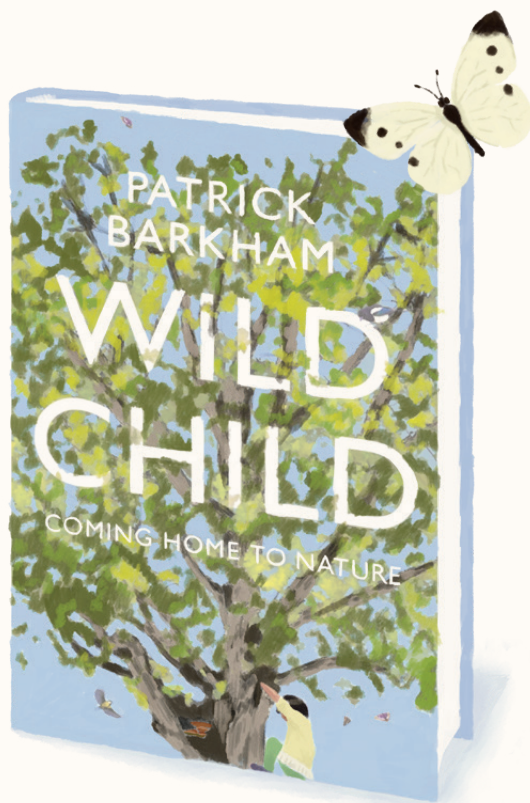


COMING HOME TO NATURE

Activities for Families



In his passionate and personal new book, *Wild Child*, Patrick Barkham argues that a relationship with the natural world is vital for the healthy development of children. This illustrated activity pack draws on the ideas and stories in *Wild Child* to give you ways to get back to nature with your family.



Being in nature makes us happy and keeps us well. But we parents (and grandparents, guardians and teachers) worry that we need to be a wildlife ‘expert’ to take children on outdoor adventures. Fear not. One of the greatest gifts we can give children is simply to take them to a green space where they can play freely. Try your local park, woods, old cemetery, nature reserve or even derelict land. Let them choose their own adventure. Here is serendipity, stimulation and surprise. And if you need a few extra ideas, try these!

Patrick Barkham, May 2020



Start a Nature Table, a Nature Drawer or a Collection

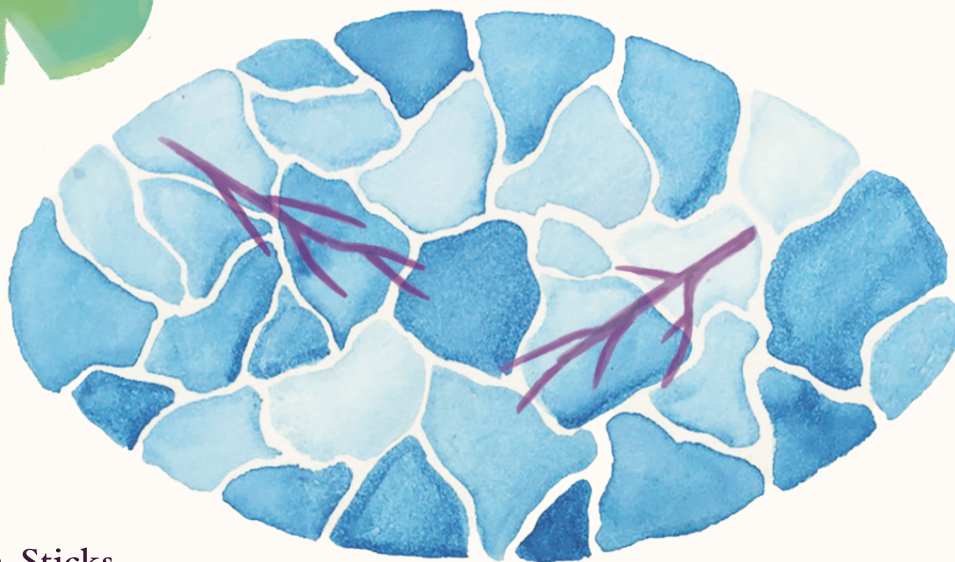
Set aside a space in your home – a drawer, a window-sill, a special box – for your children to add to. It might be feathers, pebbles, shells, leaves, bark, sticks, conkers, snail shells, seeds and berries, fungi or flowers (yes, you can pick flowers – just not on nature reserves – and do check before you pick it that it isn’t a rarity). You can encourage children to draw their collections or make lists of them.



