

# Livingston Neighbourhood Nature Spring



In partnership with:



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# Spring and Wellbeing

For many people, as for nature, spring is a time of change and new beginnings as the warmer temperatures and longer daylight hours bring energy and growth.

For people however Spring has also been associated with a rise in the symptoms of depression and anxiety. Researchers are unsure why this is the case but it may be linked to higher energy levels or to unrealistic expectations of instant change after a hard winter.

Whatever the reason it is important to look after your mental wellbeing at this time of year and one of the best ways you can do that is by spending time outdoors. Research has shown that spending time outside, amongst nature, can have a positive effect on everyone's mental health.

Feeling connected to the natural world provides broad positive psychological effects. Spending time outdoors has been shown to increase creativity, energy levels and life satisfaction and to decrease feelings of tension, confusion, anger and depression. The natural world fascinates us all on an instinctual level and these effects are felt across all age groups—and it works even on people who do not believe that they have an interest in nature.

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## Spring Factoids

- For astronomers Spring begins on the 20th March, for meteorologists it begins on the 1st of March.
- For some people Spring is the smelliest season, the high amounts of moisture in the air means smells carry further and are more intense.
- Children actually grow faster in the spring than during other times of the year.
- The famous Egyptian Sphinx – along with many other ancient buildings - was built to face the rising sun on the Spring Equinox.
- Honeybees are more likely to swarm during the spring. They swarm as a way to start new colonies from successful ones.
- March is named for the Roman God of War as in ancient times this month signalled the start of the warfare season.

# Neighbourhood Nature and Wild Ways Well

**Livingston Neighbourhood Nature** is a project that operates in Ladywell, Howden and around St John's Hospital. It is a partnership between TCV and Ladywell Neighbourhood Network and is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and NHS Lothian Charity. It demonstrates what most of us already know instinctively - **spending time outdoors, amongst nature, makes people feel better about themselves and their lives**. It might be especially helpful for issues such as depression, anxiety, low confidence and social isolation.

**Neighbourhood Nature** helps people to get out into their local greenspaces to experience all the amazing things that can be found right on your doorstep. Whilst out amongst the trees and parks participants get a chance to slow down, relax, enjoy being in the company of other like-minded people, and participate in a variety of environmental and conservation related activities.

**Wild Ways Well** is structured around the **Five Ways to Wellbeing**, a proven framework for promoting good mental health in use by organisations all over the world, including the NHS and the major UK mental health charities. The Five Ways to Wellbeing are a simple way of thinking about our mental health, they suggest five easy actions – **Be Active, Take Notice, Connect, Keep Learning and Give** - which we can all take to improve our happiness in our daily lives. Wild Ways Well takes the Five Ways and adapts them to an outdoor environment.

Example activities might include learning about trees, plants and wildlife; trying out forest skills like safe firemaking, shelter building and foraging; conservation activities like wildflower planting or invasive species removal; creative sessions focussed on photography, drawing, sculpting or storytelling; taking part in citizen science activities like wildlife recording and surveying and much more.

These activities are not a replacement for more formal forms of therapy or medication but instead should be seen as a complement to a healthy lifestyle that could benefit anyone.



# Spring Inspiration

Spring is one of the best times to get out and get creative - some of the greatest writers and poets have used this season for inspiration over the years.

**Spring is Nature's way of saying "Let's party!"**

**Robin Williams**

**Springtime is the land awakening. The March winds are the morning yawn.**

**Lewis Grizzard**

**In Spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt.**

**Margaret Atwood**

**There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature – the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.**

**Rachel Carson**

**It's Spring fever. That is what the name of it is. And when you've got it, you want – oh you don't quite know what it is you do want, but it just fairly makes your heart ache, you want it so!**

**Mark Twain**

**It was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold; when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade.**

**Charles Dickens**

**Never cut a tree down in wintertime. Never make a negative decision in the low time. Never make your most important decisions when you are in your worst moods. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass. The Spring will come.**

**Robert H. Schuller**

**"Is the Spring coming?" He said? "What is it like?"**

**"It is the sun shining on the rain and the rain falling on the sunshine."**

**Frances Hodgson Burnett**

**The beautiful Spring came, and when nature resumes her loveliness, the human soul is apt to revive also.**

**Harriet Ann Jacobs**



*“Only spread a fern-frond over a man’s head and worldly cares are cast out, and freedom and beauty and peace come in.”*

**John Muir**

## Lines written in early Spring.

I heard a thousand blended notes,  
While in a grove I sat reclined,  
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts  
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.  
To her fair works did Nature link  
The human soul that through me ran;  
And much it grieved my heart to think  
What man has made of man.  
Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,  
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;  
And 'tis my faith that every flower  
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,  
Their thoughts I cannot measure:—  
But the least motion which they made  
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.  
The budding twigs spread out their fan,  
To catch the breezy air;  
And I must think, do all I can,  
That there was pleasure there.  
If this belief from heaven be sent,  
If such be Nature's holy plan,  
Have I not reason to lament  
What man has made of man?

William Wordsworth

How do you feel about Spring? Write a story, a diary, a  
song or a poem.  
Or just record your thoughts.

# Traditions and Folklore

There are many traditions associated with Spring, for our ancestors it was the time of celebration, of renewal, of love and hope for the future, when the world came back to life after its long winter slumber.

To many Celts the **Spring Equinox** was known as **Alban Eiler**, the time when day and night stood equal and the world was held in the balance. This was a time when nature magic was held to be especially powerful.

In the Western Isles of Scotland, late on in Spring, the ceremony of **Shore Thursday** was carried out. Communities would get together on a stormy night to make huge bowls of porridge, rich with butter and filled with the best ingredients. At midnight it would be tipped into the sea to placate the waves and ensure a good kelp harvest.

On Orkney the sea would be raging with battle as **Teran**, the spirit of winter, battled it out with the **Sea Mither**, the goddess of the summer sea, for control. This was known as the **Vore Tullye** (the Spring Struggle) and huge storms would be stirred up as the two entities fought. Every year the Sea Mither would emerge victorious and Teran would be banished until autumn.

