

## Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT) Impact Case Study

*Enabling a more robust and evidence-based approach to the economic assessment of health and wellbeing benefits being delivered from WWT's wetland sites and programmes.*

### What was the need?

[WWT](#) protects, restores and creates healthy wetlands, and brings people closer to nature. One of its current priorities is its Blue Prescribing project; a wetland-based health programme designed to enhance people's connection with nature and improve their wellbeing. This [high profile](#) work is an example of green (or nature) prescribing which forms part of the government's Green Recovery drive and its wider 25 Year Environmental Plan. WWT is rolling out Blue Prescribing at two key sites - Steart Marshes (a managed realignment site) and the London Wetland Centre.

WWT increasingly needs to provide evidence of the breadth and value of human health impacts delivered from these programmes, as well as from wetlands in general, considering their wider importance in delivering natural capital services such as flood prevention and carbon sequestration. This is critical information for funders and opens opportunities to create more robust financial business cases for the co-benefits of wetland creation.

### How did SWEEP help?

Drawing on its own database of evidence, and wider sources, the SWEEP team developed two bespoke reports for WWT. These highlight both frameworks, and measures, for assessing the economic value of health and wellbeing benefits arising from natural environment-based interventions. The resources present and analyse evidence from literature, and relevant case studies, from which WWT can assess those approaches and data most relevant to their own needs.

### Outcomes and impact

#### Enhancing knowledge and changing perceptions and attitude

The bespoke SWEEP evidence reports have enhanced WWT's understanding of how best to economically assess the health and wellbeing benefits of their work, particularly at the Steart Marshes site. Additionally, the wider [suite of SWEEP resources](#) provided a much needed connection with other practitioners especially during the pandemic and have inspired new ideas.

*'Working with SWEEP has built our confidence and extended our understanding about how academic evidence can help us do our job better. It has allowed us at WWT to think about, and act on, how we best deliver health benefits from our wetland nature-based interventions and communicate more clearly and credibly about the value of this to society'. Jonathan Reeves, WWT Principal Research Officer for Health & Wellbeing.*

#### Enhancing delivery

- **New approaches** – drawing directly on SWEEP's resources WWT employed an SROI (Social Return on Investment) approach to assess the economic impact of its Blue Prescribing programme at Steart Marshes.

*'Working with SWEEP has boosted our knowledge and capacity to use some of the best available evidence-based metrics and methods for economically valuing the health and wellbeing benefits from our wetlands nature based health interventions. SWEEP's resources were key in our decision to undertake a SROI (Social Rate of Investment) assessment at our Steart site. For the first time, we hope this will give us concrete economic data on the health benefits we deliver, making our work more policy relevant and strengthening our ability to leverage further funding'. Jonathan Reeves.*

- **Accelerated timelines and cost-savings** - SWEEP provided the capacity WWT lacked in-house to collate and analysis best practice evidence in response to its needs.
- **Leveraging further funding and securing jobs** - SWEEP informed WWT's SROI work at their Steart Marshes site, and this work demonstrated a commitment to evaluation and was a contributing factor in securing additional funding to extend the work (and project officer post) by 6 months.
- **WWT leading the way** - economically evaluating health and wellbeing benefits from environmental interventions is notoriously difficult but, with SWEEP's help, WWT is now more effectively engaged with the process. The experience of applying the SROI approach at the Steart Marsh site will provide valuable data, as well as learning, to drive further improvements in this area.

*'Nature prescribing projects are logistically challenging and the project management occupies a lot of staff time. SWEEP helped to accelerate WWT's thinking and our ability to start assessing the economic value of its social prescribing work, providing the much needed capacity that WWT simply didn't have in-house to undertake this important aspect of our work'. Jonathan Reeves.*

- **Feeding into wider WWT strategies and approaches** – SWEEP's resources (the bespoke WWT reports and [Five Capitals Model resource](#)), as well as the SROI assessment at Steart Marshes (informed by SWEEP's evidence report) is already beginning to inform WWT thinking at a senior level. As WWT approaches its next strategy cycle later this year, discussions are underway to determine how best to approach the wider economic assessment of WWT's health and wellbeing impacts, both from its wetland-based health programmes, and from wider wetland natural capital service provision such as flood prevention and carbon sequestration. It is expected that SWEEP's work will inform a more standardised and robust approach that can be used across all WWT's sites and activities including wetland visitor centres, wetland restoration and creation projects and programmes of interventions.
- **Stronger partnerships** - SWEEP has provided an opportunity for WWT to consolidate and develop its relationship with the University which has generated new ideas and fed into broader work. WWT has shared the SWEEP resources with various partners, thereby better supporting them with their own activities to assess the economic value of health impacts arising from their work.

### Legacy – creating lasting change

Time is required to realise the full impact and benefit of this work for WWT. However, it is anticipated this will be significant and the following are just a couple of the expected pathways to impact:

- **SWEEP PhD** – continuing until 2024, this will ensure that the foundations of this SWEEP work will be sustained and extended.
- **Collaboration** – new policy relevant funding from NIHR will enable WWT and Exeter to work together on a high-profile feasibility trial for green social prescribing, helping deliver the Government's commitment to enhancing the use of natural environments to enhance mental health.
- **Contributing to national policy** – the creation of wetlands, and coastal managed realignments like the Steart Marshes site, are moving up the political agenda. Drawing on its own experiences, such as this work with SWEEP, WWT is in a strong position to inform and strengthen national policy around best approaches for assessing and valuing the cost effectiveness of new wetlands, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing benefits. One recent example is WWT's contribution to the new 6,140 hectare ['super' National Nature Reserve](#) in Somerset, protecting saltmarsh, heath and wetland habitats.

*'The SWEEP resources are prompting discussions, informing conversations and sowing the seeds for a different way of thinking at WWT. This first step is the most important as it has significant potential to influence how we decide to assess and value the health benefits of our work and ultimately how we manage and develop new sites, and advise policy development in this area.' Jonathan Reeves.*