Wildlife shaping favorite green places near home
6. **Wildlife shaping favorite green places near home**

6.1 **Introduction**

Research into wildlife experiences thus far has predominantly focused on far away tourism destinations and exotic wildlife (e.g. Brandin, 2009; Cong et al., 2014; Curtin, 2010; Lemelin & Smale, 2006; Moscardo, Woods, & Greenwood, 2001; Tremblay, 2008). However, from Curtin’s research into wildlife experiences during wildlife tourism holidays (2009; 2010) we know that wildlife experiences abroad are interrelated with and influenced by wildlife experiences near home. “When discussing favorite species or the most memorable wildlife occasions, participants often spoke of regular visits to their garden with whom there is some sort of ‘relationship’, seeing wildlife in urban settings and the unusual juxtaposition of humans and animals, particularly how satisfying and reassuring it is to be able to ‘share’ environments” (Curtin 2009; p.457). Curtin concludes that “the wildlife seen on home soil has equal if not more importance than exotic flora and fauna seen on holiday” (p.471). She calls for research that explores wildlife experiences near home, not only in rural or natural, but also in urban settings. In this chapter, we do this by focusing on wildlife experiences in favorite green places near home which are used for daily or weekly leisure purposes.

In our study, we investigated how a person’s bond with local green places is shaped through multi-sensory wildlife experiences. ‘Local’ implies seeing a landscape, town or cityscape from the inside, by sensing and feeling a specific location that is known and familiar (Lippard, 1997). We focused on local ‘green’ places, which meant that we only included places in which natural elements such as trees, bushes, meadows, and/or bodies of water prevail. We asked our study participants to select their favorite local green place; a place which they prefer over other local green places and which they visit frequently. Although the participants were all residents of the northern and eastern part of the Netherlands, their favorite green places varied greatly, ranging from urban parks, recreational areas, local forests and countryside to large protected areas. This is partly due to variety in place of residence (from urban to rural). The types of wildlife included in our study depended on participants’ perceptions of which animals they consider as wildlife. The

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type of green place also influenced the types of wildlife or wildlife species which could play a role. For participants living in urban areas, it may be common to encounter relatively small species, such as butterflies, robins, great tits, ducks, swans, and hedgehogs. In rural areas, the chances of encountering larger, or rarer species such as roe deer, snakes and foxes, are more likely.

We start this chapter with an exploration of what is already known from previous research about wildlife shaping a bond with green places near home. Then we describe our research method: walk-along interviews. After that, we present the results, which indicate how wildlife experiences enhance local green places, how they add to emotional place bonding, and how they strengthen people’s sense of time and place, making them aware of their own position in this world.

6.2 Wildlife experiences and green places

Places are given an identity, and become meaningful, through experience and knowledge. Through experience, which ranges from senses of hearing, smell, taste and touch, to visual perception and the indirect mode of symbolisation, an individual understands and constructs reality. Places become reality through experience and the interplay between feelings and thought (Tuan, 1977). Local green places can become important to an individual by meaningful past experiences and memories. Past experiences and memories which are shared with significant others can make these places even more important and loved (Tuan, 1974). However, experience and knowledge do not only attribute identities to places; persons can also derive identities from places (Lewicka, 2008). Lippard (1997) states that place is entwined with personal memory and known and unknown histories; it is part of a person’s life. “It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there” (Lippard, 1997: p.7). According to Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff (1983), a sense of self is defined and expressed by relationships with other people, but also with places that are important in day-to-day life. In local green places, experiencing wildlife may play an important role in a person’s life and form their identity. For instance, Berger (1980) states that eye-contact with wildlife makes individuals aware of themselves looking back. In the eyes’ reflection, individuals see themselves staring at the animal (Berger, 1980). Curtin (2010) found that by experiencing wildlife in a tourism destination, individuals connect with their real self. Having eye contact with wildlife and/or seeing animals’ natural behavior makes people reflect on their own life.
A large part of people’s multisensory experiences run through visual senses, which are skilled cultural practices (Jenks, 1995). Urry and Larsen (2011) call this seeing through a socio-cultural lens ‘gazing’. According to them, “people gaze upon a world through a particular filter of ideas, skills, desires and expectations, framed by social class, gender, nationality, age and education” (p.2). Personal experiences and memories, as well as the socio-cultural background of people, affect the gazing at things and objects in particular places (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Tremblay (2008) states that gazing at wildlife enables people to connect wildlife with its surrounding landscape, ecosystem or habitat, as well as its cultural role to local communities, its ecological usefulness, or its role as social or cultural symbol of a place. He suggests that this can lead to attachment to the surrounding environment. However, Franklin (2003) states that tourists’ experiences go further than ‘gazing’ at things and objects. Besides visual senses, other senses are important in experiencing, knowing and identifying places as well, as previous research has demonstrated (e.g. Grouch & Desforges, 2003; Markwell 2001, Pan & Ryan 2009; Gibson, 2010; Van Hoven, 2011). Of all the senses, olfactory experiences are the most closely tied to memory, and these memories remain relatively accurate in the passing of time (Porteous, 1985). Smells can therefore trigger strong and vivid memories related to place. With regard to environmental sounds, McCartney (2002) states that they are often unnoticed ambiences of people’s everyday life. In her study on multisensory experiences in a Canadian rainforest, Van Hoven (2011) found that many environmental sounds are taken for granted, and overruled by other experiences, for instance the strain of hiking. According to McCartney (2002), people have to make a special effort to become aware of these sounds, and to listen to them. In a study on tourist narratives, Rickly-Boyd (2010) found that for several individuals, hearing bird song enriches their place experience. A particular environmental sound can trigger a chain of related memories, connecting people with particular places and times in their lives (McCartney, 2002).

