

THE URBAN WILDLIFE OF BIRMINGHAM AND THE BLACK COUNTRY



**Birmingham &
Black Country**
Wildlife Trust

INTRODUCTION



Birmingham and the Black Country are filled with incredible wildlife. Despite its high urbanisation, the area is much wilder than you might think.

Our area is considered one of the birthplaces and powerhouses of the industrial revolution, Birmingham, with all its concrete and urban motorways, has been considered one of Britain's premier motor cities. But despite all of this, between the busy roads, houses and industrial estates, wildlife is living side by side to humans in gardens, parks, and along canals and train lines.

From fabulous mushrooms to stunning birds, Birmingham and the Black Country is home to thousands of different forms of wildlife. Over 11,000 species of plants, animals and fungi have been found in the area. Even in urban and industrial landscapes, nature is beautifully present if you take the time to look.

Living side by side with so many great animals, fungi and plants is a privilege, but this wildlife is fragile. Across Birmingham and the Black Country,

habitat loss and fragmentation, pollution and climate change are leaving fewer safe places for wildlife to live. Our precious species are disappearing. Our cities and towns are turning from green to grey.

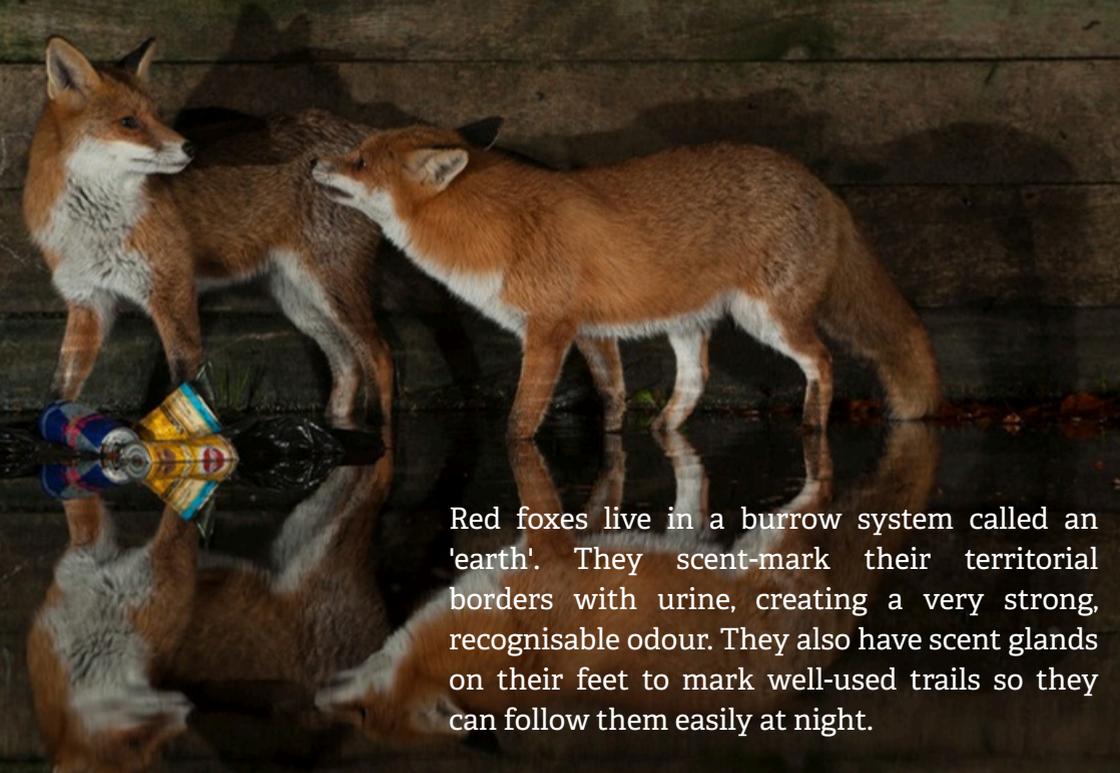
The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country was the first urban Wildlife Trust to be established and now, over 45 years later, we continue working to conserve biodiversity, improve the environment and raise awareness and understanding of wildlife issues in the area. We restore habitats, bring back species, and care for reserves across Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton so that people and wildlife can thrive side by side for years to come.

Read on to learn more about 18 species of fantastic flora, fauna and fungi that you can spot in Birmingham and the Black Country.

RED FOX

Famed for their cunning and stealth, these orange-red dogs with their bushy tails can be seen in towns and the countryside. They come out mostly at night but can also be seen during the day if you're lucky!

The red fox is our only wild member of the dog family. They 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. A male fox, called a dog makes a barking noise whereas the females, called vixens, make a spine-chilling screaming sound.



