

HEALTH & NATURE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Natural England West Midlands

November 2025

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WELCOME TO THE NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER

In November, grey wagtails appear along our West Midlands' rivers and canals – slim birds with yellow bellies and a constant tail-flick, bringing flashes of movement to the banks.

This month also marks the launch of **Natural England's new strategy: Recovering Nature for Growth, Health and Security**.

It's built around four outcomes: 1. Recovering Nature. 2. Building Better Places. 3. Improving Health and Wellbeing. 4. Delivering Security Through Nature.

You can watch a short video about the strategy [here](#).

I'm especially excited about how strongly it puts health and wellbeing at the heart of our work. There's a recognition that connecting people with nature isn't a 'nice to have' – it's essential, and it's something we're already seeing take root.

As always, I have compiled an external funding opportunities PDF suitable for wellbeing & nature projects.

YOUR NATURAL ENGLAND CONTACT

ABOUT ME

Hi, I'm Amber Marquand, the Health and Environment Lead in the West Midlands, focusing on Walsall and Birmingham.

Amber.Marquand@naturalengland.org.uk



WHAT I DO AND WHY

Nature plays a critical role in our physical and mental wellbeing, so Natural England want to ensure more people can access the healing properties of spending time in natural spaces. For example, via conservation volunteering, community gardening, tree planting, nature walks, green crafting etc.

Our Health and Environment roles across the country 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. We want to increase the offer of nature-based activities within communities to improve health and wellbeing and pro-environment behaviours, especially in areas with poorer health outcomes and lower access to nature.

I have created this newsletter as a way of providing support and information around nature for health and wellbeing in the West Midlands. For projects taking place in Walsall or Birmingham, I am able to provide tailored support so please get in touch.

SPOTLIGHTS

A snapshot of the amazing work being done in the West Midlands connecting people and nature.

Please let me know if you would like to feature in a spotlight in a future newsletter!

Thrive at Hillis Lodge, Birmingham

For 6 months over the summer Thrive delivered a therapeutic horticulture programme at Hillis Lodge. Hillis Lodge is a 15 bedded low secure unit for men, with a history of offending and risk behaviours, detailed under the mental health act, in the South of Birmingham, and is part of Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust.

Hills developed the site initially post-Covid in a co-produced project as a space designed for both service users and staff. A trained Thrive practitioner delivered a range of seasonally appropriate gardening activities. She was supported each session by a Thrive volunteer and member of Hillis staff, and 10 out of the 15 patients living at Hillis engaged with the program to some extent. This ranged from actively engaging in every session to dropping in for a quick chat about what we were doing. Six patients attended the sessions regularly for spells of time during the project.

The staff reported (and evidence would suggest) that many of the 'regulars' were good at caring for the space and engaging with the project in between our visits (including one person doing jobs and eating produce in the middle of the night when he couldn't sleep!). One man took responsibility for nurturing the tomato plants from seed and continued to water, feed, prune etc between sessions even when he didn't feel well enough to attend with others. Others enjoyed watering, reporting that they like '*being useful*' and having '*something to do*.' Some said that they just enjoyed looking at the plants and the peacefulness of the space.

As in all of our programmes, we actively encouraged the men to connect with nature whilst outside, and this was particularly easy in a hot year full of pollinators!

For more information, please contact birmingham@thrive.org.uk



MORE SPOTLIGHTS

Please let me know if you would like to feature in a spotlight in a future newsletter!

Swift Academy – Half-Term Sessions Take Flight

The RSPB's Swift Academy Project, funded through Natural England's Purple Horizons Project, is now well underway, with all five delivery partners confirmed: Birmingham Settlement, Walsall Football Club Foundation, Walsall College, Young Stars (Castle Vale) and Trinity Specialist College (Falcon Lodge). As part of the funding, research led by BVSC will explore whether these creative approaches to engaging communities in nature can successfully inspire action for wildlife – a key aim of the project.

by Amber Marquand



Meanwhile, Walsall FC Foundation delivered their first Swifty's Soccer Camp, which saw almost 50 children take part. RSPB were particularly impressed by how naturally the coaches wove swift behaviour and migration themes into their football drills.

The remaining partners are now planning their engagement sessions, and work has begun on the project's legacy – including building and installing swift boxes and community wildflower planting to boost insect food sources. The project is already taking flight, with plenty more to come.



