

# GREEN CHAMPIONS



## Noticing Nature

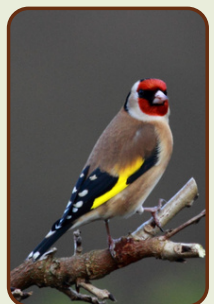
It was winter, near freezing,  
I'd walked through a forest of firs  
when I saw issue out of the waterfall  
a solitary bird. - The Dipper by Kathleen Jamie

## Learn more - Birmingham's birds

The robin is probably the bird we associate most with Christmas in the UK but there are still lots of other birds around in winter including some of the most colourful like bull finches and gold finches. But one bird that has made Birmingham it's home often goes unnoticed much of the time - the dipper. It is a short-tailed, chocolate-brown bird, with a white throat and chest. The dipper is often seen sitting on a stone in a river or stream, bobbing up and down. It feeds on underwater invertebrates, by walking straight into, and completely under, the water to find them.  
<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/birds/thrushes-chats-flycatchers-starling-dipper-and-wren/dipper>



Bullfinch



Goldfinch



## Health - Naturally

There is now clear evidence to support the belief that spending time in the natural world is good for mental health and well being. But in winter Indoor nature crafts are a way of getting the therapeutic benefits of nature when we are unable to spend time outside.

The mindful and relaxing process of arranging an assortment of natural objects into arrangements or mandala patterns is a simple therapy. Handling and studying a variety of natural materials gives multiple sensory benefits. Creating collages on paper using fresh flowers is another easy nature craft which can be enjoyed by people of all ages.



# City of Nature Programme update

## Looking back on 2024

It's that time of year when we reflect on the year, wonder where the time went and what we achieved over the past 12 months. The City of Nature Plan is notably ambitious but we don't apologise for that. Creating a city of nature is a big job taking a lot of resource and time. We can't achieve this without the whole of BCC, our partner organisation and you. Here are some of the highlights from this year.

**A to Bee Roads** - BCC Highways, Street Scene and Ecology worked together to improve the maintenance of some of the main roads in the city to better support pollinators like bees and butterflies.

<https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/news/article/1433/a-to-bee-roads-%E2%80%93-reducing-mowing-and-helping-the-city-s-ecology>

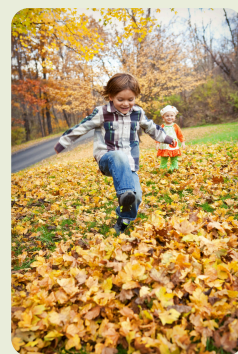
**Urban Forest Accelerator** - BCC Street Scene, National Trust and Birmingham Treepeople working with other partners and residents.

<https://birminghamtreepeople.org.uk/about-us/the-urban-forest-master-plan/>

**Commonwealth Games Legacy Workshops** - City of Nature Alliance of organisations delivered activities in Red Ward parks to help people connect with nature. <https://naturallybirmingham.org/birmingham-city-of-nature-alliance/>

**Wild at Heart - Ranger Service** - BCC Ranger Service and Public Health started a three year project delivering Nature Based Health Interventions in Birmingham's six priority Red Wards.

<https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50273/our-future-city-plan-ofcp/2518/our-future-nature-city-plan/4>



Please contact us at [Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk) if you would like to find out more about the City of Nature Programme, Green Champions, Young Green Champions, the City of Nature Alliance or the Ranger Service Wild Heart - Healthy Parks Programme.

## Come and Connect with City of Nature Team online

Please come and join us online on Friday 10th January 2025 1pm - 2pm for a catch up on what has been happening in December (there is no December online meeting).

If you receive this Newsletter by email you will be 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.



# Celebrating Our Volunteers: Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF) Friends of Parks Achievements in 2024

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 other useful information.

New groups can become a member of BOSF. The main criteria is that the group must consist of local residents who have a constitution and are looking after a local park, open space or street in the Birmingham area. Once a group has membership they will also be entitled to free insurance (funded by BCC) and currently there is a financial reward for sharing volunteering information with BOSF and BCC. For more information please contact Sarah at [info@bosf.org.uk](mailto:info@bosf.org.uk)

In 2023/2024 BOSF volunteer groups supported by Birmingham City Council contributed 105,757 hours of volunteering - worth £ 1,269,084 And they raised more than £ 241,749 in additional funding which has been invested in Birmingham's open spaces and the communities using them.

