GREEN CHAMPIONS

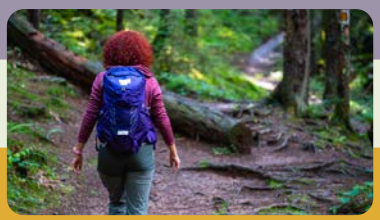
Noticing Nature

Small clouds are sailing,
Blue sky prevailing;
The rain is over and gone!
(We can but hope)
Written in March - William Wordsworth

Health - Naturally

Everyone's health matters. However March marks International Women's Day and Endometriosis Awareness Week so this feel like a time to recognise both strength and struggle.

Endometriosis affects millions of women and can bring chronic pain, fatigue and anxiety. Alongside medical care, nature connection can be a powerful wellbeing tool. Time outdoors whether sitting beneath a tree, tending a garden, or walking slowly through a local park can calm the nervous system, reduce stress hormones and gently lift mood. Nature offers steady rhythms when our bodies feel unpredictable. Even small moments looking at green space through a window can provide restoration, resilience and a reminder that we are not alone.



Learn more about - Medicinal Plants

Celebrated each year on 3rd March, United Nations World Wildlife Day recognises the vital role wild animals and plants play in sustaining life on Earth. The 2026 theme is Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Conserving Health, Heritage and Livelihoods reminds us that nature has long been our pharmacy, our teacher and our livelihood. From calming lavender and restorative chamomile to the willow bark that inspired modern pain relief medicines, wild plants have shaped healthcare traditions across cultures. Today, many communities still depend on medicinal and aromatic plants for wellbeing and income. Yet these species and the habitats they rely on face increasing pressure from habitat loss and climate change.

By valuing and protecting plant diversity, we conserve not only biodiversity, but also cultural heritage and future health. This March, take a moment to notice the quiet power of plants and discover how nature continues to support both people and planet.

https://www.rhs.org.uk/education-learning/school-gardening/resources/wellbeing/the-healing-power-of-plants

3rd March 2026 - World Wildlife Day

On 20 December 2013, at the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 3 March was officially declared United Nations **World Wildlife Day** (WWD). The date is significant: it marks the anniversary of the signing of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1973 which was a landmark global agreement designed to ensure that international trade does not threaten the survival of wild animals and plants. The United Nations General Assembly designated the CITES Secretariat as the facilitator of this annual observance, and since then World Wildlife Day has grown into the leading global celebration of wildlife on the UN calendar.

Why does this matter? Because people everywhere rely on wildlife and biodiversity-based resources to meet our everyday needs from food and fuel to medicines, housing and clothing. Healthy ecosystems regulate our climate, purify our water and support livelihoods across the world. For us to continue enjoying both the benefits and the beauty that nature brings, sustained conservation effort is essential.

Each year, World Wildlife Day adopts a theme to highlight a particular dimension of this relationship. In 2026, the focus is Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Conserving Health, Heritage and Livelihoods. From willow bark the origin of modern aspirin to fragrant lavender and traditional herbal remedies, wild plants have shaped healthcare systems and cultural traditions across centuries. Protecting plant diversity safeguards not only ecosystems, but also knowledge, heritage and future medical discovery.

At the same time, World Wildlife Day is a moment to look beyond our own neighbourhoods and celebrate the extraordinary diversity of life on Earth. From the giant panda the much-loved symbol of the World Wide Fund for Nature https://www.wwf.org.uk/ to gentle manatees drifting through warm coastal waters, and seals resting along rugged shorelines, wildlife connects continents, climates and cultures.
Each species plays a vital role in maintaining balance. Pandas remind us of the importance of forest conservation. Manatees signal the health of rivers and seagrass meadows. Seals reflect the condition of our seas. When habitats are protected, wildlife and people can thrive together.

World Wildlife Day invites us to learn more, notice more and care more. Whether exploring global conservation initiatives, supporting sustainable products, or recording species in our local parks, every act of curiosity strengthens our connection to the natural world. Protecting wildlife is not only about distant rainforests or remote oceans. It begins with awareness and grows through shared responsibility from global agreements to local action. This 3 March, let’s celebrate wildlife and the collective work, across nations and communities, that helps ensure wild plants and animals continue to flourish for generations to come.

8th March - 115 Years of International Women's Day – Equity, Health and a Fairer Future

In 2026, International Women's Day marks an extraordinary milestone: 115 years of collective action, advocacy and progress toward gender equality. What began in 1911 as a movement demanding fair wages, safer working conditions and the right to vote has grown into a global day of recognition, reflection and renewed commitment. Over more than a century, women have secured rights once denied, entered professions previously closed to them, and reshaped leadership across politics, science, business, sport and culture. Each generation has built on the courage of those before it pushing boundaries and redefining what is possible.

Yet 115 years is not only a celebration. It is a reminder that progress is ongoing. Gender inequality persists in pay gaps, underrepresentation in leadership, unequal access to healthcare and education, and the continued reality of gender-based violence. Equality is not inevitable. It is achieved through sustained action.
This year, as we also recognise a strong women's health theme in March, there is an important connection to make one that sits quietly within our City of Nature journey. Access to nature is not evenly distributed.

Research consistently shows that women and girls benefit profoundly from access to safe, welcoming green spaces. Time outdoors supports mental health, reduces stress, encourages physical activity and fosters social connection. For those managing chronic conditions — including many women's health issues — nature can be a powerful complementary wellbeing tool.

