

# GREEN CHAMPIONS



## Health - Naturally

Natural play offers powerful health benefits for children. Exploring woods, climbing trees, building dens, and digging in soil help develop strength, coordination, and motor skills. Being active outdoors supports heart health and boosts the immune system, while fresh air and sunlight improve sleep and mood.

Natural play also reduces stress, encourages problem-solving, and fosters creativity and independence. Children who regularly play in nature tend to be more resilient and socially confident. Nature is a free, ever-changing playground—vital for happy, healthy childhoods and lifelong wellbeing.



## Noticing Nature

*See, a hand sweeps stars  
from the August sky,  
as if my mother swept off the  
supper crumbs from the table at home.  
"August Evening" by Sandor Csoori*



## Learn more about - Stargazing

Stargazing is easy: you just have to look up on a clear night. But getting started can be daunting for some. The BBC's Sky at Night Magazine has some top tips for spending your first night gazing at the stars.

There's a misconception that if you want to get into stargazing you have to spend money on high-tech equipment such as telescopes and CCD cameras.

What if you just want to start with very basic astronomy and don't want to buy anything? What can you see just by stepping outside and looking up?

Here, you can go on a first night's tour of the night sky and learn how to start stargazing in 12 easy steps:

<https://www.skyatnightmagazine.com/advice/skills/stargazing-top-tips>



# National Play Day - 6<sup>th</sup> August 2025



Are you OK with even a bit disruptive?

that children's play can be noisy, adventurous and may be



Because you should be - that's what play looks like when it's real.

Every year, **National Play Day** reminds us of something vital: that play is not just fun—it's how children make sense of the world. It's how they build confidence, resilience, relationships, and creativity.



But not all play is quiet and orderly. In fact, the best kind often isn't. It can be messy, noisy, unpredictable—and that's OK. <https://www.playday.org.uk/>



In a world increasingly shaped by risk aversion, timetables, and screen time, it can feel uncomfortable to see children pushing boundaries. But boundaries are what help them learn. When children are given the space to climb, shout, build, dig, pretend, fall over and try again—they're not being unruly. They're developing essential life skills. They're becoming problem solvers, negotiators, adventurers.

Too often, adults define what play "should" look like such as structured games, neat playgrounds, safe surfaces. These things have value, of course. But children also need play that they control themselves: child-led, open-ended, and connected to the world around them. That might mean dens in the undergrowth, puddle splashing, tree climbing, or turning a fallen branch into a spaceship.



In this kind of play, children aren't just having fun they are rehearsing real life. They are taking measured risks, learning to assess danger, resolving conflict, and stretching their imaginations. Play is a powerful tool for physical and mental wellbeing especially when it happens outdoors in green space, where children can explore with all their senses.

Here in Birmingham, our parks and green spaces are vital playgrounds that are free to access, open to all, and full of opportunity. But they only become true play spaces when we, the adults, are prepared to let go a little. That means creating welcoming environments, ensuring safety without stifling freedom, and accepting that sometimes a little noise and disruption is part of a healthy, happy childhood.



We also need to remember that not all children have equal access to these freedoms. Safe green spaces aren't evenly distributed. Families in areas of deprivation may not have the same access to parks or nature-based play. That's why the work of local play organisations, Friends groups, and community volunteers is so important. From outdoor storytelling and natural play installations, to play streets and wild adventure sessions, these initiatives help open doors for more children to play the way they're wired to - freely.



This National Play Day, let's commit to protecting children's right to play. Let's support the people and organisations creating opportunities for inclusive, adventurous, and nature-connected play. And let's challenge ourselves to be OK with the noise, the mess, the glorious unpredictability of children at play. Because the cost of silence is too high. Because quiet children are not always content children. Because every shout, stomp, giggle and gasp is a signal: I'm alive. I'm learning. I'm free. So are you OK with that? Because we are.



# City of Nature Programme update

This month, I am shining a spotlight on the inspiring individuals and organisations that make up the **City of Nature Alliance** delivering or supporting the delivery of opportunities to connect to nature.

They are only part of the “ecosystem” that keeps nature high on the agenda, cares for green spaces and keeps people connected, but they give us their time, energy and inspiration to keep going even when things get tough. From community gardeners to park volunteers, nature educators to biodiversity champions, these are the dedicated Green Champions at the heart of our shared mission. Their passion, creativity, and commitment are helping to shape a greener, healthier Birmingham for everyone. Some I have known for over twenty years, some are more recent relationships but all of them work together bringing their particular skills, experience and knowledge.

Join me in this edition of the newsletter as I reflect and celebrate their stories, achievements, and the everyday actions that are making a big difference across our city’s natural spaces and communities and find out how you can benefit as an individual by joining them or becoming a volunteer, or as an organisation by joining the City of Nature Alliance or simply by taking part in the many activities they provide across the city.

**The current third sector members of the City of Nature Alliance are:**

- Birmingham and the Black Country Wildlife Trust: <https://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/about>
- Birmingham Open Spaces Forum: <https://bosf.org.uk/about-bosf/>
- Birmingham Treepeople: <https://birminghamtreepeople.org.uk/>
- Canal and River Trust: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/west-midlands>
- Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens: <https://www.castlebromwichhallgardens.org.uk/>
- Community Environmental Trust (CET): <https://environmentaltrust.org.uk/about/>
- Ecobirmingham: <https://ecobirmingham.com/about/>
- Field Study Council: <https://www.field-studies-council.org/about-us/>
- Learning Journeys Consulting:
- Legacy WM: <https://www.legacy-wm.org/>
- National Trust: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/birmingham-west-midlands>
- Natural England: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england>
- Patchwork Meadow: <https://www.thepatchworkmeadow.co.uk/>
- RSPB: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/days-out/reserves/sandwell-valley>
- The Active Wellbeing Society (TAWS): <https://theaws.co.uk/>
- Thrive Birmingham: <https://www.thrive.org.uk/how-we-help/regional-centres-and-programmes/birmingham>
- WASH project - Norton Hall: <https://nortonhall.org.uk/wash-project/>



**If you would like to join the City of Nature Alliance please email us at [Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk)**

**The City of Nature Online** - There will be opportunities to join webinars, workshops and online meetings covering a range of subjects, throughout the year.

**We will post events on Naturally Birmingham social media and email out through the Green Champion mailing list.**

**If you would like to find out more about:**

- Birmingham City Councils City of Nature Plan
- Green Champions Volunteering Programme
- Young Green Champions for Schools
- The City of Nature Alliance
- Ranger Service Healthy Parks Programme



**Visit the Naturally Birmingham website: <https://naturallybirmingham.org/>**

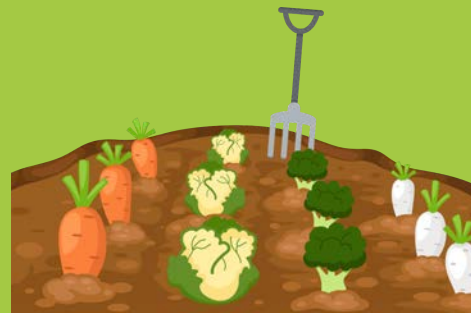
**If you want to sign up as a Green Champion and receive the newsletter directly via email please complete this form: <https://forms.office.com/e/Va1UFkAe4B>**



# National Allotments Week - 11<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> August 2025

Started in 2002, National Allotments Week is an annual initiative that aims to raise awareness of allotments and their role in helping people live healthier lifestyles, grow their food, develop friendships, and bolster communities.

The National Allotments Society's annual awareness week will run this year from **11-17 August 2025**, and they have chosen a theme of **"Allotments and Wellbeing"**



You can find out more here: <https://thenas.org.uk/national-allotments-week>

Birmingham has 113 allotment sites and nearly 7,000 plots, more than any other local authority in the UK. [Find an allotment in Birmingham](#)

Over 90% of our sites are managed by independent Allotment Associations, some are managed by BCC and the rest are managed by the Birmingham District Allotment Cooperative: <https://bdacallotments.co.uk/>

Most allotments have an Allotment Committee, made up of elected volunteers. Committees help to coordinate and manage allotment services and facilities. They can also help you with requests or concerns, or provide advice.

