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Watching birds near your home is good for your mental health

People living in neighbourhoods with more birds, shrubs and trees are less likely to suffer from depression, anxiety and stress, according to research by academics at the University of Exeter, the British Trust for Ornithology and the University of Queensland.

The study, involving hundreds of people, found benefits for mental health of being able to see birds, shrubs and trees around the home, whether people lived in urban or more leafy suburban neighbourhoods.

The study, which surveyed mental health in over 270 people from different ages, incomes and ethnicities, also found that those who spent less time out of doors than usual in the previous week were more likely to report they were anxious or depressed.

After conducting extensive surveys of the number of birds in the morning and afternoon in Milton Keynes, Bedford and Luton, the study found that lower levels of depression, anxiety and stress were associated with the number of birds people could see in the afternoon. The academics studied afternoon bird numbers - which tend to be lower than birds generally seen in the morning - because they are more in keeping with the number of birds that people are likely to see in their neighbourhood on a daily basis.

In the study, common types of birds including blackbirds, robins, blue tits and crows were seen. But the study did not find a relationship between the species of birds and mental health, but rather the number of birds they could see from their windows, in the garden or in their neighbourhood.

Previous studies have found that the ability of most people to identify different species is low (eg Dallimer et al, 2012), suggesting that for most people it is interacting with birds, not just specific birds, that provides well-being.

University of Exeter research fellow [Dr Daniel Cox](#), who led the study, said: "This study starts to unpick the role that some key components of nature play for our mental well-being".

Birds around the home, and nature in general, show great promise in preventative health care, making cities healthier, happier places to live".

The positive association between birds, shrubs and trees and better mental health applied, even after controlling for variation in neighbourhood deprivation, household income, age and a wide range of other socio-demographic factors.

Recent research by Dr Cox and Professor Kevin Gaston, who are based at the [Environmental Sustainability Institute](#) at the Penryn Campus at the University of Exeter, found that watching birds makes people feel relaxed and connected to nature (Cox and Gaston, 2016).

[The research](#) is published in the journal *Bioscience* and was funded by the Natural Environment Research Council as conducted as part of the Fragments, Functions, Flows and Ecosystem Services project.

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Being able to see birds, shrubs and trees around the home benefits mental health.