

GREEN CHAMPIONS



Noticing Nature

Across the heath the heather blooms,
all purple, pink and bright,
and still the bees are visiting
in the morning's gentle light



Health - Naturally

29 September is World Heart Day.

Walking is one of the simplest ways to look after our hearts. Regular physical activity helps our heart and circulation work more efficiently and can help reduce blood pressure and improve cholesterol.

Adults are encouraged to aim for 150 minutes of moderate activity each week – but it doesn't have to happen all at once. Even short walks count.

And when that walk takes us through a park, woodland, garden or simply along a tree-lined street, being in nature can also help reduce stress and support our mental wellbeing.

Looking after your mind and your body isn't separate – what's good for one can help the other.

<https://world-heart-federation.org/world-heart-day/>



Learn More About - Organic Gardening

Organic gardening is about much more than avoiding chemicals. It means thinking of the garden as a living system and working with natural processes wherever we can.

The RHS suggests starting with healthy soil. Homemade compost and other organic matter can improve soil structure, help retain water and provide nutrients. Reducing digging can protect soil organisms and fungal networks, while choosing suitable plants and encouraging natural predators can help keep pests and diseases in balance.

It can also mean changing how we tidy. Fallen leaves, seed heads, dead stems and logs aren't necessarily waste – they can provide food, shelter and eventually return nutrients to the soil.

So perhaps the first step towards gardening organically isn't buying something new. It's learning a little more about what is already happening in our gardens. <https://www.soilassociation.org/support-us/take-action/organic-september/>



Second Hand September – Love Your Clothes for Longer

This September, Oxfam is once again inviting us to choose second-hand and give our clothes a longer life.

It's a cheerful campaign with a serious message behind it. We are producing and buying far more clothing than we use. Oxfam estimates that there are 1.6 billion unused items of clothing sitting in UK wardrobes, while up to 40% of clothing manufactured globally is never sold. And our own wardrobes tell a story. According to WRAP, the average person in the UK has around 118 items of clothing, with 31 items – about a quarter of the wardrobe – not worn in the previous year.

Making all those clothes has an impact. The fashion and textiles industry is estimated to account for 8–10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and around 711,000 tonnes of post-consumer textiles are discarded into general waste each year in the UK. And simply making new clothes a little more sustainably won't solve the problem if we keep making and buying more of them. WRAP found that brands and retailers participating in the UK Textiles Pact reduced the carbon and water impact of each tonne of textiles compared with 2019. But by 2024 they were putting 17% more textiles onto the market, more than cancelling out those improvements. So what can we do?

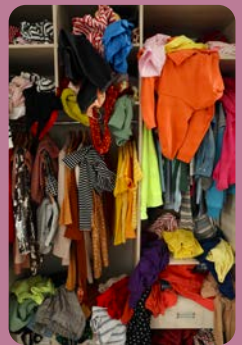
Fast fashion has made clothes remarkably cheap and easy to replace. But perhaps that's also encouraged us to forget something previous generations knew very well: clothes can be looked after, altered and repaired. A missing button doesn't need a new shirt. A small tear can be stitched, hems repaired, socks darned and favourite clothes patched. Learning a few basic sewing skills can make a real difference. Not only can you mend clothes you can redesign them or make new ones.

Keeping clothes for longer matters too. WRAP describes extending the life of clothing as one of the biggest opportunities we have to reduce its carbon, water and waste footprint.

And when we really don't want something anymore, someone else might. Swapping, donating and buying second-hand all keep existing clothes in use and reduce demand for new production. Oxfam gives one wonderfully tangible example: buying a pair of jeans and a T-shirt second-hand rather than new could save the equivalent of 20,000 standard bottles of water.

So perhaps **Second Hand September** can be about more than buying something second-hand. Have a look in your wardrobe. Wear something you've forgotten about. Take something to a charity shop. Swap with a friend. Sew on that button. Learn to darn or patch a hole. And when you do need something, perhaps look for it second-hand first.

Not because we can't afford something new, but because the things we already have still have worth and are worth caring for.



Nature Needs Us

Why does a newsletter about nature talk about second-hand clothes, saving water, reducing waste, food, energy and how we travel? Because everything we do can effect our natural world.

The water from our taps, the materials in our clothes, the food on our plates and the energy we use all ultimately depend on natural systems. How much we consume, waste and throw away affects land, rivers, climate, wildlife and people that are often far beyond the places where we live. And the evidence increasingly tells us that these things are connected.

The world's leading scientific assessment of biodiversity, IPBES, identifies five major direct causes of nature loss: changes in how we use land and sea, exploitation of wildlife and natural resources, climate change, pollution and invasive species. Behind these sit the ways societies produce, consume and use resources.

Take clothing. The UN Environment Programme estimates that textiles produce 2–8% of global greenhouse gas emissions and use around 215 trillion litres of water each year. Or food. Around 19% of food available to consumers is wasted in homes, shops and restaurants. Food waste alone is responsible for an estimated 8–10% of global greenhouse gas emissions, while wasting all the land, water and resources used to produce that food. So a City of Nature isn't simply a city with more parks, trees and wildflowers. It is a city that understands its relationship with the natural world and learns to live within it.

Of course we need to create habitats, plant trees and protect wildlife. But we also need to reduce the pressures that make that protection necessary. Nature needs space. Nature needs protection. But nature also needs us to live differently.