## The Blackberry's Secret Season

Blackberries are one of Britain's most generous wild foods.



Found tumbling through hedgerows, canal paths, and park edges, these glossy fruits are a seasonal delight—sweet, earthy, and full of childhood nostalgia. **Forage with care! Foraging tips:** <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/things-to-do/canal-and-river-wildlife/a-spotters-guide-to-waterway-wildlife/identifying-wildlife/foraging-guide>

Traditionally, blackberries are picked from late August through September, with eager foragers filling tubs for crumbles, jams, or just a handful on the walk home. But old folklore gives a curious warning: never pick blackberries after Michaelmas which is on 29<sup>th</sup> September.

From October onwards, legend says, the devil claims the fruit—cursing it with thorns, spittle, or decay. While rooted in myth, the advice has some truth. By October, blackberries are past their best. Rain, mould, and insects often spoil what's left on the bramble, making them less palatable and, possibly, unhealthy to eat.

So if you're tempted by a late-season wander, remember the saying and leave October's berries to the birds. They'll thank you, and nature's cycle will continue.

The bramble gives freely, but only for a time. Like all seasonal treasures, blackberries remind us to enjoy what the wild offers but also to know when to let go.

# Is it - Just a Plot?

## The Wider Benefits of Allotments in Birmingham



In the heart of Birmingham's neighbourhoods, beyond the busy streets and tower blocks, lie hundreds of green oases - our city's allotments.

Often tucked away behind hedges or railway lines, these spaces are much more than just places to grow vegetables. Allotments play a vital role in the health, wellbeing, and resilience of Birmingham's communities, offering benefits that reach far beyond the people who hold the keys to the gates.

At a time when access to green space is unequal, especially in some of Birmingham's most deprived areas, allotments provide a rare opportunity: a patch of earth that "belongs" to you. They offer freedom, autonomy, and the joy of nurturing life, whether that's potatoes, pollinators, or peace of mind. For many, stepping onto an allotment is like stepping into a different rhythm: slower, seasonal, and deeply connected to nature's pace.

But the value of allotments is not just personal - it's collective.

Allotment sites often act as informal community hubs. They bring together people of all ages and backgrounds, many of whom might not otherwise meet. Over shared fences and seed swaps, friendships are formed. Knowledge is passed on. A sense of place and belonging takes root. In a diverse city like Birmingham, where over 180 languages are spoken, allotments can be places of quiet connection where language is less important than kindness and a spare courgette.

The health benefits of allotment gardening are well-evidenced. Time outdoors, gentle physical activity, and access to fresh produce all contribute to improved mental and physical wellbeing. In communities facing health inequalities, allotments can play a small but significant role in preventing illness and promoting wellness. Some GPs even prescribe gardening or time in nature as part of "social prescribing" approaches.

There's also an environmental dimension. Allotments support biodiversity, especially when plots include wildflowers, composting areas, or ponds. They create habitat corridors in urban landscapes and help with cooling, air quality, and rainwater absorption contributing to climate resilience. In a changing world, every patch of green counts.

Economically, allotments offer value too. With the cost of food rising, the ability to grow even a portion of your own produce can relieve pressure on household budgets. Some plot holders share surplus with neighbours or food banks, turning individual effort into community nourishment. Yet despite all this, many allotment sites face challenges: underinvestment, long waiting lists, and unclear governance. Supporting and protecting Birmingham's allotments should be seen not just as a nice-to-have, but as a crucial part of the city's health, climate, and community infrastructure.

Allotments remind us of something simple and powerful: when people are given the space, tools, and trust to grow things - good things happen. In a city striving to be greener, fairer, and more connected, they are part of the solution.

So next time you pass an allotment gate, take a moment. Behind it lies more than cabbages. It's a small, green revolution quietly transforming lives one growing season at a time.

Find out more here: <https://thenas.org.uk/benefits-of-allotments>



# Swift Farewell: Catch Them Before They Go

August is the last month to witness one of summer's most breathtaking sights: the aerial acrobatics of the swift (*Apus apus*), one of the world's fastest and most extraordinary birds.

These scythe-winged migrants spend just a few short weeks in Britain each year, arriving in spring to breed and raising their young in the eaves of our homes and old buildings.

By August, their chicks have fledged, and the whole family is preparing for an epic journey - a return flight to Africa, crossing thousands of miles of land and sea. What makes it even more astonishing is that swifts make this journey almost entirely on the wing. They eat, sleep, and even mate in flight, spending most of their lives without landing.

You don't need to go far to enjoy their company. On warm evenings, lie back and watch them soaring overhead, screaming in joyful chorus as they loop and glide through the sky. Head to rivers, ponds, or canals, where they skim low over the water, catching insects with astonishing precision.

Their time with us is short, but unforgettable. Swifts are a reminder of how connected we are to the wider world; our rooftops are only their temporary home; their departure, a signal that the seasons are shifting once more. So pause and look up. In a sky alive with movement and sound, you'll find one of nature's most thrilling performers who are here for a moment, then gone on the wind.

Learn more by attending a Field Study Council bird course: [https://www.field-studies-council.org/courses-and-experiences/natural-history-courses/?fwp\\_natural\\_history\\_courses=birds](https://www.field-studies-council.org/courses-and-experiences/natural-history-courses/?fwp_natural_history_courses=birds)



## Mayflies: A summer spectacle in its final days

August marks your final chance to witness one of summer's most delicate natural displays - the short, shimmering life of the mayfly. Despite their name, mayflies (Ephemeroptera) can be seen across the UK from late spring through to the end of August, especially along clean, slow-moving rivers, ponds, and lakes.

These remarkable insects are symbols of transformation. They spend most of their lives, up to two years, as aquatic nymphs beneath the surface, hiding in silt or gravel. Then, in a brief and beautiful finale, they emerge into the air, their wings unfurling for just a day or two of adult life. Some species live only a few hours just long enough to mate, dance, and complete the cycle.

Their courtship ritual is one of summer's most enchanting sights. Look out for large swarms of males rising and falling in rhythmic waves above rivers and wetlands during warm afternoons and golden evenings. Their fragile bodies catch the light like tiny airborne jewels.

The presence of mayflies is more than beautiful - it's meaningful. They are excellent indicators of water quality, thriving only in clean, well-oxygenated habitats. Their decline is often a sign that something is wrong beneath the surface.

So, before summer fades, take a slow walk along a quiet riverbank. Look up into the golden light. If the weather is kind, you might just catch the final dance of the mayflies - ephemeral, elegant, and utterly unforgettable.





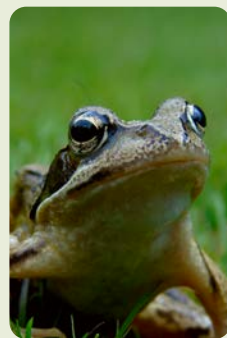
## Birmingham and the Black Country Wildlife Trust

I've had the privilege of working alongside Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust (BBCWT) from when it was known as the Urban Wildlife Group, as a member, sometimes as a partner, sometimes as a freelancer, and always as an admirer. Few organisations have done more to nurture both wild places and the people who care for them. Their Natural Prospects project, though now completed, was a standout example. It gave people from underrepresented backgrounds the opportunity to grow careers in conservation. I saw first-hand the care and commitment that went into every placement, every support session, and every opportunity offered.

There are 46 local, independent Wildlife Trusts working to make the UK a better place for people and wildlife. The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country is a local charity uniquely protecting the wildlife of Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

Whether engaging young people through Wild Schools, supporting volunteers to manage local reserves, or campaigning to protect vital habitats across the city region, BBCWT keeps nature on the agenda and at the heart of our communities. They understand that urban wildlife isn't just about hedgehogs and herons—it's about belonging, wellbeing, and justice too. Their programmes bring people of all ages and backgrounds into contact with nature, helping us reimagine our relationship with the land beneath our feet.

**As a founding member of the City of Nature Alliance, BBCWT brings deep expertise, practical wisdom, and a genuine collaborative spirit. I'm proud to call them a partner and prouder still to call them friends.**



## Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF)

Birmingham Open Spaces Forum has been part of my life for over 20 years. When the group formed in 2005 I attended meetings representing the Ranger Service and I've stayed close ever since. After leaving BCC I had the honour of serving as a trustee and treasurer for a while, and even now, I see their influence wherever communities gather to care for parks.

