

RTN NEWSLETTER

Issue 5. December 2025



RECOVERY THROUGH NATURE (RTN) IN DERBYSHIRE

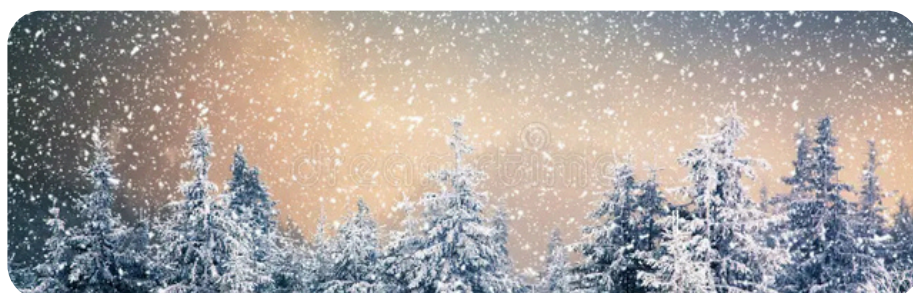
Winter, Heralds Rest and Celebration.

Winter is a season characterised by its cold temperatures, shorter days, and often transformative landscapes. This time of year typically spans from December to February in the Northern Hemisphere, though its exact timing can vary based on geographical location. The onset of winter brings about significant changes in both the environment and human activity. Snow blankets the ground in many regions, creating picturesque scenes that have inspired art and literature throughout history.

Additionally, winter's chill prompts various adaptations among flora and fauna as they enter dormancy

among flora and fauna as they enter dormancy, species of wildlife migrate to more temperate climates.

The impact of winter extends beyond environmental changes; it also affects human behaviour and culture. Traditionally, winter has been a time for introspection and reflection. Many cultures celebrate festivals during this season that emphasize themes of light amidst darkness, such as Christmas. They invariably involve communal gatherings that foster social bonds and provide warmth during the cold months.



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WILD POND BUILD

written by RTN lead Mark Bolton



Building the sign



Sign ready for information



Finding a new home at the wild pond

The wild pond, As mentioned in our last issue the wild pond is now boasting life and as such represents the builds completion. However, it was thought that a great learning opportunity for RTN members was a foot. So the team are now creating a learning area. They intend to put up a sign showing the possible life a wild pond could hold. They also will be documenting what is actually living there and complete studies into the needs of these creatures to ensure that this rich biodiverse area remains sustainable and compliments the life that is there.

A further addition was the creation of toad hole habitats to the rear of the pond. These underground habitats offer a damp safe refuge for toads and newts. Their close proximity to the pond area allows them to stay close to food sources and keeps the area damp.



Toad Hole

One of our current projects at Shipley Park is growing and making our own willow yurt. The idea to start this project came about a few months ago. We wanted to create a covered, quiet space where people could have some time out but not be completely away from the rest of the group. As for new people and those of us who are neurodivergent, we can become anxious and just need a quiet place to go to decompress before rejoining, especially when there's a lot going on with the other projects at RTN.

We didn't want to just build a typical structure like a cabin or a shed. We wanted something that would seamlessly be a part of the surrounding area and capture the heart of what RTN is all about. I came up with the idea of using the skills we have learnt through RTN and the horticulture course led by Broomfield College, to cultivate our own willow branches. This will allow us to grow our own living, sustainable structure that will not only be a wonderful space for us to use, but be a great habitat for local wildlife too!

Once the structure itself is completed, we have plans to make a sensory garden surrounding the yurt. I believe this will be beautiful and beneficial addition, as a sensory garden can help stimulate all of our senses, helping us feel calmer and more relaxed. This will be really useful for all of our group members, especially those who are neurodivergent. The sensory garden will also help to create a more diverse wildlife area.

Currently, we are in the initial stages of growing our willow yurt. The main structure supports are ready to be planted. We will then begin the process of weaving willow around the frame, where it will start to grow into the finished structure. This will be a lengthy process, one that we will keep you all updated over the coming months...

