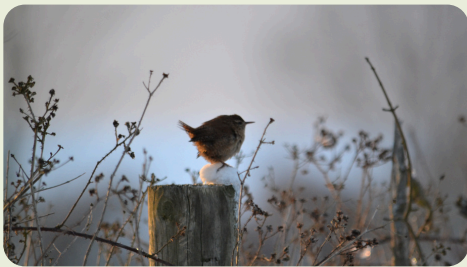


GREEN CHAMPIONS



Health - Naturally

When it comes to health and nature it appears that it is a case of the wilder the better. Any exposure and particularly connection to nature can improve our health but if we can visit wilder places the benefits are even better.

"It's all too easy in modern life with all its demands, distractions and depressing news to feel overwhelmed, alienated or despairing. Almost as if we weren't made to live like this. Society has got more and more complicated and yet we are still the same beings that evolved in wild places over millennia." -

<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/resources/953-wild-and-well-12-ways-to-connect-with-nature>



Noticing Nature

January, a canvas of frosty white,
Where the new year begins its flight.
With winter's breath upon the air,
January whispers, 'Change is near.' - Vinaya Joseph



Learn more - "Visiting" Nature

Straying out of our "backyard" into wilder places can sometimes seem daunting. You don't have to start by climbing a mountain or even spending a whole day outside with so many wonderful outdoor places in our care and open to everyone, Birmingham City Council provides plenty of opportunities for people to boost their wellbeing with a dose of nature. Start with a short stroll in a woodland, or with a lap of a pond or perhaps a lake. To begin with a gentle amble with friends can work just as well as a more challenging hike.

If you are thinking about getting started with walking or going a bit further you can learn more here:

<https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking-hub/getting-started-walking>



Woodland



Lakes



City of Nature Programme update

The Urban Nature Development (UND) Project is a transformative initiative funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and designed to enhance Birmingham's green infrastructure, boost biodiversity, and improve residents' quality of life. By integrating natural solutions into urban planning, the project aims to address challenges such as climate resilience, air quality, and community well-being. The project isn't quite finished yet and it hasn't been an easy "climb" it was ambitious from the start. It has to be said there were some frustrations along the route but we made it this far with lots of great team work and support from our many partners along the way. So where are we now?



Key Achievements:

1. Birmingham's City of Nature Alliance

- The pilot project engaged 2,000+ people, including schools and community groups, fostering a sense of ownership and environmental stewardship.

2. Habitat Creation and Biodiversity

- Defined wildlife corridors linking parks and green spaces, ensuring better connectivity for species.
- Enhanced urban biodiversity by introducing pollinator-friendly plants in public spaces and roadside verges.

3. Community Engagement

- Conducted 50 workshops and events to raise awareness about urban nature.
- Established partnerships with local and national organizations and businesses to co-create green spaces.

4. Policy Integration

- Embedded urban nature priorities into Birmingham's local plans and strategies, ensuring long-term commitment to green development.
- Secured funding from national and regional sources to support future UND initiatives.



Challenges

- Limited availability of suitable land for large-scale green interventions.
- Balancing urban development pressures with the need for conservation.
- Addressing community concerns regarding maintenance and long-term sustainability of new green spaces.



Next Steps

1. Launch the Green Champion Skills Development Programme to train local residents in conservation and urban forestry.
2. Strengthen partnerships with schools to introduce environmental education into curriculums.
3. Develop a monitoring framework to assess the project's ecological and social impacts over time.

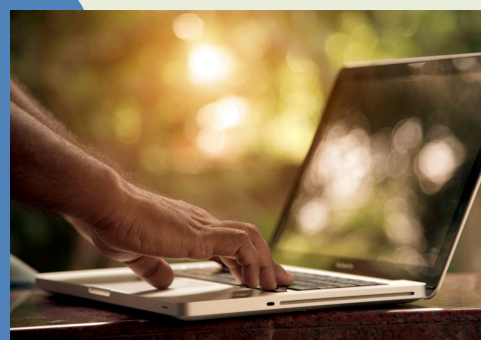
Please contact us at Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk if you would like to find out more about the City of Nature Programme, Green Champions, Young Green Champions, the City of Nature Alliance or the Ranger Service Wild Heart - Healthy Parks Programme.

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 happened last year and what is planned for this year.

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 and we will email you the link.



Veganuary - Why not try a vegan diet this January.

