

# GREEN CHAMPIONS



## Health - Naturally

A new study suggests that exposure to coastal environments can play a significant role in boosting human health and well-being, due to the 'therapeutic effects' marine and coastal landscapes have.

The Defra and UK Research and Innovation-led review in collaboration with Plymouth Marine Laboratory and Exeter University, showed that Brits spending time by the sea reported increased happiness, better general health and were more physically active during their visit, compared to visits to other types of environment.



## Noticing Nature

*Till to my garden back I come,  
Where bumble-bees for hours and hours  
Sit on their soft, fat, velvet bums,  
To wriggle out of hollow flowers.*

- William Henry Davies



## Learn more - The sea around us

In Birmingham we are around 70 miles or 112 km from the sea so we may not think about it that often. If we do it may be the seaside or the beaches and costal paths and flowers like pink thrift. But there's a world beneath the waves where seals weave in and out of sunlit kelp forests, cuttlefish flash all the colours of the rainbow, starfish graze along the muddy seabed and sharks slip through the open water. From Birmingham our rivers eventually flow into the sea so we are connected.

If you want to learn more:

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/habitats/marine>

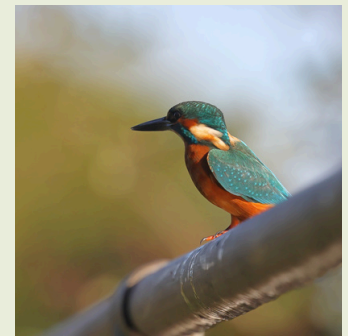
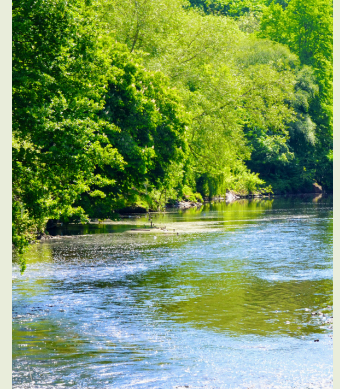


# City of Nature Programme update

**The City of Nature Programme** is about collaboration and coordination. There are many projects being delivered across Birmingham's green and blue spaces. Many of these projects are delivered in partnership with other organisations, groups and sometimes individuals. These projects are on top of what's often called business as usual, the day to day management of green, blue and greened grey spaces. On top of projects on BCC owned land there are also "green" projects happening on private land from large companies, hospitals and schools all the way to someone building a wildlife pond in their garden. All of these actions add up to how a city becomes a city of nature.

Obviously we can't really report on all the fantastic work happening for nature in peoples back gardens, although we always want to find out more. We don't have enough resource within the City of Nature team right now to report on all the projects on non BCC land, although this is monitored, or even on all BCC land. So we are going to focus on projects that are happening on BCC owned green and blue spaces so that is mostly parks and open spaces but can also include highways verges, housing areas, cemeteries, allotments, some schools grounds and land around other council owned buildings.

Here is a great example of a recent project being delivered by the Environment Agency removing the Ackers Weir, a 2.6 metre high concrete barrier on the River Cole:  
<https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2023/09/12/weir-making-a-real-difference-to-water-quality-on-the-river-cole/> There is also a separate project with the University of Birmingham and Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust to create a network of citizen scientists across Birmingham who will be responsible for monitoring river health and water quality, called **Birmingham River Champions** - you can find more details on social media.



Please contact us at [Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk) if you would like to find out more about Green Champions, Young Green Champions and the City of Nature Programme.

## Come and Connect with City of Nature Champions:



Please come and join us online on Friday 28th June 2024 1pm - 2pm for a short "Lunch and Learn" about how Birmingham is moving forward "No Mow May - What happens next?"

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

If not you can get the link by emailing us on [Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk) and we will email you the link.