Written by Kev

Image of willow Yurts



Images courtesy of The willow bank



Facebook: [Phoenix Futures Derbyshire](#)



Instagram: [@phoenix_futures_derbyshire](#)



MY WORDS

RTN Buxton is a place where I can get my hands dirty, in mud, and You can work at your own pace. Being part of the team allows me to get away from the stresses of everyday life and it means I can think for myself and I choose for myself. And also meet good friends while I'm at it. I love when we have worked hard and accomplished something. I love to watch things grow. It has helped mentally and physically with my situation to help me overcome any issues that occur in life. The group is amazing with coming up with a variety of solutions for any given situation. Bella, my support dog and me love RTN because we have lots of fun.

Written by K

RTN OPERATING SITES & TIMES

CHESTERFIELD:

Mondays at Stand Road allotments in Chesterfield (S41 8SW) or at Chesterfield train station. 10am start.

BUXTON:

Wednesdays at Cuningdale Allotments: plot 20-21 on Dew Pond Lane (SK17 7LF). 10am start.

The minibus leaves the rear car park of St Marys Gate Chesterfield office (S41 7TH) at 8am with pick-ups along the route (flexible depending on location of attendees).

ILKESTON:

Tuesdays & Thursdays at Shipley Park or the train station. 10am start.

HEANOR:

Tuesdays & Thursdays at Shipley Park in Heanor (DE75 7GX). 10am start

The minibus leaves the rear car park of St Marys Gate Chesterfield office (S41 7TH) at 9am and takes the following route:

- 09:20- Ripley Market place (DE5 3FJ)
- 09:25- Hunts Butchers in Codnor (DE5 9SH)
- 09:30- Job centre bus stop in Heanor (DE75 7EZ)
- 09:45- Rear car park of Erewash House Ilkeston office (DE7 5LD)

SWADLINCOTE:

NEW - Rosliston Forestry centre. DE12 8JX
Tuesdays 10am. meeting at the centres cafe.

*We're looking to create more RTN sites over the next year too, so please let us know if you know if a good site we can explore!



BROOMSFIELD COLLEGE

A recent development with the Broomfields College of Horticulture and Agriculture means that we now offer all that attend RTN the opportunity to obtain city and Guilds qualifications in Horticulture.

The initial qualification is at level one and is an access qualification which means on achieving this qualification people can go on to higher levels in so many subjects, from horticulture to forest management.

We have even managed to have these qualifications conducted at our Shipley Park, Buxton and soon at our Swadlincote sites. This is an amazing opportunity for all involved.

ARE THERE HEDGEHOGS IN BUXTON!!

This summer we created a habitat at our Buxton site to try and encourage hedgehogs to add to our wildlife diversity potential.

We built a hedgehog house from some old offcuts of wood and used some roofing felt to make a waterproof roof. We have lined the house with some newspaper, sawdust and some dried leaves to try and make the habitat as natural, comfortable and also a safe environment for the winter hibernation period. So far we have not had any visitors but we have had a mild autumn so there is still a possibility to attract a winter guest.

Hedgehog Facts

Nocturnal: They most active at night and sleep in dens made of leaves and grass during the day.

Hibernation: In cold climates they hibernate during the winter months.

Diet: Hedgehogs are carnivores and mostly eat insects, worms, snails and sometimes small mammal or eggs. (If you are lucky enough to have a Hedgehog living in your garden only feed it cat food meat not fish).

Social Structure: These creatures are generally solitary animals only coming together to Mate.

Self-Anointing: They lick on something with an unusual scent to create frothy saliva that they spread on their spines. It is believed they do this as part of their defence mechanism.

Lifespan: In the wild they typically live for 2 to five years, but are known to live longer in captivity due to a regular food source and security of a sanctuary.

Offspring: Baby Hedgehogs are known as hoglets.

Written By Matt



NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT!

HUMEROUS ANECDOTES!

I LOST MY SOLE!

Recently on a beautiful day we gathered our troops and set out on a conservation forestry walk to locate the fruits of the medlar bush. We hadn't gone many steps when one of our group encountered a problem. The sole of her walking boot decided it no longer wanted to participate on the walk., Whilst the crocodile impression it gave us was mildly amusing, it did cause a small problem. What to do!!!

Turn round and go back? Absolutely not. So the RTN motto sprung to mind.

IMPROVISE- The sole was of no use partially attached to the boot so we took it off.

ADAPT-We changed the design of the boot to suit our surroundings.
It was dry so not having a sole on the boot was not a problem in the short term.

