the pandemic I found that "nature" spaces provided a respite from the other work I was engaging with at the time. I would not say there has been any kind of change in my relationship since before (I do not imagine I am a representative group) however I found the pandemic gave more me time and reason to be outside (perhaps there were fewer alternative options). I think this has been beneficial for my health both physically and mentally. Although, sometimes I find it difficult to separate out the effects of summertime with the effects of the pandemic

Watching wildlife/being in nature has been hugely rewarding over this period of crisis. It's the first time in my adult life where I feel I've had time to properly see the wildlife around me & to learn more about it. It has been hugely rewarding.

It has kept me sane! I have enjoyed spending more time in our garden and the local area. Having more time has been a real benefit and we are so lucky to have lovely parks and a river nearby.

Photographing nature has helped me see a lot more and be a lot more observant. Taking time and listening to the sound of bird song and the rustle of leaves in the trees and watching their movement, watching colours change. Nature continues to have had a profound impact on my mental well being. Nature continues to be and the more I discover about the rich interactions in nature the more I want to know.

Quiet less populated at times by the river in Twickenham has allowed me to be more reflective and notice things I hadn't before. More appreciative of what is on our doorstep

Started running. Explored the park. Listened to the birds and the trees moving in the wind. Breathed in cleaner air. Found my headspace.

Had time to reflect on life and enjoy just being alive

calming down, taking time to appreciate the things around me, silence (no planes!), watching plants grow and thrive

I have taken more interest and have learnt more.

### **Impact of pandemic on nature**

In addition to spending time in the garden and appreciating nature and wildlife there, wellbeing has been greatly improved by being able to take a 5 or 10 min drive to local open spaces such as the Crane and Hounslow Heath, to explore their delights, all much improved since I was there years ago, thanks to the Environment Agency and local volunteers! I have also appreciated the lack of planes, contributing to greater (awareness of?) birdsong, less pollution, peace....

The quiet, lack of traffic background noise, has been calming and the range of birdsong one now hears is very relaxing

I think since the pandemic we have noticed a lot more wildlife activity around London where we live, the birds have been heard over traffic which is usually very rare. We have not been able to get to our usual parks for our walks due to travel on public transport. We usually go to Bushy Park and Hampton Court by train and enjoy the fresh air and wildlife. My husband is a keen photographer and has taken some amazing shots over the years. Since lockdown our nearest park was St James, which had been lovely to keep us sane!

I've valued my time in nature even more. As I decide where to eventually move to next in London, it's cemented my need to be near green space. Experiencing several parks without cars has been magical and I hope their return is limited only to access. Growing seedlings / gardening has also felt like a very positive thing to do in this time.

Flowers and lack of grass cutting has resulted in more wildlife to see in the garden.... golf courses cut their grass so less beneficial.

Since the lockdown my wellbeing has deteriorated due to the high volume of people in my local parks. It upsets me to see the wildlife trampled to death. Even with clear signage to keep off, or keep out of waterways, they are completely overrun with children stamping on everything. It's quite distressing. These people don't care about nature, they just have nowhere else to go.

Being able to hear the birds instead of the planes helps you relax in the moment. We have slept better without so much noise pollution at night.

Great that the car menace temporarily subsided, though sadly it's coming back.

Calling in except for some selfish people in parks running close to others or not stopping or moving away

### **Nature is inspirational**

Spending time in my garden or walking in nearby parks and by the river is soothing and can be inspirational.

Walking in Crane Park, along the rough paths, is very uplifting; the paths twist and turn and beckon you onwards. There is rarely anyone else on the paths, it's like my secret place. I hope it does not become popular.

It's given me a feeling of freedom and joy

Space & quiet

**Natures has an impact on mental health**

It saved my mental health which felt imperilled at times  
Mental and physical health is improved through being outdoors in nature  
Our mental health, and closeness as a family has benefitted hugely.  
Self isolation is much more bearable  
It has been a life saver  
Kept me sane  
Shielding - so very restricted

**Nature affects my mood e.g.relaxing / calming**

Being outside has calmed my mood and stopped me worrying as much.  
I feel happier and have more energy  
chill  
Keeping me calm  
Calming feelgood  
Relaxing and uplifting  
The beautiful weather has helped in mood lightening at a worrying time.  
Being around nature helps me relax.  
Relaxing  
calming, mood lifting  
Walking by the river with my dog is very relaxing.  
It has helped us to feel more liberated, relaxed and fortunate to live where we do  
Being outside enables me to feel much calmer and lifts my mood.  
It's made me feel like I can breathe and relax.  
Nature helps me relax and take a break from work.  
Walking helps numb the pain and provides mental pleasure  
Felt less stressed  
Being outdoors made an immense difference. I felt much better, fitter and mentally relaxed after every walk.  
Keeping me calm and relaxed, and takes some of the worry away of not being able to see family.  
I can see a huge difference in my irritability/mood and enthusiasm depending on how much time I am able to spend outside and in nature

**Neutral comments**

Not applicable / other activities important for wellbeing  
N/A  
Nothing to add  
Craft projects and supporting other people have kept me going  
N/a

**Negative impacts**

My wellbeing is less than previously as I can't do much nature conservation work because of government restrictions.  
Since the lockdown my wellbeing has deteriorated due to the high volume of people in my local parks. It upsets me to see the wildlife trampled to death. Even with clear signage to keep off, or keep out of waterways, they are completely over run with children stamping on everything. Its quite distressing. These people dont care about nature, they just have no where else to go.  
Shared spaces were too crowded to distance safely during the lockdown. People did not adhere to 2m rule.  
Shielding - so very restricted