

Crowdsourcing app looks at relationship between the outdoors and wellbeing

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La felicità nella luce della sera. Credit: Leonard Domnguez

A new app will crowdsource data to help scientists understand the relationship between biodiversity and wellbeing. The app, developed at the University of Cambridge, maps happiness onto a detailed map that includes all the UK's nature reserves and green spaces.

NatureBuzz, which is available to download free on iOS and Android platforms, asks participants three times per day to answer questions

about how they feel, whether they are outside or indoors, who they are with, and what they are doing. At the same time, it records their location using GPS data.

NatureBuzz also provides information about UK nature reserves and 'protected areas' and will provide users with feedback on how their [happiness](#) has fluctuated, where it was highest, with whom and during which activities.

"Apps provide a great way of collecting data from thousands – possibly tens of thousands – of users, a scale that is just not possible in lab experiments," explains research associate Laurie Parma from the Department of Psychology, who coordinates the study. "We'll use this data to answer some fascinating and potentially very important questions about our relationship with nature."

Studies have suggested that people are happier and reinvigorated when living in more natural settings. For example, a 2011 study from the United States found that people who live in inner cities were the least happy, while those who live in rural areas are the happiest. However, it is not clear whether all green spaces promote happiness equally.

Diversity – the number and abundance of different species in particular systems – is thought to be important in increasing the resilience of some so-called ecosystem services - such as climate regulation and pest control – that underpin human wellbeing. However, the more immediate role that biodiversity may play in affecting happiness is unclear.

"We know that people quickly become familiar with – and immune to – happiness-inducing stimuli and one potential way to combat this phenomenon is to provide new and varied stimuli," adds Professor Andrew Balmford from the Department of Zoology. "Natural environments with greater biodiversity – different flowers, different

birds, for example – present a rich variety of stimuli, so it's possible they will keep the 'happiness factor' fresh for visitors."

The researchers hope that by crowdsourcing data, they will be able to answer questions such as whether the type of green space – gardens, city parks, countryside or [nature reserves](#), for example – have the same impact on an individual's wellbeing, and whether someone needs to be interested in nature to benefit more from the natural environment. They believe their findings may have important consequences for how policymakers promote biodiversity and how reserve managers enable people to make the most of the happiness-improving potential of access to nature.

The app is part of a broader study of happiness and nature developed by the Departments of Psychology and Zoology, University of Cambridge, RSPB, UNEP-WCMC and Cardiff University. It is funded by the Cambridge Conservation Initiative and is part of a research programme on human happiness.

NatureBuzz is available to download from the [iPhone App Store](#) and from [Google Play](#).

Provided by University of Cambridge

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