

GREEN CHAMPIONS



Noticing Nature

O hushed October morning mild,
Thy leaves have ripened to the fall;
Tomorrow's wind, if it be wild,
Should waste them all.

October - by Robert Frost



Health - Naturally

Eat Seasonal Foods:

Incorporate autumn produce like apples, pears, squash, courgettes, nuts, seeds and pulses into your diet for increased nutrients and antioxidants.

Stay Hydrated:

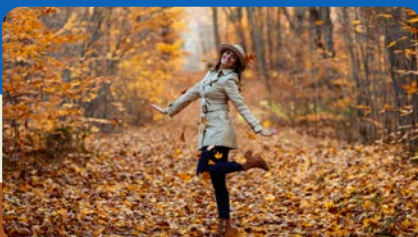
Keep drinking plenty of water to maintain your hydration, even as the weather changes.

Moisturise:

The dry autumn air can lead to dry, cracked skin, so use moisturisers for skin and lips regularly to prevent this and potential infections.

Prepare for Cold:

Start to increase layers of clothing. Look out your woolly socks, hats, gloves and scarves to get ready for cooler days.



Learn more about - Our City

Birmingham's story is long and layered, built on geology, rivers, and the energy of its people. From its early days as a Saxon settlement, it grew into a medieval market town, then expanded rapidly during the Industrial Revolution.

The city became known as the "workshop of the world," famed for metalworking, jewellery, and innovation. Its canals, that are said to stretch for more miles than the Venetian canal system, carried coal, iron, and goods that shaped a global reputation. But Birmingham is more than its industry: it is also a city of parks, culture, and communities from around the world.

This edition provides only a glimpse into the life that inhabits this city of the midland. Every street, building, and green space has its own special story.

Why not take time to explore Birmingham's past present and future and see what you discover?



City of Nature Programme Update

Birmingham the first Nature City in the UK - Building the foundation



There are three stages for the Nature City Foundation accreditation.

Stage one - Setting the vision.

Bring partners and stakeholders together to create a coherent and clear, ambitious vision for the future of the place. This is an opportunity to reflect on existing visions that might be held by separate organisations and come together to consider the big challenges and opportunities for the town or city to address in the medium to long term. Our evidence to support this included videos and animations to bring our vision to life, write-ups, photos and videos from co-design workshops, outputs from public engagement and consultation, evidence of senior sponsorship within key organisations or from key stakeholders.



Stage two - Building strong partnerships.

Build on existing partnerships and create new partnerships with a broad range of stakeholders through which you can bring the vision to life. Partnership working is essential to delivering long term change. It is an opportunity to co-create, codify ways of working and develop partnership structures. Reflect on how existing partnerships fit into the bigger picture, bring in others and formalise the sense of working together to achieve a shared vision. We provided evidence of strong partnership working. This includes a memorandum of understanding, partnership agreements, terms of reference, frameworks for partnership working and decision making.



Stage three - Writing a green infrastructure strategy and improvement plan.

Create a strategic green infrastructure (GI) plan that improves green and blue infrastructure in the area based on the shared vision. This is the opportunity to think about how the place will do a wide range of things, such as improve quality of life for urban communities, create climate resilient towns and cities, support nature recovery, deliver net zero targets, address social inequality and environmental decline and ensure everyone can access high-quality green and blue spaces within their local area. We chose to develop a high-level strategy and an improvement/action plan that includes more detail about the delivery of the strategic aims. Our evidence is the City of Nature Plan and the East Birmingham Green Infrastructure Master Plan.



City of Nature Plan: <https://naturallybirmingham.org/birmingham-city-of-nature-delivery-framework/>
East Birmingham Green Infrastructure Master Plan: <https://naturallybirmingham.org/urban-nature-development/>

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>

If you would like to join the City of Nature Alliance of organisations please email us at Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk



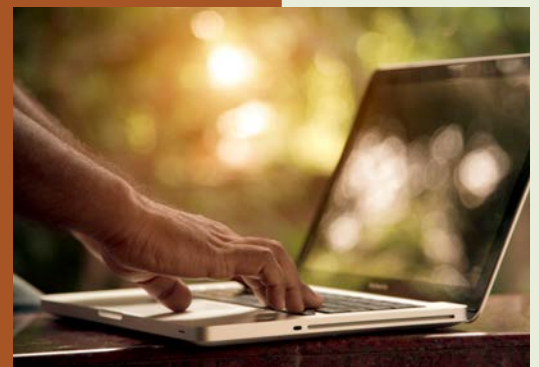
The City of Nature Online:

Webinar: Birmingham as a Nature City

11th October 2025 online on teams: 2pm to 3pm

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/> 

6th October - World Habitat Day & Birmingham: Nature, Homes, and Hope

Each year, the United Nations marks World Habitat Day, a time to reflect on the state of our cities and towns, and the basic right of all to adequate shelter. The theme is not just about buildings it's about the interface of humans, nature, and habitat. As Birmingham positions itself as a City of Nature, the values behind Habitat Day resonate deeply with our local mission.



Birmingham faces many of the same challenges that global cities do: housing demand, densification, infrastructure pressure, and environmental stress. But the city also has remarkable assets: a rich network of canals, parks, green corridors, woodlands, and open spaces places where people and wildlife intersect. The question we must ask is: how do we build homes and communities that don't erode nature, but instead embrace it?

A truly resilient and equitable city must ensure every neighbourhood has access to safe, green habitat. Over 40% of Birmingham's population lives within a kilometre of the canal network a reminder that many residents already live close to nature's front door. But proximity is not enough. We must make green spaces safer, more welcoming, biodiverse, and better linked to homes, schools, and workplaces.

The Canal Action Plan (CAP), the City of Nature Plan, and regeneration plans across Birmingham are opportunities to embed the goals of Habitat Day locally. Homes should open onto green streets and gardens, not solely concrete. New developments must include nature-rich courtyards, rain-friendly paving, tree canopies, and ecological corridors, so that habitat is woven into the built environment.

Social justice is central: some wards continue to suffer from green inequity. Habitat Day reminds us that adequate habitat is a basic human need. It's not only about aesthetics but about health, climate resilience, and inclusion. Communities must be involved early in shaping how nature and homes co-exist. The "natural health service" model suggests that parks, woodland, wetlands, and canals should be part of preventative health care accessible to all, especially in areas of higher deprivation.

