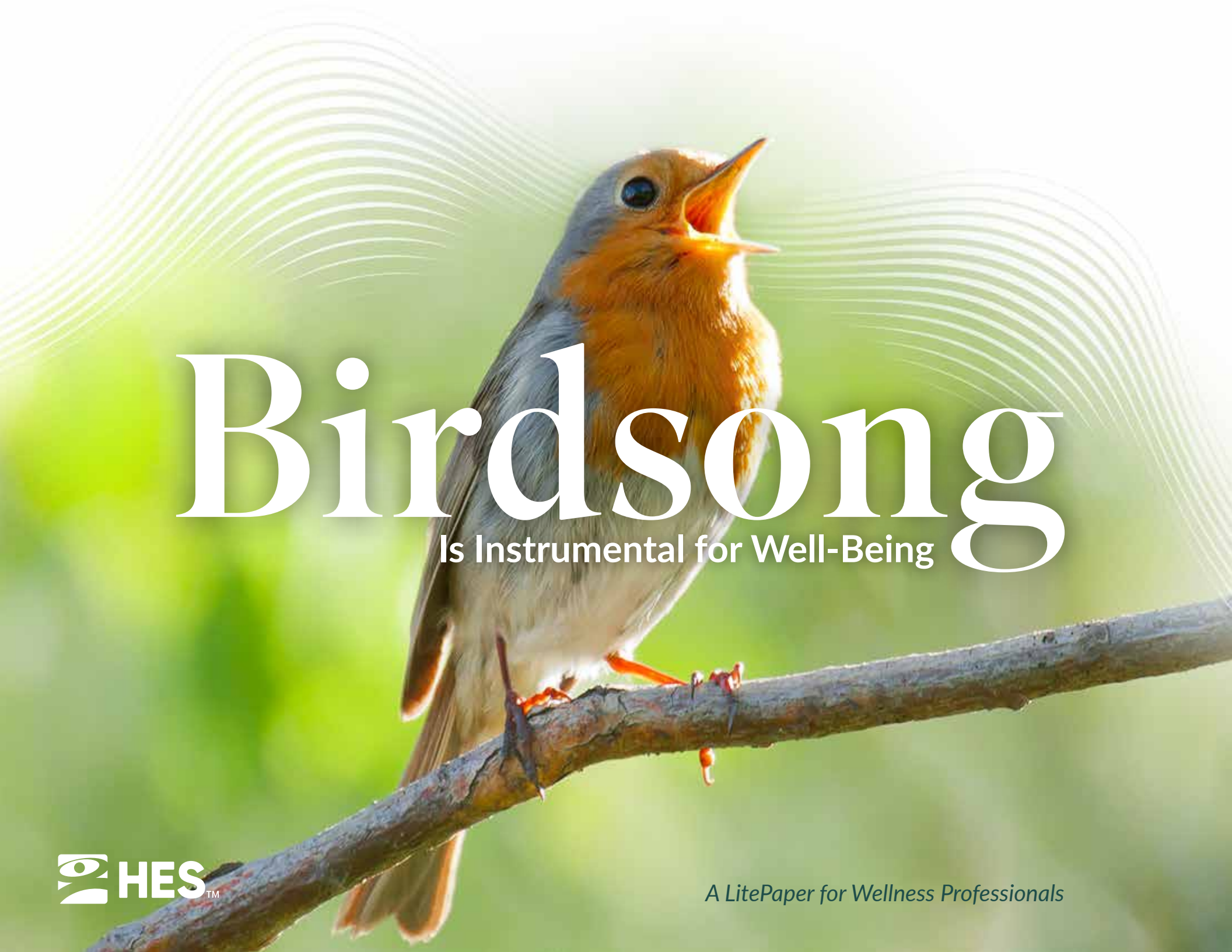




Birdsong

Is Instrumental for Well-Being

Recent research has left no stone unturned in identifying the benefits of time in nature. It has uncovered connections to improved mood, social interaction, mental clarity, sense of meaning, creativity, and academic performance. HES summarizes many of these findings in A Healthy Dose of Nature Is Good for Business: Promoting Green Exercise for Employee Well-Being.

