

GREEN CHAMPIONS



Noticing Nature

*The chickadees
Grow plump on seed
That Mother pours
Where they can feed, - John Updike (USA)*



Health - Naturally

Don't worry if you didn't make a healthy new year resolution or even if you made one and haven't been able to start it yet. There is no magic to January, February is just as good to start some healthy habits.

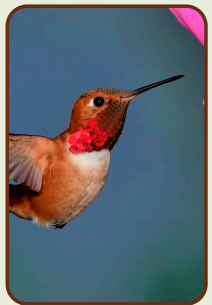
Ask a friend or a group of friends to commit to a healthy lifestyle activity or goal with you. You might take an exercise or meditation class together; go for group walks; follow a yoga video together; or have a weekly healthy meal night with each person bringing a nutritious dish.

Sharing a lifestyle goal with one or more friends gets you on a schedule and helps you stay motivated as you encourage each other,



Learn more - The world of birds

"For millennia, birds have been winging their way across the globe and through our imaginations. They have value culturally, artistically, philosophically and economically. But beyond that, they play a huge role in preserving our precious ecosystem and as such, all life on this planet. Birds control pests, clean up waste and spread seeds. Around 5% of the plants humans use for food or medicine are pollinated by birds." You can learn more about birds around the world by visiting the Birdlife website: <https://www.birdlife.org/birds/> ✨ Despite their importance, one in eight birds species is now threatened with extinction. But by learning about birds, we can begin to tackle the environmental crisis.



Hummingbird



Flamingo

City of Nature Programme update

Managing Birmingham's Parks Towards the Future Park Standard.

Birmingham's parks are at the heart of the city's green infrastructure, providing vital spaces for recreation, biodiversity, and community well-being. As the city looks ahead, aligning park management with the Future Park Standard is essential to ensure these spaces remain high quality, accessible, and sustainable.

What is the Future Park Standard?

The Future Park Standard is a framework designed to help manage parks in a way that balances environmental responsibility, financial sustainability, and community engagement. It encourages best practices in:

- Resilience and Sustainability: Ensuring parks can withstand climate change challenges.
- Biodiversity and Nature Recovery: Enhancing habitats and green corridors.
- Financial Viability: Exploring commercial opportunities to support park upkeep.
- Community Involvement: Strengthening partnerships with Friends of Parks groups and volunteers.

Key Strategies for Birmingham's Parks.

Using the City of Nature themes of Fair, Healthy, Green, Involved and Valued as a starting point the management strategy for parks includes:

1. Sustainable Funding and Income Generation

With budget constraints challenging public park management, Birmingham must explore creative revenue streams:

2. Enhancing Environmental Resilience

To meet the Future Park Standard, Birmingham's parks must become climate-resilient by.

3. Strengthening Community Partnerships

Local communities play a crucial role in park stewardship.

4. Promoting Health and Well-being

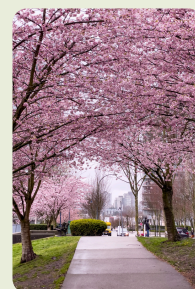
Parks are key to public health. Future-focused improvements should include:

- Expanding inclusive play areas and accessible pathways.
- Creating outdoor fitness zones and green social prescribing initiatives.
- Enhancing safety.

Looking Ahead

By embedding the principles of the Future Park Standard into long-term planning, Birmingham can create a resilient, inclusive, and financially sustainable park network. Ensuring these green spaces thrive will not only benefit today's residents but also safeguard them for future generations.

Now is the time to reimagine Birmingham's parks—not just as spaces of leisure, but as essential, future-proofed assets for the city.



