

PRESS RELEASE

12 August 2021

NATIONAL CANAL CHARITY CALLS FOR PUBLIC'S HELP TO

BRING NATURE BACK INTO TOWNS AND CITIES

Urban canals uniquely placed to benefit the wellbeing of millions of people

- Urban canals help bring nature into the nation's cities benefitting our wellbeing
- The Canal & River Trust is calling for the public's help this summer to collect valuable conservation data across England & Wales
- The Trust will work with communities to identify towns and cities where, together, help can be given to revive nature and wildlife and improve the wellbeing of residents

The Canal & River Trust, the charity which looks after and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers running through some of the most built-up areas in England and Wales, is today, 12th August 2021, launching a nationwide appeal for communities to support its #ActNowforCanals campaign by participating in its largest survey to date, 'Sense in Nature'.

With towpath use up in many urban areas, with people discovering their local canal during the pandemic*, the nation's former industrial canals have a vital role to play as the back garden for millions of people, including many of the one in eight nationwide who don't have a garden.

The 8.8 million people who live with a canal on their doorstep are being asked to collect valuable conservation data by noting the nature they can see, hear, smell and feel. The insight from the survey will help the Trust establish the ecological value of each stretch of canal across the nation as well as the wellbeing benefit to the surrounding communities using them.

The Trust will use the data to identify low-scoring sites where it can work with communities to make environmental interventions, for example targeting litter clearance or planting new habitat, bringing nature into the areas that are in most need and, importantly, helping future proof and better protect canals, making them blue, green and better.

Visits to the canals bring much-needed wellness benefits to Brits, with the Trust's research revealing that after a visit to a canal 63% noticed a positive improvement in mood, 67% felt calm, 62% said they felt happy and 41% felt more energetic. The research also revealed the reasons

why people visit their local canal, with 39% wanting a space to relax and unwind, 33% visiting for health and physical exercise benefits and 32% wanting to enjoy the nature and wildlife.

Dr Amir Khan, NHS GP and best-selling author comments; *"Spending time outdoors has huge benefits to our physical and mental wellbeing and there are many studies that repeatedly prove, being amongst nature offers numerous health benefits including reducing stress, anxiety, and blood pressure.*

"Since the start of the pandemic, I've seen a huge spike in conversations around wellbeing and people raising concerns over their mental health. That's why it's so important we protect and look after the precious outdoor blue and green spaces, like canals and rivers, particularly in our towns and cities where they are needed most.

"Over the last year, the outdoors became a savior for many of us. For me, my local canal offered the respite and the time in nature I needed to recharge after a busy clinic and influx of patients. This is why I'm supporting the Canal & River Trust by asking you to #ActNowForCanals and look after these vital spaces that offer a natural and lasting way to better wellbeing for millions of people across the country. All you need to do is one small act, that will positively impact so many people by taking part in their ten-minute Sense in Nature survey today."

Paul Wilkinson, senior ecologist at the Canal & River Trust, adds: *"The nature deficit in many urban areas has become even more pressing during the pandemic, where access to quality local outdoor space has been vital for helping to improve peoples' wellbeing. Canals are uniquely placed to be the much needed 'back garden' for millions of people, and by completing the survey we are asking them to take notice of the flowers, the insects, birds or the mammals and help record where nature is thriving. With the UK on a staycation this summer, enjoy a walk, picnic or boat trip by the canal and take part in the survey whilst you are there. We have a unique opportunity to create canals that are cared for and where nature and wildlife is looked after.*

"A legacy of Britain's industrial past, today's canals are arteries of green and blue in our towns and cities, but we've further work to do in making them cleaner and greener, attracting herons, kingfishers, bats, and even otters into urban areas. We want to know where scores are low so there is a real opportunity to work with the community to bring nature back where people need it the most."

To take part in the Canal & River Trust 'Sense in Nature Survey' and join the fight to save your canal, head to <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/actnowforcanals-and-look-after-the-blue-and-green-space-on-your-doorstep/the-sense-in-nature-survey> to upload what nature you can see, hear, smell and feel and share your findings on your social media, using hashtag #ActNowforCanals and help the Trust make more miles of canal blue, green and better – because life is better by the water.

For further information on the Canal & River Trust and details on how you can support, please visit: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/>

For all media enquiries and images, please contact the team at crt@itsprettygreen.com

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Notes to Editors

The Canal & River Trust cares for and brings to life 2,000 miles of canals and rivers across England & Wales. We believe waterways have the power to make a difference to people's lives and that spending time by water can make us all healthier and happier. By bringing communities together to make a difference to their local waterway, we are creating places and spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, every day.

www.canalrivertrust.org.uk

*Regional increases in footfall compared to pre-pandemic (with towpath usage commonly shifting from city centres to more 'local' canals in urban areas):

| Area | Region | % Increase in footfall (July 2021) |
|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Burnley | North West | +174% |
| Sandwell | West Midlands | +154% |
| Blackburn | North West | +126% |
| Stratford-upon-Avon | West Midlands | +122% |
| Devizes | South West | +100% |
| Wolverhampton | West Midlands | +98% |
| Birmingham (Inner) | West Midlands | +93% |
| Walsall | West Midlands | +82% |
| Coventry | West Midlands | +82% |
| Pocklington | Yorkshire & North East | +75% |
| London (West) | London & South East | +45% |
| Manchester | North West | +44% |
| Tottenham Hale | London & South East | +28% |