



Avon
Wildlife Trust

How to Lead a Guided Nature Walk



Made possible with



**Heritage
Fund**

With thanks to National Lottery Players

**WEST OF
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MY WILD CITY



About My Wild City

'Imagine a city where whole streets and communities get together to transform gardens and open spaces. From planting for pollinators in our gardens to influencing the space around us, we can all help to make a city better for people and wildlife.

With support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, we've been working over three years with Bristol City Council to focus on eight Local Wildlife Sites across the city, making improvements for wildlife and visitors, and encouraging everyone to get involved in enjoying and caring for these special wild spaces.'

Why Lead a Guided Nature Walk?

To get to know our human and more-than human neighbours! We know that wildlife is in trouble. In order for nature to recover, we need many more people on nature's side. The science shows that if just 1 person in every 4 (25%) takes action, it can be enough to change the behaviour of the majority. Guided walks help to reach that 1 in 4 by inspiring local people to get to know and protect the amazing habitats and creatures we share our neighbourhoods with. Guided walks are a brilliant way to introduce ourselves and others to our local parks, gardens and wildlife sites in a safe and supportive group environment, it can also help build relationships with each other and community connections.

For our mental and physical wellbeing! Walking is one of the best things we can do for our health, *it's scientifically proven to improve our physical and emotional health and can connect us with the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing'. If you're viewing this document on a smart phone or computer connected to the internet *Click on the underlined sentences to find out more.

To celebrate urban wildlife in Bristol and the power of a nature stroll, Avon Wildlife Trust co-delivered a 'How to Lead a Guided Nature Walk' training session at My Wild City site The Northern Slopes. This session was supported by Len Wyatt from Glyn Vale Heroes, a local 'Friends of' group who care for parts of the site, and attended by a wonderful group of people from across the city, all keen to learn more about connecting their communities together and with nature. Find out more about what we learned in this 'How to Lead a Guided Nature Walk' tool kit and use it to help you create your own community nature walk. We've also provided lots more links and resources to help with publicity and safety tips. Who knows what wild wonders you'll discover...



Informal and Formal Walking Groups

It's useful to know the difference between informal and formal walking groups before you start organising your walk, as each have different guidelines and expectations from attendees.

An informal walking group is likely a group of people who may already know each other, arranging to walk together on a regular basis. The walks are free, organised through informal communication channels such as Facebook, text, or WhatsApp and are not widely publicly advertised. Individuals take responsibility for their own safety, there's likely no formal health and safety briefing and there may not be a clearly defined route or finishing time. This sort of group is great for guiding your friends, family and neighbours.

A formal walking group may be a constituted group or society, they will have public liability insurance, and may charge for some guided walks and activities. Risk assessments will be made for each walk, one of the leaders will be First Aid trained and carry a First Aid Kit with them on the walk. The walk will be clearly defined, guided by a walk leader, and will have a set start and finish time. This type of group is often (but not always!) open for the public, some of the attendees you likely haven't met before.



Things to consider

If your walk is part of a funded project or if you're charging people to join your walk, it's best to have public liability insurance. This can sometimes be covered if you partner with a local group or organisation to lead your walk with (who are already covered by public liability insurance). You may also be able to receive support from your local authority or walking festival. Find out more about what's happening in the Avon Region at [Travel West](#) and [Bristol Walks Fest](#).

Get advice about setting up a walking group including where to walk, promoting your walk and staying safe [here](#).





How to Do a 'Recce'

Once you have an idea of who you'll be guiding a walk for/with, you need to find a location to walk, you'll probably already have a place in mind! The next step is to complete a recce. A recce is the short word for reconnaissance = the activity of getting information about an area. Recce's are really important, you visit your chosen location before you do your 'public' walk. This will help you to gather information about your chosen location including documenting possible hazards and risks, finding an appropriate route, describing the route for accessibility purposes and to get a sense of the place.

Top Tips

If you're visiting a location you're not familiar with you might like to do your recce with someone who knows the site well, for example you could invite along a member of the local 'friends of' or volunteer group. Including a local resident or friends of group in the planning of a walk can be a great way to find out important facts and stories, such as local names for different areas, site history and special creatures! There is a whole wealth of knowledge and experience held in communities, tapping into them may reveal some fantastic stories about your location, making your walk more meaningful for attendees and creating greater ownership of our shared public spaces.

It's best to complete your recce at a similar time that you would like to lead the walk. Sites can change across different times during the day, for example what happens in the light of day-time and what happens in the dark at night-time is very different, the site might be used by different groups of people and you'll see different wildlife.

Things also change over days and weeks for example - meadows, scrub and trees grow! A route that looks clear-ish one week could be a bit harder to navigate through the next. Think small paths - are there brambles or stinging nettles either side, is the path maintained? Will you be able to get through there with your group when the walk takes place? Or can you mitigate some of the potential risk by asking people to wear sturdy shoes, trousers instead of shorts, or take a small pair of secateurs so you can snip off any dangling spikey bits as you lead.