While the sights of nature have garnered the lion's share of attention, its sounds — chiefly birdsong — stand out as uniquely beneficial.

Increasingly, research has put birdsong (and other avian sounds: calls, chirps, tweets, squawks, and caws) under the microscope, figuratively speaking. Within broader studies to evaluate nature sound combinations — like light breezes, babbling brooks, rolling thunder, rainfall, and ocean waves — birdsong is a common denominator of those that ease our minds.





Rejuvenating Sounds

The UK's Eleanor Ratcliffe, at the forefront of this research, observes that listening to birds helps us:

- Recover from stress
- Replenish our mental energy
- Enhance alertness and focus.

In one of Ratcliffe's studies,¹ a participant notes:

"It starts to make you think how music is put together... I just like the sound of birds singing. Makes me feel happy, I suppose."

This bird lover is onto something. Birds change tempo, pitch, and tone in patterns resembling the structure of human music we all know, as well as cross-cultural intonations we may not know.

Another adds:

"I love the sound of birdsong... that's beautiful for when you're trying to relax."

Ratcliffe's research isn't limited to avian music-makers. Birds can let loose a variety of sounds that give rise to positive feelings (see the sidebar, Songs and Calls).

Songs and Calls

Birds sing a musical medley, especially around daybreak where trees and other greenery attract sparrows, finches, wrens, starlings, and others. They also emit vocalizations, many categorized as calls, like the squawking of seagulls, cawing of crows, and honking of geese.

In the avian world, song is primarily to defend a breeding territory and attract a mate. Calls and other sounds are to warn about predators, communicate hunger, court a mate, and drive away fledglings old enough to fend for themselves.

"The singing is a behavior unto itself, while calls are usually just accompanying other behavior," writes renowned birder, Kenn Kaufman.

But experts don't all agree on the differences. Birds have their variations of sound; ornithologists have their variations of how to classify them.

In the absence of consensus, this paper sometimes uses birdsong and bird calls interchangeably. For our purposes, it's not critical to classify vocalization or the bird that makes it. Our goal is to shine a light on the beauty of bird sounds and the wondrous ways they help our well-being take flight.

One of her study participants, for example, finds chickens comforting: “...They go buk-buk-buk. And it’s a very comfortable, chatty sort of sound.”

Another tells how the cooing of wood pigeons transports her to carefree childhood summers.

Bird sounds can elevate well-being, Ratcliffe concludes, but their effect depends on the species, the sound it makes, and the listener. Cultural considerations also come into play. Someone in her study associated owls with fear and death, whereas many cultures uphold them as symbols of wisdom.

One-offs notwithstanding, Ratcliffe’s research demonstrates that people prefer birdsong that’s:



Soft



High pitched



Melodic

Loud, erratic, or uninteresting bird sounds can grate on listeners.

She asserts that nature lovers are especially primed to reap benefits of bird sounds, whereas indoor-loving homebodies and people sensitive to noise respond with indifference or aversion.



Avian Audio

Playing recorded birdsong in buildings where nature isn't accessible reinforces the premise that it helps promote serenity and alertness. The Audubon Society reports:

- In an elementary school, listening to birdsong and other nature sounds helps kids concentrate after a lunch break, when they'd ordinarily exhibit afternoon blahs
- Birdsong is broadcast in a lounge at Amsterdam's primary airport, rated one of the best in the world, to help travelers relax before flights.

One wily team of scientists piped birdsong onto outdoor trails to study the benefits and help distinguish it from other forest sights and sounds. They conducted the experiment² in summer when local songbird activity (post-mating season) tends to be low, using hidden speakers to simulate different types and levels. When surveyed, hikers exposed to the recorded chorus reported greater restorative effects compared to being in natural surroundings with low levels of avian activity.

