

GREEN CHAMPIONS



Noticing Nature

Come queen of months in company
 Wi all thy merry minstrelsy
 The restless cuckoo absent long
 And twittering swallows chimney song ... May by John Clare



Health - Naturally

The Mental Health Awareness Week 2026 theme is **"Action,"** running from **11–17 May 2026**. Organized by the [Mental Health Foundation](#), The theme focuses on moving beyond awareness to taking practical steps for ourselves, others, and society to create real change, foster better mental health, and prevent crises.

- Action for Yourself: Prioritizing self-care, boundaries, rest, and recovery.
- Action for Others: Fostering community support, open conversations, and reducing stigma.
- Action for All: Implementing workplace and systemic changes to support mental health.
- Wear it Green Day: Held on Thursday, 14 May 2026, to raise funds and awareness



Learn more about - Our Museums

Across Birmingham, our museums tell the story of the city from its natural history and industry to the everyday lives of the people who shaped it. Whether you're curious about science, fascinated by local heritage, or simply looking for somewhere new to explore, there's something for everyone.

Nature & Science

- Thinktank Birmingham Science Museum
- Lapworth Museum of Geology
- Sarehole Mill

Industry & Craft

- Museum of the Jewellery Quarter
- Pen Museum
- Coffin Works

People & Place

- Birmingham Back to Backs
- Aston Hall
- Selly Manor Museum

Art & Culture

- Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Museums are more than places to visit the past, they are spaces to learn, reflect, and connect with the stories that continue to shape Birmingham today.

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



National Gardening Week 27th April - 3rd May 2026

National Gardening Week is the UK's biggest celebration of gardening. Thousands of people, gardens, charities, retailers, culture and heritage organisations and groups get involved every year and you can too. In 2026, National Gardening Week runs from 27 April to 3 May and is all about sharing your passion for plants. Join us for activities and events which will inspire and help gardeners, including creative ideas, tips and suggestions for plants to grow indoors and outdoors. Here are some suggestions if you'd like to get involved in 2026.



Join the celebrations. Events and activities are being run up and down the country. From beginners' workshops to guided walks, family activities to garden parties, there's something for everyone and everyone is invited. [Find out what's on.](#)

Would you like to throw a garden party, love your neighbourhood park or think your local street could do with a tidy up? Well if so, you can get involved in National Gardening Week by running your own event and registering it with us online. No matter how big or small your idea, we'd love to have you involved.



For 2026, the RHS are celebrating the simple pleasure of being curious in the garden. From the soft rustle of new leaves to the first signs of pollinators returning, every corner offers something worth noticing. Curiosity encourages us to pause, to explore and to enjoy the natural details that often go unseen.

Whether you garden on a windowsill or in a wide open plot, curiosity leads to better understanding and more rewarding moments outdoors. By asking questions, trying new ideas and observing how plants respond, gardeners of all abilities can deepen their connection with the spaces they care for.

Why not visit a garden for inspiration. Here are a few suggestions:

Birmingham Botanical Gardens: <https://birminghambotanicalgardens.org.uk/>

Martineau Gardens: <https://martineau-gardens.org.uk/>

Thrive in Kings Heath Park: <https://www.thrive.org.uk/how-we-help/what-we-do/about-us>

Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens:
<https://www.castlebromwichhallgardens.org.uk/>

Winterbourne Gardens: <https://www.winterbourne.org.uk/>



3rd May 2026 - World Laughter Day



The Sound of Laughter

World Laughter Day, celebrated on the first Sunday of May, was created to remind us of something very simple — that laughter has the power to connect us. Founded in 1998 by Dr. Madan Kataria through the Laughter Yoga movement, it has grown into a global moment of shared joy, rooted in the idea that something as small as laughter can ripple outward into compassion, health, and even peace. This year, it falls on 3 May.

Recently, I was in a meeting where we were asked a simple question “What is your favourite sound?” There were many thoughtful answers. But one came up again and again. Children laughing. Not polite laughter. Not the kind we often offer in conversation. But that full, unguarded, spontaneous sound that comes when children are completely absorbed in play. It’s a sound that seems to cut through everything else.

I found myself wondering afterwards if it’s a bit like birdsong. When birds are singing, we often take it as a quiet reassurance that the world, at least in that moment, is in balance. That life is continuing, despite everything. And perhaps children’s laughter holds something similar. A signal, not that everything is perfect, because it isn’t, but that there is still space for joy.

Of course, neither birds nor children are untouched by the world around them. They simply live more fully in the present. They move through moments quickly from play to pause, from laughter to something else without holding onto things in quite the same way.

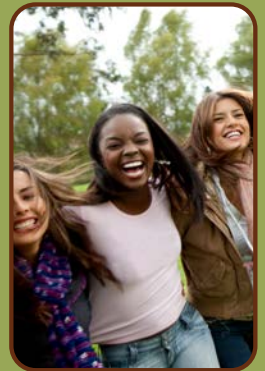
There’s something in that which feels important. Not as something to try to imitate, but as something to notice, We know it can’t all be laughter, life doesn’t work that way. But being lost in a moment of laughter can help to maintain the resilience we need to live a good life.