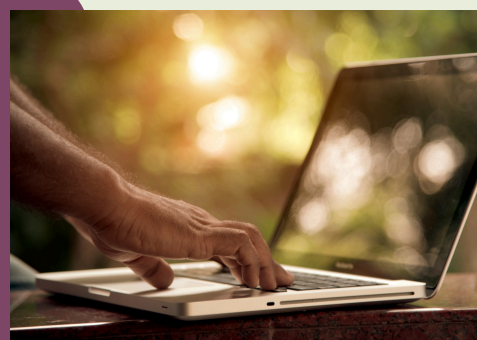
Please contact us at Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk if you would like to find out more about the City of Nature Programme, Green Champions, Young Green Champions, the City of Nature Alliance or the Ranger Service Wild Heart - Healthy Parks Programme.

Come and Connect with City of Nature Team online

Please come and join us online on Friday 28th February 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.



World Wetlands Day - February 2nd

World Wetlands Day is celebrated annually on February 2nd. This date marks the adoption of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in 1971, an international treaty aimed at conserving and sustainably using wetlands around the world.

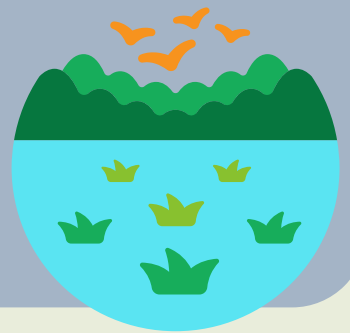
Participating in World Wetlands Day can be a rewarding experience. Here are some ways to get involved and make a positive impact on wetland conservation:

- **Visit a Wetland:** Explore a nearby wetland area, observe its biodiversity, and learn about its importance to the ecosystem.
- **Organize an Event:** Plan or participate in events such as guided tours, clean-up activities, bird-watching excursions, or educational workshops focused on wetlands.
- **Support Conservation Organizations:** Contribute to or volunteer with organizations dedicated to wetland preservation and restoration efforts.
- **Advocate for Wetlands:** Raise awareness about wetland conservation by sharing information with your community and advocating for policies that protect these ecosystems.
- **Learn About Ramsar Sites:** Discover Ramsar Convention-designated wetlands in your region and understand their significance in the global context.

Nearly 90% of the world's wetlands have been degraded since the 1700s, and we are losing wetlands three times faster than forests. Yet, wetlands are critically important ecosystems that contribute to biodiversity, climate mitigation and adaptation, freshwater availability, world economies and more.

It is urgent that we raise national and global awareness about wetlands in order to reverse their rapid loss and encourage actions to conserve and restore them. World Wetlands Day is the ideal time to increase people's understanding of these critically important ecosystems.

<https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/>



National Story Telling Week - 1st - 9th February 2025

When is National Storytelling Week?

In 2025, National Storytelling Week will be taking place from Saturday 1 February to Sunday 9 February. It is promoted by the National Literary Society.

What is National Storytelling Week?

This fantastic annual event is a joyful celebration of the power of sharing stories. Stories teach us about the world; they allow us to step into someone else's shoes and feel empathy; they help us to relax and escape and they can help develop essential literacy skills.

The theme for National Storytelling Week 2025 is 'Reimagine your world'. Whether it's something unexpected on your way to school, odd sounds you hear at night, or a path you've never followed, the world around us is full of secret lives, places and possibilities. The most extraordinary story can come from the most ordinary place: it just needs someone to find it.

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/national-storytelling-week/>

You can read our Earth Stories here: <https://earthstories.uk/>



National Nest Box Week 14th to 21st February

Every February, National Nest Box Week celebrates supporting our local wildlife with small actions that can make a big difference.

Many birds are in need for a safe place to nest. Natural nesting sites include nooks and crannies in trees, standing deadwood, hedgerows and gaps in buildings. But there are fewer choices to nest due to, garden management becoming neater, holes in old buildings being filled up, and loss of habitat among many other reasons.

An alternative and popular option for garden birds are nest boxes. When placed in the right place, these provide a secure and safe nesting site for birds.

Every year National Nest Box Week highlights the importance of nest boxes for local wildlife and gardens are a great place to start. The total area of all gardens in the UK exceeds that of our nature reserves, and as development destroys trees, hedges and old buildings, natural nesting sites are in decline.