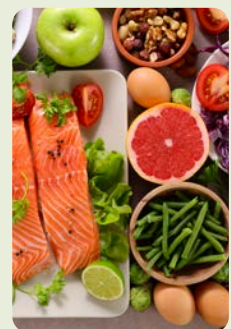
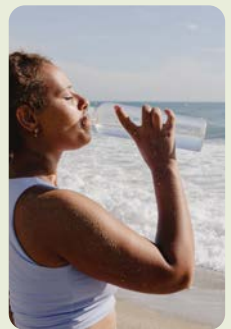
We Need Nature

If Nature Needs Us, the other side of the story is just as important. We need nature.

The Earth is a living, interconnected system, and we live within it, not outside it. Healthy soils grow our food. Plants produce oxygen and store carbon. Trees provide shade and cooling. Wetlands hold water and help reduce flooding. Insects pollinate crops and wild plants. Natural systems help clean our air and water. These aren't simply nice things nature does for us. They are part of the life-support systems on which human societies depend.

The World Health Organization estimates that 23% of all global deaths are linked to environmental factors, including air, water and soil pollution, climate change and exposure to harmful chemicals. Nature can also affect how we feel. Evidence reviewed by the World Health Organization has linked access to green space with benefits including improved mental health, increased physical activity and reduced exposure to excessive heat and air pollution. And there is something even more fundamental happening. We are living systems too.

Our bodies constantly respond to the environments around us – to temperature, light, air quality, noise, movement, food, other people and opportunities to encounter nature. Change the environment and, for better or worse, we respond. That creates a feedback loop. When we damage natural systems, we can create conditions that make human life less healthy and resilient. When we restore soils, trees, waterways and green spaces, we aren't only helping wildlife. We are improving the systems that support us too. Perhaps that's what becoming a City of Nature really means: recognising that human health and planetary health aren't two separate ambitions. Nature needs us. And we need nature. We are part of the same living system.



The Amazon Is Closer Than We Think

5 September is Amazon Day.

From Birmingham, the Amazon can seem very far away: a vast rainforest on another continent, important for wildlife and the climate, certainly, but perhaps not obviously connected to everyday life here. But look in our kitchens and cupboards and the world suddenly becomes much smaller.

Coffee, chocolate, bananas, sugar, fruit, nuts, spices and other countless ingredients we buy here depend on particular combinations of soil, water, temperature, insects, farmers, transport and trade there. Other everyday products depend on timber, rubber, fibres and minerals. We might buy these things in supermarkets but their arrival on the shelf depends on global ecosystems.

This year gives us a particularly good reason to remember that. A strong El Niño is developing in the Pacific. El Niño is a naturally occurring climate pattern, but an important one: changes in Pacific Ocean temperatures alter atmospheric circulation and can shift rainfall and temperature patterns thousands of miles away. The World Meteorological Organization expects the current event to strengthen during 2026.

For parts of the Amazon, El Niño can mean hotter and drier conditions. That can lower rivers, stress trees and crops and increase the risk of fire. Elsewhere the same global weather pattern can bring too much rain rather than too little. And eventually some of those effects can reach us.

Coffee, cocoa, sugar and other internationally traded crops are sensitive to changing rainfall and temperature. The 2026 El Niño is already causing concern about tropical agricultural production and global supply chains. That doesn't mean our coffee is about to disappear. It means we shouldn't assume that everything we have become accustomed to will always be available, in the quantities we want, at the price we expect.

And perhaps that should change how we think about waste. When we throw food away, we aren't only wasting something bought from a shop. We are wasting the soil, water, energy, labour, habitat and transport that made it possible. A City of Nature therefore has connections far beyond its own parks and boundaries. Our choices can reach forests, farms, rivers and communities on the other side of the planet.

The answer isn't fear. It is understanding. Value what arrives. Waste less. Choose carefully. And remember where things really come from. Because the Amazon isn't simply somewhere else. It is connected to the supply chains that reach our shops, trolleys and kitchen cupboards.



Clean Air Is Worth Investing In

On 7 September, the world marks the UN's **International Day of Clean Air for blue skies**. This year the message is not simply that cleaner air is good for us. It is that clean air is a good investment.

For 2026, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition are putting the economic case centre stage. New global analysis examines 25 practical measures that can tackle air pollution and climate change together, looking not only at what action costs, but at what societies gain through better health, stronger economies and reduced climate impacts. That matters because polluted air carries an enormous hidden bill. UNEP estimates the global health impact of poor air quality at around US\$5.7 trillion, equivalent to 4.8% of global GDP. Air pollution also affects productivity, ecosystems, forests and crop yields. And this isn't only a global story. Birmingham has been working to improve its air quality for many years. The city's Clean Air Zone was introduced in 2021, and monitoring showed a 17% reduction in nitrogen dioxide between the 2019 baseline and 2022. There is still more to do: meeting legal limits does not mean that air pollution has ceased to affect health.