But safety, proximity and opportunity matter. If parks feel unsafe after dark, if facilities are poor, if green space is unevenly distributed, then access becomes inequitable. A Fair City recognises that environmental justice is social justice. The same applies to opportunity.

Across the environmental sector — from ranger services to landscape management, from engineering to strategic leadership — women are increasingly visible, but representation remains uneven in some areas. Encouraging girls into STEM subjects, environmental science, ecology and green infrastructure careers is not simply about workforce diversity. It is about designing cities that reflect and serve everyone.
When women thrive, we all rise.

Communities prosper. Innovation accelerates. Decision-making improves. Environmental policy strengthens when diverse voices shape it. Within a Fair City framework, equity means ensuring that the benefits of nature — health, employment, education and enjoyment — are accessible to all genders and backgrounds.
International Women's Day is not a single way of celebrating. Across the world, it is marked by rallies, workshops, flowers, speeches, quiet conversations and bold commitments. There is no right or wrong way — only many ways.

In Birmingham, perhaps it means:

- Supporting women-led community groups and environmental projects
- Encouraging girls to see themselves as future ecologists, engineers or park managers
- Designing parks with safety and inclusivity in mind
- Prioritising women's health in outdoor programming
- Ensuring equitable access to green space across neighbourhoods

115 years on, IWD remains both a celebration and a catalyst.
In this season of spring — of renewal and possibility — we honour the activists, caregivers, workers and leaders who have shaped the movement. And we recommit to forging an equal future.
Because a City of Nature must also be a Fair City.

And equality, like biodiversity, flourishes when it is intentionally nurtured.

City of Nature Programme Update - A Healthy City

Delivering The City of Nature Plan in 2026 - The Healthy City Handbook

The Healthy City Handbook marks the next practical step in delivering the Healthy City Aims set out in the City of Nature Plan. Where the Plan establishes ambition and direction, the Handbook translates those aims into operational guidance creating a shared framework for delivery across partners, services and communities.

It is designed to sit alongside the wider operational framework and mirror the structure of the other City of Nature handbooks, ensuring consistency, clarity and ease of use.

1. From Vision to Delivery

The City of Nature Plan sets out the Healthy City Aims recognising that access to high-quality green space is fundamental to physical health, mental wellbeing and health equity. The Handbook progresses this by identifying practical actions, governance mechanisms and measurable outcomes that support implementation.

2. Health as Core Infrastructure

Green and blue spaces are not “nice to have”; they are preventative health infrastructure. The Handbook positions parks, waterways, trees and nature-based activity as contributors to:

- Reduced health inequalities
- Improved mental wellbeing
- Increased physical activity
- Social cohesion and reduced isolation

It aligns environmental delivery with public health priorities and wider local authority objectives.

3. Operational Tools and Standards

Building on existing resources including volunteer frameworks, ranger guidance, safeguarding policies and partnership models the Handbook consolidates good practice into a coherent delivery model.

It supports:

- Consistent standards across sites
- Partnership working between council, NHS, voluntary sector and community groups
- Clear accountability within governance structures

4. Prevention, Not Just Intervention

A key principle is shifting from reactive service demand to preventative investment. By strengthening everyday access to nature close to where people live the Healthy City approach contributes to long-term system resilience.

5. Data, Evidence and Continuous Improvement

The Handbook encourages alignment with evidence-based practice, including health outcome data, natural capital valuation and biodiversity monitoring. It is iterative by design - a living framework that evolves as learning grows.

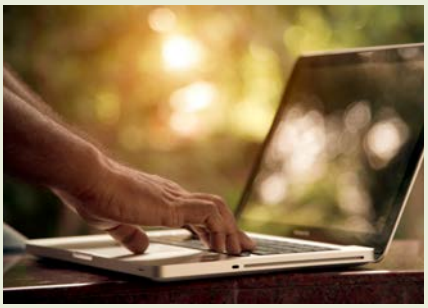
6. Shared Responsibility

Delivering a Healthy City requires collective effort. Rangers, Green Champions, Friends groups, schools, healthcare professionals and strategic leaders all have a role. The Handbook provides a common language to support collaboration.

The Healthy City Handbook represents a progression not a new direction, but a strengthening of intent. It embeds health within the City of Nature operational model and ensures that the benefits of nature are understood, measured and sustained for future generations.

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 Destination Parks - What and where are they.

Birmingham may not yet have a formal definition of a “Destination Park,” but the phrase is increasingly used to describe parks that offer something beyond everyday local green space.

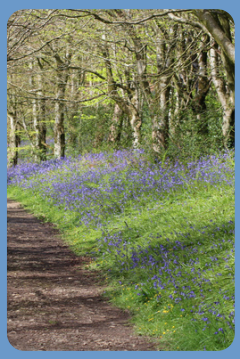
A destination park is typically larger in scale, distinctive in character, and equipped with features that attract visitors from across the city and beyond. These parks combine high-quality landscapes with facilities, heritage, biodiversity value, events or visitor experiences that make them places people intentionally travel to, rather than simply pass through. Although Birmingham has many more sites that have these features seven of the largest sites have been selected to be looked at first:

Sheldon Country Park – Rare breeds farm, open meadows and a rural character within the city boundary.
Lickey Hills Country Park – Dramatic viewpoints, woodland and geological significance.
Sutton Park National Nature Reserve – One of Europe’s largest urban parks, with heathland, wetlands and nationally important habitats.
Cannon Hill Park – Historic landscape, boating lake, MAC arts centre and major events space.
Handsworth Park – Rich heritage and strong community identity.
Kings Heath Park – Renowned horticulture and seasonal displays.
Woodgate Valley Country Park – A gateway to countryside experiences, visitor centre and extensive trails.