Habitat Day also focuses on disaster resilience and environmental change. In Birmingham, that means planning for flooding, heat stress, and biodiversity loss at the same time we build housing and densify. Nature-based solutions like rain gardens, tree swales, wildflower buffers should become standard in housing schemes, not optional extras.

Education, stewardship, and connection are the bridges between aspiration and impact. Green champions, schools, Friends of Parks groups, and nature outreach should be integral to urban planning, so that people don't see nature as an "add-on" but as part of daily life.

On this Habitat Day, Birmingham can commit to a vision of integrated habitat and housing cities where homes breathe with nature, where wildlife and people share space, and where every resident can live not just in the city, but with the city. That will be a legacy in which Habitat Day is not just marked, but embodied.

More canals than Venice?

Birmingham is often described as having “more miles of canal than Venice,” but these waterways are much more than a quirky fact. They are a vital part of the city’s heritage, landscape, and future.

The origins of Birmingham’s canal network lie in the vision of James Brindley, one of the 18th century’s most influential engineers. In the 1760s, Brindley designed winding, contour-following canals that linked coalfields, ironworks, and workshops to the growing markets of the Midlands. His work helped spark the Industrial Revolution in the region, creating the arteries that fed the “workshop of the world.”

A generation later, Thomas Telford transformed the network with straighter, more direct routes, soaring aqueducts, and innovative engineering solutions. His improvements increased efficiency and capacity, turning Birmingham into a hub of industry and trade. Between them, Brindley and Telford gave the city the infrastructure that powered its rise on the global stage.

Today, the role of canals has shifted, but their importance remains just as strong. No longer filled with coal boats and barges, they now act as corridors for both wildlife and people. Moorhens, kingfishers, and dragonflies thrive along the water’s edge, while bats swoop overhead on summer evenings.

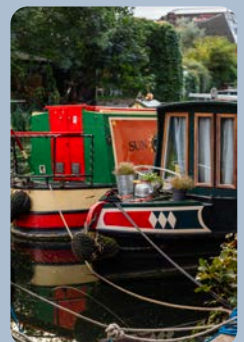
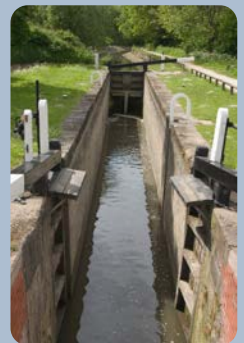
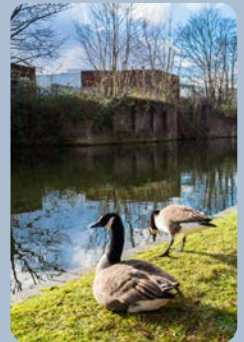
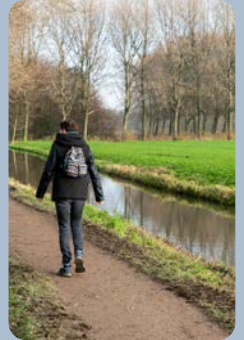
Towpaths link up parks and open spaces, creating routes for walking, cycling, and commuting. For many communities, canals are the most accessible way to encounter nature close to home.

They are also vital for health and wellbeing. A stroll along the towpath or a moment sitting by the water can ease stress, restore calm, and improve mental health. Whether used by joggers, anglers, families, or commuters, canals provide a quiet, reflective thread through the busy fabric of the city.

Economically, the network contributes to regeneration. Once-neglected wharves and warehouses now host businesses, cafés, and cultural venues. Developments in Digbeth and the Jewellery Quarter showcase how canal-side settings can blend heritage with creativity, creating places where people want to live, work, and spend time.

The canals are also part of Birmingham’s future resilience. They help manage surface water, provide shade and cooling in summer, and connect people with the natural environment which are all vital in a changing climate. Just as Brindley and Telford adapted the waterways for the needs of their time, so we must reimagine them for ours.

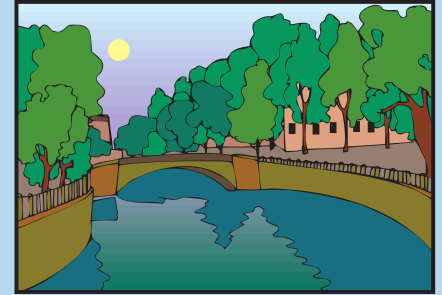
In short, Birmingham’s canals are more than water. They are our heritage, habitat, health, and hope acting as lifelines running through the city, reminding us that the spaces we inherit can always be renewed for generations to come.



Have your say - Birmingham's Canal Action Plan : A Partnership for People, Place and Nature

Birmingham City Council (BCC) is working in partnership with the Canal & River Trust (CRT) to produce a Canal Action Plan (CAP) that will shape how the city's waterways evolve over the coming decades.

The CAP will align with the emerging Birmingham Local Plan (2026–2044) and the Central Birmingham Framework 2024 – Vision for Development, ensuring canals sit at the heart of regeneration and placemaking.



Public consultation on Canal Action Plan Part 1 is scheduled for early 2026.

Comments will be invited via BCC Be Heard, alongside two in-person sessions hosted by BCC and CRT.

If you or your organisation would like to engage with the Canal Action Plan, you don't have to wait for the consultations, please email:

Evan Hui, Development Planning Officer: Evan.hui@birmingham.gov.uk



Birmingham's canal network is unique, contributing to the city's distinctive character and offering rare opportunities for people to interact with water and nature in a major urban area. Based on ONS mid-2020 small-area estimates, 42% of the city's population (476,233 people) live within 1 kilometre of a canal evidence of just how close these blue-green corridors are to everyday life.

Looking ahead, canals are central to Birmingham's future regeneration especially in Digbeth and the Gun Quarter where thoughtful development can enhance placemaking, community engagement and inclusive access to nature.