Not all traditions were quite so violent! **Hunting the Gowk** was the old name for April Fool's day and tricks would be pulled on unsuspecting victims until mid-day—but only until mid-day, any later and the trick would fall on the trickster! Gowk is an old word for cuckoo, and these birds don't arrive in Scotland until Summer, so anyone hunting for one in Spring was a bit of a fool! Coincidentally April 1st is also considered the best day to look for wild haggis which graze at dawn on grassy hillsides.

In many farming communities the tradition in spring of **Saining Straw** held strong. A pot of water would be prepared into which would be dropped some metal, often a wedding ring or a horseshoe. A handful of straw would then be dipped into the water and people would use it to scatter drops of water around their house and farm. All the farm equipment and even the horses and livestock would be treated like this to protect them from evil.

**Floralia** the Roman Goddess of flowers had a traditional festival every spring to celebrate the richness of the soil and the fertility of the livestock. Over the years this became **May Day** which is still marked in many communities on May 1st with holidays and dancing. On the same day in other communities **Beltane** is marked with huge fires to celebrate the sun. On this day the **Cailleach Bheur** (the old hag of winter) lays down her staff under a holly or gorse bush and turns to stone to allow **Bride** (the goddess of Spring) to return and bring life back to the land.



## Mad March Hares

The phrase 'as mad as a March hare' was popularised by Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland but is an old saying referring to the species behaviour during the Spring breeding season. When females will force males to compete for her attention by chasing her around the fields. If a male catches her before she is ready she will rise up on her hind legs and strike him with her front paws - known as 'boxing'.

There are two species of hare in Scotland, the **brown hare**, *Lepus europaeus*, and the **mountain hare**, *Lepus timidus*. Only mountain hares (sometimes known as 'alpine', 'white', or 'blue' hares) are native to the UK. The brown hares which are commonly seen in Lowland Scottish fields were brought here by the Romans, probably as a food source.

Mountain hares turn white in winter and are becoming rarer as climate change forces them further and further up the hillsides to find suitable habitat, they are now only found in places like the Cairngorms. The name 'hare' is an old English word for 'grey'. The Scots name is 'mawkins' or 'bawdy' and the Gaelic is 'maigheac' or 'gearr'.

Hares do not burrow, they lay up during the day in 'forms' which are shallow ditches scraped into earth, they'll often use ploughed fields for this and their camouflage, along with their ability to lie perfectly still, makes them almost invisible when they do.

In Scotland it was widely believed that turning into a hare was the preferred disguise for witches and they were persecuted because of this. Coming across a hare on your travels was considered terribly unlucky. Harebells were supposed to be a vital ingredient in the spells used to turn witch into hares.



# New Beginnings

Spring is the time for renewal and new life, many species have evolved to give birth in spring so as to allow their young the longest possible spell of good weather and plentiful food to grow and develop before the difficulties of winter.

**Fox** cubs are generally born in March and April. The female (called a 'vixen') will give birth to 4 or 5 blind and deaf cubs in an underground den. The male fox will bring food while the female looks after the young which won't venture above ground until late April. The cubs will stay with the vixen until autumn. Sometimes daughters and sisters will even stay to help with the family duties next year.

Although **badgers** mate all year round a special adaptation called 'delayed implantation' means fertilised eggs do not begin to develop until December. There is a theory that this implantation is triggered by daylength, meaning that all the badgers in a certain area will implant on the same day. Badger gestation is around 8 weeks so in February it is entirely possible that all the badger cubs in local areas will be born on the same day. A normal litter size is 2-3 cubs and they will explore the underground tunnels for the first weeks of their life, emerging for the first time on warm evenings in April. Badger cubs are very playful and grow quickly, by autumn the male cubs will disperse to find new territories though females might stay with the family (known as a Clan).

**Red squirrels** have a litter of three to four babies in a nest – called a drey - in march. The kittens are totally helpless at birth and are completely dependant on their mother. They are usually weaned by 10 weeks old and quickly begin to fend for themselves. Food can be scarce for squirrels in spring and they will extend their usual seed based diet to include plants, bulbs, and even bird eggs.

**Sparrowhawks** build sturdy nests made from twigs and lined with bark in a concealed spot close in to the trunk of a tree. Sparrowhawk chicks don't hatch until late on in spring, their emergence timed so that is after the majority of prey species like Blue Tits have already been born and are plentiful and easy targets. The eggs are laid over several days so that when all are born the chicks are different sizes. The female will look after the eggs and stay in the nest with the chicks while the male brings food until the chicks are fledged and learn to hunt for themselves.

*'The Primrose opens wide in spring;  
Her scent is sweet and good:  
It smells of every happy thing  
In sunny lane and wood...'*  
Mary Cicely Barker



# Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*)

Primroses gain their common name from the Latin *Prima Rosa* – meaning ‘first flower’ and, before the arrival of the non-native snowdrop, crocus and daffodil, this native plant would indeed have been one of the first flowers to bloom in spring.

The scientific name indicates it is was thought to be the most common member of the primula family, though it is now becoming uncommon due to habitat loss and over picking in some areas. It loves to grow in shady woodland clearings and under hedgerows – it is a good indicator of ancient woodland, when you find primroses check your surroundings, you may be in an ancient place.

Male and female flowers grow on different plants and the flowers can only set seed when both are present in the same area. Many never do so – a fact that was recognised even as far back as Shakespearean times when the great bard wrote of *‘pale primroses that die unmarried’*.

Primroses grow to about 10cm high, the flowers have five notched yellow petals with deeper orangey centres. The leaves form in clusters at the base of the plant and are hairy underneath.

They are closely related to both *oxlips* (*Primula elatior*) and *cowslips* (*Primula veris*). A hybrid, the *false oxlip* (*Primula veris x vulgaris*), can result from cowslips and primroses interbreeding. It tends to grow taller and has paler flowers but can be hard to distinguish.

They are a great nectar source but flower a little early for the majority of pollinators. Perhaps their primary beneficiaries are ants who are attracted to the fertilised seeds and carry them off to their nests – dispersing the seeds as they do.