Red foxes live in a burrow system called an 'earth'. They scent-mark their territorial borders with urine, creating a very strong, recognisable odour. They also have scent glands on their feet to mark well-used trails so they can follow them easily at night.

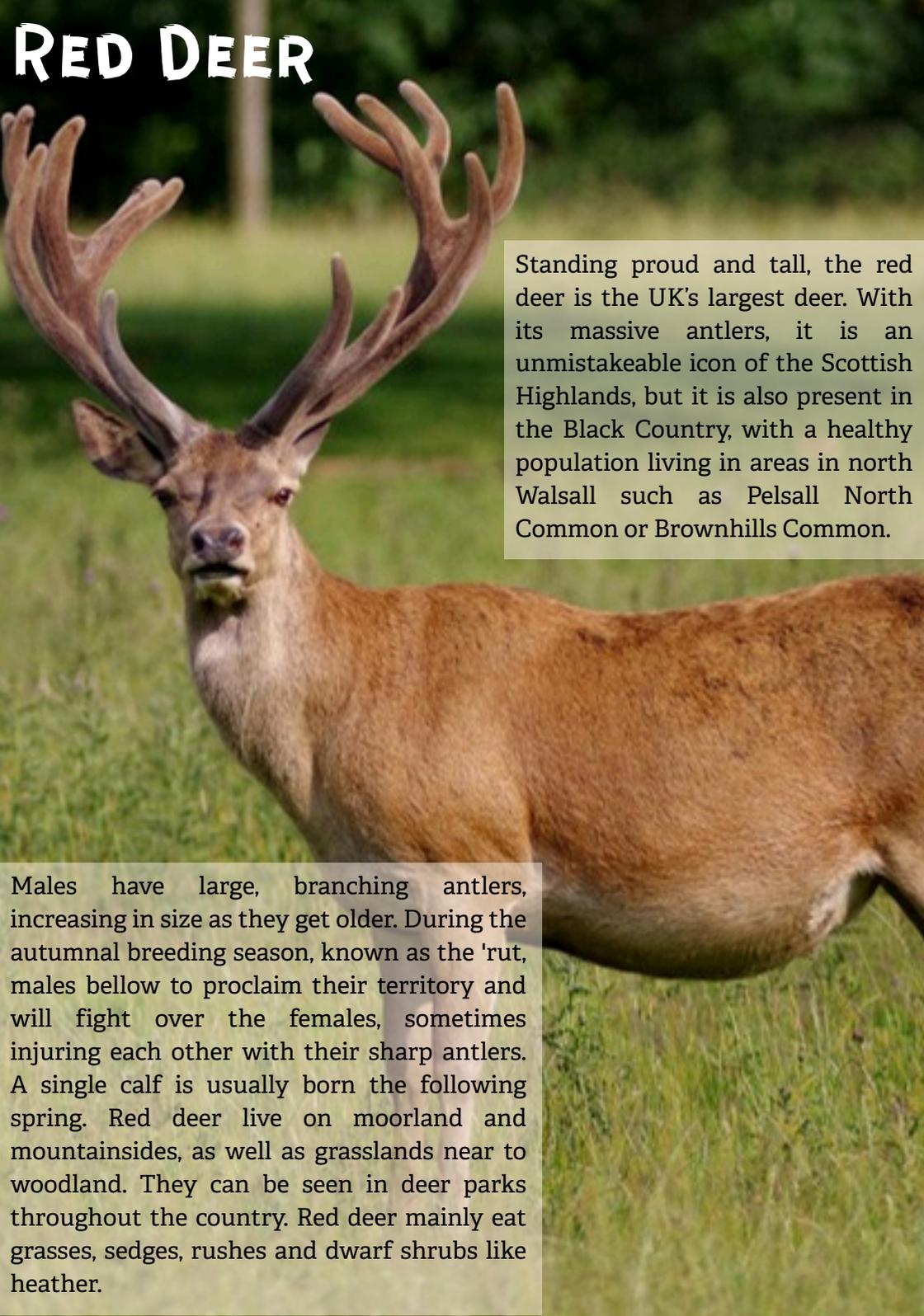
EUROPEAN HEDGEHOG

Round, brown and famously covered in spines, the hedgehog is the UK's most familiar wild animal. They can be spotted in parks and gardens where bushes provide the perfect daytime getaway! They love long grass full of insects to feast on once the sun has set.

Hedgehogs eat all kinds of invertebrates, as well as amphibians, birds' eggs and anything else they can catch; they particularly like big, crunchy beetles and earthworms, making them a gardener's best friend. Hedgehogs hibernate over winter, from about November to April, in a nest of leaves or logs called a 'hibernaculum'.