What do vegans eat? Vegans avoid all animal-derived foods – as well as meat and fish. That means no eggs, dairy or honey. They also exclude animal by-products, like rennet used in cheesemaking, gelatine in desserts and certain E numbers, including the red food dye cochineal (E120). Even certain vegetarian foods, such as some meat substitutes, are off the menu because they contain egg and sometimes dairy. Instead, vegans focus on plant-based proteins, such as beans, peas and lentils, as well as nuts, seeds and plant-based dairy alternatives and fruit and vegetables.

Veganuary has inspired and supported millions of people to try vegan since 2014 – with participants from almost every country in the world. They have worked with businesses to drive up vegan options in shops and restaurants, and have made veganism more visible and accessible through their work with national and international media.

Veganuary is a non-profit organisation that encourages people worldwide to try vegan for January and beyond. Millions of people have taken part in their one-month vegan pledge since 2014, and in 2024 alone more than 2,100 new vegan products and menu options were launched for Veganuary globally. Throughout the year, Veganuary encourages and supports people and businesses alike to move to a plant-based diet as a way of protecting the environment, preventing animal suffering, and improving the health of millions of people.

Over the next five years, they aim to make powerful strides toward a world where vegan is the norm rather than the exception.

Life is complex and change is hard so I will leave you to find out more by visiting: <https://veganuary.com/>



January - Looking for a New Years Resolution?

As we put up the calendar for a new year, many of us reflect on ways to improve ourselves and the world around us. While common resolutions like exercising more or eating healthier are admirable, there's another resolution that can have a profound impact on both your well-being and your community: volunteering in green spaces.

Not sure where to start? Here are some ideas for volunteering in green spaces:

- Tree Planting Events: Help expand urban forests and combat climate change.
- Wildlife Surveys: Assist in monitoring local species and habitats.
- Litter Picks: Keep parks and natural areas clean and safe.
- Community Gardening: Grow vegetables, flowers, or pollinator-friendly plants in a local garden.
- Path Maintenance: Maintain trails and access points for walkers and cyclists.

By dedicating time to volunteering in green spaces, you're not just enriching your own life you're helping to create a healthier, greener world for everyone. This year, resolve to step into nature, roll up your sleeves, and make a difference. Your community, your planet, and your future self will thank you.

Let's make 2025 the year we all grow greener together.



Discover Birmingham's Countryside This January: A Winter Wonderland Awaits!

When most people think of January, the first things that come to mind are cozy nights in and New Year's resolutions. But there's another side to this month that often goes unnoticed: the quiet magic of Birmingham's countryside. With crisp air, tranquil landscapes, and an abundance of wildlife, January is the perfect time to step outdoors and experience the natural beauty that surrounds our city.

Why Visit the Countryside in Winter?

While summer might get all the attention, winter offers its own unique charm. The countryside takes on a serene, almost otherworldly quality during this time of year. Frost-tipped grass glistens in the sunlight, bare trees reveal intricate silhouettes, and the stillness of nature is a refreshing escape from the buzz of city life. For wildlife enthusiasts, this is an ideal time to spot winter visitors like fieldfares and redwings, or to watch flocks of starlings performing mesmerizing murmurations. If you're lucky, you might even catch sight of a shy deer wandering through the woods.

Top Spots to Explore

Birmingham is blessed with an array of countryside gems, each offering something special for visitors:

- **Lickey Hills Country Park:** A favorite for families, with scenic trails and panoramic views over the city. Don't forget to visit the visitor center for tips on the best winter walks.
- **Sandwell Valley Country Park:** Perfect for birdwatchers, this park is home to lakes, wetlands, and woodlands that host a variety of species in winter.
- **Clent Hills:** For those seeking a more challenging hike, the Clent Hills offer rewarding vistas and peaceful trails that make the effort worthwhile.

Get Active and Stay Healthy

Visiting the countryside isn't just good for the soul—it's great for your health, too. A brisk walk through the woods or across open fields is a fantastic way to stay active and connect with nature, which has been shown to reduce stress and improve mental well-being. Why not kickstart your New Year's fitness goals with a hike or trail run?

Tips for a Great Winter Adventure

- **Dress Warmly:** Layers are your friend. Make sure to wear waterproof footwear and a good coat.
- **Pack Smart:** Bring a thermos of hot tea or coffee, a snack, and a reusable water bottle.
- **Plan Ahead:** Check the weather and choose trails suitable for the conditions.
- **Leave No Trace:** Respect the environment by taking all your rubbish home with you.