However, there is also an honest conversation to be had. While these parks stay locally vital and loved, and their historical and ecological value remains significant, the social and economic value of many of these parks has declined over time due to sustained funding pressures and changing service models. Facilities have aged, infrastructure requires renewal, and their full potential is not always realised.

This is precisely why Birmingham has introduced dedicated Destination Park Managers to focus on development, partnerships, income generation and long-term sustainability. The intention is not to commercialise at the expense of character, but to strengthen viability so that heritage, biodiversity and public access can be protected and enhanced.

Within the City of Nature framework, destination parks play a crucial role in delivering the Valued City aims ensuring that green spaces are recognised not only for their beauty, but for their measurable contribution to health, economy, tourism, culture and climate resilience.



They can act as anchors within the wider network of 600+ green spaces: demonstrating best practice, hosting events, supporting biodiversity at scale and inspiring visitors to explore neighbourhood parks across the city.

A destination park is, ultimately, a place people choose to visit and then return to because it offers something memorable and meaningful. The opportunity now is to invest, restore and reimagine these spaces so they continue to serve Birmingham for generations to come.

Why Has It Been So Rainy Recently?

If it feels like it's been relentlessly wet lately, you're not imagining it.

The UK has experienced a run of unsettled weather driven largely by a strong and persistent Atlantic jet stream. When the jet stream sits further south and strengthens, it steers a succession of low-pressure systems directly across the country — bringing bands of rain and frequent showers.

Warmer air can also hold more moisture. As global temperatures rise, the atmosphere is able to carry more water vapour, which can result in heavier downpours when rain does fall. This doesn't mean it rains all the time — but when weather systems arrive, they can release more intense bursts.

For Birmingham, our central location means we often receive the remnants of Atlantic systems after they have already delivered rain to western areas. When these fronts slow down or become "blocked" by high pressure over Europe or Scandinavia, rainfall can linger for days rather than moving quickly through.

Urban areas like Birmingham can also feel wetter because hard surfaces prevent water from soaking into the ground, leading to surface water and localised flooding.

While individual wet spells are part of the UK's naturally variable climate, climate change is increasing the likelihood of heavier rainfall events. It's a reminder of why resilient drainage, healthy soils, trees and well-managed green spaces are so important in helping cities like ours absorb and adapt to changing weather patterns.

Flooding – Where Does the Water Go?

We all know the water cycle. Rain falls, rivers flow, water evaporates, clouds form. Simple.

But in cities like Birmingham, it's not quite that simple anymore.

When rain falls on woodland, meadow or healthy soil, much of it soaks in. Tree roots create channels in the ground. Leaves slow the impact of heavy drops. Wetlands hold and release water gradually. Nature stores, filters and manages water quietly and effectively.

When rain falls on tarmac, concrete and paved-over front gardens, it has nowhere to go.

Instead of soaking in, it runs quickly into drains. When drains and culverts can't cope, especially during intense downpours, water pools on roads, overwhelms systems and can enter homes. What would once have been absorbed across fields and gardens becomes surface water flooding.

That's why rain gardens, street trees and green infrastructure matter. Rain gardens which are often planted along roadsides or in new developments are designed to capture runoff and allow it to soak slowly into the ground. Highway verges, permeable paving and restored front gardens all play a role in giving water time and space. None of this is about alarm - it's just about awareness.

As rainfall becomes heavier and more intense, how we design and care for our city matters. Every planted tree, every patch of living soil, every unpaved garden contributes to resilience.

So next time it rains, it's worth asking: where will this water go?

In a Nature City, the answer should increasingly be back into the ground, back into the system, and back into balance.

Looking forward to Summer - Activities in Parks and Green Spaces

It may still feel like coat-and-umbrella season, but now is exactly the time to start thinking about summer in our parks.

Across Birmingham, our green spaces come alive between May and September. From sponsored walks and fun runs to community fun days, conservation activities, angling competitions, cycling events, outdoor worship, sports tournaments, funfairs and even wedding photography parks are places where memories are made. And yes you absolutely can organise something. Behind the scenes, there is a simple reason why parks have an application process: they are shared public spaces. Events need to be safe, coordinated and considerate of wildlife, neighbours and other park users. That's where Birmingham City Council's Parks Service and Events Team step in, not to put up barriers, but to help organisers deliver successful, safe and enjoyable events.

If you are a Friends Group, community organisation, charity, sports club or faith group, you can apply to host activities in your local park. From April 2025, Friends and community groups will be able to outline their planned activities in advance helping the council avoid clashes, offer support and ensure everything runs smoothly. For BOSF member groups, one application can even cover a full year of activity.

Larger events — such as fun runs, festivals or gatherings — may require earlier planning (12–26 weeks ahead) and additional documentation, including risk assessments and event plans. This ensures public safety, appropriate insurance cover and coordination with emergency services where needed. It might sound formal, but guidance is available, and many community organisers successfully navigate the process every year.

Why does this matter?
Because events in parks do more than entertain. They:

- Bring communities together
- Support physical and mental wellbeing
- Encourage volunteering and stewardship
- Generate local pride and economic activity
- Activate green spaces in positive, visible ways

In a City of Nature, parks are not passive backdrops. They are active civic stages.

If you are thinking about organising something — even something small — start the conversation early. The Parks Service and Sports Events team can provide advice, and the Events Enquiry Form is the first step in turning an idea into reality.