A limited number of studies has focused on how specific wildlife species shape a person’s bond with a place. Wilkinson, Waitt, and Gibbs (2014) explored the role of bird-watching in people’s relationship with places ‘at home’ and ‘away from home’. They found that bird-watching and feelings of being ‘at home’ in a place are strongly connected with senses of time; of the past and present, and here and elsewhere. Curtin (2009) also noticed that wildlife could act as a signifier of place and time. By watching wildlife in a tourism destination, individuals get in touch with natural time, such as the cycles in nature; seasons, night and day, and biological life cycles. This may make people more aware of changes in their own lives, and their own position in time and place. In addition, Wilkinson, Waitt, and Gibbs (2014) found that different bird-watching
activities trigger a sense of belonging to places – not only near home, but also to places away from home. Nevin, Swain and Convery (2012) argue that polar bears, as icons of a landscape, create a sense of place among tourists. With the presence of polar bears, tourists perceive a landscape as authentic and wild, even though it is severely degraded. However, wildlife may play a different role in place bonding to local green places than to places further from home. As Tuan (1977) states, being rooted in a place is a different kind of experience from having and cultivating a ‘sense of place’. In tourism destinations, extra-ordinary and iconic wildlife is intentionally used to create a sense of place to attract tourists (Forristal, Lehto, & Lee, 2012), whereas in local green places, less exotic, more ordinary wildlife may be important in shaping people’s bond with a place, as ordinary wildlife may form part of a person’s everyday life, his or her past, family history and local culture.

What kind of wildlife experiences may contribute to a person’s bond with his or her local green place? According to Tuan (1977) modest and mundane events can, repeated day after day over a long period of time, create a strong sentiment for a place. Consequently, modest and frequent encounters with native wildlife may play a role in bonding to local green places. An indication for this was found by Curtin (2010), who discovered that wildlife tourists do not only have memorable wildlife encounters with large and charismatic wildlife in exotic, far-away places, but also closer to home. These can be regular encounters with robins in one’s garden on an everyday basis, but also special encounters with rare, native wildlife, such as kingfishers or sparrow hawks (Curtin, 2010). Time and regular encounters do not always have to play a role in creating attachment. Tuan (1977) suggests that intense experiences can create place attachment instantly. Intense experiences can be extraordinary events such as encountering rare wildlife, or seeing wildlife for the first time in one’s life. Intense experiences can lead to the experience of ‘flow’, consisting of feelings of concentration, absorption, deep involvement, and a sense of accomplishment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). As DeMares and Krycka (1998) found, encountering extraordinary wildlife (dolphins and whales) can lead to intense experiences, which they refer to as peak experiences. During these experiences, individuals experience feelings of harmony with the animal and their surroundings, connectedness to self and life, and a sense of aliveness. Furthermore, a peak experience is triggered by ‘reciprocity of process’, which refers to perceptions of wildlife responding to humans, wildlife performing for humans, and wildlife seeking eye-contact with humans (DeMares & Kricka, 1998). Although wildlife near home is likely to be less extraordinary than large and charismatic wildlife in far-away, exotic places, it may still trigger strong emotions and be memorable and important to people.
6.3 Methods

We conducted walk-along interviews to gain insight into the different ways in which wildlife contributes to shaping local green places. This method is often used to achieve a better understanding of people’s experiences, interpretations, and practices within a place, as it combines the strengths of field observation and in-depth interviews (Carpiano, 2009). During a walk-along interview, the participant takes the role of a tour guide, leading the interviewer through his or her lived experience of the place. The interviewer experiences the place together with the participant, and so becomes familiar with the place while observing the participants’ reactions to and interactions with people, and physical elements of the place. The participant’s role as a tour guide is led by his or her immediate sensations and associations, as well as memories of past experiences, thereby facilitating the interviewer to assess how the place is perceived, processed, and navigated by the participant (Carpiano, 2009).