Make notes of anything you find interesting on your recce. You can collect information in whichever way suits you best! Whether that's pen and paper, a video, photos, or a voice note on your phone. When organising this 'How to Lead a Guided Nature Walk' training session we annotated a paper map. We used the 5-4-3-2-1 challenge to make a record of what's on the site - 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste. This is a great activity to do with your walk attendees too! Check out our annotated map on the next page for ideas...



How Lead a Guided Nature Walk - Recce Map




Northern Slopes

Muddy, uneven
Steep slopes, steps

Meet Len here

View point and break time

Take sit mats?

Goldenrods and everlasting sweet pea, looks beautiful, must go this way!

Meeting Point

Amazing wildflowers here - knapweed, kidney vetch, talk about furrow bees!

Witches Jelly also here!

Birds - singing male blackcap, robin, wren, chiff chaff

Take some species photos, spotter sheets or FSC guides for people to look at!

Butterflies, holly blue, speckled wood. Hairy-footed flower bee on wildflowers growing up through concrete paths on Wedmore Vale Road

Woodland - dappled light good for mindfulness activity

Known locally as the strawberry path, point out cultivated strawberries along the route

Cowslips

Fly-tipping

Motorbike (stolen?!) report

Horses get out and about, include in H&S briefing

Key

- Cycleway
- Tree
- unpaved footpath
- wildflower area
- dense scrub
- steps
- paved footpath
- lookout point
- Stream





Useful Documents

Print or make a note of these handy templates to take with you on your recce. These documents will help you to collect key pieces of information relating to health and safety, and how you publicise your walk i.e. the difficulty level of the walk, is it suitable for families with small children, is it buggy friendly, is it wheelchair accessible? Both documents are available by clicking on title links below, or by visiting the Travel West website here

<https://travelwest.info/walk/starting-a-walking-group/>



Download the 'Route Planner Template'

Download the 'Led Walk Risk Assessment Template'

Route Planner Template			
Name of route explorer/s		Date	
Start of walk Landmark and street name (& postcode if known)		Finish location of walk (if different)	
Title of walk			
Distance in miles Detail different length options if explored	Time taken by route explorer Include short stops and diversions but not travel		
Brief description of walk (less than 30 words)			
Terrain and accessibility (tick all on route)			
Paths:			
Paved	Rough/uneven	Grass/mud	
Gradients: (tick all that apply - if known, record amount : eg. slight inclines √ 3)			
Fairly flat	Slight inclines	Moderate inclines	Steep inclines
Obstacles:			
Steps	Stiles	Barriers / kissing gates	Other:
Getting to the walk start / public transport information			
Please use this space to record details of how to get to the walk start by public transport or where to park. Location of bus stops, bus numbers and times and / or train times.			

Led Walk Risk Assessment - template		
Walk location		Date
Assessment carried out by		
Identify which hazards and access barriers are present for your walk by ticking or crossing through the list of hazards/barriers in the white column. For those ticked, add extra details where useful and then read the corresponding grey sections.		
Hazard	Who might be harmed	How is the risk controlled
Traffic/roads	All walkers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warn walkers in pre-walk talk Cross at safer places (e.g. zebra crossings) Keep group together Wear aluminous tabards Know the highway code: www.gov.uk/highway-code Inform group at the beginning of the walk
Shared use paths (cycle & pedestrian) Name of path/s: Where on route:	All walkers, particularly those with sensory impairments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If walking up / down, keep to one side of the path, keep checking group is not drifting across whole of path Ask walkers to help warn others of bikes approaching If crossing a shared use path keep a look out for people on wheels before crossing Warn in pre-walk talk and as necessary on route
Dogs mess	All, particularly children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warn in pre-walk talk and as necessary on route
Dogs	All, particularly those fearful of dogs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try to keep nervous walkers away from dogs and give warning to your group if a dog is approaching
Other people	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If dogs are allowed they should be kept on a lead If a situation or person appears threatening, move the group on whilst avoiding eye contact Have a charged mobile phone in your bag Be considerate of others - try not to block entrance ways (e.g. to shops), pavements and pathways
Unknown fitness and health of walkers	All - particularly walkers with health condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have at least two leaders familiar with the route Give full and clear information (e.g. terrain, length, etc.) in pre-walk talk Share any relevant, disclosed health information with other leaders Be vigilant of walkers whilst walking and be familiar with how to cut the route short (e.g. where bus stops are) If necessary, arrange for a strapping walker to be





Themed Nature Walks

There are many different types of guided nature walk such as seasonal walks, butterfly walks, wellbeing walks, dawn chorus walks, the list goes on! The theme of the walk will be informed by the people, groups and communities you'd like to invite along, what you feel comfortable doing, and the site where you'll be walking. You might want to find out what your local community would like from a guided walk too? Or maybe it's a chance for residents to come together and connect in a beautiful nature-rich space. Stopping off at different spots along your walk route to complete a themed activity can be a great way to keep interest and build connections with each other and the natural world.