This is also where City of Nature comes in. Clean air isn't just about exhaust pipes and emissions. How we design our city matters too. Trees, parks, green routes and other natural spaces can help reduce exposure to pollution while also providing shade, cooling neighbourhoods, supporting wildlife, storing carbon and creating places where people can walk, cycle, play and spend time outdoors. Birmingham's wider plans already recognise green infrastructure as part of creating a healthier, more climate-resilient city. And, importantly, those benefits need to be fairly distributed. Air pollution does not affect everyone equally. UK evidence shows that higher concentrations of air pollution are generally found in more socially disadvantaged areas. People on lower incomes are also more likely to experience other factors that can increase vulnerability — poorer health, poorer-quality environments and less access to green space. Children, older people and people with existing heart or lung conditions can be particularly affected. That means environmental inequalities can stack up. A neighbourhood can experience greater exposure to pollution while also having fewer of the environmental assets that help create healthier, more resilient places. The Environment Agency describes this as a question of environmental justice: who experiences environmental harm, who receives environmental benefits, and how fairly those are distributed. That should sound familiar in Birmingham.

Our City of Nature Environmental Justice Map already brings together access to green space with deprivation, health inequality, flood risk and the urban heat island effect. It recognises that these things are connected rather than separate problems. The City of Nature Plan is deliberately prioritising the parts of Birmingham where environmental injustice is greatest. Perhaps we should think about clean air in exactly the same way.

Clean air, trees, parks, shade, safe walking and cycling routes and healthier neighbourhoods are not luxuries to add once everything else has been paid for. They are part of the infrastructure of a healthy city, every bit as real as roads, buildings and drains. And there is an important difference. We can see the cost of planting a tree, improving a park, changing transport or reducing emissions because those costs appear in a budget.

The costs of polluted air are easier to hide. They appear elsewhere — in ill health, pressure on services, lost productivity, inequality and lives shortened.

Clean air costs something to create. Polluted air costs us too. Perhaps the economic case for action starts by making sure we count both.

On 7 September, that is a calculation worth remembering.

#CleanAirDay <https://www.cleanairblueskies.org/>



City of Nature Programme Update - From Plan to Delivery

Over recent months, we've been following the transformation of Birmingham's Parks and Green Spaces service as new structures and teams begin to take shape. But putting people in place is only part of building a service. The next question is: how do we turn all that capacity into action?

Birmingham already has a direction. Our 25-Year City of Nature Plan sets out what we want to achieve for a Fair, Green, Healthy, Involved and Valued City. The continuing transformation of the service gives us an opportunity to think carefully about how people, policies and processes come together to turn those ambitions into delivery. And it starts with people.

That means new colleagues joining the service, but equally importantly, those already here. It includes people changing roles, and those moving on who have years of experience and knowledge to pass forward. And it reaches far beyond the Council to our partners, Friends Groups, volunteers, community organisations and the wider City of Nature Alliance. Between them sits an enormous store of knowledge: about individual parks, communities, wildlife, practical maintenance, projects, partnerships and simply how things get done. A resilient service doesn't lose that knowledge as it changes. It learns from it and builds upon it.

Then we need policy and process. Policies provide consistency and direction. Good processes turn that direction into something people can actually use: who needs to know, who makes decisions, how work is prioritised, how information is shared and how partners and communities can participate.

And then comes planning. The City of Nature Plan contains actions stretching across 25 years. Delivering them means translating long-term ambitions into practical programmes of work: deciding what happens next, where resources can have greatest impact, who needs to be involved and how we will know whether things are improving.

Importantly, this isn't a one-way journey. People delivering work will discover what works. Communities will tell us what matters. Monitoring will reveal what is changing. Experience will improve processes, and plans will need to adapt. That is how resilient organisations grow: they plan, act, learn and adapt.

The transformation of Birmingham's Parks and Green Spaces service therefore isn't simply about creating a new structure.

It is about building the capacity to deliver.

The people bring knowledge and skills.

The policies give us direction.

The processes help us work together.

The plan tells us where we're going.

And together, we can turn plans into the places we need.



Maintaining Parks - Looking After Parks Every Day

A good park doesn't look after itself, but you know that. Behind the paths, flower beds, grass, trees, play areas and bins are people carrying out the everyday work that keeps our parks welcoming, safe and functioning.

Our parks operations teams are the people on the ground: maintaining sites, cutting grass, caring for planted areas, dealing with practical problems and noticing when something needs attention and that part really matters.

People who regularly work in a place build up knowledge that can't easily be captured on a map or spreadsheet. They notice the damaged gate, the blocked drain, the overflowing bin, the path beginning to deteriorate or the tree that doesn't look quite right. They also see how people actually use a park not simply how it was designed to be used and that can be very different.

That knowledge is part of a park's resilience. Resilience isn't only about preparing for major emergencies. It is also the everyday capacity to notice change, solve problems, repair things and prevent small problems becoming bigger ones. Good maintenance can therefore be strangely invisible. A drain cleared before heavy rain, a branch made safe or a piece of equipment repaired quickly may mean that nothing dramatic happens at all. And that's rather the point. We only notice when we can't keep up with an increase in risk that means a potential hazard causes harm. Hot weather and storms require an emergency response, but looking after a park today can help keep it ready for whatever tomorrow brings.



Managing Parks - Looking After Parks For the Future

Parks also need people looking beyond today's jobs. Our parks management and development teams take the longer view: thinking about how individual parks and the wider network of green spaces need to change, improve and adapt over time.

That might mean planning investment, improving facilities and accessibility, developing management plans, delivering major projects or considering how parks can respond to changing communities, biodiversity needs and a changing climate. This is another important part of resilience.

