

Co-Producing Pride in Nature:

Supporting land-owners and managers
to achieve LGBTQ+ inclusivity in nature



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Executive Summary

Aims

This project aimed to promote greater LGBTQ+ inclusion in natural spaces through co-producing a knowledge framework describing LGBTQ+ experiences in nature and developing an action plan for inclusivity.

Background

There is growing awareness of inequalities in access to and safe enjoyment of health-promoting natural spaces among minority groups in the UK. However, little attention has been paid to the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals within this context.

Approach

Through public engagement and networking, we facilitated knowledge exchange between the LGBTQ+ community and land stewards to create (a) a knowledge framework describing LGBTQ+ experiences of nature and (b) an action plan outlining ways nature and heritage organisations can promote LGBTQ+ inclusivity in the spaces they care for.

Insights

For our LGBTQ+ workshop attendees, natural spaces were vital sources of **healing, connection and freedom** that symbolised **inclusivity and acceptance**.

Five **key barriers to engagement** were identified:

- Difficulties with access;
- Overcrowding of accessible spaces;
- Exclusion from nature/heritage sites and careers;
- Mental health difficulties; and
- A lack of nature-based knowledge and confidence.

In contrast, **drivers to access** included:

- Clear LGBTQ+ visibility in natural spaces; and
 - Social support via queer outdoor groups and activities.
-

Actions

Based on these insights, we discuss targeted actions that organisations can take to support inclusive nature engagement for LGBTQ+ people.

Why focus on LGBTQ+ engagement with nature?

Natural spaces are increasingly recognised as critical assets for public health and wellbeing ([Natural England, 2024](#)). The numerous benefits associated with spending time in nature include reduced depression and anxiety, better sleep, lower blood pressure, relaxation, and restoration of attentional capacities ([Berto, 2014](#); [Frumkin et al., 2018](#)).

Yet there is growing awareness that these benefits may not extend to everyone equally ([Boyd et al., 2018](#)); minoritised groups in particular can experience inequalities in access to and safe enjoyment of natural spaces ([The Health Foundation, 2024](#)). Although gender and sex are known to impact the restorative potential of natural spaces for individuals, little attention has been paid to how belonging to gender and/or sexual minority groups may impact LGBTQ+ people's experiences of nature ([Bornioli et al., 2024](#)). This is especially problematic given that LGBTQ+ people are more likely to suffer from mental health problems and loneliness than others due to [minority stress](#) ([Gorcynski & Fasoli, 2021](#); [Meyer, 2003](#); [Ploderl & Tremblay, 2015](#)).

The literature suggests that nature-based programmes for LGBTQ+ people can be a key protective factor against minority stress and can improve mental health ([Beaumont et al., 2025](#); [Gillig et al., 2019](#); [Kara, 2023](#)). However, with the exception of a small number of papers providing initial insights (e.g. [Colley et al., 2022](#); [Davis et al., 2025](#); [Davis & Edge, 2022](#); [Wild et al., 2025](#)), little is known about how LGBTQ+ people experience natural spaces in their day-to-day lives – for example, the benefits they may derive from visiting a local greenspace, or the barriers they may face in doing so. To ensure natural spaces are accessible to and inclusive for the LGBTQ+ community, land stewards and owners must do more to integrate the perspectives of LGBTQ+ people into their management of these spaces ([Ahn et al., 2020](#); [Talal & Santelmann, 2021](#)).

Aims

This project, led by the University of Surrey and funded by the Higher Education Innovation Fund between November 2024 and July 2025, aimed to support inclusive nature engagement for LGBTQ+ people by:

1. Facilitating knowledge exchange between land steward organisations and the LGBTQ+ community;
2. Co-producing a framework describing LGBTQ+ experiences of nature, including barriers and drivers to engagement; and
3. Developing an action plan to help organisations integrate LGBTQ+ inclusive practices into natural and heritage spaces across the UK.



Our Approach

Co-Producing Pride in Nature is an impact and engagement project; all outputs, including the knowledge framework insights and action plan recommendations reported here, were co-produced with participants in engagement activities and LGBTQ+ community/land steward representatives in 1:1 meetings. Researchers and placement students at the University of Surrey collaborated with community and academic partners to achieve our aims.

Community Collaborators

Blossom LGBT

a non-profit organisation focused on empowering young LGBTQ+ adults.

