



# GREEN CHAMPIONS



## Noticing Nature

The evening sky unseals its quiet fountain,  
Hushing the silence to a drowsy rain;  
It spreads a web of dimness o'er the plain  
And round each meadow tree;  
"December" by Thomas Wentworth Higginson



## Health - Naturally

When it comes to keeping well through winter, nature is our best friend. Connecting with plants indoors and outdoors helps keep stress low and nourish our bodies and minds. Here are a few winter wellness tips to help.

With calls, emails and a big to do list, it can be easy to be distracted even when we're outdoors. Get the most of your time in nature by really paying attention while you're there. Listen to the birds and animals, look closely at the plants and vegetation, and feel the cool air on your face. Doing this has a host of health benefits, from releasing serotonin to lowering blood pressure. There's a reason we love firelight, candles, lanterns and twinkly lights in winter: just looking at them can prompt the brain to release "happy hormones" like dopamine. Go for a stroll with friends and family after dark to see the Christmas trees and lights in your neighbourhood.

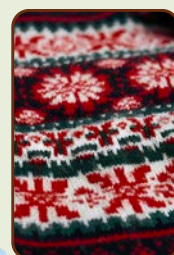


## Learn more about - Knitting

As the days grow shorter and we gather indoors a little more, December is the perfect month to discover (or rediscover) the gentle craft of knitting. While it may be a bit late to make something in time for Christmas Jumper Day (11.5.25), it's never too late to pick up some needles and begin. Knitting is more than creating warm garments; it's a calming, sustainable skill that encourages mindfulness, creativity, and connection. Many people find themselves drawn in by the simple rhythm of stitches, the satisfaction of using natural fibres, and the joy of making something lasting with their own hands. It's also a brilliant way to reduce waste by mending, repurposing, and crafting instead of buying new.

Whether you're a complete beginner or someone who hasn't knitted since childhood, winter offers the ideal moment to slow down, learn something new, and maybe even craft next year's festive jumper.

<https://www.nhs.uk/nhs.uk/pulse-staff-health-and-wellbeing-week-promotes-craft-activities-to-boost-mental-wellbeing/>



# Giving Tuesday - 2nd December 2025



**“What if we told you, you are changing the world right now? Would you believe it?”**

A better future is being built by all of us right now, in the billions of small actions we take each day. Acts of care, love, and understanding extend outward, like the threads of a beautiful tapestry. Whether it's offering a kind smile, a helping hand, or an hour of your time - these acts have a way of rippling out, becoming part of something much greater. That is the power of radical generosity.”

That is the introduction on the GivingTuesday Website. <https://www.givingtuesday.org/>

GivingTuesday is a global generosity movement unleashing the power of radical generosity. It was created in 2012 as a simple idea: a day that encourages people to do good. Since then, it has grown into a year-round global movement that inspires hundreds of millions of people to give, collaborate, and celebrate generosity. Whether it's some of your time, a donation, or the power of your voice in your local community.

It's a simple idea: whether it's making someone smile, helping a neighbour or stranger out, showing up for an issue or people we care about, or giving some of what we have to those who need our help, every act of generosity counts and everyone has something to contribute toward building the better world we all want to live in.

As I often say - why do this on just one day a year? Well it shouldn't be just one day - it should be every day just like so many other awareness or actions days, weeks and months. But in our busy lives sometimes we do need a reminder to care for the planet, others and even ourselves. GivingTuesday is a global movement, **but you don't need to sign up to join in.**

What can we do this December? Generosity comes in many forms. While signing up to the movement is a great start, there are countless ways we can give to the planet, our communities, and the people we care about.

For the earth, giving might mean planting a tree, leaving part of your garden wild for wildlife, picking up litter on your local walk, or choosing to repair and reuse instead of buying new. For the community, it could be offering time to a Friends Group, checking in on a neighbour, donating to a local food bank, or supporting small independent businesses.

You can make a donation to a chosen charity, do look out for local organisations asking for support. But giving doesn't always have to be through financial support. A handwritten note, a shared walk in the park, or simply listening with care can mean as much as any gift.

You can also show generosity, to the planet, by being more sustainable. If you want to try a more sustainable Christmas, you might be surprised to learn how easy it is to achieve something with the help of The National Trusts top tips and ideas. From making your own decorations to giving nature a helping hand, find out how you could make a real difference to the environment over the festive period with just a few simple changes. <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/discover/how-to-have-a-greener-christmas> or visit the Ecobirmingham website for more living sustainably lives information: <https://ecobirmingham.com/2025/01/07/living-sustainably-lets-play/>

This Giving Tuesday, small kindnesses can make a big difference - to people and the planet.

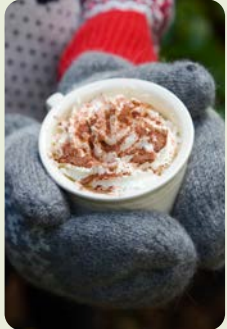


# City of Nature Programme Update - Celebration

December invites us to pause and notice the small winter moments that bring light into the darker days. Whether it's sharing mince pies or Christmas cookies and hot chocolate after a frosty walk, seeing the first sleety snowflake settle on your coat in the middle of the city, or keeping candles glowing until brighter days return, this season reminds us that celebration doesn't always need grand gestures. Sometimes it's simply about taking time to acknowledge what we've achieved together.