RED DEER

A large red deer with impressive, branching antlers stands in a grassy field. The deer is facing slightly to the left, looking towards the camera. Its fur is a rich reddish-brown color. The background is a soft-focus green field with some trees in the distance.

Standing proud and tall, the red deer is the UK's largest deer. With its massive antlers, it is an unmistakable icon of the Scottish Highlands, but it is also present in the Black Country, with a healthy population living in areas in north Walsall such as Pelsall North Common or Brownhills Common.

Males have large, branching antlers, increasing in size as they get older. During the autumnal breeding season, known as the 'rut', males bellow to proclaim their territory and will fight over the females, sometimes injuring each other with their sharp antlers. A single calf is usually born the following spring. Red deer live on moorland and mountainsides, as well as grasslands near to woodland. They can be seen in deer parks throughout the country. Red deer mainly eat grasses, sedges, rushes and dwarf shrubs like heather.

WATER VOLE

The water vole is under serious threat from habitat loss and predation by the American mink. Found along our waterways, it is similar-looking to the brown rat, but with a blunt nose, small ears and furry tail.



The water vole lives along rivers, streams and ditches, around ponds and lakes, and in marshes, reedbeds and areas of wet moorland. In our area you might be lucky to spot one along the canals or in the River Rea. Look out for the signs of water voles, such as burrows in the riverbank, often with a nibbled 'lawn' of grass around the entrance.

Water voles like to sit and eat in the same place, so piles of nibbled grass and stems may be found by the water's edge, showing a distinctive 45 degree, angled-cut at the ends. 'Latrines' of rounded, cigar-shaped droppings may also be spotted. Water voles start to breed in spring, having three to four litters a year of up to five young.

COMMON PIPISTRELLE

The common pipistrelle is our smallest bat: weighing only around 3-7 grams, it's so small it can fit inside a matchbox! They feed on midges, moths and other flying insects that they find in the dark by using echolocation. A single pipistrelle can eat up to 3000 midges a night, which is impressive for a creature so small!



A hardy species, well-adapted to the urban environment, it is the species you are most likely to encounter if you go out looking for bats. The common pipistrelle has dark, golden-brown fur, a slightly paler underside and a dark mask around the face. Its flight is rapid with lots of twists and turns. They roost in tree holes, bat boxes and even the roof spaces of houses, often in small colonies.



Look out for common pipistrelles darting about as they hunt for insects in gardens or around streetlights just after sunset. They hibernate over winter, so the best time to spot them is from April to October.

