

GREEN CHAMPIONS



Noticing Nature

But, 'neath the chilly Polar blast,
A low, sweet undertone I hear:
"The wintry storms will soon be past,
And pleasant Spring-time days are near."
February Days - Elwood Roberts 1819 - 1902



Health - Naturally

3 - 30 -300 is a guiding principle for urban forestry and greener cities, emphasizing the importance of urban forests and green spaces in enhancing health and well-being. It states that:

- Every individual home should have at least three mature trees visible from their window.
- Every neighbourhood should have at least 30% tree canopy cover.
- Every individual should live within a 300-meter walk of a high-quality public park or green space.

This concept is rapidly being adopted by local authorities worldwide to improve the quality of life for their residents.



Learn more about - Identifying Wildlife

It is still early enough in the year to set yourself a new learning challenge, in some calendars February brings the start of the new year so this really is your chance to start as you mean to go on.

The Challenge for 2026 is to up your level of wildlife identification. Whether that is from nothing to something or looking at a new kingdom or class. If you have only ever looked at animal identification why not give plants a try. Or only ever looked at birds why not try some invertebrate identification. Or even look deeper into a specific genus how many different Quercus (Oaks) can you find in your area?

We know that simply noticing nature brings so many benefits to us and the rest of the natural world. But taking your noticing - gently - to the next level can help others to understand what is happening in the natural world and what we can do help nature. We are here to support you and you'll find lots more information in this months edition.



2nd February - World Wetlands Day

Wetlands are land areas that are saturated or flooded with water either permanently or seasonally.

Inland wetlands:

Marshes, lakes, rivers, floodplains, peatlands and swamps

Coastal wetlands:

Saltwater marshes, estuaries, mangroves, lagoons and coral reefs

Human-made wetlands:

Fish ponds, rice paddies and salt pans



Not all wetlands are designated as Ramsar or Internationally Important Sites, however all wetlands are important locally often regionally and also nationally. Nearly all Ramsar Sites provide **cultural ecosystem services (CES)**, and over half have spiritual and inspirational values.

- A global systematic review of published papers found evidence of CES provided by wetlands in 175 countries and territories. Recreation/tourism was the most frequently reported CES (40%), followed by cultural identity/heritage (16%) and education/learning/knowledge (13%).
- Across cultures, wetlands are seen as cultural landscapes embedded in identity, art and spirituality. Many communities consider wetlands sacred, home to ancestral spirits or ceremonial sites. Songs, dances, festivals and oral traditions often centre on wetland life and cycles.
- Wetlands often serve as informal classrooms where elders pass on ecological knowledge to younger generations.
- The profound and rapid social and economic transformations that have taken place during recent decades have increasingly threatened the adequate preservation of the cultural heritage that is typical of wetlands in many parts of the world.

What is World Wetlands Day? <https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/>

World Wetlands Day is celebrated each year on 2 February to raise awareness about wetlands. This day also marks the anniversary of the Convention on Wetlands, which was adopted as an international treaty in 1971.

Nearly 90% of the world's wetlands have been degraded since the 1700s, and we are losing wetlands three times faster than forests. Yet, wetlands are critically important ecosystems that contribute to biodiversity, climate mitigation and adaptation, freshwater availability, world economies and more.

It is urgent that we raise national and global awareness about wetlands in order to reverse their rapid loss and encourage actions to conserve and restore them.

World Wetlands Day is the ideal time to increase people's understanding of these critically important ecosystems. World Wetlands Day 2026 explores the deep-rooted connections between wetlands and cultural practices, traditions and knowledge systems of communities across the world.

This year's theme is "Wetlands and traditional knowledge: Celebrating cultural heritage." The global campaign spotlights the timeless role of traditional knowledge in sustaining wetland ecosystems and preserving cultural identity. World Wetlands Day is open to everyone from international organizations, governments, wetland practitioners, to children, youth, media, community groups, decision-makers, and all individuals as these ecosystems are important for us all.

City of Nature Programme Update - A Green City

It's important that we keep returning to the aims and actions set out in the City of Nature Plan over the next twenty years. One of the key aims under the Plan's Green City theme is the creation of a Nature Recovery Network stretching right across the city, linking Birmingham with all our West Midlands neighbours and forming part of the wider West Midlands National Park vision (G7).

The whole of the West Midlands Combined Authority area now has a refreshed and crucially joined-up strategy for Nature Recovery. To help deliver this, a West Midlands Nature Delivery Plan has been developed, providing Birmingham with a clear set of suggested actions to support this Green City aim.

The Nature Delivery Plan is structured around three themes and ten priorities. These priorities describe the detailed outcomes needed to recover nature across the region. You can view the full set of priorities here:

👉 <https://www.wmca.org.uk/documents/environment-energy/west-midlands-nature-delivery-plan-2026-29/>



That's a lot of interlocking plans and policies to get our heads around. While all of this work matters, we want to start with where Green Champions can most easily and meaningfully get involved. For that reason, this month we're focusing on two priorities that connect directly to what Green Champions already do so well:

I. Improved evidence and knowledge to enable scaled-up delivery of nature recovery

J. Improved capacity of stakeholders to contribute to nature recovery

5 practical actions for Green Champions (clearly linked to Priorities I & J)

1. Record what you notice in your local green spaces

Priority I – Evidence & knowledge

- Take part in nature identification and recording (plants, animals, fungi)
- Share records via platforms like iNaturalist or local recording groups <https://www.inaturalist.org/>
- Even occasional observations help build the evidence base that informs decisions

Why it matters: What isn't recorded often isn't counted — and that can affect protection and investment.