For the City of Nature Programme, this year has been full of milestones worth celebrating. Birmingham's commitment to becoming a true Nature City continues to take shape, with communities, partners, and parks staff working side-by-side to bring nature closer to where people live. One of the highlights has been joining BOSF in celebrating 20 years of Friends Groups supporting two decades of dedicated volunteers caring for green spaces, championing biodiversity, and creating welcoming places for everyone.



We are also proud of the Rangers' work across the Red Wards, where on-the-ground support, local insight, and relationship-building have made a real difference, especially for our new pocket parks. Their efforts have strengthened connections with residents and helped spark new ideas for how urban nature can flourish.

Behind the scenes, the Parks team has embraced new ways of working by becoming more collaborative, more community-led, and more responsive to the challenges facing our green spaces. Partnerships have been at the heart of this shift: schools, community organisations, environmental networks, and local groups all playing a role in shaping a greener, healthier Birmingham.



Progress has been our theme this year, but December reminds us that progress deserves celebration. So as we head toward the new year, let's take a moment to recognise the collective effort that makes City of Nature possible and look forward to everything still to come.

Please join us whenever and wherever you can in 2026. Whether it's in person or online, it's you who makes the difference, it's you who needs to be involved, it's your City of Nature.



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](mailto:Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk)

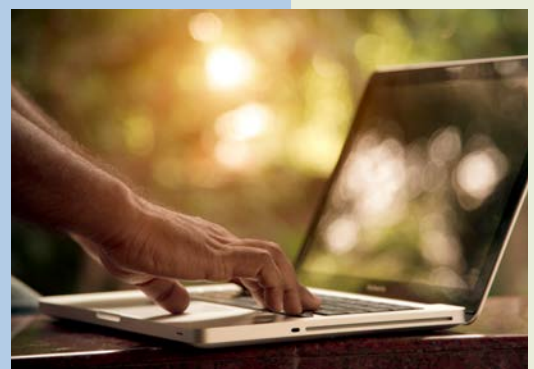
**JOIN US for The City of Nature Online:  
Green Champions Online Catch Up on Friday -  
16<sup>th</sup> January 2026 online on teams: 1pm to 2pm**

If you would like to join the November Green Champions online meeting please email us at [Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto: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/>



# A Moment to Acknowledge the World Around Us



Before we dive into celebrations, it feels important to pause and recognise the world we're living in.

This past year has been difficult for many. Across the globe, communities have faced the strain of ongoing conflicts, extreme weather events, and growing environmental pressures. From devastating floods and heatwaves to rising costs of living and uncertainty, it has often felt as though both people and places are being pushed to their limits.

Even here in Birmingham, the impact is felt. Economic pressures continue to shape the city's services and people's everyday lives, while the changing climate brings challenges we can no longer ignore: wetter winters, hotter summers, and the need to adapt our urban spaces so they remain resilient and welcoming.

And yet, in the midst of unpredictability, nature continues to be our life support system. It provides us with clean air, water, fertile soil, and food - but it also offers something less tangible and equally vital. Moments outdoors can steady us: a quiet walk under winter trees, the sudden appearance of a robin, or a glimpse of pale morning light breaking through cloud. These small interactions offer calm, connection, and sometimes even a sense of renewal.

As we look ahead in this newsletter, we carry that sense of grounded hope with us.

## 5th December World Soil Day - The ground beneath our feet



On 5th December we mark World Soil Day – a moment to appreciate something most of us rarely think about, yet couldn't live without. Soil is often seen as just "dirt", a background material beneath our feet, but in reality it is one of the most complex and life-giving systems on Earth. A single teaspoon of healthy soil can contain more living organisms than there are people on the planet: bacteria, fungi, tiny invertebrates and countless micro-organisms quietly recycling nutrients, storing carbon, and supporting the plants that feed us.

Soil is our invisible ally. It filters water, helps regulate floods, and supports ecosystems from city parks to forests and farmland. Even in winter, when the ground feels hard and frozen, life continues beneath the surface. Roots keep growing slowly, micro-organisms stay active in sheltered pockets, and the soil's structure continues to shape how water and nutrients move through the landscape.

Yet soil is under pressure from pollution, overuse, and climate change. Protecting it means choosing sustainable gardening and land-care practices, reducing compaction, planting more vegetation, and letting natural processes recover where they can.

This International Soil Day, it's worth pausing to recognise the quiet, constant work happening beneath us – a reminder that even the ground we stand on is alive, adaptable, and essential to our shared future.

# International Day of Mountains

## 11<sup>th</sup> December 2025



This International Day of Mountains, has the theme “Glaciers matter for water, food and livelihoods in mountains and beyond”, it highlights the critical role mountain regions play as a key source of global freshwater and calls for immediate measures to avoid the glaciers’ disappearance.

Glaciers, vast reserves of ice and snow found across the planet, are far more than frozen landscapes - they are lifelines for ecosystems and communities, holding around 70 percent of the world's freshwater. Their accelerated melting represents not only an environmental crisis but also a humanitarian one, threatening agriculture, clean energy, water security and billions of peoples’ lives. Their retreat, driven by rising global temperatures, is a stark indicator of the climate crisis. Melting glaciers and thawing permafrost increase risks such as floods, glacier lake outburst floods, landslides or enhanced erosion and sediment, endangering downstream populations and critical infrastructure.

