



A Young Person's Guide to **CONNECTING WITH NATURE**

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INTRODUCTION

When people **notice** nature, **explore** it, and **spend time** with it, something important happens:

they begin to feel **more connected** to the natural world!

Small experiences - like watching birds, exploring a tree, or listening to the sounds of nature - can help you build a stronger relationship with the living world.

EXPLORE THIS GUIDE

What does nature connection **mean**?

Why does it **matter** for people and the planet?

Are there **activities** that help us notice and explore nature?

Can we **see** the natural world in new ways and **feel** more part of it?



WHAT?

“Nature connection” is about a person’s **relationship** with the natural world - how they **think** about, **feel** towards and **experience** nature. People who have a strong connection with nature (high ‘nature connectedness’) feel like they are a part of nature.

“Pathways to Nature Connectedness” help people develop a closer relationship with the natural world. They include the **senses, beauty, emotion, meaning** and **compassion**.

“Green and blue spaces” are **outdoor places** where you can enjoy nature. Green spaces have **trees, grass, and plants**, while blue spaces have water like **rivers, lakes, or the sea**.

WHO WROTE THIS GUIDE?

This guide was written by **Dr Christopher Barnes, Dr Carly Butler, Hannah Persaud** and a group of young people from **Looking After the Wildness**.

Chris and Carly are part of the Nature Connectedness Research Group at the **University of Derby**.

Hannah works at the **National Society for Education**.

Looking After the Wildness is an outdoor education group for teenagers.

We all worked together to create this guide for you!

ENJOY!

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide is for **children** and **young people**!

Parents, carers, and people who work with young people may also find it helpful.

Teachers and schools may prefer our *Nature Connectedness in Schools* handbook.

WHY IS NATURE GOOD FOR US?

Scientists have found that **spending time** in the natural environment and having a **close relationship** with nature is good for young people's **health and wellbeing**.



WOW!

Young people who spend time in natural environments are often **healthier** and **happier** than those who spend more time inside.

Outdoor activities help us grow **strong hearts, muscles and bones**, and can even help us **digest** our food.

Trees release invisible oils that help us **feel calmer**.

Moving water – like in a river or ocean waves - releases ions that help us **feel happier**.

While being around nature is good for us, the benefits are **even greater** if we feel **more connected** to nature.

Nature connection can make it **easier to deal with big emotions** – for example, if we feel angry, nature can help us feel calmer sooner.

Scientists have even found that nature makes us **more likely to help other people** and **avoid having arguments** with friends!

Nature connection is **good for nature** too. Young people who have a strong sense of nature connection are **more likely to help and protect nature** through activities such as recycling, caring for plants and wildlife, planting trees, or raising awareness about environmental issues.

Many young people are aware that the natural world is in trouble at the moment, but **taking action can help bring feelings of hope**.





WHAT ABOUT ME?

Keep reading this guide! It is based on what scientists have discovered about **how people build stronger relationships with nature** and how you can do it too!

CAN PEOPLE BECOME MORE CONNECTED TO NATURE?

Yes!

This is one of the most exciting discoveries scientists have made!

Just being outdoors doesn't always create a strong connection with nature. What matters most is **how you experience it**.

For example:

- noticing the colours of a flower
- listening carefully to the sounds of the wind or birds
- feeling the rough bark of a tree
- wondering what animals might be active at night

Moments like these help people build a stronger relationship with nature.

**WE CAN ALL INCREASE
OUR CONNECTION TO
NATURE!**



ARE CHILDREN CONNECTED TO NATURE?

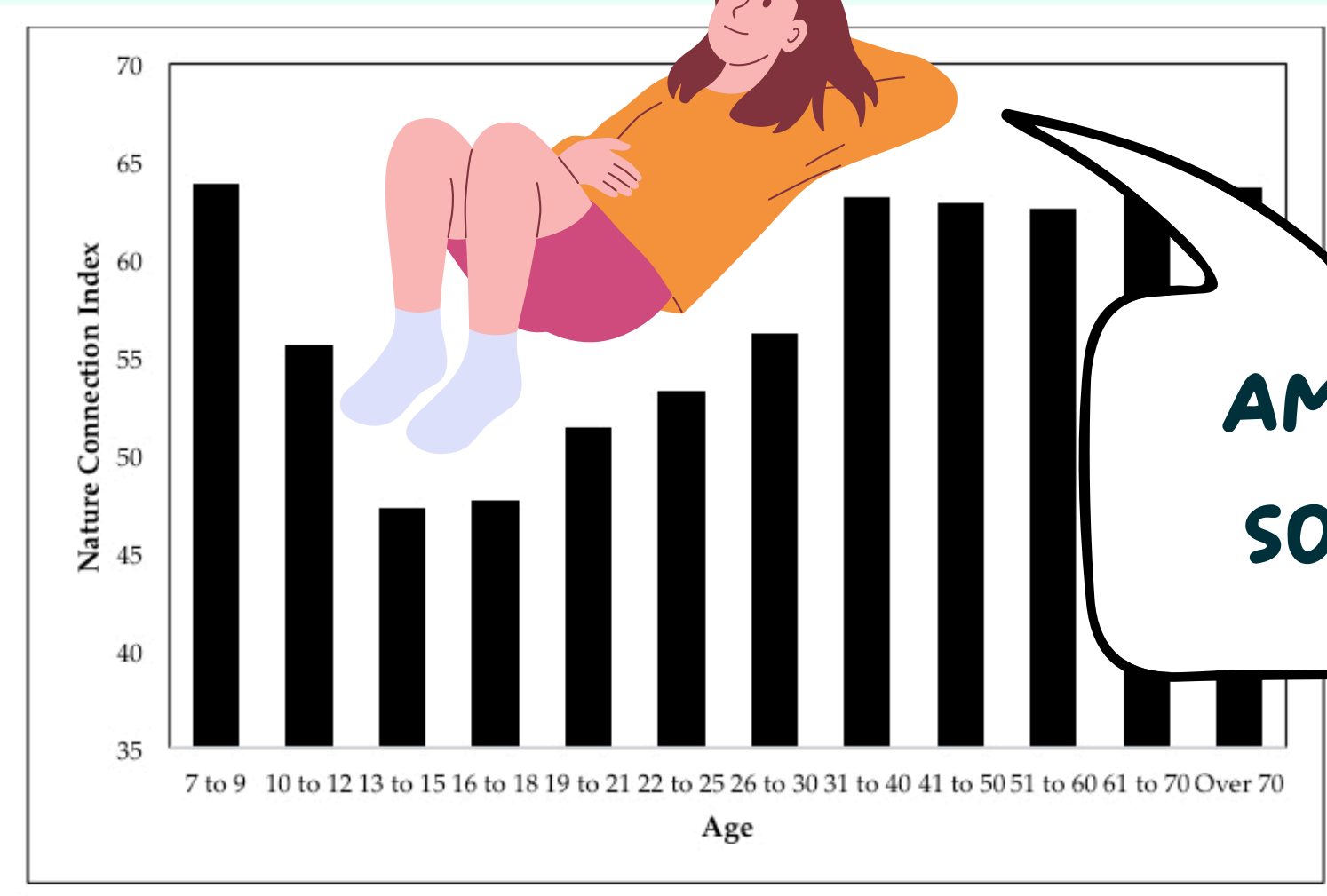
Yes!

Most children and young people have high levels of nature connectedness.

However, research suggests that feelings of connection with nature tend to dip during the teenage years.

