

# *The benefits of nature for people with autism*



It's common knowledge that spending time out of the house can benefit our physical and mental health. But while a brisk walk in the park is always a great idea, nothing quite beats a visit to the countryside and immersing yourself in nature.

There have been some studies specifically looking into the benefits of nature for people with autism, and the results have been encouraging. Here are some of the reasons why autistic people might enjoy time in the great outdoors.

## **Improving wellbeing**

Whether we have ASD or not, time outdoors can do wonders for our wellbeing. Even just looking at pictures of nature has been shown to instantly reduce feelings of stress. Time in green spaces is also known to:

- Make us more physically fit
- Improve our self confidence
- Help us meet new people and make friends
- Encourage us to try new things and learn new skills
- Reduce feelings of loneliness

Activities may need to be adapted for each person's specific needs, and make sure to encourage them once they find something they enjoy doing outdoors.

## **A source of interests**

Nature is a fascinating thing, and by spending time in and around it, autistic people can develop an interest in wildlife, plants and exploration. Birds are a common example, and for many, birdwatching has become a lifelong hobby.

## **Learning new skills**

There are countless things we can only do outside the house, so by engaging in activities like cycling, sailing and orienteering, autistic people can learn a whole range of new skills.

Many professional activity companies are more than happy to cater for autistic individuals, with staff specially trained to help them feel at ease and garner a sense of achievement. These kinds of activities usually mean low-pressure socialising too, which can help autistic people be more confident around others.

## Unique sensory experiences

Speaking of things we can only do outside the house, plenty of sensory experiences are also exclusive to the outdoors. There are so many sounds, smells, colours and textures when we step outside, and while it's understandable to be concerned about sensory overload, this can be mitigated by setting expectations and reassuring the person that they're in control.

By spending time in nature, autistic people can get a sense for what they do and don't like, and may find specific settings, such as woodland areas, that they feel particularly comfortable in.