We don’t have any mountains in Birmingham although we do have plenty of hills. But just like every other place on the planet we are dependant on global systems. <https://www.un.org/en/observances/mountain-day>.

### Do you feel like a hike to find out more?

Don't worry, you don't have to go very equipped or spend money. [Let's go on a multimedia journey](#) to the Carpathian Mountains, the Hindu Kush-Himalaya region, the Tian Shan Mountains, and the Virunga Mountains. You will be amazed by everything you will learn!

Glaciers may feel a world away from Birmingham, but they quietly shape our lives. These vast frozen stores of freshwater help regulate the global climate by reflecting sunlight and keeping global temperatures stable. Their meltwater feeds rivers and oceans, influencing weather systems that reach us here in the Midlands.

Even the landscape beneath our feet was shaped by ancient ice, which carved valleys, left behind fertile soils, and influenced the routes of rivers we still depend on. As glaciers shrink due to climate change, the balance they help maintain becomes more fragile, a reminder that distant nature still matters close to home. In 2022 and 2023 eight walking and cycling trails were launched in the Bromsgrove and SW Birmingham districts to showcase the regions erratic boulders. 100 years ago, the public were excited to learn about these relics of the Ice Age, but the boulders have been disappearing! Thanks to National Lottery players a partnership of local organisations received support to bring the boulders the prominence they deserve. They are the only visible relics of what happened deep in Birmingham’s ice age history. The have also produced a Fire to Ice Trail for the young at heart. This is a timeline trail through Balaam’s Wood, New Frankley. It has brass rubbing stations to mark milestones in the deep-time history of our erratic boulders – from their fiery origins in a volcano to their icy journey to Birmingham. <https://erraticsproject.org/erratic-boulder-trails/>





# Welcoming the New Birmingham Parks and Greenspaces Facebook Page



Birmingham's parks and green spaces have always brought people together, but now they have a new digital home to help strengthen those connections: the dedicated Birmingham Parks and Greenspaces Facebook page. In an age where communication moves quickly and people seek information in many different ways, social media has become an essential tool for keeping communities informed, inspired, and involved. This new page represents an important step forward in how we share our city's green-space story.

Social media can play a powerful role in supporting public engagement with nature. For many residents, it's the first place they turn to when looking for events, volunteering opportunities, local news, or tips for enjoying their parks. By gathering all this information in one clear, accessible space, the page makes it easier for people to find what they need—and to feel connected to what's happening around them. Posts can reach thousands within minutes, meaning that announcements from the Parks team, Friends Groups, or partners can spread far beyond traditional communication channels.

But the value of this page goes far deeper than delivering information. It offers a platform for genuine conversation. People can ask questions, share photos, celebrate wildlife sightings, offer feedback, and highlight the green spaces that matter to them. This two-way communication is vital for building trust and strengthening the bond between the Parks Service and the communities it serves. When people feel listened to and involved, they are more likely to visit, volunteer, and support their local spaces.

The page will also help sustain the wider City of Nature journey. Many partners and community organisations already use social media effectively; now there is a central point where stories, successes, and learning can be shared more widely. Whether it's showcasing the work of Rangers, highlighting improvements in local parks, promoting seasonal messages, or simply celebrating the everyday beauty of Birmingham's nature, the page can help make these stories visible and accessible to all. Ultimately, this new page strengthens what Birmingham already does so well: bringing people and nature together. By creating a lively, inclusive online space, it supports the real-world relationships that make our parks thrive. It's a small digital step with the potential for a big community impact—and a welcome addition to the city's green-space family.



## Destination Sites - Putting our "Premier" and "Country" Parks on the Map



Birmingham's parks are already well loved, but a new strand of work is beginning to highlight some of our most exceptional green spaces as true Destination Sites. As part of the Parks Service's new operating model, the focus on premier and country parks aims to recognise their unique value both as major visitor attractions and as cherished local places where communities connect with nature.

Two newly appointed Destination Parks Managers have now started in post, bringing fresh energy and dedicated leadership to this developing area of work. Their role will help raise the profile of Birmingham's flagship parks: Cannon Hill Park, Kings Heath Park, Handsworth Park, Sutton Park NNR, Lickey Hills Country Park, Sheldon Country Park and Farm and Woodgate Valley Country Park. They will be improving the visitor experience, supporting events and activities, and strengthening links with partner organisations. At the same time, they will remain rooted in the needs of local people, ensuring these parks continue to offer welcoming, accessible, everyday spaces for nearby residents.

It's an exciting step toward putting Birmingham's destination parks firmly on the map, while keeping community involved and at the heart.



# Celebrating Birmingham's Park Ranger Service – *Linking People and Nature*

As the year draws to a close, it feels the right moment to pause and celebrate one of Birmingham's greatest assets: the Park Ranger Service. Often working quietly and tirelessly in the background, our Urban Rangers are at the heart of city nature supporting wildlife, caring for green spaces, and helping residents feel that parks belong to them. In a city as diverse and dynamic as Birmingham, their role is both demanding and indispensable.

Rangers are the guardians of our neighbourhood parks, carrying out essential conservation work that ensures these places remain rich in wildlife and resilient in the face of climate change. From managing meadows and woodlands to monitoring species, restoring habitats, and tackling invasive plants, their work is rooted in practical skill and deep ecological knowledge. Yet conservation in an urban setting brings unique challenges. Parks endure heavy footfall, competing demands, and pressures from development and pollution. Despite this, Rangers continue to champion biodiversity, finding creative ways to protect the natural fabric of the city.

