

GREEN CHAMPIONS



Noticing Nature

The landscape sleeps in mist from morn till noon;
And, if the sun looks through, 'tis with a face
Beamless and pale and round, as if the moon,
John Clare, 'The Shepherd's Calendar: November'.

Health - Naturally

Enjoy all that gardening and nature have to offer for health and wellbeing this autumn with help from this

Thrive calendar of activities.

- [1. Getting started](#)
- [2. Week 1 activities](#)
- [3. Week 2 activities](#)
- [4. Week 3 activities](#)
- [5. Week 4 activities](#)

They have created a four-week journey of wellbeing activities. Find simple but effective ways to boost your physical and mental health through gardening or time in nature. You can look forward to a mix of practical, passive, creative, gardening, nature, indoor and outdoor activities. There is something for everyone's wellbeing and health this autumn.



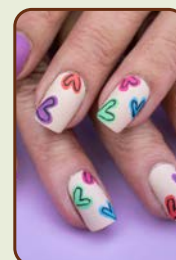
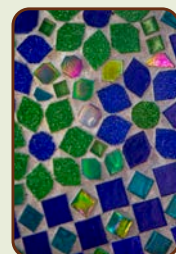
Learn more about - Art and Culture

As the nights draw in, November invites us to gather to share stories, music, and art that celebrate the living world and our place within it.

Art, literature, and music have long helped us translate times of change helping us find meaning, deepening our connection with nature. From poetry inspired by birdsong to paintings that capture shifting skies, creative expression allows us to experience nature not just with our five senses, but also with our hearts.

Exploring nature through art and culture reminds us that every creative act is also an act of noticing and caring. Whether you sketch the view from your window, write a line about the wind, or listen to music shaped by the landscape, creativity can renew your sense of belonging in the world around you.

Why not try a free online course from Open Learn:
[Art and visual culture: medieval to modern](#) |
[OpenLearn - Open University](#)



City of Nature Programme Update - Getting Creative

The City of Nature programme is taking time to reflect on the ways creativity can help people feel closer to the natural world. Art, music, literature, and food all have the power to express our shared connection with nature and to turn what we see and feel outdoors into something that can be shared, celebrated, and remembered. Over the past years, creative projects have brought people together in new and inspiring ways. Earth Stories invited communities to explore their own experiences of place through writing, photography, and storytelling, revealing how nature shapes our daily lives and sense of belonging. The Little Libraries have found welcoming homes in parks and schools across the city, offering books that encourage people to step outside, notice the seasons, and rediscover local green spaces. The Birmingham Tree People Poetry Project gave voice to the living landscapes around us celebrating the trees that connect our streets, parks, and memories. Looking ahead, we want to build on this momentum. In 2026, the City of Nature programme wants to explore even more ways to celebrate art and culture in green spaces. We want to develop opportunities for artists, musicians, storytellers, and food growers to come together using parks as outdoor studios, stages, and community kitchens. From creative workshops and pop-up performances to cultural festivals rooted in nature, these kind of events could help people connect with their local environment in joyful, imaginative ways.



The City of Nature Plan has an action: **Opportunities in green spaces to explore and celebrate art and culture and work with libraries to organise book clubs (I4)** We want to explore the development of Book Clubs in Parks that could be a new initiative to bring reading, reflection, and conversation into natural settings. Imagine gathering beneath a canopy of trees to discuss stories shaped by the seasons, or reading poetry inspired by rivers, gardens, or city wildlife. Book clubs could invite people to experience nature through words and one another's perspectives, creating space for wellbeing and connection. It is also **Green Careers Week** from November 3rd to November 8th. Supported by National Careers Week and partners like the Department for Education, it provides resources for young people to explore jobs that contribute to a greener future. These jobs can also include creative roles such as Eco-Designer / Sustainable Product Designer, Nature Engagement Artist / Environmental Arts Practitioner, Green Communications / Sustainability Content Creator.

So in this edition of the newsletter we are blending creativity with connection to our green spaces, showing how culture and conservation go hand in hand. Our parks and open spaces are living canvases for the imagination and places where we want to encourage everyone to find inspiration, share stories, and celebrate the beauty of the natural world together.

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

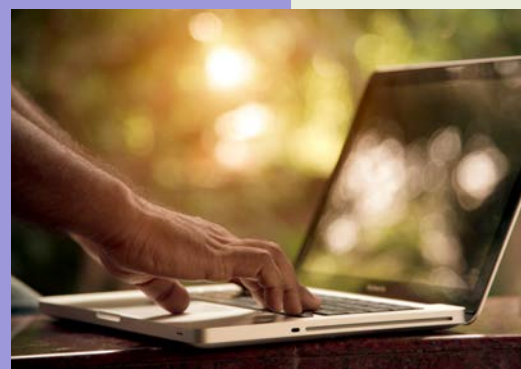
**The City of Nature Online:
Green Champions Online Catch Up Friday -
7th November 2025 online on teams: 1pm to 2pm**

If you would like to join the November Green Champions online meeting please email us at Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk

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/>



1st November - World Vegan Day – Celebrating Plant Power and Creative Connection



Each year on 1 November, people around the world celebrate World Vegan Day - a moment to explore how our food choices shape our health, our environment, and our relationship with the living world. Veganism is the practice of abstaining from the use of animal products and the consumption of animal source foods, and an associated philosophy that rejects the commodity status of animals. A person who practices veganism is known as a vegan; the word is also used to describe foods and materials that are compatible with veganism. World Vegan Day is about care and creativity: it is a global event celebrated annually when Vegans celebrate the benefits of veganism for animals, humans, and the natural environment through a range of events and activities including art and literature. In our parks and green spaces, food and culture often meet in joyful ways. A picnic under the trees, herbs growing in a raised bed, or fruit ripening in a community orchard these are simple but powerful reminders that nature nourishes both body and spirit. This World Vegan Day, why not celebrate that connection? Share a plant-based meal with friends in your local park, swap favourite seasonal recipes, or host a “food and art” afternoon where people sketch, paint, or write about ingredients grown close to home.