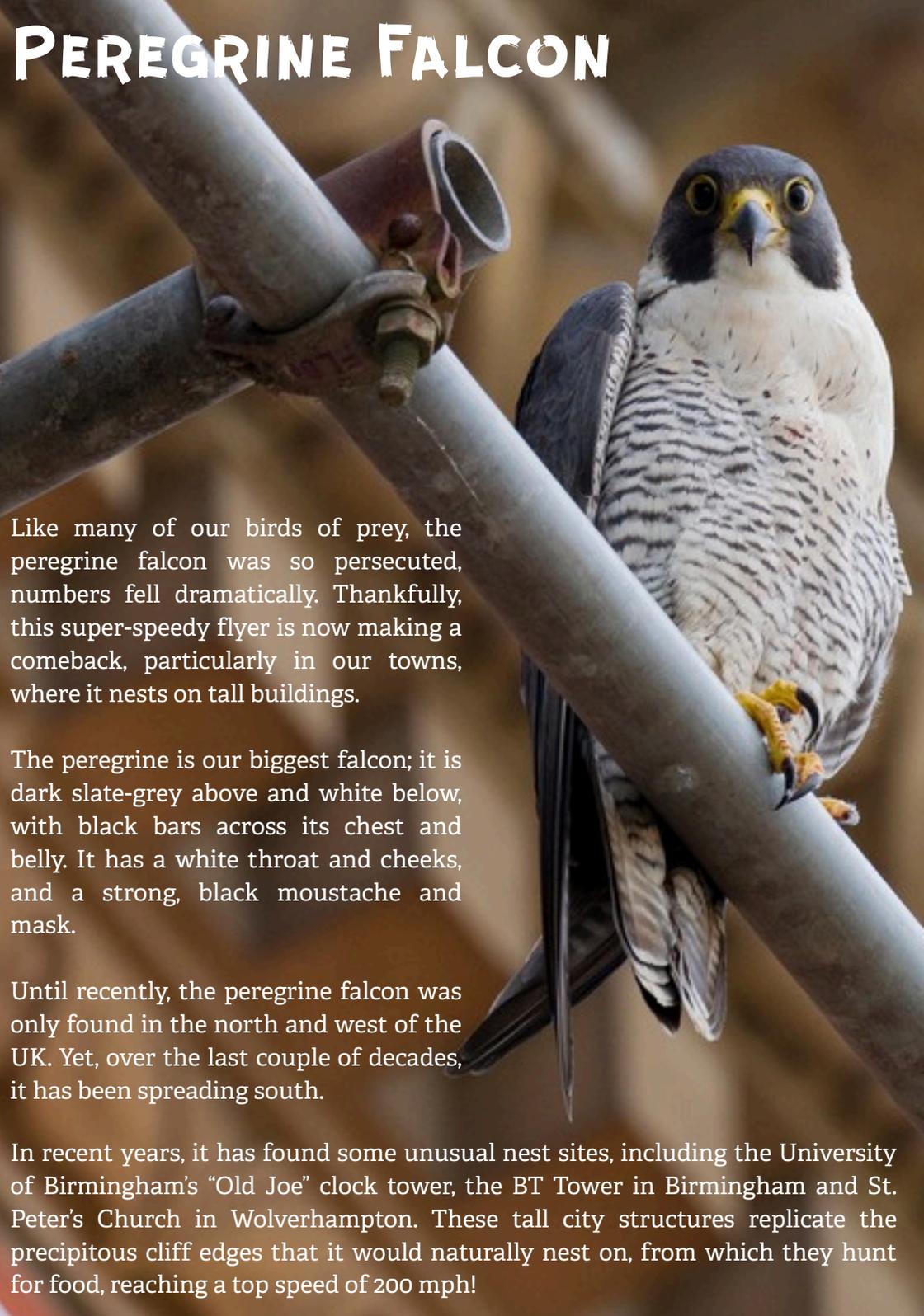
PEREGRINE FALCON

Like many of our birds of prey, the peregrine falcon was so persecuted, numbers fell dramatically. Thankfully, this super-speedy flyer is now making a comeback, particularly in our towns, where it nests on tall buildings.

The peregrine is our biggest falcon; it is dark slate-grey above and white below, with black bars across its chest and belly. It has a white throat and cheeks, and a strong, black moustache and mask.

Until recently, the peregrine falcon was only found in the north and west of the UK. Yet, over the last couple of decades, it has been spreading south.

In recent years, it has found some unusual nest sites, including the University of Birmingham's "Old Joe" clock tower, the BT Tower in Birmingham and St. Peter's Church in Wolverhampton. These tall city structures replicate the precipitous cliff edges that it would naturally nest on, from which they hunt for food, reaching a top speed of 200 mph!



LITTLE EGRET

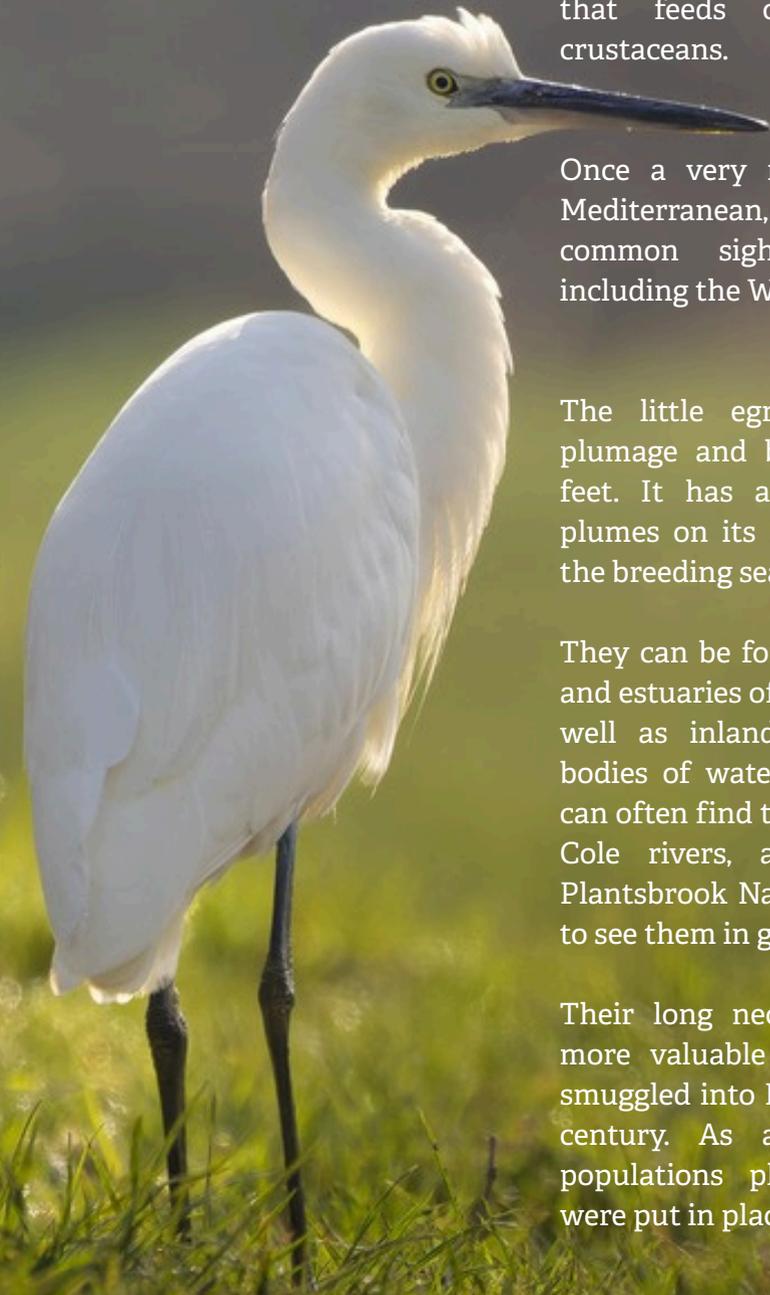
The little egret is a small, white heron that feeds on small fish and crustaceans.