For our study we asked our participants to select their favorite green place near home, the time of day, and the route of the walk themselves. The participants were asked to select a walk of approximately one hour. Most of them chose their usual routine by doing a familiar walk at their preferred time of day. These conditions made them natural guides during the interview. The walk-along interviews took place from October 2013 to September 2014, covering all seasons. The local green places selected by the respondents included urban parks, rural areas (e.g. a land consolidation area), local forests (e.g. Oranjewoud, Kroondomein Het Loo) and protected nature areas (e.g. Balloërveld, Lauwersmeer and Drents-Friese Woud). We recruited participants of different sociodemographic backgrounds (see Table 6.1), as we aimed to explore various ways in which wildlife experiences shape a person’s bond with local green places.
Table 6.1 Sociodemographics of study participants and type of local green place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Place of residence</th>
<th>Member of nature cons. organization</th>
<th>Type of local green place</th>
<th>Landscape characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Johanna</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Urban park</td>
<td>English style historic urban park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marian</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Protected area</td>
<td>Reed, marshland, lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Astrid</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Rural woods</td>
<td>Landscaped forest estate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Protected area</td>
<td>Forest and heather landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hendrik</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Protected area</td>
<td>Forest and heather landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yvonne</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Rural woods</td>
<td>Landscaped forest estate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Protected area</td>
<td>Forest and heather landscape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bart</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Rural area</td>
<td>Land consolidation grove, agricultural land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Urban park</td>
<td>English style historic urban park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerrit</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Suburban recreation area</td>
<td>Recreation park, lakes, beaches, fields, woods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monique</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Protected area</td>
<td>Landscaped forest and heather park, bordering the Veluwe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fenna</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Rural area</td>
<td>Mainland coast of Wadden Sea, agricultural land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karin</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Rural area</td>
<td>Forest and heather landscape</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: first names were anonymised by replacing the true name with another name from the top 50 of participants’ year of birth in the Netherlands.
Sociodemographic criteria used for the recruitment were based on previous research which had demonstrated that age, gender, urban or rural place of residence, and membership of a nature organization influence the relationship of wildlife experiences with the valuation of local green places (see Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis). Study participants were recruited by using snowballing. Each participant was asked whether they knew someone else who had a favorite local green place and who met the specific study criteria (for instance young, male). To avoid asking participants of the same social network, three starting points were used. This method took a long time, as each participant referred only to one or two other participants, and some participants were not able to refer to other participants who met the specific criteria. All the participants live in the northern and eastern part of the Netherlands, in urbanized areas (50,000 to 200,000 inhabitants) as well as in rural areas (< 6,000 inhabitants). Some participants were a member of a local or national nature conservation organization, but the majority was not. Three participants had an agrarian or fishery background.

During the walk along interviews we found that multisensory wildlife experiences among our participants varied greatly. Gerrit (m, 55) and Fenna (f, 42), who had a fishery and agrarian background respectively, had relatively modest wildlife experiences, while Astrid (f, 43) and Richard (m, 46) who had a rural background, got totally immersed in observing, smelling, touching, and hearing all kinds of wildlife. Richard (m, 46) and Hendrik (m, 82) can be regarded as specialist wildlife observers. Richard (m, 46) was an illustrator, watching birds and observing small creatures for his work, while Hendrik (m, 82) was a volunteer for a nature conservation organization who has spent hours and hours in his favorite green place near home, listing and observing all kinds of wildlife and flora. They were also the only two participants who went off-track during the walk. The other participants were not wildlife specialists, as they acknowledged that they did not know many different types of birds, did not search actively for animal tracks or wildlife encounters, and did not use any special equipment such as binoculars for observing wildlife.

The obvious strengths of doing walk along interviews were that the interviewer could observe responses to and interactions with wildlife and other people, what kind of routes were taken (e.g. on or off track), whether binoculars, magnifying glasses or cameras were used, and how specialised participants were in observing and recognizing wildlife. Furthermore, multisensory experiences of the place triggered memories which may not have come to the fore during seated in-depth interview indoors. A minor limitation was related to the weather: one interview had to be postponed because of bad weather and another interview had to be cut short due to heavy rainfall.
Moreover, despite using a sound recorder suitable for outdoors to enable audible recordings, the wind made some parts of the recordings hard to understand.