Nest boxes placed in gardens can make a real difference to the success or failure of a breeding species in an area, especially when accompanied by the regular supply of suitable food and water. Nest boxes come in all shapes and sizes with different types appealing to different birds. Small hole nest boxes are great for garden birds including blue tits, great tits and house sparrows. Robins and wrens prefer a wider entrance for nesting.

Why not have a go at making your own nest box by following these instructions:

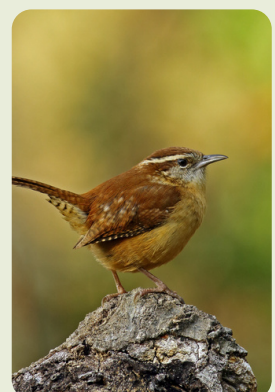
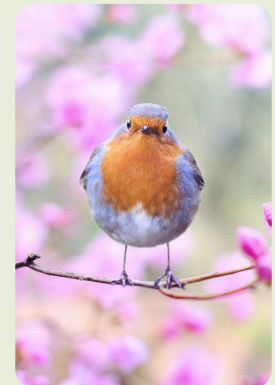
<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-build-bird-box>

You can watch this short video made in our garden for Next Box week during Covid Lockdown in 2020: https://youtu.be/dUq0_iD41-A



The number of nest boxes which can be placed in a garden depends on the species you wish to attract. Many species are fiercely territorial, such as blue tits, and will not tolerate another pair close by; about 2 to 3 pairs per acre is the normal density for blue tits. Other species, such as the tree sparrow, which is a colonial nester, will happily nest side-by-side. Do not place your nest box close to a bird table or feeding area, as the regular comings and goings of other birds are likely to prevent breeding in the box.

Some of our feathered friends will be making use of the trees, shrubs, and climbers in our gardens to build their nests in. This vegetation is a lifeline for the birds: it will provide a foundation on which their nests will rest, it will protect their eggs and chicks from wind, rain and sun and will hide them from predators. However, with more people spending time in their gardens during the warmer months they often want to tidy up and trim back this type of vegetation. So, what to do if you want to trim your hedges? We recommend waiting until after the main nesting season (March-September) as the possibility of birds nesting is very high. Please remember wrens make their nest very low down in vegetation so make sure you take extra care wherever you are clearing back.

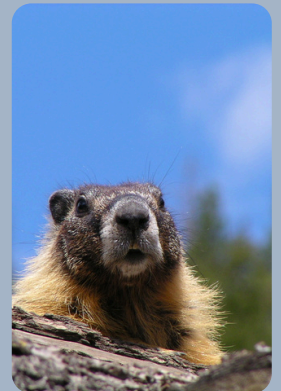


All about the hogs - Groundhogs and hedgehogs

February 2nd is Groundhog Day in America. This year “ A big crowd was in attendance at Gobbler's Knob as the woodchuck (another name for a groundhog) was ushered out of his tree stump to deliver his prediction. He was welcomed with chants of "Phil, Phil, Phil" (Punxsutawney Phil). Keeping a close eye on their furry friend, the top-hatted handlers said Phil saw his shadow, meaning a prediction of six more weeks of wintry weather.” For most of us in the UK we probably only found out about Groundhog Day because of the film of the same name. However the tradition actually has its roots European traditions. Groundhog Day originates from the feast of Candlemas, celebrated 40 days after Christmas to mark the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Candlemas includes the blessing of candles. Over time, weather lore tied to Candlemas evolved into the modern Groundhog Day.



An old European proverb connects Candlemas to weather predictions: “If Candlemas Day be fair and bright, Winter will have another flight.” This rhyme reflects the agricultural communities’ practical observations of seasonal changes, eventually inspiring the modern weather forecasting tradition through a groundhog’s shadow.



In Europe, the weather predicting animal of choice was often a hedgehog. When German immigrants took the tradition to America, they adapted it to the groundhog, a creature native to Pennsylvania. This change reflected the local fauna and reinforced how cultural traditions evolved in new settings.