Soft Fascination

These theories explain how birdsong helps us deal with stress and mental fatigue:

- **Attention Restoration Theory.** Our attention is drawn gently and effortlessly, a state known as soft fascination, to surrounding melodies of our feathered friends. This allows our minds to relax, reflect, and recharge.
- **Stress Recovery Theory.** Listening to birds diverts our focus from anxious thoughts, lessening typical physical and biochemical responses to stress.

The theories are different, but not mutually exclusive. Both help us understand how birdsong enhances well-being.

Birdsong as Ecotherapy

Research anticipates future opportunities for clinicians to build bird sounds into ecotherapy (exposure to nature, often combined with conventional interventions, to treat mental health disorders):

- Chance encounters with birdlife were correlated to improved mood for people with (and without) diagnosed depression³
- Providing headphones and nature recordings, including birdsong, helped patients sleep in a hospital's intensive care unit, where the din of a busy healthcare operation often disrupts their rest and, consequently, recovery⁴
- A comparison of birdsong and traffic noise “provides evidence for the beneficial effects of birdsongs on mood (depression, anxiety) and paranoid symptoms.”⁵



10 Ways to Enjoy More Birdsong

Tips for hearing more of these soothing melodies:

1

Wake up early, when birds are most active and vocal, to walk in parks or any safe green space.

2

Join hiking groups to explore different habitats and hear a variety of birds.



3

Create a bird-friendly habitat in your yard by planting native trees, shrubs, and flowers.

4

Use digital tools, like bird identification apps and websites, to learn about different species and their songs.

5



Set up a small feeding station near a window or patio so you can enjoy birds while you're indoors or relaxing outside.

6

Learn about native birds and their preferred habitats, then replicate those conditions.

7

Install a bird bath with a dripper or fountain, which will attract birds looking to wet their whistle.



8

Enhance your yard's appeal with a cozy birdhouse.

9



Learn about migration patterns in your region and visit areas where you can observe their resting spots.

10

Listen to podcasts and audio field guides that feature birdsong recordings.



Incorporating Bird Sounds Into Employee Wellness Programs

At last count, we deprived ourselves of nature's health/well-being benefits by averaging 87% of our time in buildings plus about 6% in vehicles. Employee wellness leaders can encourage exposure to birdsong; here's how:

- Offer programs that promote outdoor activity
- Hold a Name That Birdsong contest where employees guess for a chance at prizes
- Host Early Bird walks before work in spring when bird sounds are at their peak
- Invite a local ornithologist to lead a nature walk
- Sponsor a field trip to a nature preserve or garden and see how many different songs the group can identify, using a tool like the [Merlin Bird ID](#) app
- Introduce challenges that combine fun, motivation, and relevant information to raise awareness of the science connecting birdsong to well-being.

Conclusion

We've only scratched the surface here. Getting out and about is the shortcut to enjoying birdsong's gifts while reaping other rewards like physical activity, social interaction, and fresh air. Above all, our exposure to nature is a reminder that we're connected to something awe-inspiring and boundless. We are never truly alone.

¹Ratcliffe, E., Gatersleben, B., & Sowden, P. T. (2013). Bird sounds and their contributions to perceived attention restoration and stress recovery. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 36, 221-228.