2. Keep simple “what's changing” notes

Priority I – Evidence & knowledge

- Notice what's new, what's missing, or what seems different from last year
- This could be birds, plants, water levels, footfall, or habitat condition
- Short notes or photos over time help show trends, not just snapshots

Why it matters: Long-term change is often first spotted by people who are there regularly.

3. Share knowledge locally

Priority J – Capacity building

- Talk to neighbours, Friends groups, schools, or volunteers about what you've noticed
- Share simple identification tips or seasonal highlights
- Encourage others to look, notice, and record too

Why it matters: Capacity grows when confidence spreads — not when expertise is gate-kept.

4. Connect people to opportunities

Priority J – Capacity building

- Signpost people to local walks, volunteering sessions, surveys, or events
- Encourage new people to take part in things like the City Nature Challenge
- Help others find their way into nature recovery activities

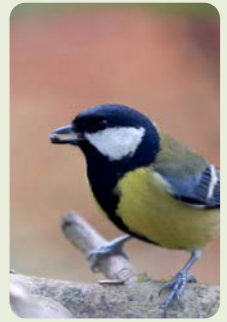
Why it matters: Nature recovery needs many hands — not just the usual ones.

5. Be a voice for nature in everyday conversations

Priority I & J – Evidence and capacity

- Share why local nature matters for health, wellbeing, and place
- Use real examples from your area
- Ask questions in meetings or consultations when nature feels overlooked

Why it matters: Evidence is strongest when it's backed by people who care and speak up.



Regular Feature Reminders - Don't miss out!

Many member organisations of the City of Nature Alliance have regular newsletters and updates that you can sign up to receive. They all cover different aspects of living in a Nature City, wildlife, friends of green space groups, tree people, nature and health, therapeutic horticulture and gardening and much, much more. below you can find links to some of their websites to catch up with what is happening and sign up to their publications - so you never miss out.



Birmingham Parks and Green Spaces - Green Champions

If you want receive this Green Champion Newsletter and online meeting invites directly via email please complete this form: <https://forms.office.com/e/Va1UFkAe4B> or email the City of Nature Team: Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk

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



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



BOSF - Birmingham Open Spaces Friends Groups

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. Find out more here: <https://bosf.org.uk/>



Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust

Works with BCC 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 here: <https://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/about>



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 group of its kind in the UK. For more information contact: <https://birminghamtreepeople.org.uk/about-us/urban-forest-volunteers/>



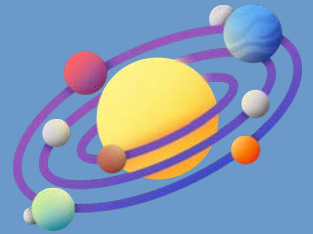
Thrive - In Kings Heath Park

Thrive has been using social and therapeutic horticulture and gardening to change people's lives since 1979. Discover the different ways to follow what's happening at Thrive, from news and campaigns to advice and developments in social therapeutic horticulture <https://www.thrive.org.uk/get-involved/keep-in-touch>



The Shape of the year - Calendars, Seasons and Cycles

Although January felt like the start of the year for many of us it's worth remembering that this is a relatively recent agreement, not a universal truth. The word calendar comes from the Latin *kalendae* meaning "first day of the month." In ancient Rome, the first day of every month was publicly called out as a sign for people to settle their debts.



January became the first month of the year because of Roman calendar reforms. King Numa Pompilius added January and February to the original 10-month Roman calendar around 713 BCE, and it was named after Janus, the god of beginnings and transitions. Julius Caesar officially established January 1st as the start of the year in 45 BCE. In the early Roman calendar the year began in March. Today's Gregorian Calendar, which also recognises January as the first month, was adopted in Britain in 1752, as systems of governance, finance and administration became more important than seasonal rhythms. Across the world, different cultures have marked the "new year" at different moments, often guided not by a numbered calendar, but by seasons, cycles, and signs in the natural world.

Here in Britain, Imbolc, traditionally marked at the start of February, was once an important moment in the seasonal year. It sits halfway between the winter solstice and the spring equinox, a time when the days are noticeably lengthening and the first signs of life begin to stir. Snowdrops appear. Lambing season approaches. The land starts, quietly, to shift.

Around the world calendars are based on different cycles:

- Solar Calendars: Based on the Earth's orbit around the Sun (e.g., Gregorian, Persian).
- Lunar Calendars: Based on the phases of the moon (e.g., Islamic).
- Lunisolar Calendars: Combine solar years and lunar months, using an added month to stay in sync with the seasons (e.g., Hebrew, Chinese).
- Seasonal Calendars: Based on environmental changes (e.g., "wet season," "dry season").