Telling our stories sharing our histories

Throughout the year different cultural histories are remembered, commemorated and celebrated. February is LGBT History Month which is an annual month-long observance of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender history, and the history of the gay rights and related civil rights movements. It was founded in 1994 by Missouri high-school history teacher Rodney Wilson. LGBT History Month provides role models, builds community, and represents a civil rights statement about the contributions of the LGBTQ+ community.

It is so important to tell the story of human history, and how we got to where we all are today. The way we have changed, how we've adapted, and all our discoveries. It's also important to look at how we've changed for better and worse, and having something to reflect on so we don't repeat errors from history but build on the successes and connect to all those who have gone before us. Through their stories we can still hear their voices and understand their lives better. Take some time today to time travel and read some of your own history stories.

“The best moments in reading are when you come across something – a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things – which you had thought special and particular to you. And now, here it is, set down by someone else, a person you have never met, someone even who is long dead. And it is as if a hand has come out, and taken yours.”

Alan Bennett, English playwright

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 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. As Birmingham continues its journey to becoming a leading City of Nature, 2025 promises to be a year of exciting progress in green initiatives, sustainability, and community engagement. With a focus on enhancing biodiversity, expanding green spaces, and encouraging active participation, here's a look at what's coming next.

1. Expanding Urban Green Spaces

Birmingham will see the creation of new wildlife corridors and the expansion of pocket parks in urban areas, ensuring more residents have access to nature on their doorstep. Plans also include increasing tree planting efforts, contributing to cleaner air and a healthier city.

2. Rewilding and Biodiversity Boost

The city is set to launch new rewilding projects in key parks and nature reserves, encouraging the return of native species. Expect to see more wildflower meadows, improved habitats for pollinators, and an expansion of wetland areas to support biodiversity and combat climate change.

3. Community-Led Volunteering and Green Champions

2025 will introduce new volunteering opportunities for residents to get involved in conservation work. The Green Champions initiative will empower local communities to take an active role in caring for parks and nature spaces, with training and support from environmental groups.

4. Sustainable Transport and Green Infrastructure

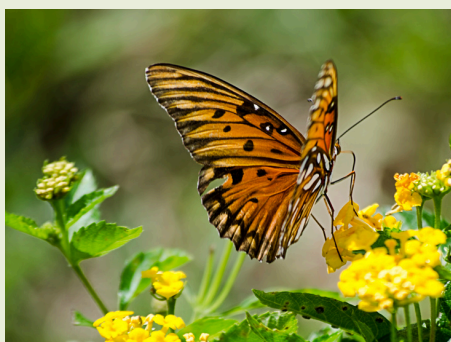
To support a more eco-friendly city, Birmingham will continue developing green transport corridors, enhancing walking and cycling routes through parks and greenways. Look out for more electric vehicle charging stations and sustainable drainage solutions integrated into urban landscapes.

5. Exciting Nature-Based Events and Education

The city will continue to host outdoor workshops, and nature-themed community events throughout 2025. Schools and local groups will have more opportunities to engage in environmental education, ensuring future generations are inspired to protect our green spaces.

Looking Ahead

Birmingham's City of Nature vision is about more than just green spaces—it's about creating a healthier, more sustainable, and connected city where people and nature thrive together.



Looking out for signs that Spring is on the way

Native Plants in February

As winter lingers and spring approaches, February may seem a quiet time for plant life—but look closer, and you'll find the first signs of nature stirring. Many native plants begin to bloom despite the cold, offering early splashes of color and vital food sources for wildlife.

1. Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*)

One of the earliest flowers to appear, the delicate white snowdrop pushes through frost-covered ground, symbolizing the transition from winter to spring. Found in woodlands, parks, and gardens, snowdrops provide an important nectar source for early pollinators.



2. Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*)

With its pale yellow flowers, the primrose is a cheerful sight in hedgerows and woodland edges. It thrives in sheltered spots and is one of the first signs that spring is on its way. Butterflies, such as the brimstone, are among the early pollinators drawn to its nectar.