They were once supposedly considered to be a special treat for children to eat and teas – and even wines – were brewed from the flowers and leaves. There is however now a fair amount of evidence that they commonly cause allergic reactions so they shouldn’t be picked for foraging – especially as they are so overharvested in any case. It was said that some children who ate the leaves were able to see fairies – which may be a hint of the allergic reactions.

They were also commonly used to treat minor skin conditions like acne as well as cuts and bruises, though again due to the dangers of allergic skin reactions they should probably be avoided.

In folklore it was believed that planting primroses by your doorway kept fairies out of the house- though, confusingly, hanging them over your doorway was an invitation for fairies to come in! Knocking on a rock with a bunch of primroses might open a door to the land of the fairies... though you have to have exactly the right number of flowers in your bunch. Get it wrong and you'll be dragged down to fairyland never to return!

There is a common folk belief that planting a primrose upside down will cause it to grow red flowers. This isn't true though you can now get cultivars of primroses in a variety of colours (these should only ever be planted in your garden, not in the wild!)

There is also a traditional link between primroses and baby chickens or geese. Bringing the wrong number into the house would prevent eggs from hatching – this is a common belief with many spring flowers.

A primrose petal under the pillow was a sure cure for insomnia and the '**he loves me, he loves me not**' game where you pick the petals off the flowers to reveal your true love was originally played with primroses (though as almost all have five petals it was pretty easy to make sure you got the right answer!). Finding a primrose with six petals was a sign of great luck.

To '**Take the Primrose Path**' meant to spend too much time chasing joy and pleasure, or to always look for the easiest way through life rather than attending to your work and duties. It was a sure route to punishment and damnation in Christian tradition.

Primroses were supposedly the favourite flower of the British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli and Queen Victoria regularly sent him bunches of the flowers. He died on April 19<sup>th</sup> 1881 and the Queen sent a wreath of primroses to his funeral (though she probably did so in memory of the deceased Prince Albert as they were his favourite flower too). Since then **April 19<sup>th</sup> has been celebrated as Primrose Day in the UK** and Disraeli's statue in Parliament Square is decorated with them on this day every year.

In the language of flowers primroses represented youth, young love – and inconstant love. Giving someone a bunch was a signal that you felt you couldn't live without them.

# Daffodil (*Narcissus* sp.)

The scientific name for the daffodil is *Narcissus* and there are lots of different species which come under this common name, many of them cultivars – plants bred into different forms over the years by gardeners.

There is also a wild species *Narcissus psuedonarcissus* which is native to England and Wales and can sometimes be found in Scotland (it is possible they were brought here by the Romans). True wild daffodils are yellow and a little smaller than most cultivars—around 35cm tall. The leaves and stem are a pale silvery grey/green shade and the outer petals are a paler shade of yellow than the dark inner trumpet. They like shady, damp, rocky places. They were once common but habitat loss has led to a great decline in their numbers.

Though daffodils are not native to Scotland they are not considered invasive, so although they shouldn't be planted in wild places there is no real effort to remove them.

According to legend *Narcissus* was a young man who lived in ancient Greece and he was so beautiful it was prophesised that should he ever discover his own beauty he would die. One day the river nymph *Echo* saw him walking and immediately fell in love, but *Narcissus* rejected her causing her to wither and die, leaving only her voice behind. As punishment for his cruelty the goddess *Nemesis* caused *Narcissus* to see his own reflection in a pool of water. He was so fascinated with his own looks that he was rooted to the spot, unable to look away even as he slowly turned into a flower.

## Daffodils

*I wander'd lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host of golden daffodils,  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.*

*Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way,  
They stretch'd in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.*

*The waves beside them danced, but they  
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee: -  
A poet could not but be gay  
In such a jocund company!*

*I gazed - and gazed - but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought.  
For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills  
And dances with the daffodils.*

**William Wordsworth**

Other theories say the name narcissus comes from the Greek word *'narke'* and has the same root meaning as *'narcotic'* - Roman soldiers supposedly carried daffodils to numb the pain from wounds. Daffodils are actually poisonous to humans and many animals, the stems and leaves can cause rashes on unprotected skin and can burn or cause swelling in the mouth if ingested. The bulbs can cause diarrhoea, nausea and convulsions if eaten. Even the cut flowers can cause headaches if left in an enclosed space. There is some modern research on certain chemicals within them for drugs to treat alzheimers and cancer.

Daffodils are often known as **Lenten lilies** as they bloom in the period before Easter – traditionally it was believed that they all died on Easter day. It is possible they were originally called *'affodells'* before the modern name arose. Affodell was a reference to a mythical flower called the asphodel which the ancient Greeks believed flowered in the afterlife and so daffodils became associated with death in Victorian times.

In the language of flowers **Daffodils meant one sided love**, they could express the non-romantic feeling of joy experienced when with someone - or they could be used by a lady to politely decline a gentleman's advances while thanking him for his admiration.

There are a few folk beliefs associated with daffodils. It was believed that you could gain fortune by walking among them without trampling the flowers. Bringing a single flower into a home would bring certain death – but finding the first daffodil of the year would ensure your purse would overflow with gold. The King is paid the princely sum of one daffodil per year from the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust for rent of the land they manage – presumably he doesn't bring it inside!





*She turned to the sunlight  
And shook her yellow head  
And whispered to her neighbour  
'Winter is dead.'*

A.A. Milne



*I don't ask for the meaning of the  
song of a bird or the rising of the sun  
on a misty morning. There they are,  
and they are beautiful.*

**Pete Hamil**



# Story - The Herald of Spring

Nowadays we are used to thinking of the world as a very settled place, night follows day, the sun sets and the moon rises. The seasons pass in order, every winter followed by a spring.

But it hasn't always been so. Long ago, when the world was still new, great battles raged between the elements. It did not seem quite so obvious to the spirits of the season that each should pass in turn, that autumn should turn to winter, or that winter should give way to spring.

**Winter** had long regarded herself as the most powerful of the seasons. She had the great **North Wind** as her ally, she could summon the snow and the ice, and as the power of the **Sun** waned in the sky she could freeze the water in the streams and wells. All had to take shelter when **Winter** raged, and none but the strongest could stand against her fury. She had long regarded **Spring** as her inferior and did not agree that she should have to give up her time on earth for another.