The purpose of the CAP is to provide a clear, practical framework that:

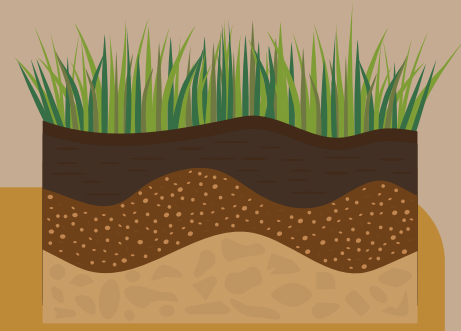
- Identifies canal locations for improvement and enhancement—making them more accessible, sustaining the natural environment and protecting canal heritage.
- Offers guidance to developers working on sites close to the network.
- Highlights the canal network's importance to residents and communities, increasing use and stewardship.
- Informs master planning for areas connected to canals and the use of S106 funding.
- Attracts wider investment and supports new growth through positive placemaking.
- Promotes the canal network in the city centre to UK and international visitors, creating new canal destinations.

The CAP will be delivered in two phases. Phase 1 focuses on primarily city-centre locations, with Phase 2 addressing stretches and corridors beyond the centre.



Let's get down and dirt-y.

What's lies beneath our feet?



From ancient rocks to living soils, the ground beneath us shapes our city and our future.

You can explore this through the story below with a quick-read checklist and a hands-on activity you can try at home (plus videos on the Naturally Birmingham YouTube channel!).

When we walk through Birmingham's streets, parks, and neighbourhoods, it's easy to focus on what's above ground - buildings, trees, traffic, people. Even when we look down we most often see tarmac, flagstones and hard landscaping. But the story of the city begins further beneath our feet, in the geology and soils that shape everything we see today. Birmingham sits on a varied geological foundation, with layers that tell a story stretching back hundreds of millions of years. To the south, you find the red sandstones and mudstones of the Triassic period, laid down in deserts long before people arrived. To the north and east, the Coal Measures of the Carboniferous era supplied the fuel that drove Birmingham's industries. Beneath parts of the city lie ancient limestone and clays, shaping not just the land, but the history of quarrying, brickmaking, and building.

On top of this bedrock sits the living layer: soil. Often overlooked, soils are rich ecosystems in their own right, home to countless organisms that recycle nutrients, store carbon, and support the plants that feed us and clothe our landscapes in green. Birmingham's soils are patchworks too: clay-rich soils in some areas make for heavy, waterlogged gardens, while lighter sandy soils elsewhere support heathlands and quick-draining allotments.

Understanding what's under our feet matters. Geology influences our buildings and transport routes. Soils influence how our gardens grow, how parks are maintained, and even how the city responds to flooding or drought. They are also archives recording past climates, vegetation, and human activity. So next time you're out walking, take a moment to think about the unseen foundation beneath you. Birmingham's future from climate resilience to food growing depends on the health of the ground below as much as the plans we make above it.

Try This: Explore the Soil Beneath Your Feet

Want to get to know your local soil? Try a simple jar test:

1. Collect a small sample of soil from your garden or local park.
2. Place it in a clear jar with water, shake well, and leave it to settle.
3. Watch as the layers form: sand sinks fastest, silt in the middle, clay at the top.

This quick experiment shows what your soil is made of and why it behaves the way it does.

Naturally Birmingham YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/8ibMvdWJWP0>



The Oak Tree – Our wild residents

Stand beneath a mature oak tree and you're looking at more than just a tree. You're looking at a vast living tower block - a vertical city teeming with residents, visitors, and commuters.

In the upper canopy, birds find nesting sites and vantage points. Blue tits and great tits feed their young on caterpillars among the leaves, while woodpeckers drill into the bark in search of insects. High branches are highways for squirrels, and on summer nights bats patrol the airspace for moths.

The middle floors are home to countless invertebrates. Oak leaves support over 2,000 species, from aphids and caterpillars to moths and beetles. The rough bark hosts mosses and lichens, each sheltering miniature worlds. Spiders weave webs between twigs, creating invisible netting for the aerial traffic.

On the ground floor, fungi break down fallen leaves into nutrients, while beetles and woodlice recycle decaying wood. The root systems provide shelter for mammals like hedgehogs and voles, and the acorns fuel a whole economy of jays, mice, and deer.

Like any tower block, an oak is never still. It's a place of constant movement, growth, and change a community in its own right. Protecting oaks means protecting whole neighbourhoods of life.

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/oak-tree-wildlife/>



Plant Populations and Habitats – Living Communities

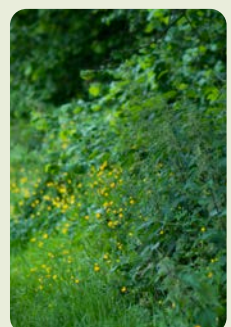
Plants are more than the backdrop to our lives they are living communities, shaping and shaped by the places they grow. Each habitat has its own character, rhythm, and society of plants.

In a meadow, grasses sway alongside wildflowers like oxeye daisy, knapweed, and clover. Together they form a constantly shifting population that feeds pollinators, shelters small mammals, and stores carbon in the soil. A meadow is not a static carpet of colour but a dynamic neighbourhood, responding to the seasons and to how it is managed.

On a heath, plants adapt to poor, acidic soils and open skies. Heather, gorse, and bilberry create a tough but beautiful mosaic, able to withstand wind, grazing, and fire. These species are specialists, thriving where others cannot, and in doing so they support rare insects, reptiles, and birds that depend on them.

A hedgerow is a linear woodland, made up of hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, and bramble. It is both boundary and corridor, a dense, layered habitat where flowers feed bees, berries sustain birds, and tangled roots give refuge to hedgehogs and insects.

Together, meadows, heaths, and hedgerows remind us that plants are not infrastructure to be managed but living populations - communities of life on which so much else depends.



Walking Naturally – Ranger Service Nature Walks

Join a Ranger-led walk in Birmingham and you quickly realise that the city is more than its streets, benches, and brickwork. Nature is always present, woven into the fabric of our everyday lives but it's sometimes hidden, sometimes overlooked, but always there if you know where to look.



Imagine, for a moment, that we could peel back the veneer of the manmade landscape - the tarmac, lampposts, bus stops, and fences - and instead see only the natural world beneath. What would Birmingham look like then?

The Rea, Tame, and Cole rivers would carve their way through valleys fringed with woodland. Ancient oak trees would still stand proud on high ground, while heaths and wetlands stretched across the areas we now call suburbs. Birdsong and the rustle of mammals in the undergrowth would provide the soundtrack, instead of traffic. The air would be alive with insects and the seasonal scent of blossom or leaf mould. The skyline might be marked by rolling ridges and spires of woodland rather than towers and chimneys.