There are heavier moments, quieter days, times when the world feels anything but light. But perhaps the invitation isn’t to choose between those things but to make room for both. To notice the sound of laughter when it comes and allow it space. And to recognise it. Not as something trivial, but as something essential.

This May, as the days lengthen and the city moves into that fuller, brighter rhythm, perhaps it’s worth pausing for those small signals.

Birdsong in the trees.
Laughter in the distance.

Not as proof that everything is fine. But as a reminder that something good is still moving through it all.



City of Nature Programme Update - A Valued City

The Valued City Handbook sets out how Birmingham can better recognise, evidence and sustain the value of its green spaces.

What is becoming clearer through current work and conversations is that this value is not theoretical - it is already being shaped, tested and understood through activity happening across the city.

1. From Value to Investment

Work is progressing to better articulate the environmental, social and economic value of green spaces through approaches such as Natural Capital Accounting (V1). Alongside this, there is a growing recognition that value is understood in different ways:

- through data (what we can measure)
- through research (what we can interpret)
- and through lived experience (how value is felt in place)

Recent City of Nature discussions have started to explore how these can be brought together into a more coherent evidence base — not as separate strands, but as part of a shared system that informs decision-making and investment.

2. Planning for Value and Growth

The relationship between growth and value came through strongly in recent discussions with partners across East Birmingham, including at the **Economic Justice Brum**: <https://economicjusticebrum.org/event-in-Nechells>.

With significant investment planned across the East Birmingham North Solihull Growth Strategy, the opportunity is clear. But so too is the challenge:

- Who benefits from that growth?
- How is access to opportunity enabled?
- What role do green and healthy environments play in supporting inclusive growth?

These conversations highlight how Biodiversity Net Gain and access to quality green space (V2) sit alongside wider questions of economic and environmental justice.

3. Diverse and Sustainable Funding

Across the city, communities and organisations continue to explore a range of funding approaches — from local grant applications and community-led activity through to emerging conversations with partners and businesses.

There is a growing sense that no single funding model will be sufficient, and that a mix of approaches (V3) will be needed to support long-term sustainability. This is an area where ideas are actively developing, with increasing interest in how different sectors can contribute.

4. Education, Skills and Green Pathways

The connection between education, skills and green infrastructure (V6) is becoming more visible across multiple areas of work.

Discussions linked to economic justice, skills development and neighbourhood growth are highlighting the importance of:

- accessible pathways into green and environmental roles
- aligning training and volunteering opportunities with local need
- recognising the role of green spaces as places of learning, as well as places of care

5. Shared Value and Long-Term Stewardship

A consistent theme across all of this work is the importance of shared ownership and collaboration. Events, partnerships and ongoing conversations are helping to build relationships between:

- communities
- city partners
- environmental organisations
- and wider stakeholders

These relationships are critical in moving from individual projects towards a more connected and sustained approach to valuing and caring for green spaces.

What is emerging is not a single programme of work, but a growing system of activity.



Birmingham Destination Parks Feature - Handsworth Park

Handsworth Park is one of Birmingham's most historic and culturally significant green spaces. With its formal design, tree-lined avenues and central lake, it offers a distinctive landscape shaped by both heritage and community life, a place where history, nature and everyday use come together.



Located in the heart of a diverse and vibrant part of the city, the park provides an important space for relaxation, activity and connection. Its mix of open lawns, mature trees and water features supports urban wildlife, while its layout invites walking, gathering and informal recreation. For many, it is a familiar and valued place woven into daily life, as well as a destination for events and shared experiences.



As a destination park, Handsworth Park combines heritage with facilities that support longer visits. Features such as the refurbished pavilion and improved play areas contribute to a welcoming environment for a wide range of users, creating spaces where people can meet, spend time and connect with their surroundings. Facilities within destination parks play an important role beyond their immediate function. They contribute to a sense of welcome and accessibility, social connection and community cohesion. They also influence the overall visitor experience and so the long-term sustainability of the park

Like many of Birmingham's parks, Handsworth Park has experienced the impact of long-term funding pressures. While its heritage and community value remain strong, there is an ongoing need to invest in its infrastructure, facilities and landscape to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the communities it serves. The Destination Park approach supports this by focusing on enhancing visitor facilities and strengthening partnerships. It also supports sustainable income generation while protecting the heritage and ecological value of the site.



A key part of this approach is collaboration. The Friends of Handsworth Park play a vital role in supporting the park through volunteering, events and community-led activity. They are active on social media, sharing updates, celebrating the park and helping people stay connected to what's happening on the ground. Their ongoing involvement helps ensure that the park continues to reflect the needs, energy and identity of the community around it.