Creative responses to food from poetry inspired by kitchen gardens to art made from foraged leaves or seed pods can help us see the world through a different lens. They remind us that eating is not just an act of consumption but can also be about connection: to place, to season, and to one another. Choosing more plant-based meals is one small but meaningful way to reduce our impact on the planet, support biodiversity, and celebrate the generosity of nature. So, on 1 November, let's take a moment to savour the colours, textures, and stories of the plant world and enjoy the creativity that flourishes when people, food, and green spaces come together.

Plant based recipes for November vegan and vegetarian



Looking through websites that offer a selection of plant-based meal ideas for November made me feel very hungry! The colours, flavours, and textures of the season lend themselves perfectly to creative cooking with roasted roots, hearty stews, spiced squashes, and leafy greens full of autumn goodness. November is a month for comfort and warmth, and plant-based dishes show just how satisfying sustainable eating can be.

Whether you're trying a new recipe or reimagining an old favourite, there's joy in cooking with ingredients that celebrate the turning of the year. For a good selection of vegan recipes you could try some of these: <https://www.livekindly.com/vegan-recipe-in-november/> There's a wide range of meal types included but good old tomato soup has got to be one of my favourites.

The BBC Good Food November recipe collection has plenty of inspiration, from seasonal soups to indulgent desserts more proof that plant-based meals can be both nourishing and delicious. Why not gather some friends, share dishes, and celebrate the bounty of the season together?

bbc.co.uk/food/collections/november_recipes

Sounds of Nature - Music and Song

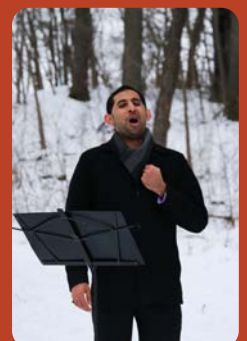
The natural world is full of sound - we just have to pause long enough to hear the music.

Sound has the power to influence emotions, sometimes without us even realizing it. This is why music, nature sounds, and even white noise are used in therapy, relaxation, and productivity enhancement. Hearing a sound, is a complex process involving multiple brain regions. The auditory system converts sound waves into electrical signals, which are then processed in different parts of the brain. Harsh, loud noises can trigger the body's stress response, while calming sounds activate the parasympathetic nervous system, helping us relax. We talk about a blackbird singing at dusk which is often described as calming but they also use a harsh alarm call to send a message of danger. Nature provides a soundscape like an ever-changing symphony that shapes our sense of place whether we are conscious of it or not.

Across time and cultures, nature's sounds have inspired us to sing, make instruments and write lyrics. Folk tunes echo the turning of the seasons; lullabies carry the comforting rhythms of rain and river; and instruments made from wood, bone and reed connect human creativity to the living materials of the earth. Modern composers continue to draw on the wild for inspiration but also collaborate with nature by using recordings of birdsong woven into orchestral works and sound artists who use field recordings to explore the more subtle sounds of landscapes. Listening to nature can be a deeply restorative act. It slows our pace, heightens awareness, and reminds us that we are part of a wider harmony. Taking a moment to tune in to the sounds around us, whether it's to the hum of a bee on a warm day, the dry rasping of leaves tumbled by the wind, or even silence after pelting rain subsides can shift our mood and deepen our connection to place.

Birmingham's music scene has always had a rhythm all its own which is diverse, inventive, and deeply rooted in the city's working heart. From the dancehalls and youth clubs of the 1950s and '60s came a wave of creativity that reshaped British music. By the mid-sixties, more than 500 local bands were swapping members, ideas, and stage time across a vibrant network of pubs and venues, turning the city into a powerhouse of sound and experimentation. Out of this grew new genres that travelled the world: the blues-driven energy of the Spencer Davis Group, the kaleidoscopic edge of The Move, and the heavy, thunderous invention of Black Sabbath, who gave birth to heavy metal. Birmingham's musical roots also run through jazz, ska, reggae, grindcore, and techno, each one reflecting the city's changing landscapes and communities. It's a sound shaped by foundries and factories yes, but also parks, canals and rivers, a mix of grit and grace that still echoes through its studios, festivals, and open-air stages today.

This November, as the days cool and shorten and busy places quieten just a bit, try creating your own "sound map" of the city. Find a spot to stop in your local park, close your eyes for a moment, and list every sound you can hear. Notice how each one tells a story: of birds settling in roosts, of water moving beneath bridges, of people and nature sharing space. You might also explore the creative possibilities of those sounds writing lyrics inspired by the sounds of birds, make a recording of the wind in the trees, or simply add a song to your playlist that came to you while you were listening. Music and nature are both universal languages, capable of crossing boundaries and bringing people together. When we listen closely, we find that the earth itself is singing and we are part of the chorus.

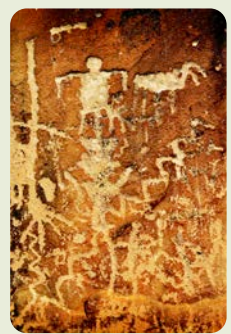


The First Marks: Art, Nature and Human Connections

Cave art provides a window into the relationship between early humans and their natural environment. By examining these ancient artworks, we can gain insights into their understanding of the world, their interactions with nature, and their connection to the environment. Cave paintings often depict animals that were a significant part of their diet and hunting practices, as well as landscapes that were familiar to them. This visual data can help us understand how early humans viewed and interacted with their surroundings, but was it art?