Most teenagers say that their **favourite places** are in nature; however, their **favourite activities** are often things like sports, gaming and arts, which they don't tend to do in natural spaces.

Are young people missing out on opportunities to deepen their relationship with the natural world?



NATURE CONNECTEDNESS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN



GOOD NEWS!

Nature is **all around** us, even in busy towns and cities, nature finds a way to thrive.

A **small patch of grass** on the side of a road might be home to hundreds of **plants and creatures**.

Tiny plants push through cracks in the pavement. **Birds** perch on rooftops. **Clouds** move across the sky. **Insects** buzz all around.

Wild things can be found everywhere!

When we feel connected to nature, **it becomes easier** to notice everywhere:

- the **plants and wildlife** we share our world with
- the **beauty** of blue skies in the day or starry skies at night
- the **sounds** of birds, wind and water

Nature connection can make nature a part of our **everyday lives**, like a friend who is always there for us – to **care** for us, to **play** with us, or to **inspire** us.



HOW CONNECTED TO NATURE AM I?



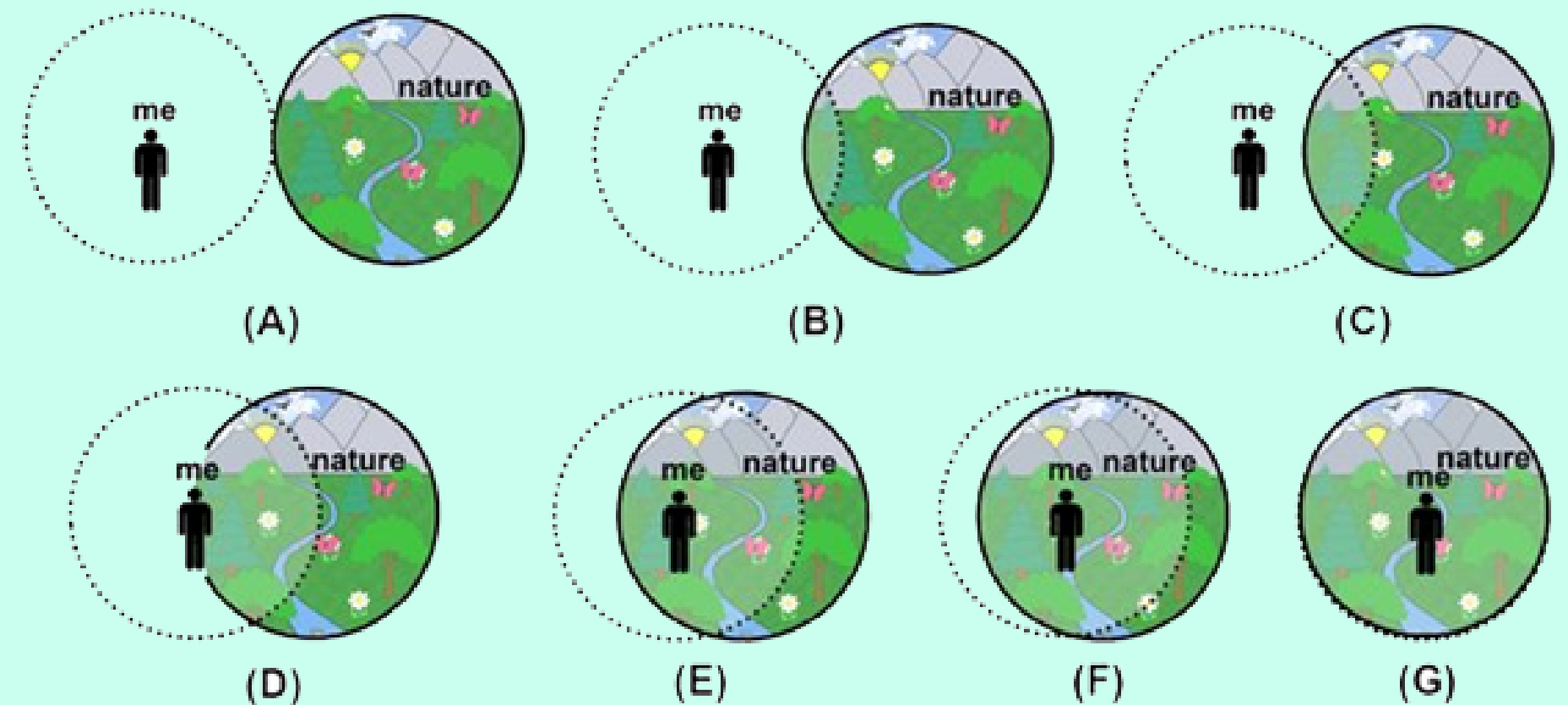
Some people feel **very close** to nature, like they are **part of it**. Others feel more **distant**, or only connected at **certain times**.

Nature connection isn't something you either have or don't have. **It's something that can change and grow over time.**

Scientists have created simple ways to help people think about how connected they feel to nature. **There are no right or wrong answers!**

One way is the illustrated ***Inclusion of Nature in Self*** scale. It uses pictures of circles to show how close you feel to nature, from far apart to overlapping.

Which picture feels most like you?



Kleespies, M. W., Braun, T., Dierkes, P. W., & Wenzel, V. (2021). Measuring Connection to Nature—A Illustrated Extension of the Inclusion of Nature in Self Scale. Sustainability, 13(4), 1761.

HOW CONNECTED TO NATURE AM I?

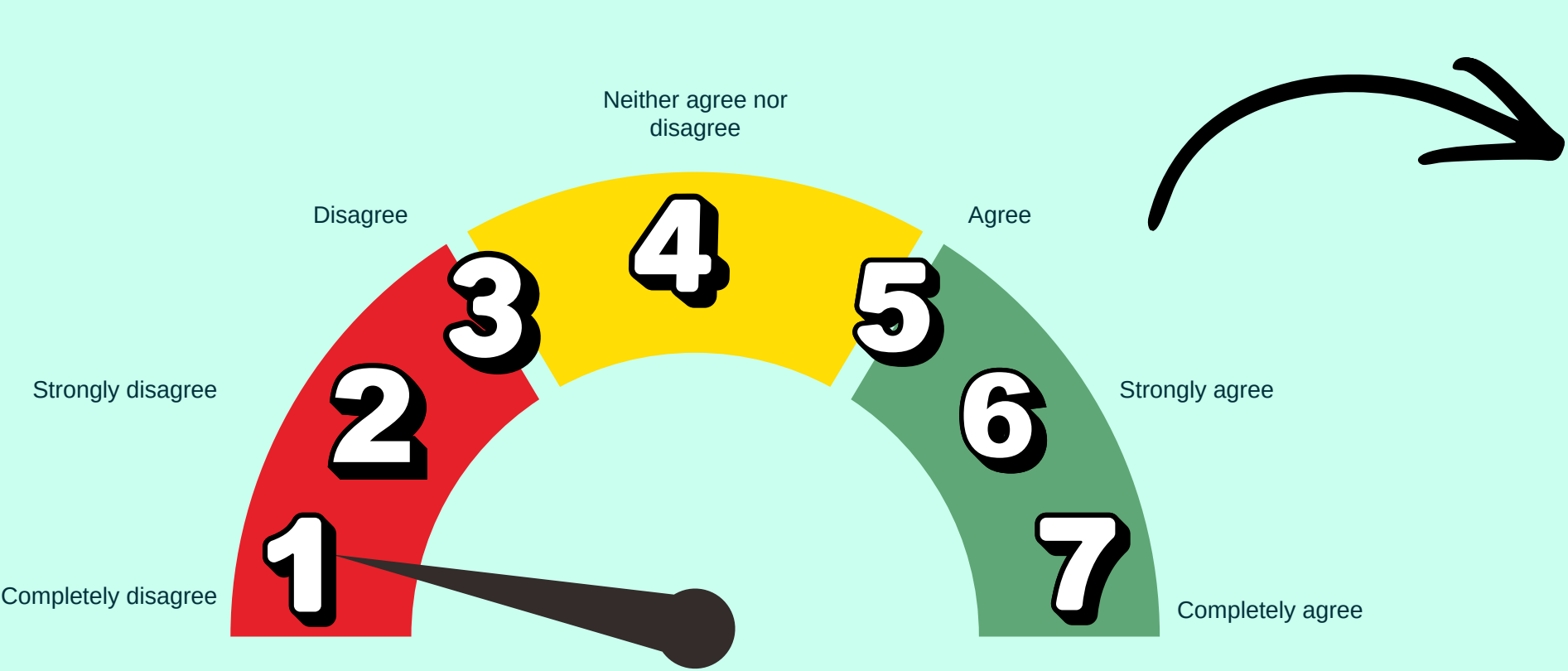
Another way scientists help people think about their connection to nature is by using the *Nature Connectedness Index*.

