



GREEN CHAMPIONS



Bumper edition



Noticing Nature

High like skeletons grim

The trees hold up their arms;
The last leaf's hurried from its limb

By the tempest's wild alarms;
The river ripples gray and cold,

And autumn's o'er like a story told. - Harvey Carson Grumbine



Health - Naturally

Winter can be a challenging time to stay healthy and feel at your best. So how can we protect our mental and physical health at this time of year? The British Heart Foundation Magazine selected their readers' top winter health tips. One reader said they enjoy feeding birds and making an effort to notice nature: "If the grey of winter starts to get to me, I consciously look for the beautiful things around me: a glimpse of a dramatic sky through the branches of trees, a little robin hopping around my patio – lovely things are there if I choose to see them."

<https://www.bhf.org.uk/information-support/heart-matters-magazine/wellbeing/stay-healthy-winter>



Learn more - Natural Decoration

Woodland Trust Blog - Helen Keating, botanist and tree lover

Why not get a little creative with some simple crafts to make natural decorations. "Even the simplest, barest branch or handful of pinecones can be transformed into impressive decorations. And in these tough financial times, making your own decorations from foraged natural materials is a satisfying and thrifty way to add festive flair to your home." **Please forage with care and respect for nature.**



<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/christmas/>



Green Champion Coordinator update

Festive Greetings from Jackie Easthope



January 2024 will be my 40th anniversary working for Birmingham City Council, how time flies...

12 months ago, I was successful in obtaining a secondment, a development opportunity working as a Green Champion Co-Ordinator for The City of Nature Project. The development of this role will now be coming to an end, and I will be returning to my substantive role as a Housing Officer.

What have I learnt during this time? Well, there is lots being done across various Departments in the Council to achieve Net Zero and create a Biophilic City. I have worked with lots of lovely people in different organisations, voluntary sectors, community groups and individuals who are all passionate about making change.

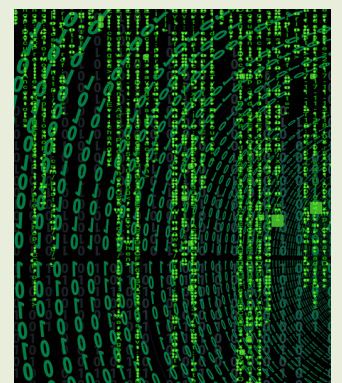
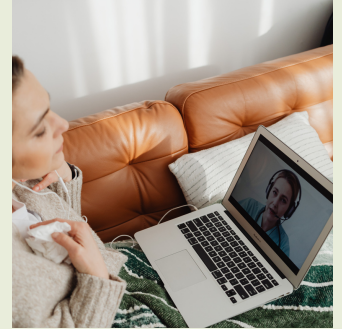
Through the Green Champion Programme, we have recruited 65 Green Champions across the City so far and have distributed monthly newsletters directly to over 350 people.

We have also held monthly online evening meetings to discuss all things green. We have been working with individuals and organisations about growing on green and grey spaces and assisted with land ownership enquiries where interested parties would like to take over neglected pieces of land to grow, whether that be wildflower planting, tree planting or just helping to maintain. I have also had the pleasure of attending community days organised by community groups and City of Nature Alliance organisations.

As well as all the success we have unfortunately also had stumbling blocks along the way with regards to technical issues with BCC IT Oracle system and recently working within the budgetary constraints put in place to deal with the 141 notice. These technical issues have meant that we haven't been able to deliver certain aspects of the UND project as we would have wished, hopefully this will improve in the New Year.

I would like to thank everyone that I have met whilst carrying out this role, and special thanks to the Ranger Service for their support, help and guidance.

Wishing you all Health and Happiness for 2024.



You can still contact the BCC Team at Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk if you would like to find out more about joining our Green Champions Programme.

Connect: With others



Please come and join us and other Green Champions online via Zoom on

20th December, for a chat about Parks and Green Spaces between 6.30pm - 7.30pm.

If you receive this Newsletter by email you will already have been sent the link, don't forget to put a note in your diary.

