

# Strengthening investments in nature for human health and wellbeing in the South West and beyond

Harnessing the latest scientific evidence, SWEEP delivered innovative resources and approaches that have strengthened a large network of cross-sectoral partnerships and influenced more robust and equitable investments, policy and practice, in the environment for health outcomes.



## sweep Impact Summary

Network of **120** stakeholders;

**12** evidence-based resources, strengthening cross-sectoral nature-based health outcomes.



**7** business cases and interventions influenced; **5** jobs supported; **£2.4m** funding, and increased business profits.



**3,626km<sup>2</sup>**

area of land informed for policy and practice to deliver nature and health



### Ways of Working



### Why it mattered?

Increasing evidence shows that spending time in nature leads to longer term improvements in our physical, and mental health and wellbeing, and delivers £2.2bn health benefits each year in England via physical activity alone.

With rising public health challenges such as obesity, poor mental health and the impact of the recent pandemic, there has never been a greater need to access the health benefits of nature. Yet many of us live more disconnected from nature than ever before.

The UK Government's 25 Year Plan outlined a need for strengthening understanding of health outcomes of interventions through environmental investments.

A growing and diverse range of policy and practice has ensued, but lacks key elements for maximising human health and nature benefits - critically, cross-sectoral working between the health and environment sectors and strong scientific evidence underpinning how best to invest in green and blue spaces.

### What we did

Responding to this, the SWEEP team - Dr Ben Wheeler, Dr Rebecca Lovell, Dr Sian de Bell, Kate Hind and Dr Karyn Morrisey (University of Exeter), Andy Edward Jones, Elaine Fileman and Dr Elizabeth Gabe-Thomas (Plymouth Marine Laboratory) and Professor Mel Austin (University of Plymouth) - worked in collaboration with key partners - Dorset Local Nature Partnership, Public Health Dorset, Cornwall Council, Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, the Dartmoor National Park Authority, Plymouth City Council - as well as a wider network of stakeholders.

These strong partnerships have strengthened cross-sectoral learning, working and investment in nature for health outcomes in the South West, and beyond, primarily through the development of:



**A cross-sectoral network of stakeholders in the South West** – via an online hub with 120 users representing all sectors of society, environment and health, both within and beyond the South West. This has provided a vital space for sharing regional good practice, policy and resources, delivering 11 public-facing cross-sectoral webinars to more than 1,000 people stimulating debate. SWEEP also co-created a suite of evidenced-based resources, disseminated via the network. For more information: <https://sweep.ac.uk/project/020/>

**A business case for investing in nature for health** – drawing from two academic databases (Web of Science and SCOPUS), SWEEP created its database with more than 500 papers connecting environmental interventions with health outcomes.

Providing evidence of how health benefits can be realised through natural resources investment, this was used to produce seven bespoke evidence reports used to successfully support partner's business cases for investment in the environment for human health outcomes.

## Impacts & benefits delivered



### Knowledge/Capacity

**New, bespoke, evidence-based resources shaping conversations and new ways of thinking at strategic and project level:** the process of co-creating 12 innovative nature-based health resources, and the resources themselves, have played a vital role in boosting stakeholder's confidence, credibility, and capacity to deliver nature-based health outcomes. This has sustained and increased levels of engagement, accelerating and improving decision making, policy and practice.



### Attitudinal/Capacity

#### Enhanced cross-sectoral working:

providing a space for networking and connection, especially during the challenging pandemic, has led to greater cross-sectoral sharing and working between the health and environment sector: a vital component for effective investment in more inclusive, sustainable nature-based health outcomes.



### Organisational Function

#### Accelerated and enhanced nature-based health and wellbeing delivery across a wide range of organisations:

e.g. SWEEP's work is strengthening strategic thinking and project evaluation approaches at the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust; local business sales and product development at Slyvawood Seeds; the equitable delivery of health benefits on Dartmoor National Park; the delivery of Plymouth City Council's Green Minds Derriford Community Park; the implementation of Health and Nature Dorset (HAND); business cases at Cornwall Council; the delivery of PH Dorset's Healthy Places programme; the evidence base, and supported development of the NATURE tool.