You can read more here: <https://bosf.org.uk/>



## Support Our Parks Partners This Festive Season

The delivery of the City of Nature Plan for the design, care and use of public green spaces in Birmingham is supported by many voluntary and charitable groups and organisations. Without them the hope of delivering the actions in the plan would be much reduced as the funding available for BCC services still declines.

Nothing can be delivered for free even community and voluntary groups need materials, tools, training, insurance, admin costs, welfare etc. Community groups and charitable organisations can apply for funding from various funds but doing this isn't easy and funding isn't guaranteed. They do a great job keeping everything going but although there are such things as money plants they are only supposed to bring you luck and fortune not actually grow money, but you knew that.

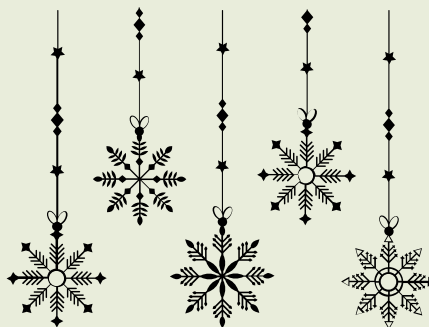
So please consider supporting our Parks Partners this season of giving by volunteering some hours, donating some money or just by sharing some of the stories of the good work they are doing in your community.



# Festive Nature Walks and Activities in Birmingham

## Keep warm and carry on.

Cold weather, grey skies and shorter days might make us feel like staying in and hunkering down for the winter but there is still lots going on in our parks and green spaces.



## Seasonal Activities

Birmingham's parks offer more than just natural beauty this season. Many host festive events or are perfect for enjoying simple winter traditions:

- Family Fun: Build a snowman (if the weather permits!) or go on a treasure hunt to find holly, pinecones, and other seasonal treasures.
- Photography Walks: Capture the beauty of frosty mornings, sunlit evergreens, and wildlife in action.
- Mindful Moments: Winter walks are an excellent opportunity to slow down and reflect, enjoying the calming effects of nature.



## Tips for Your Visit

- Dress Warmly: Layers, sturdy boots, and a good pair of gloves will keep you comfortable.
- Timing Matters: Early mornings are the best time to spot wildlife and experience the quiet beauty of the parks.
- Stay Safe: Stick to marked paths, and be cautious of icy patches.



You can find details of events and guided activities on Social Media, check out:

- BOSF - @BOSFonline
- Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust - @WTBBC
- ecobirmingham - @ecobirmingham
- The Active Wellbeing Society - @TAWsociety
- The Conservation Volunteers in Birmingham - @TCV\_Birmingham
- Birmingham TreePeople - @BhamTreePeople



You can find your local parks here: <https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/findapark>

More ideas for winter activities from RSPB here: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/news/the-rspbs-top-ten-ways-to-boost-your-mood-this-january>

And from The National Trust: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/50-things/top-50-things-to-do-before-youre-11-activities-to-do-in-winter?ContensisTextOnly=true>





# DIY Festive Decorations with Nature

When it comes to DIY decorations, winter offers so many possibilities. Even the simplest, barest branch or handful of pinecones can be transformed into impressive arrangements. 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. Greenery and flowers bring some colour inside on dull days and have been used to decorate homes in winter since pagan times. Mistletoe, yule logs, holly and ivy all playing important parts.

## Really Important Foraging Note:

For the best gathering ground for wintry materials you can start with your own garden. You can also look in woods, hedgerows and field edges, but please remember the impact of foraging on small urban parks can be damaging if too much is taken. So before you head off, make sure the landowner (which for most Birmingham parks will be Birmingham City Council) allows foraging and what rules there are to protect the site. For more rural areas further afield you can refer to the Woodland Trusts guidelines:

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/things-to-do/foraging/foraging-guidelines/> Also remember you can store natural materials and use them for many years.

A simple way to start is by creating eye-catching displays using bare twigs or branches. Stand long twigs (birch branches work really well) in large vase or weighted container and decorate with lights and baubles or natural materials for a pretty display that can cheer up a dark corner or brighten a windowsill.

Twigs gathered from the floor, please don't cut bits from public trees, that are more bendy can be shaped into a circle, use one longer flexible stick to form the circle and add other twiggy bits to make the circle thicker. Weave in and out and tuck ends in to secure. Then as with the standing twig decoration you can use battery powered lights and old decorations to attach to it or you can make small bundles of natural materials including seed heads and leaves, cones and berries if available.