Within the City of Nature framework, Handsworth Park acts as a vital part of Birmingham's wider network of green spaces by connecting people to nature, heritage and each other. The intention is not to change what makes Handsworth Park special, but to strengthen and support it ensuring that it remains welcoming, resilient and well cared for, now and into the future.

A destination park is a place people choose to visit and return to. Handsworth Park continues to offer that, with ongoing work to ensure it thrives for generations to come.



You can find more information here:

https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/directory_record/9118/handsworth_park

https://youtu.be/nZZp2W9MdNk?si=TpNqygefC3raj0_O

Friends of Handsworth Park: <https://www.handsworthpark.co.uk/>

Mental Health Awareness week - 11 - 17 May 2026

This Mental Health Awareness Week The Mental Health Foundation are asking people to join us in taking action to support good mental health. Even small actions can help us feel hopeful and less powerless. And while our individual actions matter, when we come together we are even more powerful.

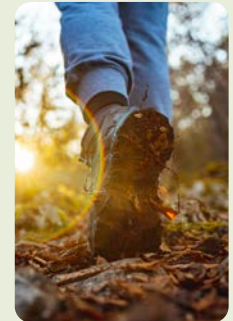
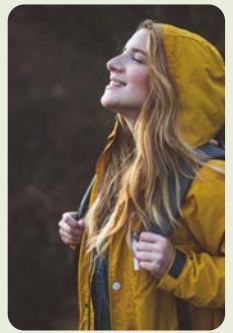
They have chosen **Action** as this year's theme because, while awareness is vital, real change comes when we take action too.

In recent years we've come a long way raising awareness on mental health, but we can't risk going backwards. There's still much we can do to prevent people becoming unwell in the first place.

In Birmingham, this connects directly to our ambition to be a City of Nature — where access to green spaces, opportunities to be outdoors, and connection to the natural environment are recognised as part of our preventative health infrastructure. This includes a growing focus on nature connectedness (H1) — supporting people to understand and experience the benefits of green space for both physical and mental health — and an increasing number of parks offering health and wellbeing services (H3), including green social prescribing.

Across the city, people and organisations are already taking action, using nature to support mental health through local programmes, community activity, and everyday experiences of green space.

[Learn more about the theme for this year's Mental Health Awareness Week.](#)



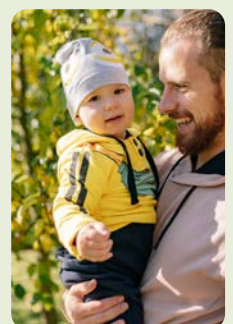
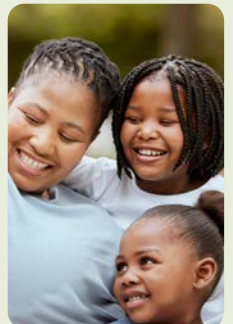
International Day of Families - 15th May

The theme of the 2026 observance, "Families, Inequalities and Child Wellbeing," underscores how widening inequalities are shaping family life and influencing children's futures. It calls for stronger investment in integrated, family-oriented policies to reduce disparities and support healthy child development. Families are central to social and economic progress, yet many face income insecurity, limited care giving support and unequal access to essential services. Without adequate support, families with young children face higher risks of poverty, with lasting effects on children's health, education and overall wellbeing. Income instability, limited caregiving support and restricted access to services can hinder children's development, especially when compounded by gender, racial, migrant or disability-based inequalities. <https://www.un.org/en/observances/international-day-of-families>

As global disparities widen, this year's observance will spotlight gaps in income, education, healthcare, digital access and essential services that shape children's life chances. It will emphasize the need for integrated social protection systems — including child benefits, parental leave, affordable childcare and early education — to strengthen family resilience, reduce poverty and promote equal opportunities.

While this reflects a global picture, many of these challenges are also present at a local level. In parts of Birmingham, including areas such as Nechells, families are navigating similar pressures — balancing work and income, access to services, and the day-to-day realities of raising children. Across the city, partners are working to respond to this in practical ways — through community support, early years provision, health and wellbeing programmes, and local initiatives that aim to strengthen connections and opportunities for families.

Within a City of Nature context, there is also growing recognition that access to green space and opportunities to connect with nature can play a supportive role — not as a solution in isolation, but as part of a wider system that contributes to health, resilience and wellbeing for children and families.



Playing in Nature - Naturally good for us

Although for many of us this will seem obvious - there is a growing body of research showing that play in natural environments supports physical health, mental wellbeing, and cognitive development not just for children, but for young people and adults too.

Time spent outdoors has been linked to improved mood, reduced stress, and better concentration. For children in particular, the evidence is consistent. Nature-based play supports social skills, confidence, and emotional development, while also encouraging curiosity and problem-solving.

Forest School approaches have helped to shape much of this understanding. They emphasise child-led, unstructured play in natural settings, where exploration, risk-taking and imagination are part of the learning process. The research shows this kind of environment leads to increased independence, resilience, and a stronger connection to place. But the principles extend far beyond formal programmes.