Surrey Wildlife Trust

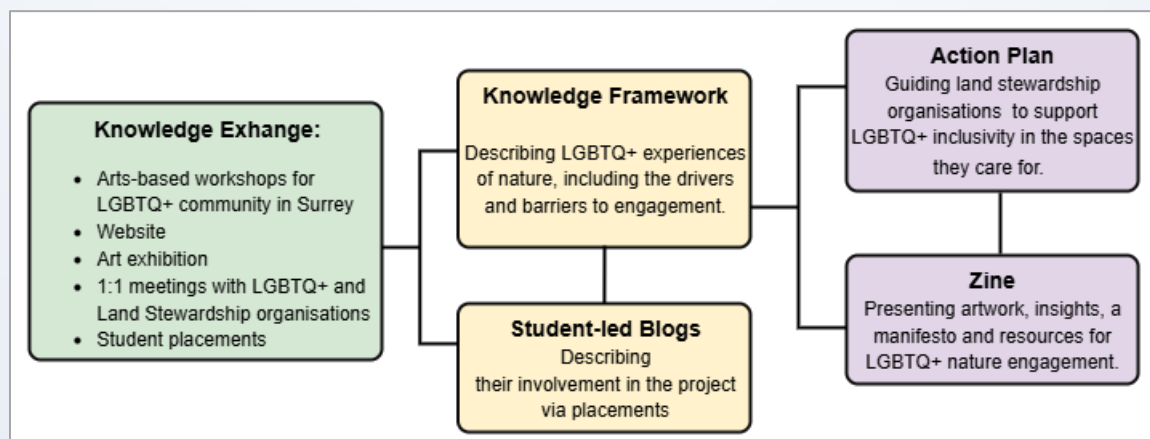
which cares for over 5,000ha of land in Surrey and works to increase local communities' nature connection.

Academic and Creative Collaborator

Dr Chloe Asker

Academic researcher (Honorary Research Fellow at the European Centre for Environment and Human Health at the University of Exeter), writer, and queer creative health practitioner and curator.

Diagram of Our Approach



Our Approach

Public Engagement Activities

1

Arts-based programme for LGBTQ+ people in Surrey January to February 2025

We hosted three art workshops in Guildford for LGBTQ+ people, together with Blossom LGBT. Each workshop was led by a professional artist and allowed exploration of nature and queer identity through specific media:

1. Clay Mushroom Making with Sophie Kathleen (20 attendees)
2. Lino Printing with Theo Mortimer (22 attendees)
3. Nature Zine Making with Sophie Kathleen (6 attendees)

Placement students and researchers at the University of Surrey attended the workshops and initiated conversations with attendees. Attendees also shared written reflections on Post-it notes and an online platform. Key discussion points were:

- Attendees' personal experiences of nature.
- Drivers and barriers to engaging with nature.
- What an ideal, inclusive natural space would be like for them.

2

Art Exhibition May 2025

We shared artwork and insights from our workshops in an exhibition organised by Blossom LGBT at The New House Art Gallery (Guildford): [Celebrating our past, creating our future](#).



3

Website

We created a website through which LGBTQ+ individuals, as well as other audiences, could find information on the project and share their experiences of nature:

prideinnature.wordpress.com

Our Approach

Network-Building Activities

4

1:1 Meetings with LGBTQ+ and land-stewardship organisations April to May 2025

We shared learnings from our workshops in 1:1 meetings with representatives from LGBTQ+ and land management organisations. Representatives reflected on these learnings and shared insights from their perspectives.

LGBTQ+ Organisations:

- [Blossom LGBT](#): Surrey-based organisation empowering young LGBTQIA+ people and addressing systemic barriers through education, advocacy and community programmes.
- [The Love Tank CIC](#): A not-for-profit Community Interest Company promoting the health and wellbeing of underserved communities through education, community building, and free events.
- [Queer Circle](#): an LGBTQ+ led charity working at the intersection of Arts, Health and Social Action to champion LGBTQ+ artists and create systemic change for LGBTQ+ people.

Land Steward Organisations:

- [Surrey Wildlife Trust](#): A wildlife charity caring for over 5,000ha of land and inspiring local communities to connect with nature.
- [Natural England](#): The government's adviser for the natural environment of England.
- [Forest Research](#): UK government research agency of the Forestry Commission.

Outputs

A Knowledge Framework

describing LGBTQ+ experiences of nature, including the drivers and barriers to engagement.

A Zine

presenting artwork and insights from the workshops, a manifesto, and resources that support the LGBTQ+ community to engage with natural spaces.

An Action Plan

outlining key ways to improve LGBTQ+ inclusivity in natural spaces

Student-led Blogs

describing their involvement in the project via placements (available on the website).

