

# Woodland Warblers, Chopwell Wood

- Participation in the choir group delivers psychosocial benefits to those that take part.
- These are related to the activity itself, the dynamic of the group and being in the forest environment.

- This case study focuses on a choir group at Chopwell Wood in North East England. The researcher joined the group whilst they sang in the forest on one occasion in July 2025.

- This case study is based on observations made during the activity in addition to conversations with six participants during an in-person focus group following the activity.



- We spoke to five women and one man from the surrounding area. Participants were between the ages of 55 and 84 and all identified as White. One participant declared a health condition.

## The Woodland Warblers choir group at Chopwell Wood

The Woodland Warblers are a choir group based in Chopwell Wood. The group was formed in 2023, and they now meet every Tuesday, throughout the year, to sing together in the forest. One participant also played a musical instrument. The activity was 1-hour long and took place in an open grassed area within the forest. Depending on the weather conditions on the day, the activity may also take place in the adjacent forest classroom. The group sung a variety of songs, including nature-inspired ones and ones from well-known musicals. The group has a leader who helps to choose the songs, keep the activity on track and organises the sessions. The group have featured in local news stories and have performed together at concerts. The activity is free to join and is usually attended by approximately 15 people. After the activity, six participants stayed for a focus group discussion while enjoying some refreshments.

## Motivations

Participants identified different motivations for involvement with the choir. These largely centred around being able to take part in an activity enjoyed in a pleasant environment. They appreciated being able to get outside and sing somewhere that is different from the indoor choir groups they usually attend.

*"...doing something I enjoy in a different place, yeah, different sort of atmosphere..."*

Participants were motivated to continue to attend the sessions because they enjoy the social aspects of it and appreciate the psychological benefits that both singing and being in the forest bring them. They additionally mentioned the relaxed atmosphere as an important motivation:

*"It's just so uplifting, you know, the music, it's just like lifts you...We're getting all the benefits of especially on a day like this, you know, the sunshine and it feels like you are breathing in fresh air, which is wonderful, isn't it?"*

Participants considered making the commitment to attend the sessions regularly and having them pre-arranged as factors that motivate them to get into the forest:

*"Sometimes I think, Oh, it's a nice day for a walk, but I always think of other things that I need to do, yeah, whereas, if you've got some reason coming into the woods, you can really enjoy it and benefit from being here."*

Most participants heard about the activity through participation in other choir groups or through word of mouth.

## Benefits of doing this activity in the forest environment

Participants identified two key benefits from participating in the activity. These included social benefits associated with participating in the activity. Participants are able to meet up with new people, whom they feel they have got to know through the activity, but also with existing friends. Participants felt the bond the group has formed contributes to their experience of the activity, also helping them to feel comfortable and safe.

*"Yeah, honestly, it's a lovely, relaxing, chatty group, you know, with a lot of laughs as well, isn't there?"*

*"...finding your voice and using your voice to sing maybe helps in other situations in life, to give you confidence to maybe speak about whatever or express yourself"*

Participants also feel they benefit psychologically from participation, something they associate with being in the forest environment:

*"You get such pleasure from what you do, just from being here"*  
*"I love the choir and the people, but it's a bit of a downer going into a cold church hall type of place, you know, on a summer's day when you've been sitting out here."*

## Changing or sustaining behaviours

While the activity itself isn't particularly active, some participants mentioned that they walk a considerable distance to get to the activity. For others, attending the activity in the woodlands prompted them to get back into the habit of walking:

*"So it reminded me when I came how lovely it is. Now I do walk in the woods more. I used to walk a lot when I had my dog, yeah, but coming here, it made me think, yeah, I must get back to it, because it made me realise how much I've missed walking in the woods. So now I come on a Tuesday morning, but I also go sometimes I just think I'm gonna go for a walk in the woods"*

By attending the activity, participants have also been made aware of some other activities happening within the programme which they are considering participating in, in the future.

## Barriers to participation

Participants did not identify any major barriers to participation. They felt the friendliness of the group omitted any concerns around feeling confident enough to participate in the activity and noted that the free parking on site enables them to attend. Public transport options directly to the site can be scarce, but participants overcome this by lift sharing. Having the forest classroom available to sing in on rainy days allows the group to continue throughout the seasons.

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More information about the monitoring and evaluation of the Active Forests programme, including additional case studies, is available at

<https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/active-forests-evaluation-overview/>

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