## Identifying deciduous trees in winter

When deciduous trees shed their leaves in winter, telling one species from another can be tricky. But even on bare trees there are clues to look out for. You can take this Woodland Trust quiz and test your winter tree ID knowledge. You'll get to know some key features, from bark and leaf buds to seeds and silhouettes: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2020/12/winter-tree-identification-twigs-buds-and-silhouettes/>



You don't even need to visit a park to try winter tree identification. It is interesting that the commonness of particular street trees can alter over time due to changes in planting fashions, as well as their ability to survive in a given climate or against particular pests. For example, twenty years ago, it would have been incredibly rare to see an olive tree anywhere in Britain, but now it would not be so unusual to see one in someone's garden. Before long they may be more widely planted on streets.

For now here is a list of five of the most common trees found in UK urban areas: Plane tree, Sycamore, English oak, Silver birch and Horse chestnut. They also happen to be deciduous, so our parks and streets look very different in winter. See how many you can spot as you walk around the city.

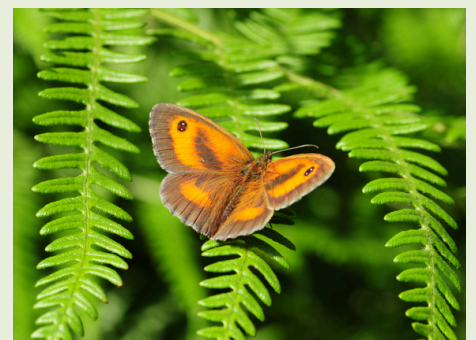
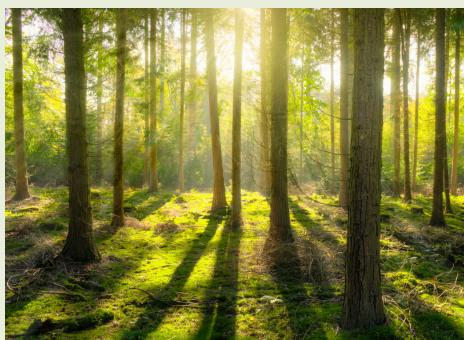
# What's Next? Exciting Plans for 2025 in the City of Nature - A Green City.

The Green City actions in the City of Nature Plan are for the next 23 years, however every year we need to take action to ensure we deliver the plan on time. The Urban Nature Development project and Urban Forest Accelerator projects have provided a great foundation, but the work continues.

**These are the Green City actions delivered at both a city level and at a local site level through the Future Park Standard and for East Birmingham the Green Infrastructure Master Plan:**

- A complete change in how we build all our public realm, providing improved connectivity and supporting the restoration and viability of urban areas (G1).
- Green corridors that are easier to find and use, helping citizens to use them for active travel and so improve air quality (G2).
- An enhanced network of green space and green infrastructure that are safe, clean, sustainably managed and meet the Birmingham Future Parks Standard (G3).
- The restoration of green spaces, nature, and the environment (G4).
- Greener development bringing natural landscapes or features into every place and neighbourhood (G5).
- Opportunities to help citizens make better use of green space outside of their home for food growing or communal gardens (G6).
- 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).
- An increase to the tree canopy coverage across the city to 25%, through the Birmingham Urban Forest Master Plan (G8).
- A change to the city's governance structures that oversee the city's natural environment across the full 25 year term (G9).

Green City is only one strand of the City of Nature Plan. A **sustainable city** or “eco-city” is an urban area whose **design**, **construction**, and **operation** prioritizes the preservation of the natural world alongside the economic, social, and physical health and wellness of the city's inhabitants understanding the role green infrastructure plays in all of these.



# Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces

## Winter Wonders: Exploring Birmingham's Parks in December

As winter settles over Birmingham, the city's parks transform into serene landscapes full of seasonal beauty. Frost-kissed leaves, crisp air, and the soft light of winter create the perfect setting for a peaceful escape. Whether you're a keen wildlife spotter or simply looking for a festive stroll, Birmingham's parks have something magical to offer this December.

Even in winter, parks are alive with activity, offering plenty of opportunities for wildlife watching: Look out for flocks of redwings and fieldfares feasting on berries, or spot robins, blackbirds, and thrushes hopping through frosty grass. Woodpeckers and goldfinches might also make an appearance. Migratory birds such as waxwings sometimes arrive in parks, attracted by rowan and hawthorn berries. Grey squirrels stay active, scurrying around in search of food, while foxes may be seen on quiet mornings. With the trees shedding their leaves, spotting wildlife becomes easier, and you'll enjoy uninterrupted views of the park's wintery landscape. December paints the parks with subtle, festive hues. While many plants rest during winter, some shine brightly in the colder months. Holly and ivy are winter classics in full display, their deep green leaves and red berries adding a touch of natural decoration. Trees like pines and firs remain lush, providing a stark contrast to the bare branches around them. Early mornings reveal intricate frost patterns on grass, leaves, and branches, creating a dazzling natural display.