The interviewer started with a very general introduction to the topic, explaining that the research was about wildlife experiences in their favorite local green place. The introduction was kept short in order to leave it up to the participant to talk about how, where, when, with whom and what kind of wildlife experiences mattered most to him or her. Semi-structured interviews were carried out, using interview themes (Figure 6.1). It was asked what kind of wildlife participants encountered, with whom, when, and what kind of experience it was. In addition, it was asked which wildlife experiences had been most special to them, why, and how these events were related to their favorite green place. There were also topics related to wildlife experiences which came up spontaneously during the walk. In addition, the interviewer mentioned having back problems, as this could have had an effect on the (length of the) walk. The unforeseen effect of this was that many interviewees also referred to personal or health problems during the walk, thus increasing rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Transcripts were coded by using three umbrella themes which had been used to guide the walk-along interviews: the type of wildlife encountered, the type of experience, and the bond with the local green place (see Figure 6.1). By using thick description and making comparisons, more in-depth aspects of these umbrella themes emerged from the data. Thick description was first carried out for experiences with the most mentioned types of wildlife (birds, roe deer and snakes). Then comparisons were made between wildlife experiences regarding types of wildlife, types of places and the importance of other people. This was followed by analysing the relationships between these aspects, which resulted in the identification of different categories of wildlife experiences. These emerging categories guided the choice of the headings in the results section. In the concluding discussion that follows, three overarching aspects of how wildlife shapes people’s bond with local green places are discussed.
6.4 Results

6.4.1 Multisensory experiences of birds

Although in all interviews different species of wildlife were mentioned and discussed, one specific type of wildlife emerged as very important and relevant for making local green places special: birds. Birds mattered in the experience of each favorite local green place, regardless of whether the place was located in an urban, rural or natural area. The types of birds which mattered, did differ between the places. Several participants stated that hearing birdsong in their favorite local green place gave them a feeling of happiness. On her walk-along interview in National Park the Lauwersmeer, a wetland with reed, marshland and lakes, the first thing Marian (f, 65) did was go to the place where she sometimes hears swans sing. She said:

“...when there are lots of swans, it is like hearing a choir. It gives a very rich feeling, very emotional actually. Because you can experience it only very rarely...(silence), then you think, I am so lucky to hear this. And then I want to go there again.”

The musical performance by the swans made her feel privileged, special and rich. It made her become attached to the place, as she wanted to go back to the place over and over again. While walking into the local forest, Astrid (f, 43) expressed what birds meant to her:
“Well, those birds...There are very many, you see very many. And sometimes you have the feeling of being in a theatre. You hear all the sounds, you see the birds fly, and sometimes they fly along with you.”

As she was walking, birds and butterflies flew alongside with her. They made her part of the performance, and part of the place. When the movement of walking is shared with wildlife, it expresses a connection between the individual and the surrounding place (Edensor, 2000). Astrid’s experience demonstrates that some small creatures, like butterflies and birds, can shape an active relationship between an individual and the place. Waitt, Gill, and Head (2009) state that, while walking in a forest, boundaries between “people, plants, animals and places are relational, active, dynamic, ongoing and fluid” (p. 44). The comparisons that Astrid (f, 43) and Marian (f, 65) made with a theatre, dance, and a choir correspond with findings of Curtin (2009), that people perceive wildlife encounters as an analogy of performing arts, theatre, and ballet. This expresses an emotional response of awe and wonder (Curtin, 2009). Both Astrid (f, 43) and Marian (f, 65) articulated their admiration for the movements and sounds of the animals. The idea that birds are performing for them implies that birds are intentionally present. According to DeMares and Kricka (1998) this suggests a sense of needing something which the animal might be able to provide. Hearing and seeing birds, moving with birds through the forest, and the emotions which were triggered by these experiences, made the place special to them.