The Chinese New Year doesn't fall on a fixed date. It follows the lunar calendar and arrives with the second new moon after the winter solstice this is usually somewhere between late January and February. Its timing reflects a deep connection to cycles of light, darkness, and renewal. Before calendars, clocks, spreadsheets, and financial years, people organised their lives by watching the world around them. They noticed when birds returned, when rivers rose, when buds swelled, when food stores ran low. Survival depended on paying attention. Because not everyone could read or write, this knowledge was often carried through stories, festivals, songs, and rituals all ways of passing information from one generation to the next. Stories weren't just entertainment; they were memory systems. They helped people remember when to plant, when to harvest, when to prepare, and when to rest.

Over time, many of us have become more attuned to systems and schedules than to seasons. That's not a failure it's a consequence of modern life. But it does mean we sometimes lose touch with the quieter signals that once guided us. Reconnecting with seasonal change doesn't mean rejecting calendars or productivity. It simply means layering something older and steadier alongside them. This might look like:

- noticing the lengthening days
- spotting the first flowers pushing through cold ground
- hearing birdsong change in tone or frequency
- recognising that energy, motivation, and rest naturally rise and fall

When we notice nature, we're not just observing wildlife we're remembering a relationship that shaped how humans once understood time itself. The natural world is unaware of our calendars and need for order. In nature things happen relative to hundreds of other things, it is a connected and complex system that works regardless of what the calendar says.

Lunar cycles, living rhythms, and the Snow Moon

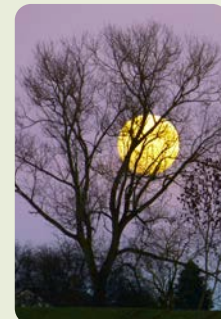
Long before calendars were printed or time was counted in weeks and quarters, people looked up.



The Moon was one of humanity's first timekeepers. Its steady cycle of waxing, full, waning, dark offered a visible rhythm that shaped planting, harvesting, fishing, travelling, resting, and storytelling. Even today, the Moon continues to move oceans, influence tides, and subtly shape life on Earth. Lunar gravity pulls at the planet itself, creating the rise and fall of the seas. Many living beings from corals to insects, birds to mammals still respond to these cycles, timing movement, feeding, and reproduction in ways we are only beginning to fully understand.

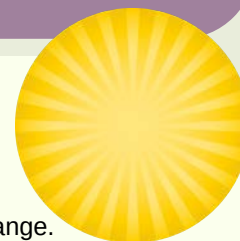
Each full moon was once given a name, not for poetry alone, but as a shared memory aid - a way of passing seasonal knowledge between generations. The Snow Moon, which usually falls in early February, marks a time when winter is still firmly present, food was once scarce, and survival depended on careful observation. It reminds us that this is not yet spring but the light is returning. Beneath frozen ground, life is already preparing. This year, the Snow Moon also sits close to a wider moment of transition. In the Chinese lunar calendar, the new year begins later in February, ushering in the Year of the Horse — a symbol associated with movement, energy, connection, and momentum. There's something fitting about that timing. February often feels like a threshold: still quiet, still cold, but no longer static. Days lengthen. Ideas stir. Plans begin to move.

Paying attention to lunar cycles isn't about mysticism. It's about remembering that life unfolds in rhythms, not straight lines. The Moon reminds us that growth includes pause, that renewal happens gradually, and that noticing change, even when it's subtle, has always been a way humans stayed aligned with the living world. Perhaps this Snow Moon is simply an invitation to look up, slow down, and notice where quiet movement has already begun.



Solar cycles, seasonal balance, and the turning of the year

If the Moon teaches us about rhythm and return, the Sun teaches us about energy and change.



Every day, the Earth turns once on its axis, creating the simple but profound cycle of light and dark. Over the course of a year, as the Earth travels around the Sun on a slight tilt, that light shifts giving us seasons, temperatures, growing periods, and rest. The solstices mark the extremes of this solar journey. In June, the summer solstice brings the longest day and shortest night a moment of abundance, growth, and outward energy. In December, the winter solstice offers the shortest day a pause point, long recognised as a time of reflection, conservation, and quiet resilience.

Between them sit the equinoxes, when day and night are roughly equal. These moments of balance in spring and autumn have long been used as markers of transition: sowing and harvesting, movement and settling, beginnings and endings. Long before weather forecasts and climate models, people read these solar signals closely. The lengthening of days told farmers when to prepare soil. The angle of light shaped migration, flowering, and animal behaviour. Even today, our bodies respond sleep patterns, mood, appetite, and activity levels all shift with daylight.

Weather is what we experience day to day - rain, wind, frost, heat. Climate is the long-term pattern that solar cycles help shape. When those patterns become unstable, the signals that living systems rely on become harder to read. Plants flower too early or too late. Animals mistime migrations. People feel out of step, tired, unsettled. Paying attention to solar cycles isn't about nostalgia or returning to the past. It's about recognising that life on Earth evolved in relationship with light, warmth, and seasonal change. The Sun doesn't just power our planet it sets the tempo. When we notice that tempo, we're better able to live within it - planning, resting, growing, and adapting in ways that work with the world rather than against it.



Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust and Ecorecord - Recording Nature

EcoRecord is the biological record centre for Birmingham and the Black Country. Your records can help map and monitor our region's wildlife.

EcoRecord collects, collates and makes available information about the wildlife, wildlife sites and habitats of Birmingham and the Black Country and currently has over 500,000 species records on its database.

These records come from many sources, ranging from professional ecologists to amateur naturalists and other wildlife enthusiasts.

EcoRecord provides an information service to a wide range of users such as local authorities, statutory agencies, ecological consultants, national and local recording schemes and others with an interest in the wildlife of Birmingham and the Black Country.

Without the support of volunteers and voluntary organisations across the region committed to biological recording over many years, the knowledge and understanding of the wildlife and ecology of Birmingham and the Black Country would be significantly poorer.

We are interested in all records from the tiniest bugs to the mightiest mammals! Records help us respond to planning and development applications, produce maps of species populations and help us build a picture of how wildlife is doing over time.

What is Citizen Science?

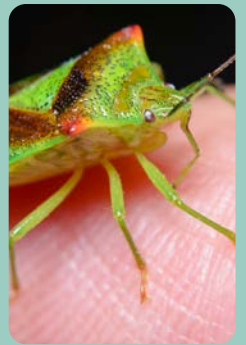
Citizen Science is a way anyone can help us to monitor and understand changes in both the diversity and abundance of wildlife we have across Birmingham and the Black Country. By letting us know the wildlife you see, whether in a local park, your garden or one of our nature reserves, it helps us to record vital information about the state of nature around us. Citizen Science initiatives are becoming more common, and with technological innovations increasing the ways in which individuals can participate, projects can even become global in scale, long-term, and engage hundreds of thousands of volunteers.

Citizen science projects are a great way to learn more about our wonderful wildlife, at the same time as helping to protect it.

What is the City Nature Challenge? <https://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/CityNatureChallenge>

The City Nature Challenge is an annual competition between cities all over the world to see how many wild species their citizens can spot over the space of four days. As well as being a fun activity, it generates useful species information that helps us to monitor the state of wildlife across our region and target our nature conservation activities to better protect wildlife.

During last year's challenge we collectively managed make over 12,529 observations of a massive 1,531 different species! This result meant that Birmingham and the Black Country recorded the 5th most observations and the 4th most species of the 26 UK areas taking part! In 2026 there will be more cities than ever taking part, including our neighbours in Coventry, Solihull, Staffordshire and Warwickshire! **We need you to help us beat our 2025 total.**



Birmingham's Park Ranger Service – Noticing Nature

Linking People and Nature

Birmingham's Ranger Service has always been at the frontline of noticing nature. Long before digital apps and citizen science platforms became common, Rangers were observing, recording, and responding to the living world over many years. From birds and plants to habitats and seasonal change, this accumulated knowledge has shaped how our parks are cared for, protected, and improved.

In destination parks especially, long-term recording has been vital. Repeated observations help Rangers understand what is thriving, what is under pressure, and how places respond to management, weather, and use. It's this depth of knowledge built through walking the same paths, year after year and that allows patterns to be spotted and informed decisions to be made. Nature identification and recording aren't just technical tasks. They are ways of reading the land.

This year, as we encourage more people to notice and record wildlife, Rangers continue to play a key role, not only through their own monitoring work, but by supporting others to get involved.

Across Birmingham's Red Wards, Rangers have been working closely with communities, volunteers, schools, and partner organisations. This work recognises something increasingly important: connection with nature is not only about biodiversity it is also closely linked to human health and wellbeing.

Walking routes, accessible green spaces, familiar wildlife, and seasonal change all contribute to physical activity, mental health, and a sense of belonging. When people learn to identify and notice what's around them, their relationship with place deepens and that brings real benefits.

Rangers support this in practical ways:

- sharing local knowledge and seasonal insights
- helping people learn what they're seeing
- encouraging simple, confidence-building recording
- linking nature activity to wellbeing, not expertise

Importantly, this work shows that nature recording isn't only for specialists. It's something that grows from regular contact, curiosity, and care and these are qualities Rangers model every day.

As we move through the year, Ranger-led knowledge, alongside community observations, helps build a richer picture of Birmingham's natural world. Together, these records support better decisions for parks, for wildlife, and for people. Noticing has always been part of the job.

Now, more than ever, it needs to be something we all do together.



Out and About in February 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.

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 February.

Check out your park's notice board.

Or visit the Naturally Birmingham Website: <https://naturallybirmingham.org/out-and-about-with-birminghams-park-rangers/>

To see all the dates for Ranger led activities in Aston, Newtown & Nechells Parks in February

Get Involved in February with the City of Nature Alliance

The City of Nature Alliance brings together a wide range of organisations, groups, and individuals who care about Birmingham's green and blue spaces — and February is full of opportunities to get involved.