3. Dog Violet (*Viola riviniana*)

Although its peak bloom is in spring, the dog violet sometimes begins flowering in late February in milder areas. Its purple blooms brighten up woodland floors and grasslands, providing a crucial early food source for insects.

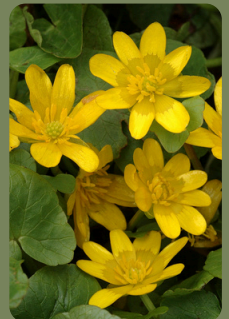


4. Hazel Catkins (*Corylus avellana*)

While not a flower in the traditional sense, hazel trees begin to produce golden catkins—often called "lamb's tails"—in February. These release pollen into the air, playing a key role in early-season pollination.

5. Lesser Celandine (*Ficaria verna*)

This low-growing woodland plant bursts into bloom with glossy yellow flowers, often carpeting the ground in sunny patches. Lesser celandine provides a much-needed nectar source for emerging bees on warm February days.



Look for these hardy plants in woodlands, along hedgerows, and in parks. Their resilience against winter's chill reminds us that spring is just around the corner, and nature is already preparing for the season ahead.

So next time you're out for a winter walk, take a moment to appreciate these early bloomers—small but mighty signs of the changing seasons.

The Importance of Mycelium: Nature's Hidden Network

Beneath our feet, an unseen world is at work—mycelium, the vast underground network of fungal threads, plays a crucial role in maintaining healthy ecosystems. Often called nature's internet, this intricate web connects plants, recycles nutrients, and even helps combat climate change.

1. The Underground Lifeline

Mycelium forms symbiotic relationships with plants, extending their root systems and helping them absorb water and nutrients. In exchange, plants provide fungi with sugars, creating a vital partnership that supports forests, grasslands, and even urban green spaces.

2. Nature's Recycling System

Fungi are powerful decomposers. Mycelium breaks down organic matter like dead leaves and wood, returning essential nutrients to the soil. Without this process, ecosystems would become clogged with waste, and plant life would struggle to thrive.

3. Boosting Biodiversity

Mycelial networks create healthy soil conditions, supporting diverse plant and animal life. Some fungi even produce antibiotic compounds, helping to protect plants from disease. By fostering rich, fertile environments, mycelium plays a key role in sustaining entire ecosystems.

4. Climate Change Fighter

Mycelium helps lock carbon into the soil, reducing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Certain fungi can also break down pollutants, offering potential solutions for environmental clean-ups.

5. Innovation and the Future

Scientists and entrepreneurs are exploring mycelium for biodegradable packaging, sustainable textiles, and even building materials. Its strength, flexibility, and renewability make it an exciting alternative to plastics and other harmful materials.

A Hidden Hero of Nature

Though often overlooked, mycelium is essential to life on Earth. By supporting plant growth, recycling nutrients, and even offering solutions for sustainability, this underground network proves that some of nature's most powerful forces work in silence.



National Weather Person Day - 5th February (USA)

National Weather person's Day, celebrated annually on 5th February, is dedicated to recognising the hard work and dedication of meteorologists who provide crucial weather information to the public. This day honours the professionals who study, forecast, and communicate weather patterns, helping us prepare for everything from daily conditions to severe weather events. Weather person's Day coincides with the birthday of John Jeffries, one of the first American meteorologists, who made significant contributions to the field in the 18th century.

Meteorologists play a vital role in our daily lives, providing forecasts that help us plan our activities, stay safe during extreme weather events, and manage agriculture, transportation, and energy usage. National Weather person's Day highlights the importance of their work and acknowledges the dedication of those who spend countless hours studying weather patterns, analysing data, and communicating findings to the public.

This day also serves as a reminder of the advances in weather forecasting technology and the ongoing efforts to improve accuracy in predicting weather events. Weather person's Day encourages us to appreciate the essential role meteorologists play in society and to support ongoing education and research in the field.



