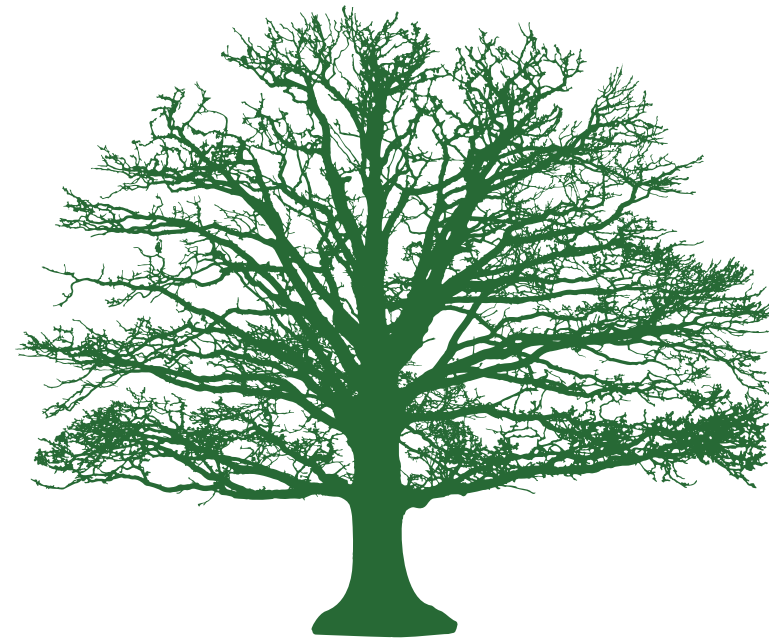


Ealing Parks Foundation

Acton Park

Nature Activity Trail



This trail will introduce you to some of the wildlife and nature in Acton Park. We always need to cherish wildlife, because every creature helps improve our local environment- so remember to be gentle with that ladybird. Have fun and come on a journey of discovery!

1 Spot that tree

Trees are so important: they are habitats for wildlife, providing animals with food and nesting sites, they produce oxygen for us to breathe, they clean the air by trapping pollution in their leaves, they provide humans and animals with shelter (from the rain) and shade (from the sun). Acton Park has some amazing trees in it- can you find these?



A giant silver birch with white bark and brilliant for wildlife



An Indian bean tree with very long thin seedpods



A Pride of India with lantern shaped fruit in autumn

2 Make a mushroom map

Fungi is the scientific word for mushrooms. Mushrooms like to grow in warm, damp conditions, and what you see on the ground is the fruit of the mushroom. They often pop up in the autumn. You might see them at the bases of trees, but underground there is a whole network of connections called a mycelium, which links trees and plants that may be far apart overground! This network carries water and nutrients between the mushrooms and the plant roots they grow near to and shows us that what we see above ground is just a tiny bit of the natural habitat of the park.

Can you mark where you find mushrooms on the park map, and take pictures of the different types you find? Don't forget- never touch a mushroom, because it could make you ill, and it is doing an important job in the park ecosystem. This picture is of a Black Staining Polypore because it goes black when bruised!



3 Find some magical nettles

Nettles are the perfect food and hiding place for lots of minibeasts. The black caterpillars of the Peacock butterfly rely on nettles for food. Nettles are also very nutritious, so if you are with an adult, you could try taking a few fresh young leaves from the tops of stems and making nettle tea or soup with them. The tiny hairs that can sting you, won't sting once crushed. Nettle leaves are full of iron, which our blood needs to carry oxygen to different parts of our bodies; they are best harvested in spring.



4 Observe the pondlife



Stand on the wooden pathway to keep safe, and if you peer over the handrail, you might spot some wildlife. Water is a brilliant way of helping wildlife. Even a mini pond on a balcony will help attract insects, because some spend their larval stages (when they are young) in water for up to two years (like dragonfly and damselfly larvae). Can you spot any mosquito larvae from the viewing deck? A bat needs to catch and eat about 3000 midges and mosquitos a night, so the ponds in the park will help feed them. See challenge 10 about bat spotting!

5 Use the Park as a playground



Natural features in parks can be great fun- can you find a natural assault course to challenge your friends or siblings to do in Acton park? If you find balancing on, or walking over logs, very easy, why not try doing it with your eyes shut? But be sure to get a helper to hold your hand so you don't hurt yourself. Jumping and balancing can help you develop your coordination skills, which will help you do other things- like riding a bike or walking on slippery pavements in the rain. Can you find some logs to jump off?

The tree trunks that are left lying on the ground will eventually break down, which will return all the nutrients to the soil, for other plants to use. That's why it's a good idea to have a log pile (or a pile of twigs) in your garden if you can. Creatures will hide there and feel safe (especially over winter), and the wood will 'feed' the soil as it decomposes.

6 Buzz around the wildflowers



Head towards the skate park and admire the wildflower bank. Go on a bug hunt and see how many you can spot. Flying insects will pollinate the flowers. Butterflies are attracted to purple and blue flowers especially- can you see any? If you lie on the grass near the edge of the meadow, can you see tiny insects like ants, or other creepy crawlies? Wildflower meadows like these are safe places for insects and, because of that, they survive and thrive.

The more insects there are, the more food there is for bigger animals. Little Owls (*Athene Noctua*) visit Acton Park, and they feed on small insects (like grasshoppers) so if you find some bugs on your hunt, make sure to release them back where you found them for the Little Owls to hunt.

7 See this bird box



Small birds need help finding suitable nesting sites because there aren't enough trees in cities. So, Ealing Council puts up bird boxes in most green spaces. The boxes need cleaning out every year, and the nests need removing, so that the box is clean for the next family. Can you find this blue bird box on a Sycamore tree near the flag pole (near the café)?

8 Count the squirrels



Squirrels can be great fun to watch as they leap from tree to tree. In the summer you will see baby squirrels too. The grey squirrel is quite territorial, which means it might chase off another squirrel that gets too close to their tree. Sometimes they make a hissing screech, to scare off other animals, but they also love to play and chase each other up and down the tree. How many squirrels can you spot on your visit today?

squirrel count:

9 Sit quietly in the formal garden



Near the café, there is a lovely quiet, more formal garden. It has four separate areas, with plants in between, including some tall grasses and lots of flowers. Each area has a wooden bench. Take a moment to sit on a bench and shut your eyes. What sounds can you hear? Take three deep breaths and breathe out slowly. Try to sit for five minutes and just enjoy being in nature and observing the wildlife around you. How does this make you feel?

10 See the bats at night



Bats like to fly over water and along tree-lined avenues, because they can easily catch flying insects to eat that way. Come out to the park on a warm evening just after sunset, between April and October, and you should see bats flying around. Pipistrelles are the most common species of bat in Ealing parks. They fly erratically, darting around you, but they won't crash into you, because they have excellent echolocation skills.

That means they emit a sound (that we can't hear) that bounces off surfaces (like trees and people) so they know exactly what they should avoid flying into, and where the mosquito is that they want to eat! Bat detectors can be used to identify the species of bat in the park.

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Trail created (and pictures taken) by  Natasha Gavin
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Acton Park

Nature Activity Trail

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