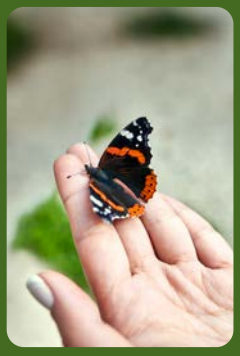
And if organising isn't your thing, keep an eye out. Notice boards, community social media pages and local networks will soon begin sharing what's planned. Summer programmes often build quietly then suddenly the park is full of colour, music, laughter or quiet concentration along a fishing lake. Our parks belong to everyone. With thoughtful planning and shared responsibility, they can host everything from conservation mornings to celebration days.

So as the days lengthen, perhaps this is the moment to ask: What could happen in your park this summer? The invitation is open.
https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20089/parks/165/holding_events_in_parks_and_open_spaces

Birmingham's Park Ranger Service – It's all connected

Linking People and Nature

Ranger Service Spring Update – Connecting the Dots

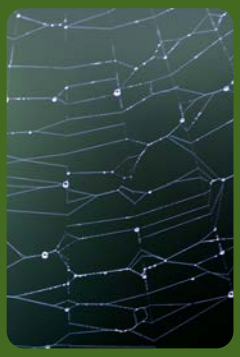


Spring is when everything becomes visible again. Buds open. Birds return. Days lengthen. But beneath those seasonal changes lies something deeper the connection between public health, climate resilience and nature recovery. Birmingham's Ranger Service sits right at that intersection.

This spring, rangers will be delivering practical habitat restoration across parks and country sites meadow management, woodland care, wetland improvements and species monitoring. These actions strengthen biodiversity, improve soil health and increase the city's ability to absorb heavy rainfall. Healthy habitats are climate infrastructure.

But the work doesn't stop at ecology.

Rangers will also be leading guided walks, volunteer conservation days, family learning sessions and school engagement activities. These create opportunities for people to step outside, connect with nature and with each other, and experience the mental and physical health benefits of green space. From reducing stress and supporting physical activity to tackling loneliness and building community confidence, nature-based activity supports public health in tangible ways.



The themes are not separate. Restoring a hedgerow supports pollinators and improves habitat connectivity. Planting trees contributes to carbon storage and shade in heatwaves. Creating accessible pathways encourages inclusive participation. Supporting volunteers builds skills, pride and local stewardship.

Spring is also a time for partnership. Rangers work alongside Friends groups, Green Champions, schools, community organisations and city-wide programmes to ensure activity is coordinated and impactful. By bringing people together around shared care for wildlife, we strengthen both ecosystems and neighbourhoods.

In a changing climate, with increasing pressure on services, the Ranger Service plays a vital preventative role. It protects habitats before they decline, supports health before crisis point, and builds resilience before extreme weather tests our systems.

It is all connected.

This spring, whether you join a volunteer day, attend a walk, or simply pause to notice birdsong in your local park, you are part of that wider story caring for wildlife, supporting public health, and helping Birmingham continue its journey as a City of Nature.

Out and About in March 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 metal 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 March 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 March 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.

St David and St Patrick - The Daffodil, Leek and Shamrock

Every year on 1 March, Welsh people around the world including those who live in Birmingham celebrate the country's patron saint - St David. The day is a celebration of Welsh culture, traditional food and music.
Many people also choose to wear one or both of Wales's national emblems - a daffodil and a leek.

But who was Saint David and how is the day traditionally celebrated? St David - or Dewi Sant in Welsh - was born on the south-west coast of Wales, near to where the city of St David's is today. It is said that he lived for more than 100 years and died on Tuesday, 1 March 589. Daffodils and leeks are considered Welsh emblems due to their historical and cultural significance. Wild Daffodils (Narcissus pseudonarcissus) are native to Wales and bloom around St David's Day, making them a fitting symbol for the nation's national day. The Welsh word for daffodil, 'Cenhinen Bedr', translates to 'Peter's Leek', which relates to the leek's long-standing association with Wales. Leeks (Allium ampeloprasum), which unlike daffodils are edible, have a rich history in Wales, with legends suggesting they were worn by Welsh soldiers to distinguish themselves in battle. The tradition of wearing leeks on St David's Day was noted as an ancient tradition in William Shakespeare's play Henry V. The name leek developed from the Old English word lēac, from which the modern English name for garlic also derives. Leeks have a mild, onion-like taste. In its raw state, the vegetable is crunchy and firm. The edible portions of the leek are the white base of the leaves (above the roots and stem base), the light green parts, and to a lesser extent, the dark green parts of the leaves.

People living in Birmingham may instead celebrate St Patrick's Day on 17 March every year. It is a celebration of Irish history and culture, and is a national holiday in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. St Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland he is thought to have grown up in Britain, during Roman times, but was kidnapped and taken to Ireland as a slave. Once he was free again, he trained as a priest, and went back to Ireland to convert thousands of people to Christianity. The dates of Patrick's life cannot be fixed with certainty, but sometime after 431 AD. The shamrock, derived from the Irish word "seamróg," meaning "young clover," has deep roots in Irish culture and is closely associated with St. Patrick, who used the shamrock as a teaching tool during his missionary work. The shamrock is a three-leaved plant, symbolic of Ireland and of St Patrick's Day has an important meaning for Christians. It is said to represent the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The three leaves of a shamrock are also said to stand for faith, hope and love.