Involved City: Opportunities in green spaces to explore and celebrate art and culture and work with libraries to organise book clubs in parks (14)

This could involve using parks and green spaces as venues for artistic and cultural activities, making nature more accessible for creative expression. Examples include:

- Outdoor art installations and exhibitions showcasing local artists.
- Live performances, such as music, theatre, or spoken word poetry in park settings.
- Community art projects, like mural painting or sculpture trails inspired by nature.
- Workshops and creative sessions, where people can engage in photography, painting, or crafts outdoors.

Working with Libraries to Organise Book Clubs in Parks

This initiative could bring literature into natural spaces, promoting both reading and well-being. Ideas include:

- Outdoor book clubs, where people gather in parks to discuss books in a relaxed setting.
- Storytelling sessions for children, linking nature themes with literature.
- Author talks and poetry readings in green spaces to inspire creativity.
- Themed reading trails, where books or excerpts are displayed along park pathways.

Both initiatives create inclusive, engaging ways to blend culture, community, and nature



Earth Stories - Memories, Hopes and Happenings

As winter begins to loosen its grip, February brings the first quiet signs of renewal in nature. The days grow a little longer, the air carries a hint of change, and if you look closely, the landscape is already stirring with life. I can see hazel catkins from my office window, they're shining in the last of the afternoon sunshine that has managed to break through the grey clouds. On the way to feed the birds this morning there were snowdrop leaves poking through the soil beneath a dogwood that is reaching out to the fence with its spindly red fingers of new growth and now a blue tit is flying back and forth between the shrub and the feeder. There is a real sense today that spring is just around the corner.

This is a month of transition—of small but significant shifts in the natural world. It's a time to appreciate the resilience of wildlife, from early-emerging pollinators to the hardy plants that brave the cold. It's also a time for us to reconnect with nature, whether by spotting the first primroses, taking a mindful walk in a local park, or even getting involved in community green projects. As we move towards longer, brighter days, let's celebrate the quiet beauty of February and the promise of the season ahead. Nature is waking up—let's take the time to notice and appreciate it.

"February brings the rain, Thaws the frozen lake again" is a line from a poem that is part of a four-line verse that describes the weather for each month of the year. The poem is called "Months" and is often attributed to Sara Coleridge, the daughter of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. The poem is a mnemonic device written to help children remember the months of the year and the weather that was typically associated with each month. I wonder if you feel the descriptions of each month still generally hold true in this time of changing climates. Or are we in need of a new poem that better reflects the seasons as they are starting to change. For now the sight of those catkins are a sign of hope I will hold on to.

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



Birmingham's Route to Zero- Be an Eco Valentine

Although BCC take their route to zero carbon very seriously here is a bit of eco fun if you are celebrating Valentines Day this month. It also goes for every day of every month as well. The best way to love your family and friends is to love the Earth, too!

- We all love receiving greeting cards! If you purchase a Valentine's Day card, buy a card made from recycled paper and avoid glitter, ribbon and bows. What's better, though, is a hand-made card crafted with love. Be sure to recycle your cards once you're done with enjoying them.
- If your loved one loves flowers, be sure to place all plastic wrap in the GREY Bin, NOT in the BLUE Bin. If flowers are a must, be sure to shop local. Spent flowers can be composted or placed in your BROWN Bin if you have one.
- Bring on the sweet tooth! Sweet wrappers go in the GREY Bin and NOT the BLUE bin. But empty and flattened cardboard boxes should be recycled in your BLUE Bin.
- If you are planning a home cooked meal be sure to pre-cycle by purchasing items in packaging that can be recycled. Don't forget your reusable bags to haul your groceries inside!
- Don't forget the bubbly can be low alcohol! Empty wine and champagne bottles should be recycled in your BLUE Bin.

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 those 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.

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



Follow us on: @NaturallyBirmi1



Check our website: <https://naturallybirmingham.org/>

