



GREEN CHAMPIONS



Health - Naturally

Welcome to 2026 and welcome back after what we hope was a peaceful, restorative festive break.

January can feel slow, quiet, and a little grey around the edges, so this month's newsletter is intentionally shorter and gentler than usual. Think of it as a soft re-entry into the year, with space to breathe, plan and reconnect at your own pace.

So we are offering just one health recommendation to get us started - listen out for bird song (or watch out for a certain bird). Start now and make a point of listening or looking for changes over the coming months. That's it - nice and easy.



Noticing Nature

January brings a silver light and scatters it with care,
A blackbird threads a golden note to warm the icy air.
The frozen earth is listening as new days slowly start
And winter holds the promise of spring within its heart.
"The Golden Note" by Arden Wrenfield

Learn more about - Green Champions.

The first Green Champions call of 2026 is coming up soon. If you'd like to join us but haven't yet requested the link, please email:

👉 cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk

We'll send the link and a calendar invite so it's easy to drop straight into your diary.

This call will be a welcoming, low-pressure session that is a chance to reconnect, share early plans, and set intentions for the year ahead.

We would like to know what you would like to learn more about this year - how would you like to upskill?

Whether it's crafts, science, art, technology, nature or social skills this year we want to find opportunities for you to try out new skills or brush up on old ones - or even better share your knowledge, skills and passion with others.



January is - Veganuary Month



Veganuary has inspired and supported millions of people to try vegan since 2014 – with participants from almost every country in the world. They have worked with businesses to drive up vegan options in shops and restaurants, and have made veganism more visible and accessible through our work with national and international media.

Their vision is simple - they want: *a vegan world. A world without animal farms and slaughterhouses. A world where food production does not decimate forests, pollute rivers and oceans, exacerbate climate change, and drive wild animal populations to extinction.*

But January is often a month for light resets nothing dramatic, just small shifts that help us feel a little clearer after the festive season. One simple way to explore a greener lifestyle is to try adding a few more plant-based meals into your week.

If you aren't already vegan you don't have to go fully vegan in one go, make grand declarations, or give up your favourite foods. Instead, you might:

- try a new plant-based recipe,
- swap one meal a week,
- explore seasonal veg,
- or simply notice which choices feel good for you.

Why? Because plant-based eating, even in small amounts, can be good for the planet, good for health, and surprisingly creative. It's about curiosity rather than commitment, and discovering what works for you at your own pace.

A gentle experiment, not a strict challenge.

A soft beginning to a greener year.

If you're curious about adding a little more plant-based eating into your January, here are some simple, low-effort swaps that don't require giving anything up just trying something new.

1. Swap milk for a plant milk in tea, coffee or porridge. Oat milk is creamy, blends well, and is often the easiest transition for people trying it for the first time.

2. Try one plant-based lunch a week

A hearty vegetable soup, hummus and roasted veg wrap, or a jacket potato with beans - all comforting, simple, and winter-friendly.

3. Switch mince for lentils or a plant mince in chilli or Bolognese. Most people can't tell the difference once the spices and sauce are in and it's often cheaper too.

4. Explore a plant-based ready meal. Supermarkets now offer quick, tasty options for busy evenings. A very easy way to dip a toe without committing to cooking something new. (Look for plastic free where possible).

5. Add one new vegetable to your plate. January is great for root veg, leeks, kale, mushrooms and winter greens. One small addition can brighten a meal and reduce food's carbon footprint.

Small swaps add up for the planet, for your health, and for your sense of trying something new without pressure. A gentle start is still a meaningful start.

City of Nature Programme Update - Moving Forward

The turn of the year always brings a sense of possibility, but 2026 carries a particular note of expectation. With new roles for the Parks and Green Spaces Service expected to be recruited early this year, we're preparing for a shift from "holding the line" to accelerating delivery.

January is a good month for steady steps rather than sprints and you'll hear more about these action plans and new opportunities as the year unfolds.

For now, thank you for everything you carried through 2025. We begin this year on strong ground because of you.

Looking Ahead - Early 2026

Over the coming months we'll be:

- Welcoming new staff into the Parks and Green Spaces Service
- Strengthening the City of Nature governance model
- Supporting more Friends Groups and grassroots projects by working closely with Birmingham Open Spaces Forum and their new team.
- Sharing updates from pilots and environmental justice mapping updates
- Preparing opportunities for volunteers, partners and communities to shape the year ahead.