Wrap up warm and take a stroll through one of Birmingham's many parks. Here are a few trails to explore:

### Cannon Hill Park

- Wander through the lakeside paths, where misty mornings create a dreamlike atmosphere. Don't miss the ornamental areas, where frosted blooms still hold a unique charm.

### Sutton Park

- One of Europe's largest urban parks, National Nature Reserve and SSSI Sutton Park offers sprawling heathland and woodlands. Its quiet trails are perfect for spotting deer or enjoying a moment of solitude.

### Lickey Hills Country Park

- With its panoramic views over Birmingham, the Lickey Hills provide an invigorating walk. Pinewoods and ancient woodlands feel especially enchanting in winter.

### Handsworth Park

- Ideal for a shorter stroll, Handsworth Park's manicured gardens and serene lake reflect the quiet beauty of winter.

Birmingham's parks are brimming with winter wonders, offering a unique way to connect with nature this December. Whether you're exploring for wildlife, enjoying the festive foliage, or simply soaking in the season's tranquillity, there's no better time to discover the magic of your local green spaces. Make the most of this winter and head outdoors – the parks are waiting to inspire you.



[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/directory/9/parks\\_playgrounds\\_and\\_open\\_spaces\\_in\\_birmingham/category/47](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/directory/9/parks_playgrounds_and_open_spaces_in_birmingham/category/47)





# How to Attract Wildlife to Your Winter Garden

Winter can be a challenging time for wildlife, with food scarce and shelter hard to find. By making a few simple changes to your garden, you can create a haven for birds, hedgehogs, and other creatures during the colder months. Not only will you be helping nature thrive, but you'll also enjoy the joy of spotting wildlife right outside your window.

## 1. Feed the Birds

Birds burn more energy in winter to keep warm, so providing high-energy food is crucial. Fat balls, suet cakes, sunflower seeds, and mealworms are excellent choices. Avoid bread, which offers little nutritional value. Hang feeders in safe, visible locations and keep them clean to prevent disease. Scatter some food on the ground for ground-feeding species like robins and blackbirds. Don't Forget Water: Birds need fresh water for drinking and bathing. Use a shallow dish or birdbath, and make sure it doesn't freeze over.



## 2. Create a Hedgehog Hideaway

Hedgehogs hibernate during winter, but they still need safe, warm shelters to sleep. A simple pile of logs, leaves, or twigs in a quiet corner of your garden can serve as a natural home. Alternatively, invest in a hedgehog house. If you spot a hedgehog's nest, avoid tidying the area or moving it during hibernation. If a hedgehog is still active, leave out meaty pet food or specialist hedgehog food. Avoid milk and bread, which can harm them.



## 3. Plant for Pollinators

Bees and other pollinators may seem absent in winter, but some species, like bumblebees, are still active on warmer days. Grow late-flowering plants like winter heather, ivy, or Christmas rose (Helleborus) to provide nectar. Plants like dandelions and ivy are valuable for insects. Let a corner of your garden go wild for nature.

## 4. Tidy Thoughtfully

While it's tempting to clear up for winter, leaving some mess can help wildlife. Hollow stems provide overwintering spots for insects. Keep hedges thick and natural to shelter birds and small mammals.

Winter is a wonderful time to connect with nature. By offering a little extra help, you can make a big difference to local wildlife while enjoying the company of birds, hedgehogs, and insects in your garden. Together, let's create a greener, more wildlife-friendly city this winter!



# Measure Monitor Manage - Soil Day 5th December

World Soil Day (WSD) is held annually on 5 December as a means to focus attention on the importance of healthy soil and advocating for the sustainable management of soil resources.

- 95% of our food comes from soils.
- 33% of soils are degraded.
- It can take up to 1 000 years to produce just 2-3 cm of soil.
- Soils supply 15 of the 18 naturally occurring chemical elements essential to plants.
- There are more living organisms in a tablespoon of soil than people on Earth.