This is a short set of six questions about how you **feel** about nature, including how much you **notice** it, **enjoy** it, and **care** about it.

Read each one and decide how much you agree:



EVERYONE FEELS A DIFFERENT
LEVEL OF CONNECTION TO
NATURE, AND THAT'S
COMPLETELY OKAY!



- ☐ I ALWAYS FIND BEAUTY IN NATURE
- ☐ I ALWAYS TREAT NATURE WITH RESPECT
- ☐ BEING IN NATURE MAKES ME VERY HAPPY
- ☐ I FIND BEING IN NATURE REALLY AMAZING
- ☐ I FEEL PART OF NATURE
- ☐ SPENDING TIME IN NATURE IS VERY IMPORTANT TO ME

². Kleespies, M. W., Braun, T., Dierkes, P. W., & Wenzel, V. (2021). Measuring Connection to Nature—A Illustrated Extension of the Inclusion of Nature in Self Scale. Sustainability, 13(4), 1761. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13041761>



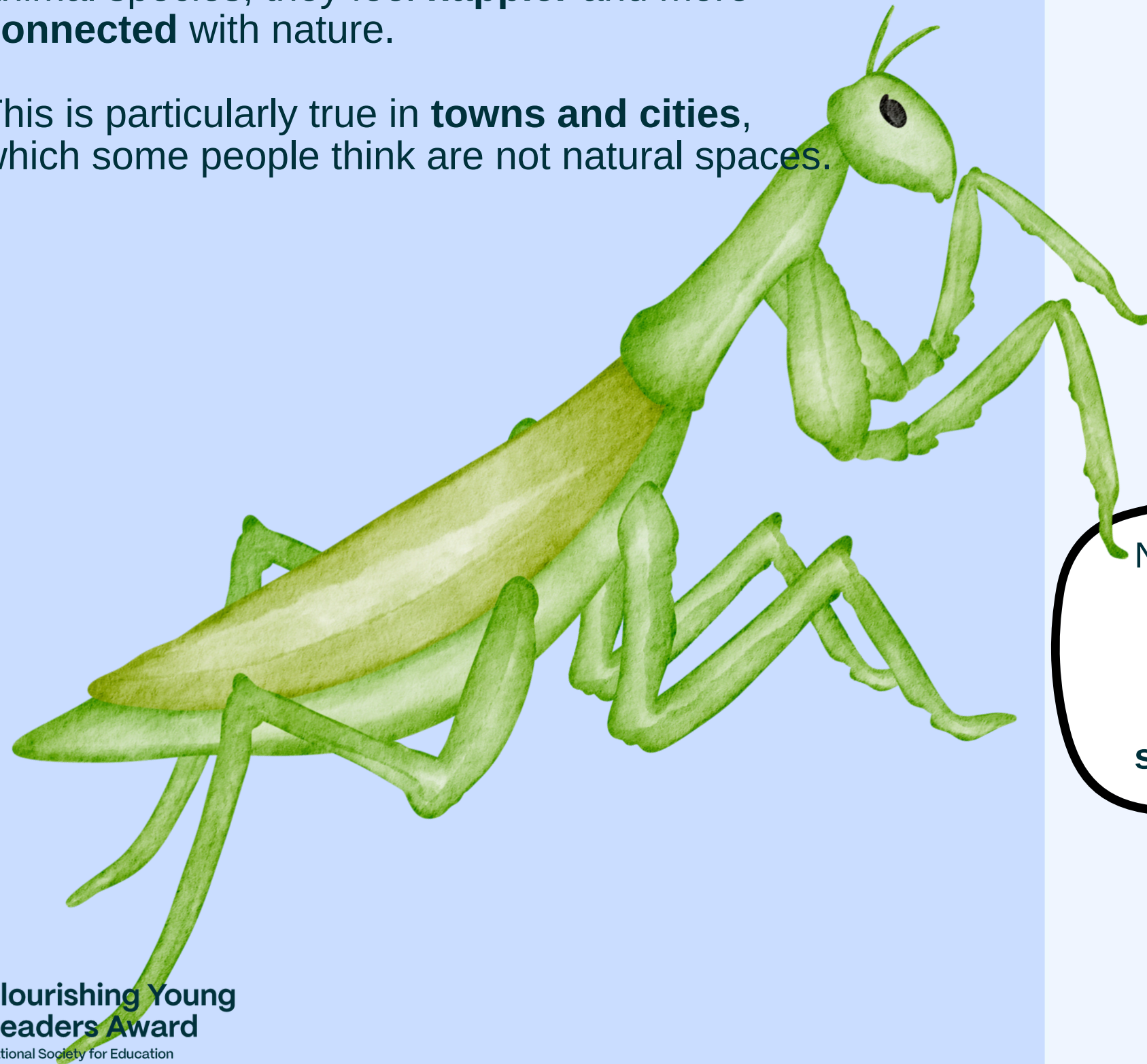
NATURE CONNECTION
IS SOMETHING YOU
CAN GROW, LITTLE BY
LITTLE, EVERY DAY!

How to grow your CONNECTION WITH NATURE

NATURE IS EVERYWHERE!

Scientists have found that when people **think** that an area has lots of different plant and animal species, they feel **happier** and more **connected** with nature.

This is particularly true in **towns and cities**, which some people think are not natural spaces.



TOP TIP!



Next time you are **walking** somewhere look for all the **living things** around you. How many different **plants** and **creatures** can you see? What is the **smallest plant** or insect you can find?

NOTICING NATURE

Being out in nature is good for us. But **what we do** in nature matters more than how long we spend in it. Research shows that **noticing** nature is **more important** than simply spending time in green places.

People who **watch** wildlife, **listen** to birdsong, or **take photos** of nature **feel closer to nature** than those who don't do these things.



TOP TIP!



It's not about finding something rare or special; it's about **noticing** what's already there!

Can you notice **three good things** in nature today?



FEELINGS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN KNOWLEDGE

We don't have to know much about nature to **enjoy** it.

Growing connections with nature is more about **how we feel** about nature than what facts we know about it.

