

Highland

Here is your nature prescription



SCOTLAND



What is a nature prescription?

Nature is really important for our wellbeing and connecting to nature has been shown to improve mood, reduce feelings of stress, help people to feel more relaxed, improve physical health, improve sleep quality, reduce loneliness and improve confidence and self-esteem.

An RSPB Nature Prescription is a free, non-medical approach based on accessible connections to nature that you can do on your own or with others. The suggestions will help you to improve your wellbeing by engaging with nature in a personal and meaningful way.

This booklet contains a calendar of seasonal ideas with ten suggestions for each month which have been designed knowing that what you do and notice in nature is far more important than how long or where you spend time in nature. Many of these can be done from your home with one suggestion each month for going further afield.

This is not a challenge but an invitation to connect to nature. You are encouraged to try as many of these as you can, as often as you can. You don't need to do them in the order or even the same month as suggested, and they can be repeated as many times as you like.

You can choose what you do and when you want to do it. Even doing just a small number will start to benefit your wellbeing. As with any trip outdoors, please dress for the weather and work to your ability. Remember to follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code which is available at

www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot

"Connecting with nature is good for all aspects of your health and wellbeing. As a GP I might only see a patient six times a year, I'm interested in how my patients can stay well in between times and make lasting changes for their health and wellbeing. I know getting outside, noticing the changes in the seasons and doing gentle activity is a great way to do this and I regularly see patients benefitting from connecting to nature."

Katie Walter, Highland GP

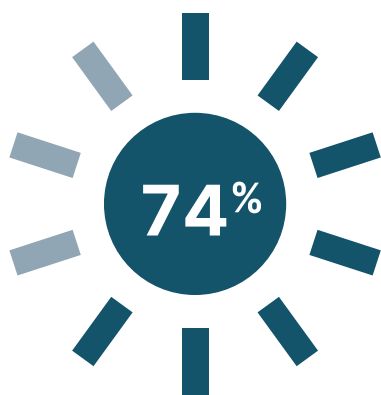


Photo by Grahame Madge (rspb-images.com)



How we know it works

RSPB Scotland recently ran a pilot of Nature Prescriptions in Edinburgh with NHS Lothian. It found that patients and healthcare staff were overwhelmingly positive about the benefit to health and wellbeing of connecting with nature through a Nature Prescription.



**74% of patients
felt that they had benefited
from the Nature Prescription**

NHS Highland has carried out its own consultation with people across the region and the feedback they received supported our pilot's findings:

“Nature is open and doesn't bother you, you can speak to it but it will never respond. It doesn't care who you are it's always there. Nature is welcoming and has helped me a lot; even just looking out the window on a rainy day was calming.”

Highland resident

“When I visited my special nature place, I sat near the small lochan. I could smell the pond; I felt the roughness of the bark on the fence I sat on. I could hear the plop of rain drops on the water and I could see small movements in the water as fish fed on the insects on the surface.”

Highland resident

Find out more about nature prescriptions at
rspb.org.uk/natureprescriptions

January



Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

- ☐ Get out, whatever the weather. Feel the wind and rain on your face or the crunch of frost underfoot. Breathe in the fresh frosty air.
- ☐ Take part in the Big Garden Birdwatch at rspb.org.uk/birdwatch.
- ☐ Clouds are often described as wispy (cirrus), heaped (cumulus) and layered (stratus). What clouds do you notice today? Watch them move across the sky.
- ☐ Put up a nestbox to provide a home for garden birds. You could even try making one. Visit rspb.org.uk/nestboxes for some ideas.
- ☐ Get out into the snow and look for animal tracks - foxes, rabbits, badgers and pine martens are common local residents.
- ☐ Open your window or step outside and be still for three minutes. Listen out for the sounds of nature, like song thrushes starting to sing.
- ☐ Look for unusual moss or lichen on buildings, walls or trees. How many colours, textures and shapes can you see?
- ☐ Sit by the seashore on a windy day and smell the sea and the seaweed.
- ☐ Watch the sunset until the light disappears - do you notice the light lasting longer as you go through the month?
- ☐ Visit one of the RSPB Scotland nature reserves (Udale Bay, Nigg, or Culbin Sands) to see the wintering flocks of waders, geese and ducks and listen to the different tones/sounds of their calls.