OVERCOME-We overcame a negative situation and changed it into a positive which benefited the boot wearer and her colleagues around her.



We successfully completed our walk with all troops accounted for and with the fruits of the medlar bush on board ready to Blet!!! (Look out for more information about the Medlars)
The forest walk also promoted something else that RTN is good at.....LAUGHTER.
RTN is really good at laughter!

Jill, RTN Volunteer.

The Stray Dog!

On a typical RTN Day, The team was busy with various projects and making good pace, when from the woods surrounding us the sound of a voice filled the air. "ROGER" the voice shouted, no one thought much of this as many people may be heard shouting a name or two. After a very short silence the voice again could be heard but this time closer. "Roger" (a short Pause) "Roger" (a Short pause) "Roger. It was quickly assumed that Roger Whomever Roger is, was missing!

The voice continued its calling, at the very same time from the forest appeared a rather scruffy looking dog. Without the skills of Sherlock Holmes, the team quickly surmised that this bedraggled creature must be Roger. The Dog was happy to see us and even answered to the name Roger. Brilliant we will keep hold of him and locate the owner.

A team was quickly dispatched into the forest to find the owner.

Several minutes later they returned with a woman in tow who was carrying a dog lead with no dog on the end. She looked at Roger who was now tucking into parts of everyones lunch and said "Thats not Roger" and promptly left. Leaving us with this somewhat scruffy, yet friendly dog. What was the chance of that the only loose dog for miles and the only person searching for Roger and it was not this Dog.

All was well as the owner was eventually found. I feel confident that Roger was also located.





As the leaves are falling in Autumn , nature is flooded with a beautiful array of colours. And naturally we are drawn to look and enjoy the falling leaves whilst out for a walk .We will look straight ahead or up at the trees.

Recently RTN has taken on a new conservation project at Rosliston Forest Centre which is an amazing place to see the seasons changing before your eyes. The changing season is beautiful to see. Maybe take time in the the forest to look down at the fallen leaves on the forest floor.

The leaf fall creates a whole new habitat for small creatures including spiders, millipedes, centipedes and black beetles. These creatures are incredibly important to the health of the forest as the small creatures provide food for birds and small mammals like badgers.

So if you're out on your walk and you're not scared of spiders take time to have a look under the leaves. See what's there.

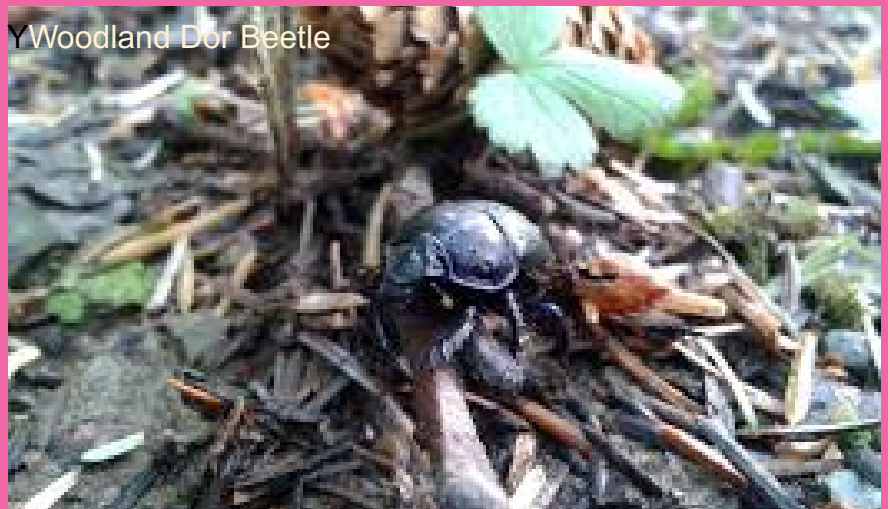
Say "hello" to a passing black beetle!

Please remember to replace any leaf mulch that you move as it really is important to the creatures and the forest.

Written by Jill, RTN Volunteer.

Did You Know
It is impossible to state the exact number of creatures living under fallen leaves in the UK, as the count involves thousands of species and potentially millions of individual organisms per square meter.

