

GREEN CHAMPIONS



Noticing Nature

January poems are sad and grey
But that's not what we want today
It's true there's gloom and pouring rain
But it all helps bring the spring again.



Health - Naturally

Blue Monday is the name given to a day in January often the third Monday of the month. There is some science behind this but also after all the celebrations of the festive season are over it can seem a bit grey and dull in January. At a time when we are often hoping for a fresh start, it can often seem nothing much is happening. But taking time to listen and look for signs of spring approaching can help to lift our mood. Tiny leaf buds and catkins, the first blades of daffodils poking through, snowdrops appearing and on sunny days bird song fills the air.



Learn more - Birds and Bird Song

Woodland Trust - Bird Identification

Song thrush: *Turdus philomelos*
Slightly smaller than a blackbird with a dark spotted underside and pale brown wings and back. Their song is varied so listen for repeated phrases, can sing all year.

Habitat: found in woodland, fields, heaths, parks and gardens.

Distribution: a resident throughout the UK, seen all year.



<https://naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk/what-we-record-and-why/species-we-record/birds/>



City of Nature Programme update

We would like to wish you all a Happy New Year.

The end of 2023 saw the development work for the Green Champion Programme completed and the UND project's Green Champion Co-ordinator Jackie return to her role as BCC Housing Officer. As you may be aware the Council is going through a process of reviewing all the services it delivers and that includes the management of green spaces (green infrastructure). It is very early in this process so we don't know yet exactly what that will look like. But we will endeavour to keep you updated.

In the meantime it has been confirmed that the Urban Nature Development Project that is currently doing work towards the delivery of the City of Nature Plan has been extended and will continue until September 2024 to account for a delayed start to the project. We will continue to work with the City of Nature Alliance of organisations and The National Trust along with other Council partners to deliver City of Nature ambitions. These organisations and groups are vital to creating a city that meets the City of Nature standard.

But it is the Green Champion Development Programme that we really want to focus on for 2024. Jackie's work with people who care for their environment identified various ways to increase their capability to do this which includes:

- Better communication
- Improved or new skills
- Shared knowledge / experience
- Support and recognition

The long term aim is that the Green Champion Programme will be available to anyone who wants to join. Currently through the UND project we have resource to work with 60 volunteers over the next nine months.

Please contact us at Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk if you would like to find out more about joining the Green Champion Development Programme.

Connect:



Please come and join us for our online lunchtime chat via Zoom on 26th January 2024

If you receive this Newsletter by email you will already have been sent the link, don't forget to put a note in your diary :)

If not you can get the link by emailing us on Cityofnature@birmingham.gov.uk and we will email you the link.



Nature's Calendar - Red Foxes

Have you heard the bone-chilling sound of foxes in the night? It can be very unnerving when heard for the first time. Well, far from the fearful event that it sounds like, they're actually out trying to find mates! The male fox, called a dog makes a barking noise whereas the females, called vixens make the spine-chilling scream. January is peak breeding season for foxes, with their night-time cries not only attracting potential mates but also warning off rivals. They will couple up for a few months, hunting and patrolling to form a strong bond, before the female hides away to have her pups. Look out for playful fox cubs in your garden come March.



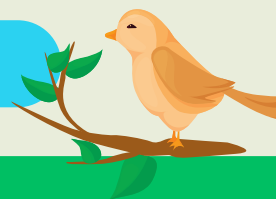
The red fox - scientific name: *Vulpes vulpes*, is our only wild member of the dog family. The size of a medium-sized dog, the red fox is orangey-red above, white below, with black tips to the ears, dark brown feet and a white tip to the bushy, orange tail (known as the 'brush').



Being omnivorous foxes are not fussy eaters and will happily munch on small mammals, birds, frogs, worms as well as berries and fruit! Foxes that live in towns and cities may even scavenge in bins to look for scraps.

RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch - 26th to 28th January

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/big-garden-birdwatch/faqs>



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

It's easy to be part of the Big Garden Birdwatch. Simply choose an hour between 26 and 28 January and count the birds you see in your garden, from your balcony, or in your local park. Only count birds that land. Then tell the RSPB what you saw. Even if you saw nothing, it still counts.

Across the UK, over half a million people took part in Big Garden Birdwatch 2023, counting a whopping 9.1 million birds! House Sparrows took the top spot, but counts of these chirpy birds are down by 57% compared to the first Birdwatch in 1979. In fact, we've lost 38 million birds from UK skies in the last 60 years. With birds facing so many challenges, it's more important than ever to get involved in the Birdwatch.

Every bird you do – or don't – count will give the RSPB a valuable insight into how garden birds are faring.



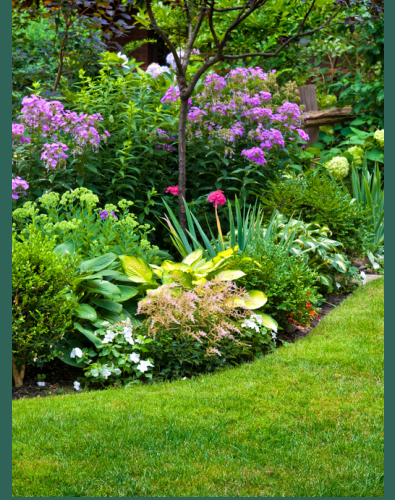
Birmingham's Parks and Open Spaces

Focusing on: Pype Hayes Park

Pype Hayes Park, Chester Road, Erdington, Birmingham, B24 0NR is one of Birmingham's larger parks, covering more than 100 acres. It contains new and mature trees and open areas of grass and a number of ornamental gardens, with many bedding areas and a number of grade II listed buildings feature at the location, including Pype Hayes Hall.