Across the city this month you'll find activities including:

- Birmingham Open Spaces Forum - Birmingham Friends of Open Spaces Groups volunteer days - Various and BOSF events: <https://bosf.org.uk/bosf-events/>
- Activities at Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens - <https://www.castlebromwichhallgardens.org.uk/events-calendar/>
- Ecobirmingham - <https://ecobirmingham.com/events/>
- Thrive - <https://www.thrive.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer>
- The Field Studies Council - <https://www.field-studies-council.org/courses-and-experiences/>
- The Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust - <https://www.bbcwildlife.org.uk/events>
- Birmingham Botanical Gardens - <https://birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk/whats-on/>
- The Active Wellbeing Society - <https://theaws.co.uk/activity-and-support/>



From wildlife watching and volunteering to walks, workshops, and community events, there's something for all ages and interests. Events and activities are regularly updated, so please check all social media channels for the latest information and joining instructions.

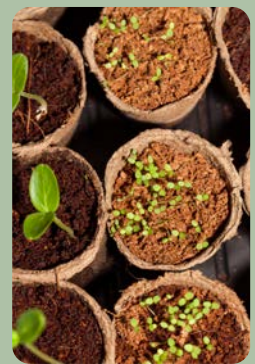
There's always something happening and everyone is welcome.

Habitat management and creation - making homes for wildlife this year.

February is a month for noticing. So we are encouraging you to slow down and look closely. Many of us are beginning to spot what already lives alongside us including plants pushing through winter soils, birds holding territories, fungi quietly doing their work beneath our feet. Recording what we see helps build a picture of Birmingham's wildlife today. But it also raises an important question: what could live here in the future?



Habitat management and creation is about making space for nature to thrive not just visiting, but settling, breeding and returning year after year. Across Birmingham, this work is already taking shape in exciting ways. Buzzing Parks wildflower areas are being designed and created by BCC's Parks Design Team and smaller but vital areas are being sown and managed by communities supported by The Patchwork Meadow charity. They will all provide habitats for pollinators, from early-emerging bees to late-season butterflies. With larger animals such as bats and birds also benefitting from an increase in invertebrates and seeds later in the season.



Wetland management is helping ponds, scrapes and damp ground hold water longer, supporting amphibians, insects and birds while also helping with flood resilience.



Orchards and hedgerows play a special role too. They provide food, shelter and wildlife corridors, while reconnecting people with traditional skills and seasonal rhythms. Local organisations such as Fruit & Nut Village offer fantastic training in orchard creation, pruning and hedgerow management, helping communities care for these spaces with confidence. Birmingham TreePeople also support tree planting and stewardship, ensuring the right trees are planted in the right places for long-term benefit.

As we move through this year, increasing biodiversity will be a shared priority. Noticing and recording what's here gives us the evidence; habitat creation gives us the opportunity. Whether you're sowing wildflowers, managing a wetland patch, planting fruit trees or laying a hedge, you're helping to build a city where nature and people can flourish together. More details of how to get involved will be available in the March edition of this newsletter.



Wildlife Watching in February – Birmingham's Wetlands and 28 birds in 28 days.

February might feel like a quiet month in nature, but when it comes to birds, it can be full of variety, movement, and surprises.

This month, **Ecorecord** is inviting people who live in the Birmingham and Black Country Area to try and record 28 different bird species in 28 days using the Inaturalist app <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/28-days-28-birds> You will need to be able to also take a photo and upload it on the Inaturalist app. This is a great project for anyone already experienced in recording bird species. Start with a notebook and simply take some notes of what you see and what the birds are doing: https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/identifying-birds/bird-id-made-easy_

But for anyone who has never tried identifying or recording birds February is a perfect time to start. Birds are easier to see now than later in the year: trees are still bare, birds are more active in daylight, and many species are feeding out in the open. Even if you aren't confident photographing nature or using apps etc. It doesn't mean you can't use the challenge of this project to stretch your nature id skills.

What's most exciting about taking time to look "closer" is the diversity on offer. Even a short walk can reveal a mix of familiar and lesser-noticed species. Was that flash of red a Robin or was it actually a Redpoll, was that a Blackbird or a Black Redstart. Did you see a Thrush or was it a Fieldfare. Did you see another Sparrow or was it a Dunnock, was the large black bird just a Crow or was it a Jackdaw. There are lots of guides for identifying birds The Field Studies Council field study guides are a good place to start: <https://www.field-studies-council.org/shop/publications/winter-birds-bundle/>

February is also a great time to look in new places. Try:

- hedgerows and scrubby edges rather than open lawns
- canals, ponds, and rivers
- school grounds, car parks, and cemeteries
- quieter corners of parks you think you already know

Birds use the whole city including rooftops, railways, industrial edges, and tiny pockets of green and noticing this can completely change how we see familiar places. Water edges brings mallards, moorhens, coots, gulls, herons, and sometimes something unexpected passing through.

You don't need to be an expert to take part. Start with what you recognise, then let curiosity do the rest. Notice size, colour, movement, behaviour. Is the bird hopping or climbing? Singing or calling? Alone or in a group? These clues often matter more than the name. Learning one or two new species during the month is a real achievement. Over time, those small moments of recognition build confidence and before you know it, your "ordinary walk" starts to feel full of life.

Every record shared helps build a better picture of Birmingham's birdlife. Together, these observations support conservation, planning, and understanding but just as importantly, they help us slow down and reconnect with what's around us. So this February, look up, listen carefully, and try somewhere new.