EVEN MORE SPOTLIGHTS!

Please let me know if you would like to feature in a spotlight in a future newsletter!



Birmingham Community
Healthcare Charity



Nature Communities Project in Birmingham Outdoor Nature Play Sessions

This autumn, Birmingham Community Healthcare's Charity began delivering their **Nature Play Project** – funded by Natural England's Nature Communities funding, which is also being used to test new principles for doing nature engagement work with communities. The project launched with a series of free half-term outdoor play sessions in three local parks: **Ward End Park, Tame Valley (Finishing Post Park) and Falcon Lodge Park**. Each park sits close to its local children's centre, making sessions easy to reach and rooted in the everyday places families already use.

Across the three sites, families took part in simple, joyful activities designed to spark nature connection: bug hunts, leaf printing, hedgehog leaf crafts, pebble-spotting, threading, outdoor storytelling, yoga, watering plants, and active play with hoops and balls. Early years practitioners supported each event, helping parents feel more confident exploring nature alongside their children.



I attended the Ward End Park session, which had a brilliant turnout – more than 90 parents and children. The feedback from families was especially warm: parents talked about feeling happier, calmer and more energised after spending time outdoors, with several saying they had noticed new things in nature they would usually overlook. Many also said the session boosted their confidence to visit Ward End Park again independently, knowing their children enjoyed exploring it.

The sessions at Tame Valley and Falcon Lodge were slightly smaller but equally positive, with parents appreciating something free, local and well organised during half term.

This was just Round 1. Another session at each park will take place in the new year – continuing to build confidence, curiosity and deeper nature connection for local families.



County by County - where to find out about your local nature-based activities and providers

Country-wide Social Farms & Gardens

Their map showcases hundreds of organisations that are doing inspiring work connecting people with nature; from city and care farms, to community gardens

Birmingham

- BCC's 'Improving your Health with Nature' Website
- Birmingham Open Spaces Forum
- Route2Wellbeing Directory Map
- Sport Birmingham's Local Outdoor Activity Finder
- Connect to Support: search 'nature', 'gardening', 'walking', 'conservation'
- The Waiting Room: search 'nature', 'gardening', 'walking', 'conservation'

Walsall

- Walsall Healthy Spaces | Facebook | Linktree
- Healthy spaces team Facebook
- Walsall Wellbeing Directory; search 'nature' or 'garden' or 'walking'

Sandwell

- Route2Wellbeing Directory

Dudley

- Community Information Directory; search 'nature', 'gardening', 'walking', 'conservation'
- Dudley Outdoor Active Facebook Page
- Healthy Dudley – Move More
- Dudley Nature Reserves Facebook page
- Dudley Parks Facebook page

Worcestershire

- Community Services Directory; search 'nature', 'gardening', 'walking' or 'conservation'
- Worcs Wildlife Trust map of community groups taking action for nature:
<https://www.worcswildlifetrust.co.uk/community-action>

Herefordshire

- Talk Community Directory; search 'nature', 'gardening', 'walking' or 'conservation'

Telford & Wrekin

- Live Well Community Directory; search 'nature', 'gardening', 'walking' or 'conservation'
- Healthy Telford; blogs, events and info on looking after physical and mental wellbeing.
Includes the Green Spaces are Go project,
- Mossy Life Green Directory

Shropshire

- Shropshire's Great Outdoors Directory: interactive maps, access information, activities on offer across the county.
- Mossy Life Green Directory
- Shropshire Together Community and Family Directory - search 'nature', 'gardening', 'walking' or 'conservation'
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust events page - free/small fee nature-based activities.

Any suggestions of directories for nature-based activities, especially in other West Mids counties please let me know!

REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT / INVOLVEMENT

HELP!

Job Opportunity: Health Community Engagement Manager



Salary: £38,864–£43,193 | Contract: to Oct 2027 | Hybrid

- BVSC is recruiting a Health Community Engagement Manager to lead system-wide engagement across the Birmingham & Solihull Integrated Care System. The role will coordinate community panels, small-grant programmes and ensure community voices shape health priorities.
- Secondments from the VCFSE sector are encouraged – offering a unique chance for someone already in the sector to step into a strategic ICS role while keeping strong community links.

Find out more; bvsc.org/health-engagement-manager

Closing Date: Wednesday 26th November 2025, 10am



Creative Communities 2025–2026 (Creative Black Country) Project Call Out

Creative commissions of up to £1,000 for community-led initiatives—like learning a new craft, creating a garden gallery, or cultural visits to shows, museums, or galleries.