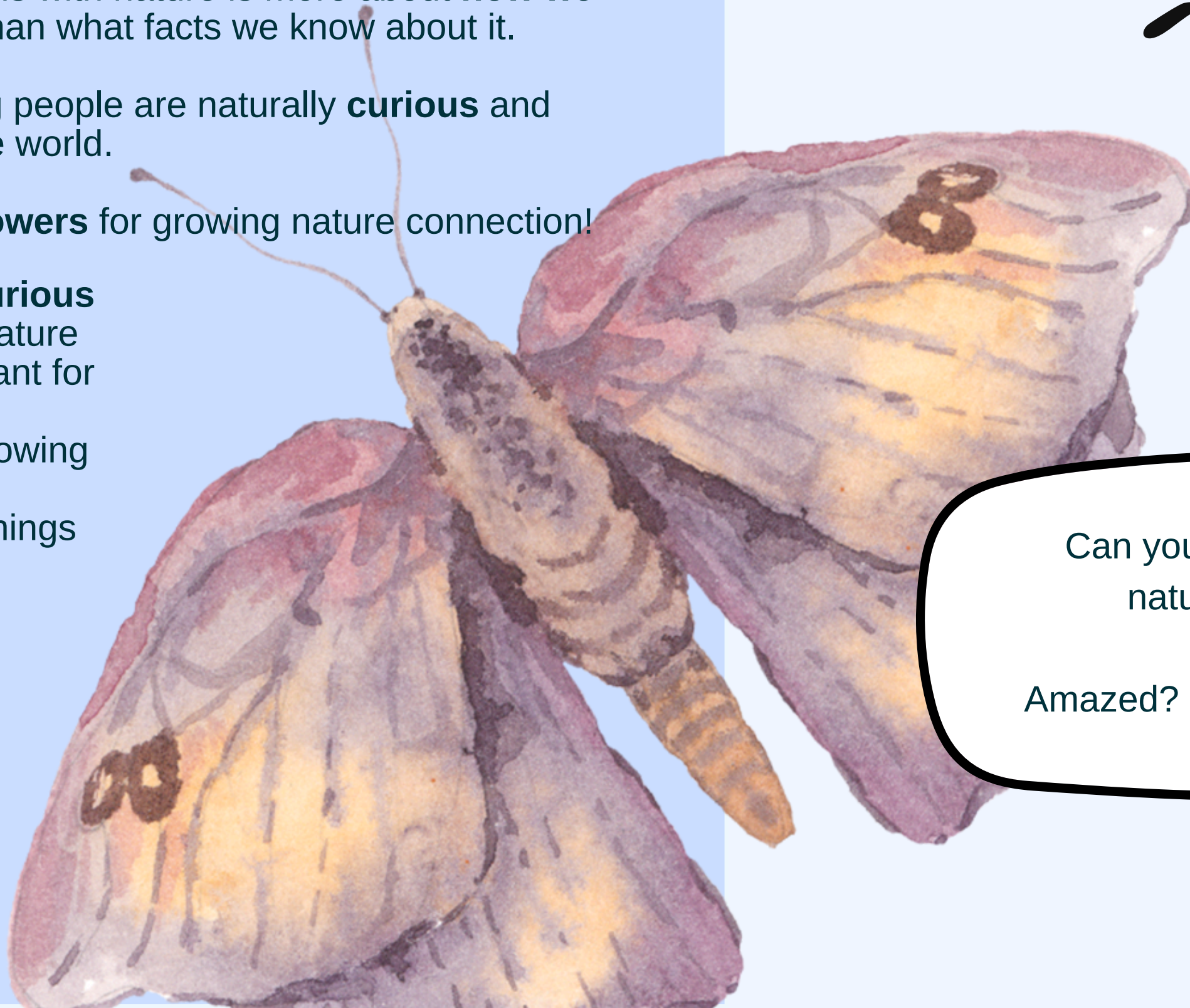
Children and young people are naturally **curious** and want to **explore** the world.

These are **superpowers** for growing nature connection!

Feeling **excited**, **curious** or **amazed** about nature are all more important for growing nature connection than knowing the names and information about things in nature.



TOP TIP!



Can you think of a time when nature made you **feel**:

Amazed? Happy? Curious? Calm?



NATURE CONNECTS PEOPLE

Nature doesn't just affect individuals; it can shape **families and communities** as well.

When **parents or carers** feel connected to nature, their **children** are **more likely** to feel that connection too.

Spending time outdoors **together** can lead to more **meaningful conversations** and **stronger relationships**.



TOP TIP!

Invite a parent, carer or friend to **join you** for a fun nature moment.
It could be something simple, like a **short walk**, **cloud spotting**, or **listening** for birds.
Even a **few minutes together** can help you both feel more **connected** and have **fun** at the same time.



THE PATHWAYS TO NATURE CONNECTEDNESS

Scientists at the University of Derby have found **five pathways to nature connectedness**.

These are ways of **noticing and appreciating nature** that help us to **feel more connected** with the natural world.

SENSES



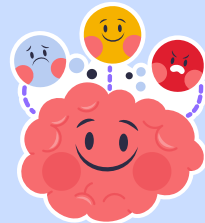
Notice and engage with nature through the **senses**. Explore the **smells, sounds, sights, feelings, tastes** of nature. Listen to birdsong, smell a leaf, feel the bark of a tree.

BEAUTY



Notice and enjoy the **beauty** of the natural world. Admire the beauty of a sunset, flower, or butterfly, or create photos, drawings, stories, or songs that show how beautiful the natural world is.

EMOTION



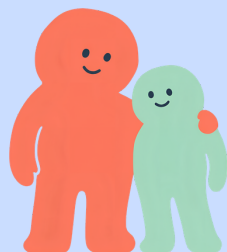
Notice how nature makes you **feel**, and seek feelings of **calm, wonder, or joy** from nature. Take a moment to appreciate the good things in nature and explore how you feel in different natural spaces.

MEANING



Consider how nature brings meaning into your life. Think about how nature matters to you, your family, and community. Explore stories about nature, and the natural rhythms (seasons, moon cycles, life cycles). Look out for where nature appears in songs, poems, stories and arts.

COMPASSION



Help and care for nature, and encourage others to do the same. Think about what plants and wildlife need to thrive, and how you can support them to do this. Create homes and habitats for wildlife and food for bees and butterflies.



NATURE ACTIVITIES

Helping you build
a closer
relationship with
nature



BEFORE YOU GET STARTED...



Stay safe

Before heading out, make sure you have **permission** from a parent, carer, or teacher.

Always tell someone where you're going and what time you'll be back.

You don't need anything special

You don't need equipment, money, or a special place, just yourself and a bit of **curiosity**.

However, if you do have a notebook, pencil, camera or magnifying glass, these can help you **record what you do**.



Everyone is different

Different activities help you connect with nature in different ways. There are lots of ways you can change each activity to make it more interesting or fun.

You might focus on how nature makes you feel (e.g. your **emotions**), what things you find **beautiful** (e.g. the colours or shapes in nature), what nature **means** to you (e.g. how you notice nature change throughout the seasons), or how you can **look after nature** (e.g. such as feeding the birds, planting flowers or building homes for nature).

Try different times and seasons

Nature is always changing. You can try the same activity at different times of year, in different weather, or even at different times of day, and notice what's different.

Alone or with others

Some activities might feel special to do quietly on your own. Others might be more fun with friends, family, or classmates.