Can your 2025 be about - Bigger, Wilder, Further

Go Bigger: Exploring Birmingham's countryside isn't just about enjoying the beauty of nature, it's about valuing and protecting it. By visiting these spaces, you contribute to their ongoing care and preservation. Many parks and nature reserves rely on public support to thrive, so your presence helps ensure these natural havens remain vibrant for future generations.

This January, break free from the indoors, lace up your boots, and step into the peaceful embrace of Birmingham's countryside. Whether you're looking for a quiet moment of reflection, a family outing, or an invigorating hike, the countryside has something for everyone. Nature is waiting why not start your journey today? Everything starts with the first step if you want to be more involved with valuing and protecting Birmingham's countryside you can not only visit it but also help the people who care for it by becoming a volunteer.

Go Wilder: Try taking the road less travelled or in other words step off the beaten path sometimes. That might just mean going somewhere you don't normally visit, somewhere - a bit wilder. That could be Sutton Park if you have never visited before, or a walk along the River Rea rather than staying in Cannon Hill Park, or out across Woodgate Valley there are plenty of wilder routes to try without leaving Birmingham: https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20089/parks/404/woodgate_valley_country_park/3

Go Further: Where else could you visit? For more information and advice about exploring further you can visit the Ramblers website: <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/> You can find places to explore, information on what to wear and take with you, inspiration to go further than you have before and advice about walking groups or becoming a walk leader. Whatever you currently do, try going a bit further this year.



Weather watching - Clouds

We get some very varied weather in the UK. From sudden downpours and gale-force winds to freak blizzards and scorching heatwaves, Britain's temperate climate means we see cold, wet winters and warm, wet summers. This is great because it means our green spaces stay just that – green – all year long, meaning we can expect to see magnificent outdoor scenery all year round.

However, when we are outside, it can become a problem when the heavens open and we're not well-prepared. Obviously, we recommend checking the forecast beforehand but even the forecast can get it wrong. When you're out on your adventures, foreseeing the kind of weather conditions clouds signify can be a real advantage - helping you to prepare to keep warm, dry and safe outdoors.

Clouds are continually changing and appear in an infinite variety of forms. The classification of clouds is based on a book written by Luke Howard, a London pharmacist and amateur meteorologist, in 1803. His book, The Modifications of Clouds, named the various cloud structures he had studied.

The terms he used were readily accepted by the meteorological community and are still used across the world today. You can find out about identifying clouds here:

<https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/learn-about/weather/types-of-weather/clouds/cloud-names-classifications>



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

The Valued City actions in the City of Nature Plan are for the next 22 years, however every year we need to take action to ensure we deliver the plan on time (2047). The Urban Nature Development project and Urban Forest Accelerator projects have provided a great foundation, but the work continues through 2025 and on into the future.

Historically the economic model adopted by all cities has been a linear one resulting in the maintenance of parks being registered as nothing but a cost; with their value not being captured. The City of Nature plan is moving away from that model towards a circular economy one, that better fits how the city will need to meet its twin challenges of levelling-up and climate change it will help the city realize the true value of the natural environment as captured in the Natural Capital Account (2022) which valued the city's future potential green estate as £14.93 billion after 25 years

These are the Valued City actions delivered at both a city level and at a local site level through the Future Park Standard and other initiatives:

- ***Gather and Share* Information demonstrating the wider environmental, social, and economic value of green space through a Natural Capital Account (V1).**
- ***Deliver* Biodiversity Net Gain and improved access to good quality green spaces using the planning and development process (V2).**
- ***Develop* Diversity of income and funding streams for green spaces from supporting communities to crowdfunding and securing grants, through to large scale business contributions (V3).**
- ***Propose* Increased Council income through commercial activity (V4).**
- ***Achieve* Added social value to our green spaces through our procurement processes (V5).**
- ***Encourage* Education and Skills commissioning done through a green lens (V6).**

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.



Caring for nature - Indoors

Houseplant Week - 13th to 19th January

If you haven't been convinced to embrace the winter and get outside, you still don't have to miss out on nature because January includes - Houseplant Week!

Houseplant Week UK is an annual celebration that embraces the beauty and benefits of indoor plants. Running from January 13th to January 19th, this week encourages people across the UK to appreciate and care for their houseplants, while also exploring the joy of adding new greenery to their indoor spaces.

What is Houseplant Week UK 2025?

