

HEALTH & NATURE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

August 2025

Natural England West Midlands



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WELCOME TO THE AUGUST NEWSLETTER

August is the peak month for spotting **Purple Loosestrife**, a tall wildflower that lines riverbanks and canals across the West Mids. Found along waterways like the Birmingham Canal or the River Severn, this plant supports bees, butterflies and other pollinators at a time when nectar is in high demand. Its a beautiful reminder of the value of our local blue-green spaces for both wildlife and people.

Lots of requests to 'have your say' this month, on various topics in the West Mids. Plus lots of engagement and conversations happening on the **Green Social Prescribing community network** that launched in July, which includes:

- A searchable Resource Hub
- A membership area (space for national and regional conversations relevant to GSP)
- Networking and events

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!

LET'S GET POTTING NETWORK MEET-UP #2 AT MOSELEY HALL HOSPITAL, BIRMINGHAM

Let's Get Potting is a branch of Natural England's project in Birmingham called *Doorstep to Landscape*— which looks at how we can help better connect communities with urban nature for improved health and wellbeing.

A series of train-the-trainer style workshops funded by Natural England were delivered in Autumn 2024 by ecobirmingham at Birmingham Settlement's Nature & Wellbeing Centre. 17 representatives from local VCFSE organisations explored practical seed planting and nature connection activities, whilst also exploring how nature-based initiatives could support wellbeing across diverse settings.

Since those initial sessions, we've continued a network of passionate organisations embedding nature connection into health and wellbeing support. Participants in the original sessions showed a desire to reconnect in person, share ideas, and learn from one another's experiences. So on the 6th August 9:30 - 11:30, we met up for our second face to face.

We were hosted by the team at Moseley Hall Hospital in Birmingham. We were treated to a beautifully sunny tour of the grounds at the Hospital, guided by Head Gardener Stuart. He shared insights into the extensive greenspaces they care for and some of the exciting developments planned for the site. These include the creation of a Secret Garden, an accessible pathway to link green areas for patients and staff, and new allotments with polytunnels for year-round planting. We explored several key areas including the peaceful Garden of Reflection, the duck pond garden—where we spotted some ducklings—and the historic Dovecote Garden, home to mature orchards.



Vanisha from Birmingham Community Healthcare Charity also highlighted the fantastic Greenspace Volunteering programme run through the charity, which plays a vital role in supporting and enhancing these spaces. It's clear that a variety of green initiatives are thriving here. We finally managed to squeeze in relaxed discussion, giving others a chance to share updates, ideas, and inspiration for integrating nature into health and wellbeing work.



"It has been so great to hear about what others are doing in Birmingham and how we might be able to share ideas, success stories and help each other through the challenging bits. It's great to come together in one place - and to be honest, to get a bit of sunshine and connection to nature ourselves!" Attendee on 6th August.

We are in the process of planning our next visit, likely in October/November time.

If you are a Birmingham VCFSE interested in the connection between nature and health/wellbeing, you are welcome to be part of the Let's Get Potting network, and/or host a future meet-up. I'd love to hear from you.

Amber.Marquand@naturalengland.org.uk

MORE SPOTLIGHTS

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



whg Community Green Growing Event at St Giles' Community Garden



I was delighted to be invited by the Community Voice Team at whg housing association to join their community garden event at St Giles' Community Garden in Willenhall.

From my stand, I spoke with residents and whg staff about the importance of nature connection for our health and wellbeing, and how they could get involved in local nature-based activities. I also shared updates on our Purple Horizons project in Walsall – a collaborative effort to help more people connect with nature and take action to protect it.

Residents were eager to share their own experiences:

"I am so proud of what we've achieved in our garden, and it's a nice feeling to let other people enjoy it too."

"I can't tell you how much nature has helped me. I was really struggling and it just helped pull me out of a rut and focus on something."

Throughout the day, I offered tips on planting for both wildlife and wellbeing – such as the “one for me, one for the bees” approach. For example, when growing a flowering herb like chives, keep one set for cutting and eating and let the other bloom for pollinators.

I also had the pleasure of watching the whg Green Growing Spaces Gardening Competition awards ceremony. The three categories – Best Garden/Most Creative, Best Sustainable/Inclusive Garden, and Community Spirit/Most Improved – showcased residents' incredible creativity, commitment, and love for their green spaces. The passion was truly inspiring. See whg's Facebook post about the event [here](#), and event [video](#)!

