

## **Recovering together:** a report of public opinion on the role and importance of nature during and in our recovery from the Coronavirus crisis in South East England<sup>1</sup>

In May, a survey conducted by YouGov on behalf of the RSPB<sup>2</sup> sought the views of adults in the UK on the role of nature in our communities during the Coronavirus crisis and its potential to help in our recovery. This summary report presents the results for the sample of respondents in South East England. *In some instances, this has not been possible due to the statistical limitations of the sample size. Where this is the case, or where further analysis has only been possible at a UK level, UK results have been used instead and this has been clearly indicated.*

The results show that regardless of age, social class or income, adults in South East England:

- **overwhelmingly support protecting and investing in nature and increasing accessible natural greenspace as part of our recovery from Coronavirus;**
- **strongly oppose reducing spending on nature or putting less emphasis on protecting nature;**
- **see nature as important for health and wellbeing and access to nature close to home as beneficial during the Coronavirus crisis.**

The survey also highlights potential **inequalities in access to nature and its benefits between households with the highest and lowest incomes, and between urban and rural households**, suggesting the impact of Coronavirus is not falling equally on people across society.

### **In numbers: what the key results say about people's views on the role of nature in South East England during and in our recovery from the Coronavirus crisis<sup>3</sup>**

#### **Importance of nature and access to natural greenspace for health and wellbeing**

**87%** of respondents in South East England agreed that living close(r) to spaces that are rich in wildlife and nature is / would be an advantage during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

**88%** agreed increasing the amount of accessible nature-rich green space will help to improve people's general health, well-being and happiness. *Only 6% disagreed.*

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<sup>1</sup> South East England region, consisting of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire, Surrey and West Sussex.

<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork undertaken on 14-15 May 2020 by YouGov on behalf of the RSPB. Total sample size for the UK was 2155, and the net sample size for South East England was 342 adults. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

<sup>3</sup> Figures representative of responses from adults in South East England unless otherwise stated.

## Protecting and investing in nature and increasing accessible natural greenspace

**84%** support the suggestion that Government should increase the number of accessible nature-rich areas in the UK. *Only 6% disagreed.*

**80%** oppose the idea of Government reducing spending on nature in the UK. *Only 12% were in favour of reducing spending on nature.*

## Social inequality in access to nature and natural greenspace<sup>4</sup>

### Income

People in the **UK** with an annual household income under £10,000 are **3.6 times more likely to have no outdoor space** where they live, and about **40% less likely to live within a 10-minute walk of any publicly accessible natural greenspace** than people with a household income of £60,000 or more.<sup>5</sup>

### Urban vs. rural

Urban households are less likely than rural households to have any outdoor space, less likely to live close to any public natural greenspace, and more likely to feel they have been unable to spend enough time in nature.

Only **48%** of people in urban households in the **UK** reported living within a 10-minute walk of their nearest publicly accessible natural greenspace, compared with **69%** for those in rural households.

**50%** of people in urban households in the **UK** agreed that they had not been able to spend as much time in nature as they would like, compared with just **30%** for those in rural households.

## Responding to this report

The results of this survey provide the clearest evidence yet of public support for putting nature at the heart of our recovery from Coronavirus.

It is the RSPB's hope that this report will help to inform thinking and decision-making on the role and importance of nature as we plan our recovery.

For emerging recovery plans to create a more resilient, more environmentally sustainable, and more socially just economy and society in the wake of the Coronavirus crisis, they must make protecting and investing in nature and increasing natural greenspace key priorities.

Doing so will help strengthen the future resilience, health, wellbeing and prosperity of people and communities around the country, including those most deprived of the benefits of nature during the Coronavirus crisis.

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<sup>4</sup> Data for UK households has been used for this section

<sup>5</sup> Calculations by RSPB.

## YouGov survey: nature in the Coronavirus crisis – summary results

### Access to nature

- Only **54%** of people in South East England reported living within 10 mins walk of any publicly accessible natural greenspace.
- **For the UK**, households without any outdoor space (e.g. garden, courtyard, balcony) are even less likely to have publicly accessible natural greenspace (nature) nearby. Just **34%** of people in **UK** households without any outdoor space reported being within 10 min walk of publicly accessible nature.
- **76%** of people in South East England agreed the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has highlighted the need for more accessible nature-rich green space near to peoples' households.

### Equality

Households with the lowest incomes are the least likely to have a garden; the most likely to have no outdoor space at all; and the least likely to live close to publicly accessible natural greenspace.

- **59%** of **UK** households<sup>6</sup> with an annual income of £60,000 and over – roughly the top 10% of households by income<sup>7</sup> – report being within a 10-minute walk of nature (publicly accessible natural greenspace), compared with just **35%** of **UK** households with an annual income less than £10,000.
- **18%** of **UK** households with income less than £10,000 have no outdoor space at all, compared with just **5%** of households with an annual income of £60,000 or more.

### Importance of nature during the Coronavirus crisis

- **73%** of respondents in South East England agreed that they had noticed more nature in their neighbourhoods since the Coronavirus outbreak in the UK than they would normally at this time of year.
- **73%** of people agreed that time spent in/ surrounded by nature has been more important to them since the onset of the Coronavirus crisis in the UK.
- **75%** agreed that nature has been an important source of comfort/ relief for them.
- **73%** agreed that visiting nature has been important for their general health and happiness.
- **80%** 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.

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<sup>6</sup> Data for UK households has been used for the section on income inequality to enable comparison with ONS data on household incomes by decile group.

<sup>7</sup> The ONS dataset, “The effects of taxes and benefits on household income, disposable income estimate: 2019” reports the top 10% of UK households have an income of £59,130 or more. The lowest 10% of UK households have an income of £13,960 or less.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/datasets/householddisposableincomeandinequality>

### Protecting and restoring nature

- **76%** of respondents in South East England agreed the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has shown the importance of protecting and restoring nature.
- **69%** supported the suggestion that rapid economic growth should not be pursued at the expense of protecting nature.
- **77%** supported the suggestion that nature could contribute to economic recovery in the UK (e.g. by reducing the risk of other economic challenges such as flooding, protecting water supplies, promoting local tourism etc.). *Just 8% disagreed, with 15% saying they didn't know.*
- **75%** of people supported the suggestion that protecting and increasing the amount of nature-rich spaces in the future will help to improve the UK's general resilience to future national pandemics/ outbreaks.

**Government action** – respondents were asked to think about the potential actions concerning nature after the Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK

- **84%** of respondents in South East England support the suggestion that Government should increase the number of accessible nature-rich areas. Only **6%** of people disagreed.
- **78%** support the suggestion that Government should set economic growth targets (i.e. aims for increasing the overall value of UK goods/ services) with nature protection in mind.
- **74%** supported the suggestion that Government should invest in nature protection as part of any economic recovery plans.
- **80%** opposed the idea of Government reducing spending on nature in the UK (e.g. on maintenance and creation of green spaces).
- **78%** opposed the idea of Government placing less of an emphasis on protecting nature in the UK.