Once a very rare visitor from the Mediterranean, little egrets are now a common sight around England, including the West Midlands.

The little egret has an all-white plumage and black legs and yellow feet. It has a black bill and long plumes on its head and neck during the breeding season.

They can be found around the coasts and estuaries of England and Wales, as well as inland next to rivers and bodies of water. In Birmingham you can often find them along the Rea and Cole rivers, and in the pool of Plantsbrook Nature Reserve it is easy to see them in greater numbers.

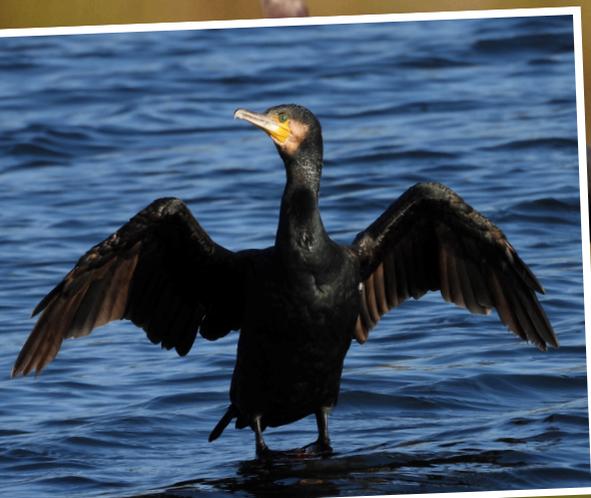
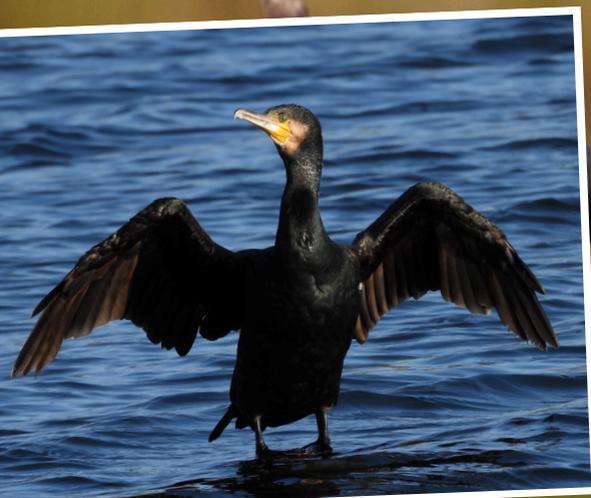
Their long neck plumes were once more valuable than gold and were smuggled into Europe during the 19th century. As a result, little egret populations plummeted until laws were put in place to protect them.



CORMORANT

The cormorant is an excellent fisher. It is most easily spotted when it is perched, stretching its wings out in the sun to dry after a dive. The UK holds internationally important wintering numbers of cormorant, and they are a common bird to spot in large lakes in parks across our region such as Cannon Hill, Edgbaston Reservoir or Sandwell Valley.

Cormorants are large, shiny black waterbirds, with a white patch on the thigh during the summer breeding season. Young birds are dark brown above and white below. They nest on low cliffs around the coasts, or in colonies in trees on lakes and flooded gravel pits. Quite often, they can be spotted drying off, following a dive whilst hunting, as shown below.