It was a wonderful day celebrating community, nature, and shared green spaces – and I look forward to seeing what whg has planned next to keep residents growing, greening, and connecting.

Reflections by Amber Marquand



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](#)

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

REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT



Birmingham Parks Survey 2025

Have your say on our Birmingham Parks. **The survey** wants to find out how satisfied you are with your local parks and what is important to you when visiting the parks in Birmingham. We would be grateful if you could take a few moments to share your thoughts.

HELP!

Let's Talk Toilets!



There's ample evidence that toilets make green and blue spaces accessible to a wider range of people, including vulnerable groups whose wellbeing may particularly benefit from spending time in nature. However, managers of green and blue spaces are often concerned about misuse or vandalism of toilets.

Laura Brown, Health & Environment Higher Officer for London is investigating whether composting toilets might be less prone to misuse than conventional ones. To begin with, Laura wants to better understand existing toilet provision in green and blue spaces.

Take the survey (less than 5 minutes)



Worcestershire - Would you like to learn new skills?

We're looking for volunteers to help manage our beautiful heathlands. This is a great opportunity to learn new skills, make new friends and improve your wellbeing by spending some active time outdoors. If you would like to know more about what it's like to volunteer and what you might be doing then [take a look at my blog](#), which gives a detailed look into **volunteering on the heathlands at Dropping Well Farm, The Devil's Spittleful and Blackstone Farm Fields**.

The next work party will take place on Friday 26th September from 10:30am until 3pm.

If you would like to join these work parties or would like more information before you do, please email volunteer@worcestershiREWildlifeTrust.org.

WMCA Local Nature Recovery Strategy Consultation - Have your say!

Take part in the public consultation to help prepare the West Midlands Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

There are 48 LNRSs covering the whole of England – the aim is for them to protect and improve nature and the environment.

An Introduction [video](#) to West Midlands LNRS explains the context whilst full details of the strategy and consultation response surveys can be found [here](#).

The West Midlands LNRS consultation is running from **Friday 15th August till Friday 12th September**.

The WMCA LNRS gives a clearer picture of where nature needs the most help in the West Midlands, and what the priorities should be. Everyone has and still can play a part, from councils and businesses right through to community groups and individuals. It has the potential to make a real difference for nature across the region.

As residents living and working in the WMCA region, you can **have your say** on what the strategy looks like and make your priorities for nature and greenspace known!

WHAT'S ON FOR NATURE #1



Nature Prescribing Course (10 Week Course)



Interested in Nature and how it can assist with your wellbeing?

Nature is really important for our well being and connecting to nature improves mood, reduces feelings of stress, helps people to feel more relaxed and many other benefits. This course, coproduced in partnership with RSPB will help you find time and space to connect to nature, wherever you are across the Black Country!

During the sessions you will have chance to:

- Connect to nature in different ways online or in person
- Learn about what nature is showing us in each season
- Discover flora, fauna and animals all around us in our beautiful Black Country urban spaces
- Build a relationship to nature that helps us to understand how we can give back to nature

Weds 17th Sept- 19th Nov: 10.00am - 12.00pm
Wolverhampton with Online Option

contact
info@therecoverycollege.co.uk
for more information or to book

Thursday 18th September - 20th November: 1.45pm - 2.45pm
Walsall Face to Face



ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2025
CLIMATE ACTION
THROUGH GREENSPACES
The role of parks in a changing world

Wednesday
12th November 2025

Derby Conference Centre
London Road, Alvaston,
Derby DE24 8UX

For further information,
and to book, please visit:



[www.midlandsparksforum.co.uk/
conference-2025-information/](http://www.midlandsparksforum.co.uk/conference-2025-information/)

07384 312840

pm@midlandsparksforum.co.uk



NHS Forests Conference Online

2nd October

10am - 4pm



Healing Spaces, Thriving Communities: real-life strategies for outdoor environments and health

The conference will explore how healthcare sites can work with communities and volunteers to develop their green spaces in a cost-effective and practical way.