What BOSF does so well is often what goes unseen: they connect, support, champion, and gently steer. With a remarkably small team, they provide unwavering support to the city's vast and vibrant network of Friends of Parks groups—groups that simply wouldn't thrive without the guidance, reassurance, and backbone BOSF provides.

They've created a culture where community-led green space care is valued and visible. Whether it's helping groups with insurance, constitutions, or confidence, BOSF shows up—quietly and consistently.

Their commitment to grassroots action is second to none. They listen deeply, work humbly, and never lose sight of the bigger picture. In a city as big and complex as Birmingham, that kind of constancy matters more than we often say. Their work may not always make headlines, but it makes all the difference. And I, for one, am grateful they're here.

**Now, as part of the City of Nature Alliance, BOSF brings two decades of community wisdom into the room. They hold the stories and struggles of the people who make our green spaces live and breathe.**



# Birmingham Treepeople

I've been part of Birmingham TreePeople's journey from back when they started life as a Tree Warden Network, set up by the Tree Officers of Birmingham City Council in 2016 to better support trees in Birmingham. After numbers grew and a greater need became apparent, a core of the volunteer Tree Wardens created Birmingham Treepeople.

For a time, I managed the Civic Society's Birmingham Trees for Life project, which planted 100,000 trees across the city and laid the roots for what TreePeople would become. But trees need more than just being planted, they need people to care about them their whole life. I remember those early Tree Warden training sessions and how eager everyone was to learn, plant, and protect. It was clear then that something special was growing - and it did.

In 2024, now a CIO, they were awarded significant funding from the National Lottery Community Fund which enabled them to transition from a volunteer-led organisation to an employee-led charity with a board of trustees who support their work. Today, Birmingham TreePeople is so much more than a group of volunteers. They are advocates, educators, citizen scientists, and community leaders. They plant trees, yes—but they also grow understanding, stewardship, and hope.

The name TreePeople feels just right now. It's no longer just about trees; it's about the people who stand with them. Their commitment to citizen-led tree care, monitoring, and urban forestry is quietly transformative. They bring together people of all ages and backgrounds, united by a simple belief: trees make our city better—and we all have a role in making sure they thrive.

**As a City of Nature Alliance member, Birmingham TreePeople bring deep-rooted passion and purpose. Their work is heartfelt, strategic, and beautifully persistent.**

**It's been a privilege to watch them grow. It's an even greater privilege to be able to continue to watch them go from strength to strength.**



# Canals and River Trust - West Midlands

My time as a Ranger at Edgbaston Reservoir gave me a deep respect for the work of the Canal & River Trust (British Waterways at the time). The Reservoir itself—its water levels, dam wall, and historic infrastructure—was their responsibility, and collaboration was essential. I always found them knowledgeable, practical, and rooted in a deep sense of place and history.

I also had the pleasure of walking alongside Tahir Parvaz, the Trust's Urban Engagement Manager, in one of his former roles. His energy and passion for the city's waterways are boundless—and he reflects the spirit of the whole organisation. There's a real drive at Canal & River Trust, not just to protect heritage infrastructure, but to connect people with water, wildlife, and wellbeing.

Today, the West Midlands Trust looks after 520 miles of canals across the region with 35 miles of canals in Birmingham, which is said to be more than Venice ; ) Their work goes far beyond locks and towpaths. They manage habitats, support biodiversity, restore heritage structures, and deliver vital engagement programmes with communities, schools, and volunteers. They're also champions of wellbeing. Their "Waterways & Wellbeing" work encourages people to walk, pause, notice—and reconnect. Whether it's canal adoption groups, youth engagement, or environmental volunteering, they ensure our blue spaces are alive with purpose and people.

**As a member of the City of Nature Alliance, Canal & River Trust brings both practical expertise and a much-needed reminder: our urban waters are not barriers, but bridges to nature, to health, and to each other.**





## Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens

As a relative newcomer to Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens, I recently found myself on one of those warm summer days, sitting in their Courtyard Café with homemade cake and a lovely cup of tea in hand—and feeling utterly refreshed. It was a moment of calm, just before I stepped out to wander the stunning gardens and lush parkland.

These 10 acres of restored early 18th-century Baroque formal gardens—surrounded by a further 30 acres of Local Nature Reserve parkland—feel like stepping back in time, yet deeply rooted in today's city life. Rescued over forty years ago by volunteers, the site is now cared for by an independent charitable trust (trust established in 1985) and open for more than 250 days a year.

The gardens are home to nearly 600 plant species, including over 60 varieties of heritage fruit, and feature intricate parterres, a holly walk and maze, orchard, and kitchen garden—all maintained by a team of about five full-time staff and over 120 dedicated volunteers contributing more than 11,000 hours annually.

Beyond beauty, they are a hub of sustainable practice and inclusive community activity. From nature-based school sessions to craft workshops, music events, and conservation volunteering, Castle Bromwich champions nature, history, and wellbeing—on a modest budget and with immense passion. Their Green Tourism accreditation and work toward sustainable operations reinforce a commitment to environment and education.

As Alliance members they show us that gardens are more than a place to unwind—they're a model of how heritage and habitat, volunteer power and visitor joy can come together.

If you're looking for peace, purpose, or a patch of green in the city, you'll find it here.



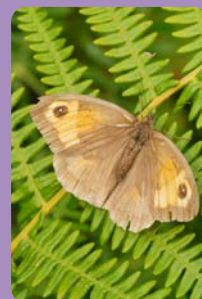
## Community Environmental Trust (CET)

I've known Alicia Grande, (CET's Project Manager), and Sarah Kasper for many years. Their energy and dedication embody the spirit of the Community Environmental Trust a true "small but mighty" force rooted in Castle Vale but reaching across Birmingham.

Born out of the regeneration of Castle Vale in the early 2000s, CET's mission was and remains to ensure the environment is central to community development and wellbeing. Over time, they've evolved beyond local green-space advocacy into a city-wide champion of inclusive environmental action. CET's work includes Forest School sessions and environmental education in local schools, empowering children with outdoor learning and nature connection. Through its Community Garden, orchard projects, youth programmes like Vale Youth Green Action, and volunteering opportunities, it brings people, skills, and green places together. They've delivered practical conservation, regenerated the Castle Vale Conservation Area, created access improvements and picnic trails, all while empowering local people with confidence and workplace skills just as seen in their Confidence Through Conservation projects.

I've watched Alicia meet challenge after challenge with warmth and determination—delivering kayaking and bell-boating, garden mentoring, planning sessions, and sustainable arts. Their values—sustainability, passion, inclusion, integrity aren't just straplines; they're woven into everything they do.

**As members of the City of Nature Alliance, CET bring local sense, learning-by-doing, and fearless innovation to the table. Their ambition may be rooted in Castle Vale, but their impact is rooted in people and the belief that community-led environmental change can flourish anywhere.**



# Natural England - Looking Back and Moving Forward.

In the early days of changing my career path, I came very close to working for English Nature, as it was known then. I remember the excitement—an opportunity to be part of something that aligned so closely with my values and love of the natural world. But I also realised I didn't want to swap one office for another. I wanted to be out there—on the ground, with people, with the land—working directly in communities, not just observing them from behind a desk.

That decision led me into decades of work supporting communities, parks, and public green spaces across Birmingham. And it's why, even now, I watch the work of Natural England with real interest, respect, and, yes, a touch of nostalgia. And it is very different now, The team is not behind the scenes or back office any more now they are mobile and out and about in the city with the people.

Natural England continues to have a strong and growing presence in Birmingham. Their work is wide-ranging—from habitat restoration to barrier-busting research, always with the aim of helping more people experience and value nature. One of their flagship projects in our region is Purple Horizons—a nature recovery partnership that's helping post-industrial landscapes in the West Midlands bloom with wildflowers, buzz with insects, and breathe new life into tired soil. It's an inspiring reminder that regeneration is always possible—ecologically and socially.