# Nature's Calendar - June: Toads, Newts and Bats

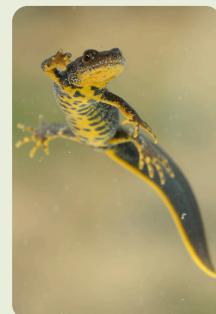
This line up sounds a bit like something Shakespeare would suggest as needed for a witches spell. But these three can often be encountered in June and over the summer as they focus on feeding up after the breeding season.

Toads are amphibians and spend most of their time away from water, hunting invertebrates under the cover of night. Their annual pilgrimages to ancestral breeding ponds during February are well known, but perhaps overlooked is the reverse migration of toadlets that begins in June. After four months feeding on algae, detritus and small invertebrates, the tadpoles have transformed, growing back and then front legs, and reabsorbing their tails. The tiny army assembles and, following rain, wave after wave of them emerge from ponds. Their size makes them vulnerable, so watch your step!

Newts are also amphibians, breeding in ponds during the spring but spending most of the rest of the year feeding on invertebrates in woodland, hedgerows, marshes and tussocky grassland. The UK's populations of the great crested newt are internationally important. The great crested newt is almost black in colour, with spotted flanks and a striking, orange belly. It has warty skin and males have a long, wavy crest along the body and tail during the breeding season.

We are lucky enough to have 18 species of bat in the UK, 17 of which are known to be breeding here - that's almost a quarter of our mammal species.

Every summer, thousands of people venture out to experience the wonder of bats in their natural environment. Sadly, bat populations have suffered severe declines during the past century, but the Bat Conservation Trust and more than 80 local bat groups are working hard to help our bats hang on. <https://www.bats.org.uk/> 



## “Let them bloom in June” Just getting started.

### Don't Mow Let it Grow

Birmingham City Council is continuing it's A to Bee roads pilot:

[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20089/parks/2923/a\\_to\\_bee\\_roads](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20089/parks/2923/a_to_bee_roads) into June and beyond. Simple messaging can be really effective and Plant Life's "No Mow May" certainly got people's attention:

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/campaigns/nomowmay/> But managing urban green infrastructure like road verges and central reservations comes with other challenges that need to be considered and changing the way these biodiversity assets are maintained takes us further than not mowing the grass in May and to thinking about the longer term natural capital benefits:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-nature-can-do-for-you> 

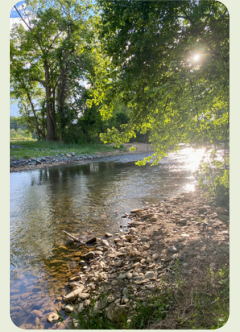


# Birmingham's River Cole - Starting in The Shire

The River Cole is considered to be one of Birmingham's rivers and so it largely is. However it actually rises in Bromsgrove close to Blackgraves Farm. It starts flowing south from it's source until it turns east at Watery Lane and crosses into Solihull. It first enters Birmingham close to Brompton Pool Road (B28 0SN) in Billesley Ward and then flows generally north east across the city linking the Shire Country Park and Kingfisher Country Park in East Birmingham. It finally leaves Birmingham close to Gressel Lane (B33 9UJ) in Glebe Farm & Tile Cross Ward and re-enters Solihull. It then flows into the River Blythe, which then meets the River Tame. The River Tame then joins the River Trent, and the combined waters reach the North Sea via the Humber Estuary.



On it's 25 mile (40 km) journey the River Cole flows through both urban and rural areas, with much of its course following a natural route. The first part of the route in Birmingham is through the Shire Country Park a local nature reserve south of Birmingham city centre. The Country park was named to honour the life and work of J.R.R. Tolkien who lived within its borders as a young child. Tolkien's childhood adventures in the park are said to have helped inspire some of his later works when he wrote about the Hobbits who lived in the "Shire". The Country Park is four miles long and is made up of a number of sites along the River Cole Valley. There are wetlands, grasslands, woodland and heath, which all support a wealth of animal and plant life. As part of the Urban Nature Development project we want investigate designating the the whole River Cole Valley in Birmingham as a Local Nature Reserve.