We have taken the decision to charge a small fee for tickets this year (£5). As a charity, we really appreciate your financial support to help us do our work. However, if you need a free ticket to attend, just send us an email at info@nhsforest.org, and we'll be happy to send you one for free—no questions asked.

GET YOUR TICKETS NOW



WHAT'S ON FOR NATURE #2



'Nature for Health Resource Hub' for integrating Nature Into Healthcare Sites

Launched 5th June by Natural England (NE) and the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare (CSH).

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 to embed 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...



Let's Get Out There

This Girl Can is helping more women enjoy the benefits of being active outdoors. Being outside in green and blue spaces is great for your health and confidence.

What you can try:

- 🌲 Forestry England – women-only running groups in forests.
- 🚣 Canal & River Trust – free women-and-girls paddleboarding, canoeing and towpath walks in cities.
- 🏞️ National Trust – join walks, runs, and water sports
- 👣 Ramblers – free short Wellbeing Walks and 4,000+ tried-and-tested routes to follow.
- 🚣 Paddle UK – learn canoeing, kayaking, or paddleboarding safely.
- 🗺️ Ordnance Survey (OS Maps) – guides, beginner tips and routes for hiking, cycling, paddling, and more.
- 🏠 YHA – self-guided walks from hostels, plus the autumn Festival of Walking.
- 🏃 Parkrun – free, weekly 5k runs/walks for all ages /levels
- 🧘 Park Yoga – free outdoor yoga sessions on Sunday mornings in parks nationwide.

Or just start small from your doorstep:

- Walk the kids to the park.
- Stretch in your garden or courtyard.
- Take a short stroll along a nearby path.

Trees for Healthcare bundles 2025-2026



The NHS Forest free tree scheme is open again with a wide variety of tree bundles to choose from. It's a smaller scheme compared to the previous two years and trees will be available on a first come, first served basis. Order now to ensure you get your choice of trees.

[More information here](#)



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 Motte Meadows, Chartley Moss, Aqualate Mere, Wymbunbury Moss and Wheaton Aston NNRs) All event details on Eventbrite, or please get in touch with [Amber](#).



Keep an eye out for continuing and brand new [Park Yoga](#) venues for 2025 season (4th May - Sept)

FREE yoga in the park every Sunday from 09:30 - 10:30.

- [Sandwell](#)
- [Leominster](#)
- [Sutton Coldfield](#)
- [Dudley](#)
- [Telford](#)
- [Kidderminster](#)
- [Worcester City](#)
- [Wolverhampton](#)

TRAINING ON OFFER

ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

OCTOBER 2025 - JULY 2026

18-25, West Mids based and want to have your voice heard?

Join us on our FREE programme!

LEADERSHIP

Develop transferable skills for your CV, whatever your career goals.

ACTIVISM

Learn how to spark positive change in your local area and beyond.

COMMUNITY

Connect and build relationships with passionate, like-minded people.

Scan to apply!

@elp2uk #ELP2

ELP2

Delivered by: Shropshire Wildlife Trust The Wildlife Trusts supported by: COMMUNITY FUND

🌱 Applications for ELP2 open until end of Sep 2025 🌱

Are you 18-25, based in the West Midlands, and passionate about the environment and keen to gain leadership skills and experience?

♥ The Environmental Leadership Programme 2 (ELP2) is free and here to help you connect with nature, build leadership skills, and make a real impact on climate and your community.

✨ Powered by @wildlifetrusts & @shropshirewildlifetrust

🎉 Funded by @tnlcommunityfund

[Find out more](#)

🌱 FREE Gardening Workshops this Autumn @ Roots to Fruit

Get stuck in with hands-on sessions. All include free drinks and are funded by National Lottery. **Booking essential.**

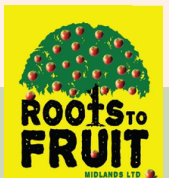
🐸 **Pond Power: Aquascaping with Marginals & Islands** - Plant pond edges, build floating islands, and learn how to create a wildlife-friendly water feature.
Fri 19 Sept | 1:30-3:30pm

🧱 **Brick It Right: Practical Wall-Building Workshop** - Learn the basics of bricklaying, mortar mixing, and wall finishing. **Mon 22 Sept | 10am-12:30pm**

🏠 **Slab It Down: Laying the Perfect Patio** - Master slab laying and patio building.
Fri 3 Oct | 1:30-3:30pm

🌻 **Sow It, Grow It: Lawns & Wildflower Meadows** - Learn how to prep soil and sow for thriving lawns and wildflower areas. **Tues 7 Oct | 10am-12:30pm**

[How to find us](#) - 51 Chester Road, Streetly, Sutton Coldfield B74 2HH (shared site with Oakdene Nurseries). Contact [Jonathan Ensell](#) with questions.