You might be surprised how many birds are already watching you back.



Things to Do in the Garden in February

February sits in that in-between space where winter hasn't quite loosened its grip, but spring is clearly on the way. In the garden, this is a month for gentle action rather than big change. You can do tidying thoughtfully, preparing the ground, and noticing what's already beginning to stir.

It's also a good time to think about how our gardens, balconies, pots and shared spaces can support both our own wellbeing and the wildlife that depends on them. The same actions that protect soil, improve structure, and encourage healthy growth often benefit birds, insects and other small creatures too. Here are ten practical February tips that work with the season — for you and for nature.



1. Tidy selectively

Clear paths and access areas, but leave some stems, seed heads and leaf litter until spring warms properly.

2. Improve soil gently

Add compost or well-rotted manure to beds to feed soil life and prepare for planting later.

3. Top up bird food and water

Cold weather still limits natural food sources — clean feeders and keep water bowls fresh.

4. Plant bare-root trees, shrubs or hedging

If the ground isn't frozen, this is still an excellent time to plant native species.

5. Check winter damage

Remove broken or diseased branches, but avoid heavy pruning where birds may soon nest.



6. Notice early flowers

Snowdrops, hellebores and the yellow of winter aconite provide colour for us and nectar for early pollinators. You can still top up with pots of bulbs left from Christmas.

7. Plan what you'll grow this year

February is ideal for planning layouts, crop rotations, and wildlife-friendly planting. You can sow peppers inside and place on window sills for now.

8. Care for pots and containers

Refresh compost, check drainage, and remove soggy growth.

9. Create shelter as well as food

Log piles, leaf piles and undisturbed corners offer vital overwintering habitat. Don't get rid of all the twig bits from windy days they make great nesting material.

10. Spend time in the garden

Even a short time taken to look, notice, and breathe counts, caring for a garden isn't only about doing but also about connecting.



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 - National Nest Box Week



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



February is a busy time for birds. Even though it still feels cold, many birds are already preparing for spring. If you look closely, you might spot them hopping along hedges and trees, carefully choosing twigs, grasses and soft moss. They pause, listen, sing to one another and then carry their treasures away to begin building a nest.

National Nest Box Week - February 14th to February 21st, is a brilliant chance for schools and Young Green Champions to help. By putting up nest boxes, we can give birds safe places to raise their chicks, especially in places where old trees and natural nesting holes are harder to find. Nest boxes don't need to be complicated. Different birds like different shapes and sizes, and part of the fun is learning who might move in. Will it be a blue tit? A great tit? Or maybe a robin nearby? Watching birds inspect a box is exciting they often peek inside, fly back and forth, and seem to have long conversations about whether it's just right.

We've made a short YouTube video to help you get started, showing how nest boxes work and where to place them safely:

👉 https://youtu.be/dUq0_iD41-A

As Young Green Champions, you can also be wildlife detectives. Keep a simple notebook or class chart and record what you see:

- Which birds visit?
- What materials are they collecting?
- When do you first hear lots of birdsong?

Sharing what you notice helps scientists and organisations like the RSPB, Field Studies Council and Wildlife Trusts understand how birds are doing and it helps us take better care of nature in our parks, school grounds and gardens.

By putting up a nest box, you're not just building something. You're helping life begin.

A Small Valentine for wildlife

Valentine's Day is often about grand gestures, but in nature, love can look very different.

For birds, insects, and small mammals, care is shown through food, shelter, and safety. And February is a perfect time for families and schools to offer a small Valentine to the wildlife that shares our spaces.

One of the simplest ways to invite wildlife in is to make sure there is something to eat — now, and later in the year. Flowers rich in nectar and pollen support bees and other pollinators. Shrubs with berries provide vital winter food for birds. Grasses and seed heads feed insects and small mammals, which in turn support birds and bats.

In school grounds and gardens, it's important to choose safe, child-friendly species — plants that are non-toxic, robust, and easy to recognise. Native wildflowers, fruiting hedges like hawthorn or rowan, and herbs such as thyme or rosemary are all good examples. These plants support wildlife while also being safe for curious hands.

Inviting wildlife isn't about perfection or large projects. A single planter, a small patch left to grow, or a tree chosen with care can make a real difference.

This Valentine's, perhaps we can widen the circle a little — offering care not just to each other, but to the living world that supports us every day.

Because when we create spaces where wildlife can thrive, we're also creating healthier, happier places for people to learn, play, and grow.



The planet and the biosphere: same place, different stories



We often talk about “saving the planet”, but the truth is a little more precise and more interesting.

The planet is the third rock from the sun. A spinning sphere of iron, rock, water and gas, held together by gravity, moving through space on a reliable path. Almost mechanical. It has existed for about 4.5 billion years and will continue to exist long after humans are gone. The planet although not indestructible is not fragile, it has survived:

- asteroid impacts
- volcanic winters
- ice ages
- massive shifts in atmosphere and chemistry.

From a planetary perspective, life is optional. Mars is a planet, but as far as we know it lost it's living parts a long time ago.

The biosphere is different. This is the thin, delicate layer of life that sits on and within it's very top layer of the planet. It includes:

- all plants, animals, fungi and microorganisms
- the soils they live in
- the air they breathe
- the water they depend on.