Several participants mentioned that birdsong helps them to unwind, to distance themselves from everyday life, empty their heads, and become re-energised, which is a main reason why green places contribute to people’s health and well-being. By hearing birdsong, a place becomes a pause in time (Tuan, 1977), a get away from modern fast-moving society. The importance of birdsong corresponds with findings by Rickly-Boyd (2010) that hearing birdsong enriches the experience of a place. Participants said that they needed to be alone to focus their attention on birdsong. Tim (m, 23) often visited his favorite local green place - a small urban park - with his mother, and mentioned that he was often not aware of birdsong, because he was walking and talking with his mother. Only when they sat down, and were quiet, did they become aware of birds. Tim (m, 23) stated that seeing and hearing birds made the place beautiful and peaceful to him. As McCartney (2002) suggests, Tim (m, 23) had to make an effort to pay attention to birdsong, and listen to it. By standing still and taking in bird song and other aspects of the local green place, attachment can take shape. According to Tuan (1977) modest and non-dramatic events can, repeated day after day over a long period of time, create a strong sentiment for a place. By frequently experiencing a place over a longer period of time, people become familiar with and
gain knowledge of a place (Tuan, 1977). Thrift (2000) stresses that much of human life is lived in unconscious awareness. Only the conscious awareness makes it possible for people to contemplate and reflect on what they see, hear or otherwise sense. Sitting on a bench, and actively focusing attention on the surroundings, makes this possible. Astrid (f, 43) described what bird song means to her:

“Birds help you to stand with both feet in the here and now. And not continuously thinking about soon, later, and yesterday”.

The experience of time standing still, while being in a natural place, corresponds with Lefebvre’s insights (1991) that, by experiencing nature, lived time slowly disappears. The perception that ‘time stands still’ in local green places also supports arguments made by Thrift (2000), that being in nature can lead to an expanded awareness of the present time, which enables people to contemplate, and wonder. Seeing and hearing birds helped to get participants into this state of mind; it makes their local green place special to them, as it is a place which, through birdsong, helps them unwind and distance themselves from worries in everyday life.

6.4.2 Modest wildlife encounters

Most participants visited their local green place to walk, contemplate, and enjoy the surroundings. During these walks, they had regular encounters with certain types of wildlife, as well as individual animals. Modest wildlife encounters occurred in urban, rural and natural types of green places. When they encountered wildlife like deer, hares, foxes or squirrels during their walk, participants said to stand still and observe them, until they were gone. Like seeing and hearing birds, these wildlife encounters facilitate the development of attachment. Seeing common wildlife such as great tits, robins, swans, geese, hares, deer, and squirrels were described in emotional words as ‘beautiful”, “wonderful”, “fantastic”, and “cute”. Astrid (f, 43) and Monique (f, 44), whose favorite green place was a relatively large landscaped forest estate, stated that seeing common types of wildlife made them feel happy. Observing familiar ducks, swans, great tits, blackbirds, frogs, beetles, and other everyday wildlife, and hearing birdsong, all create for them a sense of the beauty of the place. These kinds of modest events can in time build strong sentiments for a place (Tuan, 1977). Individual animals also played a role in the development of attachment. Johanna (f, 30) said that, almost every day, she would go into her favorite urban park, to see how a swan family was doing, while Monique (f, 44) observed the behavior of a group of six teenage “rebel” ducks every time she visited the landscaped forest estate near her house. Their expected presence was a reason to go there, and both Johanna (f, 30) and Monique (f, 44) enjoyed watching
them. The certainty dimension of emotion (Hosany, 2012) plays an important role in how these kind of modest wildlife encounters shape emotional bonds with a place. The perceived likelihood of encountering wildlife in a place, which participants base on previous experiences, leads to emotions such as hope and surprise (Roseman 1984; Smith and Ellsworth 1985), as well as love, happiness, pride, and gratitude (Ruth, Brunel, and Otnes, 2002). These emotions strengthened their bond with the place.

### 6.4.3 Special wildlife encounters

Besides modest wildlife encounters, several participants also experienced special wildlife encounters, for instance seeing rare behavior of wildlife, encountering rare types of wildlife, getting very close to wildlife, or seeing a certain type of wildlife for the first time. These encounters made participants feel privileged, as if they were destined to be there, and as if the animal(s) were intentionally performing for them. This made places special to them. Special wildlife encounters occurred more in rural and natural places than in urban places. Many unexpected wildlife encounters, especially with deer, foxes, and snakes, were described as a gift, which is associated with positive emotions such as surprise and joy (Hosany, 2012). For instance, Fenna (f, 42), who had lived her whole life on the agrarian mainland bordering the Wadden Sea, remembered that she went to look over the Wadden dike on the day she got married. On that special day, she saw a group of flamingos on the Wad for the first time in her life. It was as if they were there especially for her wedding day. She never saw them again which enforced the feeling that it had been an intentional encounter. As DeMares and Krycka (1998) discovered, intention can be a characteristic of a peak experience. The feeling that wildlife is there for the human can trigger strong emotions. In Fenna’s (f, 42) case, it enforced her bond with the Wadden Sea; the place where she grew up.