The earliest known cave paintings, discovered in Sulawesi, Indonesia, are at least 50,000 years old. Red ochre handprints and animal shapes ripple across the rock depicting a collaboration between humans and nature, using the minerals of the land to tell stories that still speak today. Thousands of years later, around 7,000–5,000 BCE early tattoos, found on mummified remains from Egypt, Sudan, and the frozen Alps, show how people began to inscribe shapes on their own bodies creating portable information about themselves and their environment. Both cave drawings and tattoos reveal something timeless: a human longing to connect with nature, with one another, and with the wider world we inhabit. They remind us that creativity was never separate from survival or environment. The earth provided the canvas and the colour, the inspiration and the tools. Those images always had meaning, what we don't know is if they also created emotional responses then as art does today for modern humans.

Whether we make art from natural materials, write lyrics inspired by the seasons, or simply pause to notice the beauty of place, we echo that same ancient dialogue between people and nature. From our first handprints on stone to the paintings we create now, art continues to root us showing that to make and to mark is, and always has been, an expression of connection to our world.



Modern Creative Walls and Shared Stories

Across Birmingham and beyond, community mural projects are transforming blank walls into spaces for dialogue and pride.

When residents, artists, and young people work together, the act of painting becomes a form of connection and a shared expression of care for place. Increasingly, these murals celebrate nature in the city: trees growing through concrete, birds in flight, or the hidden beauty of local parks. Such projects channel the same creative energy that fuels graffiti, but turn it towards renewal and collaboration. They remind us that when we invite art into our shared spaces, it can change how we see our environment not as something to be defaced or defended, but as a living canvas where community and nature meet.

For thousands of years, humans have used walls as a canvas for communication. The pigments may have changed from ochre to aerosol, but the instinct remains remarkably similar wanting to create, to protest, to remember, or simply to say I am here. Like cave art, graffiti occupies shared spaces where the boundaries between public and personal expression blur.

That tension is what makes it powerful and sometimes problematic. Uninvited markings can damage buildings or feel intrusive, yet community murals and sanctioned street art can inspire pride and creativity. The difference often lies in dialogue: who decides what belongs on the wall, and whose stories are told?

In thinking about graffiti, we can move beyond judgment to curiosity recognising both the artistic skill and the social message behind the paint. When guided by collaboration and respect, street art becomes a continuation of humanity's oldest form of conversation with place: colour, pattern, and story inscribed upon the landscape we share.



Crafting with Nature: Creativity and Connection

Across Birmingham's parks, Rangers have been bringing nature to life in wonderfully hands-on ways by delivering craft sessions that celebrate the seasons, spark curiosity, and show that creativity doesn't need to come in plastic packaging. With nothing more than balls of string, a pile of twigs, a few pinecones, and a sprinkle of imagination, they're helping children and adults to discover the joy of making with what nature provides.

These sessions are about more than just crafting. They invite people to look closely at the natural materials all around them and to think differently about waste and value. Fallen leaves become collages, twigs turn into tiny sculptures or picture frames, and cones transform into creatures or decorations. Every activity encourages resourcefulness and respect and the understanding that we can create beauty without buying more, and that nature's leftovers often hold the most potential.

The Rangers' work sits at the heart of what the City of Nature programme aims to achieve: helping people build a sense of connection and belonging through simple, shared experiences outdoors. Children leave the sessions not only with something they've made but also with muddy hands, a story to tell, and a new way of seeing the world around them. Adults often join in too, rediscovering the pleasure of slowing down, working together, and finding creativity in unexpected places.

Nature-based crafts are also a gentle introduction to environmental learning. Discussions about where materials come from often lead to bigger conversations about recycling, habitats, and the importance of looking after local green spaces.

When people create with twigs and cones, they begin to notice the trees and woodlands that produced them; when they reuse string or bottle tops, they see how waste can have another life.

Rangers adapt their ideas to the seasons - bird feeders in winter, flower-pressing in spring, natural dyeing in summer, and wreaths or lanterns in autumn. The activities can be as simple or as intricate as the group wants, always guided by curiosity and play. What matters most is that they bring people together: families, park visitors, volunteers, and passers-by who stop to join in.

In a world where screens often dominate attention, these sessions offer something grounding and joyful as a reminder that creativity starts with noticing. A handful of natural materials, a shared table, and a bit of conversation are all it takes to spark connection.

Through their craft sessions, Birmingham's Rangers are showing that environmental awareness doesn't have to begin with policy or persuasion instead it can start with a ball of string, a pinecone, and the simple pleasure of making something beautiful from what the earth gives us.



Poetry, Nature and Wellbeing

Poetry has always offered a way to translate feeling into language to share with others. Whether it's filled with anger and passion moving people to rise up or gentle and calming asking others to slow down, reflect, and make sense of what it means to be human. But when poetry meets the natural world, something especially powerful happens: words begin to breathe with the same rhythms as wind, water, and birdsong.

Across centuries and cultures, writers have turned to nature as both subject and solace. The poet William Wordsworth found in daffodils a cure for loneliness and a reminder of joy that could be "recollected in tranquillity." Mary Oliver wrote of geese calling across the sky as a message of belonging. More recently, poets such as Alice Oswald, Kathleen Jamie and Birmingham's own Benjamin Zephaniah have shown how landscapes, both urban and wild, can shape identity and heal the spirit. Zephaniah captures the vitality of the natural world with his warmth and rhythm:

"Take a look at the river,
Breathe the air, smell the rain.
Taste the sun and the pollen,
Nature's never plain."

Benjamin Zephaniah, "Nature Trail"

These lines remind us that nature is not distant or abstract it's sensory, alive, and ready to meet us where we are. His work invites us to experience nature with all our senses, blending joy, compassion and curiosity in equal measure.

Science increasingly supports what poets have always known - that time in nature nurtures mental health. Research shows that spending even a few minutes outdoors can lower stress, improve mood, and restore focus. Green spaces encourage mindfulness simply by inviting us to notice: the play of light through leaves, the scent of damp earth, the rhythms of birdsong. When combined with creative expression, these benefits deepen. Writing or reading poetry outdoors allows reflection and release transforming awareness into calm.