Play in nature often looks simple. Rolling down a hill or jumping in puddles after rain. balancing on logs or climbing low branches. And stories emerge naturally as a fallen tree becomes a dragon, a bridge becomes the setting for the Three Billy Goats Gruff (our version a goat in wolf's clothing) And of course a patch of long grass becomes somewhere to go through to an adventure hiding, exploring, or simply sitting or lying down watching the clouds.

Interestingly research increasingly highlights that these moment in natural environments offer something different to more structured play. Natural spaces provide loose materials and open-ended possibilities with sticks, water, mud, slopes, shade. These support more varied and imaginative forms of play than fixed equipment alone.

They also allow for different types of challenge. Uneven ground, changing weather, and seasonal variation all contribute to what is sometimes described as “risky play” not unsafe, but offering opportunities to test limits, build confidence, and develop judgement.

There is also a wider system at play. In cities like Birmingham, access to outdoor play is not evenly distributed, and opportunities can be shaped by factors such as space, safety, and time. At the same time, initiatives such as **Forest Schools Birmingham** <https://www.forestschoolsirmingham.com/>, free play approaches, and organisations like **ROAM** <https://www.roam.org.uk/> are working to reintroduce nature as part of everyday childhood.



Perhaps the key point is this: Play in nature is not an added extra. It is part of how we learn, adapt, and connect at any age. Whether it's a child rolling down a hill, a young person exploring independently, or an adult taking a break from work, these moments contribute to wellbeing in ways that are both immediate and long-term.



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.Harrell@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>



Birmingham's Park Ranger Service – Helping Habitats

Linking People and Nature

Across Birmingham, the Ranger Service plays a vital role in the day-to-day care and long-term stewardship of the city's green spaces. This work is not always visible, but it is fundamental. From managing habitats and monitoring wildlife to supporting volunteers, community groups and local businesses, Rangers sit at the point where strategy becomes action and where plans are translated into practical work on the ground.

Within the City of Nature framework, this connects directly to our Green City aims and the delivery approach set out in the Green City Handbook. These aim to protect and enhance biodiversity, improve habitat quality, and strengthen ecological networks across the city, not just in designated nature reserves, but across parks, waterways, and everyday green spaces. You can click on the images to find out more about habitats.

This aligns with the wider West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which sets out a coordinated approach to restoring nature across the region. The strategy identifies priority areas for habitat improvement, mapping where action will have the greatest benefit for biodiversity and communities. At a regional level, this is supported by a programme of actions including habitat restoration, improving rivers and canals, and expanding access to urban green space recognising the links between nature, health and economic resilience.

In practice, this work is highly collaborative. Rangers work alongside:

- community volunteers
- Friends of Parks groups
- environmental organisations
- businesses, education and corporate partners

Together, they carry out habitat management, species monitoring, conservation tasks, and practical improvements to sites.

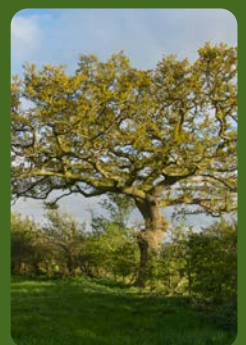
This includes:

- managing grassland and woodland habitats
- improving conditions for pollinators and other wildlife
- maintaining paths and access routes
- supporting citizen science and biodiversity recording

Importantly, this work contributes to a wider system. Urban green spaces are not isolated instead they form part of a connected network of habitats, supporting movement of species and providing ecosystem services such as cooling, flood management and air quality improvement. Regional plans also recognise the need to address inequalities in access to green space, with targeted investment and community-led projects helping to improve provision where it is currently lacking. At its core, the Ranger Service represents a practical expression of the City of Nature approach. It brings together:

- strategy and delivery
- people and place
- policy and practice

In a City of Nature, caring for green spaces is not a single activity. It is an ongoing process — shared between professionals, communities and partners — that supports biodiversity, strengthens resilience, and helps ensure that nature remains part of everyday life across Birmingham.



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

Get Active in Aston, Newtown & Nechells Parks!

A fun programme of activities are being delivered by the Council's Park Rangers help to help improve your health and wellbeing as well as caring for your parks and open spaces. Activities support volunteering, deliver nature based health interventions to increase 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 May.

Check out your park's notice board.

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

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



Get Involved in May 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 May 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.

15th May – Endangered Species Day

Endangered Species Day, marked each May, is a moment to pause and reflect on the incredible diversity of life on Earth — and the growing risks it faces.

Organisations like the World Wide Fund for Nature use this day to highlight species such as the hawksbill turtle and many others that are now at risk of extinction. But the picture is wider than individual species.



We are living through what is increasingly described as a biodiversity crisis.

The latest global data shows that monitored wildlife populations have declined by an average of 73% since 1970.