Who is eligible: Community groups, particularly those engaging in creative activities for the first time, and those located in priority areas below:

- **Dudley:** Brierley Hill, Kingswinford, Halesowen, Stourbridge & Sedgley
Contact laura@creativeblackcountry.co.uk
- **Sandwell:** Rowley Regis, Tipton, Oldbury & Wednesbury
Contact info@creativeblackcountry.co.uk
- **Walsall:** Willenhall, Bloxwich, Darlaston & Brownhills
Contact richard@creativeblackcountry.co.uk
- **Wolverhampton:** Bushbury, Heath Town, Blakenhall, Ettingshall & Spring Vale
Contact nelson@creativeblackcountry.co.uk

Deadline: All projects and activities must be completed by 28 February 2026

Support available:

- One-to-one guidance from Creative Advisers
- Connections with local organisations, creatives, and voluntary sector councils
- Help promoting the project, accessing funding, and making work accessible (e.g., BSL provision, captioning)
- Environmental advice (e.g., use of recycled materials)
- Funding support for “Go & See” visits: covering travel and/or tickets

WHAT'S ON FOR NATURE #1

CAFE OPEN:
Mon - Fri
9am - 3:30pm

Birmingham Settlement Nature & Wellbeing Centre Timetable

We encourage a voluntary £2 donation to support the ongoing costs of our charitable activities

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
Edgbaston Reservoir Running & Wellbeing group 9.30am-11.30am 	Morning Yoga 9.30am-10.30am Roots Forest School (booking required) 10-30am-12pm Social Walk & Talk. All welcome! 10.30am-12.30pm Branching Out Group (starting Mon 6th Oct) 1pm-2pm Tai Chi 2.30pm-3.30pm	Dog Walk & Talk 8.30am-9.30am Little Settlers Nature Club 10am-12pm Beginners Archery Class 1pm-2pm	Volunteer with us! Friends of the Field Volunteer Day 10am-2pm 	Nature Navigators! All ages welcome 10am-12pm Tai Chi 1.30pm-2.30pm Chess Club 2pm-3pm	Dog Walk & Talk 8.30am-9.30am Volunteer with us! Friends of the Field Volunteer Day 10am-2pm Drop-in arts & crafts for wellbeing with Pinky! 10am-2pm Creative Shed 12pm- 3pm 	 

79 Selwyn Road B16 0SL

Branching Out!

Outdoor hands-on sensory session for all abilities!

- Gentle gardening & tasks
- Keep active with light movement
- Learn new skills while helping out
- Grow confidence, friendships, try something new!

If you would like to take part, speak to Eamon at the Red Shed on 07497 519 736 or email natureandwellbeing@bsettlement.org.uk

Where are we?
Birmingham Settlement Nature & Wellbeing Centre, 79 Selwyn Road, Edgbaston Reservoir, B16 0SL

Registered charity no 517303 www.birminghamsettlement.org.uk
Funded by Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care System's Fairer Futures Fund

Get Active in Aston, Newtown & Nечеллс Parks!



The Wild at Heart programme, funded by Birmingham City Council Public Health, offers free nature-based activities across local parks.

See November's events

Park Rangers run sessions that improve green spaces, support volunteers, and boost health and wellbeing. If you live in or near Aston, Newtown or Nечеллс, you're welcome to join in – from planting and litter-picking to creating wildlife-friendly areas. Families can also enjoy free nature activities suitable for all ages.

No experience needed – just enthusiasm. Dress for the weather and check for cancellations.

For more info, email Lickey.hub@birmingham.gov.uk or follow Birmingham Open Spaces Online / Naturally Birmingham for updates.

December Events at... Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens

Crafting Decorations for Christmas Workshop
Sunday 7 December, 12:00 pm - 2:00 pm – Get creative and make three beautiful seasonal decorations in the gardens.

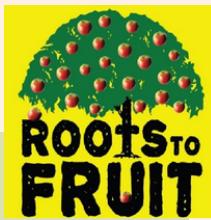
Singing Santa – Family Sessions
Saturday 6 December: 11:30 am - 12:30 pm & 1:30 pm - 2:30 pm
Saturday 13 December: 11:30 am - 12:30 pm & 1:30 pm - 2:30 pm
Ages 6-7 £6-£7.