Houseplant Week UK 2025 is a dedicated week for plant lovers to come together and share their passion for indoor gardening. It's an opportunity to celebrate the positive impact of houseplants on our well-being and the environment.

When is Houseplant Week UK 2025?

Houseplant Week UK is observed from January 13th to January 19th this year, giving plant enthusiasts a full week to immerse themselves in all things related to houseplants.

How to Celebrate Houseplant Week UK 2025?

Participating in Houseplant Week UK can be a rewarding and enjoyable experience. Here are some ways to celebrate this green-themed week:

- **Buy a New Houseplant:** Visit your local nursery or garden centre to buy a new houseplant to add to your collection. Select a plant that suits your space and care abilities.
- **Learn About Your Plants:** Take time to research the care needs of your existing houseplants. Understanding their requirements will help them thrive.
- **Share Plant Care Tips:** Share your knowledge of houseplant care with friends and family, especially if they're new to indoor gardening.
- **Decorate with Plants:** Use houseplants to decorate your home or office. They can add a touch of nature to any space.
- **Join Online Plant Communities:** Connect with fellow plant enthusiasts on social media or plant-focused forums to exchange advice and showcase your houseplant collection.
- **Visit Botanical Gardens:** If possible, visit a local botanical garden or greenhouse to see a wide variety of plants and gain inspiration for your own indoor garden:
<https://birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk/>

History of Houseplant Week UK

Houseplant Week UK was created to promote the many benefits of indoor plants, including their air-purifying qualities and their ability to enhance our living spaces. It's a week that encourages people to embrace the joys of indoor gardening.

This also coincides with National Houseplant Appreciation Day, which will be held on the 10th of January 2025.



RSPB - Big Garden Bird Watch Weekend

24th to 26th January 2025

What is the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch?

Big Garden Birdwatch is the world's largest garden wildlife survey. Every year, hundreds of thousands of nature lovers like you take part, helping to build a picture of how garden birds are faring.

How to take part

- Get your free guide and if you can stock up on supplies, (with 20% off and free delivery on food and feeders at the RSPB shop).
- Spend an hour watching the birds in your patch, between 24 and 26 January, and record the birds that land.
- Tell the RSPB what you saw (even if that's nothing at all)!

You can submit your results online or by post Please tell the RSPB what you saw at www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch by 23 February.

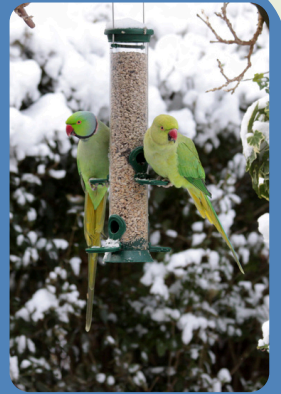
Last year's Birdwatch:

Across the UK, over 600,000 people took part in Big Garden Birdwatch 2024, counting a whopping 9.7 million birds! House Sparrows took the top spot, but counts of these chirpy birds are down by 60% compared to the first Birdwatch in 1979. In fact, we've lost 38 million birds from UK skies in the last 60 years. With birds facing so many challenges, it's more important than ever to get involved in the Birdwatch. Every bird you do – or don't – count will give us a valuable insight into how garden birds are faring.

Look out for any local events that can help with your bird identification and find out more about taking part here: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/big-garden-birdwatch>

Schools can also take part: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/get-ready-for-big-schools-birdwatch>

Big Schools' Birdwatch is back for 2025! Join thousands of other schools to find out which birds visit your school grounds. Together, we can make it count.



Nature Connection - more than just watching and listening

Nature connectedness refers to the strength of our relationship with nature, as a state of mind and emotional bond. When deeply connected with nature, we see ourselves as part of the natural world and value this relationship. We actively seek out opportunities to engage with the more-than-human, appreciate the feelings of wonder, calm and joy that we experience in nature, and give close attention to the details and beauty of nature. Having a strong sense of nature connectedness brings meaning to our lives, and a desire to live in harmony and reciprocity with the rest of the natural world.

On average, people in the UK have weaker connections with nature than those in other European countries. There is also a widespread lack of attention towards the natural world – most people in the UK don't listen to bird song, watch butterflies or take any photos of nature.

These simple practices of noticing and enjoying nature are vital for growing a sense of connection with the rest of nature, with benefits for both personal and environmental wellbeing.