Agree on your **route** and **return time** before you leave, so **someone knows** where to expect you. If you can, **explore with others**, or stick to **familiar places**. **Pay attention** to your surroundings, **dress for the weather**, and **trust your instincts**. If something doesn't feel right, **it's okay to head back**.

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED...

NATURE JOURNAL



A nature journal is a great way to help you **connect** with the **natural world**. All you need to do is use a notebook to **draw** or **write** down the things you **enjoy** in nature.

John Muir Laws – who is famous for helping people use nature journals to get closer to nature – suggests using three prompts:

I notice ... (focus attention and describe what you see, hear, smell, and touch)

I wonder ... (be curious and ask questions about what you noticed)

It reminds me of ... (connect what you notice with other things and experiences)



Nature connection grows strong when you **notice** and **enjoy** nature **every day** – even for just for a minute or two each day.

You might have a place in nature you can visit or check every day, such as a **garden**, **school grounds**, a **grassy verge**, a **tree**, a local **park**, or even a **house plant**.

Perhaps there is a **blackbird** or **robin** who lives near you or your school that you can say hello to each day.

You could even become friends with the **clouds** – how do their shapes and colours change from day to day? Or the **moon** – watch its shape change each day of the month.



Activity 1

BECOME A TREE DETECTIVE



FUN FACT

Some trees can live for over 1,000 years! That's older than castles in the UK.

1. What to do

Choose a tree and observe it closely.
Record what you notice.
See if you can discover the hidden world living on and around it.



2. What to notice

Leaf shapes and colours, bark texture, moss, insects, birds and its movement in the wind.
Draw a small part of the tree or take a photo of a section of it.



3. Keep on discovering

Use a tree identification guide or app.
Track your tree through the seasons.
Compare it to another tree.
Research the animals that live and feed on your tree species.



4. Extra Challenge

Create a short story telling others about the life story of the tree.

WHY THIS IS GOOD FOR YOU

Improves your **focus**, **curiosity** and **calmness** while strengthening your **connection** to living things.



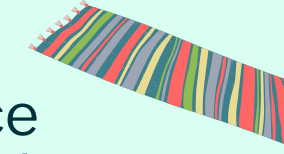
Activity 2

CLOUD WATCHERS



1. What to do

Lie down and watch the clouds. Notice shapes, movement, and colours. Imagine stories or creatures in the clouds.

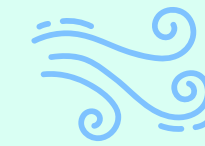


2. What to notice

Shapes and colours.

How clouds move and change.

The sounds of wind.



3. Keep on discovering

Learn about different types of clouds and weather patterns.



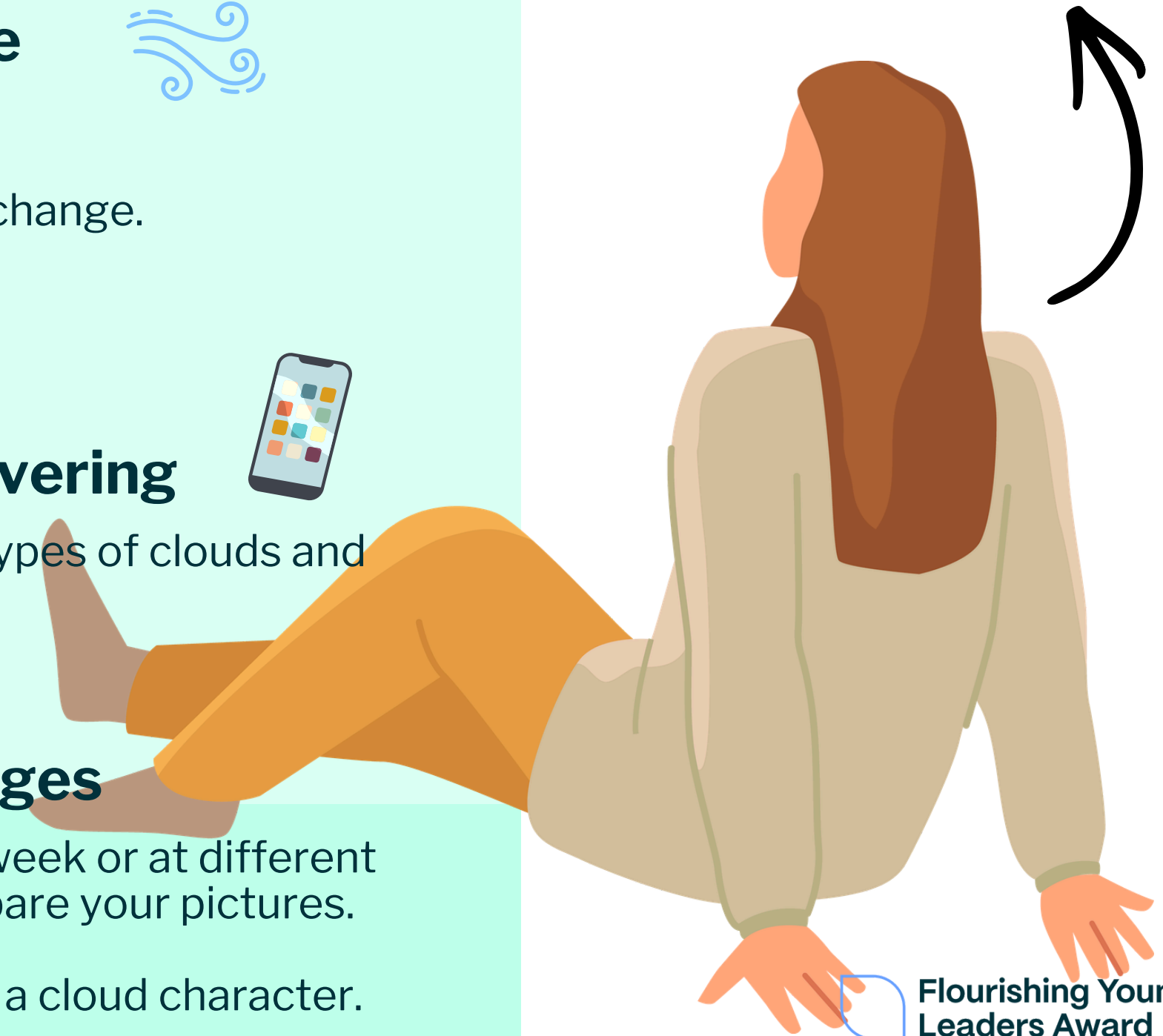
4. Extra Challenges

Sketch clouds over a week or at different times of day and compare your pictures.

Make up a story about a cloud character.

WHY THIS IS GOOD FOR YOU

Boosts **imagination**, **calmness**, and **attention** to natural patterns.