This may sound like an act of imagination, but the truth is that traces of this natural Birmingham are still here. They survive in the curves of a stream, the old hedgerow that marks a forgotten field boundary, or the veteran trees that anchor a park. Our city is built on layers of nature, and by walking with Rangers, we learn to read those layers again.



The Ranger Service plays a vital role in helping people reconnect with this hidden Birmingham. Their guided walks are not just about spotting wildlife although that is always part of the joy, but about understanding the stories that landscapes hold. A fallen log can tell of woodland ecology, lichens can speak of air quality, and even the plants in a crack of pavement remind us of the resilience of life.



Participants on these walks often remark how different familiar places feel when seen through this lens. A local park becomes a habitat mosaic. A patch of scrub, sometimes dismissed as untidy, is revealed as a vital shelter for pollinators and nesting birds. Even the soil underfoot becomes a character in the story, storing carbon, filtering water, and feeding the trees above. Walking naturally also brings wellbeing. By slowing down, listening, and noticing, people often feel more grounded and less stressed. The presence of Rangers adds reassurance and expertise, encouraging questions and sparking conversations. It's a collective act of rediscovery and a reminder that resilience, health, and joy are all strengthened by our connection to the natural world.

In a city like Birmingham, facing the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss, and rapid urban growth, these walks are more than leisure. They are acts of education and resilience-building. They show us that Birmingham is not just built on nature - it is nature, constantly adapting and growing around us.



So the next time you see a Ranger walk advertised, join in. You may find that by walking naturally, you begin to see your city anew not just as bricks and roads, but as part of a living, breathing landscape.

Birmingham: Toward a City of Natural Health Services

What if nature itself could be treated as a form of health service one where parks, canals, woodlands, and green corridors are not just amenities but active contributors to physical and mental wellbeing? In Birmingham, this possibility is already unfolding.

Birmingham is well-placed for this shift. The city has 591 parks and open spaces covering over 3,500 hectares that's more than any equivalent-sized European city. Many of these are within walking distance of people's homes, creating an opportunity for nature to be part of everyday life.

The connection between green space and health is not new to Birmingham. George Cadbury, the Quaker philanthropist, built Bournville Village with parks, trees, and playing fields to ensure working families had space for exercise, fresh air, and leisure believing that healthy surroundings created healthy people. Likewise, Louisa Ann Ryland, one of Birmingham's greatest benefactors, gave land for Cannon Hill Park in 1873 specifically for the "healthful recreation" of the city's residents. These legacies show how deeply the idea of nature as health service is embedded in Birmingham's history.

Today, modern research provides evidence to match their vision. Studies show that access to green and blue spaces is linked with lower rates of cardiovascular disease, reduced mental health burdens, and fewer GP visits. One UK analysis cited by Natural England suggests that regular access to greenspace could reduce GP attendance by up to 28%, saving the NHS millions. Urban green spaces also cool cities during heatwaves, improves air quality, and reduce climate-related health risks.

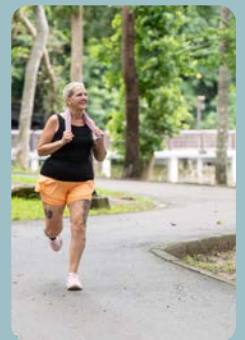
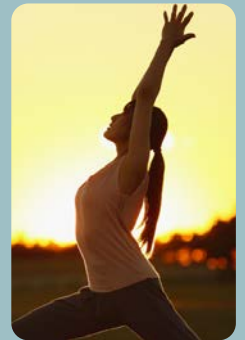
In Birmingham, the City of Nature Plan already embeds health and wellbeing as core outcomes. The Environmental justice mapping, and the Future Parks Standard all aim to raise green equity and ensure that every resident benefits, especially in wards with the greatest health inequalities.

So how do we move from green spaces as amenities to nature as a health service?

- Social prescribing – Doctors and health professionals can “prescribe” time in woodlands, canal walks, or community gardens as part of preventative care.
- Therapeutic gardens & green care – Purpose-designed spaces near hospitals, care homes, and community centres support rehabilitation, quiet reflection, and connection.
- Equitable access – Tackling barriers of confidence, culture, or accessibility ensures that all communities feel welcome in green spaces.
- Everyday greenery – Street trees and visible planting matter just as much as large parks, shaping the health benefits people feel in their daily lives.

To realise this vision, partners across health, planning, parks, and communities must work together. Birmingham's canals, parks, and open spaces are not just the backdrop to life: they are active agents in supporting health, reducing inequality, and building resilience.

By treating nature as a health service, Birmingham can honour the legacy of Cadbury and Ryland while leading the way in re-imagining what it means to care for a city not only through hospitals and clinics, but through the everyday landscapes we all share.



“Domestic” Plants – Part of the Urban Landscapes

When we think about domestication, our minds usually turn to animals: dogs, cats, horses, and livestock. We understand how wolves became dogs, or how wild cattle were bred into dairy cows. But we rarely apply the same idea to plants even though our gardens, parks, and city landscapes are filled with “domesticated” plants that often bear little resemblance to their wild relatives.



In many ways, amenity horticulture could be seen as the plant equivalent of pet-keeping. Just as we have bred dogs for temperament, appearance, or particular tasks, we have bred plants for colour, form, and utility. The roses in our gardens, the bedding plants in park displays, or the clipped hedges along our streets are no more “natural” than a spaniel or a Siamese cat. They are the results of long human relationships, shaped by culture, trade, and fashion.



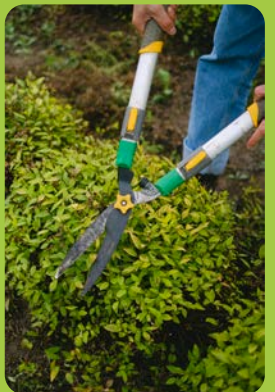
This is not to diminish them. Like pets, domestic plants give joy, beauty, and companionship. A bright border of geraniums or a winter flowering cherry can lift spirits just as a friendly dog might. They invite us to care, to notice, and to find delight in the everyday. They also serve practical purposes: stabilising soils, shading streets, softening buildings, and providing year-round greenery.

Yet domestication has consequences. Pets are dependent on us, they need feeding, shelter, and care. So too with many cultivated plants. Annual bedding must be replanted each year. Lawns require mowing and watering. Exotic species may not support local wildlife, and some can even become invasive if they escape cultivation. In this sense, domesticated plants create responsibility: our choices shape not just the look of a space but the ecology around it.