One year, as the Spring Equinox approached, **Winter** decided that this time she would not give way. This year she would remain, blanketing the earth in snow, and dare anyone to oppose her.

**Winter** knew that the other seasons would turn to **Summer** as being the only one that could truly be pitted against her. **Spring** alone would not have the strength, and **Autumn** would be too tired and lazy. Only the strength of the **Summer Sun**, beating down from the sky could possibly stand against her.

The only thing which could defy the **Sun** was the **Moon**, so **Winter** spoke to her and offered her friendship. **Winter** felt they should be natural allies, her long dark nights were perfect for the **Moon** to shine in all her glory, and the **Moon** herself had always felt that her silvery light looked best reflected off an icy landscape.

The bargain was struck. The **Moon** agreed that on the morning of the Spring Equinox she would not retreat from the sky and allow the **Sun** to take his proper place. The old agreement would be broken and **Winter**, and the **Moon**, would rule forever.

And so it came to pass that on that fateful morning the **Moon** did not set and so the **Sun** could not rise. The world was bathed in darkness and **Winter** brought her cruel **North Wind** and freezing ice to sweep the land.

The creatures of the world were in turmoil. Such a thing had never happened before and they didn't know how to respond. **Hedgehogs** and **Bees** awoke from their hibernation to find the world was still dark and cold. **Trees** extended their leaves but found no sunlight to give them strength. **Otters** found their streams were frozen, **Birds** could not find their voices to sing without light and warmth to give them hope.

All the plants and animals called a great conclave, a meeting deep in the woods, where the oldest and wisest trees lived. All life was represented there and their discussion went on for hours as the **Moon** hung in the sky, lost in wonder at her own silvery light reflected back at her from the ice and snow below.

They talked and they talked but no agreement could be reached. Old enmities and grudges meant that they could not agree to work together and no-one was brave enough to stand against **Winter** alone.

Finally when hope seemed all but lost, one last voice spoke up. It was a small voice, so quiet it almost could not be heard, and it came from low in the undergrowth. The animals and trees all stood aside to see who was speaking and were amazed to find it was the tiny **Celandine**, least among the woodland plants, who grew un-regarded on the forest floor.

*"I will stand against Winter, if no-one else will. I am one of the first of my kind to appear after the snows, calling in the dim light for others to follow. Few have noticed me because I grow so low and my flowers are so small but I have always heralded the arrival of Spring and I will do so again whatever may come."*

The **Wolves** and the **Foxes** laughed at the temerity of this little plant to speak up amongst all the great voices of the world. They were some of the strongest creatures around and they were not altogether sure they didn't prefer the new arrangement in any case, endless night might suit their purposes very well indeed.

But many others were touched by the **Celandine's** bravery. The **Birch**, the **Rowan**, the **Oak** and the **Ash** stepped forward.

*"If you who are so small will stand against Winter then we can do no less than stand alongside you. Our strong trunks will protect you from the North Wind and our branches will hold the worst of the snow and ice at bay. You can grow beneath us in safety and gather your strength."*

The **Bees** also came forward.

*“We will emerge from hibernation and fly, even in the freezing air, amongst your flowers, collecting your pollen so that you can spread as far and wide as possible.”*

Then the **Sun** itself spoke.

*“I cannot appear whole in the sky while night still holds sway, but perhaps I can help. I will split myself into a million golden sunbeams and give a part to each of your flowers. They will shine with the golden light of the sun and bring my light, even into the dark of winter.”*

And so their plans were set into motion. Protected by the strong trees of the woods and spread by the hard working bees the **Celandine** colonised the woodland floor. As it grew in **Winter’s** darkness it worked in secret, keeping its petals closed against the cold and the ice.

And then, on the morning of the 21st February all was ready.

As the time came for sunrise, the **Moon**, like she had every night for the past year, hung high in the sky refusing to give way. As one, every **Celandine** in the woods turned its flower upwards and opened its petals, each flower shining with the golden light of a summers’ day.

Unable to withstand the light blazing up from the earth the **Moon** faded into the background, night was ended, and dawn broke for the first time in an age as the **Sun** returned and rose over the world.

**Winter** had no choice but to give way before the **Sun** as she had so many times before. She fled and hid beneath a **Holly** tree as **Spring** walked through the woods, flowers blooming everywhere her feet touched the earth. **Spring** tapped on trees to awaken them from their winter slumber and they spread their leaves to gather the sunlight. She gently awoke hedgehogs from their nests and set the streams to flowing so that otters could swim once again. Everywhere **Spring** walked she brought light and hope and the birds in the trees sang with the joy of her coming.

The plants and animals all knew they had the **Celandine** to thank for their deliverance and they all agreed that from now on it would have special status in the woods. For ever after it would be allowed to spread far and wide beneath the protective arms of the trees, shining through the woods like a million sunbeams, banishing **Winter** and heralding the coming of the **Spring**.

# Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*)

*“And out once more in varnish’d glory shine  
Thy stars of celandine.”*

**Tennyson**

Beloved of poets the lesser celandine brings a much needed splash of early colour in spring.

Bright yellow, star shaped flowers, each around 3cm across, with 8-12 petals. Glossy green heart shaped leaves grow on long stalks.

Found in damp, shady places, woodlands, hedgerows, meadows and riverbanks, its golden flowers can cover the ground like a blanket. They open in sunlight, giving it a reputation as a sunlover. In fact people believed you could use it to predict the weather!

*“There’s a flower that shall be mine,  
'Tis the little Celandine.”*

**William Wordsworth**

Wordsworth loved lesser celandines so much he asked for one to be carved onto his gravestone. Unfortunately the stonemason got a bit confused and carved a greater celandine (a completely unrelated plant) instead.

Its not all about beauty however. Our ancestors thought that lesser celandine’s knobbly, lumpy roots reminded them of something... The flower was given the common name *‘pilewort’* because under the *‘Doctrine of Signatures’* (the belief that plants could cure parts of the body or illnesses that they physically resembled) lesser celandine was considered to be a sure cure for haemorrhoids.



# Spring Activities

Try 1 activity per week for the 12 weeks of Spring.

## Go on a picnic

Wrap up warm (it is only spring!) and take your lunch outdoors with you. After a cold winter getting outside and enjoying the fresh air can be a great boost.