Christmas Quiz Fundraiser
Saturday 13 December, 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm – A fun evening of quiz-style festive fundraising.

Carols in the Courtyard
Sunday 21 December, 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm – Join for an outdoor carol singing session in the garden courtyard.

CHECK OUT OTHER EVENTS

WHAT'S ON FOR NATURE #2



↓ WE'RE COMMISSIONING ↓

Our **Mentally Healthy Communities Grants** scheme will work with community and third sector organisations to deliver mental health and wellbeing interventions for one of the 5 communities of identity where our Deep Engagement Partners have delivered focus groups, including:

Black Caribbean, Muslim, Sight Loss, Sexual Orientation (LGB) and Trans & Non-binary

We're offering 4 x £5,000 and 3 x £10,000 grants to a max of 7 community organisations, a total of £50,000

- Directly respond to the DEP's focus group findings
- Be evidence-based
- Promote lasting habits that contribute to positive mental and physical wellbeing
- Follow a community-centred approach

Applications close on Sunday 7th December 2025 at 5:00pm



Winter Apple Tree Pruning Workshop - Friday 12 December, 1 - 3:30pm

Join us at the Roots to Fruit Midlands orchard for a practical winter pruning workshop covering routine and regenerative apple tree care, tree health, fruiting wood development and long-term management. Alongside the hands-on training, we'll add a light festive touch with traditional wassailing, a decorated Yule log and a bit of seasonal fun.

Cost: **£5 booking fee** via Eventbrite + £5 cash on the day (supporting our non-profit training work)

Location: Roots to Fruit Midlands
Training Centre, 51 Chester Road,
Streetly, Sutton Coldfield B74 2HH
(within Oakdene Nurseries)

Who: Adults 18+; tools provided; please wear sturdy shoes and warm layers. Parking available.

Book your place

Warm drinks, mince pies, good company, and plenty of hands-on learning included.



National Nature Reserve EVENTS West Midlands Natural England

From birds to butterflies, dragonflies to dark Skies and bug hunting there is something for everyone on our NNR events. See [Eventbrite](#) for details and to book on any of our 26 activities (including Mottey Meadows, Chartley Moss, Aqualate Mere, Wynbunbury Moss and Wheaton Aston NNRs)

All event details on Eventbrite, or please get in touch with Amber.

NETWORKS TO BE A PART OF

Coventry & Warwickshire GSP Community of Practice

We are a relatively new group of Green social prescribing practitioners/professionals, who are working in the Coventry and Warwickshire area and are keen to connect with partners to exchange ideas, support each other and to campaign to raise awareness of the importance of GSP to support health and wellbeing. We are keen to work with partners across our geography and to make connections with anyone who has an interest in GSP.

We are in the process of identifying our priorities for 2026 and will be sharing these and news in the form of a regular newsletter.

If you would like to connect with us, please email our facilitator Karen Higgins on: karen-higgins1@outlook.com



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Community Environment Network

Run by the West Midlands Combined Authority, this network brings together local people, groups, and organisations who care about nature, climate, and community. It offers free membership, events, and peer support to help communities share ideas, access resources, and work together on projects that improve local green spaces and wellbeing. Nature helps us feel better, get active, and connect – this network makes it easier to turn that into action.

[Find out more and join here](#)



Green Social Prescribing Innovation Community

A national network for anyone helping people connect with nature for health and wellbeing. Whether you work in healthcare, local government, the environment or the voluntary sector, this is a space to share ideas, access resources, and collaborate. Join a growing movement making Green Social Prescribing more inclusive, accessible, and effective—so more people can benefit from the power of nature.



Nature Connectedness Network

Open to all, this national network explores how time in nature can support different areas of work. Members can join themed groups and nodes, including Nature Connectedness for Health and Wellbeing, Children and Young People, and Nature for NHS Staff Wellbeing.

Nature Towns & Cities Network



A programme by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, National Trust and Natural England aims to improve access to nature by helping local authorities, communities and partners bring green space into every neighbourhood.

The [Nature Towns and Cities Network](#) is open and free to join, offering events, training and resources for community groups, charities and local government.

NEW RESOURCES



Nature Towns and Cities

Explore Nature Towns and Cities guidance and resources, including:

 **Practical Guides** – From funding green spaces to designing nature-rich places that support community health and wellbeing. A great starting point if you're looking for evidence, step-by-step support, or examples of what's working elsewhere. Click [HERE](#).