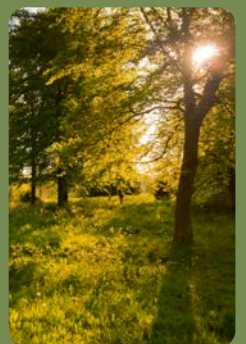
What sets Birmingham's Rangers apart is their commitment to people as much as to the landscape. They build relationships at a local level by supporting volunteer activity, leading activities for schools, and helping Friends of Parks groups grow in confidence and capability. Their presence in neighbourhoods creates a sense of safety, welcome, and connection. Whether it's guiding a child through pond-dipping for the first time, working with young people on practical conservation tasks, or supporting community events, Rangers help people of all ages feel at home in nature.

Partnerships are central to how they work. Within the City of Nature Alliance, Rangers collaborate with organisations across the city including environmental charities, community groups, researchers, educational networks, and fellow council teams. These partnerships amplify impact, allowing projects to grow and ensuring that learning and resources are shared. From tree-planting initiatives to nature recovery work, from citizen science to health and wellbeing programmes, Rangers are often the bridge that brings people and organisations together.

It's also important to acknowledge the challenges they face. Urban Rangers work with limited resources, in a climate where environmental issues are accelerating and communities expect more from their local green spaces than ever before. They navigate the complexities of balancing recreation with conservation, all while responding to the unpredictable realities of weather, vandalism, litter, and wildlife disturbance. Yet, despite these pressures, their dedication never wavers. They remain front-line ambassadors for Birmingham's natural heritage.

At a time when the need for nature has never been greater, for our physical health, mental wellbeing, sense of belonging, and environmental resilience, the Ranger Service is essential. They help weave nature into everyday life, ensuring that even in a bustling city we have access to places of peace, learning, and wild wonder. Their strapline, Linking People and Nature, captures this perfectly. Rangers don't just manage landscapes - they build relationships, spark curiosity, and help communities rediscover the joy and value of the natural world.

So this December, we celebrate them: the quiet heroes of Birmingham's green spaces, keeping our city wild, welcoming, and full of life.



# The Winter Solstice

The Winter Solstice, falling around 21st December, marks the shortest day and longest night of the year. For thousands of years, communities across the world have recognised this moment as a turning point and a pause in the deep midwinter, the gentle beginning of the sun's return. Even in our fast-paced modern lives, there is something grounding about acknowledging this shift. The Solstice invites us to slow down, breathe, and take comfort in the promise of lighter days ahead.

Here in Birmingham, the Solstice has its own quiet relevance. Our city's parks, woodlands, and canals hold a special stillness at this time of year. Morning frost on the grass at Cannon Hill, the low golden sun slipping behind the trees in Handsworth Park, the silhouettes of bare branches along the Rea Valley or Sutton Park's heathland they all remind us that winter has its own kind of beauty. Wildlife adapts too: robins become more visible and vocal, foxes leave tracks in soft mud, and wintering birds gather on our lakes. Nature continues, even in the coldest weeks.

The Solstice encourages us to notice these small details, to reconnect with seasonal rhythms, and to appreciate the green spaces that hold us through the darker months. It's also a moment to reflect on what the year has brought, and what we hope to grow as the days lengthen. Many people mark the Solstice with candles, lantern walks, or simply stepping outside at dusk to watch the sky shift from blue to indigo.

In a bustling urban environment, these pauses matter reminding us that even surrounded by buildings, buses, and busy streets we are still part of the natural cycle. The Winter Solstice offers a gentle invitation: to find light where we can, to rest when we need to, and to look forward with renewed hope as the year turns once again.



## Robins – A Winter Symbol of Hope and Love

Few birds capture the spirit of winter quite like the robin. With their bright red breast and fearless curiosity, robins have become one of the most recognisable symbols of Christmas. They appear on cards, wrapping paper, decorations and storybooks—but their connection to the season runs far deeper than festive imagery.

Historically, the robin's role as a Christmas emblem dates back to Victorian times, when postmen wore red uniforms and were nicknamed "robins". As the tradition of sending Christmas cards grew, artists often painted small red-breasted birds delivering messages of goodwill. Over time, the robin became woven into our winter celebrations, symbolising warmth during the coldest months.

In folklore, robins carry a quieter meaning too: they are often seen as messengers of hope, reminders of loved ones, or symbols of renewal. Their song brightens even the darkest mornings, and many people feel a special connection when a robin appears nearby, it's as though it carries comfort or reassurance.

In Birmingham's parks and gardens, robins remain active throughout winter. While many birds migrate, robins stay close to home, singing boldly from hedges, benches, and low branches. Their presence brings colour and life to frosty days, offering a moment of joy to anyone who pauses long enough to notice. Rangers and volunteers often speak of robins as loyal companions during winter tasks, hopping beside them in search of disturbed insects or simply keeping watch.

Beyond their festive charm, robins remind us of the resilience of nature and the small sparks of beauty that persist even in challenging times. Their bright chest stands out against the bare branches, just as hope stands out in the quiet of winter. In this way, the robin becomes more than a seasonal motif—it becomes a symbol of love, continuity, and the promise that brighter days are on their way.