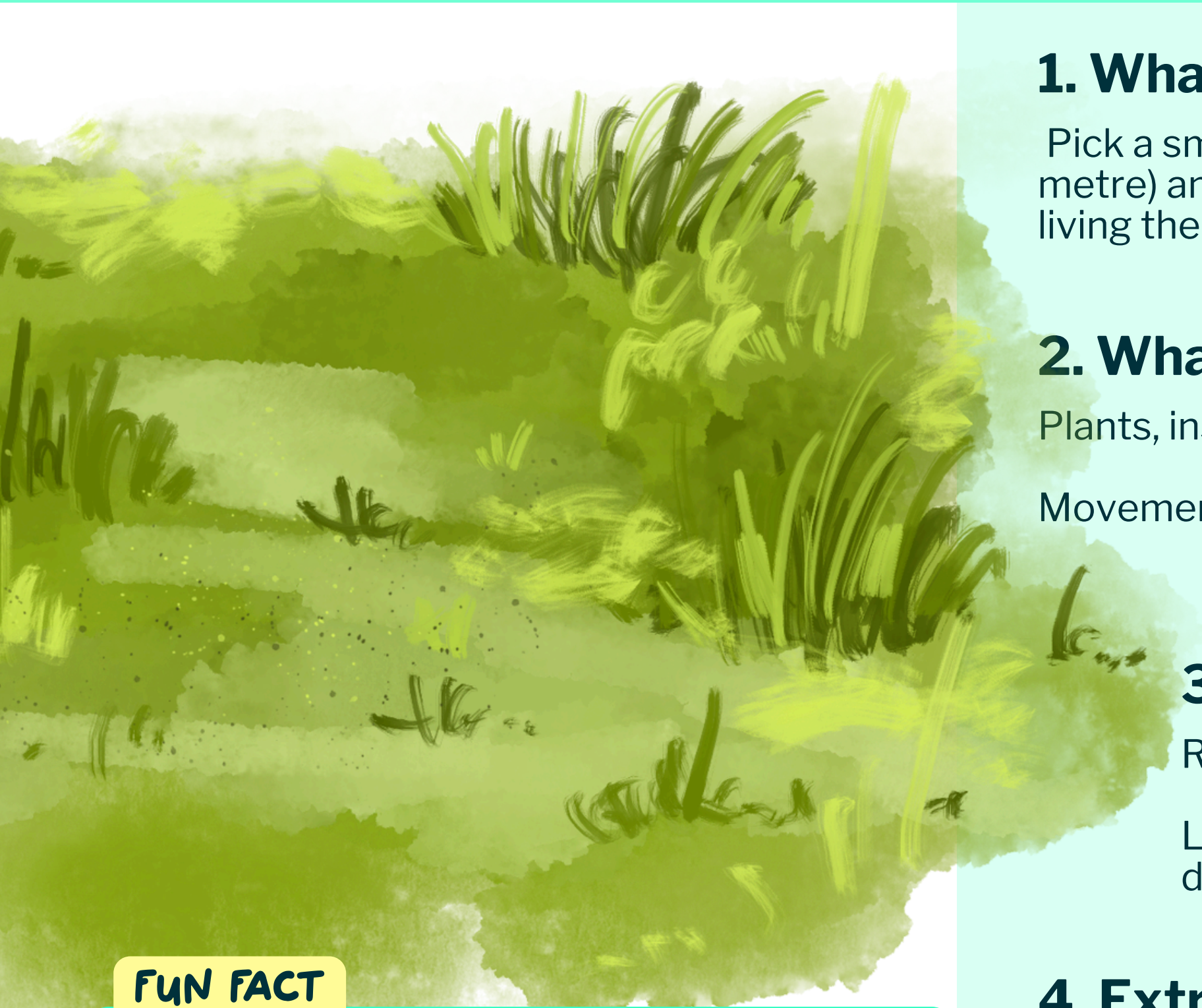


FUN FACT

No two clouds are ever exactly the same; each one is unique!

Activity 3

THE SECRET LIFE OF A SQUARE METRE



1. What to do

Pick a small patch of ground (1 square metre) and explore everything growing or living there. Look carefully and quietly.



2. What to notice



Plants, insects, soil, moss, fungi.

Movement, patterns, sounds.

3. Keep on discovering

Research species you see.



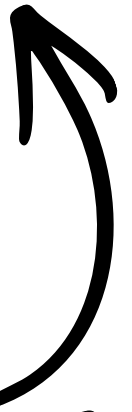
Learn how insects, plants, and fungi depend on each other.

4. Extra Challenges

- Revisit the same patch over a season.
- Draw a map of your patch.
- Compare your patch to a friend's patch.

WHY THIS IS GOOD FOR YOU

Improves **attention to detail** and **curiosity**; while helping you **feel** part of a living ecosystem.

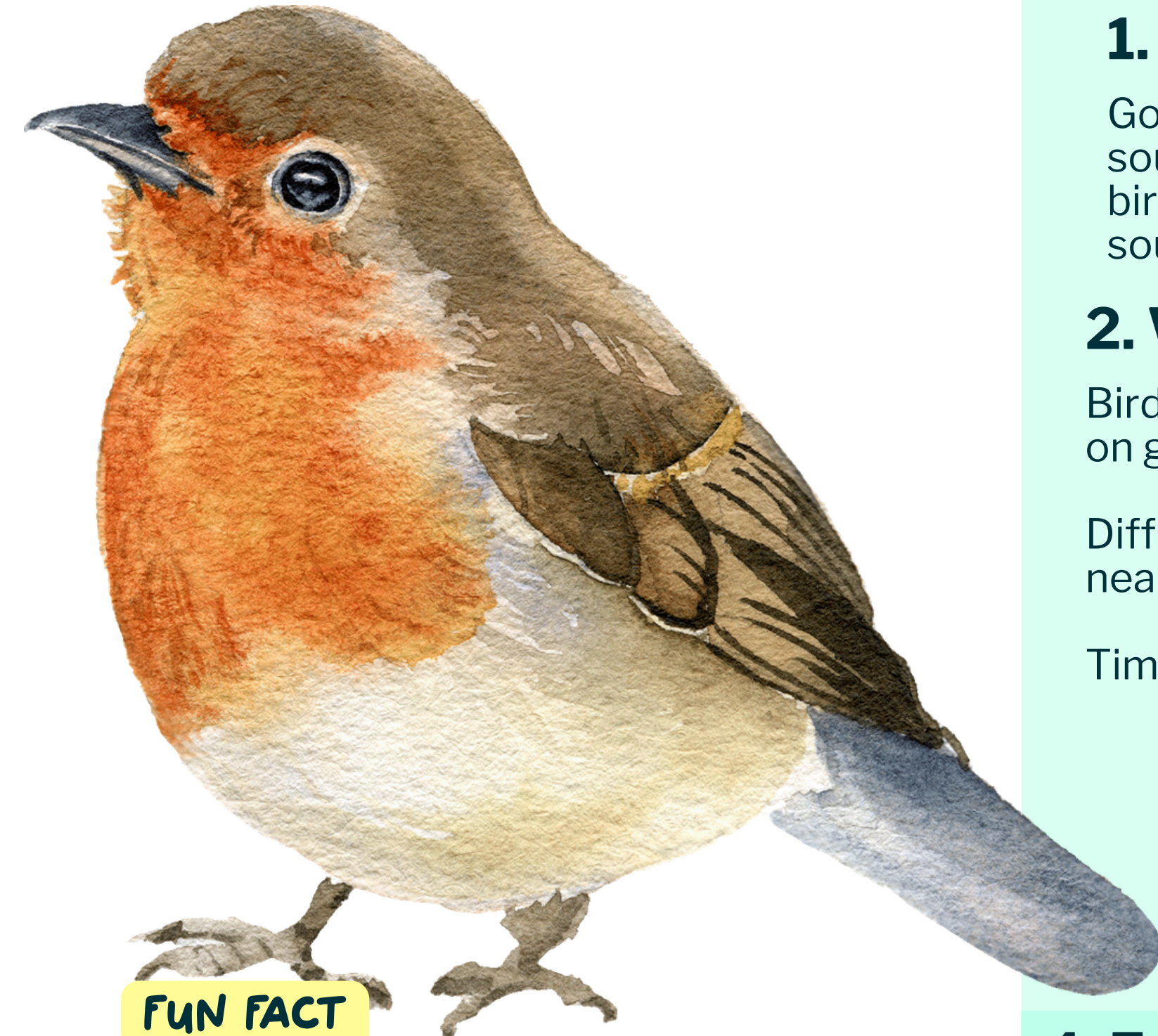


FUN FACT

A single square metre of grassland can contain up to 40 different plant species and be home to thousands of tiny creatures!