- ☐ Find your 'sit spot' - a favourite place in nature to rest and just be. Visit it often and tune into the world around you. Get to know the local wildlife, plants and trees. Make note of how it feels to connect with nature in your special place.
- ☐ Take a walk and look out for bare trees (trees that have lost their leaves) and feel their bark - can you do a bark rubbing to create some art?
- ☐ Seek out an early spring flower, like a snowdrop. Can you draw, paint or photograph it?
- ☐ Make a nature mobile for your home using twigs, leaves and other natural materials you can collect outside.
- ☐ Walk through trees or a woodland near you and listen for woodpeckers drumming to attract a mate.
- ☐ Find someone to chat to about nature. Tell them about your favourite plant, bird or insect. Ask them what theirs is, and talk about why they are your favourites.
- ☐ Beachcomb for shells and do a mini beach clean as you go. Look at the **2-minute Beach Clean** app and join a network of people keeping plastic away from our marine wildlife.
- ☐ Start a nature journal and write down one thing each day that you notice in the places close to home.
- ☐ Walk round your nearest town or village and see how much nature you can spot even in winter - berries on trees or green shoots of spring?
- ☐ Feed the birds in your garden or in your local greenspace or go further afield and visit the bird feeders at Glenmore or Loch Morlich. Sit for half an hour and watch the coal tits and crested tits feed.



March

- ☐ Spot the first signs of spring like the first primroses and lesser celandine, whose flowers open when the sun shines on them and close in the shade. Take time out to think about what spring means to you.
- ☐ Watch and listen for the skeins of geese flying over to go to Iceland and further north.
- ☐ Look out for queen bees emerging from hibernation. Follow one as it moves between the flowers.
- ☐ Listen for birds such as blackbirds or house sparrows nesting in hedges and watch them carrying materials to build their nests.
- ☐ Look up opportunities for conservation volunteering.
Go to highlandenvironmentforum.info/resources/ and find something near you.
- ☐ Plant some seeds or bee-friendly plants in a pot or outside, ready for summer. Enjoy watching them grow. Visit rspb.org.uk/plantfornature for more ideas.
- ☐ Find a smooth pebble on a beach - keep it in your pocket to remind you of a peaceful time.
- ☐ Look for frogspawn in local ponds - what other pond life can you see?
- ☐ Take a pavement plant walk. How many different pavement plants can you see and are any in flower?
- ☐ Visit the Botanic Gardens in Inverness where you can see plant life all year round. Visit the 'hottest' spot in the Highlands and marvel at the colours of the exotic plants.

April



Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

- ☐ Turn over some soil and plant wildflowers for pollinators such as bees, butterflies and hoverflies: visit rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators.
- ☐ Get out into April showers, feel the rain on your face and watch for rainbows.
- ☐ Take a stroll around your own village/town/local area and note what you see, hear and smell - take a note and make return visits throughout the year to see what changes with the seasons.
- ☐ Listen for a cuckoo calling.
- ☐ Go on a micro safari - choose one small space in nature close to your home and study it up close. Perhaps explore a patch of grass, the trunk of a tree, or the petal of a flower. What colours do you see? Are there any minibeasts around?
- ☐ Look out for swallows, house martins and swifts returning after spending the winter in Africa: rspb.org.uk/swiftswallowmartin.
- ☐ Think about joining a walking or hiking club to help you get out into the hills and meet new friends: visit ramblers.org.uk/highland-islands, greatglenwalking.club.
- ☐ Find a bud on a tree and feel the texture - can you identify the tree?
- ☐ Visit Loch Garten and see if you can spot the ospreys as they return.
- ☐ On a windy day, sit outside and watch how the birds use the wind to hover and swoop across the sky.