The theme for this year "**Caring for Soils: Measure, Monitor, Manage,**" underscores the importance of accurate data understanding soils characteristics and supporting informed decision-making on sustainable soil management for food security. <https://www.fao.org/world-soil-day/about-wsd/en/>

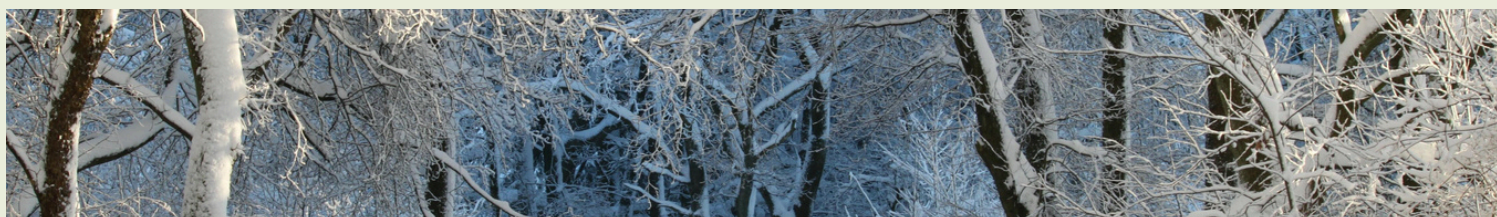


## Green City: An increase to the tree canopy coverage across the city to 25%, through the Birmingham Urban Forest Master Plan (G8)

Tree Equity in urban areas means taking into account how many people are condensed in that area.

Especially in the case of apartment style buildings, therefore the equity in these areas will generally be lower. That's why a lot of our priority wards in built-up areas struggle to 'retro-fit' trees into the environment due to space, but more trees are needed to raise the equity of those areas.

Birmingham Treepeople have been using [TreePlotter](https://birminghamtreepeople.org.uk/tree-planting/tree-equity/) to be able to do this. You can read more here: <https://birminghamtreepeople.org.uk/tree-planting/tree-equity/>



## Earth Stories - Memories, Hopes and Happenings

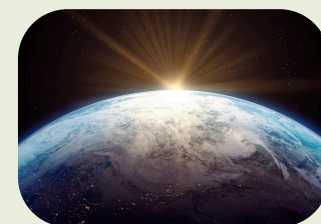
This time of year is very much about memories. Whether those memories are from long ago with our family and friends or just reflections on this year's holiday, achievements or perhaps even hard times of loss and loneliness. We all live in a constantly changing and evolving world, billions of people (8,190,850,859 give or take) living in 195 different countries speaking around 7,000 different languages. Perhaps it's a wonder that we all get on at all, but we do. Not all the time and not everywhere but there are so many heart warming stories of people helping and caring for each other we mustn't let the darkness push back the light, even when that is really hard.

For all this we are only one species of the estimated 5–10 million species on Earth, excluding microbes and if microscopic life was included, then the best estimates put the total number of species in the billions. There are so many animals and plants incredible in their diversity going about their business everyday all over the world most of which we will never see or even notice. An oak tree alone can support more than 2,300 other species including birds, bats and insects – more than any other native tree. Likewise, oak-dominated ancient forests are home to more of our threatened species than any other type of woodland.

So as first the seasons turn again on the winter solstice, December 21st, and the days start to get longer again here in the UK and then the new year starts we should also have hope and celebrate this amazing blue dot that is home to all of us. However you celebrate during the festive season and the start of the new year - after the clock strikes twelve and last year fades away, the sun will rise on a fresh horizon to start a brand-new day and in that dawning light let all your hopes take flight, and take one step be it bold or small, for together we can face it all.

Even if the new year starts grey and dull which is very possible just remember: "It never hurts to keep looking for sunshine." – A. A. Milne. Wishing you a Merry Christmas, and happy, safe and warm December whatever you do.

**Debbie Needle - Community Coordinator for the City of Nature Plan**





# Birmingham's Route to Zero - Birmingham Pupils Debate International Climate Politics at Model COP

On the 21st of November, 16 teams of students from 8 Birmingham schools met in the council chamber to role play as state delegations and debate topics like climate finance, nationally determined contributions, and economic development.

Our student survey at the end of the day had some great results including 94% of students leaving with a better understanding of how the council is taking climate action. The feedback from students and teachers is really encouraging. "Thank you so much for today. It was such a fantastic event and what a setting to conduct it in. The students got so much out of it, very inspirational. Can't wait for next year." - teacher.

Next year we hope to run the event again and reach new schools, continuing to grow climate action in Birmingham.

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

[routetozeroarbon@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto: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. You can register your group to receive regular updates about funding sources, training opportunities, events in open spaces and lots of useful information. If you want to start a group to care for a green space near you they can support you to do that. Get in touch with the team.

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



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Heritage Fund