## Install a bird box

You can buy one or make one—there are lots of instructions like this one online [www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/resource/build-a-nest-box-for-birds](http://www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/resource/build-a-nest-box-for-birds).

Some boxes can even have a camera installed so you can watch the new bird families make a start in life.

## Sow some seeds

Set aside a corner of your garden and sow some native wildflower seeds, these will give an amazing boost to all sorts of wildlife through the year.

## Look for your first bumblebee

Bumblebee queens can be out and about prospecting for nectar and nesting sites on any warm spring day. Keep an eye out—and if she's looking tired try giving her a spoonful of sugar water to drink!

## Learn a bird song

Every bird has a different call and as you walk through the woods or streets you'll hear all sorts of noises as birds call out the joys of spring. See if you can identify different birds by their song.

## Start a nature art project

Pick a subject that you can follow for the whole season or even the whole year. Perhaps you could photograph a particular colour or draw the same spot in different seasons? You could make a collage of leaves or simply sit in a beautiful place and write. Don't worry about your ability, just express yourself.

## **Plant a tree**

Spring is a good time to plant a tree so it has time to acclimatise before the hot summer weather. Plant one in your garden or find a volunteer group to help plant one in a park or nature reserve.

## **Volunteer**

Find a local volunteer group, community group or environmental charity and see what volunteering opportunities there are. Check [www.volunteerscotland.net](http://www.volunteerscotland.net) or the TCV Scotland website [www.tcv.org.uk/scotland](http://www.tcv.org.uk/scotland)

## **Make a bug hotel**

Pile up leaves, twigs, moss, stones etc. into a heap and leave it somewhere secluded. It'll provide perfect habitat for all sorts of beneficial insects to live and breed in.

## **Smell the flowers**

Use your senses, don't just explore nature with your eyes, start tuning in your sense of smell. Try and tell different flowers apart by their different scents or look for the fresh smell of a woodland or meadow after rainfall.

## **Skip stones across a pond**

Find a nice flat stone and relive your youth! Skim a stone across the surface of the water, how many skips can you get?

## **Spot a rainbow**

Go out after a spring shower and spot a rainbow, try photographing or drawing it. Or why not see if you can find a nature rainbow? Look for different colours of leaves, flowers, plants, birds and animals.

# Grow some micro-greens

**Microgreens** are really just vegetable seedlings harvested while the plant is still in its primary growing stage.

Though the plants are still tiny at this stage some research has shown that they are still packed with nutritional value, at concentration levels up to 40 times that of their mature forms.

Many of these nutrients are vital for our health—and the link between eating well and good mental wellbeing is well established—but even if you're not concerned about the nutritional value, microgreens can also be a great addition to your meals for their delicate flavours and bright colours.

## Micro-green Varieties

Why not get started with some of these—you'll find seeds in supermarkets and garden centres, or you can order them online.

**Radish**—*tall and colourful, harvest after 7 days and sprinkle into a stir fry.*

**Peas**—*you'll have to pre soak the seeds before planting, harvest after 12 days.*

**Swiss Chard**—*another colourful one, harvest after 10 days*

**Coriander**—*flavour packed when stirred into soup, harvest after 14 days*

**Broccoli**—*a great spicy addition to an omelette, harvest after 10 days*

**Beetroot**—*add a splash of colour to your salad, harvest after 10 days*

**Fennel**—*powerful aniseed flavour, harvest after 10 days*

Try growing them in little pots, or in cardboard egg boxes, on your windowsill.



**Cowslip (*Primula veris*)**



*Thank you, pretty cow, that made  
Pleasant milk to soak my bread,  
Every day and every night,  
Warm, and fresh, and sweet,  
and white.*

*Do not chew the hemlock rank,  
Growing on the weedy bank;  
But the yellow cowslips eat;  
They perhaps will make it sweet.*

*Where the purple violet grows,  
Where the bubbling water flows,  
Where the grass is fresh and fine,  
Pretty cow, go there to dine.*

Robert Louis Stevenson

# Citizen Science – Wildlife Recording

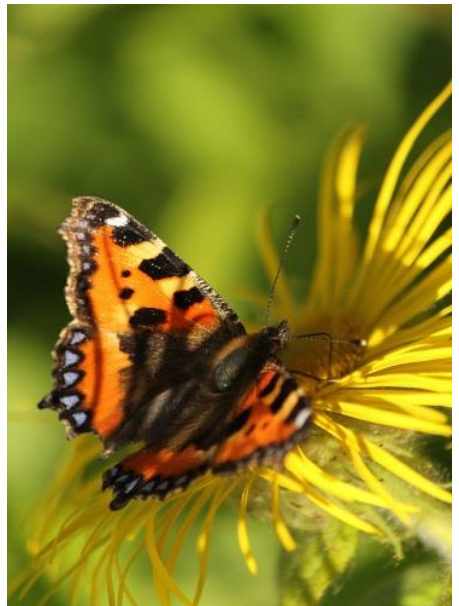
Recording wildlife is easy to do and it makes a real contribution to science and conservation, as well as improving your own knowledge of the species that surround you and your identification skills.

You don't need to be a wildlife expert to be a recorder, we want records of all the species that live around us, even the most common and easily identifiable – if you can recognise a robin or a squirrel, then you can take part. In fact common species are often very under-recorded as most people don't realise that the records are wanted - think about it, if you saw a golden eagle in your garden you would tell everyone... but who do you tell when you see a sparrow?

If the conservation and scientific community don't know which species can be found where then they don't know which areas should be protected and which species are thriving – or in need of help. By regularly contributing records you'll be adding to this information, building up a picture of the wildlife all across Britain and providing early warning of its status.

There are a whole host of organisations out there running recording schemes for members of the public to take part in and the information gained in this way is one of the most important resources in conservation. If you've ever seen a news report about the decline of bumblebee numbers, or the appearance of a new species in a particular area – then it's likely the information will have come from wildlife recorders just like you!

A good place to start recording, and to find ideas of things to look for is the Woodland Trust's Nature Calendar website [www.naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk)



# Making a Wildlife Record

Making a **Nature Record** couldn't be easier. All you need are four basic pieces of information, the 4 W's—**Who**, **When**, **Where** and **What**.