And of course continuing to celebrate the people, places and ideas that make Birmingham's nature network so vibrant.

The Parks and Green Space Service will also be part of the Shaping Birmingham's Future Together (SBFT) programme.

SBFT sets out the city's shared vision for a fairer, more inclusive and better-connected Birmingham. Its emphasis on collaboration, community voice and long-term wellbeing aligns seamlessly with the City of Nature Plan. Where the wider strategy describes the kind of city we want to become, the City of Nature Plan provides a practical pathway for achieving that vision through greener neighbourhoods, improved access to quality parks, and environmental action rooted in fairness and partnership.

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

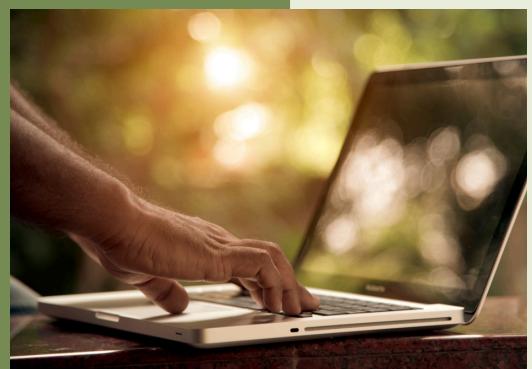
JOIN US for The City of Nature Online:
Green Champions Online Catch Up on Friday -
16th January 2026 online on teams: 1pm to 2pm

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

If you would like to find out more about:

- Birmingham City Council's 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/>



Big Garden Bird Watch -

23-25 January 2026

Every January, the Big Garden Birdwatch invites people across the UK to pause for one hour and notice the birds that share our everyday spaces.



In Birmingham, this simple act feels especially powerful. Our gardens, balconies, streets, parks and canal paths are home to an extraordinary range of winter visitors and year-round residents - from blackbirds and blue tits to redwings, bullfinches and the ever-curious robin.

Taking part is more than a gentle winter activity. It helps build a clearer picture of how birds are coping in an urban landscape shaped by climate pressures, development and changing seasons. The data gathered influences real conservation work, including here in the city's parks and neighbourhoods.

Whether you watch from a window, a doorstep or one of Birmingham's many green spaces, that quiet hour connects you to something larger and a reminder that our wildlife is always nearby, always adapting, and always worth protecting.

The Big Garden Birdwatch is the world's largest garden wildlife survey. Every year, hundreds of thousands of nature lovers like you take part, helping to build a picture of how garden birds are faring.

How to take part

1. Get your free guide and stock up on supplies, with 20% off and free delivery on food and feeders at the RSPB shop.
2. Spend an hour watching the birds in your patch, between 23 and 25 January, and record the birds that land.
3. Tell us what you saw (even if that's nothing at all)! You can submit your results online <https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/big-garden-birdwatch> or by post.



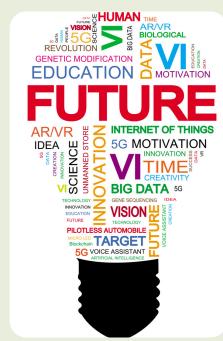
Last year's Birdwatch - Every Birdwatch counts

Across the UK, over 590,000 people took part in Big Garden Birdwatch 2025, counting a whopping 9.1 million birds! House Sparrows took the top spot, but counts of these chirpy birds are down by 60% compared to the first Birdwatch in 1979. In fact, we've lost 38 million birds from UK skies in the last 60 years.

With birds facing so many challenges, it's more important than ever to get involved in the Birdwatch. Every bird you do – or don't – count will give us a valuable insight into how garden birds are faring.



Shaping Birmingham's Future Together - How It Aligns with the City of Nature Plan



Shaping Birmingham's Future Together is the city's broader strategic vision for how Birmingham will grow and develop over the coming decade. It was developed through a major engagement process led by Birmingham City Council in partnership with citizens, communities, voluntary groups, businesses and other partners, with the aim of co-creating a shared vision for a fairer, more prosperous and more connected city.

This vision now guides the Council's Corporate Plan and other strategic frameworks, reflecting the priorities and lived experiences of local people from tackling inequality to improving wellbeing and opportunity for all.

