

GREEN CHAMPIONS



Health - Naturally

Water can have a calming effect on people and create a sense of well-being, so ponds are great for people who do not have easy access to rivers or coasts. Have you ever stopped for a few minutes next to a pond and had a good long, hard stare? Well doing that is great for our mental health and is a good exercise in mindfulness.

Sitting by a pond and watching all the life within brings you back into the present moment, concentrates the mind on something new and can allow your mind the space it needs to get some inspiration.



Noticing Nature

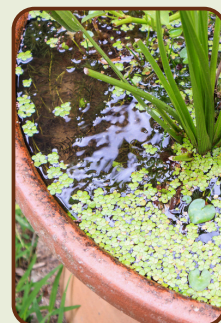
I love the hay grass when the flower head swings
To summer winds and insects happy wings
That sport about the meadow the bright day
And see bright beetles in the clear lake play
- John Clare (1793-1864)

Learn more - Pond dipping

Safety First - exploring water does have risks so it's important to be safe. Make sure children are always supervised while pond dipping - the pond may be deeper than it looks. Pond water can contain bacteria, so make sure any cuts are covered by watertight plasters. Always wash hands thoroughly after this activity.

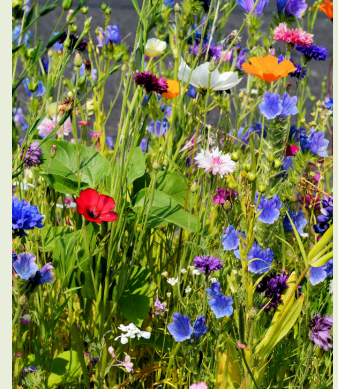
Learn more about pond dipping here:
<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/08/how-to-pond-dip/>

Learn more about pondlife:
<https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/pond-life-facts-about-habitats-plants-animals.html>



City of Nature Programme update

The City of Nature Programme delivers the actions in the City of Nature Plan. For many years Birmingham's Park Ranger Service has cared for Birmingham's countryside and helped to link people to nature through a programme of events, activities and support for community groups across the city. The Council's services are currently under review, and the Ranger Service has been no exception to this process. As such changes to how the Ranger Service operates are now in place and the number of Ranger Service personnel has been reduced by removing any vacant posts. They will continue to carry out Health and Safety inspections across the city's parks and open spaces and the rest of their time will focus on new, targeted activities in the wards most in need of action to level up environmental justice scores as per the City of Nature 25 year plan. This includes 46 parks within Bordesley & Highgate, Balsall Heath West, Nechells, Gravelly Hill, Pype Hayes and Castle Vale. This new programme of work is being delivered through a funding contribution from Public Health. Activities being delivered by the Rangers are those that support or deliver nature based interventions to improve health outcomes such as physical activity levels and wellbeing. This means the level of support previously provided by the Ranger Service to 'Parks Friends Of' groups and community groups in the other parts of the city will be greatly reduced for the next two years whilst the Council returns to a more sustainable financial position. That said, the Ranger Service will continue to work with the City of Nature Alliance of organisations and other partners to help inform and coordinate the delivery of nature recovery activities and will aim to increase participation, volunteering, and appreciation of our green spaces across the city. The wider BCC Parks teams and Birmingham Open Spaces Forum will of course be there to provide advice and support so that existing Friends Groups can continue to make their contributions to their local sites as much as possible.



Please contact us at Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk if you would like to find out more about the City of Nature Programme, Green Champions, Young Green Champions and the Ranger Service Wild Heart - Healthy Parks Programme.

Come and Connect with City of Nature Team



Please come and join us online on Friday 2nd August 2024 1pm - 2pm for a short "Lunch and Learn" about Birmingham's Healthy Parks

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 and we will email you the link.



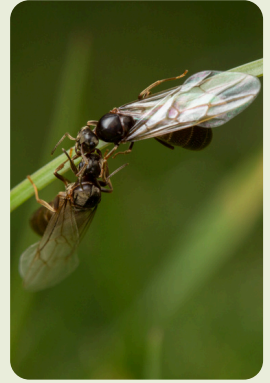
Nature's Calendar - July: The heat is on - and off.

Black Garden Ants

When the summer weather gets hot and sticky, huge swarms of flying ants take to the air. In the UK, it's usually Black Garden Ants we're trying to dodge as they emerge in huge numbers from their nests. The swarms are made up of winged males (drones) and virgin queens (princesses) and they take flight to mate and then form new colonies.

