

HEALTH & NATURE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

September 2025

Natural England West Midlands



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WELCOME TO THE SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER

September is when hedgerows really come into their own. Clusters of hawthorn, elder and rowan berries are starting to show, a welcome feast for birds and small mammals getting ready for the colder months ahead. You'll spot them whether you're wandering through Sutton Park, strolling the paths around Walsall Arboretum, or just a rural lane.

*These splashes of colour are a reminder of how generous nature can be. If you're tempted to gather a few berries for yourself, take a look at this lovely [**Wildlife Trusts guide to safe and mindful foraging**](#). It's full of tips on how to forage responsibly, making sure there's plenty left for wildlife too.*

Lots of exciting stuff in the WMCA region this month - make sure to check out the different networks, opportunities to have your say, and funding on offer.

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!

METTAMINDS

Mindfulness in Nature at Walsall Arboretum



When partners came together for a Mindfulness in Nature session at Walsall Arboretum, it created space to explore how simple practices outdoors can support health and wellbeing. The session, led by Amrit of Mettaminds, was attended by two social prescribers, members of the Healthy Spaces Team, and myself.

Together we learnt Tai Chi principles to promote circulation and openness, practised “nature-synchronised breathing” – matching our breath to the sway of leaves or the rhythm of the wind – and walked slowly through the park, pausing to notice details such as the katsura tree with its toffee-scented leaves.

For the social prescribers, the chance to slow down in nature was particularly valuable. As one participant reflected, “*we wouldn’t be able to survive without Amrit’s sessions.*” The discussion that followed underlined the importance of making time for nature connection as part of everyday mental health.

From Potting to Partnerships, in Birmingham



When Maddie and Kyra met through Natural England’s **Let’s Get Potting project**, which recently reconvened at a networking event at Thrive Birmingham – a charity in King’s Heath Park that uses gardening and nature to support health and wellbeing – it opened the door to a new partnership with Midland Mencap, a leading charity for people with learning disabilities, their families and Carers.

In August, Midland Mencap’s group visited Kyra (Community Engagement Officer) at Thrive’s gardens for a mindful sensory tour, exploring herbs through touch and scent, making bird feeders, and propagating sage to take home. The day finished with cups of freshly brewed herbal tea – enjoyed more by some than others – but it gave everyone a chance to share a new experience together.

This autumn, Maddie (Community Wellbeing Support Worker) will shadow Kyra in her community engagement role, building on that first connection and learning how nature can help bring communities together.



MORE SPOTLIGHTS

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



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Community
Environment
Network

Supporting communities and the environment



The WMCA Community Environment Network

“My main aspiration for the Network is to not only support environmental action within communities across the region, but to amplify and showcase the amazing work communities deliver every day to improve lives and the places where we live. There are so many passionate people working across the region and personally, I’m most looking forward to bringing everyone together, learning from each other, and turning good ideas into action.”

Katie Jepson, Project Manager – Environment Behaviour Change, WMCA

Katie’s words sum it up: the Community Environment Network is about people coming together. It’s for anyone who cares about the climate and their community – whether you’re improving health, tackling loneliness, running a local group, or protecting green space.

We know nature makes a difference. It reduces stress, helps people get active, and brings neighbours together. The Network exists to make those benefits easier to share, offering free membership, learning events, and the chance to link up with others doing similar work.

As Health Lead on the Advisory Group, my role is to keep health and wellbeing at the heart of it all – making sure we show how powerful nature can be in supporting happier, healthier communities.

**Through a Small Sparks Grant (up to £500),
members can turn simple ideas into real projects
that bring people together and make places
better. You need to be a member to apply!**

See ‘What’s On’ pages for WMCA Community Environment Network Events coming up!

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'

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

REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT

Walsall Let's Chat Hubs



Could your group bring a bit of nature to Walsall?

The 'Let's Chat' Hub in Walsall is a friendly community space run by Walsall Community Transport, where people come together to tackle loneliness, meet others, and try new activities. Alongside colouring, games and art classes, the team would love to offer more nature connection opportunities for their visitors.

They're inviting local nature-based groups and organisations to get involved – whether that's running a small workshop, giving a short talk about the health and wellbeing benefits of nature, or simply sharing what your group does so visitors know how to get involved locally.

It's a lovely chance to reach people who may not usually step into greenspaces, and to spark conversations about how nature can support everyday health and happiness.

Get in touch on: aking@walsallct.org.uk

HELP!

LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY SURVEYS

A reminder that the West Midlands still have 3 LNRS out for public consultation - huge milestones worth celebration!

This means they are currently live on the council websites, complete with map and written strategy. Please take a look through and add comments through the websites:

- [Gloucestershire LNRS](#)

Survey closes on 19 October 2025, at 5pm.

- [Shropshire LNRS](#)

Survey closes at midnight Weds 15 Oct 2025.

- [Worcestershire LNRS](#)

Survey closes Friday 26 September 2025

- ([West Midlands Combined Authority LNRS](#) closed 12th September)

Birmingham Parks Survey 2025



Birmingham City Council is inviting residents to share their views on local parks—how satisfied you are and how well you think the council is performing. **Every response helps better understand how people use and value our parks and how to improve!**

Closing date: **10 November 2025**

[Take the survey here](#)

Call for Collaboration: Connecting People & Nature

Researchers from Birmingham, Coventry and beyond are working on how nature, mindfulness and compassion can improve wellbeing and encourage pro-environmental behaviours. Most existing research on nature and wellbeing comes from narrow groups (often white, middle-class, US/Australia). They're deliberately working with diverse UK communities to make findings more relevant. Their projects range from mini nature labs to partnerships with Birmingham Botanical Gardens, with a strong focus on reaching diverse communities often underrepresented in research.