You can find out about becoming more connected on the new website here:

<https://www.natureconnectedness.net/what-is-nature-connection>



Valued City: Share - information that demonstrates the wider environmental, social, and economic value of green space through a Natural Capital Account (V1)

Natural Capital Accounting (NCA) is an umbrella term for an accounting framework that provides a systematic way to measure and report on natural capital stocks and flows. You can find out more about Natural Capital by watching this Natural England Webinar recording on YouTube:

<https://youtu.be/QEj2smK3rO8?si=JWtv6yoGFshPWcZP>

Nature and its resources or capital, therefore, supports human well-being through the supply of goods and services, including: clean water, soils and valuable natural resources. Accordingly, such assets and resources must be well maintained and managed, with economic contributions better integrated into commonly applied sustainability reporting frameworks to enable more comprehensive and informed decision-making. This integration helps ensure that the true value of natural capital is recognised and preserved, promoting sustainable practices and long-term environmental health. Find out more about the West Midlands Natural Capital: <https://www.wmca.org.uk/what-we-do/environment-energy/natural-environment/local-investment-in-natural-capital/>



Earth Stories - Memories, Hopes and Happenings

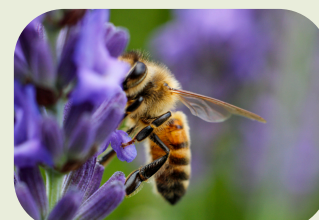
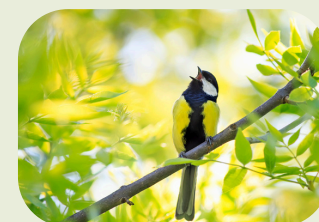
Happy New Year! When we say "Happy New Year," we're expressing a mix of goodwill, hope, and encouragement. At its core, the phrase is a wish for joy, success, and positive experiences in the year ahead. It's also a way of celebrating the transition into a new chapter, acknowledging the significance of time and life itself. Whether the past year was good, bad, or in-between, the greeting carries optimism for what's to come. In essence, when we say "Happy New Year," we're offering a little spark of hope and kindness, inviting others to embrace the potential of the days ahead with optimism and joy.

As we reset the calendar to the start of another year, it is also an opportunity to rethink, reimagine, and reinvigorate our connection to nature. January isn't just the first of another twelve months it's a chance to start growing again. Together, we can dig deeper roots, plant bolder ideas, and nurture a future where Birmingham thrives in harmony with its natural spaces. Let's make 2025 a year of action, collaboration, and inspiration. Whether it's a single seed planted or a big project imagined, everything we do matters. Thank you for being part of this journey and here's to a year of meaningful green moments! It's the perfect time to reflect on the incredible progress we've made together so far and to look forward to the opportunities ahead.

Your passion, dedication, and collective action have been the driving force behind Birmingham's journey to becoming a greener, more sustainable city. This year, let's continue to grow our impact, inspire others, and nurture the natural spaces that connect us all. Whether you're planting trees, supporting wildlife, or encouraging others to embrace nature, every effort makes a difference. Together, we can make this year even more remarkable for Birmingham's environment and communities. Thank you for being part of this movement. Here's to a year of hope, growth, and green achievements!

Warm wishes,

Debbie Needle - Community Coordinator for the City of Nature Plan
Editor, City of Nature Newsletter



Birmingham's Route to Zero - Energy Efficiency

In the winter months cold weather conditions can have a negative impact on health if we can't get warm. People with respiratory problems such as asthma, or heart conditions are at particular risk during the winter months. Our bodies need to be kept at a core body temperature of 37C to stay healthy, which means rooms should be heated to a minimum of 18C.

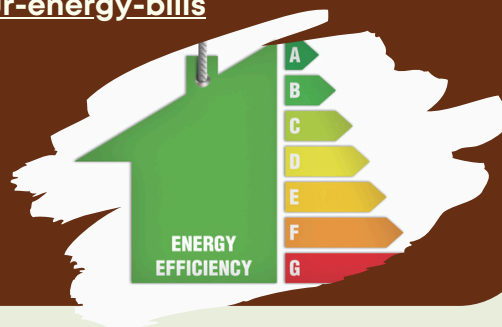
Friends of the Earth have put together energy-saving tips that you can act on now.

Whether you rent, live in social housing, are a student or homeowner, there are many things you can do to trim your bills. From low or no cost ways to keep warm and save electricity, to ideas that can cost from £100s up to £1,000s if you can afford it.

See what changes you can make to make your home more energy efficient:

<https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate/50-tips-save-money-your-energy-bills>

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. 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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