

England

David Boardent (rspb-images.com)



There are inequalities in access to nature between high and low incomes and urban and rural households.

2020–2021 brought unexpected challenges, but also brought everyone closer to nature. We commissioned research, revealing how important nature-rich greenspaces are to us, and how access to them is unequal. We've also continued our push to end burning on deep peat, with Defra announcing a partial ban on protected areas in January.

Emma Marsh
Director, RSPB England



Lelia Bain (rspb-images.com)

Access to nature close to home was beneficial during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Recovering together

In March 2020 we entered lockdown. It had some unexpected side effects. People began noticing nature, and sharing their experiences with us. How did time in nature help people cope with lockdown? What role did nature play in building resilience, and supporting our recovery from the pandemic?

In response, our Policy and Advocacy team commissioned research through YouGov in May 2020, which revealed that adults in England:

- see nature as important for health and wellbeing
- think access to nature close to home was beneficial during the Covid-19 crisis
- overwhelmingly support protecting and investing in nature, and increasing accessible natural greenspace as part of our recovery from Covid-19
- strongly oppose Government reducing spending on nature or putting less emphasis on protecting it.

The survey also highlighted inequalities in access to nature: between households with highest and lowest incomes, and between urban and rural households.

When the report – *Recovering Together* – was launched in June 2020, we called on England's metro mayors (elected leaders of the largest urban and metropolitan areas) to put nature at the heart of their

recovery strategies. In response, four mayors' offices recorded videos talking about their commitment to a green recovery, and nature featured in many of their recovery strategies.

Recovering Together 2 (the 'Greenspace report')

The implications of Covid-19 for the economy became more apparent as the year continued. Spending initiatives under the slogan 'build, build, build' seemed the antithesis of a green recovery. We saw a risk that nature commitments could be forgotten.

In *Recovering Together 2*, published in December 2020, we set out the vision for a nature-rich future. We argue that projects investing in nature-rich greenspace, green infrastructure and nature-based climate solutions should be prioritised. We call on decision-makers to put these initiatives at the heart of plans to reboot the economy and deliver a green recovery.

Adults in England see nature as important for health and wellbeing



Banning the burn, for peat's sake

Peat is incredible. Composed of partly-decomposed plant matter, it develops over thousands of years. It supports rare species such as the carnivorous sundew, acts as a natural flood protector, and stores huge amounts of carbon. We have long opposed the practice of burning peat bogs.

Our 'ban the burn' campaign has brought the plight of peatlands into the spotlight. Following a promise by Government to end burning on deep peat in 2020, Defra announced a partial ban in January 2021.

Under the new rules, burning vegetation on protected areas of upland peatland (over 40cm deep) will be prevented. Although there are several exemptions, it's encouraging to see.

In a climate crisis, protecting one of our largest carbon stores seems obvious. Burning is still allowed in many areas without protected status, thwarting habitat restoration and releasing carbon. As Director of Global Conservation (at the time) Martin Harper put it: '...the climate does not care whether emissions are from within or outside protected areas.' Our work continues!