At its heart, Shaping Birmingham's Future Together emphasises deeper collaboration, shared decision-making, and a focus on the things that matter most to residents. It calls for more democratic, inclusive ways of working, where communities are genuinely involved in shaping the city's future rather than simply being consulted after plans are made.

This approach fits perfectly with the City of Nature Plan. Both strategies share a commitment to:

- Equity and wellbeing: ensuring everyone has access to high-quality green space and the health benefits it brings;
- Partnership and participation: supporting community involvement through Friends Groups, the City of Nature Alliance, volunteers and local organisations;
- Cross-sector collaboration: embedding environmental action into wider city planning, not treating nature as an add-on.
- Long-term change: building systems and relationships that deliver benefits not just in the short term, but for decades to come.

In other words, Shaping Birmingham's Future Together provides a wider strategic frame in which the City of Nature Plan sits. Where the wider city vision sets out what kind of city we want Birmingham to be, the City of Nature Plan provides the detailed pathway for one of the most important dimensions of that future: a greener, healthier, fairer and more nature-connected city for all.

Technology and Birmingham's Future: Working With, Not Instead of, People and Nature



As Birmingham looks ahead to the coming decades, technology will inevitably play a greater role in how the city works but not in a way that replaces human experience or the natural world. Instead, the future likely lies in using technology to strengthen the things that matter most: community, wellbeing, access and sustainability.

We may see smarter ways of managing parks using sensors to track flooding, soil moisture or tree health, or digital mapping that helps identify where investment is needed most. Community groups might benefit from easier online booking systems for activities, tools that help volunteers record wildlife or report issues, or apps that bring local people together for events and stewardship. Technology can also help us understand our city more deeply: how people use green spaces, where nature is thriving, and where health inequalities persist. This kind of insight means decisions can become fairer, faster and more effective.

But even as these tools grow, the heart of a Nature City remains firmly human. Technology won't replace conversations on a park bench, shared learning in community halls, or the simple grounding power of being outdoors. Instead, it can sit quietly in the background helping us care for our places, amplify community voices, and make Birmingham greener, healthier and more connected for everyone.

In the future, nature and technology won't compete. They'll complement each other each supporting the other to make the city stronger.



Birmingham's Park Ranger Service in Winter – Linking People and Nature

Winter has never stopped Birmingham's Park Rangers.

Long before most of us have coaxed ourselves out from under a blanket, they are already out in the city's parks, checking on wildlife, restoring habitats, supporting volunteers and keeping green spaces welcoming through the coldest months. Their work continues quietly in all weathers, often unseen but always essential and a steady presence at a time of uncertainty.

When the Ranger Service was at full strength, they delivered a remarkable programme of activities across every ward in the city, plus the City Centre. Their seasonal booklet, "Out and About," was something many residents looked forward to: pages filled with guided walks, conservation sessions, craft workshops, family events and opportunities to learn new skills. People still remember willow weaving by the lakesides, bird identification walks at dawn, pond-dipping adventures, children's nature clubs, and even traditional canal art taught from their base at Edgbaston Reservoir.

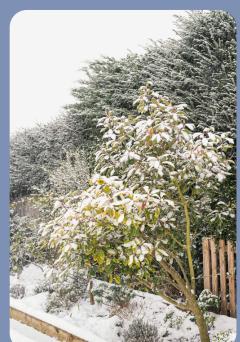
These activities didn't just fill time they built community, connected generations, and helped people understand the landscapes around them. They offered a gateway into nature for people who might not have known where to start, and they played a huge role in shaping Birmingham's culture of outdoor engagement.

But while we honour that legacy, we don't want to get stuck in the past. The spirit of Out and About is still alive, even if the way it is delivered has changed. Today, a vibrant network of organisations - Friends Groups, community projects, environmental charities, wellbeing groups, educational partners and dedicated volunteers help carry forward the work of connecting people with nature across the city.

Together, they offer events, walks, talks, skill-building sessions and conservation activities throughout the year, creating a patchwork of opportunities that reaches into every corner of Birmingham. This collaborative model is now part of the City of Nature vision: a city where nature connection is not delivered by one team alone, but by a whole community of committed people and groups working in partnership.

Winter is a perfect time to celebrate this. While the days are short and the air is crisp, the work of caring for Birmingham's green spaces continues and so do the opportunities to get involved.

Following this article, you'll find the January events list, showcasing just some of the activities happening across the city over the coming weeks. Whatever the weather brings, we hope you find something that encourages you to step outside, meet others, and enjoy the extraordinary green spaces Birmingham has to offer.