# Wildlife Watching in December – Finding Life in the Quiet Season

December may feel like the sleepest month of the year, but for those willing to wrap up warm and step outdoors, it offers some of the most rewarding wildlife moments. Across the UK, winter reveals nature in a new light that is quieter, sharper, more intimate. And here in Birmingham, our parks, canals and woodlands provide plenty of opportunities to experience the season's hidden life.

With the leaves now fallen, birds become easier to spot. Robins are our most familiar winter companions, defending their territories with bright confidence. Alongside them, look for blackbirds turning over leaves in search of food, flocks of long-tailed tits bouncing through the hedgerows like tiny pink-and-grey pom-poms, and great spotted woodpeckers drumming on trunks in the clear winter air. In larger spaces such as Sutton Park, the Lickey Hills and Woodgate Valley, mixed flocks of finches and tits feed together, creating bursts of movement in otherwise still landscapes.

One of winter's greatest spectacles is the arrival of migratory birds. Many species travel from colder parts of northern Europe to spend the season here. Birmingham's lakes and reservoirs such as those in Cannon Hill Park, Handsworth Park, Edgbaston Reservoir, and Salford Park become winter refuges for tufted ducks, pochard, teal and wigeon. Look for the elegant goosander, often seen slicing across the water with its sleek profile and dagger-like bill. Gulls, too, gather in large numbers, offering a chance to appreciate their subtle winter plumages.

If you're walking near the River Rea or the Tame Valley wetlands, keep an eye out for the sudden electric-blue flash of a kingfisher. Despite the cold, they remain active hunters, perching low over the water and diving for fish. Grey herons and little egrets also become easier to spot against the muted winter palette, standing motionless along bank edges. Mammals leave clearer signs in December's softer ground. Fox tracks weave through parks at dawn, and squirrels remain busy, retrieving hidden food stores or raiding bird feeders with acrobatic determination. In quieter places such as Brandwood End's woodland edge or Balaam's Wood, you may find the neat, clipped hazelnuts characteristic of mice or voles, even if you never see the animals themselves. Badgers are less active but not fully asleep, dusk walkers in outlying areas may still notice their paths through the undergrowth.

Winter is also fungi season at its tail end. While the flushes of October and November have passed, species like scarlet elf cup can appear on decaying wood later in winter, bringing surprising colour to damp, shaded corners. Mosses and lichens, refreshed by rain, glow brilliantly on tree trunks, stone walls and canal bridges.

December wildlife watching is as much about atmosphere as sightings: the stillness of a frosty morning in Kings Heath Park; mist rising from the lakes at Highbury; the soft wingbeat of a swan cutting through fog; a robin singing from a bare branch as the light fades. These quiet winter gifts remind us that nature never truly stops - it simply shifts pace.

With a warm coat, a slow step, and a little curiosity, December becomes a month rich with life, wonder and unexpected beauty right here on our doorstep.



# Things to Do in the Garden for Wildlife in December

December may be the quietest month in the garden, but it's still full of small, meaningful actions that help wildlife and a few that help you too. Winter can feel long, yet every seed head left standing, every log pile built, and every feeder topped up makes a difference. Here are ten simple things you can do this month to support nature and lift your own spirits along the way.

## 1. Keep bird feeders topped up

Food is scarce now. Offer high-energy options like sunflower hearts, suet and peanuts to help birds through the cold snaps.



## 2. Thaw some ice on small ponds

If your wildlife pond freezes, gently create a small hole by pouring warm water on the surface, **don't step on or lean on the ice** and don't crack the ice. A ball may help keep some water stay unfrozen.

## 3. Leave the leaves where you can

A pile of fallen leaves in a quiet corner provides shelter for hedgehogs, frogs and insects. It also becomes next year's nutrient-rich leaf mould.



## 4. Build a log or stick pile

A simple pile of wood in a shady spot becomes winter housing for beetles, spiders, solitary bees and even the odd toad.

## 5. Plant bare-root trees, shrubs and hedging

December is the perfect time for native species like hawthorn, hazel or dog rose. They provide food and shelter for wildlife and thrive in Birmingham's varied soils.



## 6. Clean out bird boxes

If not already done, give nest boxes a quick tidy. Birds will often use them as winter roosts on freezing nights.

## 7. Grow for early pollinators

Plant winter-flowering favourites such as hellebores, heather or winter honeysuckle. These will support queen bumblebees waking on mild days.

## 8. Leave seed heads standing

Teasels, coneflowers and grasses look beautiful in frost and provide food and shelter for birds and insects.



## 9. Put out a shallow dish of water

Fresh water can be more valuable than food in winter. Refresh daily and place near protective cover.

## 10. Take time for yourself outdoors

A short walk in your local park does wonders for winter wellbeing. Even ten minutes can reset your mood.

Even the smallest actions matter in winter. With a bit of care, a little patience, and a warm pair of gloves, December becomes a month of quiet stewardship and a reminder that nature never truly sleeps, even when the gardener does.

# Young Green Champions - Learning outdoors



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



Winter might feel like a quiet time for nature, but for Little Green Champions it's full of small wonders waiting to be discovered. Whether you're in school or enjoying the Christmas break, there are lots of simple, fun ways to stay connected to the natural world - even on the chilliest days.

