



Robin mural in Hackney by street artist ATM. Photograph: Jan Fuscoe

Robin Redbreast Day?

A lesser-known charity project is raising money to protect birds and their habitats all over the world

JAN FUSCOE

Hands up who knew it was Robin Redbreast Day on 17 November? Me neither. But then the celebration of our national bird only became a 'thing' in 2019, when Redbreast Whiskey teamed up with Birdlife International to support its work to protect birds and their habitats around the world.

Robins are a familiar sight to gardeners, perching expectantly on a fence waiting for the unearthing of a tasty worm, but in colder months, they rely on fruits and berries, and suet from your birdfeeder.

You'll find a beautiful rendition of our favourite bird, with its distinctive red breast, on the wall of Hackney's Morland Estate - on the corner where Lansdowne Drive meets Richmond Road.

Charlie Peel, founder of Urban Good, commissioned the mural in a bid to remind us of the importance of the natural environment. The art was created by London-based ATM, who is also on a mission to celebrate birdlife in an urban setting and remind us of

threats to its survival through loss of habitat and pollution.

Another street artist keen to alert us to the beauty of wildlife is Roa, from Belgium. His *Big Bird* can be found on a wall at the junction of Brick Lane and Hanbury Street. His depiction of a heron is particularly apposite for the area as it's a sacred bird to Bengalis, who make up a large part of the local population.

'In the last 50 years, Great Britain has lost more than 38 million birds'

The good news is that robins are bucking most wildlife trends. Their numbers are on the rise, with almost seven million of them in the UK.

But the British Trust for Ornithology warns that, in the last 50 years, Great Britain has lost more than 38 million

birds. In 2021, 70 new bird species were added to the RSPB's 'Red List', which means that one in four are under serious threat.

So what can we do to change that? London is the world's first National Park City. The ambition is to make London greener, healthier and wilder, with the aim that all children have easy access to nature. And Hackney is one of the greenest boroughs in London, with 58 parks and green spaces totaling 282 hectares.

And there are plans for more - the ambitious East London Waterworks Park project is currently crowdfunding to rewild the Lea Bridge Waterworks, which would create an unbroken green link that stretches from the south to the north of the borough and beyond.

It's a matter of fact that nature boosts health and mental wellbeing and can even reduce feelings of loneliness. Not only that, walks in woodlands are estimated to save the NHS £185 million a year through fewer GP appointments, prescriptions and sick days.

This time of year is one of the best times to get out walking. It's not just kids who love wading through multicoloured leaves. Fresh air and walking in nature stimulate all the senses. Wrap up well, and remember that, as you trudge through snow or push against the wind, you're burning calories and the cold air helps to clear the mind.

'In Abney Park Cemetery, you'll be wowed by wrens'

While you're at it, look and listen out for birdlife. In Abney Park Cemetery you'll be wowed by wrens, willow warblers and great spotted woodpeckers. Seek out sedge and reed warblers, great bitterns, red kites and kingfishers along the River Lea and Hackney Marshes.

The Woodland Trust has a list of walks for you to try in your neighbourhood,

or further afield. Wick Woodland is obviously closest, but Hampstead Wood, Epping or Hainault Forest are less than an hour away.

If you want to learn more about birdlife, check out the Countryfile bird guide, which will help you identify the most common garden birds. It also includes tips on what to put in your birdfeeder. And, if you're lucky enough to catch sight of a rare species, why not upload it to @LondonBirdClub, which posts bird sightings across London.

Redbreast Irish Whiskey is on a mission to raise up to €100,000 for charity partner BirdLife International through its Robin Redbreast Day initiatives. Up to €70,000 will be raised through the sales of the limited edition bird feeder bottle.

Find out more at bit.ly/3VxUxAG.

Jan Fuscoe is a gardener, ex-beekeeper, and Hackney walker.