



for birds  
for people  
for ever



# NATURAL FIT

Physical inactivity has serious effects on human health, which cost the UK economy more than £8 billion a year. New research commissioned by the RSPB underlines the strong links between good physical health and the natural environment. Outdoor activities, particularly walking, offer a cheap and accessible route to better health for all, and address many of today's pressing public health issues. The continued use of green space for physical activity is strongly linked to the quality of the landscape – in terms of beauty, diversity, and contact with nature.

## About the RSPB

The RSPB is Europe's largest wildlife conservation charity with over one million members. We advocate the creation of more opportunities for people to enjoy the countryside – this means more natural habitats and wildlife, and more recreational access for all (without damaging the environment).

## Our research: natural health for national fitness

Green space has a key role to play in the drive to increase levels of physical activity across the nation. Detailed studies of two recent schemes, using the natural environment to promote fitness ('Health Walks' and 'The Green Gym'), show that being in contact with nature both encourages people to take exercise and sustains their participation in physical activity.

Sociable walking is recommended around the world as a simple, cheap and popular form of exercise. In contrast to more structured exercise, such as visiting the gym or team sports, walking is highly accessible, even to high-risk health groups.

Research commissioned by the RSPB indicates that varied and wildlife-rich natural environments with inspiring landscapes are most effective in promoting sociable walking and a healthier lifestyle. Time spent in natural environments is known to promote a positive outlook on life and enhance our ability to cope with, and recover from, stress, illness and injury.

## Biodiversity and health

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan has established targets to restore and recreate natural habitats. The delivery of these targets would not only fulfil the Government's international obligation to halt biodiversity loss by 2010 but would also deliver on a wide-range of other people-based Government objectives, including enhanced public health.

We urge the Government to act now to:

- invest at least £75 million a year, rising to £140 million a year by 2010, to implement recovery plans for the UK's most threatened habitats
- invest at least an extra £50 million a year to protect and manage our finest wildlife sites to achieve their favourable condition

- enhance the countryside through further reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, so that by 2010 all agricultural subsidies support environmentally friendly farming, resulting in an attractive countryside, rich in wildlife.

## Fit for the future

The RSPB believes that public health can be increased cheaply and sustainably by combining the provision of natural green space with local opportunities for social walking and outdoor activities.

Increasing the availability of accessible natural green space will increase levels of physical activity, leading to increased public health and associated cost savings.



'The countryside can be seen as a great outpatient department whose therapeutic value is yet to be fully realised.' *Dr William Bird*

The RSPB commissioned research by Dr William Bird into green spaces, physical activity and public health. His report: *Natural fit – can biodiversity and green space increase levels of physical activity?* (available at [www.rspb.org.uk/policy/health](http://www.rspb.org.uk/policy/health)) has been endorsed by the Faculty of Public Health ([www.fph.org.uk](http://www.fph.org.uk))



The RSPB is the UK charity working to secure a healthy environment for birds and wildlife, helping to create a better world for us all.