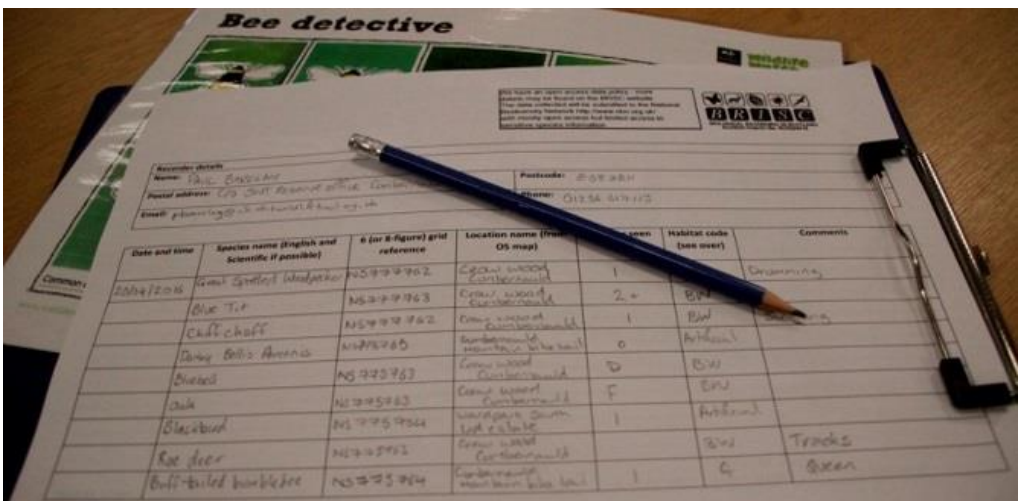
**Who** - The easiest one, the person who made the sighting, usually this will be yourself!

**When** - The date on which you made your sighting, this can provide vital clues to issues such as species migration and even climate change

**Where** – So that anyone interested in your records can find where they were made you need to supply two pieces of information. The first is a common name that everyone will recognise - a good example would be the nearest town, river or landmark. The second piece of information is a bit more precise, the Ordnance Survey Grid Reference. There's lots of advice online about how to find a grid reference – or even apps for your smartphone that will do it automatically.

**What** – This is the exciting bit, what did you see? All you need is the name of the species for a good wildlife record. You should only record things you're sure of, but it is fine to simply write down "crow" or "bumblebee" if you can't identify the exact species. As you begin to record wildlife regularly you'll soon start to notice the differences between species and it won't be long before you're able to note down more details. There are all sorts of guides and apps available online to help you – a photograph might be useful too.

And that's it! With these four basic pieces of information you've made a wildlife record. If you go to the website <https://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord> you can enter your records and they will be added to the NBN Atlas <https://nbnatlas.org> the national database which contains all of the UK's wildlife records. From here scientists, politicians and conservationists can all use the information you provided to help protect wildlife.



# Experience Your Senses

One of the best things you can do while you're outdoors is tune into your senses. We're all used to experiencing the world through the things we can see – but what about all the other ways we can interact with what's going on around us?

Lots of people say we have five senses - What are they?

**Sight : Sound : Smell : Touch : Taste**

Head out into a natural space, sit or stand somewhere quietly, and close your eyes. Concentrate on your breathing.

**Inhale** slowly through your nose for a count of **4 seconds**.

**Hold** your breath for **4 seconds** (or however long feels comfortable)

**Exhale** slowly through your mouth for **5 seconds**

Do this five times and then open your eyes and say out loud:

**Five things you can See**  
**Four things you can Hear**  
**Three things you can Feel**  
**Two things you can Smell**  
**One thing you can Taste**

You actually have lots more senses than these five – can you think of any?

**Heat** – you can tell the difference between hot and cold.

**Orientation** – you can tell if you're standing up, lying down, or even upside down.

**Movement** – you can tell the difference between moving and standing still.

**Balance** – you know when you're going to fall over.

**Proprioception** – the sense of where your body is in relation to itself (close your eyes and touch your nose – how do you do that without looking?).

**Hunger** – you know when you need to refuel.

**Can you think of any more?**

**Take these senses one by one and find a way to experience or examine them while in a greenspace.**

How do you think the animals that live in these woods experience their senses? Do they have the same senses as you? What about the trees? What can they feel?

# Greenspace Journal

How much time do you actually spend outdoors every day? Keep a journal to find out, it might surprise you. Once you've recorded a week, try to do better the next week.

<b>Mon</b>	
<b>Tue</b>	
<b>Wed</b>	
<b>Thurs</b>	
<b>Fri</b>	
<b>Sat</b>	
<b>Sun</b>	

<b>Mon</b>	
<b>Tue</b>	
<b>Wed</b>	
<b>Thurs</b>	
<b>Fri</b>	
<b>Sat</b>	
<b>Sun</b>	

# Wee Ways to Wellbeing

Why not try some of these simple activities to help you engage with nature this spring?

Take your shoes and socks off and walk barefoot across the grass

Go stargazing. Look out for the Lyrid meteor shower in April or try to find the star Arcturus (the Herdsman) who follows the Great Bear around the sky (follow the handle of the plough diagonally downwards until you see a bright star)

Take a walk and look for wildflowers beginning to poke up through the ground

Take a close look at the birds around you – can you spot any pairs? Can you see male birds displaying or females checking out a prospective mate?

Make some rock art – you could paint some pebbles or try collecting stones and arranging them into an artwork – try searching online for artists like Andy Goldsworthy for inspiration.

Make an animal footprint cast – you can find instructions to make plaster track casts online

Get up early, find a spot which faces east and watch the sunrise

Build a nest. Gather together some sticks, leaves, grass and soft materials like moss and see if you can weave them into a nest worthy of a bird – remember not to damage any living plants!

Check ponds for signs of frogs and toads – Can you find some frogspawn?

Go out into the woods at dusk (make sure someone knows where you are – or go with a friend) and experience the woods growing dark around you

Pinch the young leaves off from stinging nettle plants and brew up some nettle tea

If you have somewhere you walk regularly then make an effort to notice what's new. What has changed since your last visit? How is spring progressing?