If not you can book via Eventbrite (click below) to get the meeting link sent to you:



[Click here to join us for an online chat](#)

The Bleak Midwinter Winter Solstice 21st Dec

The earth rotates on a tilted axis. During the winter solstice, the earth's axis is tilted at its furthest point from the sun. This means that, for us in the northern hemisphere, the sun is at its lowest point in the sky. It's also the shortest day of the year - and the longest night.

Under the old Julian Calendar, the winter solstice occurred on 25 December. With the introduction of the Gregorian calendar the solstice slipped to the 21st, but the Christian celebration of Jesus's birth continued to be held on 25 December. Marking the passage of time was important to many ancient cultures. For the people of Stonehenge who were farmers, growing crops and tending herds of animals, knowing when the seasons were changing was important. Winter might have been a time of fear as the days grew shorter and colder. People must have longed for the return of light and warmth. Marking this yearly cycle may have been one of the reasons that Neolithic people constructed Stonehenge – a monument aligned to the movements of the sun. But the winter solstice is also an important time for cultures across the globe.

Yule or the Feast of Juul, was observed in Scandinavia. Fires would be lit to symbolise the heat and light of the returning sun and a Yule log was gathered and burnt in the hearth as a tribute to the Norse god Thor. In present day Christmas customs and traditions such as the Yule log, stem from pagan Juul. Today the event is celebrated in some forms of Modern Paganism.

Saturnalia (Ancient Rome) in Ancient Rome, began on 17 December and lasted for seven days. As the name suggests, the festival was celebrated in honour of Saturn, the father of the gods. People would make sacrifices at the Temple of Saturn before banqueting and giving gifts.

Dongzhi Festival (Asia) is one of the most important times of the year. It celebrates the return of longer daylight hours and ultimately an increase of positive energy. The festival's origins can be traced back to the yin and yang philosophy of balance and harmony.

Yalda (Iran) is a festival celebrated on the 'longest and darkest night of the year'. Friends and family get together to eat, drink and read poetry until the early hours.

Nature's Calendar - Start recording

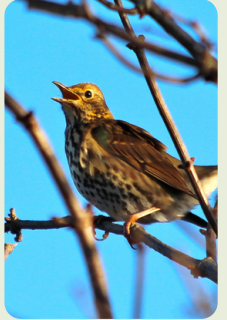
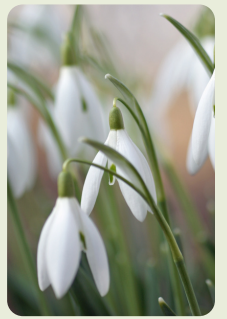
The Woodland Trust has information on what they call - Nature's Calendar. This project looks at:

- What effect has recent weather had on wildlife?
- Does climate change affect timings in nature?

You can join Nature's Calendar and help scientists discover answers to these questions. From leaf buds bursting to blackberries ripening, you can let them know what's happening near you. You'll be contributing to a long biological record that dates back as far as 1736. To know what to look out for you can download your date range calendar here:

<https://naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/1817/10103-natures-calendar-date-range-poster.pdf>

December is a bit of a pause in the year and dull December days can be very grey, but nature will do it's best to still provide splashes of colour to look out for. Lots of things are still happening and there is still plenty to watch, but things aren't changing much in the UK. However, you need to get into the habit of watching nature to be able to spot the first changes that are expected, like the first snowdrop or the first song thrush singing or if you have hazels nearby the first flowering of male catkins.



World Soil Day - 5th December 2023



<https://www.un.org/en/observances/world-soil-day>



Our planet's survival depends on the precious link between soil and water and over 95 percent of our food originates from these two fundamental resources.

However, in the face of climate change and human activity, our soils are being degraded, putting excessive pressure on our water resources. Erosion disrupts the natural balance, reducing water infiltration and availability for all forms of life.