They're looking to connect with local organisations and stakeholders to co-create projects, share findings, and explore funding opportunities.

Contact [Dr Kiki Giannou](#)

WHAT'S ON FOR NATURE #1



West Midlands
Combined Authority

Community
Environment
Network

Supporting communities and the environment



Calling all Community Environment Network members – don't miss these events!

These events are a great opportunity to meet fellow community organisations with shared aims to grow a greener West Midlands.

It's FREE to come along, meet fellow members and see inspiring demonstrations.

Walsall Manor Farm Community Association event 10th October

Ekho Collective Dudley event 13th October

Tour and Talk with Ekho Collective

Monday 13 October 1-5pm
Hawbush Community Gardens, Dudley

Calling all **Community Environment Network** members – don't miss this event!

Join us to experience Ekho Collective's incredible nature and community space at this exclusive open day.

This is a fantastic opportunity to connect with fellow members, learn how nature can enhance our wellbeing, and get inspired by exciting demonstrations.

FREE EVENT!



Scan the QR code
or visit
<http://bit.ly/4p6kK98>
to register.

Walsall Community Environment Day

Friday 10 October 11-2pm
Manor Farm Community Association, Walsall

Calling all **Community Environment Network** members – don't miss this event!

Come along to connect with fellow organisations and enjoy some friendly networking.

This is a fantastic opportunity to share ideas, gain inspiration to grow your projects, and take part in fun activities.

FREE EVENT!



Scan the QR code
or visit
<http://bit.ly/3VvnHCp>
to register.

Creating Healthy Childhoods WEBINAR

Wednesday 24 September, 2-3pm (online)



How can we give every child the chance to grow up healthy, happy and connected to the world around them? Join Intelligent Health and an inspiring panel – including Dr William Bird MBE, Adrian Bethune, Paul Lindley OBE, Sarah Brown and Ingrid Skeels – as they share ideas on play, wellbeing, community, and the freedom for children to thrive outdoors.

[Save your place here](#)

WHAT'S ON FOR NATURE #2



tcpa

FREE Webinar - Tackling Health Inequalities through Green & Blue Infrastructure

Discover how parks, waterways, and nature-based planning can reduce health inequalities. Hear from leading researchers and local case studies, and take part in a live Q&A.

Thursday 23 October 2025, 12:00-1:30 pm

[Register here](#)

NHS Forest Conference 2025



Healing Spaces, Thriving Communities: real-life strategies for outdoor environments and health. We have taken the decision to charge a small fee of £5 for tickets this year. 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.

Date - 2 October 2025

Time - 10am-4pm

The event will be **online** via Zoom this year -

[Book your place now](#)

NatureWell Woodland Wellbeing Course

- At Bramblewood in Worcester



Why not join us in the woods this autumn?

This **free** six-week course offers adults the chance to slow down and reconnect with nature in the beautiful Bramblewood woodland. Guided by the 5 Pathways to Nature Connectedness, each session includes gentle, mindful activities, time for reflection, and a simple plant-based lunch. It's designed to support relaxation, boost mood, and improve wellbeing—particularly for those experiencing stress, low mood or anxiety.

Thursdays, 2nd Oct - 13th Nov 2025

10:30am - 2:30pm

Bramblewood, Worcester

[Register 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](#).

TRAINING ON OFFER



Two full-day workshops at the beautiful **Winterbourne House & Botanic Garden**, part of the University of Birmingham.

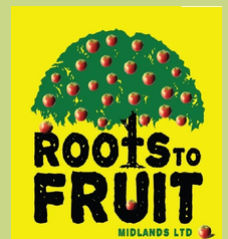
These workshops focus on organic gardening techniques and environmentally sustainable methods in the vegetable garden. Not only will you gain practical skills, but you'll also enjoy learning in the inspiring surroundings of Winterbourne's historic gardens.

- Workshop times: 10:00am – 3:00pm
- Location: Winterbourne House & Botanic Garden, Birmingham
- Dates & booking links:
 - Monday **6th October** 2025 – [Prepare the Ground](#)
 - Monday **10th November** 2025 – [Sustainable Techniques](#)

£58 + booking fee per workshop



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NETWORKS TO BE A PART OF

Green Social Prescribing Innovation Community

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.

Nature Connectedness Network

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**.

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](#)

NEW RESOURCES

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STIRLING

New guidance to help people with poor mental health and substance dependence get out into nature



Practical new guides to help health and social care providers support people with poor mental health and substance dependence through nature-based activities. Step-by-step advice on engaging participants, managing risks, using creative tools like art and journaling, and ensuring ongoing support after programmes.



How to play

1. Look out of the car windows (safely!) as you travel.
2. Shout out what you see - animals, birds, even interesting trees.
3. Use the score guide below to collect points.
4. Keep a tally - the person with the most points at the end of the holiday wins.

Volvo's **"Roadside Nature"** **campaign** offers a printable **free activity pack** for kids—packed with creative, nature-themed games to entertain them during car trips. It's collaboration with Eden Project and Steve Backshall aims to replace backseat chaos with calm curiosity, nature connection and safer, more enjoyable journeys for families.



Royal College of
General Practitioners



Nature moments - quick tips for healthcare settings

Quick ways to bring nature into your healthcare setting.

Whether you have just a few moments or the capacity to lead a larger initiative, download [this short document](#), developed by Forestry England with support from the Royal College of General Practitioners, to discover how you can start building a greener, more restorative healthcare environment today.

From the creator, Ellen Devine, at Forestry England:

created based on my personal experience of the benefits of nature during multiple inpatient hospital stays, combined with knowledge and resources I've found through my job. It's been reviewed and supported by the RCGP and will be included in a sustainability e-learning module they're currently developing.