[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/directory\\_record/9168/shire\\_country\\_park](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/directory_record/9168/shire_country_park)



## June - Folklore: The Solstice and Midsummer

The summer solstice is when the sun is at its furthest point from the equator, making it the longest day of the year. It has been marked as the high point of summer – or midsummer – since the Neolithic era. The summer solstice may have been related to timings of crop cycles, as it was typically marked by lighting bonfires, intended to boost the sun's strength for the remainder of the crop season and ensure a healthy harvest. The solstice sits within a wider celestial framework, complemented by seasonal equinoxes marking spring and autumn as well as daily, monthly and annual cycles.

Many Neolithic stone circles also appear to have been built around the movement of the sun at solstices. Because there are no written accounts from the time, it's difficult to know their exact purpose. However, stones appear to be carefully positioned to align with the sun's movements, framing solar motion on summer and winter solstices. Stones were even shaped with hammerstones to frame the sunrise for those standing in the centre of the circle.

Though it might seem that the middle of summer would naturally fall on the longest day of the year, the summer solstice and Midsummer's Day are distinct events, normally a few days apart between 20 and 24 June. The difference is thought to stem from variations in the Julian and Gregorian calendars. The longest day has been marked in different ways over the years and has its own set of customs. Some are based on practical needs. Others originate from spiritual and superstitious beliefs.

Lighting and jumping over bonfires (not recommended) on Midsummer's Eve dates to pre-Christian pagan customs. It was thought to keep demons away and bring good luck to lovers. The solstice was particularly important in Nordic communities, where seasonal changes in sunlight are dramatic. The Vikings used the long days to maximise their productivity by hunting, settling disputes and conducting raids.





# Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces

## Focusing on: Glebe Farm Recreation Ground

This recreation ground is one of a number of open spaces in the Stechford area of Birmingham that plays an integral role in the local community.

The park features a younger children's play area, older children's play equipment, a youth shelter, multi-use games area and also a skate park.

For those looking for a gentle stroll there are tree-lined walks around the park and volunteers and local school pupils have planted new shrubs and flowers.

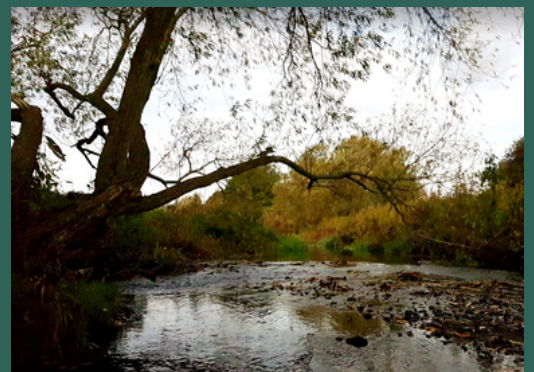
It is also close to the River Cole Valley Cycle Route, which runs for a distance of 10 miles and passes through several of the city's suburbs with parks and lakes along the way.

The River Cole winds its way through the northern fringes of the park and is a magnet for wildlife along its 25-mile length.

In 2019 Audley School Year Four visit the park with BTFL and wrote a Poem

In the city, by the river, here we planted emerald trees.  
Willow, Oak and prickly Hawthorne, juicy berries, swishy grass.  
In the Autumn, by the river leaves are getting brown and crunchy.  
Falling slowly in glimmering water, flowing gently to the sea.  
In the summer, by the river, sun is shining on the trees.  
And on water, people bringing picnics under shady trees.  
In our forest by the river, we protect the baby trees,  
To grow with sun and rain and soil, homes for owls, pigeons and squirrels.