In Birmingham's parks, this connection is alive and growing. Poetry walks, open-air readings, and creative writing workshops invite people to respond to nature through words. Participants often find that writing about a tree, a patch of sunlight, or a bird's call helps them express feelings that are otherwise hard to name. The act of crafting a poem can be profoundly grounding, turning noticing into art and reflection into resilience.

You don't need to be a poet to feel the benefits. Try carrying a small notebook on your next walk. Jot down colours, textures, or sounds - use all your senses. Later, shape those notes into a few lines. The result doesn't have to rhyme or even make sense it simply needs to capture a moment of connection. In finding words for the world around us, we often rediscover gentleness within ourselves.

Poetry and nature both teach us to look closely, to feel deeply, and to remember that we are all part of a living, breathing poem that begins the moment we step outside.



Stories of Weather and Wildness – Fiction Rooted in Birmingham

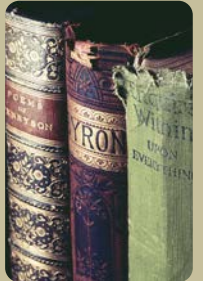
Fiction often reveals how people and place intertwine - how weather, light, and landscape shape not only what we see, but how we feel and who we become. Birmingham's writers have long drawn inspiration from the natural world, finding poetry and truth in its changing moods.

J.R.R. Tolkien, who grew up in Sarehole, once wrote of the “leaf-mould of the imagination.” The Shire, with its green hills and winding rivers, was born from his childhood walks along the River Cole. Even as Middle-earth expanded in scale and drama, its heart remained the familiar rhythms of English nature like the comfort of trees, the courage of growth, and the melancholy of passing seasons.

Later writers have continued this tradition in different ways. David Lodge and Kit de Waal both evoke the city's landscape as living background where rain, gardens, and parks mirror the emotions of their characters. Benjamin Zephaniah's novels and poems celebrate urban nature and resilience, blending the voices of people and place until the two become inseparable. Weather, especially, threads through Birmingham's literature like a character in its own right. Grey skies, sudden sunlight, the hush of snow, each carries emotional weight. In Mick Scully's and Catherine O'Flynn's stories, fog, rain, and city light become backdrops for reflection and change.

Nature in fiction is never just scenery; it's the pulse beneath the story. The smell of wet pavements after rain, the echo of birds between tower blocks, the stillness before a storm all these moments remind us that every story grows from a landscape.

As new writers emerge from Birmingham's thriving creative community, many are rediscovering this connection and exploring how nature, even in the most urban settings, gives texture to our inner worlds. The city's writers remind us that wherever there's weather, there's wonder and wherever there's a patch of sky, there's a story waiting to unfold.



The Art of Storytelling – Speaking with Heart and Hands

Before stories were written, they were spoken and shared around fires, under trees, or by the glow of lanterns. Storytelling began outdoors, carried on the air, shaped by wind, birdsong, and the crackle of the fire. The storyteller's tools were simple: a voice, a face, and a pair of expressive hands.

Watch any storyteller and you'll see how physical the act is. Hands shape mountains and waves, eyes widen like storms, shoulders rise and fall with the rhythm of breath. Storytelling is as visual as it is aural, formed from a dance of language and movement that brings listeners close, as if the story is unfolding right there in front of them. When stories draw on nature like the turning seasons, the lives of animals or the weather's moods this embodied language feels especially powerful. Gestures become the wings of birds, the sway of branches, the flow of rivers. The teller becomes a bridge between human imagination and the living world.

In parks, schools, and community gardens across Birmingham, storytellers continue this ancient art of gathering people to listen, imagine, and connect. These sessions remind us that nature isn't only something to look at; it's something to speak through and move with. Every story told in the open air rekindles an instinct as old as language itself: to share who we are, through voice, expression related to the world around us.

Across Birmingham, storytellers are keeping old traditions alive in new ways by bringing tales of nature, memory, and belonging to parks and community spaces. One of them is Catherine Paver, a Birmingham-based writer and performer whose storytelling sessions weave together myth, song, and environmental themes. Whether she's retelling folk tales under the trees at Highbury Park or leading creative workshops in libraries, her stories are full of birds, rivers, and the turning of the seasons. Catherine says, “Stories are living things - when we tell them outside, they breathe differently.”

She's part of a growing network of local storytellers, artists, and educators who believe that storytelling in nature helps people to reconnect not only with green spaces, but with each other. In the City of Nature, stories don't just describe the world around us they help us feel part of it.



Roots of Creativity – National Tree Week 22 Nov – 30 Nov

At the turning of the year, when branches are bare and the air sharpens with winter, tree planting begins again. National Tree Week, led by The Tree Council, marks the start of the planting season. It's a time when communities across the country dig, mulch and dream of future canopies.



Here in Birmingham, the week carries a special resonance. Trees are part of the city's character and its hope. From the street saplings tended by volunteers to the ancient oaks of Sutton Park, each tree tells a story of patience, resilience and connection. Tree planting is often described in practical terms providing carbon capture, shade and biodiversity. but it's also an act of imagination. Every sapling planted is a gesture towards the future: a work of living art that will take decades to mature. There's something deeply creative about that. Planting a tree is like composing a slow symphony or painting on a canvas that future generations will complete.



In Birmingham, TreePeople are at the heart of that creative collaboration between people and place. Working alongside the City Council, schools, and Friends Groups, they train volunteers in tree care and help communities take ownership of their green spaces. Their projects combine science, storytelling, and civic pride helping residents understand not just how to plant trees, but why it matters.

TreePeople's volunteers often describe their work in artistic terms: the texture of bark, the shape of branches, the colours that shift through the seasons. Each tree becomes a subject for sketching, photographing, or simply admiring acting as a muse that asks nothing but time and attention.

