

Hello

Thank you for signing up to participate in these activities. They have been based on the principals of mindfulness, which has been defined as “paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.” It is hoped that the activities aim to help you connect to nature, which has been shown to increase wellbeing.

When starting the activities set aside some time, an hour is good, for yourself, so you can focus on your own wellbeing. You may want to do this with other members of your family, or alone. Whichever it is, let people know that this is your time. To help this it is recommended that you turn off phones and computers and other distractions.

Find a space where you are comfortable, ideally outside in a garden, but by a window is good as well. Wherever you are, remember to follow government guidance on social distancing. There may be some simple resources that are needed for the sessions such as pen or paper. These are listed at the start of each activity so they can be gathered before you start.

Finally, a quick note on your wellbeing, which is very important, especially at this time. These activities are designed to increase your wellbeing. However, you are the expert on you – you know yourself, and if any of the activities make you uncomfortable or uneasy, stop. If you need extra guidance on your own wellbeing you can find this by visiting some of the following places:

- Livewell in Essex <https://www.livewellcampaign.co.uk/article-categories/mental-well-being/>
- Generic advice - <https://mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>
- NHS links - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/>, <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/>
- NHS Apps - <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>
- Mind help lines - <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/>
- Samaritans - <https://www.samaritans.org/scotland/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/>
- Current government guidance - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19>

Trees – Prose

You will need

- Somewhere comfortable to sit, preferably outside in your garden. If you do not have a garden, by a window is good.
- Pen, paper

<p>Arrival activity</p>	<p>Your anchor</p> <p>It can often be good to bring yourself back to what is happening in the here and now by focusing on an “anchor” – something that is always there, and when your mind is running off all over the place, it brings your attention back to now and what is happening. The breath can be good for this. Try bringing your attention to your breathing. This can be anywhere where you feel your breath most obviously. It can help to put your hand on your stomach or chest to help feel the breath going in and out. Try keeping your attention on your breath for a few breaths.</p>
<p>Appreciate activity</p>	<p>Prose</p> <p>Select a piece of writing, such as one of those below. You can also choose your own favourite story. Make sure you are comfortable. If it feels right close your eyes and focus on your breath for 3-5 breaths. Then simply read the story. With a short story especially you may like to read it through a few times, maybe once to get the idea of it, maybe read it aloud to hear the sounds of the story, think about how it has made you feel. Are there any ideas you would take away from the story?</p>
<p>Focus on Forests</p>	<p>Forest imagines</p> <p>Find somewhere comfortable to sit. If it feels right close your eyes. Imagine yourself standing amongst trees – this could be a woodland you know and love, or somewhere imaginary. Slowly breathe and as you do so imagine feeling the warmth of the sun on your face, see if you can imagine the feel of a soft breeze on your skin, and the sound of birds close by. As you picture yourself standing amongst the trees, try to take in your woodland surroundings using all of your senses. What do you see around you? What do you hear? What can you smell? What can you feel? Stay in your woodland as long as you like – it is a calm and peaceful place that you can return to. When you’re ready to move on, take a deep breath and slowly open your eyes.</p>
<p>Focus on Trees</p>	<p>Tree meditation</p> <p>Focus on a tree in your garden or near your house. It is great if you can touch it, but this can be done from a window if you are totally inside. If you can’t get close to the tree try imagining doing this activity. Stand and look at the tree from afar. Look at the shape, the branches, reaching up. The root going underground. Bring your attention to the roots, explore the idea of the roots with curiosity, imagine your feet are rooted to the ground in the same way. Try to feel the sense of being supported by the floor, much as the tree is. Move your attention up the tree to the trunk, consider the trunk with kindly curiosity, look at the solidity, the shape, the things around it affecting the trunk.</p> <p>Bring your attention to your body – your trunk. Bring the same kindly curiosity you had to the tree, to the sense of your own body. Explore the solidness and permanence. Move your attention up to the branches, the angles and ways they branch out. Maybe follow one branch all the way from the trunk to the final twig. Look at the different colours, and movements, the angles and contours. Bring your attention to your arms. Stretch out your arms away from your body. Consider your arms and the length of them, the way they reach away from your body, the shapes you can make with them, and the movements you can do. Don’t worry about where your arms are, just bring a gentle curiosity to them.</p> <p>Move toward the tree so you can feel it. Lay your hands on it and gently feel the bark, you may want to close your eyes, feel the bark’s roughness, and smooth areas, feel the girth of</p>