Insights into LGBTQ+ experiences of nature

The insights described here combine learnings from our workshops and 1:1 meetings with existing literature on LGBTQ+ experiences of nature. We explore insights relating to (1) **Nature's Meaning for LGBTQ+ People** and (2) **Barriers and Drivers to LGBTQ+ People's Engagement with Nature**.

1

Nature's Meaning for LGBTQ+ People

Space for Healing

Workshop attendees described multiple benefits of nature for their mental health and wellbeing, including relaxation, reduced rumination and social anxiety, and experiences of positive emotions such as joy. Forest Research shared [similar insights from their recent survey](#) that LGBTQ+ people access woodlands to relax and unwind.

Natural spaces may also help LGBTQ+ people combat loneliness: as a workshop attendee put it, “urban loneliness” is unwanted, but in nature “it’s okay to be alone”. Given the higher loneliness and stress-related risks LGBTQ+ people face, the relaxation and connection natural spaces enable may be particularly important for this population.



Freedom from Judgement

The healing benefits of nature may be facilitated by the opportunity for LGBTQ+ people to “turn away” from other people and their expectations. As one workshop attendee put it, “nature is relaxing because there’s no one and no pressure”. Open spaces with few people and little human impact (e.g., noise from roads), where “it’s just me and the world”, were generally preferred. On exploring this preference, attendees reflected on not always feeling safe around other people in urban settings – particularly strangers.

In contrast, the natural world was generally experienced as a safe space. Attendees emphasised that “nature doesn’t discriminate” and “animals don’t judge”. This freedom from societal pressures allowed workshop attendees to be their authentic selves in natural spaces: “No one is expecting nature to be something it’s not – a tree isn’t expected to become a flower – if that’s true of nature, it can be the same for me,” observed one attendee. This is consistent with previous research suggesting nature can provide escapism from hetero- and cis-normative urban environments and foster greater self-acceptance for LGBTQ+ individuals ([Davis et al, 2025](#); [Gillig et al., 2019](#)).

Insights into LGBTQ+ experiences of nature

1

Nature's Meaning for LGBTQ+ People

Opportunities for Connection

Although most workshop attendees preferred being alone in nature, many also appreciated shared experiences with “safe others”, including close friends and queer groups. One attendee even reflected that socialising in nature is “more open and natural” than in urban spaces where conversation is more regimented, allowing deeper, more meaningful connection. Being in nature also facilitated connection with “something bigger” and more than human. For some, this involved connection with the physical environment, for example through touching different mushrooms and mosses whilst hiking. For others, the connection was more symbolic; for example, one attendee spoke about how they started seeing nature as “community” when they came out and described how the feeling that “everything is connected” helped them to see the world more positively.



A Model of Diversity and Inclusivity

Many workshop attendees saw nature as “innately inclusive”, mirroring an ideal vision of a queer society where everything is connected and individual differences are valued. In particular, mushroom modelling in the first workshop facilitated reflection on the parallels between fungi and the LGBTQ+ community. Like mushrooms and the mycelium networks connecting them, the LGBTQ+ community goes beyond binary identities, prioritises togetherness and resilience, and is an underrated but essential part of nature and society. These reflections echo a wider eco-queer movement reimagining nature as a force that disrupts gender normative assumptions (Hogan, 2010; [Kaishian & Djoulakian, 2020](#); Sbicca, 2012).

Insights into LGBTQ+ experiences of nature

2

Barriers to LGBTQ+ people's engagement with nature

Discussions in workshops and 1:1 meetings shed light on five key barriers that may inhibit LGBTQ+ people's engagement with nature.

Lack of Access and Facilities

Difficulty accessing natural spaces was the main barrier workshop attendees mentioned. This is a barrier other minority and disadvantaged groups also report facing ([Ahn et al., 2020](#)). "Access to natural spaces is tricky. Sometimes there are no buses to get there, or they are very infrequent," one attendee shared. Difficulties with land access were also raised; public footpaths are not easy to find, while water pollution and access restrictions limit opportunities for wild swimming. A lack of facilities such as toilets and fresh water created further physical and psychological barriers to engagement: "It feels like the land owners don't want you there," said one attendee.

During 1:1 meetings, a representative shared that while lack of public transport is a barrier for their LGBTQ+ community, scarcity of accessible natural spaces within walking distance is a bigger concern. [Recent work by Forest Research](#) also indicates that increasing the number of spaces within walking/wheeling distance may be the best way to overcome access barriers, since those who were able to walk to woodlands were 52% more likely to visit than those using other transport modes. One organisation we spoke with aims to boost urban wildlife opportunities such as green corridors to address this issue.