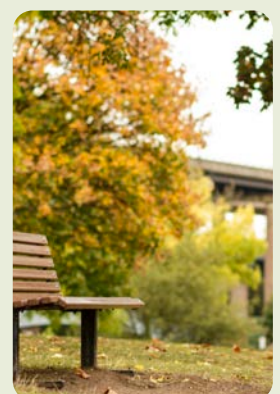
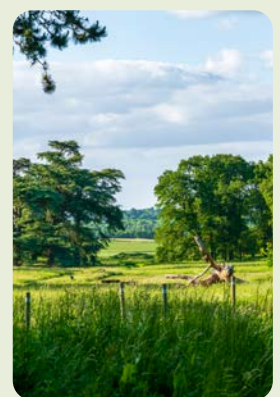
But what resonates most with me is their work around access and inclusion. Natural England has invested time in researching the barriers that prevent people from connecting with nature in places like Birmingham. These aren't just physical barriers like fences or lack of transport—they're cultural, emotional, economic. Sometimes it's about not feeling welcome or safe. Sometimes it's about never having been invited into the conversation in the first place.

By naming these challenges, Natural England is also helping tackle them. They're advocating for diverse and inclusive green spaces, for better amenities, and for activities that reflect the needs of the whole community—not just the few. They speak the language of environmental justice, recognising that access to nature is not just a “nice to have”—it's a right, a health need, a social equaliser.

They are also key statutory advisors when it comes to protecting Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and ensuring that new developments meet environmental standards. Their voice in planning is essential for balancing growth with ecological integrity—a challenge Birmingham knows all too well.

From National Nature Reserves in the wider West Midlands, to collaborations across the city's Nature Recovery Network, Natural England plays a quiet but crucial role in shaping a greener, fairer Birmingham.

**Natural England are a great Alliance member because they bring deep ecological expertise, a national perspective, and a strong commitment to inclusion and environmental justice. Their work helps connect local action in Birmingham to wider nature recovery goals, while their research into access and barriers ensures that our city's green spaces are being shaped for everyone, not just the few.**



# Ecobirmingham

Ecobirmingham grew from a successful nine years as Northfield Ecocentre blessed by the support and values of the Quaker community. They benefited from the passions of amazingly dedicated staff, volunteers, funders and partners. In July 2018, they officially became ecobirmingham a new independent charity for the city.

I knew the team at Northfield Ecocentre and I've come to know ecobirmingham well through the Future Parks Accelerator project, especially working with Anne Dasgupta during pilot sessions at Garrison Lane Park. Anne's passion, expertise, and sheer energy helped bring Creative Learning to life—and embodied the spirit of this truly inspiring organisation.

As their website proudly states: They give the people of Birmingham the tools to take positive environmental action and help others do the same. Looking at sustainable living holistically their core areas of work cover – Transport, Food, Education, Waste, Water, Arts Engagement and Energy. Through a variety of projects they deliver grass roots activities, events and programmes that engage, educate and stimulate communities and volunteers; supporting, advising, challenging and training organisations and influencing wider social change through dissemination, partnerships, research and internships.

Their Creative Learning strand is all about making nature meaningful for children and families across Birmingham enriching young lives and builds curiosity, resilience, and a sense of place—especially for children with limited access to nature. Ecobirmingham isn't afraid to experiment: they tailor sessions to local needs, spark new ways of seeing green space, and invite families into the natural world with inclusion and joy. Through their championing of sustainable living—whether energy advice, food growing, arts or active travel—they plant seeds of change in communities across the city.

**As members of the City of Nature Alliance, ecobirmingham bring creativity, spirit, and real impact. They remind us that when people grow together in nature, we all flourish.**



## Field Study Council

I'm thrilled that the Field Studies Council (FSC) has joined our City of Nature Alliance. They've long been my go-to for identification guides and practical ecological training. More recently, their partnership with rangers at Sutton Park has brought those trusted resources directly into Birmingham's greenspaces—helping staff and volunteers sharpen their fieldwork skills while deepening nature connection.

For over 80 years, FSC has pioneered outdoor learning across the UK, rooted in their original centre at Flatford Mill and now supporting 17 field centres nationwide that welcome more than 140,000 visitors annually—from primary pupils to teachers, families, and professional ecologists. Their commitment is simple yet powerful: to offer first-hand learning experiences in nature, unlocking curiosity, confidence, and lifelong environmental stewardship.

What excites me most is their local work here in Birmingham. FSC Birmingham delivers hands-on field courses in parks like Sutton Park, Cannon Hill, Lickey Hills, Perry Hall, and Woodgate Valley—bridging the gap between formal education and real-world landscapes. They tailor sessions to curriculum needs (KS1 through A-Level), urban geography, and biodiversity studies—always bringing the city's natural world into clear focus. They also publish accessible fold-out ID guides, run online Minibeast and Pollinator resources, and partner on projects like BioLinks to strengthen biological recording networks in the West Midlands.

Through all this, FSC embodies the spirit of City of Nature: rooted in learning, inclusive in reach, and grounded in place.

**As a City of Nature Alliance member, FSC brings trusted expertise, national reach, and a deep commitment to connecting people of all ages with nature's stories. What a wonderful partner and what a gift they bring to our city.**



# The Active Wellbeing Society (TAWS)

I've long admired The Active Wellbeing Society (TAWS), not least because of the early projects I delivered with them—Teen Explorer sessions and even streamed live children's nature activities from my own garden during the pandemic. Those moments of connection, curiosity, and shared exploration still resonate today.

TAWS has evolved from its city roots into a national community benefit society focused on tackling inequality and promoting wellbeing through free, co-produced activities.

Drawing on innovation, collaboration, and lived experience, they deliver initiatives like the Big Feed Project, Big Bike Revival, Active Parks, Active Streets, and Mobile Share Shack—all designed to break down barriers and build stronger neighbourhoods and healthier lives.

Across Birmingham parks—from Eastside to Kingstanding—they continue to offer park-based activity programmes, catering to all ages and abilities with inclusive, outdoor events and sessions. Their recent rebrand highlights their ambition and values, and it was born from the same spirit that first drew me in: community-led, grassroots action with real impact.

TAWS doesn't just host events—they work with communities to design change and shift systems, co-producing solutions with those they serve rather than doing things to them. Whether it's hospital rounds, youth cycling clubs, wellbeing walks, or active streets weekends, their work combines movement, nature, inclusion, and empowerment.

As a member of the City of Nature Alliance, TAWS brings grounded energy, lived knowledge, and creative collaboration. Their approach reminds us: health and nature thrive when communities are led, heard, and resourced. I'm proud to share our history—and their future—with this truly remarkable organisation.



## Through Young Eyes: Youth, Nature, and the Power of Photography

This August, two inspiring global observances come together to shine a spotlight on young voices and creative action—International Youth Day on 12 August and World Photography Day on 19 August. The 2025 theme for International Youth Day, Local Youth Actions for the SDGs and Beyond, celebrates the powerful role that young people play in bringing global goals like sustainability, biodiversity, and climate action to life—right here in their communities.



In Birmingham, we're seeing this every day through the work of our Young Green Champions, school-based eco projects, and community groups led or supported by young volunteers. From planting pollinator-friendly flowers to helping design park events and leading litter picks, young people are not just participating—they're shaping the future of our city's green spaces.

**To mark these two dates, we're inviting young people to share how they see the natural world—with a camera or phone in hand. You can email your photos to: [Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk)**

Whether it's a favourite tree, a buzzing bee, a quiet corner of a park, or a moment of joy in nature, every photo is a window into how young people are connecting with the land, wildlife, and community around them. Entries will be shared in a special online gallery, and selected photos may be featured in future City of Nature publications or displays.

Together, these moments show that change doesn't always begin in conference rooms—it often starts with a young person, a small act of care, and a fresh perspective on the world around them.

# Urban Nature Delivery - 20 Years of BOSF supporting groups caring for parks



When I first joined the world of Birmingham's parks and green spaces, I quickly encountered the term "Friends Group." These grassroots teams, from dedicated duos to hundreds-strong associations, combine passion, place-knowledge, and practical action to care for local open spaces. Together, they form the heartbeat of the Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF), a robust network of over 130 member groups citywide. This is not a collection of siloed groups. BOSF weaves them together - helping with funding bids, insurance, volunteer handbooks, training, and neighbourhood advocacy. They empower communities to speak with one voice when parks budgets are threatened and to share learning, reassurance, and vision.