A tree planted today may still be growing in fifty years. Decisions about drainage can help a park cope with heavier rainfall. More shade can make somewhere more comfortable during hotter summers. Connected habitats can give wildlife more opportunities to move and adapt. Well-designed paths and facilities can help ensure that parks continue to work for changing populations.

But resilience isn't simply about building stronger things. It also means retaining the knowledge, skills, relationships and capacity to adapt when circumstances change. The best long-term plans therefore leave room for people to learn, respond and sometimes do things differently. Day-to-day care and long-term planning are different jobs, but they depend upon each other. One builds resilience through care and response. The other builds it through foresight and adaptation. Together, they help parks keep working — whatever the future brings.



Birmingham Destination Parks Feature - Cannon Hill Park

Birmingham has over 600 parks and green spaces managed by Birmingham City Council. From small Public Open Spaces to Recreation Grounds (Recs), they include seven special Destination Parks — places with something extra to discover and plenty of reasons to stay a little longer.

This month we're heading to Cannon Hill Park. Just a couple of miles from Birmingham city centre, Cannon Hill is one of the city's best-known and best-loved parks. Covering around 250 acres, it brings together formal parkland, woodland, conservation areas, lakes, open spaces, sport, play, wildlife and culture and all within one remarkable green space.

Around 120 acres are set aside for conservation and woodland plantation. Follow the paths and you can explore woodland, wildflower areas and an impressive collection of more than 100 species of native and non-native trees. Queen Mother's Woodland was planted with oaks marking the years of the Queen Mother's life, while the RSPB Plantation combines five acres of woodland and wildflower meadow.

Water is an important part of Cannon Hill too. The River Rea runs along the western side of the park and the Rea Valley walking and cycling route provides a wonderful way to explore it. This is the river around which Birmingham's earliest settlement developed. It is a living thread connecting today's city with its past.

There is plenty of room simply to be outside. Large areas of open grass provide space to walk, run, exercise, meet friends, play or just find somewhere to sit. There are children's play areas, tennis courts, fishing, cycling and walking routes, boating and mini golf, alongside the park's lakes and quieter natural corners. But Cannon Hill has another unusual quality.

Within and alongside the park are two of Birmingham's much-loved attractions. Midlands Arts Centre — MAC Birmingham brings art and creativity into the landscape, with theatre, cinema, exhibitions, courses, workshops and events throughout the year.

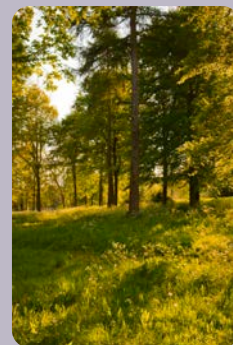
And at Birmingham Wildlife Conservation Park, visitors can encounter wildlife from around the world while learning more about conservation and the importance of protecting species and habitats.

The park has plenty of history of its own. Opened to the public in 1873, much of its original landscape can still be recognised today. Look out for the Grade II-listed bandstand and bridge, the 16th-century Golden Lion Inn, the model of the Elan Valley Reservoirs and memorials telling stories from Birmingham's past.

Perhaps that is what makes Cannon Hill such a good example of a Destination Park. You can come to see a film and find yourself walking beside a river. Come to play and discover a woodland. Visit the wildlife park and stay for a picnic. Go for a run and notice a tree you've never seen before.

Nature, culture, history, wildlife, play and people all share the same place. In a City of Nature, Cannon Hill Park reminds us that connecting with nature doesn't have to mean travelling somewhere remote. Sometimes it begins with an afternoon in the park — and seeing where the paths take you.

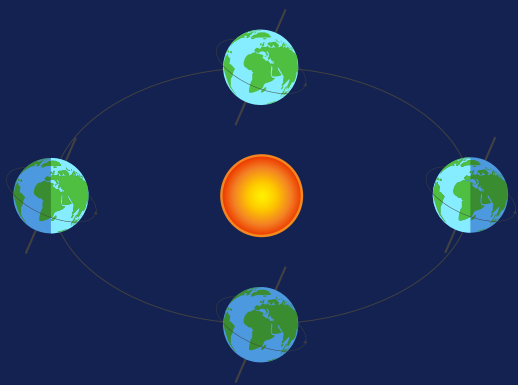
https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/directory_record/9091/cannon_hill_park



Autumn Equinox - 1:06am BST on 23 September

We sometimes talk about “connecting with nature” as though nature is somewhere distant to us.

The autumn equinox is a reminder that we are all travelling through space on a tilted planet, responding to the same changing light as everything else. It's something we don't think about too often and although we all experience the same astronomical event, perhaps unsurprisingly, we don't all agree about what it means.



Astronomically, the four seasons centre around the equinoxes and solstices. However, there is disagreement between those who see the equinox or solstice as the start of the season, and those who hold that it represents the middle of the season. Nevertheless this year, the autumn equinox happens at 1:06am BST on 23 September in the UK, as the centre of the Sun crosses the Earth's celestial equator, and the planet's axis tilts neither toward nor away from the Sun. While people celebrate the equinox for a whole calendar date, the actual event is a single, fleeting moment in time. “Equinox” means equal night, but technically there are not exactly 12 hours of light so day and night are not precisely equal on this day. Atmospheric refraction bends sunlight and makes the Sun appear above the horizon when it is technically below it, making daylight slightly longer than 12 hours depending on your latitude. The day when daylight and darkness are closest to equal is called the equilux.