At school, winter is a brilliant time for short "noticing walks" around the grounds. Children can look for frost patterns on railings, evergreen leaves that stay bright through the cold, or birds visiting the playground. Setting up a bird-watching station near a classroom window is another excellent activity: feeders attract robins, blue tits and blackbirds, giving pupils a chance to observe wildlife up close. Schools can also collect natural materials like twigs, cones and leaves for winter craft projects or to build mini bug hotels in quiet corners.

During the Christmas break, families can weave nature into their time together. A winter scavenger hunt in the local park (spot a robin, find a holly leaf, listen for a crow) turns a simple walk into an adventure. Children can make easy pinecone feeders at home, helping garden birds through the colder months. Pressed winter leaves or small nature journals encourage creativity indoors when the weather is wet.

On clear nights, wrapping up warm and doing a bit of simple stargazing can spark awe - Orion and the Pleiades are bright and easy to find at this time of year. And even ten minutes outdoors, looking for your breath in the cold air or listening for the wind in the trees, can help children feel calm and connected. Winter may be dark, but it's full of moments of magic.

Little Green Champions can find them everywhere.

## Christmas Magic – Where Imagination and Truth Live Side by Side



Magic doesn't only happen at Christmas or for those who celebrate , but Christmas has always held a special kind of magic for children, not because everything needs to be literally true, but because the season invites imagination, wonder and play to take centre stage.

Children are perfectly capable of holding both fact and fantasy at the same time; they often understand more than we realise, yet still delight in the possibility that the world might be a little more mysterious than it appears.

Stories of Father Christmas, flying reindeer, twinkling stars that guide the way, or animals whispering at midnight give children room to explore kindness, generosity and hope. These tales help build emotional truths, even when they're wrapped in a little sparkle.

Magic isn't about misleading children, it's about creating a safe space where curiosity and belief can coexist.

And when adults join in, they often rediscover a touch of wonder themselves, remembering what it felt like to believe in something beautiful like hearing the clear ring of the Polar Express bell, which only those who truly believe can hear or taking one last peak at the sky on Christmas Eve - just in case.



# The Holly and the Ivy – Winter Symbols

## Rooted in Nature



“The Holly and the Ivy” is one of our most enduring winter songs, weaving together two plants that have carried meaning through centuries of seasonal celebration. Long before they became associated with Christmas, holly and ivy featured in midwinter rituals marking the Winter Solstice as symbols of life, protection and renewal at the darkest point of the year. Their evergreen leaves reminded early communities that nature endures, even in the coldest months.

Holly, with its glossy leaves and bright berries, has long represented resilience. In folklore it was believed to ward off evil, bring good luck, and protect homes from winter storms. Its deep green leaves symbolised masculine energy and strength, while ivy, soft, winding and persistent, was associated with the feminine, intuition and growth. Together, they embodied balance, continuity and the promise of returning light.

As Christianity became rooted in winter traditions, these plants took on new layers of meaning. Holly’s red berries came to represent the Christmas story, while ivy’s ability to cling and climb suggested faith and endurance. Today, both remain beloved symbols of the festive season, adorning wreaths, cards and windowsills across Birmingham and beyond.

But holly and ivy matter not only for their cultural heritage, they are also vital for biodiversity. Holly berries are an essential winter food source for thrushes, blackbirds and migrating redwings. Its dense branches provide shelter for small birds during cold snaps. Ivy, often misunderstood, is a powerhouse for wildlife: its late flowers offer crucial nectar for bees and hoverflies when little else is blooming, and its berries sustain birds well into early spring. Mature ivy also provides roosting sites for bats and nesting places for wrens and robins.

In celebrating holly and ivy, we honour both tradition and ecology they are a reminder that even our oldest seasonal symbols are deeply connected to the living world around us.

## Celebrating with Light – Finding Hope in What We Share



As winter settles in and the days grow short, people across the world turn instinctively toward light. Candles, lanterns, fires and strings of glowing bulbs appear in windows, parks and neighbourhoods, softening the darkness and bringing warmth to the cold months. Though our traditions differ, this shared impulse to create light is one of the most universal expressions of hope.

Across many cultures, light is central to winter celebrations. In the Christian tradition, candles on Advent wreaths and tree lights symbolise guidance and the promise of brighter days. During Hanukkah, families gather to light the menorah, each flame marking resilience, memory and joy. In South Asian communities, Diwali, often falling earlier in the season, celebrates the victory of light over darkness with lamps and vibrant displays. Pagan and nature-based traditions honour the Winter Solstice with lanterns, bonfires or the burning of the Yule log, welcoming the sun’s slow return. Even the simple act of placing a candle in a window has long been a gesture of welcome, remembrance or peace.

Here in Birmingham, these traditions intertwine beautifully. Our city glows with Christmas lights, menorahs in community centres, lantern parades, and winter festivals that brighten streets and parks. Strings of lights wrapped around trees in neighbourhood gardens echo the same ancient desire to bring reassurance into long nights.

What unites all these customs is not just illumination, but connection. Light brings people together - around a table, a hearth, a window, or a shared celebration in the park. It reminds us that even in challenging times, warmth and kindness spread outward, just like the gentle widening of a flame. In celebrating with light, we recognise what we have in common: a hope that outshines darkness, a belief in renewal, and a shared humanity that glows brightest when we nurture it together.

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

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

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.