BOSF groups include major open spaces like Handsworth Park, Bournville Park, Sheldon Country Park, Cotteridge Park, Edgbaston Reservoir, Kings Heath Park, and nature reserves like Balaam's Wood, Deers Leap Wood, and Lickey Hills. They range in size, habitat type, community demographic, and activity—but share a commitment to stewardship. Whether running litter picks and conservation planting, organising events like wassails and festivals, or working on campaigning and local consultation, Friends groups strengthen civic life. The parks & open spaces BOSF volunteer groups figures for April 2024 – March 2025 are an amazing 106,410 hours logged, which are worth £1,340,766 (based on the Real Living Wage of £12.60/hr).

BOSF doesn't just link groups, it supports them. With about 650 volunteers feeding into their work, BOSF offers training sessions, newsletters, toolkit resources, support arranging insurance, and advice on constitutions and funding. Their volunteer development officers, trustees, and staff bring experience, local contacts, and a collaborative spirit to every interaction. Over the past year alone, 10 new groups have joined BOSF - some starting from scratch, others born from neighbours' determination to improve forgotten spaces. BOSF has helped launch these groups, signpost funding, and encourage confidence and ambition along the way.

When council budget cuts threatened frontline park services, it was Friends groups and BOSF who mobilised community voices, responded to consultations, and helped save key ranger roles and maintenance posts. They've become a respected partner in consultations, not a token invite, but a respected advisor shaping policy and budgets. Since its founding in late 2004, BOSF has evolved from a loose cluster of interested groups into a strong charity focused on education, empowerment, and environment. Their annual income now supports events, training, and advocacy across the whole city—valuing lived community knowledge as equal to technical expertise. To put it briefly Birmingham's open spaces are cared for not by institutions alone—but by communities. Each Friends of Park group is a micro-story of local pride, care, and action. BOSF knits these stories into a supportive network—helping volunteers find voice, resources, confidence, and impact.

**Looking ahead:** this network remains one of our city's living assets—inspiring not just activity but belonging, resilience, and value for nature, wellbeing, and civic life.

**To every volunteer litter-picker, path-mender, planter, campaigner, walker, or storyteller: thank you. You are the grassroots lifeblood that makes Birmingham's parks flourish.**



# August Wildlife in Birmingham's Parks: A City Alive With Nature

As summer begins to soften into autumn, August brings a final burst of wildlife activity to Birmingham's parks and green spaces. This is a month of change, of full-grown energy, and quiet preparation—for birds, insects, plants, and people alike.

Look up, and you might catch the last exhilarating flights of swifts, high above rooftops and treetops. These summer visitors are getting ready for their long migration back to Africa, their screaming calls fading with the season. They're joined by house martins and swallows, skimming low over parks and lakes, feeding on the last of the flying insects.

On the ground, grasslands and meadows are at their most colourful. Late-flowering wildflowers like meadowsweet, knapweed, and yarrow are still feeding bees and butterflies. If you visit areas like Moseley Bog, Lickey Hills, or the wilder edges of your local park, take a moment to watch red admirals, gatekeepers, and common blue butterflies dancing through the warm air.

August is also a great month to spot dragonflies and damselflies, especially near ponds and canals. These shimmering aerial hunters are at their peak, zipping over water surfaces and resting on reeds. Birmingham's canals, Edgbaston Reservoir, and Kingfisher Country Park all offer excellent dragonfly-watching opportunities.

Meanwhile, hedgerows and woodlands are quietly beginning their seasonal shift. Blackberries ripen on brambles (best left for the birds until they're fully ready!), and squirrels become more active as they begin caching food. If you're lucky, you might spot a young fox or hedgehog venturing out during the cooler evenings.

Insects continue to hum in flowerbeds and along park paths. Hoverflies, ladybirds, and wasps are busy among late blooms. Listen carefully and you may hear the gentle buzz of grasshoppers and crickets in long grass—one of the signature sounds of summer's end. The RSPB, gets dozens of reports each summer of hummingbirds on the loose in the UK countryside. But hummingbirds are only native to the Americas, so how can this be? The answer lies in an unassuming moth – the Hummingbird Hawk-moth – which looks uncannily like a miniature hummingbird. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/natures-calendar/natures-calendar-august>

Whether you're walking the dog, joining a park event, or simply sitting on a bench with a book, take a moment to notice the life around you. Birmingham's parks are not just places of leisure—they're vibrant ecosystems, teeming with wildlife that connects us to the turning seasons.

In August, everything is active, alert, and alive making the most of the remaining warmth before the slowing pace of autumn begins.





# August in the Wildlife Garden

## Jobs for the Wildlife Garden in August

August is a beautiful month in the wildlife garden—flowers are blooming, insects are busy, and birds are still feeding hungry young.

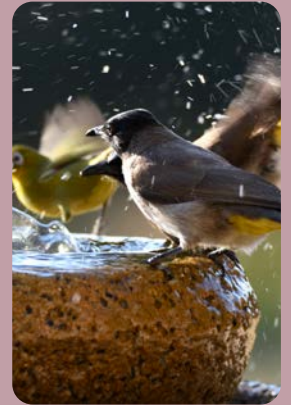
But it's also a time of quiet transition as the garden begins to prepare for autumn. Here are eight simple jobs you can do this month to support wildlife and keep your garden healthy:

### 1. Keep bird baths topped up

Hot, dry weather can mean water is scarce. Check bird baths daily, clean them regularly, and make sure shallow water is available for bees and other insects too.

### 2. Deadhead with care

While deadheading can prolong flowering, consider leaving some seed heads on plants like teasel, poppy, or sunflowers. These provide autumn food for birds and shelter for insects.



### 3. Create a mini log pile

As you trim or prune shrubs, save some wood to make a simple log pile in a shady corner. It's a perfect home for beetles, frogs, and fungi.

### 4. Avoid too much tidying

Leave some nettles, ivy, and long grass in tucked-away spots. These wild areas are essential habitats for butterflies, moths, and other creatures.

### 5. Harvest mindfully

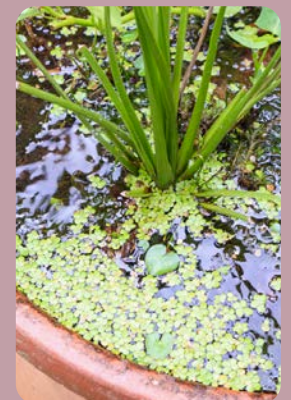
If you grow fruit or veg, leave a little behind for wildlife—blackbirds love windfall apples, and wasps help clean up overripe plums.

### 6. Let ponds breathe

Scoop out excess blanket weed and top up low water levels using rainwater if possible. Avoid disturbing froglets and other pond life still active around the edges.

### 7. Sow wildflower seeds

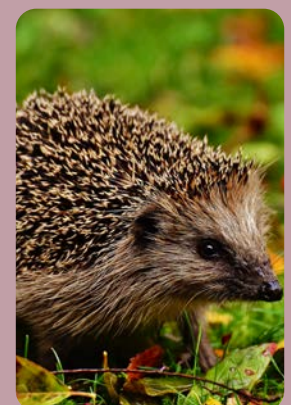
August is a good time to start planning ahead. Clear small patches for sowing hardy annual wildflowers like cornflower or poppy in early autumn.



### 8. Keep an eye out for hedgehogs

As evenings draw in, watch for hedgehogs feeding before hibernation. Avoid using slug pellets, and check compost heaps before turning.

Spending time in a wildlife garden is one of the simplest and most powerful ways to reconnect with nature. Whether you're watching bees flit between flowers, listening to birdsong at dusk, or gently tidying flower heads, each small moment invites stillness and wonder. A wildlife garden isn't just a home for creatures—it's a space where we can slow down, notice the seasons, and feel part of something bigger.



# Young Green Champions - Learning outdoors



Birmingham's youngest nature heroes are stepping up -  
and they're bringing big ideas in small wellies!

School may be out for summer, but that doesn't mean the learning stops—especially for our Young Green Champions.