May



Thomas Plant

- ☐ Listen to the dawn chorus. You don't need to go far; just open your bedroom window really early. How does your body respond as you listen?
- ☐ Visit a beach and take in the sounds and smells of the sea. Breathe deeply and watch the ocean waves.
- ☐ Don't mow the lawn. Watch wildlife move in and see how many wildflowers find a home in your garden.
- ☐ Plant a native tree. Visit woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/advice for some ideas.
- ☐ Look for kingfishers whizzing by on the River Ness or River Dearn.
- ☐ Visit Caithness to watch the seas for orcas; or go along to Orca Watch: seawatchfoundation.org.uk/orca-watch-3/.
- ☐ Plant a herb in a pot beside your front or back door or on your windowsill. Mint, marjoram or oregano are easy to grow and have a lovely aroma as you pass by. They're tasty in cooking and bees love them too!
- ☐ Find a pond on a warm day and watch for insects and birds visiting.
- ☐ Head to your favourite place to watch the sunset - what sounds do you hear at twilight?
- ☐ Look for daisies and other wildflowers growing in unusual places, bringing colour to our streets and paths.
- ☐ If you can, take a walk in the Oak Woods at Sunart and Glenelg to see the bluebells; or Fort Augustus Abbey or the Ness Islands for bluebells and wild garlic. Feel the colours and smells bring your senses alive.



June

Paul Turner

- ☐ Follow a bumblebee - did you know that there are 24 different types of bumblebees in the UK? How many can you find near your home? Go to bumblebeeconservation.org/bumblebee-species-guide for help identifying different species.
- ☐ Lie in the grass and watch the clouds come and go.
- ☐ Celebrate midsummer! You could welcome the sunrise, have a picnic, make a herb garland, play, or just sit in the open air and enjoy the long, light evenings; or watch the new baby birds being fed by their parents.
- ☐ Open your window or sit outside for half an hour and listen out for flocks of screaming swifts skimming over rooftops. Or enjoy the chattering of sparrows, too.
- ☐ Visit somewhere you know well but look around as if you were looking for the first time. What flowers and plants do you see that you haven't noticed before?
- ☐ Rewild one of your senses - smell everything in nature growing around your home.
- ☐ Look for different types of grass, and notice how different they look and feel.
- ☐ Visit your local bog to see all the dragonflies and cotton grass and if you don't have one local to you visit RSPB Scotland Nature Reserve at Forsinard.
- ☐ Join a NatureWalk for Wellbeing: n4h.co.uk/nature-walks-for-wellbeing.



- ☐ Find a patch of wildflowers and take in all the colours and scents.
- ☐ Visit your local beach and feel the sand between your toes or paddle in the sea. Look out for Arctic terns dipping and diving to feed; but don't go too close if they are on the beach as we don't want to disturb the colonies.
- ☐ Sit by a flowering shrub and see who comes to visit. Record any butterflies at the bigbutterflycount.org.
- ☐ Go for a picnic in a place you've never been before - what is growing around you?
- ☐ Watch out for baby frogs as they disperse from the ponds.
- ☐ Can you find any dandelion clocks dancing in the wind. Are the fluffy white seed heads blowing around? Give them a blow and imagine them carrying away your worries.
- ☐ Explore all the amazing things you can do for wildlife where you live by going to rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-you-can-do/activities.
- ☐ Find some flowers and listen for bumblebees.
- ☐ Look out for moths on your windows at night attracted by the lights. Have a go at making a simple moth trap. Search wildlifewatch.org.uk for ideas.
- ☐ Take a bus trip to somewhere you have never been and write some notes about the nature you find there.