The females are larger than the males and sometimes you see them flying while joined together. The males only live for a day or two, while the females, once they've mated, chew off their own wings and go looking for a suitable place to set up their own colony.

Ants usually fly in a period of warm still weather between June and the start of September. Exactly when will depend on the weather conditions in a particular area.



Precious water

Although the weather is very unseasonable at the moment in the UK. When the summer heat hits the high notes, water for wildlife can become scarce. Birds have no sweat glands, so they need less water than mammals. Even so, small birds need to drink at least twice a day as well as using it to bathe to keep feathers clean.

If you can, put out water in a birdbath, replacing it every day with fresh and cleaning the bath around once a week. You can also put out a shallow container at lower levels, for mammals such as Hedgehogs to get a much-needed drink.

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/natures-calendar/natures-calendar-july>



“We are giving it a try - into July”

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

In July, meadows have reached maturity and the wildflowers of late spring have waned and set seed. The grasses are tall and lush and sway in the gentle breeze. A new wave of deeply coloured plants appear. Rich purple from knapweed and betony and the golden yellow of lady's bedstraw and meadow vetchling. The rich variety of plants supports a mass of insects – it's boom time for bees and butterflies. Along our unmown road verges field scabious and orchids have also been seen. We are still mowing around the edges of A to Bee central reservations and islands to ensure tall plants don't cause a visual obstruction.



Birmingham's River Cole - Moving through the middle

Last month we talked about the start of the River Coles journey in Birmingham in The Shire Country Park:

https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/directory_record/9168/shire_country_park

In the middle part of it's journey it reaches the point where the Shire Country Park meets Kingfisher Country Park. "The Ackers" at Golden Hillock Sports ground on Golden Hillock Road, Sparkbrook, B11 2PJ is the most eastern edge of the Shire Country Park and reaches out to join Heybarnes Recreation Ground on Heybarnes Road at the start of the green spaces that make up Kingfisher Country Park. Golden Hillock Sports Ground is a large grassy space very popular with local residents. Ackers Adventure, a Birmingham-based outdoor adventure activity centre run by the Ackers Trust, is situated on the edge of the sports ground.



Recently The Community Commons Project saw the University of Birmingham teaming up with community organisations, residents, and Birmingham City Council to design and deliver improvements stretching along the river from The Ackers, via Tyseley Energy Park, to Heybarnes Recreation Ground. Work has been carried out to enhance habitats for wildlife and clear waste and invasive species to create an accessible and connected green corridor with amenities including a children's adventure play area and outdoor seating.:



<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/2023/river-cole-community-commons-project-reaches-completion>



July - Folklore and Traditions: 40 days and 40 nights

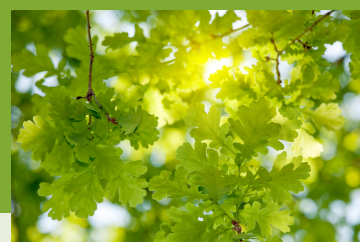
St Swithin's Day - 15th July

According to an ancient tradition, if it rains on St Swithin's Day, it will rain for the next 40 days. The story began in the year 971, when the bones of St Swithin (who had died over 100 years before) were moved to a special shrine at Winchester Cathedral, and there was a terrific storm that lasted for 40 days. People said that the saint in heaven was weeping because his bones had been moved.

Although July doesn't have many specific days associated with traditions, there are many plants and trees that are flowering at this time of year that feature in folklore.

Elder trees were once regarded as one of the most magically powerful of trees, elder is a forager's favourite and its flowers are the scent of summer. It was said that an elder planted by your house would keep the devil away. The flowers are borne on large, flat umbels, 10–30cm across, the individual flowers are creamy-coloured, highly scented, and have five petals. Flowers generally appear from late May. <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/a-z-of-british-trees/elder/> Elder flowers are often used to flavour jellies and cordials.

Oak has a long history of folklore throughout Europe and was sacred to many people, including the ancient Greeks, the Norse and the Celts. Oak's association with the gods of thunder may have come from the phenomenon that oaks are often split by lightning being the tallest trees standing in the landscape. More recently oak was the sacred wood burnt by the druids for their mid-summer celebration. In fact the word 'druid' means 'oak man'



Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces

Focusing on: The Oval Public Open Space

We know that Birmingham has many beautiful and diverse areas of green space, but we are also very aware this vital green infrastructure is not located equally across the city.