But, fortunately, you don't need to understand the astronomy to notice what is happening here on earth. Trees respond to changing daylight and temperature. Birds receive cues that help govern migration. Plants fruit and set seed. Fungi appear. Animals prepare for winter. And humans notice that it is getting dark earlier and reach for a jumper. For thousands of years, people have looked upwards and noticed these cycles. We should be careful about assuming that every ancient monument marked the equinox — Stonehenge, for example, is strongly aligned with the solstices, not the equinoxes — but there is abundant evidence that the movement of the Sun and changing seasons mattered enormously to our ancestors. And people around the world still mark this turning point in different ways.

Modern Pagans often celebrate the autumn equinox as Mabon, associated with harvest, balance, gratitude and preparation for the darker months. In Japan, Autumnal Equinox Day is a national holiday associated with appreciating nature, while the Buddhist tradition of Higan around the equinox includes visiting family graves and remembering ancestors. In China and other parts of East Asia, the Mid-Autumn Festival follows the lunar rather than solar calendar, but similarly brings together the season, harvest, food, family and the autumn Moon. Different cultures, different traditions, but perhaps a remarkably familiar human response: Look up. Notice change. Gather together. Eat. Remember. Prepare.

Our own harvest traditions belong in that story too. Think of September: apples, nuts, blackberries, jams and chutneys. Harvesting and preserving are ways of carrying summer's abundance into winter. There is an extraordinary planetary story inside an ordinary jar of blackberry jam:

Sun → plant → blackberry → person → jam jar → winter.

Perhaps we don't need to “reconnect” with nature quite as much as we think. The horse chestnut responds to shortening days. The swallow prepares to leave. The blackberries and apples fill our pies and we notice the evening getting colder and take a coat.

Different responses — but all of us living on the same tilted Earth, travelling around the same Sun.

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. **Find out how you can get involved.**



Birmingham Parks and Green Spaces - Green Champions

If you want to 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: Natalie.Kenn@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 - Building Resilience

- Linking People and Nature

When we think about what makes a city resilient we tend to think about things like flood defences, emergency plans and infrastructure. But resilience also looks like someone who knows the woodland, knows the community, knows what changed yesterday and knows what to do next. That is an important part of the role our Rangers play. Not just emergency response but also preparedness.

Rangers help build resilience every day. They know which paths flood first, where water collects, which trees are struggling after drought and where problems repeatedly occur. They know the parks and understand how nature reacts but, importantly, they also know many of the people who use and care for our green spaces. That everyday knowledge becomes particularly valuable when something goes wrong.

Understanding storms, flooding, heatwaves, drought and wildfire increasingly needs to be part of how we prepare for managing green spaces. Rangers can help before, during and after an emergency: spotting changing conditions and reducing risks, providing local knowledge and communicating during an incident, then helping places and communities recover afterwards. But resilience isn't only about emergencies.

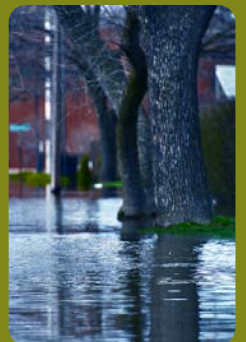
Every volunteer taught a practical skill, every Friends Group that knows who to contact, every young tree helped through drought, every habitat made healthier and every relationship built with a community adds a little more capacity to the city.

Rangers also provide something easily overlooked: memory. Someone remembers what happened last time. Which corner flooded. Which trees struggled. What worked. What didn't. Who helped. Where the equipment is. Who has the skills we need. We can record all of this - and we - do but instinct forged through experience can never be replaced by even the best written handbook.

Technology, maps, procedures and emergency plans are vital, but they work best alongside people with practical experience and local knowledge. Because resilience doesn't mean making a city so strong that nothing ever goes wrong.

It means building our ability to prepare, respond, recover, learn and adapt when things inevitably do.

A resilient city needs good infrastructure and good plans. But it also needs people who know how to put those plans into action.



Green Champions - What can you do?

It's easy really. Champion green living any way you can.

Start with something you enjoy. Grow food. Walk more. Repair something. Plant for wildlife. Waste less. Volunteer. Just because you enjoy doing it doesn't mean it isn't a powerful part of green living. And don't underestimate where those actions can lead.

Here are five ways to start building something bigger:

1. Grow something — and learn about organic gardening - soil, water, weather, food and pollinators. Growing even a little food helps us understand the natural systems and resources upon which every community depends.

1. Waste less — repair, reuse, cook, sew, share and compost. Keeping food, materials and products in use reduces waste, saves resources and preserves practical skills that communities may need in the future.

1. Know your neighbourhood — walk, cycle and explore your local green spaces. Spending time in nature supports health and wellbeing. Knowing a place also helps us notice change, identify problems and understand what needs protecting. Check out maps and walking apps.

1. Get involved — volunteer, join a Friends Group or support a community project. Get to know your neighbours. Strong relationships, local knowledge and people who know how to organise and act are essential parts of community resilience.

1. Share what you know — skills become more valuable when other people have them too. Grow it, mend it, identify it, cook it or conserve it — then show somebody else.