Activity 4

NATURE SOUND HUNT



FUN FACT

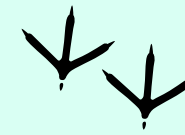
Some birds can recognise **hundreds** of different songs from other birds!

1. What to do

Go outside and listen carefully to all the sounds around you. See if you can hear birds, insects, wind, water, and other natural sounds.



2. What to notice



Bird calls, rustling leaves, water, footsteps on grass.

Differences in quiet and loud sounds, and near and far sounds.

Times of day when different sounds appear.

3. Keep on discovering

Learn bird calls and insect sounds.

Try apps like Merlin Bird ID for sound identification.



4. Extra Challenge

Make a “sound map” by drawing where you hear each sound. Try listening at different times of day. Record and compare with friends.

WHY THIS IS GOOD FOR YOU

Strengthens **attention**, **emotional connection**, and **memory**.



Activity 5

NATURE BY STARLIGHT

1. What to do



Go on a short night walk with a trusted adult in a safe place (garden, park, or woodland). Use a torch to notice nocturnal creatures and observe the night sky.

2. What to notice



Animals active at night (bats, moths, owls). Shapes and sounds in the dark. Stars, moon, and night sky.



3. Keep on discovering

Learn about constellations, nocturnal insects, and the night ecosystem. Try photographing nighttime nature. Take part in the National Moth Recording Scheme.

4. Extra Challenge

Listen without using a torch first. Keep a star diary. Draw animals you spot.

WHY THIS IS GOOD FOR YOU
Builds **wonder**, **calmness**, **curiosity**, and **awareness** of the natural world at night.



FUN FACT

Bats can eat up to 1,000 insects in one hour!

Activity 6

THE MINI WILDLIFE HELPER



1. What to do

Small creatures need water, food and shelter (just like humans do!). Pay attention to where different insects live, drink and feed to find out what they like. You could offer some of these things for them to find, such as a tiny saucer of water for bees, or a small pile of leaves for insects.

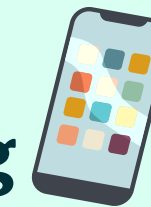


2. What to notice



Which creatures like warm sunny places and which ones like dark damp places?
How do bees drink?
What flowers do butterflies feed on?

3. Keep on discovering



Learn about how insects help gardens and food chains.

Take a look at the Ladybird survey:

<https://european-ladybirds.brc.ac.uk/>

4. Extra Challenge

Ask an adult if you can grow wildflowers for butterflies and moths, make a bee hotel, or create a small pond in a tub.

Draw a “habitat map”.

Check in on a tiny creature every day.

WHY THIS IS GOOD FOR YOU

Builds **empathy**, **curiosity**, and **attention** to small life around you.



FUN FACT

Earthworms can improve soil health by aerating it and helping plants grow!



Activity 7

FOLLOW THE BEE



1. What to do

Find a bee (or another flying insect) and gently follow it with your eyes. Watch where it goes and what it does.



2. What to notice



Where the bee flies (high, low, fast, slow).
Which flowers or plants it visits.
How long it stays in one place.
What it does when it moves between flowers.

3. Keep on discovering



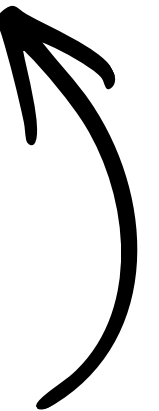
Find out how bees help plants and flowers grow? Use an ID guide to see how many different types of bumblebees you can spot (there are 24 different species!).

4. Extra Challenge

Follow the same bee for as long as you can
Watch different insects and compare how they move.
Sit still and see if insects come to you.

WHY THIS IS GOOD FOR YOU

Helps you **slow down**, **focus** your attention, and **notice** patterns in nature. It can also make you feel more **curious** and **connected** to living things.



FUN FACT

Bees don't just wander, they remember where good flowers are and return to them again and again!

Activity 8

NATURE PATTERNS



FUN FACT

Spiral patterns in sunflowers follow a special sequence called the Fibonacci sequence!

1. What to do

Find patterns in nature, such as spirals in flowers, stripes on bark, symmetry in leaves, and then try to draw or photograph them.



2. What to notice



Shapes, lines, colours repeating.
How patterns help plants and animals.
How few straight lines there are in nature.

3. Keep on discovering



Learn how maths shows up in nature's design by researching fractals and the Fibonacci sequence.

4. Extra Challenge

On a sunny day see if you can capture the shadow of a tree or plant on a sheet of paper then draw around the shadow.

Create a collage from pattern photos.
Compare with patterns in famous art.

WHY THIS IS GOOD FOR YOU

Strengthens **creativity** and **visual awareness**.



Activity 9

WATER'S JOURNEY

1. What to do



Follow the travels of water, and observe where it goes and what it meets along the way. On a rainy day you could watch water go from raindrop to puddle to drains to streams. If you have access to a stream or river or canal, you could follow its course.

2. What to notice



Where does water go when it rains?
Which animals and creatures do you see enjoying water?
How is water's journey affected by rocks, leaves, soil, concrete?

3. Keep on discovering



Research how water travels in the water cycle.

4. Extra Challenge

Time how long water takes to flow a short path.
Collect water samples (and record differences).

WHY THIS IS GOOD FOR YOU

Encourages **curiosity** about water cycles and ecosystems.