Thinking of plants like we do pets can help us see both the value and the limitations of amenity horticulture. They are companions, but not substitutes for wild nature. A bedding scheme may give a burst of seasonal colour, but it will not sustain the complex web of life that a wildflower meadow does. A clipped hedge may mark a boundary, but it may not provide the more diverse nesting habitat of a native hedgerow.

Birmingham City Council is responsible for caring for thousands of “domestic plants” across parks, streets, and public spaces. Like pets, these plants rely on regular attention, from planting and watering to pruning, mowing, and replacing seasonal displays. This work keeps the city green, welcoming, and uplifting, but it also carries costs and responsibilities. Choices about which plants to grow affect not just appearance, but biodiversity, climate resilience, and maintenance needs. By managing these living assets carefully, the Council can balance beauty with function, ensuring that Birmingham’s landscapes remain healthy, sustainable, and enjoyable for all.



Perhaps the challenge for the future is about that balance: to enjoy our amenity plants while making space for their wild cousins. Amenity horticulture can evolve, moving beyond purely ornamental displays to embrace planting schemes that also deliver food for pollinators, habitat for wildlife, and resilience for climate change. Just as responsible pet ownership means providing care and respecting the animal’s nature, responsible horticulture means choosing plants that contribute to the wider ecosystem as well as human wellbeing.



So next time you admire a flower bed in a city park or plant up your garden containers, think of them as the pets of our landscapes: beloved, dependent, expressive of culture but always part of a bigger relationship between people, plants, and the natural world.

Halloween: From Ancient Ireland to Today

Halloween may feel like a modern festival of costumes, pumpkins, and sweets, but its roots stretch back thousands of years to ancient Ireland.

The tradition began with Samhain (pronounced sow-in), a Celtic festival marking the end of the harvest and the beginning of winter. It was a time of transition, when people believed the boundary between the living and the spirit world grew thin. Bonfires were lit to ward off evil, people wore disguises to confuse wandering spirits, and offerings were left for ancestors.

When Christianity spread through Ireland, Samhain blended with the Church's feast of All Saints' (All Hallows') Day on 1 November. The evening before became known as All Hallows' Eve that was eventually shortened to Halloween. The focus shifted, but many of the older customs endured: lighting lanterns, wearing costumes, and remembering the dead. The Irish carried these traditions across the Atlantic during the 19th century.

In America, Halloween mixed with other cultural influences, adding pumpkins instead of turnips for lanterns, trick-or-treating, and an emphasis on community festivities. From there, it spread widely, becoming the celebration we know today.

At its heart, Halloween still reflects its origins: a moment of change, a respect for cycles of life and death, and a reminder that stories, symbols, and traditions connect us across centuries.



Mist, Cobwebs, and Fungi – Nature's Halloween

As October deepens, the natural world offers its own seasonal theatre which is perhaps part of the reason we so easily connect it with Halloween.

Walk out on a misty autumn morning and you may notice cobwebs strung across hedges, fences, and grass, each strand suddenly visible, jewelled with dew. For most of the year these webs are hidden, but autumn mists reveal them in their thousands appearing out of thin air. The effect can feel otherworldly with ghostly veils stretched across the landscape, reminding us that spiders are tireless architects working just beyond our sight. No wonder cobwebs became a symbol of mystery and spookiness.

At the same time, fungi seem to appear almost overnight. One day a patch of grass looks empty, the next it hosts a cluster of toadstools. In truth, the underground mycelium has been growing quietly all year. Autumn's damp conditions trigger the sudden growth of fruiting bodies, releasing spores to continue the cycle. To our eyes, this sudden materialisation seems magical with strange shapes and strange colours emerging as if from nowhere. Folklore has long connected fungi with fairy rings, witches, and the supernatural.

Together, these seasonal sights feed into Halloween traditions. Cobwebs, mist, and fungi are part of the natural rhythms of autumn, but they also evoke mystery, transformation, and the thin boundary between seen and unseen. As nights lengthen and the year turns, it's easy to understand why our ancestors wove these symbols into tales of spirits, magic, and the uncanny.

Next time you see a glistening web or a cluster of fungi, pause to notice the enchantment. Nature's own Halloween is playing out under our feet and before our eyes.



Nature Versus Natural - What is the cost?

When we talk about “nature,” we often imagine wilderness: mountains, forests, rivers, and wild animals. In contrast, “natural” is a word we apply more loosely to food, clothing, even behaviour. We use it to mean “untainted” or “as it should be.” But how useful is this divide? Are “nature” and “natural” really different things, or are they two shades of the same truth?

The cultivated bananas we eat today are not found growing wild; they are the result of thousands of years of human cultivation and selective breeding from wild, seed-filled, and less palatable ancestral plants. The modern banana is also a triploid plant, meaning it has an uneven number of chromosomes, making it sterile and unable to reproduce without human intervention through methods like cloning.

At one level, the difference seems obvious. Wild nature is self-willed. It grows, adapts, and evolves without our intervention. A meadow of native grasses and wildflowers, spreading according to soil and season, feels different from a municipal flowerbed replanted every spring. A fox hunting in the night seems more “natural” than a domestic dog on a lead. Yet both the bedding plants and the Labrador are alive. Both are part of the wider fabric of life.

That’s the paradox: we are all part of nature. Human choices and interventions from selective breeding to landscaping do not take plants or animals out of nature, but they do change the degree of wildness. The roses in a park border, the clipped hedge, or the turf lawn are no less biological than a heathland or a woodland. They simply rely more heavily on us, like our pets compared to their wild ancestors.

This raises uncomfortable questions. If so much of what we see around us is “manipulated nature,” does that make it less valuable? Should we judge a wildflower meadow as more authentic than a garden display? Or can both have meaning, beauty, and purpose in different ways?

Perhaps the key difference lies not in the plants themselves, but in the relationship. Wild nature maintains itself. Manipulated nature requires our maintenance watering, mowing, weeding, or replacing. And in that sense, have people too become less wild. Our bodies seem to need gyms, diets, medicines, and routines to stay in balance, where once life itself provided the movement and resilience. Like a lawn that demands regular mowing, we seem to need to be consciously maintained as much as we need to maintain our environment.