Is Shamrock different to clover? A shamrock typically refers to a specific species of clover associated with Ireland, while clover is a broader category that includes various species within the Trifolium genus. Shamrocks always have three leaves, whereas clovers can have a fourth leaf or more. Shamrocks are low-growing plants with three-lobed leaves, while clovers have dense, white, globular flower heads and can vary in leaf shape and colour.
All shamrocks are considered clovers, but not all clovers are shamrocks

Wildlife Watching in March – Natures Calendar

It may still be cold. The rain may still come sideways. But look closely and you will see it — bud burst on hedgerows, the first butterflies testing the air, birds gathering moss and twigs with sudden urgency. Spring does not arrive all at once. It unfolds, quietly and faithfully.

The Woodland Trust runs an extraordinary citizen science project called Nature's Calendar, inviting people across the UK to record these seasonal signs. From leaf buds opening to blackberries ripening, observations contribute to a biological record stretching back to 1736. It is one of the longest continuous phenology records in the world.
Why does this matter?

Phenology is the study of seasonal changes in plants and animals from year to year, such as flowering of plants, emergence of insects and migration of birds, especially their timing and relationship with weather and climate.
Nature's Calendar volunteers record the dates of certain events which happen to certain species during the changing seasons.

Because the timing of natural events — bud burst, first butterflies, nesting behaviour — tells us how weather patterns and climate change are affecting wildlife. Warmer winters can trigger earlier flowering. Sudden cold snaps can disrupt food availability. Pollinators and plants can fall out of sync. By recording what we see, we help scientists understand these shifts.

In Birmingham, this connects directly to our Green City and biodiversity aims. Healthy urban habitats depend on timing. Street trees bursting into leaf provide early nectar. Connected hedgerows allow butterflies such as brimstones and peacocks to move safely. Quiet corners of parks offer nesting spaces for blue tits, robins and blackbirds.

Bud burst is more than a botanical event. It signals the return of shade, oxygen, carbon capture and beauty. The first butterfly is more than a fleeting delight — it is an indicator species. A nest being built is both fragile and fiercely hopeful.

Nature's Calendar invites us not only to collect data, but to pay attention. To look up at branches we usually walk beneath. To notice which park trees leaf first. To feel that lift in the chest when something small and winged appears after months of absence.

In a City of Nature, biodiversity is not abstract. It is present in our streets, our parks, our school grounds and gardens. By contributing observations, residents become part of a long-term scientific record while also strengthening their own connection to place.

This March, as everything begins to stir, consider becoming a recorder. Watch for bud burst. Look for the first butterflies. Notice birds building.
Spring is returning. And by noticing it — by marking it — we help protect it.

Join thousands of other people and let us know what's happening to wildlife near you. Have you seen your first butterfly or tadpoles of spring? Take part in Nature's Calendar and help scientists monitor the effects of climate change on wildlife.

Register or Sign in to start recording.

Things to Do in the Garden in March

March is a month of visible change. Light stretches further into the evening, soil begins to warm, and growth shifts from hidden to hopeful. This is the point where winter gives way — not suddenly, but steadily.
In the garden, March is about encouragement rather than control. Supporting new growth, protecting early wildlife activity, and preparing thoughtfully for the abundance ahead. It's also one of the most important months for biodiversity. Early flowers feed emerging pollinators. Nesting materials matter. Soil health sets the tone for the whole growing season.
Here are ten practical March tips that work with the season for you and for nature.

1. Watch for bud burst: Notice which trees and shrubs are leafing first — an early sign of seasonal change and a useful biodiversity indicator.

2. Leave nesting space: Before heavy pruning, check hedges and shrubs for early nest building. Many birds begin now.

3. Plant pollinator-friendly flowers: Choose early nectar sources such as crocus, pulmonaria, hellebore and native primrose.

4. Divide and replant perennials: As growth begins, divide overcrowded clumps to encourage healthier plants and share with neighbours.

5. Start a compost check-in: Turn compost gently and monitor moisture — living soil is the foundation of a healthy garden.

6. Sow hardy vegetables and herbs: Broad beans, peas and hardy salad crops can often go in now, depending on frost risk.

7. Create a small water source: Even a shallow dish with stones can support insects as temperatures rise.

8. Install a nest box (if not already done): Early March is still suitable — position away from direct sun and prevailing wind.

9. Avoid pesticides: Emerging insects are vital food for birds feeding young. Let natural balances work.

10. Plan with biodiversity in mind: Consider one small change this year plant a native hedge, a mini wild patch, or fewer hard surfaces to allow water to soak into soil.

March gardening is not about perfection. It is about participation.
Every bud, every bee, every nest being built is part of a wider system — one that connects our individual gardens to Birmingham's broader green network.
Spring is not something we watch. It is something we join.

Young Green Champions - Growing herbs in pots

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

March is World Wildlife Day, and this year's theme celebrates Medicinal and Aromatic Plants the herbs and flowers that have helped people stay healthy for centuries. What if your school became a mini plant pharmacy? You don't need a big garden. Pots, raised beds, windowsills or a sunny corner of the playground are enough. Growing from seed is especially exciting because you get to see the whole life cycle — from tiny seed to full plant.

Here are some great plants to try:

- 🌱 Chamomile – Known for calming teas and supporting sleep. Its daisy-like flowers also attract pollinators.
- 🌿 Mint – Easy to grow (best in pots so it doesn't spread too far!) and brilliant for teas and cooking.
- 🌸 Lavender – Loved by bees and famous for its relaxing scent.
- 🌿 Thyme – A hardy herb with antiseptic properties and early flowers for insects.
- 🌼 Calendula (pot marigold) – Bright, cheerful flowers used in soothing balms.