### Policy & Legislation

#### Strengthened regional and national policy and strategies with robust evidence:

e.g., Cornwall Council's 2023-2028 Social Prescribing Strategy, Dorset LEP's strategic policy development, and Wildfowl and Wetland Trust's contribution to Somerset's new 6,140 hectare 'super' National Nature Reserve.



### Natural Capital

#### Contributed to environmental enhancement and safeguarding:

via SWEEP-informed investments in health interventions, that extend over 3,626km<sup>2</sup> of the South West, and beyond.



### Health & Wellbeing

#### Enhanced health and wellbeing benefits for local populations and visitors:

through engagement with the nature-based health interventions delivered across this 1,402 square miles.



### Economic

#### Delivered partner profits and cost-savings:

through SWEEP undertaking this work and adding value by strengthening business cases, leveraging more than £2.43m funding, increasing Sylvawood Seed's forecasted revenue by 38%, and creating/safeguarding five jobs.



*One of the key benefits of SWEEP's work has been to keep the latest evidence and ideas at the forefront of our thinking. This is improving conversations, both on the ground and at senior level, fostering greater understanding about how best to bring together the many different, often fragmented, strands of work, and stakeholders, to deliver more effectively."*

**Rupert Lloyd, Healthy Places Project Coordinator, Public Health Dorset**



*SWEEP's work has contributed to closer working relationships between the environmental and health sectors in the South West. This type of cross-sectoral working is key to our success in delivering interventions that target nature-based health outcomes."*

**Richard Sharpe, Public health specialist & lead mental health & suicide, Cornwall County Council**



*SWEEP resources contributed to the thinking behind discussions with the Local Enterprise Partnership aimed at proving the value of nature based health and wellbeing and embedding this more in its policies and strategies. This has successfully resulted in getting the HAND collaboration included in Dorset LEPs Investment Prospectus Wellbeing portfolio, and embedding the natural capital concept."*

**Maria Clarke, Dorset Local Nature Partnership Manager**



*The SWEEP resources are prompting discussions, informing conversations and sowing the seeds for a different way of thinking at WWT. This has significant potential to influence how we assess and value the health benefits of our work and ultimately manage new sites and advise policy development."*

**Jonathan Reeves, Principle Research Officer, Wildfowl and Wetland Trust**



Westhay Moor Nature Reserve, Somerset



## Looking to the future

The value of SWEEP's work has been widely recognised. Our partners confirm that through its robust scientific evidence, strong partnerships, advisory roles and ongoing work, SWEEP's impact will continue across the South West and beyond. For example, strengthening:

- Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Local Plans, delivering health and wellbeing outcomes.
- National policy, and business cases for investments in nature for health outcomes e.g. Environmental Land Management Schemes.
- Green social prescribing schemes.
- Flagship programmes such as Future Parks Accelerators enhancing green spaces, and innovative ecosystem services tools such as the NATURE tool.

For more information contact [sweep@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:sweep@exeter.ac.uk)



*SWEEP has provided valuable evidence-based work that plays an important part in helping to drive the agenda for a 'right' to nature - where we are investing in enhancing our natural resources to create spaces that make us happy, and save money on health treatments."*

**Luke Pollard, former Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs**



## Organisations we've worked with



### Underpinning NERC Science

- NE/M005410/1 - Valuing Nature Programme Valuing Nature Programme Coordination Team
- NE/L002922/1 - Dan Bloomfield Dose of Nature Knowledge Exchange Fellowship
- NE/P01237X/1 - Developing a Nature and Health Hub for Cornwall
- NE/R006946/1 - Linking ecosystem services and businesses through Green Bonds
- NERC Oceans 2025 project - Plymouth Sound project
- NE/N013573/1 - CoastWEB - Valuing the contribution which coastal habitats make to human health and wellbeing

### About SWEEP

The South West Partnership for Environmental & Economical Prosperity (SWEEP) is a partnership between the University of Exeter, the University of Plymouth, and Plymouth Marine Laboratory. Funded by the Natural Environment Research Council and stakeholders together to solve key challenges faced by those working with our natural resources. [www.sweep.ac.uk](http://www.sweep.ac.uk)



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