Sustainable soil management practices, such as minimum tillage, crop rotation, organic matter addition, and cover cropping, improve soil health, reduce erosion and pollution, and enhance water infiltration and storage. These practices also preserve soil biodiversity, improve fertility, and contribute to carbon sequestration, playing a crucial role in the fight against climate change.

World Soil Day 2023 (WSD) and its campaign aim to raise awareness of the importance and relationship between soil and water in achieving sustainable and resilient agrifood systems. WSD is a unique global platform that not only celebrates soils but also empowers and engages citizens around the world to improve soil health.



The Active Wellbeing Society - Grow and Connect

This year.....

I have been invited to write a little about what I've been up to this year in my role as Grow and Connect coordinator for the Active Wellbeing Society. I am grateful for this opportunity to pause and reflect on how the year has emerged. There have been many seeds planted, both material, metaphorical and even metaphysical!



So, let's begin...

It felt like this year erupted into being. Preparing for the months ahead, January involved a litter pick for Naden road in Lozells, building new planters for our community garden at All saints, Small Heath, preparing a presentation for a national compost workshop, and attending the Future parks standard audit training- I haven't looked at a park the same way since!

All Saints garden sessions

Our garden sessions happen every Tuesday at All Saints Church, Small Heath. We started the year building a massive new planter, filling it using the Hugelkultur method which included a ton of our homemade compost. We have wonderful volunteers who have helped us plant Squash, beans, tomatoes, Kale, fruit bushes and more over the year. Each session includes a free lunch at our community café. More information about the sessions, including how to get involved can be found here: <https://theaws.co.uk/grow-connect/>

Compost Culture

Between you and I, Compost Culture is my favourite project! I can lose myself in the compost heap. On a cold day when the heap is steaming, I have to resist the urge to jump into its warmth. This year we have been busy clearing and preparing space for snazzy new compost bays that were built in August. We have nurtured environments for red wiggler worms and microorganisms to flourish and produce nutritious compost to fill our planters and beds. We have four sites that we have been developing. This has involved the new bays building, getting signage in place, embedding other composting methods such as bokashi and lots of hot piles. We have also delivered workshops and stalls at community days and events, presented at sharing days, supported the launch of the B16 food 'waste' pilot, Who said this is Rubbish?, presented for a national online composting workshop and run our annual Pumpkin Amnesty!

Facilitating the process of turning food scraps into rich, life sustaining compost reminds us there is no waste in nature, everything is nourishment for something else. There is so much wisdom in the heap.

More information about our compost work can be found here: <https://www.compostculture.co.uk/>



Sustainability Sundays

In April we were given the opportunity to work with the amazing Warehouse café, Digbeth. The Warehouse is a hub of green and environmental activism and activity. After discussions with Birmingham Friends of the Earth who own the venue, we agreed to trial six events with the working title that stuck- Sustainability Sundays. It was such a privilege to play a lead planning and organizing role at these events. Each covered a different sustainability theme such as Soil, sharing, regenerative practices and more. We had all our Taws projects in one place- Active Streets, bikes, sharing, Green and growing, food and were able to explore our work through the lens of climate action. We got to work with some truly inspirational campaigns such as Extinction Rebellion Brum, Better streets for Birmingham, Mums for Lungs and more..

The last event was in November, but we are exploring the, what next for this exciting work. For more information click here:

<https://theaws.co.uk/sustainability-sunday-starting-and-ending-with-community/>



A new Green Team!

In March we gained a new green team. Together we set to work on The River Cole Community Commons project with partner organisations. We facilitated consultations, supported litter picks, community events and helped to beautify the space around the river for people and planet. The team have worked hard developing Essington house gardens, Victoria Road gardens, Omnia medical practice green space and working with Fruit and Nut village to plant and maintain fruit trees at Naden road garden.

We've also been busy getting our house in order. That is our beautiful main office, Hay Hall: transforming the space into a welcoming community hub. This work is on-going and has involved facilitating consultations to co-design and create a beautiful outdoor space. Gardening sessions, developing the composting area and co facilitating the learning festival that has been an open space to share all we have learned through our work.