Overcrowding of Accessible Space

Workshop attendees also identified a paradox whereby natural spaces that are "too accessible" (e.g., Box Hill) no longer embody the qualities of real nature and instead feel like "a theme park". This means key benefits, such as freedom from societal pressures and subsequent mental health benefits, are lost.

"It feels like there are natural areas full of visitors with parking lot and facilities, and then there are other ones which are hard to access and have nothing. There is no in-between point," summarised one attendee.



Insights into LGBTQ+ experiences of nature

2

Barriers to LGBTQ+ people's engagement with nature

Discussions in workshops and 1:1 meetings shed light on five key barriers that may inhibit LGBTQ+ people's engagement with nature.

Exclusion

The lack of LGBTQ+ representation in some heritage and nature sites means many queer people feel excluded from these spaces and disengaged with the organisations who manage them. Workshop attendees experienced these spaces as “privileged” and “not accessible to everyone”.

Representatives in our 1:1 meetings shared that many young LGBTQ+ people lack trust in service providers and highlighted a lack of role modelling for young queer people in the environmental sector, meaning that the sector overall is seen as hetero- and cis-normative. These concerns were echoed by workshop attendees who questioned the lack of representation of queer outdoor workers within the media. 1:1 meetings also revealed that many young LGBTQ+ people are interested in nature-based careers, but report facing bias and discrimination from training organisations.

Mental Health Barriers

Representatives in our 1:1 meetings discussed how getting out into nature can be challenging for those experiencing poor mental health (e.g., depression) and body dysmorphia within the LGBTQ+ community.

Lack of Knowledge & Confidence

Several representatives in our 1:1 meetings highlighted low levels of nature-based literacy as barriers to engagement with nature for LGBTQ+ people; for example, a lack of knowledge about how and where to go for hikes.

Forest Research's recent work has also highlighted limited understanding of land access as a barrier to engagement with woodlands for minority groups.



Insights into LGBTQ+ experiences of nature

3

Drivers to Access

Two key drivers to engagement with nature were identified through conversations with workshop attendees and organisations: (1) Clear LGBTQ+ visibility in natural spaces and (2) Social support through queer outdoor groups and activities.

Clear LGBTQ+ Visibility in Natural Spaces

Visible indication that other queer people use a natural space was an important driver in our workshop attendees' own use of these spaces. One individual mentioned looking for "a little sign showing we are welcomed" when describing their ideal natural space on our project's Padlet page, consistent with previous research suggesting queer and trans flags help signal that environments are safe and inclusive at ground level ([Davis & Edge, 2022](#)). A similar strategy discussed during 1:1 meetings involves putting information about organisations' inclusivity work on noticeboards at sites.

Representatives in our 1:1 meetings shared that emphasising links between queer heritage and nature (e.g., [lesbians wearing lavender](#)) can help LGBTQ+ people feel safe and included when accessing natural and heritage sites. Several workshop attendees resonated with this, praising efforts by organisations such as Kew Gardens to [foreground the queerness of nature in exhibitions](#).

Social Support Through Queer Outdoor Groups and Activities

Workshop attendees identified the presence of queer friends or groups as supporting their engagement with nature, although several noted the lack of queer walking groups in smaller towns. This is in keeping with the wider literature; [Wild et al. \(2025\)](#) found that 75% of participants felt joining a queer outdoor group would be a motivating factor to engaging with nature, since such groups offer safety in numbers, a sense of belonging, and opportunities for growth.

Representatives from LGBTQ+ and land steward organisations described how free/low-cost events (e.g., queer kayaking, woodland craft, wildlife watching) enable LGBTQ+ people to show up and be collectively queer in natural spaces, thus combatting fears and overcoming nature-based literacy barriers. Small groups may be particularly helpful, since they allow more intimate connection, including moments of solidarity and support between participants. Representatives emphasised that groups are best facilitated by queer outdoor leaders. This too is supported by the wider literature, which shows LGBTQ+ facilitators are more likely to be aware of LGBTQ+ people's needs and put in measures that support them ([Lundin & Bombaci, 2021](#); [Wild et al., 2025](#)).

Recommendations

Based on the insights discussed on previous pages, we recommend the following actions to promote inclusive nature engagement for LGBTQ+ communities.