[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/directory\\_record/522066/glebe\\_farm\\_recreation\\_ground](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/directory_record/522066/glebe_farm_recreation_ground)

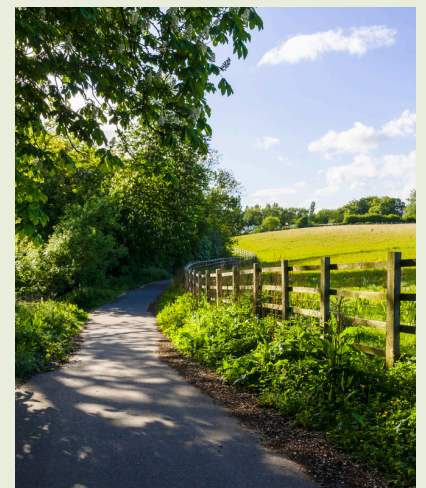


## 30 Days Wild - There's still time

30 Days Wild is The Wildlife Trusts' annual challenge event, where everyone involved does one wild thing a day throughout the month of June. They are excited to celebrate 10 years of 30 Days Wild with YOU this year. This year the challenge not only has weekly themes, but also activity suggestions for each day, giving you a more mindful approach to nature and all its glory.

There is still plenty of time to get involved, but don't wait any longer start right now.

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/30dayswild>



# World Environment Day - 5th June 2024

World Environment Day is the biggest international day for the environment. Led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and held annually since 1973, it has grown to be the largest global platform for environmental outreach. It is celebrated by millions of people across the world.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia will host World Environment Day 2024 with a focus on land restoration, desertification and drought resilience. Land restoration is a key pillar of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), a rallying call for the protection and revival of ecosystems all around the world, which is critical to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

<https://www.worldenvironmentday.global/> ✎



## World Ocean Day - 8th June

When The Ocean Project began coordination of World Ocean Day in 2002 they saw it as a great concept that needed global attention. Ever since then, they have prioritized collaboratively coordinating World Ocean Day as a unique opportunity to unite and rally the world for celebration and collective action of our ocean planet in June and throughout the year. We currently face one of the greatest threats ever to our blue planet and all its inhabitants: the climate crisis. It is all too clear that we need a healthy ocean for a healthy climate, and vice versa, and we need significantly stronger local, national, and international action from both government and corporate leaders. Now, for 2024, they are launching a new multi-year action theme: Catalyzing Action for Our Ocean & Climate. By growing the movement through transformative collaboration, they aim to create not only a healthy blue planet, but also a more just, equitable and sustainable society.

<https://worldoceanday.org/announcing-the-world-ocean-day-2024-action-theme/> ✎



## International Day of Play - 11th June

Play opens up a whole world of possibilities. That's why organisations got together and successfully called on the United Nations General Assembly to adopt an annual **International Day of Play**, on the 11th of June. They did this because they believe every child can reach their full potential, with the time, space and access to play. It's time to put play back on the agenda. On this day, and every day. Play is a fundamental right; it builds resilience, instils confidence and helps children develop. But children need time to play. That's where we need policies, training and funding to get play integrated into education and community settings.

Play heals through learning, life skills and psychosocial well-being. That's why there must be investment into diverse, inclusive and safe play spaces, extending access to all, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised children. There are so many reasons we should all be celebrating the power of play.

<https://www.internationaldayofplay.org/> ✎





# Great Big Green Week - 8th to 16th June

The Great Big Green Week is the UK's biggest ever celebration of community action to tackle climate change and protect nature.

Every year, people come together to unleash a wave of support for action to protect the planet. Tens of thousands of people in every corner of the country celebrate the heartfelt, brave, everyday actions being taken to stand up for nature and fight climate change.

In 2024, Great Big Green Week will take place between 8th and 16th June.

Great Big Green Week sees all kinds of events take place. For 2024, the theme is swaps – from clothes or book swaps, to skill swaps in allotments or upcycling workshops, to knowledge swaps on discussion panels or wildlife reserves. Events are hosted by teachers, bus drivers, sport clubs, artists, community groups, places of worship, libraries, builders – anyone who cares about climate change.

Local Green Weeks – Great Big Green Week community hubs – celebrate local activity, raise the profile of climate change and show why it is relevant to the community and local decision makers.