Out and About in January with the City's Park Rangers

Get Active in Aston, Newtown & Nечells 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.

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 Parks and Green Space, Birmingham Open Spaces Online or Naturally Birmingham on social media to keep up to date with what's happening in January. Or check out your park's notice board.



Tuesday 6th January 11am -12pm: Burbury Park - Mindful nature walk. Time to take a deep breath, stretch your legs and clear your head. Join the ranger for a mindful stroll around the park noticing the natural side of winter. Meet by the playground (Newtown B19 2UP).

Wednesday 7th January 11.30 am: Start at **Eliot Street POS** Nature Walk to Salford Park and back Approx. 3 miles. Meet near notice board Eliot street (Nечells B7 5LX)

Thursday 8th January 11.15 am: Georges Park - Practical Volunteer session: Woodland management. Meet by notice board near the play area. (Lozells B19 1PP)

Friday 9th 11.15 am: Newtown POS - Practical Volunteer session: vegetation management. Meet by the playground (Newtown B19 2YX)

Tuesday 13th January 12.00 – 1.30 pm: Witton Lane Gardens - Community clean up : Meet at Holte Rd Entrance (Aston B6 6QB)

Thursday 15th January 11.15 am: Mount Street Rec - Practical Volunteer session: vegetation management. Meet at Mount St entrance. (Nечells B7 5QT)

Friday 16th January 11.15 am: Loxton Park - Practical Volunteer session: vegetation management. Meet at notice board entrance from Duddeston Manor Rd (Nечells B7 4JJ)

Monday 19th January 12.00 to 1 pm: Loxton Park - Community clean up. Meet at MUGA (sports court) Nечells B7 4JJ

Wednesday 21st January 11.15 am: Mansfield Green Park - Practical Volunteer session: vegetation management. Meet by the playground (Aston B6 6LE)

Thursday 22nd January 11am to 12pm: Mansfield Green Park - Mindful nature walk. Time to take a deep breath, stretch your legs and clear your head! Join the ranger for a mindful stroll around the park noticing the natural side of winter. Meet by the playground 11am. (Aston B6 6LE)

Friday 23rd January 11.15 am: Mount Street POS Practical Volunteer session: vegetation management. Meet by the playground/ entrance off Mount Street. (Nечells B7 5QT)

Sunday 25th January 1200 – 1.30 pm: Burbury Park - Community clean up. Meet by Play Area (Newtown B19 2UP).

Tuesday 27th January 11 am – 12.30 pm: Sycamore Road POS - Community clean up of the wooded area Park Road North (Nечells B6 5UJ)

Wednesday 28th January 11.15: **Georges Park** - Practical Volunteer session: Woodland management. Meet by the playground/ Noticeboard (Lozells B19 1PP)

Thursday 29th January 11 am to 12 pm: Aston Park - Mindful nature walk. Time to take a deep breath, stretch your legs and clear your head! Join the ranger for a mindful stroll around the park noticing the natural side of winter. Meet in front of Aston Hall 11 am. (b6 6JD)

Friday 30th January 11.15 am: New John Street West POS - Practical Volunteer session: vegetation management/ clean up. Meet by the entrance area on Great King Street North; opposite Farm Street (Newtown B19 2ER)

Wildlife Watching in January – Starting as we mean to go on.

January often arrives quietly, with soft light, bare branches and a sense of stillness after the festive rush. But beneath that calm surface, the natural world is far from dormant. If we begin the year with even a small intention to notice nature, we set a gentle rhythm for the months ahead one that brings connection, wellbeing and moments of unexpected joy. So this year, how about making a promise to yourself to try and experience something new in nature every month? In The RSPB year in nature: January, you'll find plenty of inspiration as we pick out some of the best things to see and do this month.

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/the-year-in-nature/the-year-in-nature-january>

Winter birds are among the easiest places to start. Robins, obviously, are not only ever-present but also wonderfully bold at this time of year. Unlike many birds, they sing through winter, using their bright, clear voices to defend territories when food is scarce. Their red breast is a signal to rivals rather than a decorative flourish and a reminder that even the most familiar species have many stories woven into their behaviour.