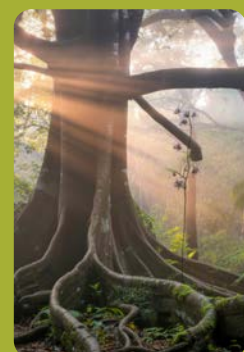


Another local initiative, Fruit and Nut Village, shows how creativity can be woven into everyday life through community planting. Their edible landscapes including orchards, hedgerows, and shared harvests transform underused land into living artworks that feed both body and imagination. A row of apple trees becomes a story about heritage varieties; a walnut or hazel tree becomes an anchor for recipes, festivals and songs. The work blends ecology, culture and belonging, the same themes that have run through art for centuries.



In many ways, trees are the original artists. They sketch on a canvas of space with their branches, paint with light and shadow, compose music in wind and leaf. To walk among them is to step into an exhibition that changes by the hour. For children especially, planting a tree can be their first experience of creating something that will outlive them and give a lesson in patience and possibility.

National Tree Week isn't just about numbers planted; it's about stories rooted. Each planting event adds another chapter to Birmingham's ongoing narrative as the UK's first Nature City. Whether you're digging in a community orchard, joining a TreePeople training session, or simply noticing the silhouettes against a winter sky, you're part of that creative process.



Because caring for trees is itself an act of art, slow, thoughtful and collaborative. Every branch and bud holds the shape of time and touch. When we plant together, we're not only greening our city, we're composing a living gallery and a celebration of what can grow when people, imagination, and nature take root together.

Capturing the Living World – Drawing, Painting and Photographing Nature

Artists have always turned to nature for lessons in light, form and patience. From the first sketches of leaves in the margins of notebooks to the sweeping landscapes of Turner or Constable, the natural world has shaped the history of art as surely as wind shapes the clouds. Each generation finds its own way to translate what it sees with charcoal, oils, camera lenses, or a quick digital snap on a morning walk.

To draw or paint outdoors is to enter into a kind of quiet conversation. The light never stays still; clouds move, shadows change, birds ignore your best intentions by flying off at exactly the wrong moment. The Impressionists understood this and took their easels into the open air, chasing the shifting colour of sky and water. Today's plein-air painters do the same, armed with travel palettes and folding stools instead of parasols and oil lamps, but with the same mission to catch a living moment before it changes.

Modern nature artists such as David Hockney show how technology can extend rather than replace observation. His iPad drawings of Yorkshire trees, made with digital brushes and styluses, have the freshness of sketchbook studies. Each line reminds us that seeing comes before technique: the eye must notice before the hand can translate.

For those of us who prefer a camera to a paintbrush, the challenge is much the same. Photography is painting with light and nature provides the best studio imaginable. Learning to read that light is half the skill: how early morning mist softens contrast, how backlighting turns a leaf into stained glass, how reflections play tricks with still water. Even a phone camera rewards those who pause, compose, and wait for the moment the wind stills.

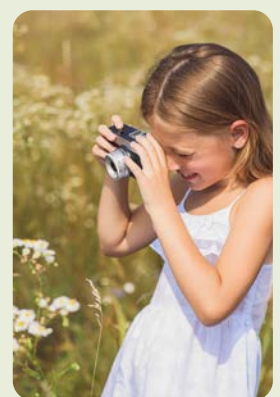
Of course, there are also the moments that get away from us like trying to photograph the moon. Everyone does it: that gleaming silver disc looks enormous and majestic until you raise your phone and end up with a blurry white dot but no less enthusiasm to do better next time. It's a shared human experience, a reminder that sometimes beauty refuses to be captured, and that's part of the magic.

Children, meanwhile, understand instinctively what many adult artists spend years relearning which is that art is about attention, not accuracy. Give them crayons, chalks or a handful of leaves, and they'll find pattern, movement and emotion long before anyone mentions perspective. Their drawings of trees and birds are not studies of detail but expressions of joy - the purest kind of landscape art.

We need to retain that freedom to explore through art, it doesn't need to be "good" or even shared, we just need to try and see what happens. Even if it is mindful colouring the linking of mind, hand and nature is very therapeutic. Pick up some crayons and give it a go.

Whether with pencil, pigment or pixels, making art from nature is a way of learning how to look. It teaches us that the world is made of shapes, tones, and stories waiting to be noticed. In Birmingham's parks, along canal paths, or in a back-garden corner, every leaf and reflection offers material for creativity.

In the end, it doesn't matter if your masterpiece hangs in a gallery, a classroom, or your phone's camera roll. What matters is the act of paying attention and of saying, with line, brush or lens: I saw this, and it mattered to me.



The Art of Flowers – Creativity in Bloom

Flowers have always been nature's way of reminding us that beauty can be both delicate and bold. For centuries, people have used flowers to celebrate, comfort, and communicate, it's an ancient art that continues to blossom in new, creative ways. Floristry is more than arranging flowers and foliage; it's a practice of observation and care. Each stem has its own place and shape - the curve of a tulip, the fullness of a rose, the way wild grasses sparsely fill a space. Working with flowers teaches balance and patience, turning colour, scent, and texture into a living composition.

Creative florists today are rediscovering sustainable and seasonal approaches, using locally grown blooms, seed heads, and foliage gathered from community gardens or even (with care) park edges. Others are exploring wild arrangements using looser, more natural styles that echo the movement of real meadows rather than the stiffness of perfection. Children and adults alike can enjoy simple flower crafts: pressing blooms, making petal collages, or weaving daisies into crowns. These small acts of creativity bring mindfulness and joy offering a chance to slow down and notice life unfolding in vivid detail.

Whether it's a hand-tied bouquet, a park display, or a few wild flowers in a recycled jar, floristry is a quiet conversation with nature. Each creation says, "I've seen the beauty around me, and I want to share it."



Moving with the Earth – Dance and Theatre in Nature

Before there were stages, there were open spaces, simple circles of grass, clearings in woods, the banks of rivers. Dance and theatre began outdoors, in rhythm with the seasons and the elements. Every culture has its rituals of movement: to celebrate harvest, to call for rain, to welcome spring. These early performances weren't just entertainment they were conversations with the living world.