Woodland Dor Beetle



Every Year a team from the RTN project in Derbyshire attend the John Muir trust site in Glenlude on the Scottish Borders. The team work tirelessly to help set up the annual tree plant, this tree plant is supporting the re-introduction of broad leaf trees into their native lands, as a result this creates habitats for an array of animals from Birds including Eagles to pine martins. The biodiverse area is awash with wildlife. The Derbyshire team have supported this project for many years. The project attended by people from all over the country work together to plant around 350 trees. Working in an environment that offers such positive experiences for all.

This year the project known as Recovery Through Nature, Phoenix Forest in partnership with the John Muir Trust <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/>

had been shortlisted for the prestigious Nature of Scotland awards.

The event was attended by our RTN leads Mark, Sean, Jill from Derbyshire Jon the founder of RTN nationally along with representatives of the John Muir Trust. Our entry was in the health and wellbeing category.

I can happily report that we are winners! All the other contestants in this category where very deserving of winning this prestigious award. So, you may imagine how honoured we are to have won.

A massive thank you to Wild Scotland awards and the evenings hosts the RSPB. For putting on an amazing event.



Looking for an activity this Winter? Perhaps something to keep the kids occupied? How about making log reindeer. Kids will need to be supported by an adult. As a drill and saw are needed.

Log reindeer

You will need:

- Logs or branches: Different diameters for the body, head, and legs.
- Wooden dowels or twigs: For the antlers and connecting pieces.
- Garden Trimmer: to cut small branches
- Saw: For cutting the larger branches to size. (mini chainsaw or handsaw)
- Drill and drill bit: For creating holes to assemble the parts.
- Hot glue gun/wood glue: To secure parts together.
- Sandpaper: For smoothing edges if needed.
- Exacto Knife; to carve edges.
- Decorations: faux wreaths or bells.

How:

Prepare the Logs

- Body: Cut a medium-sized log (about 3-5 inches long) for the body.
- Head: Use a smaller piece of wood, angled slightly at the cut to give the reindeer a natural head position.
- Legs: Cut four thin, equal-length branches (about 4-5 inches) for the legs.
- Antlers: Choose thin, branching twigs for a realistic antler look.



Drill and Assemble

- Drill holes in the body log for the legs and neck.
- Insert and secure the leg branches into the body with hot glue.
- Drill another hole for the neck and attach the head piece.

Add the Antlers

- Drill small holes at the top of the head for the antlers.
- Insert the twig antlers into the holes and secure them with glue.
- Add a red nose, or small decorations like wreaths and bells for a festive touch.
- Glue Disks of branches (dollar store supplies) for ears & tails
- Leave the wood natural for a rustic look.