At the same time, over 47,000 species are currently classified as threatened with extinction, and scientists estimate that around one million species could be at risk in the coming decades.

Some species have already been lost. Others are now critically endangered. And many more, even those that seem common are under increasing pressure. The causes are well understood:

- habitat loss and fragmentation
- climate change
- pollution
- overexploitation of natural resources

These pressures don't act in isolation. They combine, reinforcing each other, and pushing ecosystems towards tipping points where recovery becomes much harder. But this is not only a global issue. In cities like Birmingham, the same pressures exist — just expressed differently. Urban development, changing land use, and the way we manage green spaces all influence the habitats available to wildlife. At the same time, cities also offer opportunity. Parks, canals, gardens, roadside verges and even small patches of green space can support a surprising range of species — from pollinators and birds to fungi and soil organisms. These everyday places form part of a wider ecological network.

Within the City of Nature approach, this connects directly to our Green City aims and Local Nature Recovery priorities of protecting habitats, improving connectivity, and supporting biodiversity across the whole city, not just in designated sites.

Endangered Species Day is not only about awareness. It is also about recognising that nature recovery happens at every scale. Global conservation efforts are essential.

But so too are local actions:

- managing habitats well
- recording and understanding biodiversity
- creating space for nature in urban environments

Because biodiversity is not something distant. It is present, often unnoticed, in the places around us.

And the actions we take both individually and collectively play a part in whether species decline, recover, or continue to exist alongside us.

Across Birmingham there is a network of organisations helping to connect people with nature from ambitious landscape level projects and to children clutching bug pots or pond dipping nets. There is a way to get involved check out the Naturally Birmingham Website to find partners to help you connect:

<https://naturallybirmingham.org/>



Outdoor Classroom Day - 21st May 2026

Outdoor Classroom Day is a global movement to make time outdoors part of every child's day. On two days of action each year, teachers take children outdoors to play and learn. All year round, the Outdoor Classroom Day community campaigns for more time outdoors every day.

The global Outdoor Classroom Day movement is led by [Learning through Landscapes](#), the UK's leading outdoor learning and play charity. Learning through Landscapes work with respected environmental and educational NGOs around the world to deliver locally relevant campaigns.

Whether you're looking for outdoor lesson ideas for school, play ideas to do at home, or guidance on making outdoor learning and play part of every day, you'll find it using the link below! If you have your own resources you would like to share with the Outdoor Classroom Day community, please share post them on social media using #OutdoorClassroomDay.

<https://outdoorclassroomday.org.uk/resources/>

Get inspired by seeing how families and schools across the world are getting outdoors to learn and play all year round! To appear on the list simply use #OutdoorClassroomDay on a public Facebook, Twitter or Instagram post. This page shows a selection of the most amazing posts we see, we hope they support your adventures every day!

<https://www.facebook.com/outdoorclassroomday/posts/843933787762582>

Here you'll find books covering each aspect of getting involved in the day itself and how to make outdoor play and learning part of the every day.

We encourage you to dip in and out, selecting the chapters that contain the information that is most relevant to you. However, if you're pushed for time (like every teacher we know!) you can download it and read the whole book later.

<https://outdoorclassroomday.org.uk/resources/outdoor-library/>

Outdoor Classroom Day is a great opportunity for Birmingham schools to take learning beyond the classroom and into the city's parks and green spaces. From local neighbourhood parks to larger destination sites, Birmingham offers a wide range of places where children can explore, learn and connect with nature.

Whether it's a simple outdoor lesson, a nature walk, or a more structured activity, these spaces are part of the city's wider learning environment.

If your school would like to use a park or find out more, please get in touch via: cityofnature.birmingham.gov.uk



Wildlife Watching in May – Natures Calendar

I hope you aren't all spotted out after the City Nature Challenge. There is still plenty of wildlife to spot and some of these are normally first spotted in May in the UK. So if you do see any of these species please do keep recording them. You can click on the photos for more info. Where April builds momentum, May moves us towards the abundance of summer. More blossom trees join the parade and canopies fill out. Insects are more active. Birdsong becomes part of the background of everyday life, with a new song catching our attention every now and then. The pace of nature is no longer increasing, now it is sustained. Look and you will see it everywhere.

Bees and hoverflies are continuing their work but they are now joined by Cockchafers that appear on warm evenings. They live underground as larvae for years and emerge as adults often in large numbers. Listen for their characteristic buzzing sound. They are often clumsy in flight and on landing but are so unusual they are unmistakable.

Speckled wood butterflies often rest in dappled shade. They are mostly seen in woodland, gardens and hedgerows. They will dance in sunny spots, spiralling into the air to chase each other.

Understanding what lives where and when remains important. The timing of flowering, the activity of insects, and the presence of birds all contribute to a wider understanding of how ecosystems are functioning. Projects such as Nature's Calendar show how these seasonal patterns shift over time. <https://naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>

Elderflowers beginning to open, marking the shift towards early summer. Once regarded as one of the most magically powerful of trees, elder is a forager's favourite and its flowers are the scent of summer.