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 December events here: <https://naturallybirmingham.org/out-and-about-with-birminghams-park-rangers/>

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

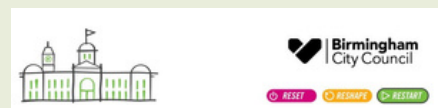
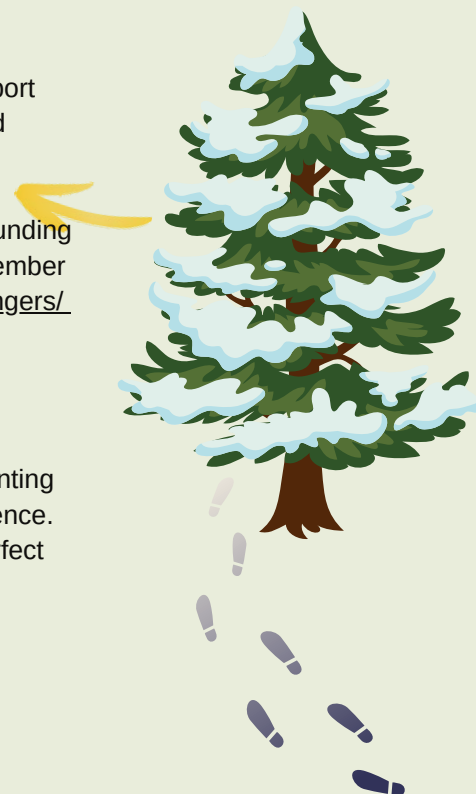
You can join our Park Rangers to help care for your local green spaces whether it's planting for pollinators, litter picking, or creating wildlife-friendly areas, your time makes a difference. Or bring the whole family and take part in our free nature-inspired activities that are perfect for all ages!

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](mailto: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.**



## West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy

"Our West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy is a call to action. For the first time, we now have clear priorities, and locations, where we see the need to safeguard and improve nature. We also have clearly identified actions that everyone can get involved in delivering, from large organisations down to individual people and communities. This document has been developed through extensive collaboration with our constituent local authorities, environmental organisations, businesses, and residents. Their insights and contributions have helped us to shape a strategy that is both ambitious and achievable and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for the time they have taken to provide input. Together, we can ensure that the West Midlands remains a vibrant and thriving region, where nature and people coexist in harmony. With your support, we can achieve the priorities set out in this strategy to create a legacy of environmental stewardship for future generations. Thank you for your commitment to nature recovery in the West Midlands." - Richard Parker Mayor of the West Midlands

<https://www.wmca.org.uk/documents/environment-energy/west-midlands-local-nature-recovery-strategy-2025/>



A West Midlands LNRS vision and aims:

- 10 priority themes and 62 associated actions with case studies to demonstrate how the priority is already being effectively delivered by stakeholder(s) within the West Midlands
- An interactive online map identifying areas for targeted action
- Next steps – monitoring, governance and nature finance
- Supplementary information in appendices

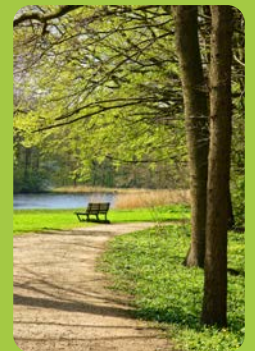
By 2030, through collective action, nature in the West Midlands will be thriving, valued by all, and central to a healthier, more resilient and prosperous region. We will recover nature by restoring habitats and species and use nature-based solutions to ensure that people and wildlife can flourish together - now and for future generations.

# Birmingham's Parks: Past, Present and Future – A Christmas Carol-ish Reflection

If the parks of Birmingham had their own Christmas Carol, the first spirit to visit us would be the Spirit of Parks Past. It would take us back fifty years, gliding over snowy lawns in Cannon Hill, drifting through the quiet winter avenues of Handsworth Park, brushing the frost from benches in Ward End or Cotteridge. We would see families skating on frozen ponds, gardeners tending roses wrapped against the cold, schoolchildren racing across playing fields. We would watch people shaping their surroundings through pride and friendship, and Park Keepers who knew every tree by name. The spirit would remind us that parks have always been our city's shared rooms, those places where people gathered, played, healed, and made memories in the open air.



Then the Spirit of Parks Present arrives - not unkind, but honest. It shows us the challenges we know well: bins overflowing on busy days, corners of parks where litter gathers like an unwanted winter drift, paths wearing thin under constant use. We see budgets stretched thin, teams working harder with fewer resources, climate impacts arriving as flooded paths, heat-stressed trees or sudden storms. And yet, this spirit also brings light. It shows Friends Groups turning up on cold Saturday mornings, planting bulbs and picking litter with cheerful determination. It shows the Rangers connecting people and nature through quiet daily graft. It shows children finding joy in robins and puddles, volunteers restoring habitats, partners stepping forward to share skills and ideas. The present is imperfect, yes - but alive with people who care.



The spirit shows us something else too: new directions taking root. We glimpse the City of Nature Plan, a promise to reimagine Birmingham as a true Nature City where green spaces are central to health, climate action and community life. We see the early steps of nature recovery across meadows, wetlands and woodlands. We see new ways of working across teams, sectors and neighbourhoods - slow but steady shifts toward a more joined-up, people-centred approach to our local landscapes. The present is a work in progress, but not without hope.



