

Sonic Spot - Listening to Nature

When we go outside, our focus is usually on everything except the sounds around us – we might be deep in conversation, worrying about work or school or listening to loud music through headphones. If we do stop and listen then the soundscape is dominated by cars, building sites and planes overhead.

As roads, construction and airways have reduced or even stopped completely, we currently have the rare opportunity to connect deeply with the sounds of nature immediately surrounding us.

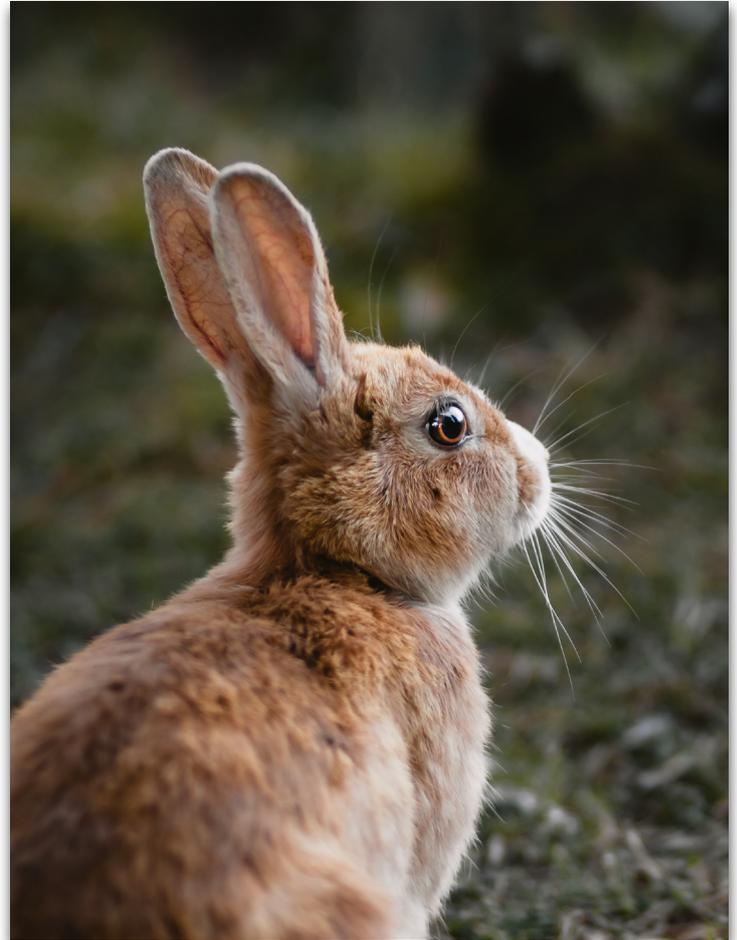
Why is sound important?

Being surrounded by nature has long been thought to benefit humans, particularly in terms of our stress levels and mental health. Now, there are studies which support this theory.

In 2017, neuroscientist Dr Cassandra Gould von Praag published the results from a study where participants listened to both natural and artificial sounds while their brain activity was monitored in an MRI scanner.

The results showed that the activity in the Default Mode Network (the part of the brain which is active when a person is resting) changed when different sounds were played. When listening to artificial sounds, the participants' brain activity indicated an inward focus, something also observed in people with depression, anxiety disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Contrary to this, when participants listened to natural sounds, their attention was outward, indicative of being wide awake and focussed. Further to this, the sympathetic nervous system which is responsible for fight-and-flight responses to dangerous and stressful scenarios was at rest. Meanwhile the parasympathetic system which is responsible for recovery and the development of the body's resources become more active. You can read the full results of the study [here](#).



*Brown rabbits have big ears to help them hear better
Image Credit: Tolga Ahmetler*

Activity Instructions

If you can, head outside – a garden, doorstep, balcony will all work well. If heading outside isn't an option, find a window that you can open, ideally in a quiet room.

Find somewhere comfortable to sit and close your eyes.

Listen.

Sketch what you hear

Why not bring some paper and a pencil. Have a go at sketching what you think you can hear. Is it a bird? Something crawling through leaves? Rustling bushes or trees?

Create a digital recording

It's not always possible to hear the sounds of nature, so how about making a recording? You can use a phone or tablet. Open the built in recording app. On iPhone/iPad this is called 'Voice Memos', and on an Android device it might be called 'Recorder' or 'Voice Recorder'. Press record and sit very quietly. Once you think you have recorder enough nature sounds, save the file and now you will always have access to the benefits of natural sounds wherever you are!

If you do create a digital recording, we would love to hear it! Please share it with us using [#DynamicEarthOnline](#)



Blue tit
Photo by Hans Veth on Unsplash

Bird Identification

One of the things you are most likely to hear is singing birds. Because there are so many different bird species in the UK and around the world, it can be very tricky working out which birds you can hear.

Luckily, there are some very useful resources to help us:

[RSPB: What bird is that?](#)

[Woodland Trust: Bird song identification](#)

Why not also have a go at making our [bird feeder](#) to attract some more birds for you to spot!

By providing food, you can support birds through times of year when food is more scarce, or just make their lives a little easier by supplementing what they can find in nature!