More information:

Get involved with our growing work here: <https://theaws.co.uk/support/>

Learn more and get involved with the Learning festival here:

<https://theaws.co.uk/active-communities-learning-festival/>

More information about our growing work here: <https://theaws.co.uk/grow-connect/>

Want to connect? Please get in touch: Laura.hackett@theaws.org

Written by Laura Hackett- Grow and connect Coordinator. Dec 2023

The Patchwork Meadow

We have had a very busy year, giving out and sowing 1,700 packets of wildflower seeds to brighten up our local neighbourhoods and provide pitstops for bees.

Our seeds have been given out at a wide range of events including ward meetings, eco/neighbourhood festivals, community dinners and mental health and well-being workshops. To reach out to individuals who do not go along to events, we have targeted specific streets, putting cards through everyone's door, inviting residents to get in touch if they would like some seeds. Working with local residents, schools, community and friends' groups we've sown seeds in tree-wells, raised beds, parks and the grounds of youth centres, faith organisations and the assessment centre at Winson Green Prison, helping to brighten up some of the most nature-depleted areas in the city. We know that children love to see flowers and plants growing. We attended lots of events this year where we sowed 'mini meadows in egg boxes', made seed-bombs and poppy cupcakes.



This included a session at a library during the Great Big Green Week when children heard stories about pollinators before sowing seeds. Our bee activity trail introducing fun facts about bees, was particularly popular (not least because of the chocolate bee that everyone gets at the end!). Thanks to funding from a Birmingham City Council CIL grant and support from the Green Champion CoOrdinator and housing officers, we have been able to plant pocket meadows in the grounds of three tower blocks in Ladywood and an extra-care service in Newtown. As well as helping to brighten up the area, we've also spotted a number of pollinators visiting the flowers. In September this year we gave out our 5,000th packet of wildflower seeds, since we started 3 years ago.

Our target now is to give out and sow seeds that will result in 10,000 square metres of meadow across the city. We'd love to hear from you, if you think we could work together to achieve this.

If you would like to see more photos of our pocket meadows and hear more about our activities, Do follow us on Facebook (The Patchwork Meadow) or X formerly Twitter (@MeadowPatchwork)

Chris Blythe - Researching food growing in urban areas

Food Growing and it's associated activities and challenges are prominent across Birmingham, be that in allotments, community gardens, orchards and many other spaces.

One of the biggest challenges faced is how to access and use public land across the city, and the City of Nature Alliance together with Oxford Brookes University and organisations across the city came together for a workshop exploring "Access to Land" in September. Presentations and discussions through the day, highlighted the similarity of issues that many face, as well as some possible solutions.

Work also continues on a number of reports for the Alliance concerning food growing in the city, and also ensuring that the Alliance is represented in some of the discussions around the Birmingham Food System Strategy:

(https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50279/food_revolution/2602/birmingham_food_system_strategy)

As part of a research project with Oxford Brookes University, a survey is currently running about perceptions and attitudes to food growing in urban areas. It doesn't matter whether you grow food yourself or not, all views are equally important.

The survey can be accessed on the following link:

https://brookeshls.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eXsTvOJL34IM498

It should take between 15 and 20 minutes to complete, and we really hope to get a wide range of responses from both growers and non-growers to inform the study.

The survey is confidential if you wish, and there is the opportunity to win vouchers in a prize draw as well.

The survey will run until early in the New Year (2024) to ensure as many responses as possible.

Many thanks in anticipation of your help and support - Chris Blythe



Have you ever considered growing your own
Christmas dinner?

<https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to/grow-plants/grow-your-own-christmas-dinner/>



The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country

We're delighted to have had a really wild 2023, and we'd like to thank all of our members, volunteers, partners and supporters for their help in working towards our vision for a wilder Birmingham and Black Country.

This year saw the conclusion of our ground breaking Natural Prospects traineeship programme. Designed to tackle the barriers that some individuals face when looking for work in the environmental conservation sector, we upskilled the next generation of conservationists as 33 local people completed year-long traineeships across 4 years.