August



Thomas Plant

- ☐ Watch salmon jumping upstream at the Falls of Shin.
- ☐ Look for raspberries and blueberries and taste them straight from the bush.
- ☐ Scan the shores and see the migrating wader numbers start to increase as they return from the Arctic; or go seabird spotting and watch for gannets diving into the waters for fish.
- ☐ Take a walk in the hills to see, feel and smell the heather. Take a deep breath and think about how this gives your local honey its distinct flavour.
- ☐ Watch for bats skimming around in the early evening sky. A popular spot is the Ness Islands.
- ☐ Go for a nature scent walk around where you live. What do you smell in the air? Look for hints of honeysuckle, earthy moss, urban foxes and freshly cut grass.
- ☐ Feed the hungry hedgehogs in your garden to help them build energy for raising hoglets, and fat reserves for their long winter hibernation (from October). Visit rspb.org.uk/hedgehogcafe to learn more.
- ☐ Find some binoculars and just explore what you can see from your garden or from a green space near your home.
- ☐ Pick a cloudless day and just sit on the grass and marvel at how blue the sky is.
- ☐ Spend time near flowing water and just listen to the sounds and watch what floats downstream. Places to go include Corrieshalloch Gorge near Ullapool or Blackrock Gorge.



September

Eleanor Bentall (rspb-images.com)

- ☐ On a clear dark night you may see the Aurora Borealis. Find a place with a clear open view looking north. If you have a smart phone, you can download an app that will tell you when you are most likely to see this phenomenon. Go to aurora-alerts.uk.
- ☐ Find somewhere green to linger at lunchtime or sit beneath a tree and take a break in nature.
- ☐ Go for a walk and look out for different fungi in the woods and elsewhere - but don't eat them!
- ☐ Notice how many types of wildflowers are still in bloom and record what you see at bsbi.org/wildflower-hour.
- ☐ Go for a sound safari and listen out for the curious sounds of nature.
- ☐ Build a bug hotel: rspb.org.uk/buildabughotel.
- ☐ Sit outside in the dark and take deep breaths - what can you smell?
- ☐ Go for a walk and see how many natural 'treasures' you can find - feathers; twigs; leaves; pebbles - or shells if you are near a beach.
- ☐ Look for a snail after rainfall and follow its journey. Notice the slow and steady movements and how it uses its tentacles to sense the world around it, including you! Let yourself slowdown.
- ☐ Watch the dolphins from Chanonry Point - where they come close to land to feed on salmon.



October

Michael Harvey (rspb-images.com)

- ☐ Take a weekly walk and notice the changing colours, light and scents of autumn. Collect some of the fallen autumn leaves and create some artwork with them.
- ☐ Listen to chattering starlings gathering on rooftops. Did you know that starlings are excellent mimics, often copying other bird calls, humans and sometimes even car alarms!
- ☐ Prepare homes for winter wildlife - tend to plants, clean bird baths, fill feeders and let piles of leaves grow: visit [rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/year-round-gardening/October](https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/year-round-gardening/October) for advice.
- ☐ Look out for the gossamer of money spiders' webs in the heather or any tall plants or shrubs near your home.
- ☐ Collect some natural materials for your windowsill. Look out for acorns, conkers and hazelnuts. Find a conker and rub it until it is shiny and feels warm in your hand. Keep it in your pocket. Do you find it comforting?
- ☐ This is a good time for autumn colours and stags roaring in the hills.
- ☐ Listen for the honking and squeaking of the skeins of geese flying south for the winter.
- ☐ Get away from it all by taking a trip to Dunnet Head Lighthouse, which sits on a remote moorland peninsula at the northernmost point of the Scottish mainland. Search [dunnetheadlighthouse.com](https://www.dunnetheadlighthouse.com).
- ☐ Watch squirrels rummaging through autumn leaves.