Hendrik (m, 82), whose favorite local green place is a forest and heather landscape in a National Park, had often seen foxes. However, he once had a special encounter with a fox:

> “Then you arrive quite unseen at that beautiful, tranquil field....There I once stood for more than half an hour observing a fox who was catching dragonflies in the middle of the meadow....Yes, then I may as well stop cycling after that, because my afternoon is complete.”

He stated, that he perceived this event as special, because he knew that most people will never see a fox in their life. Due to feeling privileged, the place became meaningful to him. Wildlife experiences were also perceived as special when participants could get very close to an animal, or
when there was eye contact. In his favorite green place, the Balloërveld, which is also a heather and forest landscape, Richard (m, 46) and his son (m, 11) once came very close to a hare:

“He (the son) could touch it. I took a photo of just his eye, it was that close...You could see us in his eye. That was very beautiful.”

The proximity and eye-contact made the experience more intense, there was a momentary connection between human and animal. The eye-contact made them more aware of themselves, and how they were seen by the animal. People need eye-contact to connect with another being, which in turn connects them to their sense of self (Berger, 1980; DeMares and Krycka, 1998). The hare encounter made Richard’s (m, 46) bond with the place stronger, which supports Tuan’s (1977) argument, that an intense experience of short duration can overrule past experiences and create place attachment instantly, instead of over a long period of time.

The first time participants encountered a certain type of (rare) wildlife in their lives often served as anecdote in the interviews. Encountering wildlife for the first time in one’s life can be an event which leads to long-lasting bonds with the place, where it occurred. For his walk-along interview, Richard (m, 46) had chosen to visit a heather field in a National Park where he spotted an adder for the first time in his life. He said that when he saw the adder, he was first shocked, then pleasantly surprised, and finally thrilled. Since that time it had become one of his favorite local green places to look for snakes, lizards, and other small animals. He started visiting the place more often and it became one of his most favorite local green places. Novel or unexpected events can lead to surprise, which is a short-lived emotion (Izard, 1977; Meyer, Reisenzein, & Schutzwohl 1997). Positive surprise has been associated with joy, a higher satisfaction and loyalty (Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). In addition, positive surprises can enhance a person’s sense of well-being and happiness with life (Gilbert & Abdullah 2004; Sirgy 2010). As Richard’s (m, 46) experiences and behavior illustrate, unexpected wildlife encounters can, if they are perceived as positive, and joyful, lead to a high loyalty and strong bond with a place.

6.4.4 Rewarding wildlife encounters
Richard (m, 46) and Hendrik (m, 82) actively searched for certain types of wildlife by going off the path, into heather fields and grassland. Searching and encountering wildlife which is difficult to find, such as snakes, can give people emotional satisfaction, because knowledge about the place, as well as wildlife, is necessary. For instance, during the walk-along interview, Richard (m, 46) searched for snakes in a specific heather field, where he had encountered them for the first time. Knowledge about the place, and about the behavior and preferences of the snake (who seeks a
quiet, safe, warm and sunny place in the heather), was clearly necessary. The effort of looking for the snake, and the uncertainty of finding it, increased the pleasure and joy once a snake was eventually found. When shortly after, two people with dogs passed on the main path, Richard (m, 46) stated: “They will never see snakes.”. This made clear that he perceived a distinction between him and ‘others’ who were not going off the track, prevented them from finding wildlife. This made the place more ‘his’ place. Hendrik (m, 82) also experienced these rewarding moments, encountering wildlife in places other people did not know about. Hosany (2012) found that the main aspects of emotion (joy, love and positive surprise) were formed by appraisals of pleasantness, goal congruence, and internal self-compatibility. All these aspects are attended to when actively seeking wildlife encounters, as individuals need to know a lot about the whereabouts of wildlife, about the most suitable times of the day, the best weather circumstances, and the right seasons to increase the chance of experiencing certain types of wildlife. Searching for wildlife is a relatively intense activity and both Jan (m, 82) and Richard (m, 46) were totally immersed in their surroundings by it. Their feelings of concentration, absorption, deep involvement, and a sense of accomplishment lead to an experience of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). As a result of their efforts, focused attention, and hard work, they made the wildlife encounter happen, resulting in feelings of pride and happiness. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990) flow experiences form the best moments in life, although they may not always be pleasant at the time. The places which facilitate these sought-after wildlife encounters are associated with strong positive emotions, leading to a strong emotional bond, and feelings of belonging to a place. In our interviews, rewarding wildlife encounters mainly occurred in rural and natural green places, as interviewees specifically visited these places to encounter wildlife.