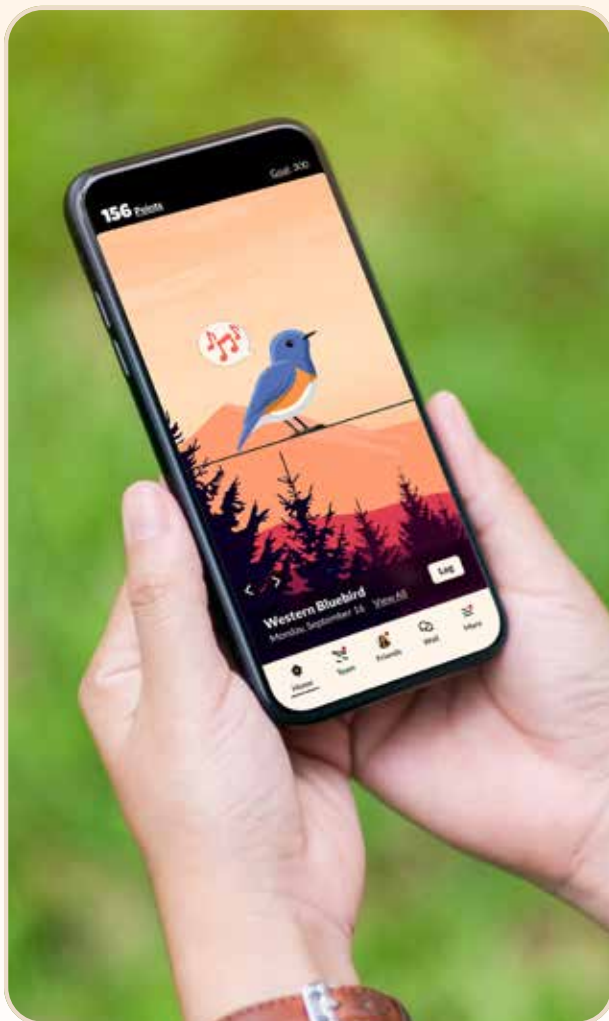
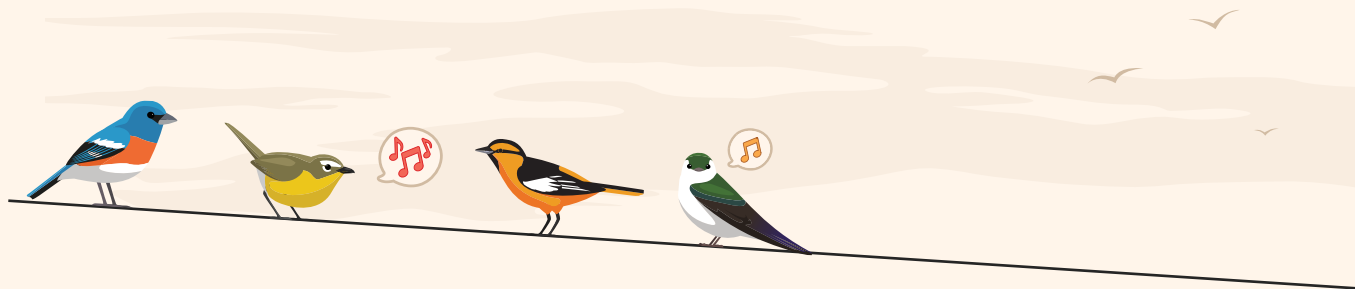
²Ferraro, D. M., Miller, Z. D., Ferguson, L. A., Taff, B. D., Barber, J. R., Newman, P., & Francis, C. D. (2020). The phantom chorus: Birdsong boosts human well-being in protected areas. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*, 287(1941), 20201811.

³Qi, Y., Chen, Q., Lin, F., Liu, Q., Zhang, X., Guo, J., ... & Gao, T. (2022). Comparative study on birdsong and its multi-sensory combinational effects on physio-psychological restoration. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 83, 101879.

⁴Nasari, M., Ghezeljeh, T., & Haghani, H. (2018). Effects of nature sounds on sleep quality among patients hospitalized in coronary care units: A randomized controlled clinical trial. *Nursing and Midwifery Studies*, 7(1), 18-23.

⁵Stobbe, E., Sundermann, J., Ascone, L., & Kühn, S. (2022). Birdsongs alleviate anxiety and paranoia in healthy participants. *Scientific Reports*, 12(1), 16414.





Feeling Chirpy?

You know how it feels to be both energetic and optimistic... when every challenge is an opportunity, not an obstacle?

That's what we call being "chirpy."

Employees, members, and clients can feel chirpy every day in the well-being program with a songbirds theme.

- Track physical activity and other health habits
- Experience progress by filling a wire with colorful songbirds while earning chirps.
- Give and get support on the Wellness Wall
- View and share delicious, nutritious recipes
- Connect with friends and teammates on the go.

Learn More

Watch the 1-minute video at ChirpyChallenge.com or call **800.326.2317** today.