Look a little more closely at hedgerows or berry-laden trees and you may spot winter thrushes. Redwings and fieldfares travel to the UK in large numbers each year, escaping colder northern climates. Redwings have a soft cream eye-stripe and a flash of rusty colour beneath the wing, while fieldfares are larger, with a speckled breast and a distinctive chuckling call. They move in loose flocks, often accompanied by blackbirds, creating a lively winter feeding scene on hawthorn, holly and apples left in gardens.

Along rivers, canals and lakes, January is a wonderful month for watching water birds. Goosanders, sleek fish-eating ducks with sharp bills, are winter visitors that lend a sense of grace to Birmingham's waterways. Tufted ducks are more common but always striking — glossy black-and-white with a jaunty little feather crest. Even gulls take on fresh elegance in their smart winter plumage, with softer tones and crisp markings that reward close attention.

And while some wildlife hides from view, it still leaves clues. After rain, soft ground becomes a record of movement: fox prints shaped like neat diamonds, badger tracks broader and more powerful, often accompanied by well-worn paths that hint at their nightly routes. Tracking is a quiet way of connecting with nature — a reminder that the city is shared with many unseen neighbours.

Sound can also alert us to things that we may not be able to spot such as the drumming of the Great Spotted Woodpecker, who have been known to use telegraph poles to tap on to well - telegraph their presence to other woodpeckers in the area.

January nature watching doesn't require travel, equipment or clear skies. It can happen on a short walk to the shops, during a lunch break, or while looking out of a window with a warm mug in hand. A few intentional moments outdoors help reorient the mind after December's busyness, easing us gently into the new year.

If we begin by noticing these small signs of life, we start the year as we mean to go on connected, curious, and open to the constant quiet wonders of the world around us.



Things to Do in the Garden in January

January asks for patience: resist tidying too soon, check bulbs peeking through, look over trees and structures, and enjoy noticing small signs of life while the garden quietly prepares for spring. It's a good time to plan and look through catalogues to choose plants for the spring. You can also check your tools and garden supplies. Think about nesting sights in the garden, or perhaps you could add a small pond this year. Colder days give you plenty of time to do some research online or visit local gardens for ideas. There are still some tasks to do outside here are some things to do:

- Feed the Birds Regularly - Food is scarce in midwinter. Offer seeds, suet, mealworms and fresh water to support garden birds through the coldest weeks.
- Clean Bird Baths and Feeders- Hygiene is vital for wildlife health. A quick clean with hot water reduces disease and keeps visitors returning.
- Look for Early Signs of Spring - Check for the first snowdrops, emerging bulbs or hazel catkins, is everything looking healthy.
- Create Shelter for Wildlife - Leave log piles, leaf litter and undisturbed corners for insects, frogs and hedgehogs. It's tempting to tidy when there isn't much else to do but these micro-habitats are winter life-savers.
- Cut Back Only What's Necessary- Seed heads, dead stems and hollow stalks still provide food and shelter. Save major pruning for later unless safety or structure requires it.



- Plan and Order Seeds for the Year Ahead - Winter is perfect for dreaming. Think about pollinator-friendly planting, vegetable beds or new habitats you'd like to develop.
- Check and Repair Structures- Fix fences, mend raised beds, clean pots, sharpen tools - practical jobs are easier before the garden wakes up.
- Plant Bare-Root Trees and Shrubs - January is ideal for planting native species that support birds and insects - hawthorn, rowan, dog rose, hazel.
- Start a Monthly Garden Photo Record - Take photos from the same few spots each month. Over time, you'll build a beautiful record of seasonal change and wildlife activity.



Enjoy your winter garden. Frost, low sunlight, silhouettes, bark textures and visiting birds all make January surprisingly photogenic.

A slow walk with a camera or phone can be wonderfully calming, take time to notice the structures that are hidden away in spring and summer.

Young Green Champions - Big School Bird Watch



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



Every winter, thousands of schools across the UK take part in the RSPB Big Schools' Birdwatch, turning a simple hour of bird spotting into a powerful learning experience. For Birmingham schools, this is a fantastic opportunity to connect children with the nature on their doorstep even in the middle of the city, even in the coldest months.