Across Birmingham, children and young people are getting outside, exploring local parks, woodlands, and community gardens. Whether it's spotting butterflies, helping with planting, or joining nature-themed play sessions, these young volunteers are discovering the joy of connecting with wildlife. Through hands-on fun, they're learning about habitats, sustainability, and the importance of caring for green spaces. It's learning that's active, joyful, and memorable—and it all happens outdoors.

The Young Green Champions are showing that even in the holidays, curiosity, care, and community can flourish. After all, the best classrooms sometimes have leaves instead of walls!

## Learning Journeys Consulting



I've known Laura Wilson for many years, from her time in Birmingham City Council's Outdoor Education Service to her current role leading Learning Journeys Consulting. When she branched out on her own, she carried with her a spirit of creativity, learning and connection which is a gift she's now generously shared across the City of Nature Alliance.

Laura brought true entrepreneurship to the Alliance when she delivered Connecting Schools to Nature sessions at Greenwood Academy (Castle Vale), Bordesley Green Girls School & Calthorpe SEND School (Bordesley and Highgate ward) and CPD courses to support staff to integrate connection to nature within the schools timetable and on highlight cross curricular ways of integration as part of the City of Nature pilot. Her work isn't just educational, it is inspiring. She has a rare ability to design outdoor learning that is relevant to educational goals but also flexible to young people's interests while still nature-based.

As her LinkedIn profile notes: Laura has over 25 years' experience in Learning Outside the Classroom, meaning she knows how to design experiences that stick. Whether building secondary school programmes, crafting citizen science sessions or working with schools, her consultancy sits at the intersection of creativity, ecology and learning (LinkedIn).

Learning Journeys Consulting creates learning experiences that go beyond checklist outcomes also planting seeds of curiosity: sessions in woods, classrooms, riverbanks or empty plots. There's a focus on student leadership, inquiry and the environment, they are always rooted in place, always grounded in joy.

As the Council navigates how to nurture climate and nature-relevant education, Laura and her consultancy are providing an agile, responsive alternative to institutional training. She brings nimble design, civic imagination, and rooted experience.

**In the City of Nature Alliance, Learning Journeys Consulting adds entrepreneurial energy, pedagogic craft, and real-world impact. Working with Laura feels like planting new ideas—ideas that could grow, branch and root in every classroom, park and school across the city.**

# Legacy West Midlands (Legacy WM)

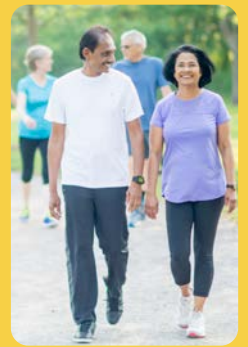
Legacy West Midlands (Legacy WM) has been part of the City of Nature Alliance since its founding—bringing candour, challenge, and community-led clarity from the start.

Though I've worked alongside them mostly through alliance meetings, their influence has always been tangible: honest, open, and sharply focused on making green connections real. Panellist input from Legacy WM helped keep us grounded—no drifting mission statements, just a focus on community impact. As their website says, they're a charity rooted in post-war migrant heritage but have grown into a powerful voice for wellbeing, arts, and inclusion in Birmingham.

On the ground, Legacy WM delivers practical tools with heart. Their Every Step Matters initiative builds on the Daily Mile model, creating safe, local walking or running routes that connect people to heritage and green spaces.

With a team of 11 passionate staff and more than 40 volunteers, they weave heritage trails, health initiatives, and cultural storytelling across Handsworth and beyond—including sensory walks and multi-generational activities. Their openness and honesty strengthen trust, and their small-scale projects often out-punch their size. Legacy WM's approach reminds us that landscape is more than flora and fauna—it's walking-for-wellbeing, storytelling, and rooted community connection.

**As members of the Alliance, they bring us grounding and openness, helping ensure we never lose our way—and always keep walking forward.**



## Patchwork Meadow

I first met Alison while we were both delivering children's nature sessions for The Active Wellbeing Society during the odd years of the Covid pandemic. I've always been struck by her energy she is not just active, she's one of our activists. She never lets us rest on our laurels, always pushing for more. That drive is at the heart of Patchwork Meadow.

Founded by Alison in North Edgbaston in 2020 at the start of lockdown, Patchwork Meadow is a small, volunteer-led group with a mighty mission: to bring back pollinators by creating dense networks of "pocket meadows." These miniature wildflower patches just one square metre each are planted in window boxes, planters, church grounds, cemeteries, tower blocks, youth centres and more across Birmingham and Sandwell.

Patchwork Meadow provides wildflower seed packets at a minimum donation of £1.50, with proceeds used to provide seeds free to under-resourced areas. Their patches act as vital pit stops for pollinators helping bees, butterflies and other insects thrive amid urban areas where nature often struggles. To date, they've helped create nearly 5,000 m<sup>2</sup> of meadow habitat across the city. They also run community workshops seed-bomb making, mini-meadows in egg cartons, bee activity trails and seed-sowing art projects in collaboration with arts groups and local events. The aim isn't just plants it's connection, pride, colour and collective action.

**In the Alliance Patchwork Meadow demonstrates how small acts, plants in planters or seeds sown on a bare patch, can weave together into a vibrant citywide tapestry of nature. Their activism is both playful and powerful. I'm constantly inspired by their action, creativity, and refusal to settle for anything less than a blooming pollinator friendly Birmingham.**



# National Trust & Birmingham City Council: Growing Together Toward Nature City

My memories of the National Trust stretch back many decades - long before “City of Nature” or “Nature City” were terms. But my experience was very little to do with cities and that has been one of the biggest changes for me. When I first learnt to drive (over forty years ago) I used to go and visit rural National Trust sites often, marvel at the landscapes and buildings, purchase special gifts for family and friends and yes - eat scones. I still do.

But fast forward to the Future Parks Accelerator (FPA) where the National Trust played a vital advisory role in helping city teams reimagine parks as vibrant, inclusive, and blue-green community spaces. Their belief in applied heritage, sustainable landscapes, and people-centred access helped us shape many of our pilot models in the heart of a city known for its industrial past.

Then in July 2025, Birmingham was officially named the UK’s first Nature City - a partnership led by Natural England, National Trust, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, investing £15.5m into cities aiming to embed nature in everyday life. That milestone draws directly from the vision both organisations championed.

On a local level, National Trust does also care for key heritage sites across the West Midlands: Wightwick Manor & Gardens, Clent Hills, Birmingham Back to Backs, and via community events at Birmingham Roundhouse which also houses NT’s regional office in the restored canal-side building, a joint venture with Canal & River Trust. Visitor programmes, summer festivals, wellbeing tours, and access initiatives all bring nature, history, and community together. Nationally, the Trust is part of the ambitious Nature Towns & Cities mission, a coordinated effort to ensure five million people have accessible nature nearby and one million children can play in nature by 2035.

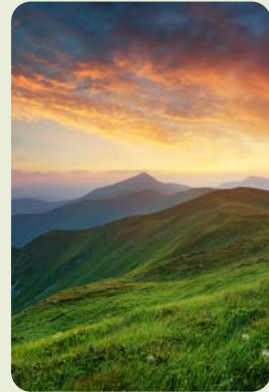
Their BlossomWatch campaign is a great example of public participation: crowdsourcing spring blossom maps, planting orchards along bus routes, and inviting residents to document seasonal change locally. The Pocket Park project takes the idea further supporting the community to design, deliver and care for and use new small green areas.

What makes the National Trust such a valuable partner isn’t just their heritage buildings or acres of green land, it’s how they bridge history, ecology, culture, and wellbeing into inclusive public programmes. Whether you’re on a heritage tour of the Back to Backs, attending community planting at Clent Hills, or joining wildlife walks at Wightwick, there’s a sense that nature and place belong to everyone.

Their journey with Birmingham City Council has grown from specific heritage projects to a strategic alliance helping shape the City of Nature Plan, joining with local partners to bring nature into every neighbourhood. Together, we’ve helped shift the city’s narrative: nature is not optional—it’s essential. The National Trust has been both heritage keeper and green visionary—and with us, they’ve helped a city dream bigger and greener.