The line between wild and domestic, natural and artificial, is blurred. A hedgerow, for example, may have been planted centuries ago by human hands, but over time it develops into a rich ecosystem, hosting birds, mammals, and invertebrates indistinguishable from those in a woodland. Conversely, an ancient oak may grow in the middle of a housing estate, framed by paving and fencing, its roots reaching far beyond the tidy world we impose. Which is more “natural”? Both, in their own ways.

So perhaps the task is not to chase an absolute difference, but to acknowledge a continuum of nature. From wild moorland to city bedding schemes, from wolves to spaniels, from hunter-gatherer to office worker, all are part of the same story. The question is how we manage those relationships with humility, responsibility, and awareness of the costs as well as the joys. In the end, “natural” may not mean untouched. It may simply mean alive, interconnected, and evolving. And on those terms, we remain inseparable from the world we try to tame.



Walking & Cycling in Birmingham: People Who Make It Happen - A Healthy City

One theme of the City of Nature Plan is - A Healthy City and Birmingham is home to a growing movement of individuals and organisations championing walking and cycling not just as recreation, but as everyday transport, wellbeing practice, and means to reclaim streets for people. These organisations and groups are shaping how the city moves, breathes, and connects in the future.

Some key Organisations & Initiatives:

West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) leads regional investment in cycling and walking, collaborating with partners to deliver new infrastructure and community cycling clubs.

Better Streets for Birmingham campaigns for safer, greener streets where walking, cycling, wheeling, and public transport are the first choices. They critique and influence proposals for cycle lanes, public space design, and road safety.

Sustrans West Midlands supports the creation of active travel routes across Birmingham and the wider region. Their recent project promotes newly installed walking and cycling infrastructure and works with communities to encourage uptake.

The Active Well-Being Society has made strong contributions through free bike distribution, training, and events. They've provided over 4,000 bikes and training for residents in deprived areas, helping to reduce transport inequality and improve health.

Ecobirmingham are committed to improving our city's access to active travel. To support this, they have created a collection of 13 online maps showing bike and walking friendly routes linking all 69 wards of Birmingham to encourage people to get outside and choose sustainable transport more often:

<https://ecobirmingham.com/project/69wards-by-bike-or-foot/>

The Roundhouse, Birmingham is another contributor. Operated by an independent charity in partnership with the National Trust and Canal & River Trust, it runs walks, cycling tours, kayaking, and stand-up paddleboarding from canal-side settings.

There are also many grassroots groups across Birmingham and what unites these groups is a recognition that active travel is more than infrastructure: it's about culture, confidence, community, and visibility.

- Infrastructure without community uptake is incomplete. Advocacy groups help ensure new bike lanes or walking corridors are used and valued.
- Inclusivity matters. Many organisations prioritize reaching communities often excluded from active travel low-income areas, people with limited access, or those unfamiliar with cycling.
- Education & support. Workshops, training sessions, bike repair clinics, and guided walks help remove barriers to participation.
- Storytelling and data. The Walking & Cycling Index, local stories, and campaign media help build public awareness and shift mindsets about how cities should move.

As Birmingham continues to grow and adapt, walking and cycling advocates are essential partners in shaping a more connected, healthier, and sustainable city. Their work is a reminder that movement is not just about transport but it's about belonging, wellbeing, and reimagining our relationship to place.



Spotting October Wildlife in Parks and Public Spaces

October is a wonderful month for wildlife spotting when the forests soften in golds and russets, migrating birds pass overhead, fungi emerge overnight, and mammals are active preparing for colder days. In Birmingham, this is prime time to stop and look closely and to contribute to the city's living record of nature.

One person deeply involved in this movement is Chris Millward, co-founder of Team4Nature and experienced land manager. His approach brings together community, nature, and recording. Team4Nature encourages people to record wildlife by photographing or noting species, date, location, and behaviour, then uploading them to citizen science platforms like iSpot <https://nbn.org.uk/tools-and-resources/useful-websites/ispot/> or iNaturalist <https://www.inaturalist.org/> Through this simple action, participants become part of a larger data network revealing the pulse of Birmingham's biodiversity.

Chris's own work and public walks provide inspiration and practical leadership. Here you can see him setting off from Cotteridge Park on a citywide recording walk with volunteers: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=24331897493131006> an example of how recording can be social, local, and meaningful.

In Birmingham and the Black Country, EcoRecord is the regional biological recording centre collecting over half a million species records from local volunteers, naturalist groups, and professionals. <https://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/Ecorecord> Their work supports mapping of species trends, informing planning, conservation, and education.

So this October, consider stepping out with curiosity. Bring a notebook or phone. Look for corvids in parks, fungi on fallen logs, migrating thrushes overhead, and insects buzzing in hedgerows.

Five species to look out for this month:

- Redwing – These small thrushes arrive from Scandinavia in autumn, often seen in flocks feeding on berries in parks and hedgerows.
- Jay – Look for their flashes of blue as they bury acorns in woodlands and larger parks, helping oak trees spread.
- Fly agaric – The classic red-and-white spotted toadstool, often found near birch trees in woodlands and park edges.
- Grey wagtail – Lively birds with long tails, often seen bobbing along canal edges and rivers at this time of year.
- Hedgehog – Preparing for hibernation, they can still be spotted at dusk in gardens and green spaces, foraging for insects.

Join or follow Team4Nature walks, contribute your sightings to EcoRecord, and help strengthen Birmingham's nature story.

Because spotting wildlife isn't merely observing it, it's participating in a living archive, a city that remembers what life has been, and knows what it must protect.



October Gardening for Wildlife

October is a month of change bringing cooler days, falling leaves, and the slow winding down of the growing season. But for gardeners and volunteers in parks, it's also a time of preparation and care.

The work we do now from planting bulbs and protecting habitats to leaving seed heads and leaf piles supports the wildlife that depends on our green spaces through the winter months. Whether in a back garden, front garden, community garden or a city park, October offers countless opportunities to give nature a helping hand and ensure our spaces remain full of life.



- Create leaf piles in corners of your garden or gather up leaves into small piles in corners of parkland to create valuable shelter for hedgehogs, insects, and fungi.
- Plant bulbs in grassed areas and borders – snowdrops, crocuses, and daffodils will provide early nectar for pollinators next spring.
- Cut and clear lawns or meadows – removing summer growth now helps wildflowers thrive next year.
- Build or refresh log piles – essential micro-habitats for beetles, fungi, and other woodland wildlife.