The Stick Game

Get everyone to find themselves a stick and tell a story about what it is – it could be a snake, a sword, a monster’s leg, the options are endless!





water boatman



Pooh-Sticks

As played by the 'bear of little brain' and every generation since. If you've missed A. A. Milne, the rules are: find a stream with a bridge, throw one stick each from one side of the bridge, and see whose floats under and out the other side first. If you're near a beach with one of those rivulets flowing across it, try having a seaweed race.

'Our knees are wetted by the miniature marsh at the pond edge but Esme and I reach in and grab a frog or two. It's hard to hold them for long. Each one feels like a seaweed-covered stone, cool and slippery, and they squirm like a mouse.'

dragonfly larvae



Go Pond-Dipping or Stream-Skimming

You need a basic fishing net (you can buy nets for 99p) and an old ice-cream tub or Tupperware box – to put your finds in and to observe them more closely – which you fill with water from your pond or stream.

The appeal is timeless and the ethics are simple: if you're transferring live creatures, make sure they have enough water in the tub, and put everything you catch back where you caught it after a few minutes.



pond snails



pond skater

pond weed





Count Butterflies

Go butterfly spotting, and see how many you can find. You can even submit butterfly-sighting records to Butterfly Conservation. A small PSA: you are allowed to catch the common butterfly species with a proper butterfly or entomological net, so you can examine them and then release them unharmed.

Esme inches forward, having mastered the slow approach required to get really close to butterflies. She can almost touch it, but then it zooms off, flashing maroon velvet wings and blue eye-spots. We retreat and the butterfly loops around and returns to its favoured spot.'



Hapa-zome, or leaf bashing

The Japanese name for the art of pounding plant parts onto cloth to make images. Collect leaves, flowers or fronds to extract colour from – they will need to hold some moisture, but autumn leaves often still have enough.

Place the leaves behind fabric or paper on a firm surface. Gently but firmly tap the area with the head of a hammer (the flat part), and the colour and pattern of the leaf will transfer onto the fabric.



Potions and Perfumes

Children love making 'perfume' from scented and unscented petals – all kinds of rose petals, especially – and magnolia leaves.

Potions are pretty exciting too: rosehips, mushrooms, mud – you can add anything to the mix. Just don't let them drink it.

Keep a Nature Diary

This could be a secret diary or a communal, family diary, kept in the living room, where you can all enter interesting observations, happenings or thoughts.



cirrus



cumulus

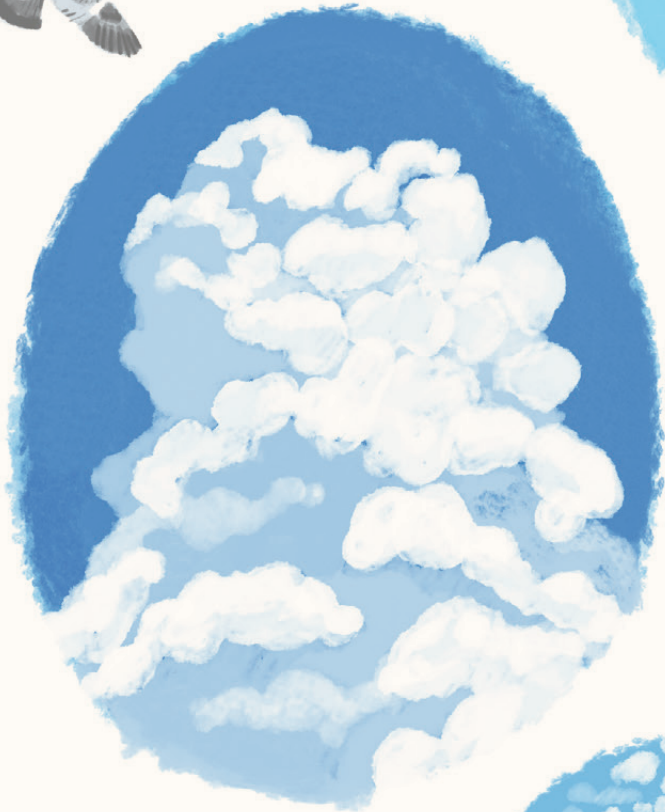


Go Cloud-Watching

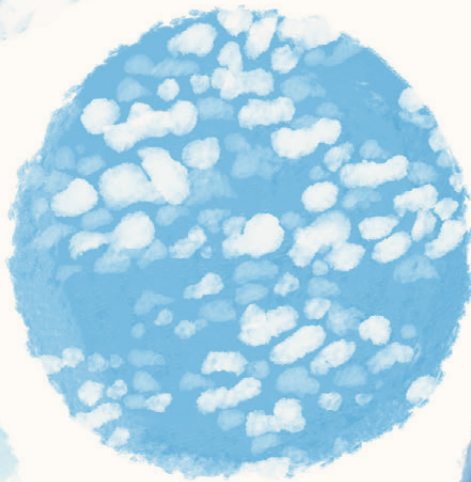
Lie on your backs and see what you can see in the clouds – wolves, dragons, buses, islands, seas, funny faces, people, maps.