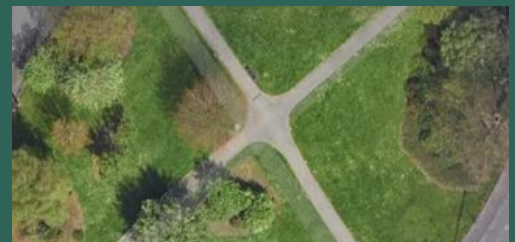
An example of a ward that is lacking public green spaces is Gravelly Hill. The Oval Public Open space is the only green "park" in Gravelly Hill Ward. It is in fact a large traffic island on Oval Road.

In spring it has bright areas of daffodils, but it doesn't lend itself to an area that is good to play on for young children.

It does have a cross of paths and some benches and bins and it has a variety of trees and some shrub beds. On bright summer days it can look very attractive.

We know that when we speak to people about what attracts them to a park they often say colourful plants and flowers and what makes them feel welcome and safe is if the park is well managed and looks "cared for".

All of Birmingham's parks and open spaces have a programme of work delivered by BCC Parks but many parks also have groups who help to look after the park litter picking, doing small gardening tasks and helping other people to get involved. Luckily Rookery Park is not too far away and the Park Rangers will be working in Rookery Park and reaching out to The Oval to help to bring it back to life.



July - National Picnic Month

If you enjoy getting out of the house and eating outdoors then July is the month for you, as the whole of this month is National Picnic Month! What better way to wind down after a busy day/week at work than to slip on your sandals, pack up your picnic basket and head to the outdoors with friends and family. So get yourself outside this National Picnic Month, and with a whole month of celebrating ahead of you the culinary possibilities are G-astronomical! **Don't forget to make it waste free if you can, if not please take all your packages home with and recycle if you can and leave the BBQs at home if you are visiting a public park in Birmingham - they aren't allowed.**

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/50-things/no.-9-eat-a-picnic-in-the-wild>



World Snake Day - 16th July 2024

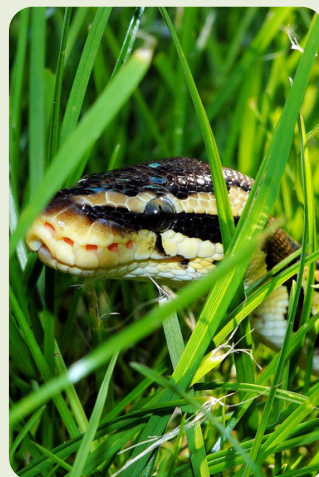
16th July is World Snake Day:

an opportunity to celebrate snakes and raise awareness about their preservation.

While snakes are threatened by many of the same issues that affect all wildlife (habitat loss, climate change, and disease), negative attitudes toward snakes may be the biggest barrier to their preservation because it often impedes efforts to address other threats.

There are three species of snake native to the UK: grass snake, adder and smooth snake. Depending on where you are will affect what type of snake you're more likely to see. In Birmingham the most likely snake you may see is the grass snake, although they tend to stay well away from busy places

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/how-identify/identify-snakes>



Love Parks - 26 July to 4 August 2024

Love Parks is a week-long celebration (July 26th - August 4th) highlighting the vital role green spaces play in boosting the health and wellbeing of residents and communities.

It is your park's chance to shine! You can organise events to showcase your park's fantastic facilities and, if you have one, your Green Flag Award. This week-long celebration is the perfect opportunity to engage your local community, boost park pride, and get everyone enjoying your amazing green spaces!

Parks and green spaces are amazing! Here's three great reasons why we 'Love Parks':

Healthier communities – parks encourage physical activity, reduce stress, and provide spaces for social interaction, leading to happier and healthier residents.

Stronger communities – well-maintained parks become hubs for community events, fostering a sense of belonging and pride.

Sustainable future – parks act as natural filters, improving air and water quality while mitigating climate change impacts.

If you manage or help take care of a park in your area, sign up now to receive a free resource pack.

The pack will have ideas and tools to help you promote Love Parks in your area you can find out more by visiting the website.