- Clean and repair bird boxes and feeders – ready for winter feeding and spring nesting.
- Plant native hedgerows or thicken existing ones – hawthorn, blackthorn, and hazel provide food and cover for birds.
- In your garden only - check and maintain ponds – clearing excess leaves while leaving natural refuge for overwintering amphibians.
- Help tidy paths and entrances in parks carefully – keeping access safe while leaving wild corners undisturbed for wildlife.
- Compost cuttings responsibly – compost heaps can support invertebrates, small mammals, and reptiles.
- Get involved in park workdays – hedge planting, bulb planting, litter picks, and habitat management all help keep parks thriving for both people and wildlife.



Every action makes a difference from planting a single bulb to helping restore a meadow. Parks thrive because of the care volunteers put into them, creating spaces that welcome both wildlife and people. If you want to help with gardening in your local park check out the BOSF website to find the contact details of your local Friends of the Park group: <https://bosf.org.uk/members/>



October is a reminder that small efforts now - will bring colour, life, and energy back to our parks and gardens when spring arrives.



Young Green Champions - Learning outdoors

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



Young Green Champions – Autumn Inspiration

October is a perfect month for our Young Green Champions to connect with nature. The crisp mornings, colourful leaves, and shorter days bring a new rhythm to the year — and plenty of opportunities for young people to notice, create, and share their love of the natural world.

Autumn invites us to slow down and pay attention. Collecting fallen leaves becomes a way to explore changing colours and shapes, while conkers, acorns, and pinecones turn into natural treasures ready for play and learning. These seasonal finds are not just fun to gather — they are also materials for crafts that celebrate creativity and sustainability. From leaf prints and natural mobiles to wildlife-friendly feeders made from pinecones, crafts encourage children to see nature as something to enjoy and care for.

Being a Young Green Champion is about more than activities. It's about noticing the changes in our local environment, understanding how the seasons affect plants and wildlife, and sharing that awareness with family, friends, and schools. This October, let's encourage our Young Green Champions to embrace autumn: to walk, to collect, to create, and to celebrate the beauty of the season while strengthening their bond with nature.

Birmingham's Educational Figures – A City of Learning



Birmingham has long been a city shaped by learning, innovation, and people whose ideas reach far beyond the classroom. It has been home to scientists, academics, and campaigners who have not only advanced knowledge but also inspired others to pursue it. The city can proudly claim a link to Joseph Priestley, the 18th-century chemist and theologian who discovered oxygen. Living in Birmingham during a period of radical thought and industrial change, Priestley embodied the city's spirit of curiosity and invention.

In the modern era, Birmingham nurtured the career of Sir Gabriel Horn, a distinguished biologist whose research into the brain and memory won international acclaim. His work reflects the city's strength in life sciences and medical research, areas still central to Birmingham's universities today.

Education in Birmingham is also enriched by figures who bring science to the public. Professor Alice Roberts, anatomist, author, and broadcaster, has become a household name through her books and television work. As an academic based at the University of Birmingham, she demonstrates how research can inspire wide audiences and bridge the gap between science and society.

The city also provided a home for Malala Yousafzai, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate who survived an assassination attempt and became a global advocate for girls' education. After attending high school in Birmingham, Malala went on to graduate from Oxford University, continuing to inspire millions with her story of courage and determination. From pioneering scientists to advocates for global education, Birmingham's educational figures reflect the city's diverse and dynamic spirit. They remind us that learning here is not only about knowledge for its own sake but also about how education can shape lives, communities, and the wider world.

Out and About in October with 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 Birmingham City Council's Public Health department.

Activities being delivered by the Rangers are those that improve parks and open spaces, support volunteering development and deliver nature based interventions to improve health outcomes such as physical activity levels and mental health wellbeing.

If you live in or near Aston, Newtown or Nechells ward and 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



Follow Birmingham Open Spaces Online or Naturally Birmingham on social media to see what events are happening in autumn. Or check out your park's notice board.

Parks for People and Nature In Nechells.

Nechells ward in Birmingham is at the heart of urban nature recovery. In October 2023 the partnership which supported the independent People's Plan for Nature launched a new initiative, Nature Neighbourhoods. The project supported community organisations across the UK to create people-powered plans for nature in their neighbourhoods, helping to tackle the global nature and climate crisis at a local level. The People's Plan for Nature calls on nature conservation organisations to bring key actors together with a common purpose and vision for nature. Nature Neighbourhoods is a direct response to this call, focusing delivery of this at the community level. The RSPB, the National Trust and WWF received funding from the National Lottery Community Fund and the Co-op to deliver the Nature Neighbourhoods project. In Nechells The Active Wellbeing Society (TAWs) helped to mobilise the community to lead a positive change for nature and people through the creation of Nature Neighbourhood Plans. The project was delivered over two years supporting a programme for partners and building collaborations with the Council. Not only did each neighbourhood co-design a plan, but the local organisations and wider community are in a better position to put these plans into practice. Birmingham has two Nature Neighbourhoods the other being supported by CET (Community Environmental Trust) in Castle Vale.

Another project helping to connect nature and communities in Nechells is the National Trusts Pocket Park project. Working with the Council, TAWs, and Free at Last <https://freeatlast.co.uk/> The National Trust has supported the community to design and create a new park area at Eliot Street Recreation Ground (B7 5QS).

Free at Last help kids navigate their journey through childhood, education and the difficulties they face on a daily basis. They provide opportunities for children, teenagers and adults, from fun activities and different experiences to developing practical skills, enterprise, therapy and advice. Their purpose is to empower the people in their community to become resilient and independent – ultimately helping the next generation to find the strength and determination to visualise and achieve a better future. By forming the Friends of North Nechells Parks they are now harnessing the power of parks and people to provide a greener environment for children and their families to live in.