By growing these plants, you are doing three important things:

1. Learning about traditional plant knowledge and how nature supports health.
2. Helping pollinators by providing nectar and pollen.
3. Becoming scientists — observing how weather affects germination, flowering and growth.

You could even link your planting to Nature's Calendar by recording when seeds sprout or when the first flowers open. Medicinal plants remind us that nature doesn't just look beautiful it also supports wellbeing, biodiversity and culture too. This spring, why not sow a seed and grow something that helps both people and wildlife?

Mothers Day - Mother Earth

March is a month of return. Light stretches further. Buds break open. Birds begin building. The earth feels as though it is breathing in again after winter. Mother's Day sits within this season of renewal, and it invites us to think about care. To consider who gives it, who receives it, and how it shapes us.

We often speak of Mother Earth not as a literal figure, but as a reminder that the planet sustains us quietly and constantly. Soil grows food. Trees clean air. Rivers carry life. In many ways, nature models the very qualities we associate with good parenting: nourishment, protection, resilience and patience.

For young girls, spring can be a powerful time of possibility. Seeing women leading, restoring habitats, studying science, running community groups or guiding Ranger teams shows that environmental leadership is not one shape or one voice. Role models matter especially when they show strength and kindness together.

But care does not belong to women alone. Families come in many forms. Single parents, grandparents, all-male households and blended families every caring adult shapes the next generation. Teaching a child to plant seeds, notice birdsong or tread gently on the earth is an act of love, whoever is doing the teaching. Mother's Day, in this wider sense, becomes less about one day and more about a way of being. It is about nurturing health both physical and emotional. It is about encouraging curiosity. It is about protecting what is fragile until it can stand strong.

In a City of Nature, care extends outward from home to park, from family to community, from garden to woodland. When we look after the earth, we are modelling responsibility and hope for the children watching us. March reminds us that rebirth is possible. That growth follows dormancy. That strength and softness can exist together.

And that love in all its forms is something we can grow.

The Birmingham Civic Society - Next Generation Award

Some days restore your faith in the future. Serving as a volunteer assessor for the Next Generation Awards is one of those privileges.

Run by the Birmingham Civic Society for over twenty years, the programme has engaged more than 37,000 young people across the city. Each year, around 20 schools and 2,000 pupils take part in this highly respected Citizenship initiative a scheme that was recognised in 2018 with an Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community Award at the Education Awards.

The format is simple but powerful. Over approximately six hours of structured class time, Key Stage 3 students identify an issue affecting their community, research it, develop a practical solution and design a sustainable project. They then present their ideas in five-minute pitches, first in school, then at semi-finals, and finally at the October Grand Final, where the winning team receives up to £1,500 (courtesy of Birmingham Newman University) and mentoring support to bring their idea to life.

What strikes me every time is the depth of thinking. Many projects focus on eco themes like biodiversity, litter reduction, climate awareness and green spaces, but whatever the topic, the courage and clarity of these young people is extraordinary. They are not naïve about the scale of the challenges facing their generation. They are pragmatic, creative and collaborative. They look at big issues and say: What can we do?
That mindset alone is worth celebrating.

Huge credit must go to Jo Dunlop, who leads the programme with dedication and quiet determination. Coordinating schools, assessments, semi-finals and finals across the city is no small task. The structure she and the Civic Society have built ensures consistency, fairness and genuine impact.

Most recently, I had the pleasure of assessing at Edgbaston High School for Girls on Friday 27 February - a particularly special visit as the school celebrates 150 years. The welcome was warm, the thinking sharp, and yes, the biscuits excellent. But beyond the hospitality, what stayed with me was the sense of possibility in the room.
In a City of Nature and a city navigating social, economic and environmental change programmes like the Next Generation Awards matter deeply. They cultivate civic confidence. They nurture leadership. They show young people that their ideas have value.

For me, volunteering as an assessor is a gift. It offers a front-row seat to Birmingham's future as one that is thoughtful, determined and full of heart.

Schools wishing to take part can email nextgenerationawards@googlemail.com to request free resources and express interest.

If you ever need reminding that hope is alive and well, spend an afternoon listening to Year 8s explain how they plan to change the world.

You can find out more about Next Generation Award and hear from some of the young people who have taken part in the project here: https://birminghamcivicsociety.org.uk/next-generation-awards/

Earth Hour - “Do you switch off when it comes to thinking about climate change?”

I remember that line clearly. It was printed on a poster when I worked at the Birmingham Nature Centre as part of a sustainability display designed to make people pause. It was clever. A play on words. But it carried a deeper truth.

Because here’s the irony: talk too much about climate change and people can feel overwhelmed, fatigued, even “turned off.” Don’t talk about it at all, and it quietly slips to the back of our minds while life carries on at full speed.

So how do we engage without exhausting?

That’s where Earth Hour finds its power.

Organised by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Earth Hour 2026 takes place on Saturday 28 March, from 8:30pm to 9:30pm local time. For one hour, people across the globe switch off non-essential lights and choose to spend 60 minutes doing something positive for the planet. This year marks 20 years of collective action for nature and climate.

At first glance, turning off a light for an hour may seem symbolic. And it is. But symbols matter. They create shared moments. They remind us that we are part of something bigger than our individual routines.
Earth Hour is not about guilt. It is about invitation.