Our work for wildlife has seen us undertake large habitat creation and improvement projects in key wildlife corridors, such as at Sedgeley Beacon and at Woodgate Valley as part of our Natural Rivers and Green Corridors partnership project.

Our Love Your River Stour project has worked to improve the River Stour and Smestow Brook corridor to allow wildlife to thrive through the heart of the Black Country.

We partnered with local councils, Natural England and the Environment Agency as part of Purple Horizons, an ongoing project to restore our lost landscape of historic heathlands from Sutton Park to Cannock Chase.

We've created wildflower meadows, managed our nature reserves and much more!

Our work for people has seen us help more than 50 schools connect children to nature, over 4,000 people joined us at events across the region and 169 young people attended our accredited training courses.

And of course, our efforts alongside Birmingham Museums Trust to lead Birmingham and the Black Country in the City Nature Challenge, a global wildlife-spotting challenge, saw us record more wildlife than any other city region in the UK – in fact, we placed 36th in the world overall, a fantastic achievement!

Do keep an eye on our social media to see how you can all get involved in the 2024 City Nature Challenge!



School group exploring Eco Park



Natural Prospects Trainees - Conservationists of the future

Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces

Focusing on: Highgate Park

Highgate Park has been the focus of our pilot project in Bordesley and Highgate Ward which was highlighted as one of the red wards areas within the Environmental Justice Map.

Most recently a community day was organised by Helen Harvey, BOSF with the park at it's heart but also involving a community trail which was supported by organisations in the area, the Alliance and West Midlands Police. Nearly a hundred local families attended the event and enjoyed visiting the different community hubs, which included hot food and cakes, and there was fun and games for the children in the park.



You can find out more about Highgate Park here:



https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/directory_record/9122/highgate_park

The Holly and The Ivy 🎵 & other Christmas plants

While some ever green plants such as Holly, Ivy and Mistletoe for example have their Christmas roots in Pagan traditions others come from further a field. Holly, ivy and other greenery were used during winter solstice celebrations to ward off evil spirits and celebrate new growth. In pagan times, holly was thought to be the male plant and ivy the female holly. Both plants were sacred to Druids. Chosen perhaps because while other plants wilted in winter, holly and ivy remained green and strong. Druids also valued mistletoe for its healing properties but the tradition of kissing under the mistletoe could have started in ancient Greece, during the festival of Saturnalia and later in marriage ceremonies, because of the plant's association with fertility.

For a popular but less traditional plant we move to Mexico where it is said little Maria did not have a gift to celebrate the birth of Jesus. All she could find was a handful of weeds...but, because she gave them from her heart, the weeds turned into beautiful red flowers of the poinsettia. From South Africa we get amaryllis also called the Saint Joseph Lily - because in the Gulf Coast region where it is most common, it usually flowers by March 19, on the feast of Saint Joseph. It is probably popular today mostly for its low maintenance and ease of growing indoors during the winter months and of course for it's mostly bright red coloured huge bell shaped flowers.



Birmingham City of Nature - Green City Action I.6

A City of Nature Alliance, made up of charities and community organisations, to provide a new civic voice and engagement mechanism

https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50273/our_future_city_plan_ofcp/2518/our_future_nature_city_plan



The City of Nature Alliance is where local charities, community organisations and national organisations come together to share, learn and support each other in the delivery of the actions listed in the City of Nature Plan for Birmingham.



Your Stories - Learning Journey - Laura Wilson

Laura Wilson of Learning Journey Consultancy, tells us about her year.

Bordesley Green Girls School enjoyed weekly sessions in an outdoor space learning about making the space much more nature friendly. The groups worked hard to plant bulbs in the winter and cleared non native/invasive plants to help other plants thrive. A bench and gravel path was put into the school garden to encourage students to enjoy and connect to the space the groups worked and developed. Some of the students were able to put the time spent on the project towards their Volunteering hours for their Duke of Edinburgh Award. Future plans include continuing to learn about and connect to their local green spaces. In addition, students demonstrating their knowledge in local green spaces to community groups and families at planned events.