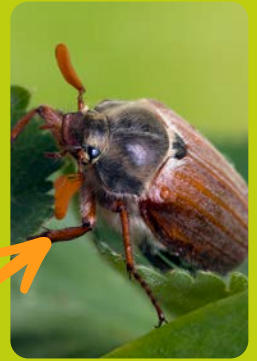
Oxeye daisies are a resilient little flower, look for oxeye daisies on roadside verges, meadows and waste ground.

This is a good time to keep recording, even after the intensity of the City Nature Challenge. Observations made now help extend the picture beyond a single event and into the season as a whole.

In Birmingham, this connects directly to our Green City and Local Nature Recovery aims. Urban habitats from parks to canals, school grounds to gardens all support a wide range of species. Much of this activity remains unnoticed, but it underpins the health of the system. Pollinators can be very obvious as they move between flowering plants, but look for differences in the bees you see, they aren't all the same. Birds rely on increasing insect availability to feed young so in good conditions there will be more chances to see a wide range of insects in all their life cycle stages, eggs, juveniles or caterpillars and adults.

If you are really lucky you might spot - a spotted flycatcher returning, watchful from their perch then flying off quickly to catch insects on the wing.

Each observation adds to a wider picture. In a City of Nature, biodiversity is not something distant. It is present in everyday spaces very visible, active, and worth recording. May is a time to continue noticing, building on what has already been seen, and contributing to a growing understanding of the life around us.








Things to Do in the Garden in May



As temperatures rise and daylight lengthens, gardens move from early activity into full development. Plants establish quickly, and both ornamental and food-growing areas begin to take shape. There is plenty to do to support healthy growth and create space for wildlife.

According to seasonal guidance from the Royal Horticultural Society, May is a key time for:

-  Sowing seeds outdoors, including vegetables such as carrots, beetroot, lettuce and beans
-  Planting out tender crops like tomatoes, courgettes and squash once the risk of frost has passed
-  Planting summer bedding plants and filling containers and hanging baskets
-  Supporting and tying in climbing plants as growth accelerates
-  Watering regularly, particularly containers and newly planted areas

It's also an important time to continue preparing and improving soil. Adding compost or organic matter helps retain moisture and provides nutrients to support steady growth through the summer months.

May is one of the most productive months for food growing.

Kitchen gardens, allotments and even small raised beds or containers can begin to supply early crops. Fast-growing salad leaves, herbs and radishes can be harvested, while other crops are establishing for later in the season.

Growing food at home — even on a small scale — helps reconnect people with the process of how food is produced, while also supporting pollinators and soil health. Gardens are also important habitats.

As planting increases, so too does the opportunity to support biodiversity: Planting nectar-rich flowers for bees and other pollinators. Allowing some areas to remain slightly less managed for insects. Providing water sources for birds and wildlife. Avoiding pesticides where possible

You may also notice increased wildlife activity. This is a good time to continue recording what you see. Tools such as:



iNaturalist – to photograph and identify plants, insects and other wildlife
Merlin Bird ID – to identify birds by sight and sound

These can help turn everyday gardening into a contribution to wider biodiversity knowledge.

May is a month of establishment. Plants are growing, wildlife is active, and gardens are becoming more complex and connected. Whether growing food, planting for wildlife, or simply maintaining a small outdoor space, each action supports a wider system.

What you do now helps shape how your garden grows through the rest of the year.



Young Green Champions - National Children's Gardening Week - 23 – 31 May 2026



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



The aim of National Children's Gardening Week is to inspire children's curiosity, whilst the warm weather is a great time to see speedy results of seed sowing, planting and other gardening activities.

Children love growing plants and love being involved in the garden but they're often impatient, wanting to see instant results. National Children's Gardening Week aims to capture children's enthusiasm at a time when results are immediate. National Children's Gardening Week takes place annually in the 'warm' week at the end of May.

This means that pretty much throughout the UK they can plant all the popular plants with little fear of weather damage or the need for complicated protective growing.

National Children's Gardening Week was the brainwave of Neil Grant, Managing director of Ferndale Garden Centre near Sheffield who is also BBC Radio Sheffield's garden expert and co-presenter of their weekly garden phone in, and it's widely supported by the whole of the UK garden industry.

It's now an annual festival of fun that's embraced in homes, schools, and community groups across the country, and supports the amazing Greenfingers charity, which is dedicated to providing magical gardens for children in hospices suffering from life limiting illnesses.

The Wildlife Trust:

Together, our gardens are a vast living landscape. With an estimated 24 million gardens in the UK, the way they are cared for can make a big difference to the natural world. Hedgehogs, bats, sparrows, song thrushes and stag beetles are all declining species in the UK, but if we manage our gardens to benefit wildlife, these creatures and many more will find refuge.