Switch off the lights — and light a candle. Sit with family. Tell stories. Step outside and look at the night sky. Listen for owls. Notice how different your home feels without the usual glow of screens. Perhaps use the hour to plan one practical action for the year ahead — planting trees, reducing waste, joining a local conservation day, recording wildlife, restoring a garden patch.

The genius of Earth Hour is that it shifts the focus from fear to participation.

Climate change is complex. It is global, systemic, political and scientific. But action can start small and local. In Birmingham, that might mean supporting green infrastructure, protecting trees, volunteering with a Friends group, or encouraging schools to grow pollinator plants. It might mean thinking differently about energy use at home or work.

When we feel powerless, we disengage. When we feel part of a shared effort, we lean in.

So perhaps the real question is not “Do you switch off?” but “What might switching off help you switch on to?” Earth Hour creates a pause and pauses are powerful. In a city that rarely slows down, one intentional hour can reset our thinking. It can reconnect us to quiet, to darkness, to reflection.

Twenty years on, Earth Hour continues because it taps into something human. We need rituals. We need moments of collective recognition. We need reminders that change is possible when enough people care.

On Saturday 28 March at 8:30pm, lights will dim in cities around the world. Landmarks will go dark. Homes will flicker with candlelight.
And in that shared darkness, there is not despair there is possibility.
Switch off the lights.
Switch on awareness.
Switch on hope.

World Book Day - 5th March 2026

The World Book Day charity champions reading for fun — because it seriously improves lives. Research shows that reading for pleasure is one of the strongest indicators that a child will grow up to enjoy a happier and more successful future. Yet today, only one in three children says they enjoy reading. By changing this, World Book Day hopes to transform lives.

Young people are more likely to read when it feels fun, social and imaginative. That's why thousands of children across the UK dress up as favourite characters, share stories and celebrate books together. The aim isn't just one magical day it's to spark habits that last all year.
And where better to spark imagination than in nature?

Stories rooted in the natural world have shaped generations. Think of the deep woodland adventure in The Gruffalo, the quiet wonder of watching birds in Blackbird Song, or the gentle seasonal rhythm of traditional tales like The Wind in the Willows. Nature stories invite children to notice — to see the world as alive, interconnected and full of possibility.

Reading outdoors can make this connection even stronger. A story shared under a tree, in a park, or beside a school garden bed brings words to life. A book about hedgehogs feels different when you know they might visit your playground at night.

World Book Day offers a wonderful opportunity to explore nature-themed books in classrooms and at home. Schools can use the charity's free resources to build creative activities around wildlife, habitats and seasonal change. Families can visit local libraries or swap favourite nature reads.
In a City of Nature, reading and the outdoors belong together. Stories grow empathy. Empathy grows care. And care grows action.

So this World Book Day, whether your child dresses as a woodland creature, a young explorer, or a favourite fictional hero, remember: when we nurture a love of reading, we are opening doors to imagination, to knowledge, and to a deeper relationship with the world around us.
Together, let's help every child discover the life-changing joy of reading for fun

Birmingham Authors to Discover This World Book Day

World Book Day is the perfect moment not only to celebrate reading, but also to celebrate writers from our own city. Birmingham has produced extraordinary literary voices - storytellers who capture humour, humanity and the natural world in distinctive ways. One much-loved name is Benjamin Zephaniah poet, performer and passionate advocate for social justice. His writing for young people, including Talking Turkeys and Nature Trail, combines rhythm, warmth and accessibility. Zephaniah's work often celebrates animals, fairness and connection to place, making him a wonderful bridge between literacy and environmental awareness.

For younger readers, Julia Donaldson, who studied and has strong links to Birmingham, has given generations of children a love of rhyme and woodland adventure through stories like The Gruffalo. Her tales bring forests, creatures and courage vividly to life perfect for outdoor story sessions in parks or school grounds. And for older readers, Malorie Blackman, former Children's Laureate, offers powerful storytelling that explores justice, empathy and social responsibility. While not solely nature-focused, her work reminds us that reading builds the imagination and compassion that underpin a fair and inclusive city. Celebrating Birmingham authors helps children see that great stories can grow close to home. When young people recognise their own city in the voices they read, books feel less distant and their own voices feel more possible. This World Book Day, why not explore a Birmingham bookshelf?

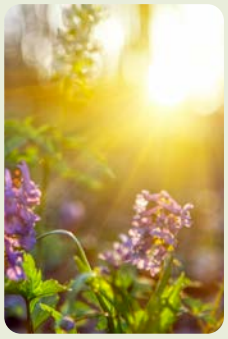
The Spring Equinox – A Moment of Balance

Around 20 March each year, something subtle but powerful happens. Day and night stand in balance. Light and dark share the sky equally. This is the Spring Equinox a turning point. From here on, light begins to take the lead.

The equinox doesn’t arrive with noise or ceremony. There are no fireworks in the sky. But it marks a profound shift in the Earth’s journey around the sun. In Birmingham’s parks and gardens, we feel it before we name it. Buds swell. Birdsong strengthens. The air changes. For centuries, cultures across the world have recognised this moment of balance a pause between seasons. A reminder that change does not happen all at once, but through steady, cosmic rhythm.

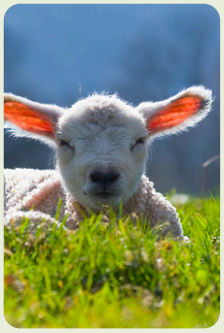
The Spring Equinox, known as Ostara, is a pagan festival of balance, renewal, and fertility, marking the return of light and spring. It is a time for cleansing, setting new intentions, and welcoming the vibrant energy of the earth's awakening.