That instinct to move with nature is still alive today. In Birmingham's parks and gardens, artists and community groups are rediscovering how dance and performance can reconnect us to place. From outdoor movement workshops to site-specific theatre, the landscape itself becomes part of the story. Grass becomes stage, wind becomes music, and the performers' bodies echo the shapes of trees, waves, and flight. Watching people move in open air is different from sitting in a theatre. There's no curtain between audience and performer, only shared space and sky. The body responds to sunlight, birdsong, and shifting ground and each gesture feels rooted and real.

For participants, dancing outdoors can be transformative. It's exercise, yes, but also meditation - a way of feeling grounded and alive. Whether through structured choreography or spontaneous movement, it reminds us that we're not separate from the environment but part of its constant flow and change. Nature, after all, is always performing for us, unfolding its own rhythms in wind, water, and light. When we dance in nature, we're joining that timeless performance: the living art of being part of the world.



Watching wildlife in November – Culture, Myth and the Turning of the Year

November in the park often brings noticeable seasonal change, the bright energy of autumn fades, the hush of winter begins to settle in. The air smells of leaf mould and occasional wood smoke. Colours shift from gold to bronze to quiet grey. Yet even now, when much of nature seems to be resting, life continues in subtler, slower rhythms.

Listen, and you'll hear the chatter of fieldfares and redwings, winter visitors from Scandinavia feeding on the last berries. Their arrival has always marked the season's change and in old folklore, they were called "storm thrushes," messengers of cold weather on the way. Beneath the trees, robins hold their winter territories, their song softer but still hopeful, a thread of sound through the bare branches.

Foxes grow thick winter coats and move with a kind of stealthy confidence through the early dusk. To many cultures, the fox is both trickster and teacher - clever, resourceful, adaptable and a reminder that urban survival is an art form. Squirrels are busy burying acorns, a behaviour so instinctive it's become a symbol of foresight and thrift. In literature, they appear in fables and children's tales as comic gatherers, but their careful caching is one of nature's quiet miracles of planning.

Look closer, and November reveals its quieter artists. Fungi bloom like sculptures overnight showing russets, purples, and chalky whites pushing through leaf litter. Each species has a name worthy of poetry: amethyst deceiver and candle snuff, or artist's bracket that truly earns its title because when scratched, its underside darkens, allowing naturalists to draw or write with a fingertip.

Even plants are part of the cultural story of this season. The holly, long a symbol of endurance, seems to gleam brighter now that other leaves have fallen. Its berries once decorated winter solstice fires, a sign that life would return.

In Japanese haiku: Low sun paints the pond, light sketching the still water, silence holds its breath.

In British art, too, painters like Samuel Palmer found beauty in the soft melancholy of change in late autumn light.

In Birmingham's parks, cultural and natural heritage meet quietly and mostly with muted colours and stark shapes. Walking in November is like stepping into an old story that is part natural history, part memory, part art. Each species carries centuries of meaning: survival, transformation and rest. If you take a camera or sketchbook into the park this month, you may not find abundance, but you'll find character. The shapes of trees are more dramatic against a pale sky; the soundscape is stripped back to the essential elements wind, water, frosted earth and fire turned into a low light dimmed by the angle of our planet's journey around the sun.

November invites us to remember that in every robin's note, every fox track in the frost, every shining holly leaf, there's a message that nature and culture are not separate worlds - they've always been telling the same story, just in different forms.



Things to Do for Wildlife in November

(and a few to do for yourself too)

November can feel like the garden or park has gone quiet, but beneath the surface, life is still ticking along. It's a time for tidying, preparing, and noticing.

Here are ten ways to keep connected, creative, and kind to wildlife this month.

1. Feed the birds. Natural food is scarce now, so top up feeders with seeds, nuts, and fat balls. Keep a bowl of water fresh and ice-free.
2. Leave a little mess. Resist the urge to over-tidy. Piles of leaves, logs, and hollow stems make perfect winter shelter for hedgehogs, toads, and insects.
3. Plant for spring. Daffodil, crocus, and allium bulbs planted now will feed pollinators in early spring — hope buried in the soil.
4. Collect some natural materials. Pine cones, twigs and seed heads make brilliant supplies for crafts, decorations, or nature-based art projects.
5. Create a wildlife corner. If you help care for a park or green space, consider leaving a section 'wild' providing a quiet patch for creatures to overwinter undisturbed.
6. Craft for the season. There's still time to knit or crochet a winter hat and gloves set inspired by nature choose moss greens, bark browns, frosty whites, berry reds. It's practical creativity, and I'm sure the wildlife visiting your park or garden would approve of your choice of colours 😊



7. Check your compost. Turn it gently to let in air and cover with cardboard to keep it warm through winter. Worms will continue their quiet work.

8. Record what you see. Take photos, write notes, or share sightings with your local Friends Group. Even the humble robin or familiar fungus are important to record.

9. Join a planting day. National Tree Week is the perfect time to volunteer with groups like Birmingham TreePeople or your local park team. It's fresh air, friendship, and the chance to plant something that will outlive us all.



10. Make something beautiful. Paint, sketch, write, or weave something inspired by November's palette — bronze leaves, silver skies, and ever greens that linger. Creativity, after all, is just another way of caring for the world around us.

For more hints and tips on winter gardening jobs you can visit:

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/discover/gardening-tips/gardening-tips-for-winter>

Young Green Champions - Learning outdoors



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



Little Green Champions – The Art of Being Human

Long before there were pencils, paints or classrooms, human beings found ways to make their mark. The earliest cave art was handprints, animals, and shapes drawn with earth and ash showing that creativity is one of our oldest instincts. Those handprints, pressed on stone walls thousands of years ago, are like whispers from the first children and families who saw beauty in the natural world and wanted to not only be part of it but also capture it to keep a record of being in the world.