	<p>the tree, down the roots and up as far as you can reach. Maybe feel the earth around the tree and any leaves or other plants close enough. Take a few deep breaths and become aware of the smells around you, the scent of the tree and leaves. Open your eyes and look at the colours of the tree. The shades of greens, browns, greys and more.</p> <p>Find somewhere near the tree and sit down. You may like to be somewhere you can see the tree, or maybe leaning against it. You are going to expand your attention to what is around you and see if you can open your senses to all of nature. Bring your attention to what you can hear, see, feel around you or even smell. How does the air feel on your skin, is there any movement around you? Any insects or other animals? What other plants are there near you? What colours are they? What does the earth feel like under your feet, or even fingers? Ideally a sit-spot lasts for 20 minutes or more, but it is good if you can do this for at least 5 minutes, as it allows your body and the natural world to get used to each other and you start noticing more and more.</p>
Create	<p>Writing</p> <p>Think about the tree you have been focusing on. Can you create a story or narrative of its life. Have a guess at how old it is, what it has “seen”, how things around it have changed. What reaction it may have had to the changes, how it might view the animals including insects near it. Try writing down your story. You can do this even if you decide at the end you don’t like it and want to throw it away. It is just about allowing yourself to be free enough to give it a go.</p>
Assist and learn	<p>Set aside a bit of time to make your own contribution to nature. Today the focus is on trees. Have a go at one of the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out about a campaign or method of supporting trees whilst at home • Find out about what there is in your local neighbourhood where nature may need support, this could include finding out and planning to help with conservation volunteering <p>Plant a tree, or if you don’t think you will have room for a tree, try planting something smaller. Take some time to learn more about the trees you have been near – such as the type of tree, what lives on it, how it is related to other trees, how long it might live. A couple of good sources of information are https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/ and https://www.forestryengland.uk/visit</p> <p>You can also join Colchester’s woodland project – find out more at https://www.colchester.gov.uk/better-colchester/colchesterwoodlandproject/</p>

My two favourite elm trees at the back of the hut are condemned to dye – it shocks me to relate it but tis true – the savage who owns them thinks they have done their best & now he wants to make use of the benefits he can get from selling them – O was this country Egypt and I was but a caliph the owner should loose his ears for his arrogant presumption & the first wretch that buried his axe in their roots should hang on their branches as a terror to the rest – I have been several mornings to bid them farewell – had I but £100 to spare I would buy their reprieves – but they must dye . . . was People all to feel & think as I do the world coud not be carried on – a green woud not be ploughd a tree or bush would not be cut for firing or furniture & every thing they found when boys would remain in that state till they dyd – this is my indisposition & you will laugh at it.

John Clare, letter dated 7 March 1821

EUROPEAN BEECH

There is a little hill named Carne within the territorie of Tusculum not far from Roman Citie side, clad and beautiful with a goodly grove and tuft of beech trees, so even and round in the head as if they were curiously kept cut and shorne artificially with garden sheares. . . . In it there was one especiall faire tree above the rest, which Pabienus Crispus, a man in our daies of great authority . . . cast a fancie and extra ordinarie liking unto; insomuch as he was wont not only to take his repose and lie under it, to sprinkle and cast wine plentifully upon it, but also to clip, embrace and kisse it other whiles.

Pliny the Elder (first century BC)

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=XFF9CgAAQBAJ&lpg=PT349&ots=xqxZAEyuuJ&dq=kilverts%20diary%20william%20and%20I%20walked%20to%20the%20top&pg=PT350#v=onepage&q&f=true>

Saturday 22nd April from William and I (bottom of page)

Gilbert White

The Natural History of Selbourne

January 29 1774

THE HOUSE-SWALLOW, or chimney-swallow, is undoubtedly the first comer of all the British hirundines; and appears in general on or about the 13th of April, as I have remarked from many years' observation. Not but now and then a straggler is seen much earlier: and in particular, when I was a boy I observed a swallow for a whole day together on a sunny warm Shrove Tuesday; which day could not fall out later than the middle of March, and often happened early in February.

It is worth remarking that these birds are seen first about lakes and mill-ponds; and it is also very particular, that if these early visitors happen to find frost and snow, as was the case in the two dreadful springs of 1770 and 1771, they immediately withdraw for a time. A circumstance this, much more in favor of hiding than migration; since it is much more probable that a bird should retire to its hybernaculum just at hand, than return for a week or two to warmer latitudes.

The swallow, though called the chimney-swallow, by no means builds altogether in chimneys, but often within barns and out-houses against the rafters; and so she did in Virgil's time:—"Garrula quam tignis nidos suspendat hirundo" (The twittering swallow hangs its nest from the beams).

In Sweden she builds in barns, and is called Ladu swala, the barn-swallow. Besides, in the warmer parts of Europe, there are no chimneys to houses, except they are English built: in these countries she constructs her nest in porches, and gateways, and galleries, and open halls.