So as summer wanes into a golden August and autumn begins its slow turn, I’m grateful for the seeds we’ve planted, the partnerships cultivated, and the tree-like growth before us.

There is a lot more work to do and - personally I feel - there is still room for some scones.



# Out and About in July with the the City's Park Rangers

## Get Active in Aston, Newtown & Nechells Parks!

The "Wild at Heart" programme is being delivered as part of a significant, time limited funding contribution from Public Health with defined targets for delivery set out in a Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) developed between Public Health and the Ranger Service. 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.

If you live in or near Aston, Newtown or Nechells ward and are you looking for a fun, rewarding way to enjoy the outdoors and give back to your community?

You can join our Park Rangers to help care for your local green spaces whether it's planting for pollinators, litter picking, or creating wildlife-friendly areas, your time makes a difference. Or bring the whole family and take part in our free nature-inspired activities perfect for all ages!

Come along, get stuck in, and help make our parks better for both people and wildlife

- No experience needed – just enthusiasm!
- Wear suitable outdoor clothing and footwear.
- **Check for cancellation in bad weather.**

For more information please email [Lickey.hub@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Lickey.hub@birmingham.gov.uk)

**Friday 1st August: Salford Park, B6 7TG**

**12 o'clock start – Meet by the notice board**

**Nature Walk around the park.**

**Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> August: Burbury Park, B19 2UP**

**12.30 – 2:30 pm – Meet at the Park Pavilion**

**Fun day with Burbury Community Forum and the Park Rangers**

**Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> August: Mansfield Green Park, B6 6LE**

**12.30 – 2 pm – Meet at the Play Ground**

**Park Fun – Free Children's Activities**

**Friday 8<sup>th</sup> August: Mount Street Rec, B7 5QT**

**12.30 – 2 pm**

**Park Fun – Free Children's Activities**

**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> August: Philip Street, B6 4PT**

**12 o'clock start – Meet by playground**

**Community Clean Up of park**

**Monday 11<sup>th</sup> August : Yellow Park, B19 2LA**

**12:30 – 2pm**

**Picnic in the park with Newtown Community forum + children's activities with The Rangers .**

**Some refreshments provided, please bring your own picnic!**

**(No BBQs please)**



**Continued on next page**

# Out and About in July with the the City's Park Rangers

**Tuesday 12th August: Salford Park, B6 7TG**

**12.30 – 2pm**

**Park Fun – Free Children's activities**

**Wednesday 13th August: Georges Park, B19 1PP**

**12.30 – 2pm**

**Meet by the Playground**

**Park Fun – Free Children's activities**

**Friday 15th August: Aston Park, B6 6JD**

**Starts at 12 o'clock**

**Meet in front of Aston Hall**

**Park Fun – Free Children's Activity – Mini Beast Hunt with Ranger Jim**



**Tuesday 19th August: Bloomsbury Park, B7 4NY**

**12 o'clock start – Meet by the playground**

**Community Clean Up of park**

**Thursday 21st August: St Georges Park, B19 3JJ**

**12:30 – 2pm – Meet by the playground**

**Free Family Fun activities**

**Saturday 23rd August: Aston Park, B6 6JD**

**12 o'clock start – Meet in front of Aston Hall.**

**History Walk around the park**

**Wednesday 27th August: Georges Park, B19 1PP**

**11:15am start – Meet by the playground**

**Flower Bed Care in the park**

**Thursday 28th August: Loxton Park (Rocket Park), Nechells, B4 4JJ**

**12.30 – 2pm**

**Park Fun – Free Children's activities**

The Ranger Service continues to work with the City of Nature Alliance of organisations and other partners to help inform and coordinate the delivery of community activities and aim to increase participation, volunteering, and appreciation of our green spaces across the city.

The wider Parks team 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. Hopefully in the future they will be able to build on what they have and increase support across the whole city once more.

The Rangers are still based at three sites across the city, Sutton Park , Lickey Hills Country Park and Sheldon Country Park that you can visits to enjoy Birmingham's countryside and speak to a Ranger to get advice about your local green space.



# RSPB Bird & Wildlife Conservation Charity

RSPB and I go way back, together we helped pioneer the Biodiversity Charter for Schools in Birmingham over twenty years ago. It feels like a lifetime ago. I also remember visiting Sandwell Nature Reserve over thirty years ago long before nature connections and social prescribing became news, but with the same passion for nature. Their website says: “We carry out conservation on a large scale, protect and restore habitats, and save species from extinction. We’re living in a nature and climate emergency, and we won’t stop whilst the threats persist.”

Today, RSPB is also helping lead a new chapter in nature and wellbeing: Nature Prescriptions - an innovative green social prescribing initiative now active in Birmingham, Sandwell, and Walsall. Trained professionals (GPs, link workers, wellbeing coaches) hold a guided conversation about nature with patients, supported by a seasonal calendar of mindful, nature-connection prompts - suggestions like listening to birdsong, noticing leaf patterns, or breathing in fresh air. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/about-us/annual-report/nature-boosts-health-and-wellbeing>

This free, accessible approach is already improving mental and physical health across the UK. Pilot studies, most notably in Derbyshire and Edinburgh, have shown measurable benefits: increased happiness, reduced anxiety, and higher life satisfaction, all at a significantly lower cost than conventional therapies. RSPB also provides training for health professionals, supporting referral systems and building trust between sectors.

Their local reach extends far beyond supportive tools: RSPB works with diverse community partners, offering walk and wellbeing sessions, nature-based interventions, and inclusive green engagement programmes connected to City of Nature membership. With RSPB now embedded in green prescribing networks, alliance members and park teams in Birmingham can benefit from shared training, resources, and proven wellbeing frameworks.

RSPB remains a national voice in nature care, but their impact in our city has become deeply local. As we reconnect with nature and renew our health, I’m proud to say our long-standing partner continues to evolve and make every breath outside count.



## Thrive Birmingham

The location of Thrive Birmingham holds a special place in my memory, it's based in the very park where my office was when I worked for the BCC Parks Service. More recently I vividly remember joining a cohort of Green Champions there for training in therapeutic horticulture as part of the City of Nature pilot. It was not only a day of learning, but a chance to connect more deeply with the Champions, meeting some in person for the first time, a truly lovely experience. Most recently I met up with Thrive's Regional Centre Manager Sam Gamblin who showed me round the site to see the improvements and enjoy the gardens - in the rain.

Thrive's garden sits in the historic TV gardens of King's Heath Park—once the backdrop for Gardeners' World and Pebble Mill broadcasts. As part of the NHS-recognized charity, Thrive delivers Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (STH) programmes for people living with disabilities, ill health, or supporting roles such as carers. At the Birmingham site, they offer tailored sessions: General Sessions for adults with health or learning needs, Carers Connect, Growing Out (for women with mental health concerns), and Grow & Learn, a practical City & Guilds-accredited training programme for young adults aged.

With support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Thrive's Birmingham garden programme now includes a series of guided garden tours, seasonal events and expanded outreach across Park visitors, community sites, schools and care homes. Thrive's impact is deep and measurable: over 13,000 therapeutic gardening sessions were delivered across the UK in 2023–24 alone, improving wellbeing, confidence, skills, and social connection for hundreds locally. Their personalised, nature-based interventions are grounded in inclusion and hope.

**Especially meaningful is how Thrive allows people to grow—not just plants—but belonging, calm, and creativity. As members of our Alliance, they bring a living model of what green care can achieve.**

# WASH project - Norton Hall

I'm excited to introduce Norton Hall's WASH Project—one of our newest City of Nature Alliance members, but working tirelessly in Ward End from the very start. Ward End Park was the jobs-and-skills hub during the Future Parks Accelerator (FPA) project, so it's no wonder Norton Hall's Dolphin Centre and WASH Project have stepped up to deliver climate-action, access, and green jobs locally.



Launched as part of Norton Hall's outreach at The Dolphin Centre, the Washwood Heath Adaptation & Sustainability Hub (WASH) is a five-year programme funded by the National Lottery Climate Action Fund and local donors, aiming to Connect, Do, Learn and Lead in the local community through nature and sustainability action.