Explore ways to attract pollinators, by planting a range of native species to flower throughout the year. The simple act of providing water for wildlife will have a huge impact. Try leaving a patch of logs or long grass undisturbed all year, giving shelter to all sorts of wildlife. And go chemical and peat-free, to maintain a healthy ecosystem. Explore our guides and actions below. If you think you don't have enough space, check out our free download, Gardening in Small Spaces.

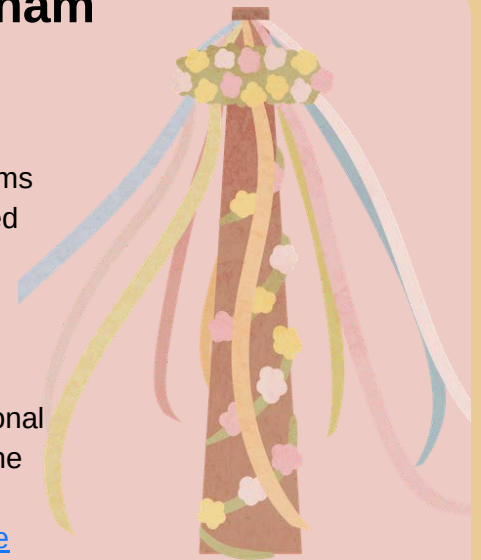
The National Education Nature Park

This programme empowers children and young people to make a positive difference to both their own and nature's future. Go on a journey to get to know your outdoor space and use creative decision-making to improve your grounds for both people and nature. This free programme provide all educators with the resources, support and guidance to embed climate and nature into learning in a way that suits your setting and learners. <https://www.educationnaturepark.org.uk/>

May Day: Then and Now, and in Birmingham

May Day has always been a celebration of change marking the moment when spring tips fully into life. Across centuries, people have marked this turning point with flowers, dancing, and shared ritual. Many of these customs have their roots in much older celebrations of nature. Early festivals marked the return of fertility to the land. Seen as a magical time when flowers appeared, animals returned to pasture, and communities gathered to welcome the start of summer.

These traditions are also recorded and cared for in collections by the National Trust - In Roman mythology, Flora is the goddess of flowers and spring. The Austrian artist Johan Georg Platzer's oil painting, from the collection at Basildon Park in Berkshire, captures the fertile energy of the feast. [See the painting in our collection](#)



Like many other festivals, May Day was a topsy-turvy affair when a 'lord and lady' would be chosen from among the ordinary people of the community to preside over the day. Eventually the focus shifted completely onto the woman and she became known as the May Queen. This figure reached the height of her importance in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, by which time she was embodied by a young girl decorously dressed in white and crowned with flowers. Accompanied by a 'court' of other girls, the May Queen had become a symbol of purity and the promise of spring. The quintessential image of May Day is of dancers weaving the long ribbons of a maypole into intricate patterns. This practice was first recorded in mid-14th-century Wales but eventually spread far and wide. As time went by, it evolved from an opportunity to flirt into a picturesque pastime for children, often tinged with nostalgia for a simpler and more innocent way of life.

In the Gaelic world, the opening of the summer pastures for grazing was marked by the Beltane festival. Wild blossoms decorated the doors and windows of houses while great bonfires were built on the last night of April to bestow their protective powers on livestock and their herders. First recorded in the early medieval period, these rural traditions had come to an end by the middle of the 20th century but have since been revived as an evocation of even older Druidic rites. In Wales, where the first day of May is known as the Calan Mai or Calan Haf, these customs never died out. This began to emerge as a day of feasting and dancing in towns and villages across the British Isles from the medieval period. A host of exuberant traditions developed to mark the day, now mostly forgotten. Chimney sweeps wearing gaudy clothes would make mischief on the street and hustle for coins. Milkmaids would dance for pennies while balancing towers of borrowed silverware on their heads.

And while Birmingham may not have maypoles on every green, the spirit of May Day is still very much present, just expressed in different ways. You can see it in the blossom lining streets and parks and if you pause you will hear the hum of bees moving between flowers. It is in children playing outside again, their laughter carrying across open spaces. It's there in community gardens coming back into life. In volunteers tending green spaces organising picnics, garden parties and joyful gatherings welcoming sunny days and families will spend time outdoors, often without naming it as anything special at all.

What the history of May Day reminds us is that these moments have always mattered. They were never just decoration or entertainment. They were a way of recognising our relationship with the natural world and with each other and for recognising that we are part of something seasonal, cyclical, and shared.

In an urban city like Birmingham, that connection can sometimes feel less visible than in a rural village close to fields and farming, but it is no less real.

How Data, Research and Lived Experience can help us to bring positive impact.

Across the City of Nature work, we are increasingly operating in a space where data, research, and lived experience are all present but not always well connected.

Traditionally, data has been seen as something objective measurements, indicators, maps, statistics. And this remains essential. Long-term environmental data, for example, helps us understand patterns in biodiversity, climate, and urban change over time.