Here and there a bird may affect some odd peculiar place; as we have known a swallow build down a shaft of an old well through which chalk had been formerly drawn up for the purpose of manure: but in general with us this hirundo breeds in chimneys, and loves to haunt those stacks where there is a constant fire,—no doubt for the sake of warmth. Not that it can subsist in the immediate shaft where there is a fire; but prefers one adjoining to that of the kitchen, and disregards the perpetual smoke of the funnel, as I have often observed with some degree of wonder.

Five or six feet more down the chimney does this little bird begin to form her nest, about the middle of May: which consists, like that of the house-martin, of a crust or shell composed of dirt or mud, mixed with short pieces of straw to render it tough and permanent; with this difference, that whereas the shell of the martin is nearly hemispheric, that of the swallow is open at the top, and like half a deep ditch; this nest is lined with fine grasses, and feathers which are often collected as they float in the air.

Wonderful is the address which this adroit bird shows all day long, in ascending and descending with security through so narrow a pass. When hovering over the mouth of the funnel, the vibration of her wings, acting on the confined air, occasions a rumbling like thunder. It is not improbable that the dam submits to this inconvenient situation so low in the shaft, in order to secure her broods from rapacious birds; and particularly from owls, which frequently fall down chimneys, perhaps in attempting to get at these nestlings.

The swallow lays from four to six white eggs, dotted with red specks; and brings out her first brood about the last week in June, or the first week in July. The progressive method by which the young are introduced into life is very amusing: first they emerge from the shaft with difficulty enough, and often fall down into the rooms below; for a day or so they are fed on the chimney-top, and then are conducted to the dead leafless bough of some tree, where, sitting in a row, they are attended with great assiduity, and may then be called perchers. In a day or two more they become flyers, but are still unable to take their own food; therefore they play about near the place where the dams are hawking for flies: and when a mouthful is collected, at a certain signal given, the dam and the nestling advance, rising towards each other, and meeting at an angle; the young one all the while uttering such a little quick note of gratitude and complacency, that a person must have paid very little regard for the wonders of nature that has not often remarked this feat.

The dam betakes herself immediately to the business of a second brood as soon as she is disengaged from her first, which at once associates with the first broods of house-martins, and with them congregates, clustering on sunny roofs, towers, and trees. This hirundo brings out her second brood towards the middle and end of August.

All summer long, the swallow is a most instructive pattern of unwearied industry and affection: for from morning to night, while there is a family to be supported, she spends the whole day in skimming close to the ground, and exerting the most sudden turns and quick evolutions. Avenues, and long walks under the hedges, and pasture-fields, and mown meadows where cattle graze, are her delight, especially if there are trees interspersed; because in such spots insects most abound. When a fly is taken, a smart snap from her bill is heard, resembling the noise at the shutting of a watch-case; but the motion of the mandibles is too quick for the eye.

The swallow, probably the male bird, is the excubitor to house-martins and other little birds; announcing the approach of birds of prey. For as soon as a hawk appears, with a shrill alarming note he calls all the swallows and martins about him; who pursue in a body, and buffet and strike their enemy till they have driven him from the village; darting down from above on his back, and rising in a perpendicular line in perfect security. This bird will also sound the alarm, and strike at cats when they climb on the roofs of houses, or otherwise approach the nest. Each species of hirundo drinks as it flies along, sipping the surface of the water; but the swallow alone in general washes on the wing, by dropping into a pool for many times together: in very hot weather house-martins and bank-martins also dip and wash a little.

The swallow is a delicate songster, and in soft sunny weather sings both perching and flying; on trees in a kind of concert, and on chimney-tops: it is also a bold flyer, ranging to distant downs and commons even in windy weather, which the other species seems much to dislike; nay, even frequenting exposed seaport towns, and making little excursions over the salt water. Horsemen on the wide downs are often closely attended by a little party of swallows for miles together, which plays before and behind them, sweeping around and collecting all the skulking insects that are roused by the trampling of the horses' feet: when the wind blows hard, without this expedient, they are often forced to settle to pick up their lurking prey....

A certain swallow built for two years together on the handles of a pair of garden shears that were stuck up against the boards in an out-house, and therefore must have her nest spoiled whenever that implement was wanted; and what is stranger still, another bird of the same species built its nest on the wings and body of an owl that happened by accident to hang dead and dry from the rafter of a barn. This owl, with the nest on its wings, and with eggs in the nest, was brought as a curiosity worthy of the most elegant private museum in Great Britain. The owner, struck with the oddity of the sight, furnished the bringer with a large shell or conch, desiring him to fix it just where the owl hung: the person did as he was ordered, and the following year, a pair, probably the same pair, built their nest in the conch and laid their eggs.