Make a wildlife record – write down what you saw, when you saw it and where you saw it, then submit it to [www.brc.ac.uk/irecord](http://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord)

Look for squirrels nests – large balls of twigs high up in trees, usually close in against the trunk.

# Wee Ways to Wellbeing

Go for a walk in the woods. Get as far away from roads and houses as you can and take a deep breath of fresh air

Look for the first bumblebees emerging from hibernation

Write a letter to your local newspaper or post online in favour of conservation. Encourage a friend to care about nature

Listen to the birds sing in the trees. Copy one of the calls and see if you can start a conversation

Move as quietly as you can through the woods. What do you see differently? Can you move as silently as a deer?

Help your local hedgehogs. Put some food and water out for them as they emerge from hibernation. If you have a garden fence speak to your neighbours and put a small hole in it to allow hedgehogs to pass through

Start a spring photo or art project

Look in muddy places – there's always lots of mud in spring - for tracks of badgers or deer walking through the woods

Treat the bees – plant some native wildflower seeds in a pot or window box

Take your lunch and a hot drink outside and find somewhere natural to enjoy it

Find a new conservation blog or social media channel and follow it

Look for three different tree species in your local area (look for different colours and textures on the trunk and different shapes and colours of twigs, and buds). Watch for when they first come into leaf. Which species comes first? Which takes the longest?

If you have a garden add some water to it. Make a pond, it doesn't have to be large, even a washing up bowl buried in the ground or among rocks will attract wildlife. You can find instructions online – try the Scottish Wildlife Trust or TCV websites. Remember to always make a ramp or stepping stone so anything which falls into your pond can get back out.

Go out in a spring storm, feel the wind on your skin, unleash your inner child and splash in a puddle. Then come home and get warm!

Volunteer! A great way to get outside is to join a volunteer group, check out the TCV or Volunteer Scotland websites.

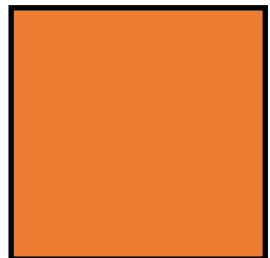
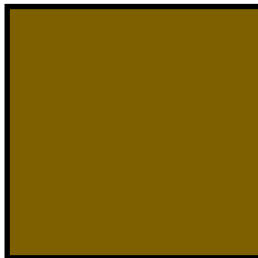
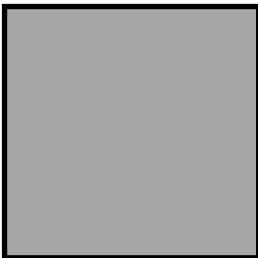
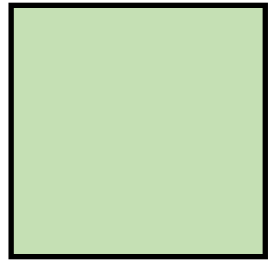
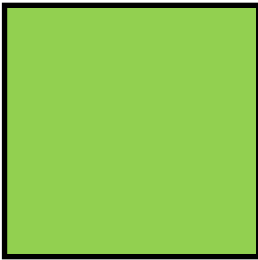
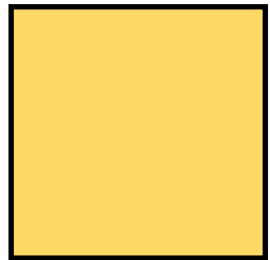
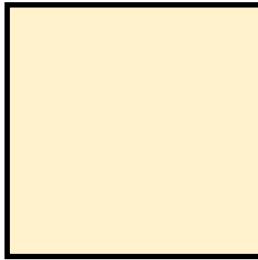
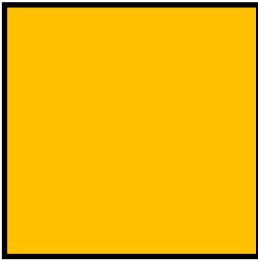
# Look for Spring Colour

In winter it can sometimes feel like all the colour disappears from the natural world – but in reality it is still there, you just have to look for it!

There are many plant species which flower even in the depths of winter, and some – like snowdrops and primroses which herald the return of spring. Winter is one of the best times to look for fungi and some species can have vivid colours to match even the showiest of flowers. You'll also find a surprising range of colours on tree barks and even on some of the birds and animals that share our neighbourhood with us.

## Instructions

Go for a walk in your local woodlands and find something natural that **EXACTLY** matches the colours in these squares – you could also use crayons, paint samples, coloured pens – or even the colours on your favourite winter socks!





# Spring Scavenger Hunt

**A bird carrying some twigs in its beak to build a nest**

**Some spring flower shoots pushing through the earth**

**A wild primrose**

**A green leaf bursting out of its bud**

**A bumblebee looking for a nest hole**

**Some colourful fungi**

**A squirrel running through the tree branches**

**A singing bird perched on a tree branch**

**A tree with flowers hanging from its twigs**

**Some toad or frog spawn in water**

**A daffodil with a dark yellow trumpet and pale outer petals**

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SPRING WORDSEARCH

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A	N	A	L	O	B	I	F	G	L	S	N	E	N
W	R	R	B	R	I	D	E	C	U	Z	Y	T	N
G	C	B	O	N	R	D	Z	A	A	F	N	S	A
P	J	E	N	N	D	P	E	W	L	Z	I	B	N
B	G	G	L	H	S	S	L	A	F	N	A	E	G
R	O	I	D	A	O	B	F	K	L	I	N	V	N
F	M	N	L	R	N	B	Z	E	B	A	A	B	X
E	D	N	M	E	G	D	T	N	R	E	G	V	B
G	A	I	R	X	U	W	I	I	G	F	B	G	F
Z	R	N	B	B	N	O	R	N	D	A	P	A	V
P	B	G	F	N	O	H	N	G	E	G	U	B	T
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L	G	U	N	H	U	H	L	D	N	A	N	E	V

AWAKENING   BEGINNING   BELTANE   BIRDSONG   BRIDE   CELANDINE  
DAFFODIL   HARE   LEAFBUD   NEST   PRIMROSE

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# Spring Quiz

Try your hand at this Spring nature quiz – all the answers can be found somewhere in this booklet.