6.4.5 Wildlife, childhood memories and shared experiences
Multisensory wildlife experiences in a green place are not only about living in the present, feeling alive, and getting away from everyday worries; they can also take a person back in time. Wildlife facilitated this in urban, rural and natural green places, but especially in places where participants had grown up, or in places with a similar nature or landscape to where they had grown up. For instance, seeing and hearing birds in favorite local green places triggered childhood memories for several participants. Karin (f, 76) had recently – after an absence of 50 years - moved back to the place where she had grown up. She made daily walks in the nearby forest, which was filled with happy and meaningful memories about learning how to swim, building campfires, roasting fish with boys, and skating on a forest pond in the moonlight. In her favorite local green place, she especially enjoyed seeing and hearing the birds. They reminded her of her father, who was very
good at recognising birds. Being in the same green place where she had grown up, the birds activated many memories, as stable elements in a changing environment. The favorite local green place of Bart (m, 55) was also the place where he had grown up, even though he now lived somewhere else. While walking through the land consolidation grove and along the meadows which he had known since childhood, Bart (m, 55) contemplated his past. Through his stories, it became clear that his biography was intertwined with the place. Many memories sprang up, set off by the multi-sensory experiences of the surroundings (seeing the landscape, smelling the soil, hearing birdsong, seeing the sunlight through the trees, feeling the changing temperatures). At one point, he said:

“Here, I looked for lapwing eggs with my uncles. They let me find the egg. They said: ‘Stop, don’t walk any further, there is a nest nearby.’ When I found the egg, it made me feel very proud.”

Looking for and protecting lapwing eggs is an old Frisian tradition and part of the local culture. For Jan (m, 55), seeking lapwing eggs had an emotional dimension, as he felt proud when he found the egg. This activity bonded Jan to his place in multiple ways; it was a shared experience with family members, it made him feel part of the local culture, it had an economic function, as eggs were a source of food and money, and it contributed to an emotional bond with the place. Being attached to the place where people grew up is a common human emotion, according to Tuan (1977). Most other participants also mentioned the role of family members and their own role as teacher, in transferring knowledge and skills related to wildlife. How parents or other family members had reacted to seeing certain types of wildlife (e.g. snakes, birds), had affected their own attitude towards these types of wildlife. The important role of family members in childhood wildlife memories add greatly to the meaningfulness of a place. This supports Tuan’s (1977) argument that other human beings are the main source of giving meaning to a place.

6.4.6 Wildlife, natural rhythms and sense of self

Besides making participants aware of the present and the past, experiencing wildlife also made participants aware of natural rhythms and of being part of a larger whole. Birds were mentioned most often in relation to natural cycles, especially seasons and time of the day. Many participants mentioned enjoying birdsong announcing spring. Some participants also focused their attention on hearing and seeing migrating birds flying over as a sign of a particular season. Atypical behavior was also noted, for instance swans having young ones in early winter, or bird song associated with spring heard in the middle of the winter. Wildlife behavior is steered by cyclical rhythms,
originating in the cosmos, in nature, days, nights, seasons, the tides, monthly cycles (Lefebvre, 2004). When participants turn their attention towards seeing wildlife and hearing birds, they are brought back in touch with these natural rhythms. Edensor (2010) argues that these regular routines and slower processes of change offer some sense of stability, as they exist longer than the human lifespan. Most participants valued exactly this aspect of experiencing wildlife in their local green place: the awareness of their lives being just a small part of a larger whole. Astrid (f, 43), Yvonne (f, 55), Bart (m, 55) and Monique (f, 44) mentioned specifically that experiencing wildlife in their natural habitat gives them the idea of being part of a larger system. This gave them comfort, especially when going through difficult times in their lives. Astrid (f, 43) said seeing and hearing birds, seeing squirrels and other wildlife in her local forest consoled her, because everything in nature is simple, and clear. Yvonne (f, 55) stated that being in her favorite green place, which is a landscaped forest estate, gives her a sense of authenticity, as she can be who she really is. She does not have to pretend, wear fancy clothes, or be in a hurry. Knowing this gives her freedom, harmony, relaxation, and a balance in her life. She feels part of a larger universe, which she can’t change, so she surrenders to sensing the place, by seeing and hearing birds, smelling different types of soil, touching plants and feeling and hearing the wind through the trees. When asked how he felt in his local green place, Bart (m, 55) said, after a silence:

“When I am fishing, I enjoy the warmth and cosiness most. You are sitting there, feeling one with nature.”