Today's children carry that same spark. Give them a handful of leaves, twigs or mud, and they'll start creating: patterns, stories, dens, and decorations. Art and play come naturally when children are free to explore outdoors. Through simple creative moments - making leaf prints, painting pebbles, or sculpting with clay they develop curiosity, confidence, and care for nature. These early experiences remind us that imagination grows best in open air and muddy hands. When we nurture children's creativity in parks and green spaces, we're not just making art, we're keeping alive one of humanity's oldest ways of connecting with the world around us.

Shaping Nature – Sculpture Through the Ages



From ancient stone carvings to modern installations in our parks and gardens, sculpture has always drawn inspiration from the natural world. Early artists shaped rock into animals, trees, and flowing forms, trying to capture the movement and mystery of life around them. Over time, nature has remained both muse and material from marble leaves on cathedral walls to the organic curves of modern environmental art.

Some sculptors go further still, working with nature itself. The ancient art of bonsai began in China and flourished in Japan, where tiny trees are carefully shaped to echo the beauty and balance of full-grown forests. It is a living form of sculpture which is part patience and part philosophy that celebrates harmony between human hands and the natural world.

Today, artists continue to carve, weave, and grow their ideas from natural materials: wood, stone, clay, willow, even light and sound. In parks and green spaces, these artworks remind us that creativity doesn't stand apart from nature it grows within it. Whether it's a grand statue or a single shaped branch, each work expresses the same impulse that first moved us to carve on cave walls: the wish to see ourselves reflected in the world around us.

Birmingham-born sculptor Luke Perry is known for creating powerful public artworks that celebrate community, heritage, and the environment. His large-scale metal sculptures often explore the relationship between people and place from the Black British History installations in Handsworth to the striking Titanic Workers Memorial in the Black Country.

Luke's recent work also turns towards nature, using reclaimed materials and sustainable methods to tell stories of regeneration and resilience. His outdoor pieces are built to weather and change, becoming part of the living landscape rather than standing apart from it. He describes his approach as "art for everyone" it is designed to be touched, walked around, and connected to daily life.

Out and About in November 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. Check out November's events here: <https://naturallybirmingham.org/out-and-about-with-birminghams-park-rangers/>

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

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

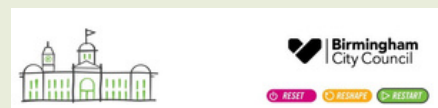
You can join our Park Rangers to help care for your local green spaces whether it's planting for pollinators, litter picking, or creating wildlife-friendly areas, your time makes a difference. Or bring the whole family and take part in our free nature-inspired activities that are perfect for all ages!

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.



Hidden Art – Discovering Birmingham's Forgotten Sculptures

There are hundreds of pieces of art in public spaces in Birmingham. Some of which is very obvious and well known. However art in Birmingham's parks isn't always easy to find. Some pieces stand proudly at entrances like the rings in Burbury Park or on lawns like the SS Journey in Handsworth Park, but many lie half-hidden among the trees, softened by weather and time. These quiet artworks tell stories not just of artists, but of communities, movements, and moments in the city's history simply fragments of creativity slowly returning to nature. In Castle Vale, for example, sculptures (like the hippo-cat below) and mosaics are tucked along green corridors and housing estates, part of a community-led regeneration programme that wove art into everyday life. Figures, shapes, and abstract forms emerge beside pathways or play areas, blending local identity with imagination. Many residents pass them daily without knowing who created them, yet they've become landmarks of belonging all the same. Like the "lamb chop" in Curtis Gardens, a sculpture by John Bridgeman or further south, in the Lickey Hills, the legacy of the once-celebrated Sculpture Trail still lingers. Most of the works have faded or been reclaimed by woodland, the Birdman and Icarus long since returned to the woodpile. But one piece remains - the Green Man, weather-beaten but watchful. Although his mossy face still peers from the trees like a guardian of the woods and his spring song is still holding on, he is a reminder that art, like nature, changes and endures in cycles.



Across the city, other works survive quietly: carvings on park benches, metal forms near boating lakes, murals hidden behind hedges or under leaves like the one in Garrison Lane Park. Together they form an unofficial museum - one built not of walls and plinths, but of open spaces and the seasons. Perhaps that's what makes them special. These forgotten sculptures remind us that creativity doesn't always seek permanence. Sometimes it simply wants to belong to a place, to age with it, and to be rediscovered by those who look closely enough.

Next time you are walking in a park or open space look more carefully at those shapes, were they once more than they appear now, or perhaps it's just your imagination. <https://www.handsworthcreative.com/park-arts-trail>

Nature's Orchestra – Music in the Wild

Long before the first human sang around a fire, the world was already alive with music. From whale song to birdsong, nature has always known it's own rhythm and melody used not just as communication, but also as expression.

Birds are perhaps nature's most famous musicians. Blackbirds, nightingales, and thrushes improvise like jazz artists, shaping songs that vary by region and even by individual mood.

In tropical forests, groups of gibbons sing duets at dawn, their calls weaving together in harmony. Beneath the ocean, humpback whales compose haunting melodies that can travel for hundreds of miles, changing subtly each season as if revising a symphony.

Even rhythm runs deep in the animal kingdom. Palm cockatoos drum with sticks on hollow trees to impress potential mates, while chimpanzees beat on roots and trunks to signal presence and power a percussive heartbeat of the forest.

Scientists studying these natural musicians have found that many species share traits once thought uniquely human: timing, repetition, variation, and even creativity. Their performances remind us that sound itself is part of life's design and a shared language that connects species across time and distance.

When we listen carefully to the music of the natural world, we hear more than noise. We hear patterns, relationships, and echoes of our own creative spirit. The first human songs were not the beginning of music, they were our way of joining in.