And then comes the Spirit of Parks Yet to Come. It does not speak, but shows us possibilities. We see parks twenty years from now - greener, wilder, fairer. Trees arch higher over pathways. Wildflower edges hum with pollinators. Play spaces feel welcoming to every child; walking routes feel safe and inviting; ponds and wetlands gleam with birds that have returned because we made space for them. We see communities shaping their parks with pride, their voices at the table from the very beginning. We see green jobs, new skills, and youth programmes that grow confidence as much as habitat. We see Birmingham recognising its parks not as extras, but as essentials: climate shelters, health-giving landscapes, places where nature and people breathe together.



The spirit shows us something more intimate too - small moments that signal a cultural shift. A child picking up a piece of litter because this is my park. A family planting a tree for future shade. Elders sitting on a bench they helped restore. Volunteers celebrating their 30th anniversary. A teenager who once joined a ranger session now leading one. Tiny actions forming part of a larger, hopeful story. If the spirits teach us anything, it is this: the past gives us roots, the present asks for honesty and effort, and the future depends on the choices we make now.



And as the vision fades, we are left with a sense that Birmingham's parks can continue becoming what they have always had the potential to be - places of belonging, of biodiversity, of beauty. Places where people feel connected to each other and the natural world. A future that is wilder, fairer, healthier and greener is within reach. Together, we can make it real.



# Christmas Earth Stories – Memories, Hopes and Happenings

Winter always seems to ask me to listen a little more closely. To lean in. To notice the quiet pulse beneath the cold. When the year seems to slow and the nights draw long, I find myself returning to a small constellation of images - cinnamon, snowmen, deer and dawn. Acting as tiny sparks that pull my memories and hope into the same gentle circle.

Cinnamon: warm, familiar now, but once new - drifting through my American friends kitchen where our hearts met over mugs of hot chocolate and shared stories.

Snowmen: sometimes real but more often imagined here in Birmingham, always reminders that play is its own kind of resilience. Even a dusting of snow in past winters would find me and my brother trying to form the tiniest of these icons of the season.

Deer: glimpsed in the stillness of early morning, or simply held in the mind's eye, symbols of nature and yet somehow magical at this time of year. They do seem to fly as they move together through the mists of a sleeping landscape.

And dawn: the shyest of visitors in December, thin and pale at first, but carrying the quiet promise that no darkness lasts forever. Whether after the solstice or on the 25<sup>th</sup> both bring their own sense of expectation and hope.

Winter can fold itself around us in ways that feel heavy - wet streets, the grey hours, the wind that whispers of unfinished tasks. Yet beneath the soil, life is gathering itself. Roots tightening their grip. Bulbs swelling in the dark. The earth writing its patient, unseen chapters while we hurry past, unaware of the careful preparation for spring's green exhale. Nature is never idle; it rests with purpose. And so each year we follow suit. We light candles on windowsills, drape strings of brightness around tree branches and porches, share hot drinks that thaw our fingertips. Bells chime across the city from churches, from classrooms, from small shops where people pause long enough to wish each other well. These small illuminations are our way of refusing the dark. A soft defiance. A way of saying: we are still here, and we are still hopeful.

Across cultures and celebrations, winter draws us together in its own quiet choreography. Christmas, Solstice, Hanukkah, Yule, simple family gatherings - all of them offering warmth in different languages, yet speaking the same truth: that light matters most when nights are longest.

Looking back on the year, I think of the work done in parks, the hands that planted, swept, carried, tended. I think of the wildlife weathering storms, the volunteers showing up with laughter and determination, the small triumphs tucked among the larger ones. These are our "earth stories" happening quietly around us, as steady and necessary as root and rain.

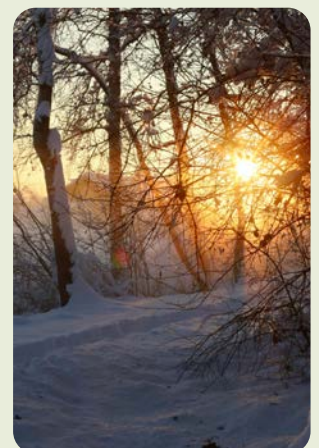
And so, as winter deepens, I offer this wish:

that your celebrations, whatever shape they take, are gentle and bright;  
that you find moments of magic tucked into ordinary days;  
that the dawn, slow and soft, finds you ready to begin again.

May light reach you. May hope hold you.

And may the turning of the year bring a little more green, a little more joy,  
and a little more of the world's quiet wonder every day.

Deborah Needle - Editor and City of Nature Green Champion for Involvement



# Birmingham City Council's Route to Net Zero

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

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

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

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

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



## Natural England - Health and Environment

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



## Birmingham TreePeople - Urban Forest Volunteers

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



## Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust

Works with us for nature's recovery across Birmingham and the Black Country; protecting, restoring and creating wildlife-rich, accessible spaces that benefit people and wildlife. Get involved and find out more about their events in Birmingham and the Black Country.

<https://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/>



## BOSF - Find you local Friends of Open Spaces Group

BOSF offers opportunities for those interested in open spaces to share knowledge and experience. You can register your group to receive regular updates about funding sources, training opportunities, events in open spaces and lots of useful information. If you want to start a group to care for a green space near you they can support you to do that.

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



Follow Naturally Birmingham on: @NaturallyBirmi1



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

