

Birdwatching can improve mental health and foster a sense of well-being

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The [mental health benefits](#) of being in nature have long been acknowledged, whether through activities like listening to birdsong or taking a walk in the park.

While birdwatchers are often [portrayed as boring](#), it turns out that twitchers have been onto something all along. A [study](#) published in 2024 shows that even half an hour of bird watching could make us happier, healthier and help foster a deeper connection with nature.

We already know that [listening to birds](#) throughout the day positively impacts our well-being. Even hearing birds indoors, through an open window can boost our [emotional state](#), albeit in the short-term.

The study suggests that not only can birdwatching offer even more benefits than just listening to birdsong, it's more effective at increasing well-being and reducing stress than going on a nature walk.

So why is birdwatching so good for us?

[Biophilia](#) could be a big part of it. Biophilia is the belief that humans have an affinity with nature—some would argue that we should see ourselves as part of nature—so being in [natural surroundings](#) makes us feel well. But [biodiversity](#) could play a role too. [Research suggests](#) that biodiversity is a natural medicine for humans that can help reduce stress and encourage physical activity.

My research, though, focuses on [positive psychology](#) and nature. I explore which resources are fundamental to improving well-being and help people go beyond feeling "good enough" mentally to flourishing—the highest level of well-being. My research, then, could help explain why birdwatching is so beneficial for mental health.

Twitching with happiness

Birdwatching can boost [positive emotions](#)—the foundation of well-being. Research shows that conscious experiences of emotions affect well-being more positively. For example, a [study](#) asked participants to either count how many birds they had seen, or rate their joy upon seeing each bird species—both groups reported well-being boosts. However, the joyful group experienced the most remarkable improvement, suggesting that participants' awareness of positive emotions while birdwatching may have boosted the activity's benefits.

But birding can be awesome as well as joyful. [Research suggests](#) that experiencing awe of nature can be transformational for human well-being. "[Noticing](#)" is an essential aspect of awe. Noticing means that our full attention is on the birds rather than ourselves. Being in nature and noticing wildlife, then, requires us to immerse ourselves in the activity, which can improve [mental](#) and [physical health](#).

The birds and the bees

Unlike the "boring birder" stereotype so popular in TV and film, birdwatching is not a dull, passive activity. It is an engaging pursuit that captivates the mind. Recently, my colleague and I conducted [research](#) on the impact of bees on the mental health of beekeepers and their families.

We found parallels between beekeepers and birdwatchers: both experienced a deep engagement and profound sense of tranquility through hours of observing their subject. Like birdwatchers, beekeepers can become so absorbed in their observations that they lose track of time and surroundings, enveloped entirely in the hive's dynamics. This immersion triggers a psychological flow crucial for overall mental well-being.

[Psychological flow](#) is a state of deep absorption in an activity. It's characterized by intense concentration, a seamless sense of involvement and a feeling of mastery. This mental state is not only a sign of enhanced performance, but also a key to overall well-being. It's often compared to being "in the zone," a state where we feel our best and perform at our peak.

One of the reasons that birdwatching is so good for us is that it can produce this experience of psychological flow. Twitchers become fully engrossed in identifying [bird species](#), deciphering their behaviors, and observing their actions. This flow state emerges organically, fueled by curiosity, heightened concentration and sustained engagement. After being "in the flow" birdwatchers can experience a rush of endorphins and a profound sense of satisfaction and well-being.

Get a buzz

[Our study](#) found a strong bond between beekeepers and their bees, similar to "[positivity resonance](#)"—a deep emotional and physiological connection with another living entity, often resulting in feelings of joy and satisfaction.

This resonance, we found, significantly bolsters beekeepers' happiness and overall well-being, fostering a profound sense of harmony in the beekeeper and a sense of unity with the bees. Observing birds could promote a similar experience for birdwatchers.

Recent research on the beekeepers and birdwatchers, then, confirms the power of nature-centered therapies for improving mental health. So, grab your binoculars and step into nature for a twitching session and a well-being boost. [Embrace the journey](#) and savor every moment.

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