Birdwatching requires no special equipment, no perfect conditions and no expertise. A playground, school garden, field, courtyard or even a patch of sky outside the classroom window is enough. Birmingham's schools are surrounded by winter wildlife: sparrows chattering in hedges, blackbirds turning over leaves, magpies patrolling fences, gulls sweeping the sky, robins singing boldly from the tops of railings. These everyday encounters become extraordinary when children are invited to look closely and notice. Taking part in the Big Schools' Birdwatch supports learning across the curriculum - science, geography, maths, literacy and wellbeing. It teaches observation skills, introduces species identification, and gives children a sense of curiosity about the natural world. For pupils with limited access to green space at home, this hour can be transformative, sparking interest that lasts far beyond winter. It also contributes to national conservation data. Birmingham's participation helps build a clearer picture of how birds are coping in urban settings affected by climate change, development and pollution. Children become part of a real scientific project, understanding that their observations matter.

Schools don't need a big green field or a nature reserve. Some of the richest sightings come from unexpected places - crows on rooftops, starlings gathering at the edges of car parks, blue tits flitting between saplings in new school plantings. City nature is everywhere. So Get counting in your school grounds at any time between 6 January and 13 February 2026. We encourage all Birmingham schools to join the Big Schools' Birdwatch, it's simple, joyful, educational and empowering — a perfect way to start the new year with curiosity and connection.

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/get-ready-for-big-schools-birdwatch>

Why not Wassail?

January can feel like a quiet, grey month which is exactly why it's the perfect time to dust off an old tradition and bring some colour back into winter. Wassailing is an ancient custom, still celebrated in orchards and community spaces across the UK, and it's a wonderful activity for families to experience together.



Traditionally held in mid-January, often on or around Twelfth Night or "Old Twelvey" (17 January), a Wassail is a joyful ceremony to bless fruit trees for the year ahead. People gather with lanterns, ribbons, drums, songs and warm drinks to "wake" the trees from their winter rest and wish them a healthy, fruitful season. It's part folklore, part celebration, part community gathering and entirely good fun.

Children love the noise-making, the storytelling, the dressing of trees and the chance to join in a ritual that people have passed down through generations. Adults enjoy the warmth of being outdoors together in midwinter, keeping alive a tradition that connects us to land, seasons and shared heritage.

You don't need your own orchard to join in. Many parks, community gardens, Friends Groups and environmental organisations host local Wassails lively, welcoming events for all ages, look out for your local Wassail activities.

So this year, why not Wassail?

It's a beautiful way to brighten winter, honour old traditions, and start the year with togetherness and a touch of magic.

January - Looking back at last year and forward to this year.



January arrives carrying centuries of folklore and symbolism about beginnings, thresholds and possibility. Its very name comes from Janus, the Roman god of doorways and transitions, who is depicted with two faces: one turned toward the past, the other toward the future. It is a reminder that reflection and intention are not opposites, but partners. To look forward with purpose, we must first understand the ground we have travelled.

Across cultures, early January is a time of renewal. New Year's Day brings traditions of resolutions, promises and small rituals for luck and fresh starts. Twelfth Night, on 5 January, closes the Christmas season with echoes of older Celtic customs a moment of feasting, storytelling and marking the end of the solstice's deep darkness. In Celtic tradition, this time of year was one of pause: a space to reflect, gather strength and quietly prepare for the spring to come.

These traditions remind us that January is not about racing into the new year. It is about stepping through a doorway consciously looking back with honesty, carrying forward what is useful, and letting go of what no longer serves. When we reflect with care, we move ahead with clarity.

So as the year begins, may we all travel forward with intention, rooted in the wisdom of the path behind us.

Many of our ancient traditions are shaped by the animals, plants, landscape and weather. We took signs from these and wove them into stories and activities to help pass on what we had learned to the next generation. Communication is as vital now as it was then.



In the still of winter - Sound carries further

In a month shaped by the spirit of Janus where we look back to understand the past and look forward with purpose, it seems fitting to consider a species that at this time of year is not only checking out past achievements but is also considering what will happen next: the Great Spotted Woodpecker. Not normally thought of as a winter bird however it is active throughout the winter months checking out old territories and preparing for spring.

In the quiet of winter, woodpeckers continue to drum on trees, fence posts and hollow trunks. To us, it may sound like simple tapping echoing through the still air, but to other woodpeckers it is a clear and ringing intentional message. Drumming is their non-vocal language, a way to declare themselves, set boundaries and strengthen bonds. At this time of year, drumming often serves as territorial signalling - a rhythmic announcement that says, "I'm here; this space is taken." It reduces conflict by making presence known long before confrontation is needed. As spring approaches, drumming becomes more frequent, shifting into the earliest stages of courtship, with strong, confident rhythms communicating health, vitality and readiness.