You may seek to identify the types of cloud, but first, let your imaginations run.

cumulonimbus

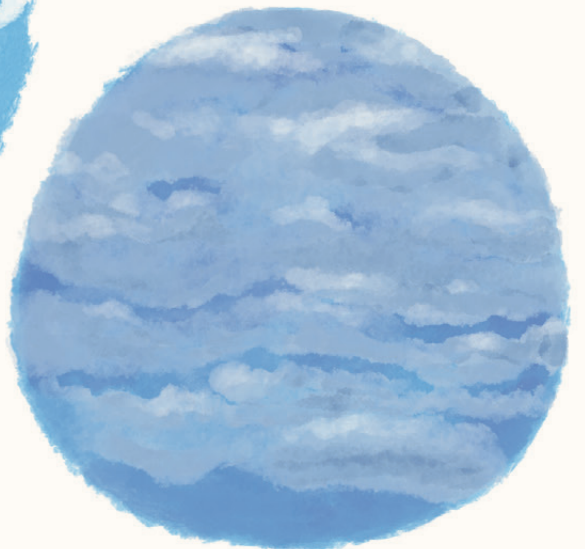
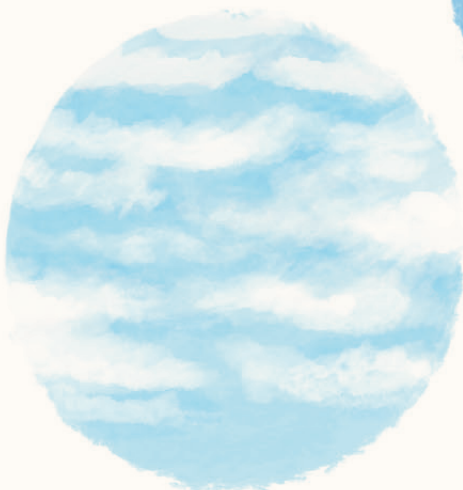


altocumulus



stratus

nimbostratus



Animal Tracking



Go out into the countryside on a muddy day and see what prints you can find and identify – dogs', humans' (man or woman?), common gulls', deer's? Or look for hair – badger hair, for instance, may be snagged on barbed-wire fences – and poo too.



badger



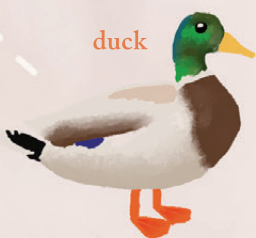
dog



blackbird



fox



duck



deer



hedgehog



rabbit



Forest Crafts: Leaf Crown

Ideally, you'll need quite large fallen leaves such as sweet chestnut or plane. Thread the stalk of one leaf through the leaf of another and continue, with the leaves facing the same way, until they begin to form a natural circle. Join up – but not before you've measured it around your or your child's head – carefully turn it inside out, and you have a crown.

Wild Book Club

Reading certain books outdoors is like putting turbo boosters under the words and their meanings. Obviously children respond best to short story breaks between bursts of activity and not an hour solid reading outside but being outdoors does not have to mean perpetually charging around.



Patrick's suggested Wild Book Club reading list:



The Lost Words

by Robert Macfarlane
& Jackie Morris

good for woods!

The Gruffalo

by Julia Donaldson
& Axel Scheffler

We're Going on a Bear Hunt

by Michael Rosen
& Helen Oxenbury

Stick Man

by Julia Donaldson & Axel Scheffler



Hoot Owl

by Sam Taylor & Jean Jullien

good for twilight

Moomin and the Wishing Star

by Tove Jansson

*good for playing find
your own Stick Man*

After the Storm

by Nick Butterworth

*good for twilight/
evenings out/star gazing*

*or other Percy the park keeper
books— good for parks!*

The Utterly Otterleys

by Mairi Hedderwick



For parents and nature lovers alike, *Wild Child* is an intimate and inspiring story of a year outdoors in the company of children, to make you look anew at the nature to be found in your own neighbourhood.

Available now from Foyles