<https://greatbiggreenweek.com/get-involved/>



# Clean Air Day - 15th June

To breathe clean air every day we need to make rapid changes: adopting electric vehicles, avoiding millions of car journeys, slashing industrial and construction emissions and stopping buying products that cause pollution in our homes.

To see change at this scale requires us to work as a movement, with changemakers across the country modelling that change, and exerting pressure on government and major polluters.

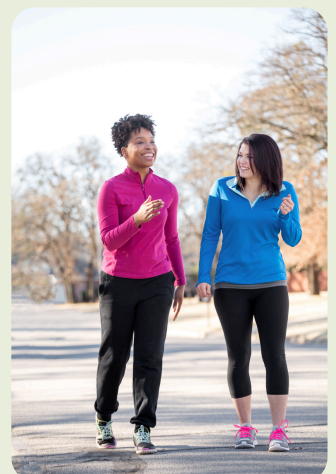
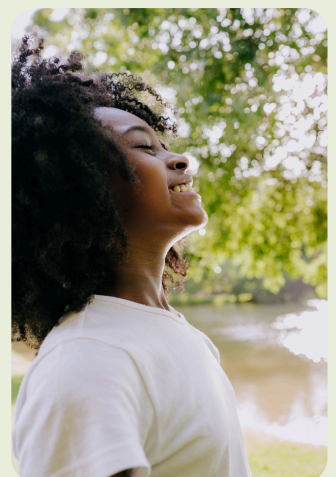
Air pollution causes heart and lung disease and results in over 36,000 people in the UK dying each year.

Clean air is essential for our health, and the co-benefits of clean air measures are also good for our wellbeing as well as being good for the planet.

<https://www.cleanairhub.org.uk/clean-air-day>

Birmingham's Clean Air Strategy:

<https://www.brumbreathes.co.uk/about>



# Sustainable Lives - June is a busy month

It's National Volunteers' Week which celebrates the amazing contributions volunteers make to communities across the UK!

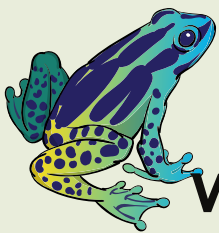


The celebration starts on the first Monday in June every year. It's a chance to recognise, celebrate and thank the UK's incredible volunteers for all they contribute to our local communities, the voluntary sector, and society as a whole. What happens during Volunteers' Week?

From open days to celebration events, every year hundreds of online and in-person activities take place across the UK to mark Volunteers' Week and celebrate volunteers. This year Volunteers' Week will culminate in The Big Help Out, from Friday 7 to Sunday 9 June, where people across the UK will get the chance to experience a range of volunteer taster sessions.

But there are also many things you can do every day to live a more sustainable life and you can start this June. So whether it's water bottle refills <https://www.refill.org.uk/world-refill-day/>, thinking about using plastic free beauty products, considering sustainable gastronomy when you shop or go out to eat <https://www.un.org/en/observances/sustainable-gastronomy-day>, or adding a green roof to your bin store: <https://worldgreenroofday.com/>

There's a way you can make a difference every day.



## World Rainforest Day - 22nd June

World Rainforest Day like many national / international days of focus provides a point in the year to consider what is happening to the world's rainforests even if our busy lives means that we don't normally have time to think about this vast planet we live on and all that is happening on it every day. Tropical rainforests lie along the equator, mainly between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. They have four main layers: the emergent, the canopy, the under canopy and the forest floor. Every layer of the forest is different with different plants and animals, some animals live their entire life cycle in one layer others move between them.