STARLING



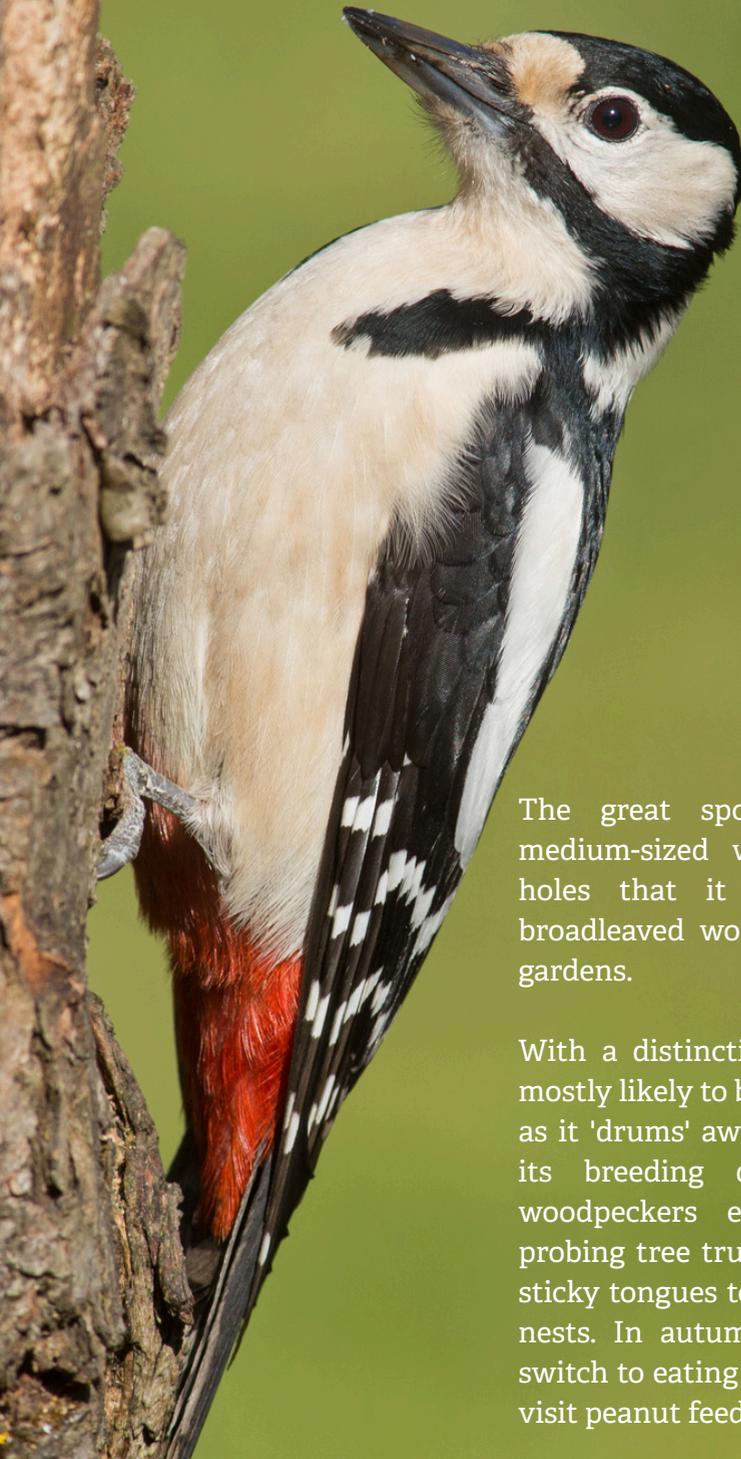
Characterised by its beautiful purple-and-green sheen to its oily-black feathers, the starling is a familiar bird of farmland, parkland, gardens and towns. Sociable birds, starlings spend a lot of their time in large flocks, roosting and performing sweeping, aerial displays - they can often be seen moving fluidly through a wintry sky.

Starlings eat insects and fruit, and will visit birdtables and feeders. They make untidy nests in holes in trees or in buildings, in which the female lays five to seven eggs. Both parents raise the chicks.

Despite starlings still being very common throughout the West Midlands, their numbers have decreased – back in the 1970s it was still common to see starling murmurations over New Street in Birmingham. Nowadays, the place where you will most definitely spot starlings is around the Bull Ring Open Market, where they are constantly looking out for a tasty treat from the produce and food stalls.



GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER



The great spotted woodpecker is a medium-sized woodpecker. It nests in holes that it excavates in trees in broadleaved woodlands, large parks and gardens.

With a distinctive, bouncing flight, it is mostly likely to be heard, rather than seen, as it 'drums' away at a tree trunk during its breeding displays. Great spotted woodpeckers eat insects and larvae, probing tree trunks with their extremely sticky tongues to extract them from their nests. In autumn and winter, they will switch to eating berries and nuts, and will visit peanut feeders in gardens.

SMOOTH NEWT

The smooth newt is grey-brown, with an orange belly and neat black spots all over. In the breeding season, males have a smooth crest running the full length of their body and tail.



