

ALIVE IN LONDON'S WOODS

Trees for Cities, London



Enjoying London's woodlands (Source: Trees for Cities)

There's nowhere better to observe the changing seasons than a woodland. Every day, something new appears, changes colour or disappears altogether to return again as if by magic next year. The rich tapestry of woodland life keeps us in tune with the rhythm of nature. And nowhere needs this more than in London. London's woodlands are not the dark no-go areas of myth and folklore, but alive with fascinating natural phenomenon and fun activities for the entire family.

Trees for Cities is an independent charity set up in 1993 (initially as Trees for London) to work with local communities on tree planting projects. Their aim is to tackle global warming, create social cohesion and beautify cities through community, education and training initiatives in urban areas of greatest need.

Through Capital Woodlands, Trees for Cities delivers the London-wide Community and Education programme. The key tasks of their work in this programme are to raise awareness and appreciation of woodlands in London, and increase public benefit and participation in a range of woodland events and activities for local communities.

Capital Woodlands is a 3-year London Biodiversity Partnership project, which is managed by Trees for Cities and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It brings together other organisations like the Greater London Authority, Forestry Commission, BTCV, the Peabody Trust and the London Boroughs of Bromley, Croydon, Haringey, Merton and Redbridge.

Whilst woodlands occupy 8% of London's land area, many Londoners are unaware of this fantastic resource that is on their doorsteps. The project aims to get Londoners to explore and discover the beauty of their local woodlands and to experience the many benefits of woodlands for themselves.

There are so many benefits to having woodlands right in the heart of the city. But being able to step out of our hectic lives into the calm of a woodland has to come top of the list. Our eyes are allowed to rest on natural colours and, suddenly, we have space to think. A brisk walk in beautiful surroundings is a far superior way to get fit than running on a treadmill amongst weights, machines and sweaty lycra, isn't it?

But whilst London is well-known for its large woodland and parks, the city also has hundreds of smaller, pocket woods where you can explore your local area and take part in regular activities. To champion these local woodlands, Capital Woodlands has selected six woods across the city as the focus of its programme of events for local communities: Scadbury Park in Bromley, Birch & Rowdown Woods in Croydon, Coldfall Wood in Haringey, Morden Park in Merton, Claybury Wood in Redbridge, and Peabody Hill in Lambeth.

These flagship woods face the typical range of issues that threaten many of London's woodlands. Many of the Capital Woodlands programmes focus on these sites, working to empower local communities and enabling the woodlands to become celebrated as an invaluable natural resource.

Live London's Woods is a web-based resource that provides up-to-date information on woodland seasons and linked activities. The website aims to inform and engage Londoners through celebration of the seasonal changes that occur in London's woodlands.

Hundreds of walks, talks, tours and other seasonal woodland events are held in London every year, offering the opportunity for Londoners to engage with their natural heritage and experience the delights of woodland wildlife, cool summer shade and the crunch of frosted winter leaves. Some are practical activities, which will not only get you out in the fresh air but also get you fit. Others make you an artist or a craftsperson for a day using just the inspiration of nature and your own imagination. Almost all events are free and there's something for everyone.

November signifies the start of the tree planting season and National Tree Week. Tree planting events are taking place across the capital. There are other practical activities that can get you out in the fresh air this autumn. Trees for Cities are always looking for volunteers to take part in woodland conservation activities.

Facts and Information

- If you are interested in environmental training, consider Trees for Cities' 8-week Woodland Management Training Programme, which offers vocational qualifications in arboriculture NPTC units.
- There are about 1.3 billion trees in England, covering nearly 9 percent of the land. About two-thirds of these are broadleaves and the rest are conifers.
- 1 hectare of woodland grown to maturity and looked after forever would absorb the carbon emissions of 100 average family cars driven for one year.
- Forests can cool the planet by absorbing the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide during photosynthesis.
- They can also cool the planet by evaporating water to the atmosphere and increasing cloudiness; a deck of white clouds reflects incoming solar radiation straight back out into space.

Further Resources

- To find out more about Trees for Cities and any of their programmes, visit their website at www.treesforcities.org or call 0207 5875 1320.
- The Tree Council is an umbrella body promoting the importance of trees – visit their website at www.treecouncil.org.uk or telephone 020 7407 9992. They also support a network of Tree Wardens across the country: a national force of local volunteers dedicated to their community's trees in town, city and countryside across the UK.
- The Forest Education Initiative (FEI) aims to increase young people's understanding of the local and global importance of trees. It promotes shared learning through a network of local groups in the UK. Visit www.foresteducation.org.
- The Forestry Commission manages a large portion of the English forests and organises educational study visits. Call 01420 23666 and ask for the Education Officer. They also produce some information booklets available online at www.forestry.gov.uk.
- Our wonderful tree heritage is recorded within the Tree Register, an organisation with a unique database of over 150,000 of our most notable trees. Find out more at www.treeregister.org or telephone 01234 768884.
- The Woodland Trust campaigns to protect ancient woods, improve woodland biodiversity, increase native woodland cover and increase understanding and enjoyment of woods. They produce information sheets and can offer grants for tree planting. Find out more on their website at www.woodland-trust.org.uk.

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