1 Build and maintain effective, equitable partnerships

- **Forging effective partnerships** between LGBTQ+ and land steward organisations is the foundation for transforming natural spaces into places where LGBTQ+ people can feel safe, visible and connected.
- **Partnerships should be equitable**, centred on the leadership of LGBTQ+ communities, and leverage LGBTQ+ staff networks to facilitate connections.
- **Financial support should be included** to cover organisational costs for LGBTQ+ Voluntary Community and Social Enterprises, such as facilitation, staff time and transport.

Example of Good Practice

QueerCircle work with Greenwich Peninsula Ecology Park to offer [seasonal, nature-based workshops for LGBTQ+ communities](#). This collaboration offers participants from QueerCircle, which is based in a dense urban area, access to a vibrant natural environment, whilst simultaneously strengthening diversity and inclusion practices at the ecology park. Workshops are offered free of charge to ensure accessibility for all.



Recommendations

Based on the insights discussed on previous pages, we recommend the following actions to promote inclusive nature engagement for LGBTQ+ communities.

2 Increase representation of the LGBTQ+ community in natural spaces

- Since many LGBTQ+ people feel excluded from ‘privileged’ nature and heritage sites, it is critical to **address the underrepresentation of the LGBTQ+ community** in these spaces and associated sectors.
- Land steward organisations should **consult with LGBTQ+ partners** on communications that integrate LGBTQ+ histories and narratives within curatorial practice.
- **Highlighting specific LGBTQ+ contributions to sites and spaces**, along with Staff Spotlight initiatives, could further promote belonging and challenge heterosexual and cisgender norms that may alienate LGBTQ+ people.
- Organisations should **develop programmes that support LGBTQ+ youth in exploring careers** in environmental and conservation sectors.

Example of Good Practice

With Art and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Impact Acceleration funding, researchers at University of Exeter are collaborating with LGBTQ+ staff and students to [co-produce a queer, nature-based walking trail across the Streatham campus](#). The trail draws on insights from participatory workshops that explored ‘queering’ campus, alongside historical and archival research, to create an audio trail that celebrates LGBTQ+ histories and fosters deeper connection with nature on-campus.



Recommendations

Based on the insights discussed on previous pages, we recommend the following actions to promote inclusive nature engagement for LGBTQ+ communities.

3 Create safe, social opportunities for LGBTQ+ people to engage with local nature

- Accessing natural sites **as part of a group** may help LGBTQ+ people feel safer when engaging with nature.
- Land steward organisations should partner with LGBTQ+ organisation to **co-design and deliver nature-connection and educational events** led by LGBTQ+ facilitators.
- Examples could include guided hikes, foraging workshops, kayaking and water-based activities, and outdoor crafting (e.g. willow weaving). LGBTQ+ organisations could also offer queer walking groups.

Example of Good Practice

Love Tank CIC hosts [nature-based events for queer migrants and people of colour in London](#). These events are led by queer, global majority facilitators, so that the programme reflects participants' lived experiences and enable a safe, affirming space. The events help increase access to nature, reduce loneliness, and strengthen sense of belonging and resilience. They also provide opportunities to develop nature-based skills and knowledge – e.g., navigation, water-based activities, and learning about local plants and ecosystems.



Recommendations

Based on the insights discussed on previous pages, we recommend the following actions to promote inclusive nature engagement for LGBTQ+ communities.

4 Provide inclusive guidance and information about natural sites

- To address nature-literacy and access-related barriers, land steward organisations should develop **inclusive informational resources that improve access** to sites they manage.
- Examples could include **transportation guidance, accessibility and facility information, and route maps** with photos and/or social media videos.
- **LGBTQ+ organisations can co-develop and share these resources** to increase community awareness of local nature-based assets, especially in urban settings.



5 Implement accessibility and inclusivity protocols

- Finally, safety and inclusion protocols that recognise **the specific risks LGBTQ+ individuals face** are necessary for all events and sites.
- Initiatives should also consider how these risks may interact with **physical, sensory and cognitive accessibility needs**.

Conclusion

Insights from our workshops and 1:1 meetings illuminate the potential natural spaces hold to support LGBTQ+ people's wellbeing. However, it is clear that the LGBTQ+ community face additional barriers to safe engagement with nature that limit their capacity to experience its benefits, thus compounding existing health and wellbeing inequalities.

To address these inequalities, land steward organisations must work together with the LGBTQ+ community to embed inclusivity into their management of the natural spaces we all share. Increased representation of LGBTQ+ people and histories within nature and heritage sites, targeted guidance to access, and the facilitation of group activities are all crucial to achieving this goal, as is ongoing research dedicated to better understanding LGBTQ+ people's needs and experiences in relation to natural environments.

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