Seasonal - Throughout history humans have celebrated the changing of the seasons such as the Spring equinox and the Winter solstice. The Celtic Calendar is a useful tool to build nature celebration into your guided walks. An almanac is also a useful book with hints, tips, and stories of key moments in nature every month, available for both children and adults. Seasonal walks can focus on the specific highlights of that time of year, for example a spring walk could focus on bird song at dawn chorus, emerging spring wildflowers such as bluebells and the unfurling leaves on trees.



My Wild City Orchard Day,
Stockwood Open Space, c. Alex Dommett

Litter Picking - Litter picking is often one of the first ways someone might experience a guided nature walk, the focus on an activity can give people a sense of purpose to get out the door and go on a walk in the first place, and by the end of the session the group often feels a sense of achievement seeing all their collected litter together. It's amazing what a few people can achieve in a short amount of time! Many local authorities and town councils loan litter picking equipment and collect the litter for free.



My Wild City Litter Picking Walk
Coombe Brook Valley, c. Alex Dommett



Wildlife - A walk all about a particular group of creatures such as bees, birds, bats or butterflies can be a great way to frame a session and get to know our wild neighbours better. There are many organisations that focus on specific species and you can often download free activities and resources. Bat detecting and mini beast quests are all great ways to get to know wild creatures in a fun way! Bat detectors can be costly but can be loaned for free from some library services and local wildlife groups. Small bug pots or recycled containers and magnifying glasses are useful for looking at our insect friends up close, remember to encourage 'gentle hands' and always put any creature back where you found them. There's a wealth of free downloadable activity sheets available on [The Wildlife Trust's Wildlife Watch website](#).



Common blue butterflies on oxeye daisy, Hawkfield Meadows.
c. Alex Dommett

Citizen Science - A '[BioBlitz](#)' can be [delivered like a competition, game or learning experience](#) as part of a nature walk. Great for adults and children alike! There are also wildlife monitoring events that happen throughout the year such as bee walks or the Big Butterfly Count, take a look at this [handy survey calendar](#) to see what you can get involved with. Remember to [record what you see](#) with your local environmental records centre - this will help guide conservation action in your area. You can also use apps to help you identify what you see such as iNaturalist and take part in global events such as the [City Nature Challenge](#).



Identifying ladybirds,
Stockwood Open Space.
c. Alex Dommett



Wellbeing - A gentle introduction to nature which could focus on the 5 pathways to nature connectedness or the 5 ways to wellbeing. You can also download free guidance and resources to support you to guide a sensory walk. Sensory walks are designed for people with complex disabilities, but can be enjoyed by anyone. You don't need any specialist equipment and the walks can be any length you like. You can go on foot, use a wheelchair or walker – sensory walks are inclusive for all. The programme has even won an award for diversity and inclusion at the Outdoor Industry Awards.



Nature Loom, The Northern Slopes,
c. Bethan McLatchie



Early morning Spring Bird Walk
Lawrence Weston Moor. c. Alex Dommett

Time - Walking at different times of the day provides different experiences with the natural world. For example, very early morning walks in spring are great for listening to the dawn chorus or spotting birds looking for their first meal of the day. Twilight walking as the sun sets brings a whole new perspective, think hunting barn owls, bats emerging to hunt for insects, the bark of a fox, the shriek of a muntjac deer, maybe even the flash of a badger!



Other Activities - Walks can be focused around a specific activity such as wildlife photography, drawing, foraging - there's so many to choose from! When foraging always ask for the land owner's permission and abide by the foraging code, wild food is vital for the survival of the UK's wildlife. Only pick what you plan to consume that day and always leave plenty for our wild neighbours!



Wildlife Photography Walk
Saltmarsh Drive Open Space. c. Chloe





How to Organise a Nature Walk?

Use the prompts below to help you to plan, organise and deliver your guided walk

Before the walk



- Recce the route
- Make contact with other leaders
- Agree between leaders, which of you will be in the front and which will be at the back
- Make sure you have everything you need
- Check the weather before you set out
- Arrive early 15-20 minutes before advertised

At the start of the walk



- Welcome attendees and thank them for attending
- Check walkers are suitably dressed
- Complete register including gathering emergency contact details and do a headcount
- Introduce yourself and the other leaders





- Explain the roles of the leaders
- Give a health and safety briefing
- Introduce the route and info such as toilets and breaks
- Tell people to report any issues to a leader
- Ask people to stay with the group
- Set out in good time
- Do a head count
- Make the start of the walk clear - "Off we go!"
- Smile and enjoy yourself

