

Biodiversity good for mental health, scientists find

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Biodiversity, an area's richness in different species, is good for more than just the environment, researchers have found: it benefits us psychologically, at least in city parks and green spaces. For the world's burgeoning city populations, public urban green spaces provide one of the few avenues for direct contact with the natural environment, the researchers noted in a paper describing the study. "Such contact has measurable physical and psychological benefits."

For instance, a 1984 study by Roger Ulrich at Texas A&M University found that hospital patients recovered faster if their hospital room windows overlooked trees rather than brick walls. The new study shows that benefits of this sort coincide with the species richness of urban green spaces, wrote the authors, Richard Fuller and colleagues at the University of Sheffield, U.K. The findings appeared online May 15 in the research journal *Biology Letters*. Fuller's team studied 15 urban parks and green spaces throughout the U.K., analyzing their biodiversity levels and questioning visitors. The visitors were given questionnaires asking whether coming there helped them clear their minds, gain perspective on life, think easily about personal matters or feel connected to nature. Visitors not only felt better in more biodiversity places: they could roughly accurately gauge the level of biodiversity, at least in terms of easily visible species like birds, butterflies and plants, the scientists found. The findings are important since about half of the world's people now live in cities, increasingly isolated from nature and its benefits, Fuller and colleagues wrote. The results indicate that successful management of urban green spaces should emphasize biological complexity to enhance human well-being in addition to biodiversity conservation, they concluded.

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