NETWORKS TO BE A PART OF



Join the Green Social Prescribing Innovation Community



National
Academy
for Social
Prescribing

A national network for anyone working to connect people with nature to support their health and wellbeing.

Whether you're from healthcare, local government, the environment or voluntary sector, this is a space to share ideas, access resources, hear from others doing similar work, and collaborate on solutions.

By joining, you'll be part of a growing movement helping to make GSP more inclusive, accessible and effective—so that more people can benefit from the power of nature. [Find out more](#)

Nature Towns & Cities Network

A programme set up by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, National Trust and Natural England, will tackle lack of access to nature and greenspace by helping local authorities work together with local communities and partners to bring nature into every neighbourhood for all to enjoy.

Please see the [website](#) to find out more about **The Nature Towns and Cities network - which is open to all, and free to be a member**. Membership includes events, training and resources for community organisations and charities, as well as local government. See the 'How it will work' section on [Nature Towns and Cities](#) and [What's on – Nature Towns and Cities](#)



Nature Connectedness Network



Nature Connectedness Network is open to everyone and provides the opportunity to explore when spending time in, and connecting with nature, can play a role in different areas of work. Do consider becoming a member as you have the opportunity to join various working Groups and Nodes such as nature connectedness for **Health and Wellbeing** or **Children and Young People**.

Working Groups and Nodes

Are you interested in joining a thematic sub-group (Node) or a working group? The focus and activity of these nodes and groups will be shaped by the membership and thus may change over time. Some nodes currently meet every 2-3 months to share and discuss projects, ideas and issues. Others are not currently active, but indicating your interest will help us identify areas for future nodes and working groups.

- ☐ Health and Wellbeing
- ☐ Education/Children and Young People
- ☐ Arts and Culture
- ☐ Law and Policy
- ☐ Business and Organisations
- ☐ Environment and Sustainability
- ☐ Food and Farming
- ☐ Campaigns
- ☐ Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- ☐ Postgraduate

NEWS, REPORTS & PUBLICATIONS

A rare visitor to the Black Country

BBC Article



The large copper butterfly, extinct in Britain since the 1850s, has made a surprise appearance at **Bumble Hole and Warrens Hall Nature Reserves in Dudley and Rowley Regis**. The sighting has thrilled visitors and highlighted how important it is to care for local pollinators.

You can help by planting nectar-rich flowers, supporting local reserves, and volunteering with groups like Butterfly Conservation!

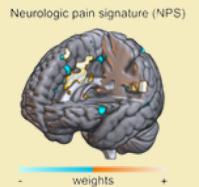
Watching nature scenes can reduce pain, new study shows

A University of Exeter study found that watching nature scenes—like forests or rivers—reduced pain perception in participants receiving mild electric shocks. Brain scans showed lower activity in regions tied to pain processing, compared to when people viewed urban or indoor settings. The findings suggest virtual nature could be a simple, drug-free tool to help manage pain, especially when access to real nature is limited.

Read more



University
of Exeter



The
Guardian

Human Connection to Nature Has Declined 60%

A major new study has revealed that our connection to nature has dropped by 60% in just 200 years. Researchers found words like “meadow”, “blossom” and “river” disappearing from books and everyday language, reflecting how people spend less time outdoors. The authors warn this “extinction of experience” matters most for children, since early contact with nature is vital for health, wellbeing, and shaping lifelong care for the environment.

Read more

HOMES
& GARDENS

Gardening as Therapy: Healing One Plot at a Time

A horticultural therapist with over a decade of experience shares **five transformative benefits of gardening**: improved mental health, boosted confidence, better physical wellbeing, stronger social bonds, and a deeper connection to the natural world—from tending to flower beds to growing your own food.

It's a hands-on reminder that nature isn't just good for us—it's healing.

Read more