- 1. What sport are hares said to be playing in March?
- 2. Which Roman God is the month of March named after?
- 3. Where does the Cailleach Bheur go to sleep at the start of Spring?
- 4. What flower was carved onto the gravestone of the poet William Wordsworth?
- 5. What is the common name for the flower lesser celandine?
- 6. What date in Spring do we go traditionally go hunting the gowk – its also the best time to see wild haggis?
- 7. What do daffodils represent in the language of flowers?
- 8. How many cubs do female badgers usually have in Spring?
- 9. According to astronomers, when is the first day of Spring?
- 10. What does the name 'Primrose' mean?

1. Boxing; 2. Mars; 3. Beneath a Holly tree; 4. Greater celandine; 5. Pilewort; 6. April 1st; 7. No; 8. One sided love; 9. 20th March, 10. The first flower

*Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings the tune without the words,  
And never stops at all,*

*And sweetest in the gale is heard;  
And sore must be the storm  
That could abash the little bird  
That kept so many warm.*

*I've heard it in the chillest land,  
And on the strangest sea;  
Yet, never, in extremity,  
It asked a crumb of me.*

**Emily Dickinson**



# The Five Ways to Wellbeing



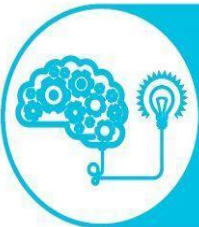
**BE ACTIVE** – Take part in health walks and practical outdoor activities. Explore your local paths, woods and greenspaces.

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



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

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



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

## Spending time with nature improves wellbeing

Spending time outdoors, amongst nature, makes people feel better about their lives.

Whilst out amongst the trees, parks and reserves participants get a chance to slow down, relax and enjoy being in the company of other people.

All of our sessions include a walk, a chance to safely socialise with other people over a hot drink (often round a fire) and opportunities to try a variety of environmental and conservation related activities designed to fit in with the internationally recognised Five Ways to Wellbeing mental health framework.

## Wild Ways Well and Spring

Spring is one of the most important times to get outdoors and enjoy nature. Many of us will have naturally slowed down over winter, so getting out now can be a great antidote to those winter blues. The world around you is bursting with energy and changing by the hour as plants and animals come back to life with a roar.

Find a greenspace near you and **Be Active**—go for a walk and discover what is there to be found. By exploring new areas you can be the first to see some of the welcome signs of spring like snowdrops bursting through the ground.

This is a great time to **Connect** with the world around you. You can share in the trials of a plant struggling out of the earth to gain the best share of the sunlight, or a bee coming out of hibernation and searching for nectar.

**Take Notice** of everything around you. Spring is a brilliant time to spot wildlife with all sorts of plants and creatures reappearing after their winter lull. Look out for migratory birds arriving back to breed, watch and listen to them sing and collect materials for their nests. The woods can change almost daily at this time of year with leaves filling out and new plant and insect species emerging all the time.

There is always more to **Learn** when studying nature. How does each species greet the new spring, how do they adapt to the change in temperatures, what triggers their new behaviour? Where do animals live, how do they choose a potential future mate? What new opportunities are there for life every day?

There are lots of ways to **Give** in Spring. This is a brilliant time to take up wildlife recording, noting down what you see and letting conservation organisations and scientists know about it. The Woodland Trust's Nature's Calendar website is a great place to start. You could raise the profile of your greenspace by taking a camera out with you and sharing your photos with people you know or post them online for the world to enjoy. You could do the same by writing poetry or sketching.

Spring is a time of great energy and renewal, embrace this, be part of it, feel the surge of energy move through nature into you. But at the same time be careful not to overdo things or expect too much. Use the time wisely, recover after the long winter. Take heed of nature, seek out new opportunities, but don't overstretch yourself, do only what you feel capable of and comfortable with.

# Join our Nature Sessions

Working in partnership with TCV, Ladywell Neighbourhood Network, the NHS Lothian Charity and St John's Hospital we are helping people to discover the nature on their doorsteps and learn how they bring it into their daily life. Our sessions are free of charge and we provide all the materials and equipment needed. There is no need to have any previous knowledge or experience of nature or the outdoors.

Each session involves a short walk (taken at a gentle pace), a chance to relax and chat (if you want) over a hot drink and time to immerse yourself in the outdoors, as well as a chance to get in touch with nature and find out how it can help you – and how you can help nature in return.

Sessions are run weekly on weekdays and regularly at evenings and weekends. Everything is done at your pace and there will always be experienced, friendly guides and leaders, who understand mental health issues, there to help.

Every session will be different, our activities will change with the seasons and there will always be something new to do or experience.

**If you are an individual who would like to take part, a group leader, or someone who would like to refer participants to the project you can find out more details by contacting Paul Barclay directly - [p.barclay@TCV.org.uk](mailto:p.barclay@TCV.org.uk) - 07795 800970**



## Links

### **The Conservation Volunteers**

[www.tcv.org.uk/scotland](http://www.tcv.org.uk/scotland)

### **Ladywell Neighbourhood Network**

[www.ladywellnn.org.uk](http://www.ladywellnn.org.uk)

### **NHS Lothian Charity**

[www.nhslothiancharity.org](http://www.nhslothiancharity.org)

### **The Five Ways to Wellbeing**

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/five-ways-to-mental-wellbeing](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/five-ways-to-mental-wellbeing)

### **Our Natural Health Service**

[www.nature.scot/professional-advice/contributing-healthier-scotland/our-natural-health-service](http://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/contributing-healthier-scotland/our-natural-health-service)

### **NHS Mental Health**

[www.healthscotland.scot/health-topics/mental-health-and-wellbeing](http://www.healthscotland.scot/health-topics/mental-health-and-wellbeing)

### **SamH**

[www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk)

### **The Samaritans**

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) **call** 116 123 **email** [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

### **Breathing Space**

[www.breathingspace.scot](http://www.breathingspace.scot) **call** 0800 83 85 87

### **Shout – text ‘shout’ to 85258**

[www.giveusashout.org](http://www.giveusashout.org)