You are likely to spot the smooth newt in your garden or local pond.

It breeds in water in summer and spends the rest of the year in grassland and woodland, hibernating over winter among tree roots and in old walls.

The smooth newt is also known as the 'common newt' and, as the name would suggest, is the species you are most likely to find in your garden pond.



HAIRY-FOOTED FLOWER BEE



The hairy-footed flower bee can be seen in gardens and parks in spring and summer, visiting tubular flowers like red dead-nettle and comfrey. As its name suggests, it has long, orange hairs on its middle legs.

This bee emerges from hibernation from late February to March. The males, which are rusty-brown and have long, orange hairs on their middle legs and feet, emerge first and the females, which are black and furry, akin to a small bumble bee, appear a couple of weeks later.

This species is an important pollinator for early spring flowers, particularly lungworts, but also primrose, comfrey and dead-nettles. It feeds on the nectar using its long tongue. Hairy-footed flower bees will nest in soft mortar in walls, or occasionally in soil.

CUCKOOFLOWER



A sure sign that spring has arrived, the Cuckooflower blooms from April to June. You will typically find it in damp meadows and ditches, and on riverbanks.

Also commonly known as 'Lady's-smock', cuckooflower has a rosette of leaves at its base and an upright stem that bears the delicate, small, pale pink or mauve flowers. Each flower has four petals, although double-flowered varieties do appear.

It is very common to find the tiny eggs of the orange-tip butterfly on the developing seed pods of cuckooflowers, as they are the primary food source for its caterpillars.

BEE ORCHID

Bee orchids are one of a few species of orchids which notably thrive on old industrial sites with newly exposed or disturbed soil with low levels of nutrients in it. Their success growing in these alternative habitats challenges the assumption that sites changed by human activity have no conservation value.

The bee orchid's love for post-industrial and urban landscapes make it a common orchid to find around Birmingham and the Black Country.

The bee orchid gets its name from its main pollinator - a species of bee - which is thought to have driven the evolution of the flowers. To attract the bees that will pollinate the plant, it has flowers that mimic their appearance. Drawing them in with their appearance, the bee attempts to mate. As they land on the velvet-textured lip of the flower, the pollen is transferred and the poor bee is left frustrated. Sadly, the right species of bee doesn't occur in the UK, so bee orchids are self-pollinated here. Look out for their diminutive flower spikes on dry, chalk and limestone grasslands or old industrial sites from June to July.