Gardens feature heavily in the park, with an older traditional garden in the vicinity of the Hall incorporating flower beds and dwarf yew hedges, and also a garden with a modern twist planted for the millennium.

In the western section of the park, there is a fish and duck pond, where many species of birds can be found, notably Mallard Ducks, Canada Geese and Mute Swans.



https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/directory_record/9143/pype_hayes_park

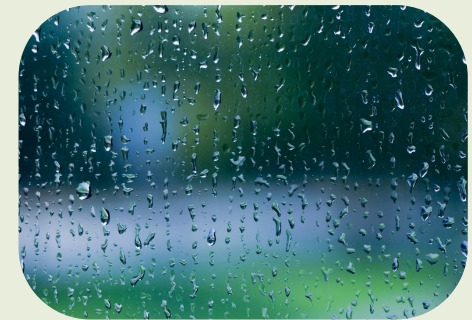


January brings the snow? How is our climate changing?

The changes to our climate are effecting UK wildlife. Here are just two effects that the WWF highlights.

Our native tree species, such as oak, have adapted to changing climate over hundreds of years. Oak trees are known to support over 2,300 other species, making them vital for the woodland environment. But now the climate is changing beyond its normal limits and our ancient oaks cannot adapt fast enough. They are under pressure like never before, from extreme climate events that bring droughts or flooding, and from new pests and diseases. The good news is that diverse woodlands, made up of trees that are different species and ages, can act as a giant carbon sponge. Protecting oaks and woodlands will help to protect our climate.

Many of us have heard about honeybees and bumblebees, but did you know that the UK is home to 270 different species of bees? Each one plays a special role in keeping our meadows, woodlands, heathlands and hedgerows alive. To protect these and other insects, we need to protect and restore the varied habitats they rely on. Our grasslands and pockets of vibrant wildflower meadows across the country help keep our bee populations afloat. We need to act now to limit the rise in global temperatures, otherwise climate change could be the final straw for some bee species. All bees are vital for the food system and are the primary pollinators for crops in the UK. Without them, our food security is at risk.



<https://www.wwf.org.uk/updates/9-uk-species-affected-climate-change>



Birmingham City of Nature - Green City Action G8

The Nature Recovery Network, stretching right across the city and linking with all our West Midlands neighbours, forming part of the West Midlands National Park (G7)

https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50273/our_future_city_plan_ofcp/2518/our_future_nature_city_plan



Under a Green City the plan will address one of the themes prioritised in the 25 Year Environment Plan: “Support the delivery of the national Nature Recovery Network, with its focus on enhancing landscapes; improving connectivity between wildlife rich places; climate resilience; protection of existing natural environments and supporting access to nature for health and well-being.”



Your Space - Your Words - Your Views

From: Simon Needle - Urban Nature and Forestry Lead for BCC

Throughout 2024 I'll be updating you about the progress of nature recovery in Birmingham. But for this January edition I thought I would mention Burns Night which happens on the 25th January and celebrates the poetry of Robbie Burns. Burns Night is a time to enjoy Scottish traditions and celebrate the renowned poet Robert Burns with a classic combination of haggis, neeps, tatties, some reciting of poetry, and maybe even a warming dram [of whisky]. Why reference a Scottish poet to introduce nature recovery in Birmingham, when there are some amazing local poets? When Robbie wasn't writing iconic poetry, he was a farmer, a profession not widely concerned with the wellbeing of wild animals at the time [around 1780]. So, his ode to a tiny field mouse was quite out of character for a farmer in Burns' day. It starts - Wee, sleekit, cowran, tim'rous beastie, O, what a panic's in thy breastie..." Burns wrote this after destroying a field mouse's nest with his plough and stopped to consider what impact it had on the mouse. He continues - "I'm truly sorry man's dominion, Has broken nature's social union, An' justifies that ill opinion, Which makes thee startle At me, thy poor, earth-born companion, An' fellow-mortal!" Modern poets like the amazing Benjamin Zephaniah have been sending out similar messages in a different way, but it is thinking about how long people have been trying to tell us how important nature is that made me choose this poem. In 2024 it is a case of if not now, then when do we take action?

<https://www.scotland.org/events/burns-night/the-poetry-of-robert-burns/to-a-mouse>



Birmingham's Route to Zero - Climate Action

Back to school. In our experience, educators and young people care deeply about environmental issues and have a strong desire to actively protect our planet. However, environmental issues are huge and the thought of tackling them can be intimidating, leaving many feeling overwhelmed and wondering 'Where do we begin?'

The Keep Britain Tidy / Eco-Schools programme provides a simple, seven-step framework that can help with this, but we want to do more in Birmingham to empower young people to make a difference in their school, local community and beyond by encouraging them to take part in the Eco Schools Programme but also get involved at a local level. Look out for more info soon.

To find out more about BCC's Route to Zero you can contact the team on:
routetozeroarbon@birmingham.gov.uk



Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust

Works with us for nature's recovery across Birmingham and the Black Country; protecting, restoring and creating wildlife-rich, accessible spaces that benefit people and wildlife. Get involved and find out more about their events in Birmingham and the Black Country.

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



BOSF - Find you local Friends of Open Spaces Group

BOSF offers opportunities for groups and individuals interested in open spaces to share knowledge and experience. They produce regular updates about funding sources, training opportunities, events in open spaces and lots of useful information. They can also put you in touch with other groups who have experiences that might be useful to you.

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



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Heritage Fund