I also worked with Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust (BBCWT) who installed physical features into Calthorpe Special School's outdoor space including a sensory tunnel, and a barefoot walk with natural sensory steps such as sand and gravel. The tunnel has plants trailing in and around for an immersive, nature sensory experience. In addition, the team have delivered sessions to learners and staff at Calthorpe school. The sessions are designed to get learners used to going into green spaces and connecting to nature. Sessions include making habitats for animals, natural den building, planting, mud painting, dressing up in wearable nature art and creating a very green and eco-friendly Winter Wonderland. BBCWT have also put together a school resource pack for Highgate park. The pack includes a variety of curriculum linked, outdoor activities which, can be experienced in the park. The resource pack is for mainstream and SEND schools.



Birmingham Open Space Forum - Friends of Parks

Birmingham Open Spaces Forum “BOSF” is a network organisation that aims to bring together all the people in Birmingham with an interest in their parks & open spaces. Their management committee is made up of volunteer representatives.

WHAT IS AN OPEN SPACE?

BOSF considers an Open Space as any space that a community regards as a green area which is accessible to the local community. This includes: parks, allotments, nature reserves, country parks, public open spaces, cemeteries, wildlife corridors, woodlands, playing fields, community gardens & the bit of green at the end of the road.

WHAT DOES BOSF DO?

BOSF offers opportunities for groups and individuals interested in open spaces to share knowledge and experience. They produce regular updates about funding sources, training opportunities, events in open spaces and lots of useful information. They also organise network meetings and training opportunities.

WHO IS BOSF FOR?

BOSF is for any group in Birmingham working to promote and develop an open space. This includes: friend’s groups, community groups, residents’ associations, neighbourhood forums and environmental projects.

HOW CAN BOSF HELP YOU?

By joining BOSF as a member group you will have the opportunity to make contact with other groups and individuals interested in open spaces in Birmingham. You will be kept informed of events and activities that may be of interest to you. You will be able to tap into the network to get answers to problems that other groups have already solved and it is all FREE!

We spoke to Mary Kennedy, Operations Manager for Birmingham Open Spaces Forum about how 2023 has been for BOSF:

“We are delighted to be finishing such a difficult year on a high by celebrating the tremendous efforts of our Friends of groups and all those who volunteer in our parks and open spaces.

Our members volunteer their time and efforts and make a profound and positive difference across Birmingham but their work is largely unsung.

This year, we are hoping to make them feel a little special by inviting them to a small celebration where local dignitaries can meet our volunteers and gain an understanding of their sterling work. We usually host a Christmas lecture for our volunteers and partners so we decided to bring the two events together in the interests of everyone having a great time whilst being recognized for all that they do”.

For further information, please contact mary@bosf.org.uk .

Birmingham Tree People - Urban Forest Accelerator

The Urban Forest Accelerator is a partnership project focusing on the urban forest.

The National Trust, Woodland Trust, and Community Forest Trust currently support a range of Councils and diverse communities with significant urban green estates, with high potential to increase trees and woods that enhance existing heritage and create new urban landscape with cultural value. The project is designed to respond to Council and communal needs, by improving urban green-space through the encouragement of tree planting, communications, and community engagement.

Birmingham TreePeople, alongside Birmingham City Council, have been the propagators of this programme within the City of Birmingham, using the city as a preliminary case study that coincides with the implementation of the Urban Forest Master Plan, another project focusing on the increase of ward-level canopy cover to improve the health and well-being of residents.

You can find out about tree plantings here: <https://birminghamtreepeople.org.uk/the-urban-forest-accelerator-brings-a-quirky-sustainable-touch/>

Oh Christmas Tree 🎵 Spruce, Fir or Pine?

You can visit Forestry England's website to get top tips from Christmas tree expert Rob Lamb reveals how to pick the perfect Christmas tree and how to look after it.

<https://www.forestryengland.uk/news/forestry-englands-guide-choosing-the-perfect-christmas-tree>

For trees that are grown in Britain, Rob recommends three species:

Norway spruce, Nordmann fir and Lodgepole pine.

