

Feature



Ecotherapists
Sebastiana Black,
Robert Black and
Nick Jackson

Where the wild things are

There's an intrinsic link between nature and wellbeing – and in Suffolk, that's led three local people to host a number of events aimed at helping participants get back to basics, and finding inner peace in the countryside.

Ecotherapy East founders Robert and Sebastiana Black, along with adult education teacher Nick Jackson, are holding workshops and sessions across the east this summer that they hope will help heal the natural world, as well as the mind, body and spirit.

Since the autumn of 2020, Robert and Sebastiana have been busy rewilding a 12-acre meadow in Bramfield Robert inherited from his family – and it is here that they run their events.

"We feel a sense of urgency about offering this work more widely," Robert explains.

"As our connection to this beautiful piece of land and its ecosystems grows, we want to begin offering workshops and events at the meadow to help people to access the mental health benefits of ecotherapy."

But what exactly is ecotherapy? As the name suggests, it's an all-encompassing term that refers to therapeutic treatments that help support people, by getting them involved with the great outdoors. There isn't a singular definition for ecotherapy, as such,

Danielle Lett meets the East Anglian trio working together to promote ecotherapy, combining mindfulness with nature

but it focuses on regular, structured activities, led by trained professionals who aid and support those taking part.

Attendees can take part in a number of activities on Robert's meadow, including planting and growing trees and flowers, tending to the land using traditional methods, meditating, and getting to know the local wildlife.

"I grew up on a farm, and I ended up becoming a therapist. However, I've always really been into nature, so decided to bring nature and therapy together.

"That was when I discovered ecotherapy – so I started taking my work outside, and that evolved over time, and grew into these projects," explains Robert.

"There's something quite reciprocal about the nature-based work we do.

"Nature is very supportive as people do their healing and growing journey, but at the same time, that connection helps people



A previous ecotherapy workshop

Pictures: KATE WOLSTENHOLME

get in touch with their own care for the planet, and they start to naturally want to protect what they care for."

Nick adds: "My career has been in adult education – teaching adult literacy and language, and helping people communicate with

others. But now I've moved into mindfulness and ecotherapy. So whereas before I used to help people get in touch with each other, I now help them communicate with nature."

With the help of friends and volunteers, so far Robert and co

have managed to plant over 300 trees, as well as create patches of wildflowers, and a labyrinth. They have also built a compost toilet from reclaimed wood, and have purchased a yurt where they will host events.

Ecotherapy East has also set up



Ecotherapy workshop attendees planting the labyrinth at the Bramfield meadow



Ecotherapy encourages people to get back to nature to help improve their wellbeing

a Community Interest Company to help develop its work. The group is currently fundraising to build a safe water supply and a shed to aid the care of the meadow – which will be used for training, nature walks, and other ecotherapy courses and workshops.

For anyone who might wish to improve their wellbeing and give ecotherapy a go themselves this summer, the next Suffolk event is coming up this weekend.

Taking place on Saturday, May 21, and Sunday, May 22, attendees can spend time tending the meadow, utilising a number of techniques that help restore and preserve nature.

“We’ll be supporting the regeneration of the land’s biodiversity. We’ve already planted trees and wildflower areas but of course these need tending to and looking after. It’s therapeutic – spending time with like-minded people who just like to be outside and do something active in nature.

“It’s a really nice community-connecting activity,” says Robert.

“I’m incredibly excited for this weekend – we’ll be making homes for wild bees, and sites where they can nest, alongside tending to the trees and making sure things like the young oaks have space to breathe and come out,” adds Nick. And next month, the trio will be

hosting a scything workshop, where attendees can work their body and mind while learning a traditional farming technique.

“It’s a great chance to develop a skill in a way that supports wildflower meadows. One of the best ways to keep them healthy is to not drive over them with tractors, and scything is a good way to stay fit. The teacher who will be running the session is interested in tai chi, and he teaches you how to move in a way that’s good for the body and the mind. And the community element is really important – we always share a cup of tea and have a nice time out on the field,” explains Robert.

“I find what we do incredibly rewarding – and for me, it’s about future generations. I may not be around to see the trees we’ve planted, but I know they’re going to be there for years to come. There’s also a great sense of self-worth that comes with doing something physical,” says Nick.

As well as the aforementioned Suffolk events, an ecotherapy and mindfulness retreat will be taking place in Norfolk this July, and a “rewild your mind” event is due to take place in north Norfolk later in October.

To get involved with Ecotherapy East or find out more, visit robertblackcounselling.co.uk/ecotherapy

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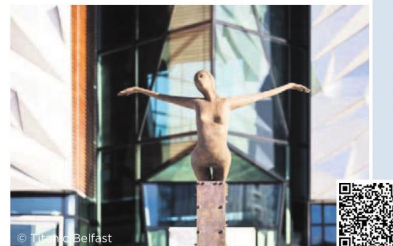
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