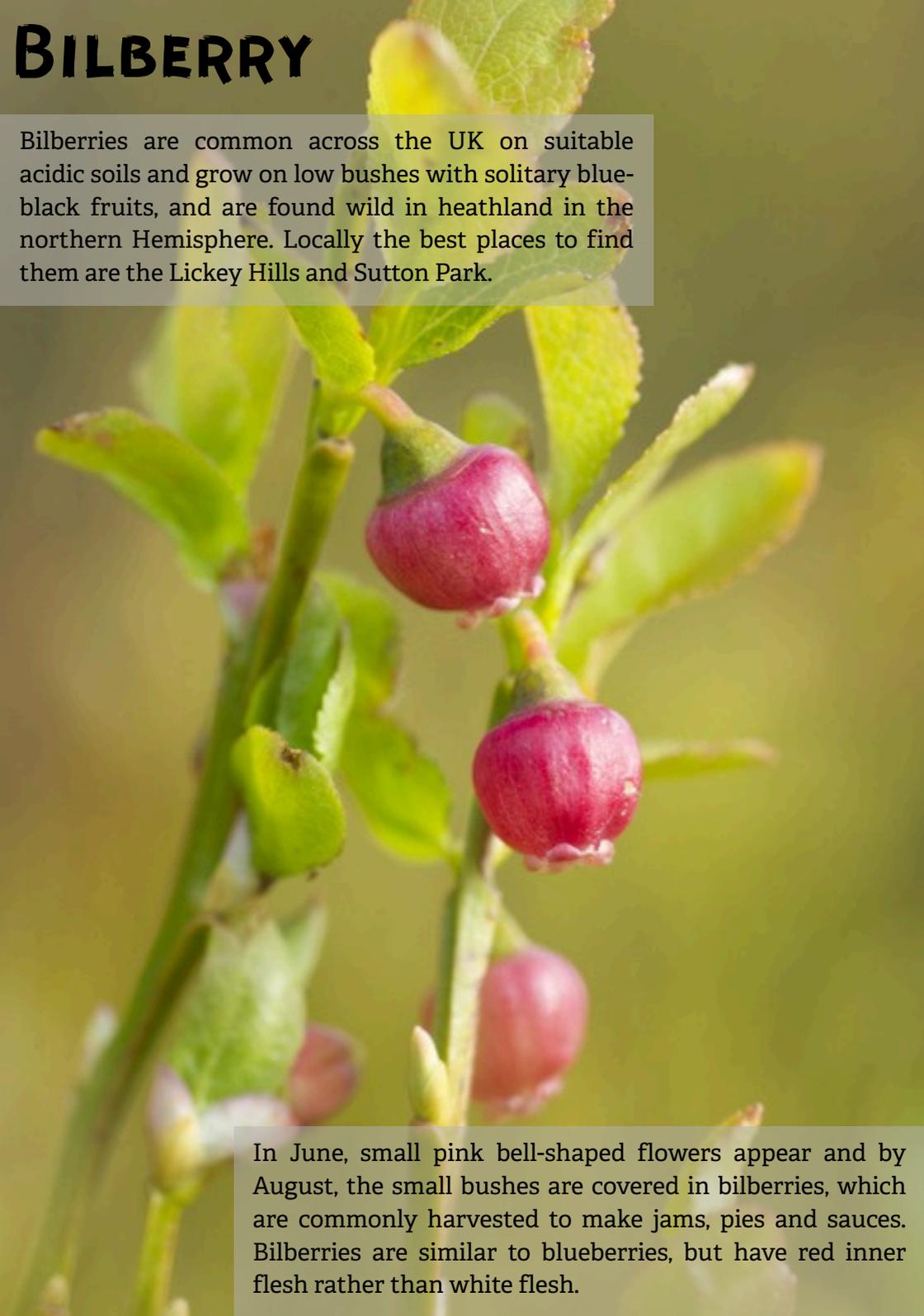
HORSE CHESTNUT



A tall, broad tree of woodlands, roadsides and parks, the introduced horse chestnut is familiar to many of us the 'conker' producing tree - its shiny, brown seeds appearing in their spiny cases in autumn.

Originally native to the mountains of northern Greece and Albania, it was introduced into the UK in 1616 and has since become naturalised. In April and May, rows of horse chestnuts lining roads and in woodlands provide a spectacular display of 'candles' - large, upright flower spikes ranging in colour from white to deep pink. In autumn, it sheds its spiny-cased seeds, known as conkers.

BILBERRY

A close-up photograph of a bilberry branch. The stem is green and woody, with several small, oval-shaped green leaves. Two prominent, round, reddish-pink berries are in focus, hanging from the stem. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a natural outdoor setting.

Bilberries are common across the UK on suitable acidic soils and grow on low bushes with solitary blue-black fruits, and are found wild in heathland in the northern Hemisphere. Locally the best places to find them are the Lickey Hills and Sutton Park.

In June, small pink bell-shaped flowers appear and by August, the small bushes are covered in bilberries, which are commonly harvested to make jams, pies and sauces. Bilberries are similar to blueberries, but have red inner flesh rather than white flesh.

SHAGGY INKCAP

The shaggy inkcap is an unmistakable fungus - its tall, white, shaggy cap providing this name and also others, such as 'lawyer's wig' and 'shaggy mane'. It is widespread and common on roadside verges, parkland, grassland and gardens, growing in small groups.



The shaggy inkcap displays a tall, narrow, cylindrical cap that is white and very 'shaggy' with 'scales' over its surface. The cap gradually opens out to a bell shape. The gills are very crowded; they are white at first, then turn pink and eventually black, dissolving from the margin of the cap until it is almost entirely gone. The shaggy inkcap has a tall, smooth, white stem with a moveable ring.

WAXCAP

Waxcaps are group of fungi that take their name from the waxy texture of their caps. The fruiting bodies of many species of waxcap are unmistakable due to the attractive bright colours, waxy or slippery cap and thick, coloured gills.

With their bright red, pink, yellow, and green colours, waxcaps are mostly found in the late summer and autumn, typically from September to November, in unimproved grasslands, including churchyards and sheep-grazed pastures. These 'waxcap grasslands' are typically poor in nutrients, having escaped 'agricultural improvements' in the form of fertilisers, pesticides and ploughing. Unfortunately, huge percentages of these grasslands have been lost in the UK in the last 80 years, which makes many species of waxcaps rare and declining.

Fortunately for our area, The Leasowes in Halesowen is home to one of the richest waxcap grasslands in England and contains several internationally rare species. Some species you can find there are the scarlet, golden and parrot waxcaps.





**Birmingham &
Black Country**
Wildlife Trust

We're Working for a Wilder Future

We work for nature's recovery across Birmingham and the Black Country; protecting, restoring and creating wildlife-rich, accessible spaces that benefit people and wildlife.

Your membership means that we can be here for generations to come.

Thank you.

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