"Each of these tree species is a bit different in size, shape and scent, so choosing one is really down to personal preference", says Rob.

"If you appreciate the traditional look and smell of Christmas then the Norway spruce is for you. Spruce is a magnificent scent that will make your home smell all Christmassy.

"If you have young children the soft, big needles of the lodgepole pine is a great choice. Though it is a bit less common than other varieties, it's a fantastic tree with lush green needles and a wonderful pine scent.

"And for keeping needles off the carpet, you can't beat the Nordmann fir. It's has soft foliage and an even shape and extra strong branches make it a real joy to decorate."



Legacy West Midlands - Every Step Counts

Legacy West Midlands deliver a variety of innovative and engaging wellbeing sessions. These range from classes on food and nutrition through to fitness workshops and walking routes in parks.

The teams at Legacy empower local residents to become Community Champions who identify health issues within their community to develop targeted peer-led solutions to encourage all participants to adopt a healthy and fulfilled lifestyle.

Find out more about the Bloomsbury Park walking route:

<https://youtu.be/nStUAXkN6D0>



Peace on Earth and goodwill to everyone



While December may be synonymous with the arrival of Christmas for many people across the UK and the world, December also includes other major cultural and religious holidays as well, such as celebrating Buddha's enlightenment; commemorating an apparition of the Virgin Mary; and honouring African-American heritage.

Not all religions including Muslim, Hindu, Daoism, Sikh, and Shinto and many others have special days or festivals in December but here are some others that do:

Bodhi Day (Dec. 8)

Also known as Rohatsu, this Buddhist tradition honours the day in which the Buddha—Siddhartha Gautama—is said to have achieved enlightenment. Many Buddhists celebrate it through meditation.

Feast Day of Our Lady Guadalupe (Dec. 12)

Mexicans and Mexican-Americans often celebrate the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico who symbolizes patriotism and devotion.

Hanukkah (Dec. 18-26)

The eight-day Jewish holiday of Hanukkah begins Dec. 18. A central part of the Jewish Festival of Lights entails the lighting of a nine-branched menorah each night. The ritual symbolizes how one day's worth of oil miraculously lasted for eight days during a battle between a small group of Jewish people and the powerful Greek-Syrian army in 165 B.C. after which they are said to have emerged victorious and reclaimed the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

Kwanzaa (Dec. 26-Jan. 1)

The week-long holiday of Kwanzaa honors African-American heritage; it's a cultural holiday as opposed to a religious one.

Zarathosht Diso (Dec. 26)

Founded by the Prophet Zoroaster more than 3,000 years ago, Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions. Zoroastrians honor the death of their prophet on this day, typically by visiting a fire temple and offering prayers.

New Year's Eve (Dec. 31)

In many post-Soviet countries, the holiday is celebrated with traditions similar to Christmas, such as the arrival of gifts from "Grandfather Frost."

RSPB - Making Community Connections

In 2023, we have been meeting and establishing links with groups and individuals via our Community Connector, with a particular focus on the Sandwell area but also reaching into Birmingham and Wolverhampton.

The aim of this work has been to develop an understanding of communities interests and motivations when it comes to nature and their outdoor spaces, providing support and information to suit their needs. This has led to some interesting collaborations, such as working with Spectra and Brushstrokes to support their users with incorporating nature into gardening activities, as well as developing a music-based wildlife workshop with EcoBirmingham to teach children about Swifts. Individuals from within these 30+ communities have recently started a series of online workshops, where they will gain knowledge and skills to enable them to develop nature and environment initiatives with their groups independently.

Next year, we are looking to continue developing and supporting these networks whilst focussing on two specific themes. Firstly, we intend to enable more people to experience the wonders of nature where they live by supporting people to facilitate nature activities in their local outdoor spaces. Secondly, we plan to tell the story of Swifts in new ways, inspiring more people to take action for a bird that relies upon our urban environments to nest and successfully raise their families. We will be looking for volunteers and organisations to get involved with this work. If any of the above sounds of interest, we'd love to hear from you.