Through WASH, residents gain access to opportunities across Ward End Park—forest school, habitat surveys, food growing, ecological water surveys, even digital inclusion and employability workshops. The WASH Hub includes a vibrant Lakeside Café, community allotment sessions, and events like guided walks, open days, and storytelling circles [Norton Hall](#).

Early in July I spent a wonderful morning visiting Sarah Robertshaw (WASH Project Manager) at Ward End Park. We started at the White House next to the carpark, chatted in the garden, visited the Urban Harvest Balcony and shared a coffee in the Lakeside Café at the Dolphin Centre. Is there still work to do in the park - yes. But with [Norton Hall Children & Family Centre](#) working together with the local community, [Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust](#) the Friends of Ward End Park and [Birmingham City Council](#) more improvements will be possible. It was so positive to see how the power of collaboration and passion gets things done.

WASH delivers accredited training—Forest School qualification, ecology and conservation levels, and skills pathways into green jobs. Its focus on confidence-building, inclusion, and local action makes it truly standout.

As an Alliance member, WASH brings powerful energy, rooted place-based action, and opportunity: people learning, nature recovering, and hope growing in B8 every day.

## Ward End Park

Ward End park has a long history as a focal point at the heart of the local community. The 54-acre green space was once medieval open fields and then, later, formed the grounds of Ward End Park House, which dates back to 1759. At the turn of the 20th century Birmingham Corporation bought the land and the park was laid out and opened to the public in 1904. Later, a large boating lake was dug out in the winter of 1908 to 1909.

Nowadays, the lake remains a popular spot to stroll along or a place to catch a glimpse of wildlife. A number of sporting activities can be pursued in the park, such as basketball and tennis and there are playground facilities and plenty of opportunities to walk on well-laid paths around the lake and the park's open green spaces.

[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/directory\\_record/9178/ward\\_end\\_park](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/directory_record/9178/ward_end_park)

The distinctive Grade II-listed two-storey Ward End Park House (The White House), which is notable for its Stucco-style exterior, still stands in the park surrounded by trees and colourful flower beds – this feature is not open to the public.

**Formally established in 2007, the Friends of Ward End Park (Find them on Facebook) have since delivered many projects and events.**

**Activities include:**

- Promoting the park
- Voluntary maintenance

# Earth Stories - Memories, Hopes and Happenings

As we move through August and begin to sense autumn around the corner with the light a little lower and the air a little cooler I've been taking a moment to pause and reflect. Writing this month's features on each of the City of Nature Alliance members has been a walk down many paths I've known for years, and some I'm only just discovering. It's reminded me of how far we've come - and how much we've grown.

Birmingham has become the UK's first "Nature City"! An incredible milestone that recognises the city's deep-rooted commitment to people, place, and planet. From urban woodlands and canals to community gardens and nature-rich parks, this honour reflects the collective effort of residents, organisations, and volunteers who have championed access to green space for all. It's a moment to celebrate not just the title, but the thriving partnerships, bold vision, and everyday acts of care that brings nature closer to every doorstep.

<https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/news/article/1600/birmingham-becomes-uks-first-nature-city>

What strikes me most is the variety of voices, places, and passions represented in this alliance. From long-standing partners like the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust and Birmingham Open Spaces Forum, to newer arrivals like WASH Project at Norton Hall and the national reach of the Field Studies Council, each member brings something unique. Whether it's therapeutic horticulture in King's Heath, rewilding in Edgbaston, canal conservation, or nature education in schools and libraries, this alliance really is a tapestry. And like any good tapestry, it's stronger for its many threads.

Throughout this journey, I've been reminded that behind every organisation are people - many of whom I've had the pleasure of working alongside over the years. Some of you I met as fellow park rangers, some through training sessions, community events, or collaborative projects. You've brought knowledge, challenge, compassion, and energy. And it's this human element, the relationships, that makes our shared work so powerful.

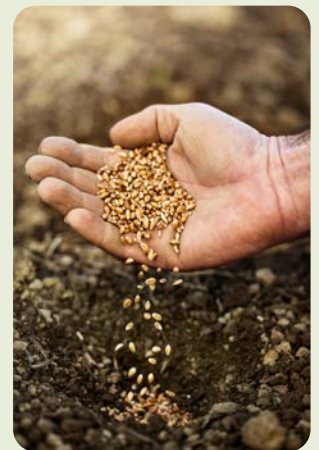
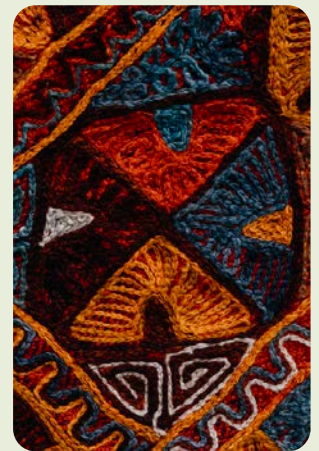
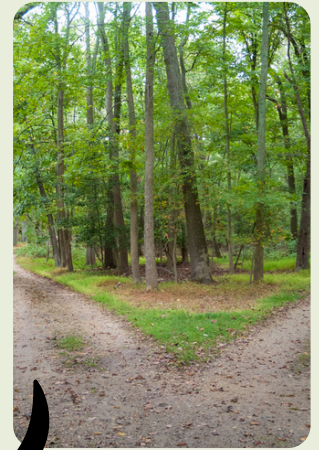
But it would be impossible to reflect on our progress without also shining a light on our volunteer Green Champions. You are the ones who carry the spirit of this movement into your schools, parks, libraries, surgeries, community halls, and street corners. You sow seeds - literally and metaphorically. You organise, talk, walk, host, plant, and advocate. You support events, share ideas, offer feedback, and carry the values of the City of Nature into places we'd never reach without you.

Through your efforts, we've begun to change not just how we use our green spaces, but how we value them. how we relate to them, and to each other. Whether you've led a nature walk, handed out seed packets, hosted a community picnic, or just paused to share the joy of birdsong with someone who needed it - thank you. Your work is changing this city.

August is often a time to catch our breath - a lull before the busy return of autumn routines. I hope you find a moment this month to pause, reflect, and notice how much has grown. We are in the middle of something important. We are helping shape a future where nature is not an afterthought, but a shared value and everyday joy.

In September it's not only the start of autumn but it's also back to school and we will be taking a look at learning in all it's forms.

With thanks and appreciation,  
Deborah Needle - Editor, Green Champions Newsletter





# Birmingham City Council's Route to Net Zero

Net zero is the idea of reducing our emissions down to zero or as close as possible to prevent further temperature increases. To find out more about BCC's Net Zero journey visit BCC website:

[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50282/climate\\_change/2641/what\\_is\\_climate\\_change\\_and\\_net\\_zero/4](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50282/climate_change/2641/what_is_climate_change_and_net_zero/4)

To keep up to date you can receive the BCC **Greener Birmingham Bulletin** by email go to :

[https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20179/news\\_and\\_media/201/sign\\_up\\_for\\_regular\\_email\\_updates\\_from\\_birmingham\\_city\\_council#:~:text=Subscribe%20to%20the%20Birmingham%20Bulletin,on%20a%20range%20of%20topics](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20179/news_and_media/201/sign_up_for_regular_email_updates_from_birmingham_city_council#:~:text=Subscribe%20to%20the%20Birmingham%20Bulletin,on%20a%20range%20of%20topics)

scroll down and select the "Climate Change, Nature and Net Zero" option.



## Natural England - Health and Environment

Natural England have Health and Environment Lead roles to support and create connections between any Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprises, health practitioners, Community Wellbeing Roles, or local authorities interested in increasing the offer of Green / Blue Social Prescribing. To receive the West Midlands Natural England newsletter please contact: [Amber.Marquand@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:Amber.Marquand@naturalengland.org.uk)



## Birmingham TreePeople - Urban Forest Volunteers

Birmingham TreePeople, organise and oversee the Urban Forestry Volunteer Scheme in the city. It was originally set up as part of the Tree Council's Tree Warden Scheme by Birmingham City Council's Tree Officers in 2016, and is now one of the largest of its kind in the UK. For more information contact: <https://birminghamtreepeople.org.uk/about-us/urban-forest-volunteers/>



## 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/>



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More Information on : <https://naturallybirmingham.org/>