But woodpecker drumming is more than a call for rivals or mates. It is also practical. Their tapping helps locate insects and sap, revealing food sources hidden deep within wood. It enables them to excavate nesting cavities, shaping spaces that will protect their young. Their drumming is purpose, presence and preparation all at once. In many ways, this natural behaviour mirrors our own January tasks. As we step into a new year, we, too, are sending signals to ourselves and to our communities about our commitments. We often take time to clarify where we stand, what matters to us, and how we intend to move through the year. We prepare the "territory" of our plans, strengthen relationships, and shape the spaces where new ideas and collaborations can take root.

So when the woodpecker's drum echoes through bare winter branches, consider it an invitation: to use the still of winter to speak clearly, listen closely, and signal your intentions with confidence. Even the most simple of rhythms can guide us into the year ahead with passion and purpose.

Earth Stories – Memories, Hopes and Happenings

January has always felt to me like a threshold month a time suspended gently between what has been and what might be. A month for contemplation, for preparation, and for the slow regathering of energy after all the frantic action in December leaves us, may be, a little drained. We call it the “start of the year”, though it wasn’t always so. Before calendars were tidied and re-ordered, the new year began in March, with the first hints of spring stirring the land awake. Part of me still feels that older rhythm: that the true beginning sits somewhere ahead, waiting for light to lengthen. And yet January does hold its own kind of beginning - quieter, more inward-facing. A beginning made of thought rather than action, of noticing rather than doing. It asks us to breathe, to look, to listen.

Those who know me well know my abiding love for Scotland my “second love,” as I often joke. With it the approach of Burns Night on the 25th January, I find myself returning to the lines of Rabbie that have travelled with me through so many years. One in particular always settles in my mind at this time of reflection:

“Gie me ae spark o’ Nature’s fire, That’s a’ the learning I desire.”

He wrote this in order to spite the ‘Critic folk’ who denied that a non-university educated man could produce poetry equal in worth to those who had a knowledge of Latin and Greek. A reminder that poetry is there for everyone to read and write and is so often inspired by nature and humanity rather than formal education.

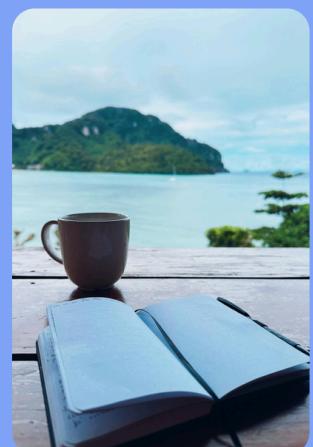
January’s landscapes offer their own poetry. The early darkness gifts us starry nights sharp and glittering, and sometimes if the skies are kind the quick flare of a shooting star, a promise written in light. The Wolf Moon rises large and luminous, pulling at something ancient inside us. The sun, when it appears, lifts itself over the horizon with a quiet drama, casting peach and gold over frost. Evening skies answer in return with sunsets that burn briefly and beautifully, like a held breath and long exhale.

And then there are the encounters, the ones that feel like little blessings. I still hold tight to the memory of foxes playing in the snow, scattering white powder with their paws, as if joy itself had briefly taken animal shape. These moments come unannounced, unplanned, unforgettable. They are the reminders that winter is not empty, but simply more subtle; not silent, but often softly spoken.

January is also my planning season, though the plans are drawn lightly, like maps in pencil. I sit with a mug warming my hands, sketching thoughts for the year ahead with projects, journeys, writings and places to visit as the seasons allow. Some are new ideas; some are old traditions I return to loyally; some are simply the steady, hopeful movements forward that carry one year into the next.

Not every step needs to be bold. Some years call for quiet progress, roots strengthening beneath the surface. But always - whatever the shape of the year ahead - it will be walked with people and nature beside me. The companions who ground me, challenge me, laugh with me, guide me. The places that remind me to breathe. The landscapes that teach patience, trust and wonder.

And so January, with all its contemplation and preparation, becomes not an end or even a beginning, but a gentle turning toward possibility, toward purpose, and, I hope, toward even more laughter shared with you.



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.bbcbwildlife.org.uk/>



BOSF - Find you local Friends of Open Spaces Group

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

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



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



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