If the planet were to be considered an apple, the biosphere is like the skin, it's astonishingly thin, complex, and alive. This is the more fragile part. It is vulnerable not because life is weak but because it is precise and depends on balance:

- the right mix of gases
- stable temperatures
- flowing water
- healthy soils
- relationships between species.

When those balances shift too quickly, most life struggles to adapt fast enough. Once the balance is too extreme life cannot survive. Human life at it's most basic has vital needs. As individuals we don't survive long without oxygen, water, food and shelter. There are some species that can survive extremely hostile environments, humans are not one of them. We are however resilient we can heal once the conditions are favourable again - as long as we survive.

Although the planet's structure is changing, we are not damaging the planet. We are disrupting the conditions that allow the biosphere to function. Most likely the planet will endure for millennia and life will most likely also continue in some form, But the rich, diverse, human-friendly biosphere we depend on is not guaranteed. That's why biodiversity loss, climate change, soil degradation and pollution are so tightly linked:

- they all interfere with the systems that keep the biosphere breathable, fertile and stable
- they all affect the thin layer where life actually happens

Humans are not outside the biosphere neither are we managers of it but we are not separate from it. We are participants that can effect it and we are utterly dependent on:

- oxygen produced by plants and plankton
- soils built by fungi, bacteria and invertebrates
- water cycles regulated by vegetation and wetlands.

As a society we are aware of our needs and concerned by the thought that human life may not always be provided for by natural systems, however, trying to manage biosphere systems through construction may not be sustainable. Even before we disrupt the natural systems to our detriment - we may actually simply run out of money to create and maintain human built infrastructure and services. Every city, every economy, every health system sits inside the biosphere, whether it remembers that or not. When we act as if the planet is just a backdrop, a venue for human built systems, we forget our real dependency.

Sustainability - How do we continue to live the lives we want to live

Most of us don't wake up thinking about the biosphere. We think about work, family, health, transport, food, warmth, and connection. We think about the lives we want to live — and quite rightly so.

What's easy to forget is that those lives are currently supported by countless quiet systems we don't pay for directly.



Clean air is filtered by trees and soils. Water is stored and slowed by wetlands and vegetation. Food depends on pollination, fertile soil, and stable weather. Our physical and mental health is shaped by access to green space, daylight, birdsong, and seasonal change.

The biosphere does this work constantly, without invoices. So it's worth asking a simple but important question: If these living systems stopped supporting us, what would we replace them with? Because the answer isn't "nothing", it would be human built infrastructure and services.

- Air filtration plants instead of trees.
- Water treatment instead of wetlands.
- Climate control instead of shade and evapotranspiration.
- Medical intervention instead of prevention and wellbeing.

All technically possible. All extremely expensive. And none of them as adaptable or resilient as the living systems they replace. In other words, if we choose not to live with nature, we don't escape dependence — we just shift it onto engineered systems that require:

- energy
- constant maintenance
- financial investment
- and long-term stability

That raises a quieter, more practical question: Could we actually afford to live without a functioning biosphere? Not emotionally. Not philosophically. But economically, socially, and physically. When birds disappear, when soils tire, when water quality declines, the cost doesn't vanish it moves. It shows up in health budgets, flood damage, food prices, infrastructure repairs, and inequality.

This is why noticing matters. Noticing is not nostalgia. It's not romantic. It's not about going backwards. It's about recognising the systems that already sustain our lives and deciding whether we want to protect them, or attempt to replace them at great cost.

Before we measured nature, we noticed it. Before we engineered solutions, we watched how the world worked. What we're doing now identifying species, recording change, sharing local knowledge is not a new movement. It's a remembering of how humans once stayed aligned with the limits that keep life possible. History shows us there have been other times when humans lived outside their means - it didn't go well.

The planet will endure almost anything. The question we're really asking is: "What kind of lives do we want to be able to live and what else needs to stay alive to support them?"

For all the work we do - what return do we get? As a society are we happier? Living longer? Living better lives? Building a better future for our descendants? The biosphere we are all part of is not constant, not unchanging we do need to be able to interact, mitigate and adapt but it may be easier and more affordable if we choose to live in a way that lets us use our resources to be happy today - and tomorrow.

Brum's Biosphere and Chris Millward's Team4Nature

Building Pride in Our City Through the Power of Art, Community and Nature

Their mission: To strengthen local businesses and build pride of place so that local communities thrive, whilst enjoying the many benefits that arise from a deep connection with the rest of nature. You can find out how to get involved here:

<https://www.team4nature.co.uk/>



Chris asks the question - "Have you ever looked towards the heart of Birmingham from high ground on the city's border?"

He goes on to suggest that when you do, Brum becomes a living entity. Its heart starts beating and you feel its pulse. Its lungs start breathing as you connect with the nature in view. You begin to connect deeply with the city that lies at your feet. This "solemn organism" that lies in front of you forges our lives and builds our memories. Chris also says: "Our lives and memories are shaped in the UK's second city, but can we shape this city? Can we shape our home? There really is something for everyone in the Team4Nature local networks"

Every local business can be cherished for raising awareness of nature and caring for its local community, Every community group that embraces nature in its mission statement and activities can grow from strength to strength, Every hero in waiting, regardless of age, background, faith, gender, race or sexuality can be supported, whilst they rise and help transform their communities.