Share your results
with us via social media

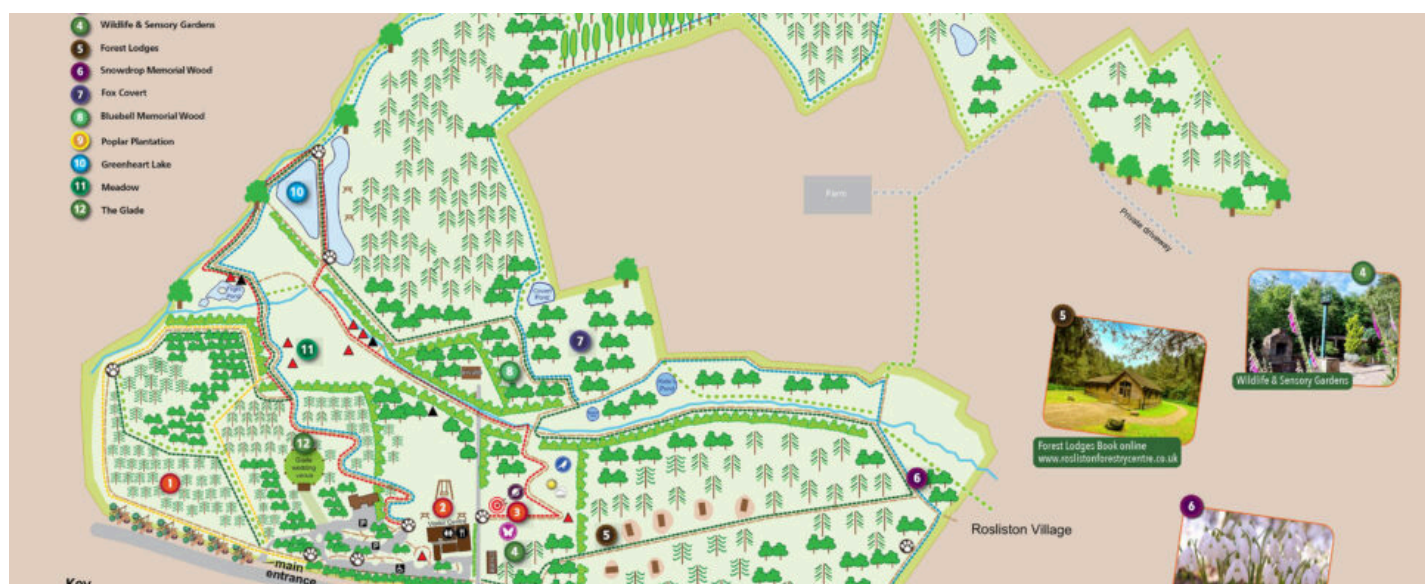


SWADLINCOTE HITS THE GROUND RUNNING

RTN Swadlincote has finally arrived, based at Rosliston Forestry centre the team of 3 people on day one has grown in number each week. The project at Rosliston has seen some learning in forest management courtesy of the local forestry commission.

The team have been involved in crown lifting an area of the forest. Crown lifting is removing the lower dead branches of the trees in the forest. This allows more light and airflow into the forest which ultimately benefits the trees and wildlife.

What about all of the cuttings? We gather them into 3 different piles and then transport them to another area of the forest where we have been creating box habitats see image below. These habitats allow beneficial insects to move into the forest. These insects not only serve their own purpose with the mulching of woods etc they also provide a food source for birds and other small mammals. It is hoped in time that we can create a haven for hedgehog in this area.



Images Credited to Rosliston Forestry centre, www.roslistonforestrycentre.co.uk

CURRENT RTN SITE DETAILS

Recovery Through Nature: A Path to Healing and Growth

The Recovery Through Nature (RTN) project operates from various locations including:

Buxton - Cuningdale allotments
 Chesterfield - Stand Road allotments
 Chesterfield - Train station
 Heanor - Shipley Country Park
 Ilkeston - Train Station
 Swadlincote - Rosliston Forestry centre!

These sites provide a varied environment and a supportive community for people seeking recovery from various challenges, including active addiction.

The RTN project stands out by offering participants prestigious conservation awards and qualifications in horticulture. This focus on practical skills and equips individuals with valuable knowledge about conservation and the environment, as well as fostering a sense of achievement and purpose. Participants connect with nature, experience the satisfaction of nurturing plants and wildlife, and witness the fruits of their labour. This hands-on approach can significantly enhance self-esteem, **making participants feel more capable and confident in their abilities.**

Statistics reveal that individuals involved in the RTN project are 42% more likely to succeed in their recovery. This impressive figure emphasises the effectiveness of nature-based interventions. Connecting with nature has been shown to reduce stress, improve mood, and provide a sense of calm. This is crucial for individuals who may be grappling with anxiety or other mental health concerns. By offering a safe and tangible learning environment RTN ensures that every participant, regardless of their background or skill level, feels included and valued.

The community aspect of the RTN project is also noteworthy. Participants join a supportive team that fosters camaraderie and friendship. This connection with others who share similar experiences can be incredibly uplifting. The friendships formed in these nature settings often extend beyond the project, providing a valuable support network that contributes to long-term recovery.

The Recovery Through Nature project serves as a beacon of hope for many individuals looking to rebuild their lives. By combining the therapeutic benefits of nature with practical skills in horticulture, RTN not only helps individuals reclaim their health but also empowers them to feel valued within a supportive community. As we continue to discover more about the healing properties of nature, initiatives like RTN remind us of its profound impact on recovery and well-being. Through such programs, **individuals can find a path to healing, growth, and a brighter future.**

If you like the sound of what we do and would like to come along to an RTN project, please contact your local Phoenix Futures Recovery Connector at the Derbyshire Recovery Partnership who will bring you along.



This newsletter has been codesigned and coproduced with the Recovery Through Nature Commandos.
 We hope you've enjoyed reading it.