November



Mark Hamblin (rspb-images.com)

- ☐ Note three good things in nature every day for five days. How does your body feel as you notice them?
- ☐ Plant some spring bulbs.
- ☐ Feed the birds in your garden or the local park - halve an apple and put it on the grass to see if you can attract a blackbird.
- ☐ Look for migrating birds feeding on the berries of rowan trees. Can you spot a fieldfare or redwing? Look for their red armpits!
- ☐ Sit under a tree and be showered by falling leaves. Look for sycamore seeds twirling down from the sky.
- ☐ Sit inside with a hot drink and watch the light fade at the end of the day. How long does it take for the sun to go down?
- ☐ Look for examples of how strong and resilient nature is: trees bending and swaying in high winds or plants still flowering through the frost and snow.
- ☐ Visit Trees for Life Dundreggan Rewilding Estate or Glen Affric and enjoy the smells of autumn in the woods.
- ☐ Go stargazing at the Abriachan Forest Trust. Search Abriachan Forest Trust for more information.
- ☐ Learn something new about nature. Find a book, magazine or online article, or watch a film or programme to find out something you didn't know.



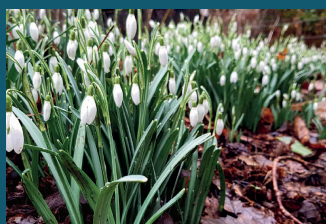
December

Andy Hay (rspb-images.com)

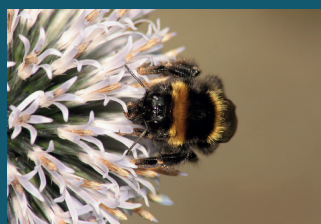
- ☐ Look for the first star appearing in the winter night's sky. What does looking at the stars make you think about?
- ☐ Go for a walk and see where you can still find colour and look for things that grow even in the cold and frost.
- ☐ Find fallen branches, ivy or berries and make a festive wreath.
- ☐ Wrap up warm and stand outside with a warm drink. Look around you. Listen to the sounds of nature.
- ☐ If there has been a frost, look for patterns in the ice on leaves, in puddles, or on car windscreens.
- ☐ At dusk listen for song thrushes singing from the tops of trees and feel your spirits lift.
- ☐ Make it your mission to put out fresh water for birds every day and watch them come for a drink.
- ☐ If it snows, stand outside while the snow is falling and catch snowflakes - listen to the silence of the snow.
- ☐ Plan an outdoor adventure to mark the first day of winter (Winter Solstice) - you could go to watch the sunset at Clava Cairns near Culloden.
- ☐ Reflect back on your year. What was your favourite moment in nature? How does it feel now as you bring it to mind? What are you looking forward to noticing in nature next year?



January



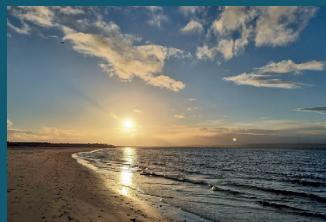
February



March



April



May



June



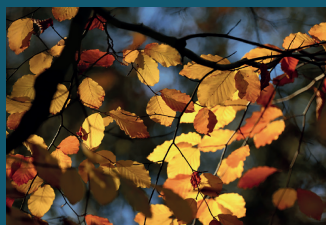
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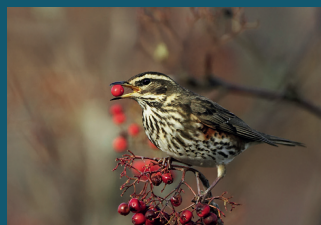
August



September



October



November



December

Finding out more

Discover more fun activities that you can do close to home:
rspb.org.uk/natureonyourdoorstep

The Highland Green Health Partnership - Think Health Think Nature

The partnership works to connect people in the Highlands with nature to improve their health and wellbeing. For local information, a directory of activity providers in Sutherland and resources visit www.thinkhealththinknature.scot

Nature Prescriptions is a collaboration between RSPB Scotland and Think Health Think Nature, to strengthen our connections to nature. It is inspired by growing evidence that nature makes us healthier and happier.

Think Health Think Nature is delivered by the Highland Green Health Partnership which is funded by NatureScot, Scottish Government and the Smarter Choices Smarter Places Fund as part of the Our Natural Health Service programme.



Protecting habitats, saving species
and helping to end the nature and
climate emergency.

**Nature is in crisis.
Together we can save it.**

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