We are aware that unlike the deserts that are spreading we are losing more rainforest all the time. There are many causes of rainforest deforestation, which leads to loss of habitats, but also soil erosion, which leads to flooding and contributes to global warming. There are international agreements now, with 'debt for nature' swaps and selective logging and replanting of trees being used to help reduce deforestation. But we haven't stopped the loss yet. You can read more about rainforests here: <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/rain-forest/>





# Birmingham City of Nature - Actions for the city

**The Nature Recovery Network, stretching right across the city and linking with all our West Midlands neighbours, forming part of the West Midlands National Park (G7).**

When it comes to the natural world we often quote The Lawton review. Bigger, Better, More joined up. The idea for a West Midlands National Park (WMNP) was envisioned by Kathryn Moore, Professor of Landscape Architecture at Birmingham City University. The project seeks to establish a new kind of national park for the West Midlands. Despite being the birthplace of the industrial revolution and containing a complex infrastructure of motorways, roads and canals, the West Midlands is also home to major agricultural areas and beautiful open spaces.

The plans for a national park includes the whole of the WMCA territory, stretching from headwaters of the Tame in the Black Country to the Blythe and Tame Valley in the East, from Wolverhampton, Walsall, Sandwell and Dudley, to Birmingham, with Solihull and Coventry in the south. It contains a variety of features to make the region a greener, healthier place in which to live and work including patterns of parks and squares that are easy and pleasant to walk through. Potential new housing developments would make the most of the beauty of the region by opening up views, horizons, and skylines and creating green spaces in the towns and cities.

[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50273/our\\_future\\_city\\_plan\\_ofcp/2518/our\\_future\\_nature\\_city\\_plan/2](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50273/our_future_city_plan_ofcp/2518/our_future_nature_city_plan/2)



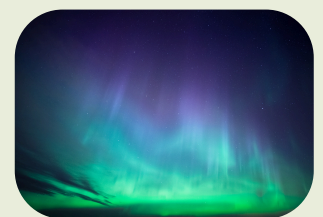
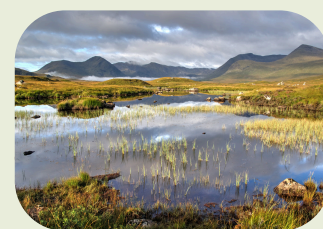
## Earth Stories - Memories, Hopes and Happenings

During May I took some leave to leave the Midlands, head north and visit the Scottish Highlands.

The Visit Scotland website <https://www.visitscotland.com/things-to-do/landscapes-nature> says: *“Towering mountains, glittering lochs, dense woodlands and miles upon miles of golden beaches - Scotland's landscapes and natural scenery really will take your breath away.”* and it did!

*“Head to one of our Dark Sky Parks or spots where you can marvel at the sparkling night sky, dip your toes into our crisp sea water, wander around one of the many glistening fresh-water lochs, or venture out into the wilderness to see if you can catch the Northern Lights dancing in the sky.”* and we did! I can say - Scotland does what it says on the tin : )

Those of us that live in cities need nature on our doorsteps so we can experience it everyday, but - we also need to be able to experience the natural world at the landscape level, it really can reset your perspective, for a while at least. We do have some amazing landscapes much closer than Scotland so I encourage you to check some of these out when you can. - Debbie, Community Coordinator UND project.



# Birmingham's Route to Zero - Climate Action

10th to 16th June is National Bike Week - Bike Week is the UK's biggest awareness-raising moment of the year for cycling and a chance to celebrate. It's a time to remind ourselves of all the positives that riding a bike can bring, both to our own health and wellbeing, as well as the wider impacts on our communities and the planet. This year, Cycling UK wants to celebrate cycling as a force for good. We want to celebrate all those who cycle and encourage and enable more cycling, as we know that when more people cycle, we all become happier, healthier, greener and more connected:

<https://www.cyclinguk.org/bikeweek>

Find out where you can cycle in Birmingham:

[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50122/cycling\\_in\\_birmingham/1322/where\\_can\\_i\\_cycle](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50122/cycling_in_birmingham/1322/where_can_i_cycle)

You can join ecobirmingham to experience: <https://ecobirmingham.com/project/brum-by-bike/>

To find out more about BCC's Route to Zero you can contact the team on:

[routetozerocarbon@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:routetozerocarbon@birmingham.gov.uk)



## Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust

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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Heritage Fund