 **Urban Forest Masterplanning** – Advice on how to create, grow, and care for urban forests, whether you're starting from scratch or improving what already exists. Ideal for councils, community groups, or anyone shaping greener neighbourhoods. Click [HERE](#).

 **Quick-Start Urban Greening Guide** – A bite-sized, easy-to-use introduction to bringing more nature into towns and cities. Perfect if you need simple, practical actions to get going. Click [HERE](#).



The RHS has just published a brand-new report called [Space to Grow](#), it's a review of community gardening across the UK – who's doing it, why it matters, and what support these groups need to keep going.

Over 2.5 million adults have taken part in community gardening in the past three years – and 14.7 million more want to get involved.

It's the first time anyone's pulled together a national picture of community gardening, and it shows just how much growing is happening in every corner of the country.

If you fancy a read, you can find it [here](#).

[Watch the video](#) to find out more.

Green Social Prescribing

If you're looking to create any kind of garden for wellbeing, a colleague and I put together a [Gardens for Wellbeing Resource Map](#) – a one-stop guide with links to ideas for supporting both thriving wildlife and thriving people. It pulls together activities, inspiration, design considerations, and practical things to think about when developing or improving a wellbeing garden.

It's also now hosted on the [Green Social Prescribing Innovation Community Hub](#), where you'll find loads more nature-based resources, examples and tools for all things GSP from across the country!

USEFUL NATURE CONNECTION RESOURCES

NATURE CONNECTION HANDBOOK

Developed with the Uni of Derby and Natural England.

The importance of connecting with nature: including case studies on nature on prescription and social prescribing.



NATURE CONNECTION PRACTICES

Set of 5 nature connection practices to help activate the 5 pathways to nature connectedness. Each one takes just a few minutes a day alongside ordinary daily activities. E.g. watching videos of nature for 10 minutes every day can increase nature connection and reduce feelings of stress.



NATURE BUDDIES TOOLKIT

The Toolkit includes information on how to:

- Design a Nature Buddies programme to build on interests of volunteers and the people you work with
- Enhance your offer and recruit new volunteers, and support existing volunteers.
- Empower people to feel better, improving their mental health, other health outcomes and build social connections
- Build people's connection to outdoor spaces / nature near them
- Measure success and impact
- Evidence from pilot of impacts of Nature Buddies on wellbeing & nature connection
- Case studies and testimonials



GREEN SOCIAL PRESCRIBING E-LEARNING MODULE FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Natural England have been working in collaboration with Dr William Bird at Intelligent Health, NHS partners, NASP and online training education provider, Red Whale, to create two GSP e-learning modules. Includes a 30-minute video explaining evidence and health benefits of connecting patients to nature. And 15-minute consultation video with simple, practical steps for how to integrate nature into everyday practice.



CREATING A COMMUNITY GARDEN/GREENSPACE FOR WELLBEING?

Health Leads, Amber Marquand and Mandy Preece, have created a Resource Map - a compilation of useful websites and resources - for anyone interested in creating garden spaces to improve peoples' health and wellbeing, but also to benefit nature and wildlife.

We hope it's helpful - please share around!



NATURE FOR HEALTH RESOURCE HUB



The hub shares essential, free tools and guidance for developing green spaces on healthcare sites. And makes it easier for healthcare staff to develop nature-positive environments that benefit patients, staff and wildlife. It also includes recommendations for embedding nature into NHS training and policy.

RESOURCES Page on NHS Forest can be filtered into Clinical, Estates and Facilities, Sustainability...

Includes Training, webinars, evidence etc...

WHY NATURE WORKS: THE EVIDENCE

- Links between natural environments and mental health - EIN065 (naturalengland.org.uk)
- Links between natural environments and physical health - EIN066 (naturalengland.org.uk)
- How the Natural Environment can support Children and Young People - EIN067 (naturalengland.org.uk)
- Connection to Nature - EIN068 (naturalengland.org.uk)

Follow Natural England on Social Media:

- Natural England on Twitter
- Natural England on Instagram
- Natural England on YouTube
- Natural England on LinkedIn

Although I hope that this newsletter will contain something useful for everyone, I completely understand if you feel it is not relevant for you. Please email me (Amber) if you would like to opt out of receiving my newsletter at any time. Thank you.