Chris has been delivering nature based opportunities across the city working in partnership with organisations including Birmingham Open Spaces Forum, Ecobirmingham, Birmingham Botanical Gardens and communities including Friends of Parks groups. You can follow Team4nature on social media to find out where you can join Chris to get inspired about the Birmingham Biosphere.

So! If you appreciate the power of nature, understand the challenge and feel inspired to get involved and make a difference in your local community you can contact Chris at Team4Nature here: <https://www.team4nature.co.uk/contact-us>



Greener and More Sustainable Lives - Ecobirmingham

As a sustainability charity ecobirmingham support greener, fairer and healthier communities across the city.

They deliver grass roots activities, events and programmes through a variety of projects that engage and educate Birmingham residents, helping them to start or continue a more sustainable lifestyle.

On their website you will find several online resources including digital walking and cycling maps '[69wards by bike or foot](#)' and [downloadable guides](#), offering tips and advice on funding, planning, designing and running a community garden.



Their online '[sustainability toolkit](#)' is another valuable resource to support individuals across Birmingham to make small changes every day for a big impact. For people and the planet! Whether you're looking to reduce your carbon footprint, conserve resources, or support local biodiversity, our toolkit offers practical tips and guidance to help you on your journey towards a greener, healthier lifestyle.

Earth Stories – Memories, Hopes and Happenings

February can feel like a month of contradictions. On grey days, from my office window, the trees look bare. The ground seems quiet. Snowdrops are still too small to announce themselves properly, and everything feels muted and waiting. But when I look closely - really closely - I know something else is happening.

The buds on the trees are swelling, still tight with promise. Snowdrops are forming their white heads, continuing to rise on slender stems above the soil. On brighter days, the dogwood stems shine red, vivid against the winter light, as if quietly insisting that colour never truly left.

And even on the dullest days, there is joy. On the garden table sit bright and I mean super intense pink hyacinths, a Christmas gift from our cousins. They stop me mid-thought, again and again, as I work through my to-do list. Flowers do that. They interrupt. They connect us. They lodge themselves in memory and light up our lives in ways that feel both simple and profound.

February is a short month, often it starts slowly after the endless month of January but it quickly picks up speed and before you know it ta-da! spring arrives . It's Nest Box Week soon, and the birds seem to be holding meetings in the trees gathering in noisy groups discussing twig shapes, debating shades of moss and planning who will go where with likely nesting spots being agreed. That's how it looks to me as I watch their antics from my window. They sing and chatter constantly, calling to one another. There is something deeply reassuring in that shared activity, in the sense that the work of spring has already begun.

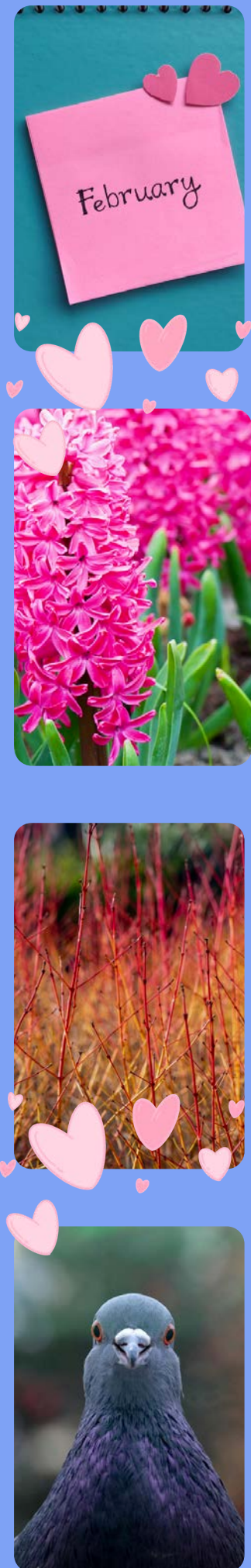
The window I watch from is actually a glass door and I am starting to long for the day I sit with it open while I work. I am often visited by doves and pigeons edging along the wall and staring in at me, seemingly as fascinated by me as I am them. I wonder what they'll do when we are in the same space with no glass between us?

There are other February rituals - for us. Baking heart-shaped biscuits for valentines and cooking pancakes on Shrove Tuesday. The first pancake, the wonky one, was always for the dogs. They didn't care what shape it was, I still miss them. Or receiving red envelopes from my mum for the Chinese New Year - she always wrote "Gong Hei Fat Choy" on them and put shiny coins inside. I kept one. I'm glad I did.

This is what February offers me: reflection and preparation, memory and noticing. The days stretching out, slowly but surely. Colour is beginning to pour back in. And as we pay attention in our gardens, parks, school grounds and green spaces across the city, we're reminded that nature is already moving forward.

If we notice carefully enough, February shows us that good things are not just coming they are already quietly here.

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

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.



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For More Information visit the Naturally Birmingham Website :

<https://naturallybirmingham.org/>