Fungi in October – Birmingham’s Hidden Kingdom

October is the month when fungi step out of the shadows. For most of the year, the real body of a fungus, the mycelium, is hidden underground or inside wood, recycling nutrients and supporting plants. But autumn’s damp, cooler days trigger the appearance of fruiting bodies - the mushrooms, toadstools, and brackets that we recognise. In Birmingham’s parks, woodlands, and even roadside verges, fungi emerge as if by magic. Fly agaric, with its red cap and white spots, is one of the most striking it’s a classic fairy-tale mushroom often found near birch trees. More subtle species, such as ink caps, appear in clusters on grassland, while bracket fungi decorate old tree stumps like layered shelves. On fallen branches, you might spot turkey tail fungi, with their colourful, fan-shaped rings. You can find out more here: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-explorer/fungi>



Fungi are not just beautiful; they are vital. They recycle dead leaves and wood, releasing nutrients back into the soil and supporting new growth. Some form partnerships with trees, helping them absorb water and minerals in exchange for sugars. Others create habitats for insects, which in turn feed birds and mammals. Without fungi, our ecosystems, including the ones in Birmingham’s green spaces, could not function.

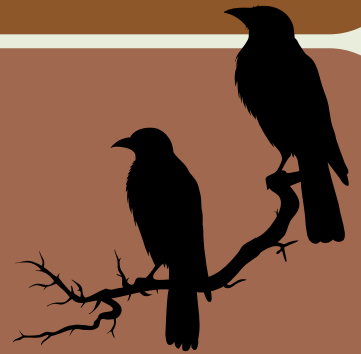
For volunteers and park visitors, autumn is the perfect time to look more closely. Join a guided walk if you can, as fungi identification can be tricky, with many species looking similar. Remember: never pick or eat fungi unless you are with an expert but do take time to notice their forms, colours, and patterns. The West Midlands Fungus Group and fungus expert Lukas Large can help you to find out more about fungi - check out this video:

<https://youtu.be/RMe3JGq5aoU?si=lthibUBVX6KlxLee>

This October, keep your eyes on the ground and the trees. The fungi of Birmingham are storytellers of the season, reminding us that decay and renewal are part of the same cycle, and that even in the city, wild magic is close at hand.

Ravens, Crows and other Corvids

Birmingham’s skies and parks are often filled with the distinctive calls and dark silhouettes of corvids which is the family of birds that includes crows, rooks, jackdaws, magpies, jays, and ravens. Intelligent, adaptable, and often misunderstood, these birds are an important part of the city’s natural life.



The most familiar is the carrion crow, a sleek black bird commonly seen in parks, cemeteries, and along the canals. Crows are quick learners, able to solve problems, recognise faces, and even use tools. Their adaptability allows them to thrive in both urban and rural areas, scavenging food scraps or foraging for insects in grassland. Magpies, with their striking black-and-white plumage and iridescent feathers, are also a common sight. Known for their curiosity, they have a reputation for collecting shiny objects, though in reality they are cautious, social birds that often gather in noisy groups.

In woodlands, particularly at the edges of Birmingham’s larger parks, you may spot the colourful jay. With its pinkish body, blue wing flashes, and harsh call, the jay is famous for burying acorns playing a key role in spreading oak trees and shaping the landscape.

Rooks and jackdaws prefer to live in colonies. Rooks are often found in larger open spaces or farmland near the city, while jackdaws, with their pale eyes and smaller size, nest in chimneys, towers, and older buildings.

Occasionally, ravens the largest of the corvids can be seen soaring high above the city, their deep croaking calls carrying across the sky. Once confined mainly to wilder landscapes, ravens are slowly returning to the Midlands.

Together, Birmingham’s corvids remind us of the intelligence, resilience, and mystery of urban wildlife thriving alongside us, often in plain sight.

Earth Stories - Memories, Hopes and Happenings

October always feels like a turning point, when autumn settles in. The days draw shorter, the mornings grow cooler, and the year seems to gather itself in readiness for winter. Yet this is also one of the most colourful, abundant, and imaginative months of the calendar. It's a time when leaves turn gold, orange, and crimson, and the sky seems often to reflect these hues and change colour more quickly and dramatically than in any other season.

Walking through Birmingham's parks at this time of year is a reminder of how lucky we are to live in a city threaded with so many trees and green spaces. A single gust of wind can turn the air into a snowstorm of swirling leaves, settling on the paths, lawns, and benches where we can pause to watch the season unfold. They remind me of games I played as child with my brother, laughing so much as we tried to catch the leaves before they reached the ground. Evening comes earlier and the autumn light softens the urban edges, and even the busiest streets feel briefly hushed under the glow of October skies.

Of course, this is also the month of Halloween a moment when imagination and tradition come together. Pumpkins appear in windows, carved into grinning faces or glowing lanterns. Children dress as ghouls, witches, and heroes, while in kitchens across the city, pumpkin soup might be bubbling away (we don't want to waste the scooped out pumpkin flesh: https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/pumpkinsoup_89904) or perhaps yummy apple pies are baking, filling homes with the scents of the autumn harvest and warm spices like cinnamon, nutmeg and ginger.

But Halloween is also rooted in something deeper: the old rhythms of Samhain, the end of the harvest and the beginning of winter. It reminds us that this time of year has always been about change, reflection, and renewal. Perhaps that's why so many of us feel nostalgic in October it is a season that invites us to visit our memories. We remember the summers just passed or more distant ones spent with friends and family. Perhaps after all the noise and activity of summer we also anticipate the quiet stillness that winter will bring.

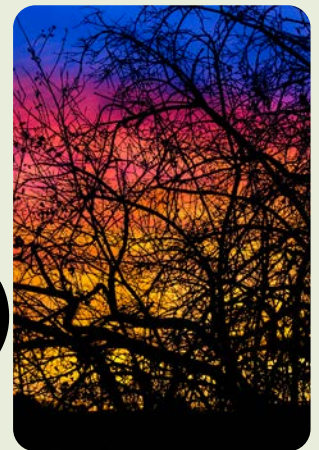
As editor, my hope is that this newsletter helps carry some of that spirit celebrating the changes in nature, but also highlighting the ways we can be part of them. From fungi and migrating birds, to community planting days and autumn crafts, there are endless ways to notice, learn, and take part in the life of the city.

October is not only about endings, but about preparation. Apples picked and stored through winter. The bulbs we plant now will bloom in spring. The habitats we build will shelter wildlife through the cold. The conversations and connections we make today will carry forward into the new year and beyond. So as the leaves fall and the skies shift, let's embrace this month of colour and transformation.

Enjoy the fun of Halloween decorations and autumn treats, but also take time to step outside, watch the turning of the season, and remember that every change holds the seed of something new.

Wishing you a bright, creative, and restorative October.

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

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

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



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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