During the walk

- Make a particular effort to welcome new walkers
- Be welcoming, friendly and informative
- Lead an engagement task - where appropriate
- Talk to as many walkers as possible
- Check that the group is keeping together
- Remind people about the pace





- Highlight hazards - Poo! Hole! Cyclist!
- Check that no-one is being ignored or sidelined
- Be aware if anyone is over-exerting themselves

At the end of the walk / after the walk



- Call everyone together and get their attention
- Gather the group and make sure everyone has returned
- End the walk clearly. Congratulate them and point out this is the end of the walk
- Tell them about any future walks, hand out leaflets, or give further information about how they might like to get involved i.e. volunteering opportunities at the site etc.
- Highlight any social opportunities. If the group goes to a café after the walk, make sure everyone knows they're welcome if appropriate
- Complete any additional paperwork and make sure forms and registers are filed safely and confidentially
- Pass on any walker feedback or any notable problems



Other Things to Consider

- Think about how people book onto your walk and how many spaces you want to offer. Remember to pick a number that you feel comfortable leading. Large walk numbers can be more challenging if the site you've chosen means you have to walk in single file, also large numbers can make it difficult for people to hear you, especially if you'd like to share points of interest or talk about a topic along the way.
- How do people book on your walk? You can use platforms such as [Eventbrite](#) or you can ask people to text or email you with the number of attendees they're booking for, their name(s) and contact details. Email and phone numbers are important to collect to share meeting details and what to bring in advance of the walk and to cancel a walk if needed.
- Make sure to advertise your walk. Share in places which will gather interest such as local cafes, shops, libraries, and on social media platforms such as Facebook and X (Twitter). Be really clear about what the walk is, the start and end time, the location and where to book.
- Make the meeting point clear in advance via email or your chosen communication method. Useful details can include a photo of the meeting point, along with [What 3 Words](#), and an address with a postcode.
- Is there parking, a bike rack or a bus stop nearby? Let attendees know what's available.
- Does the size of the group mean you need to have a back marker to make sure everyone stays together? Any number higher than 20 needs a volunteer at the back. The bigger the group the more volunteer markers you have equally spaced between the rest of the walkers. You might like more helpers for your first walk, do what feels comfortable for you.
- Carry a well-charged mobile phone in the unlikely event of an emergency during your recce and the walk. If completing your recce by yourself make sure someone knows where you are, and what time you're likely to be back if possible.





- Carry extra water and any First Aid items during your walk.
- Ensure any under-18s or vulnerable adults attend with someone to supervise them during the walk.
- Consider who the walk is for and adapt accordingly.
- If you need to cancel a walk do it with as much notice as possible, at least 24 hours, more if possible.
- Check the weather 24 - 48 hours before the walk. It is good practice to not lead any guided walks in any weather warning, or during woodlands where the wind is above 25 mph. Equally, if it is very hot it's sometimes best to cancel walks where there is little access to water or shelter for shade.
- Carry your risk assessment and route planner with you on your walk.
- Things may go wrong and sometimes things crop up that are unexpected - attendees running late, overfriendly dogs stealing sandwiches - it's all part of the learning process!



My Wild City, Managing Grasslands for Wildlife Walk, Stockwood Open Space, 2023



Go on other guided walks to learn what delivery styles work (or don't work!) for you



Remember you don't need to be a wildlife expert to lead a guided nature walk! It's OK not to know all the answers. It's impossible to know everything about nature, that's the joy of it. Learn together!

Keep a record of top facts about your chosen walk location. Use the 5-4-3-2-1 challenge to help you collect information whilst on your recce. Note facts which you find funny or interesting. Speak from your own experience.

Create a 'nature treasure' box to show others



Be yourself!
Authenticity is
magnetic!





Further Links and Resources

Advice on [starting a walking group](#)

[Guide to Leading Nature Walks](#) (USA based but has lots of transferrable tips!)

[Sensory Walks](#)

[Go Jauntly Walking App](#) - create unique nature-filled circular walks from your doorstep. Get from A-B the leafiest, quietest and least-polluted way.

[The Rambler's Association](#)

Links to UK Wildlife Species Information

Bees - [Bumble Bee Conservation Trust](#)

Amphibians and Reptiles - [The Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust \(ARC\)](#)
and [Froglife](#)

Butterflies - [Butterfly Conservation](#)

Bats - [Bat Conservation Trust](#)

Mammals - [The Mammal Society](#)

Invertebrates - [Buglife](#)

Birds - [RSPB](#)

Wildflowers - [Plantlife](#)

Hedgerow - [People's Trust for Endangered Species](#)

Trees - [The Woodland Trust](#)

Freshwater Habitats - [Freshwater Habitats Rivers Trust](#)

Marine - [Marine Conservation Society](#)

Wildfowl and Wetlands - [Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust](#)