One thing leads to another. Grow tomatoes and you learn about drought and water conservation. Plant flowers and you begin to understand pollinators. Compost food waste and you discover soil. Volunteer in a park and you learn who looks after it, what threatens it and what it needs. That is more than green living. It is building capability. But individuals cannot do everything alone. Green living must be supported by policies, services and places that make sustainable choices practical and fair: accessible green spaces, safe walking and cycling routes, opportunities to repair and reuse, community growing space, affordable public transport, good information and meaningful ways to participate.

Green Champions can help connect everyday experience with those bigger decisions. They can show what works, identify barriers, share local knowledge and help organisations understand what communities need. A resilient city is not created simply by telling people to change their behaviour. It is created by enabling people to learn, participate, act and use their civic voice and by listening when they do.

Learn something. Do something. Share something. Change something.

Multiply that across a street, neighbourhood and city, and small actions become evidence, influence and a powerful force for the future.



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

Get Active in Aston, Newtown & Nechells Parks!

A fun programme of activities is being delivered by the Council's Park Rangers 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 improve physical activity levels and 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 this month.

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



Get Involved in September 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 September is full of opportunities to get involved.

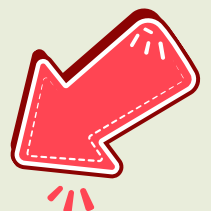
Across the city this month you'll find activities you can join including:

- 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/>
- Birmingham Settlement - <https://www.birminghamsettlement.org.uk/>



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.



World Rivers Day

A river doesn't begin when we reach its bank.

Every drop of rain that falls on a roof, road, garden, park or field becomes part of a much bigger water system. It may soak into soil, be taken up by plants or travel through drains and streams before eventually joining a river. That means the health of our rivers tells us something about the health of the whole landscape around them.

And we need to be honest. England's rivers are still a long way from where we want them to be. The Environment Agency's latest assessment found that only 14.3% of surface water bodies achieve good ecological status. Pollution comes from many sources: wastewater and sewage, agriculture, roads and urban runoff, industry and chemicals.

There has been progress. Some pollutants have fallen dramatically over recent decades. Monitoring has improved, inspections have increased and billions of pounds are being invested in water infrastructure and environmental improvements. In 2025, monitored storm-overflow spills also fell substantially although a particularly dry year means we need to be cautious about declaring a lasting improvement.

For Birmingham, there is another part of the story.

Our rivers — including the Rea, Cole and Tame — are easy to overlook. Over generations, sections have been straightened, engineered, built around or hidden. Yet these waterways are part of the living system of our city: carrying water, providing wildlife corridors, helping manage flood risk and connecting neighbourhoods and green spaces.

Perhaps knowing our rivers is part of restoring them. The Government's new National River Walks programme brings these ideas together. Its objectives aren't simply about creating paths. Projects must improve inclusive access to nature, particularly in areas of higher deprivation; remove barriers to visiting green and blue spaces; involve communities; increase opportunities to enjoy and learn about nature; and improve nature or water quality through restoration projects.

That's an important combination.

A healthy river shouldn't simply be something we measure. It should be somewhere people can know, enjoy, understand and help care for.

Walk beside a river and you begin to notice things: wildlife, plants, water levels, litter, pollution, changing seasons — even where the water flowing down your own street eventually goes.

And people who know a place are more likely to notice when it changes. This World Rivers Day, perhaps the first step is very simple. Find your river. Follow it. Learn its story.

Because a river doesn't begin at its bank — and neither does our responsibility for it.



Wildlife Watching in September – Woodland Wonders

September is a month of change. Summer hasn't quite left us, but autumn is beginning to make itself known in berries, seeds, fungi and the first changing leaves.

But when does autumn actually begin? Meteorologists use 1 September. Astronomical autumn begins around the equinox. Nature, of course, follows neither calendar. Instead, autumn arrives species by species, place by place and year by year. September is a wonderful month to watch that happen.

Look along hedgerows and woodland edges and you'll find the year's growth being turned into food for the months ahead. Blackberries ripen, rosehips glow red and hawthorn, elder, rowan and blackthorn produce their autumn fruits. Acorns and beech mast begin to fall.

Look more closely and another overlooked plant comes into its own: ivy. Its small greenish flowers may not look spectacular to us, but flowering late in the year makes ivy an important source of nectar and pollen for bees, hoverflies, butterflies and other insects when fewer flowers are available.

Overhead, change is happening too. Swifts have largely departed and swallows and house martins begin their journeys south. Other birds will soon be arriving from colder northern regions. Migration is a reminder that Birmingham's wildlife is connected to places hundreds, sometimes thousands, of miles away.

After rain, look down. September can bring an extraordinary variety of fungi pushing through woodland floors, grassland and dead wood. Spiders and their dew-covered webs become increasingly conspicuous too.

And then there are the trees.

Perhaps one horse chestnut leaf develops a yellow edge. A silver birch begins to turn. An acorn drops onto the path. When did it happen? That simple question matters.

The Woodland Trust's Nature's Calendar records the timing of natural events — known as phenology — using observations made by people across the UK. Its records stretch back centuries, helping researchers understand how the timing of our seasons changes from year to year and over longer periods.

You don't need to be an expert to contribute. Choose a tree, hedgerow or familiar patch that you pass regularly. Watch for the first ripe fruit, first autumn tint or first fallen leaf. Notice when fungi appear after rain. Remember the last swallow or house martin you see. Then write down the date.