Please contact jamie.murphy@rspb.org.uk



THRIVE - Using gardening to change lives

Thrive have over 40 years' experience of an approach called social and therapeutic horticulture (STH), where trained horticultural therapists work with plants and people to improve an individual's physical and psychological health, communication and thinking skills. They offer a variety of training and education opportunities - ranging from introductory workshops to extended learning. For more information: <https://www.thrive.org.uk/get-training/courses-and-workshops>

Here are two opportunities to grown and connect in Birmingham based at Kings Heath Park
Growing Out – Tuesday 5th December, 11am – 12pm

- FREE weekly horticulture programme for Women Only, experiencing anxiety, depression or other mental health conditions.

Carers Connect – Thursday 16th January, 12 – 2pm

- This group is specifically for carers to be able to take time out in nature and have space and support for their own health and wellbeing.

For more information or to book on any of these please contact the Birmingham office on birmingham@thrive.org.uk or 0121 293 4531

And the work goes on - Delivering a City of Nature

Although Jackie is leaving the UND project to return to her role in Housing, the City of Nature work goes on.

Here you can meet the other members of the BCC Programme team:

Mark Dixon - City of Nature Programme Manager

this is a belated, virtual hello to everyone that hasn't already met me or, indeed, may know me from elsewhere. I'm Mark Dixon, and I joined Birmingham City Council as the City of Nature Programme Manager in April.



The aims of the City of Nature plan are dizzying in their ambition and the prospect of being part of transformational change affecting so many people is a rare privilege, so I was really excited when I saw the role advertised nearly 12 months ago. Eight months in and I'm even more convinced that this innovative, all-encompassing plan will deliver the benefits it promised when adopted in February 2022. I can't pretend that the City Council is not currently facing some enormous challenges, but because the goals of the 25-year City of Nature plan are shared by so many other organisations, groups and people in Birmingham, this deep well of expertise and enthusiasm means that its success is assured.

I genuinely believe that the natural environment – in the widest sense – in which people live matters to the quality of their lives and have a passion for sharing this enthusiasm. I've worked in the environment sector for many years, with a lot of this time being spent on urban projects around the UK and here in the midlands including roles at The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country, and at the Wolverhampton-based National Urban Forestry Unit. (I've often joked that no-one ever leaves the environment world; we just get recycled! This has certainly proven very true in Birmingham, and I've enjoyed getting reacquainted with people who I first worked with *cough* decades ago...)

And what's the best thing about my job? That's an easy one; being fortunate to work alongside people within and outside of the Council who care, are passionate and want to play their part in something so important as City of Nature.



Birmingham's Route to Zero - Climate Action

COP28 - COP stands for 'Conference of the Parties', which is a generic phrase in International Relations-speak meaning a committee created after an international treaty is signed, tasked with making decisions about how that treaty is implemented.

A total of 154 countries signed the UNFCCC in June 1992, agreeing to combat harmful human impacts on the climate. Since then, COP meetings have been held (almost) annually to discuss how exactly that should be achieved, and monitor what progress has been made. Each COP is usually referred to by its number in the series, e.g. COP28 is the 28th COP meeting.

You can find out the latest about COP28 here: <https://unfccc.int/cop28>

To find out more about BCC's Route to Zero you can contact the team on:
routetozeroarbon@birmingham.gov.uk



The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country

Works with us for nature's recovery across Birmingham and the Black Country; protecting, restoring and creating wildlife-rich, accessible spaces that benefit people and wildlife. Get involved and find out more about their events in Birmingham and the Black Country.

<https://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/>

BOSF - Find you local Friends of Open Spaces Group

BOSF offers opportunities for groups and individuals interested in open spaces to share knowledge and experience. They produce regular updates about funding sources, training opportunities, events in open spaces and lots of useful information. They can also put you in touch with other groups who have experiences that might be useful to you.



<https://bosf.org.uk/members/>



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