

Nature programmes could put a spring in your step

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New research shows that watching TV programmes such as the BBC's Springwatch and Countryfile might actually be good for you.

The study by academics from Anglia Ruskin University in the UK and Perdana University in Malaysia, published in the journal *Body Image*, has investigated the effects of watching short [films](#) showing both natural and [urban environments](#).

Participants watched two three-minute films, shot from a first-person perspective, produced by Anglia Ruskin University's StoryLab research institute. One was of a walk through streets in Cambridge city centre and the other was on the banks of the River Cam in Grantchester, just outside Cambridge, England.

Lead researcher Viren Swami, Professor of Social Psychology at Anglia Ruskin University, carried out a previous study showing that spending time in green spaces, such as parks, helps to promote positive [body image](#), which includes respecting your own [body](#) and rejecting rigid ideals around appearance.

This new study found that similar, immediate improvements in body appreciation could be achieved by watching a film depicting a natural [environment](#). The film showing city streets had no effect, either positive or negative, on participants' body appreciation.

Professor Swami said: "There are a number of possible explanations for our results, including the idea that [natural environments](#) promote 'soft fascination', which is a state of cognitive quiet that fosters self-kindness and helps individuals have a more compassionate view of their body. Views of rivers and trees are also devoid of any reminders of materialism, and so allows the viewer respite from thoughts of consumption and image.

"However, more work still needs to be done to fully understand exactly how exposure to natural environments promotes improvements in body image, as well as how our findings here translate to how people view

nature films outside the laboratory. For example, if we watch Springwatch on the sofa whilst at the same time checking our Twitter feed, it's possible the natural scenes might not have the same immersive effect.

"However, our findings suggest that there could be a straightforward and low-cost solution for promoting healthier body image, particularly for individuals who may not have easy access to real natural environments, for example if they live in a city centre or because of a lack of mobility."

More information: Viren Swami et al, The impact of exposure to films of natural and built environments on state body appreciation, *Body Image* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.06.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2018.06.002)

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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