Animal Artists – Creativity Beyond the Human Hand

We often think of visual art as something only humans do a sign of imagination, expression, and culture. Yet across the natural world, creativity takes many surprising forms. Animals arrange objects, alter and shape natural materials and decorate their spaces in ways that blur the line between instinct and art.

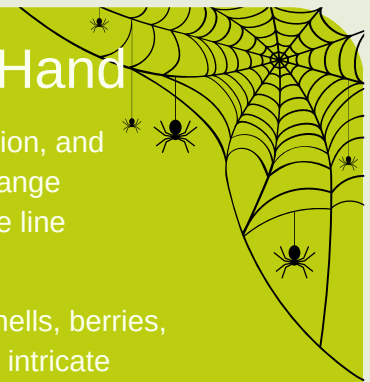
The bowerbird, for example, builds elaborate structures to attract a mate by arranging shells, berries, and bits of glass by colour and size, creating a natural sculpture gallery. Pufferfish carve intricate geometric circles in the sand, perfectly symmetrical designs made only with their fins. Spiders spin webs that glisten like strings of jewels in morning dew, while weaverbirds knot grass with the precision of a textile artist. Even elephants, given brushes, paint and canvas, have been seen to explore pattern and form with their trunks that appear to us to move with the flourish of a human hand.

Are these truly acts of art, or just instinct shaped by evolution? Scientists debate this, but perhaps the distinction matters less than the feeling such acts evoke in us. Watching a bird choose a blue petal, or a dolphin create a bubble ring, we sense the same impulse that drives human art - the urge to make, to play, to communicate beauty.

In celebrating these animal artists, we are reminded that creativity runs deep in life itself. Nature doesn't separate art from living; it builds it into every nest, song, and ripple. When we create, we're not inventing something new nor are we just enjoying a hobby or working as a profession, we're joining an ancient visual conversation that began long before the first handprint appeared on a cave wall.

Did you know?

🕸 Spiders – Orb-weaver spiders design webs so precise they've inspired architects and engineers. Some species even decorate their webs with zigzag "signatures" of silk.



Earth Stories - Memories, Hopes and Happenings

November always feels like a bit of a pause but that means it's a good time to slow down, to make things and listen to music. This month's newsletter has explored how art, music, storytelling, and creativity help us stay connected to nature, and for me, that theme feels very personal. I've always believed that creativity and nature are two sides of the same coin with one inspiring interest in the other. Over the years, I've seen how the simplest creative acts can help to make that connection: a child painting pinecones, a volunteer weaving willow, or someone quietly sketching trees on a park bench. During my time as a Park Ranger or later leading Teeny Explorers in nature crafts it was pure joy hearing children's laughter ringing through the woods, taking wonderful treasures (stones, sticks and leaves) offered to me from tiny fingers, and being invited to participate in the creation of a gloriously muddy masterpiece! Those sessions taught me that creativity isn't about skill; it's about noticing, sharing, and most of all endlessly expressing delight in the world around us.

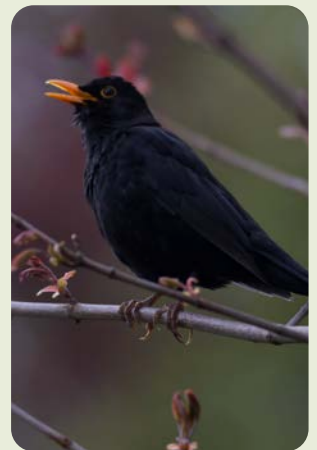
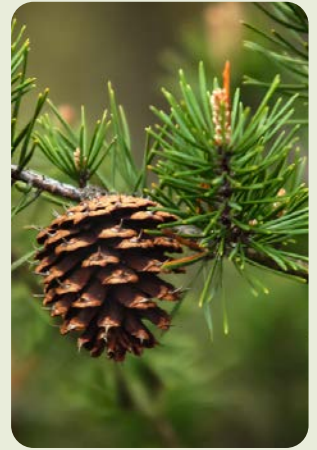
Music, too, has its place in that expression. I love listening to all kinds of music from jazz and, occasionally, heavy metal to classical pieces like The lark Ascending all the way to the harmonies of the natural world: the blackbird's call, the wind in the trees, the rustle of leaves underfoot and the rhythm of the rain on the roof. It's all music and it has different ways of helping us to tune in and keep time with life. But most of all I love singing and to hear people sing and to sing with others. Sometimes I think we respond to nature with song because it's already singing to us.

Photography is another thread that runs through my life. I often find myself crouched in a park or garden, trying to catch the light on a spider's web or the curve of a petal and, yes, occasionally losing an argument with my camera phone while attempting to photograph the moon! What I love about photography is the way it makes me stop and breathe slowly. Often, I like to zoom right in, making me focus on the smallest of detail. Even the familiar becomes extraordinary when you pay close attention: the texture of bark, the shimmer of frost, the pattern of ripples on a lake, the tiny hairs on the edge of a leaf.

All these creative practices - music, craft, photography, storytelling and so many others - are also ways of recognising our own belonging. They connect us not only to nature, but to our planet and to each other. I've seen that in community projects across Birmingham: the organisations who use creativity to inspire others to plant trees and shape habitats; the artists carving, painting, and performing outdoors; the Friends groups turning green spaces into places of pride and possibility using colour and flowers and crafts. Together, they remind us that a city's creativity isn't confined to galleries or concert halls, it doesn't even have to be fashioned by us instead it can grow in parks, playgrounds, and allotments. It can be organic as well as considered. We need to have nature's magical creations along with our carefully crafted ones so we can still be surprised and amazed by our world.

As we head into winter, I hope this issue inspires you to keep creating, listening, and looking. Knit a hat, make a pinecone garland, write a poem, take a photo, or simply stop to watch the clouds. Nature is generous and it keeps offering us inspiration, even in the quietest months. After all, the act of noticing is where both art and appreciation begin. And every time we take time to notice - really notice - the world becomes a little more special.

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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