But there is a growing recognition that this is only part of the picture. Research is increasingly moving towards approaches that combine data with lived experience recognising that how people experience place, inequality, nature, and health provides critical insight that data alone cannot capture. This is particularly important in cities, where:

- The physical environment (green space, transport, housing) and
- The social environment (belonging, connection, trust)

interact to shape outcomes such as health and wellbeing.

At the same time, there are some tensions we want to explore openly: Data as a barrier: When data is too complex, inaccessible, or disconnected from people's reality, it can unintentionally exclude rather than enable.

- Research without reciprocity: Communities are often asked to contribute their experiences, without always seeing how that input shapes decisions.
- Lived experience as "add-on": When it is often the starting point — particularly in understanding environmental justice and access to nature.

There are also positive shifts emerging:

- Participatory and community research approaches: where people are actively involved in shaping questions, collecting data, and interpreting findings
- Citizen science and community data: which are increasingly recognised as valuable sources of insight, especially at neighbourhood scale
- Creative and place-based methods such as mapping, storytelling, and visual approaches (e.g. photovoice), which help surface experiences that might otherwise remain unseen

Within a City of Nature context, this suggests a more integrated way of working, where:

- data provides the structural baseline (what we can measure and monitor)
- research provides interpretation and insight (what the data is telling us and why it matters)
- lived experience provides context and meaning (how these patterns are felt and understood in place)

Rather than treating these as separate components, the opportunity is to bring them into a coherent system, where each informs and strengthens the others. Perhaps the question for us is not just:

"What data do we need?" But: "How do we design a system that connects data, research and lived experience into a shared evidence base?" And importantly: "How does that system translate into decision-making, action, and visible change on the ground?" Including: "How do people and organisations recognise their role within that system and how they can contribute to it?"

We have been exploring these questions with the City of Nature Alliance and will report back more on this on the Naturally Birmingham Website: <https://naturallybirmingham.org/>



Earth Stories – Memories, Hopes and Happenings

Imagine, for a moment, not knowing. No books, no internet, no records to look at. Imagine not knowing if the trees will come back into leaf. If the ground will soften again allowing the shoots to break through and if the long stretch of cold and darkness will give way to something kinder and return the hope of life continuing.

It could be a metaphor related to mental health week but for much of human history, this wasn't a metaphor - it was reality. So when May arrived, in all its fullness, it meant something simple and profound - we made it through.

And yet even when spring did return nothing was certain. Frosts lingered. Rains came at the wrong time. People learned not just to celebrate the season, but to adapt, to grow, to store and to prepare. That's how we can make sure we make it through - celebrate the good times, the times of plenty, but build our resilience for the times it doesn't go so well. When we know how to get through, it makes a huge difference.

Nature provides us with wonderful opportunities throughout May. Flowers appear where there was none just days before. Hedgerows thicken and the air carries scent of white lilac, hawthorn and elder flower - so rich it stops you in your tracks. On a warm day it can feel... intoxicating.

And then, just as quickly, the sky changes and a stillness and quite happens and then the breeze comes. You feel the weight of a thunderstorm building somewhere out of sight. It's that eerie pause before the first distant rumble and flash - then the rain comes.

May holds all of it, growth, energy, uncertainty. And the sense that something is changing whether we're quite ready or not. For me, May has always felt personal. It's my birthday month. And my name, Deborah, carries the meaning of a bee, a small, purposeful part of something much bigger. And perhaps that's what I find myself reflecting on this year. Not just the beauty of the season — though it's everywhere right now, in the apple blossom, in the hum of pollinators beginning their work, in the sheer abundance of it all. But the idea of participation. Because the natural world in May doesn't wait until everything is perfect. It simply... starts. Each part playing its role. Each small action contributing to something larger, often unseen.

Across Birmingham, it feels a little like that too. In parks and green spaces. In community gardens and neighbourhood projects. In the quiet, steady work of Rangers, volunteers, and local groups. People are already part of something. Already contributing. Already shaping what this city can become. Notice where you already are within it and step a little closer.

So spend time outside whether that's in a garden, a park, or simply under a tree on your street. You know that and yet we still spend too much time inside. And take part in something, join in with a walk, a planting session, a moment of learning outdoors. Or simply to pause long enough to notice the detail, a bee moving between blossoms, the taste of a cake a friend has baked or how the first drops of rain feel on your skin. Recently my sister-in-law told me about when she recently got caught in the rain. She realised she was going to get wet and instead of that being a problem she embraced it and strode happily through the downpour arriving home soaking wet - but less stressed.

May doesn't ask for perfection, it asks for presence. And perhaps, in that, there's something we can all be part of. But - "the mountains are calling me and I must go". So although I will do my very best to be present in nature everyday, I'm going to be travelling a bit further a field this month to visit the mountains in Wales for a few days.

See you soon, Deborah Needle - Editor.

"Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees." - John Muir



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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<https://naturallybirmingham.org/>