He hesitated and took some time to answer the question, suggesting that he had to think very hard about how he felt. Tuan (1977) states that these kind of intimate experiences lie deep within participants’ being, so that they often lack the words to express their feelings. The warmth and cosiness (in Dutch: “gezelligheid”) experienced during fishing suggest a feeling of being part of nature. He felt in his place. He said that all that he needs in his life is there, around him. That made him feel happy. His feeling of being one with nature echoes Maslow’s (1970) statement that, one day, people’s appreciation of nature will “be understood as a kind of self-recognition, a way of being at home, a kind of biological authenticity...” (p. 321-322). Wildlife can remind individuals of the essence of existence, its presence can connect them with life, being alive, and being in the world. Clearly, experiencing wildlife in a favorite local green place means a lot to the participants. Multisensory wildlife experiences in a favorite green place form part of who participants are, they form part of their sense of self and identity, in a multiplicity of ways.
6.5 Concluding discussion

Concluding, it can be stated that wildlife indeed adds to the intensity and the magnitude of nature experiences in green places near home. As Curtin (2010) suggests, wildlife seen close by can be very important to people. Modest, special, rewarding, and childhood wildlife experiences strongly influence people’s bond with local green places, and make local green places special. Ordinary wildlife can make everyday green places special to people. Birds in particular play a prominent role in shaping people’s bond with local green places. It is clear that the results of our study connect to the observations in literature on the restorative effects of nature and wildlife on human wellbeing (Curtin, 2009; 2010; Groenewegen et al., 2012; Van den Berg et al., 2010). However, by focusing on wildlife experiences in local green places, our study provides an extra dimension to the body of knowledge on how these restorative effects work: the aspect of being familiar with the place. On the grounds of repeated visits, people build a relationship with the local green place and with its wildlife. These relationships accommodate three more in-depth and long-lasting ways of how wildlife shapes people’s bond with natural places: the localized self, the internalized place, and embeddedness in Panta Rhei (see Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2 Three ways in which wildlife shapes people’s bond with green places.
First of all, and in line with findings of Curtin (2009; 2010) and DeMares and Krycka (1998), we found that multisensory wildlife experiences contribute to finding the real self, a person’s identity and feelings of being one with nature. Yet, wildlife experiences in a familiar place seem to result in rooted feelings of finding the real self: the localized self. This happens in many different, personal and unique ways, as wildlife experiences in specific places are often strongly entwined with a person’s (past) life biography. Wildlife experiences trigger childhood memories, especially memories shared with significant others, but they can also bring to mind more recent experiences. The predictability and familiarity of the behavior of wildlife make individuals feel comfortable, authentic, and ‘at home’ in their local green place.

Secondly, the familiarity and predictability of the presence of certain types of wildlife, or even certain specific animals, seem to form an extra stimulant for emotions such as joy and happiness, shaping an emotional bond with the place. Having internalized knowledge of the place and its non-human inhabitants makes a person more successful in seeking wildlife encounters, affording a sense of accomplishment and pride. In familiar green places, it is easier to know exactly where to find certain animals, and to predict their behavior. The interviews reveal that the awareness of being specialized in encountering wildlife, and having wildlife experiences makes the place ‘their place’: the internalized place. This gives scope for strong feelings of belonging to the place. Yet, unexpected and rare wildlife experiences which are not predictable, can also add to place belonging. These wildlife experiences feel intentional, as if wildlife is making itself visible or audible to the person, and as if the person was destined to be there at that moment. It feels as if the place is ‘giving’ a gift. These experiences make people (want to) come back to the same place to experience it again. Both expected and unexpected wildlife encounters, with both special and more ordinary wildlife, result in people feeling rewarded for investing time in the specific habitat. This leads to caring for the place, becoming loyal, and having a strong bond with the place.

Thirdly, because nearby green places allow for repeated visits throughout the year, people gain insight into seasonal patterns, and the related wildlife behavior they observe in situ. Wildlife adds permanence to a place, because wildlife has the same routines, such as building nests, migrating and announcing spring, year after year. This makes individuals reflect on their own lives, their past, their future, significant others, and on the continuing natural cycles of life and death. Seeing and hearing wildlife in a local green place can give comfort and a sense of stability in good and bad times of life. Individuals feel part of a larger whole by focusing their attention on wildlife and wildlife behavior. Through the experience of wildlife, they become more aware of day and night, seasons, years, life, and something larger than their own lifespan. Wildlife
reminds individuals of the essence of existence. It also provides people with *embeddedness in Panta Rhei*: the flows and cycles of nature and life.

In short, wildlife experiences shape personal, and unique bonds with local green places. Through modest, expected, rare, unexpected and other kinds of multisensory wildlife experiences, familiarity with wildlife in a local green place grows stronger, and so augments *the localized self*. Different kinds of wildlife experiences also make individuals feel more part of the place (*the internalized place*), and lead to feelings of *embeddedness in Panta Rhei*. 
References


