

Go on an urban safari!

If you think safaris are only for the wilds of Africa then you're wrong. Nottingham has its very own wildlife safari right in the heart of the city. It costs nothing, you don't have to fly hundreds of miles and it's a great way to experience urban nature. What's more, there are (hopefully) no lions. So why not download the map, pack some sandwiches and set off on your very own urban adventure. If you're not sure, here's my guide to Nottingham's safari. I hope I can persuade you to give it a go!

The urban safari starts in Victoria Park in Sneinton, a typical city park, with lawns, trees, paths, benches and a playground. It is the sort of place you might think of if asked to name an urban green spot. In fact, whilst there some of my fellow explorers briefly glimpsed a Goldfinch, so if you look carefully it is possible to see some interesting wildlife even in a small city park. However, the park also provides an interesting contrast to some of the other, more unusual places you will visit on the safari. This will hopefully get you to think differently about urban nature and see beyond the more obvious urban green spaces.

The next stop on the tour is certainly an unusual one. St Mary's Rest Garden is right next to Victoria Park, but it is very different. Instead of neatly mown lawns and criss-crossing paths, the garden is home to wide expanses of grass, including a wildflower meadow that provides an important habitat for butterflies. The garden is a former cemetery and, as you will learn on the safari, even cemeteries, which you might not think of as wildlife havens, can be important spaces for animals, plants and insects.

I said you didn't have to worry about lions, but whilst you are in St Mary's Rest Garden you should look out for the lion that memorialises one of Nottingham's most famous sons, the bare knuckle boxer, Bendigo.

It is a short walk from St Mary's to [Stonebridge City Farm](#) in St Anns. That's right, there's a farm in the middle of Nottingham, so you really don't have to go too far to experience the countryside. As well as beautiful gardens that grow plants and food, the farm is home to chickens, sheep, goats, cows, a pony, rabbits, guinea pigs and even a turtle. It is a strange experience to be wandering through a paddock full of cows and sheep and then realise that you are in the middle of a city. I also smelt some tempting aromas coming from the farm's café, which uses a lot of its own organically grown produce, so I will definitely be going back there again!

After Stonebridge, the tour goes through Sneinton. Along the way, look out for urban nature spots like the patch of wasteland just down the road from the farm, which has been overtaken by plants and shrubs. There are a number of wastelands all over Nottingham and they are an often overlooked but important spot for nature. Pay attention to the roadside as well, where small patches of soil provide a foothold for shrubs like buddleia, that attract butterflies, and trees like Rowans, which offer birders and passers-by alike the opportunity to see Waxwings in the winter. Appreciating wildlife in the city is often about noticing the small things. Nature is remarkable, it can make use of even the tiniest patch of grass and one tree can be home to dozens of insects, birds and squirrels.

From the small to the big picture next, as the urban safari takes you up to West View at Colwick Woods, where you can take in an incredible panorama of the city. You can see all the major landmarks from there – Nottingham Council House, the castle and even a glimpse of Wollaton Hall in the distance. If by now you're feeling peckish, the viewpoint is also a perfect spot for a picnic!

After taking in the view (and eating your sandwiches), a gentle stroll down through the woods

takes you to yet another unusual urban green space – Sneinton Greenway. The Greenway is a tree and shrub lined path that was once a railway and which now offers a peaceful alternative to the busy A road that runs alongside it. Green passageways like this also offer habitats for flowers and birds and provide wildlife with a safe route through the city.

Sneinton Greenway takes you to the next stop on the safari, St Stephen's Churchyard. As I mentioned earlier, cemeteries might seem like an unlikely urban nature spot, but because the land has been set aside and not developed, often for hundreds of years, it can be an important site for mature trees and plants not found in more developed parts of the city.

St Stephen's also has a rich history and Nottingham's famous mathematician, George Green is buried there. It is a short hop from St Stephen's over to Green's Mill, the windmill owned by George Green's father, where the mathematician's famous theorem is now celebrated. If maths isn't your thing, you can buy some of the mill's organic flour. Just think, as you bite into your freshly baked bread, you'll also be biting into a piece of Nottingham's history. As you'll probably discover on the safari, natural and human history are often closely intertwined.

It is another short hop from Green's Mill to King Edward Park, the final stop on the urban safari. You can now have a well earned rest and relax in the shade of the parks magnificent trees.

The urban safari is a great day out and an opportunity to visit parts of Nottingham you might never have seen before and probably didn't associate with nature. It is also great exercise, and for those who don't fancy a 7.5km walk there is also a shorter 4km version. Nature can often be found in the most unexpected places and Nottingham is full of wonderful green spots – so why not become an urban explorer and venture into some of the city's hidden natural wonders.

Just make sure you watch out for lions...