In August we asked whether you had noticed anything appearing — or disappearing — earlier than expected. September gives us an opportunity to look more carefully. Look. Notice. Remember. Record.

Because there isn't one day when summer ends and autumn begins. Nature tells us when the seasons are changing.

We just have to be watching.



The Garden in September - Things to do

September is a month of seasonal change in the garden. Summer has not quite finished, but autumn is beginning to make itself known. Apples and pears are ripening, autumn raspberries are ready to pick and late flowers continue to provide colour and valuable nectar. At the same time, cooler nights, shorter days and increasing moisture make this an excellent month for planting and preparing for the seasons ahead.

According to seasonal guidance from the Royal Horticultural Society, September is a good time for:

- 🍏 Harvesting apples, pears, autumn raspberries and remaining vegetables, as well as lifting potatoes before slug damage becomes a problem.
- 🌱 Sowing vegetables for overwintering, including spinach, winter lettuce, rocket and other salad leaves, and sowing green manures on empty vegetable beds to protect and improve the soil.
- 🌸 Planting spring-flowering bulbs such as daffodils and crocuses, creating next year's early colour and an important source of food for pollinators.
- 🌻 Dividing established herbaceous perennials and planting new perennials while the soil is still warm and autumn moisture is beginning to return.
- 🌾 Collecting and saving seeds from annuals and perennials to sow next year.
- 💧 Continuing to water newly planted trees, shrubs and containers during dry weather, using stored rainwater where possible.

September is also a good month to resist the temptation to tidy everything away. The RHS recommends leaving many perennial stems standing until late winter because they provide valuable habitat for wildlife. Seed heads can feed birds, hollow stems shelter overwintering insects and fallen leaves can provide cover for countless small creatures. Late-flowering plants are particularly important now. Michaelmas daisies, sedums and ivy can continue providing pollen and nectar as other flowers disappear. A log pile, small pond, patch of longer grass or simply some leaves left beneath a hedge can add another little habitat to the garden. Even a container of water can make a difference.

And there is good reason to think collectively. Britain's private gardens cover hundreds of thousands of hectares, giving them enormous potential as habitat for wildlife. The RHS encourages us to think of individual gardens as part of a wider web of interconnected green spaces rather than isolated plots. That is particularly relevant in a city. A Birmingham garden, allotment, balcony, community garden or window box may be small on its own, but together these spaces form stepping stones between parks, waterways, street trees and larger areas of habitat. September gardening therefore isn't only about putting summer to bed. It is about helping the garden make the transition into its next season — harvesting what this year has produced, preparing the soil and plants for what comes next, and leaving enough food and shelter for the wildlife making its own preparations for autumn and winter.

No garden? You can still enjoy the season. Birmingham has community gardens, allotments, parks and public gardens where you can see autumn beginning to unfold or get involved in growing. Contact Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk to find out more.



Young Green Champions: Back to School

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



Start as You Mean to Go On!

September means back to school — new classes, new adventures and a chance to start some new habits too.

And this September, two environmental campaigns give our Little Green Champions a great reason to think about something we all create every day: waste.

Zero Waste Week takes place from 7–11 September, encouraging people to think about what they throw away and find simple ways to waste less.

Then, on 20 September, World Cleanup Day brings people around the world together to tackle the waste that does end up in our streets, parks and communities.

But here's a challenge for our Little Green Champions:

What if we could stop some of that rubbish being created in the first place?

You don't need to change everything. Start with one thing and see where it leads.

🌱 Use it again — does last year's pencil case, ruler or school bag really need replacing?

🍷 Waste less lunch — take what you think you'll eat and use reusable bottles, tubs and lunchboxes where you can.

👕 Pass it on — school uniform you've grown out of might be exactly what another child needs.

🔧 Look after your things — keeping, repairing and reusing something means fewer resources are needed to make another one.

♻️ Sort it out — learn what can be recycled at home and at school.

👤 Pick it up — join a supervised litter pick or help look after your school grounds, street or local green space.

And remember, zero waste doesn't mean you have to produce absolutely no waste at all. It's about noticing what we use, where it comes from and where it goes when we've finished with it.

A new school year is a chance to learn all sorts of things. Some of the most useful lessons might be the little habits we practise every day.

A chance to start as you mean to go on.

Earth Stories – Memories, Hopes and Happenings

September always arrived with apple pie made with apples from the garden even the ones nibbled by wasps were gathered up. But the ones that had more eaten out were left for nature to finish off. I don't have apple trees in my own garden now but I do share my apples with the blackbirds. I try very hard to use all the apples up before they become less than inviting, but sometimes one older apple gets hidden under the new fruit and then, when discovered, I return the wrinkled and spongy apple to the wild. They are gratefully received by the birds and squirrels.

And thinking of apples gives two memories to share - one is captured in a photo I still have - my mother holding a ladder while I picked apples in our garden, we are talking as we work. The other is studying Robert Frost at school and reading his poem After Apple Picking for the first time. His writing is very reflective but in simple terms the lines "My instep arch not only keeps the ache, It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round." made so much sense to me. Leaning into the tree to reach the furthest fruit meant pressing hard on the rungs and later that feeling stayed with me even while I enjoyed the first taste of tangy apple pie.