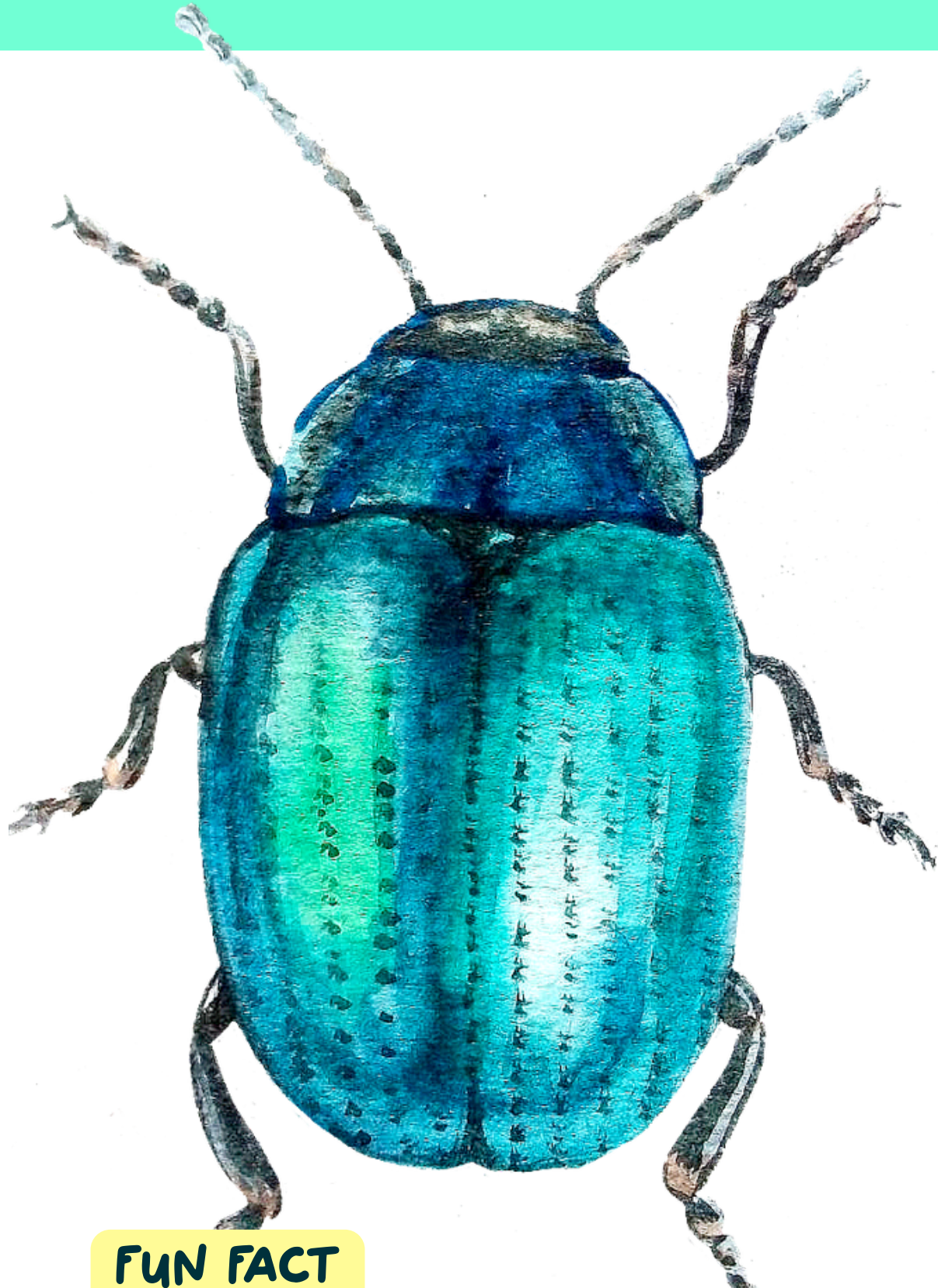
FUN FACT

The water you see in a stream may be hundreds of years old!



Activity 10

THE WONDER WALK



FUN FACT

There are more species of beetles in the world than any other group of animals!

1. What to do

Go on a walk with the aim of noticing five new things you've never seen before.



2. What to notice



Small details.

Unusual shapes or sounds.

Tiny movement or colours.

3. Keep on discovering

Write a short nature journal entry about your discoveries.



4. Extra Challenge

Do it every day and compare.
Make a "wonder wall" collage at home.
Try imagining what the species you see are thinking, feeling, and saying.

WHY THIS IS GOOD FOR YOU

Boosts **curiosity** and **attention** in everyday life.



BECOME A CITIZEN SCIENTIST

Citizen science is when **people help scientists** by **collecting information** or **making observations** about nature. By taking part, you're not just **learning** about nature, you're actually helping to **protect** it and **understand** it better! Here are three examples you could get involved in!



BUGS

www.buglife.org.uk

WHO?

Buglife is a charity that works to **protect insects** (invertebrates) and their **habitats**. They help people **learn** about them and why they are so **important** for our planet.

WHEN?

Different projects run at different times of year, but many happen in **spring** and **summer** when insects are most active.

WHAT?

Buglife runs projects like **Bugs Matter**, where you help record the number of insects you see (for example, on car journeys). This helps scientists understand how insect populations are **changing** and how we can **protect** them.

BUTTERFLIES

www.butterfly-conservation.org

WHO?

Butterfly Conservation is a charity that works to save **butterflies, moths**, and their **habitats**.

WHEN?

The Big Butterfly Count usually takes place over a few weeks in **summer**.

WHAT?

You spend some time **counting** butterflies you see in a garden, park, or green space. Your observations help scientists **track** how butterfly populations are doing across the country.

BIRDS

www.rspb.org.uk

WHO?

The RSPB is a charity that works to protect **birds** and **wildlife**, and to look after important natural **places**.

WHEN?

The Big Garden Birdwatch takes place once a year in **winter** (usually January).

WHAT?

You spend some time **watching** and **counting** birds in your garden or local green space. This helps scientists understand how bird populations are changing over time.

RESOURCES AND TIPS



While **nature can be found everywhere** if we pay attention to see it, there are also lots of **special places** around that are bursting with nature. These spaces are kept as safe spaces for nature and people to come together, and most of them are free to visit.

The **Wildlife Trusts** have **nature reserves** all over the United Kingdom – this webpage helps you find one near you [Wildlife Trust – Find a local Nature Reserve](#). Your local Wildlife Trust will also have **activities and events** in these places that you might be able to join in with.

You could also look at different types of landscapes to visit:

Wetlands: www.wwt.org.uk

National Landscapes: www.national-landscapes.org.uk/

National Parks: www.nationalparks.uk

Forests: www.forestryengland.uk/visit

National Trails: www.nationaltrail.co.uk

The best place to start, is of course, right outside your own front door!

RESOURCES AND TIPS



There are some amazing **apps** that can help you to find out what you are seeing and hearing in nature. There are also lots of great **guides online**, and in your **local library**.

You could try some of these to get started:



Merlin helps you identify **birdsong**



Seek helps you identify **plants**



The **Woodland Trust's ID app** helps you identify **trees**



The **Field Study Councils WildID cards** are great to use when you're out and about.

BOOKS, POETRY AND MORE

Books and art can help us connect with nature even when we are not outside. Here are some suggestions to get you started, but there are plenty more to discover:

The Lost Words and The Lost Spells
by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris

Wild Child: A Journey Through Nature and A Wild Child's Guide to Nature at Night
by Dara McAnulty

Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants
by Robin Wall Kimmerer, adapted by Monique Gray Smith

We Have a Dream: Meet 30 Young Indigenous People and People of Colour Protecting the Planet
by Dr. Mya-Rose Craig ("Birdgirl") and illustrated by Sabrena Khadija.

Princess Olivia Investigates the Knights of Nature by Lucy Hawking and illustrated by Zoe Persico

By Oak, Ash and Thorn by Melissa Harrison

Greenwild: The World Behind the Door by Pari Thomson

A Year of Nature Poems by Joseph Coelho

Want to hear what wildlife think and feel?
'Messages from the Wild' offer some fun
interviews with everything from beetles to worms
to peregrines
<https://www.messagesfromthewild.com/>



NATURE ARTISTS

Art can help us connect with nature even when we're not outside. Here are some artists' work to get you started. What other works of art can you find? And what will you create yourself?



Van Gogh's paintings of a 'Vase with Fifteen Sunflowers' (1888), 'Wheatfield with Crows' (1890), 'Almond Blossoms' (1890), or 'The Starry Night' (1889)

Andy Goldsworthy's sculptures such as 'Refuges d'art', 'Woodline' (2011) and 'Ice left by the tide' (1999).

Ramón Piaguaje paintings such as 'Eternal Amazon'.

Yayoi Kusama paintings and sculptures such as 'Fireflies on the Water' (2002), 'Mushrooms' (1995), and 'Flowers' (1983).

Citation

Barnes, C., Butler, C.W., & Persaud, H. (2026). *A young person's guide to connecting with nature*. University of Derby & National Society for Education.



WWW.NSE.ORG.UK

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