"The perfect wheel of nature keeps spinning, with proof that an ending, is just the beginning." — Stephanie Laird



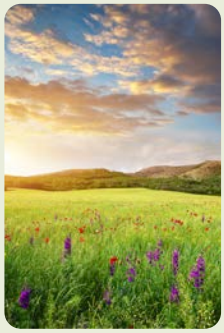
There are many books that echo this sense of seasonal turning. One that feels especially fitting is The Lost Words by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris. The book reawakens words for nature — acorn, bramble, heron — reminding us that language and landscape are intertwined. Like the equinox itself, it invites us to pay attention to what might otherwise pass quietly.

The equinox is not only about astronomy. It is about balance. After months of winter contraction — shorter days, inward thinking — spring offers expansion. Light stretches further into our evenings. There is space again for walks after work, for noticing blossom, for children to linger outside.



In a City of Nature, the equinox can feel like a collective exhale. Ranger projects move into active season. Schools step outdoors. Volunteers return to conservation tasks. Gardens shift from planning to planting.

But the equinox also asks something gentle of us: how do we hold balance in our own lives? Between doing and resting. Between urgency and patience. Between speaking about climate and pausing to notice beauty.



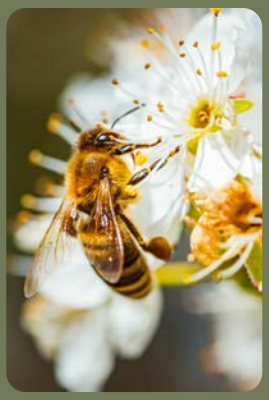
Nature models balance constantly. Soil rests and then produces. Trees stand bare and then leaf. Darkness makes light meaningful.

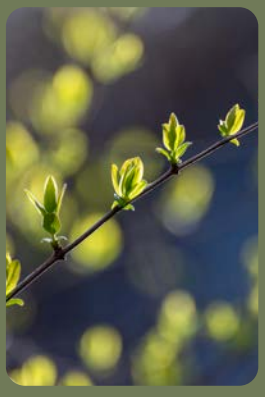
Perhaps this is why spring feels hopeful. Not because problems disappear — they don’t — but because the Earth demonstrates renewal year after year.

On the Spring Equinox, the world is held evenly between shadow and sun.

And from that steady balance, growth begins again.

Earth Stories – Memories, Hopes and Happenings





"February brings the rain…" well, it certainly did that this year. The old weather rhyme continues: "March winds and April showers…" which makes you wonder what might still be ahead. Our weather patterns feel less predictable now. Downpours are heavier, seasons blur at the edges, and conversations about climate feel ever-present. And yet, for now, the great turning continues. It is meteorological spring. The earth has tilted us back towards the light.

March means looking across open fields for hares. The phrase "mad as a March hare" dates back to at least to a sixteenth century quote: "As mery as a marche hare." During their breeding season, which peaks now, hares appear almost theatrical in their behaviour. They box, leap vertically, chase and tumble across fields. What looks like chaos is instinct, urgency, life surging forward. There is something fitting in that.

March always feels personal to me. It carries International Women's Day and Mother's Day and these draw my thoughts to the strong women in my family. My gran. My aunt. My mum. Women who carried resilience quietly, who shaped lives through steady presence rather than spectacle. Their strength feels woven into this month of renewal. Living with endometriosis has shaped my relationship with March too as it draws attention to women's health. It is so often endured privately, spoken about softly if at all. Yet I have come to see the power in naming it, in acknowledging it and sharing how nature has been a steady companion in that journey offering me a breathing space, perspective and gentle strength. A reminder that bodies, like seasons, move through cycles.

March also reminds me of working in what was once a very male-dominated Ranger Service. Change can be slow, but it does happen. Seeing more women step into environmental roles in ecology, leadership, green infrastructure feels like part of the wider arc we honour this month. And then, there is joy.

It is my husband's birthday in March. There are cakes to bake and candles to light. Plans begin forming for picnics - proper ones in the garden, in parks and hopefully by the sea or up in the mountains. I imagine bench chats in warm sunlight, conversation mingling with birdsong. The garden shifts now too. Daffodils stand bright and unapologetic. Do you favour the bold golden trumpets that shout of spring? Or the smaller, softer wild daffodil (Narcissus pseudonarcissus) our native species, nodding gently in woodlands and verges? The diversity we see today is remarkable: ruffled, double, pale lemon, almost white. Each one feels like a small declaration that winter has loosened its grip.

Cowslips and violets begin to return. Buds swell to that almost luminous green the colour that only exists for a short window each year. Birds rehearse their songs more confidently with each passing morning. And somewhere, the first bees are stirring - something I wrote about recently on the Green Pages (I'll add the link below). Even that first low hum feels like promise.

This newsletter has explored big themes: health, equality, biodiversity, climate, young people shaping the future. But beneath all of it sits something simpler. Hope.

March does not solve everything. It does not erase complexity or challenge. The rain may continue. The winds may blow hard. Our climate conversations remain urgent.
But year after year, the earth demonstrates renewal.

Light returns. Hares leap. Daffodils rise. Women lead. Children imagine better futures. Seeds germinate quietly beneath the soil.

There is so much to look forward to. The Green Pages: https://naturallybirmingham.org/2026/03/01/the-moment-of-meeting-a-bee/

With warm regards
Deborah Needle

City of Nature Newsletter Editor and 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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