Although it's not yet autumn my kitchen has already begun to smell of cinnamon, I couldn't wait any longer. And I am considering making soup. Outside, the rowan trees are laden with berries and the blackbirds have discovered that feast. They hop between the branches, pulling at the bright red fruit, apparently unconcerned that summer is slipping quietly away. The garden knows, though. Leaves are beginning to change colour. Not everywhere and not all at once, but a little yellow here, a flash of red there. The green landscape of summer is starting its transformation early this year, stressed by the heat like many of us.

As I write this I know the Michaelmas daisies will be flowering soon. My mom always called them simply "September", and I still think of them that way. Their purple flowers seem to belong to this moment, and the bees agree. On warmer days they are still busy amongst them, gathering pollen while there is still some left to find. But September has another side. Warmth combined with dampness brings mildew. Fungal spores that have waited unnoticed begin to awaken. The last blackberries can suddenly turn from perfect to spoiled almost overnight. It is frustrating when you were hoping for one final crumble. But there is compensation.

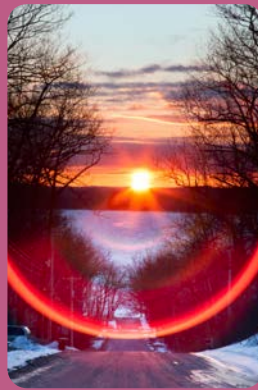
Across woodland floors, beneath trees, beside paths and sometimes unexpectedly in lawns, the fungi begin their autumn magic. What we see above ground is only the fruiting body of organisms whose networks may extend invisibly through soil and dead wood below our feet. Luckily we don't need to forage for mushrooms, it is not to be advised for the untrained! But thoughts of a creamy mushroom soup can be brought to life with a trip to the local shop. Aren't we lucky. As the climate changes I do wonder what changes it will bring to our shopping and eating habits. We will need to consider this.

Above us, the sun creates a much more regular and recognisable pattern. Around the autumn equinox, day and night draw towards roughly equal length. Darkness begins arriving noticeably earlier, giving us more opportunities to look upwards in to the dark sky. Stars appear before bedtime, familiar constellations return to our evening skies and, on a clear night, it is worth simply standing outside for a while and experiencing the difference of the night.

September is a transitional month, not quite still summer and not quite yet autumn. As we move through the month there will be hints of both, but the changes in our climate may mean that Septembers in the future will feel very different. For now let's enjoy the rest of summer, golden mornings, fruit pie and jams, until autumn arrives as we carry on round on our celestial journey through our calendar.

Best wishes

Deborah Needle - Editor



One Planet - Six Very Different Animals

September gives us an extraordinary collection of wildlife days for our One Planet piece: International Vulture Awareness Day, World Manta Day, International Red Panda Day, World Rhino Day, World Gorilla Day and World Cassowary Day.

Six very different animals. Six very different places. One living planet. Look a little closer and something fascinating appears. These animals don't simply live in their ecosystems. They have jobs to do.

The vulture is a recycler, consuming carcasses and returning nutrients to the system while helping remove decaying remains.

The manta ray is an ocean traveller, moving through vast marine environments and reminding us that wildlife doesn't recognise the boundaries on our maps. Protecting a species that travels means protecting connected seas.

The red panda is a forest specialist, dependent upon the cool, bamboo-rich forests of the Himalayas. Its survival is inseparable from the survival of its habitat.

The rhino is a landscape engineer. By grazing, browsing, trampling and moving through its environment, this enormous herbivore can influence vegetation and create opportunities for other species.

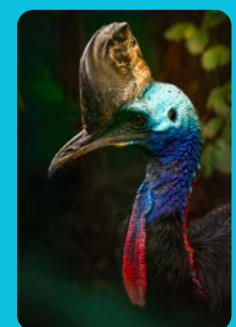
The gorilla is a forest gardener. Gorillas eat fruit and disperse seeds as they travel, helping the forests around them regenerate.

And the remarkable cassowary is a seed carrier. It eats rainforest fruits whole and transports their seeds through the forest which includes some large fruits that relatively few other animals can disperse.

Take away the recycler, traveller, specialist, engineer, gardener or seed carrier and you haven't simply lost an animal. You have changed the system. That's an important distinction. A rainforest isn't a collection of trees with animals living amongst them. An ocean isn't water containing fish. A grassland isn't grass with animals standing on it. They are relationships: eating, growing, dying, decomposing, travelling, pollinating, dispersing, recycling and beginning again. A healthy planet doesn't just need species. It needs species doing their jobs.

Which leaves one rather uncomfortable animal to consider. Us. What is our role? Perhaps that's difficult because humans can be recyclers, gardeners, seed carriers, builders and landscape engineers too. We can restore habitats, grow food, repair things, reduce waste, share resources, protect species and pass knowledge between generations. Unlike the cassowary, however, we can understand the consequences of what we do. And that gives our particular role an unusual ingredient: choice.

We are not standing outside nature looking in. We are participants in the same living system. The question isn't whether we have an impact. It's what kind of impact we choose to have.



Birmingham City Council's Route to Net Zero

Nature recovery and climate action are part of the same story. Birmingham's journey towards Net Zero is another part of building a greener, healthier and more resilient city.

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 :

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Scroll down and select the “**Climate Change, Nature and Net Zero**” option.



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