<https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/get-involved/support-our-campaigns/love-parks-2024>



Sustainable Lives - Plastic Free July

Plastic Free July® is a global movement that helps millions of people be part of the solution to plastic pollution – so we can have cleaner streets, oceans, and beautiful communities. Will you be part of Plastic Free July by choosing to refuse single-use plastics?

If you want some tips to find out how you can reduce plastic waste? The good news is, anyone can get involved. You can start out small, or really challenge yourself! Get inspired using the Plastic Free July menu options: <https://www.plasticfreejuly.org/get-involved/what-you-can-do/category/my-community/>

Here's just one idea: Host a picnic with friends, family and community members to share the solutions.

- Bring tap water in a reusable bottle (and encourage others to do the same!)
- Make sandwiches and put them in reusable containers or beeswax wraps.
- Bake a cake and bring it along as a sweet treat.



International Mangrove Day 26th July 2024

International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem

Mangroves are rare, spectacular and prolific ecosystems on the boundary between land and sea.

These extra ordinary ecosystems contribute to the wellbeing, food security, and protection of coastal communities worldwide. They support a rich biodiversity and provide a valuable nursery habitat for fish and crustaceans. Mangroves also act as a form of natural coastal defence against storm surges, tsunamis, rising sea levels and erosion. Their soils are highly effective carbon sinks, sequestering vast amounts of carbon. Yet mangroves are disappearing three to five times faster than overall global forest losses, with serious ecological and socio-economic impacts. Current estimates indicate that mangrove coverage has been divided by two in the past 40 years.

UNESCO is engaged deeply in supporting the conservation of mangroves, while advancing the sustainable development of their local communities. The inclusion of mangroves in Biosphere Reserves, World Heritage sites and UNESCO Global Geoparks contributes to improving the knowledge, management and conservation of mangrove ecosystems throughout the world.



Birmingham City of Nature - Actions for the city

Support to citizens living in Council housing to make communal gardens where they live (H5).

Whether you're an experienced gardener or just starting out, community gardening is a great way to connect with others and improve the place where you live. If you don't have a garden to call your own, community gardening means you can share the benefits of tending a green space, while helping others and the environment.

Benefits for your community

- **Pride of place:** public spaces improved by the people that use them allows a sense of ownership and shared learning – for lasting benefit
- **Greener surroundings:** more gardens mean a cleaner and greener place to live and visit
- **A healthier environment:** attracting wildlife with plants could help to boost local biodiversity and tackle air pollution
- **Transformation:** community gardens can regenerate run-down areas and boost the local economy
- **Safer streets:** Cleaner, greener environments have been linked to lower crime rates and reduced anti-social behaviour
- **Healthier communities:** Local food growing can help people make better eating choices, while green exercise is linked to better mental and physical health

For more information: <https://naturallybirmingham.org/community-gardening-2/>



Earth Stories - Memories, Hopes and Happenings

Last month was an opportunity to get out and about around Birmingham's parks and catch up with what opportunities there are to connect to nature in those green and blue spaces. Dappled sunlight was my theme for these observations.

Although the weather has been rather unseasonal there are still signs of summer all around us. Butterflies appear whenever we have a few dry days and include the brown and cream well named Speckled Wood <https://butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/speckled-wood> These butterflies often perch alone in pools of sunshine between the silhouettes of leaves, suddenly spiralling up into the air to chase another passing by.

Young robins who don't yet have their red chests also blend in well amongst the foliage and sunlight in shrubs, learning to pounce on their prey or chirping noisily to their parents if they haven't been successful in finding some lunch.

Sitting quietly in a shady place on a warm but breezy day can sometimes provide you with glimpses of other animals using the cover of dancing shadows to peak out and see who else is sharing their world. Like a fox cub just starting to explore the park for the first time.

- Debbie, Community Coordinator UND project.



Birmingham's Route to Zero - Climate Action

Net Zero Week 6th to 12th July 2024

This is the UK's official national awareness week and the biggest net zero conference - and it's back for year four.

It brings together all the stakeholders needed to reach net zero by 2050, and to ensure Britain's energy is both secure and affordable. You can get involved in their live and exclusive, online conference and hear from a wide range of experts sharing insight and commentary from academics, scientists, policy influencers, trade associations and solution providers:

<https://netzeroweb.com/>

To find out more about BCC's Route to Zero Plan you can contact the team on:
routetozeroarbon@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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Check our website: <https://naturallybirmingham.org/>



Heritage Fund

