

CHAPTER 1 NATURE



AMELIA'S STORY

'Small changes
add up to make a
big difference.'

AMELIA LAM



PHOTO © PUI FUN LAM

An albino squirrel, white from nose to tail, pricked its ears as it sat at the base of a tree in the middle of London. Its eyes were fixed on a young girl who stared straight back, holding its gaze. Amelia Lam's first encounter with this rare, otherworldly squirrel would stay with her as she grew up. It was a reminder that even in the middle of the city, nature can surprise you.

But it wasn't until she was fifteen that Amelia started to take action. She took part in an environmental competition at school. With some friends, she designed and made bird feeders out of old pencils. They hung the feeders outside and watched as birds they had never seen before visited their school in large numbers. Amelia's group won the competition. They spoke in an assembly about it, inspiring other students to act.

Then Amelia went on a guided kayak tour of the River Thames. She got to see her city from a completely different point of view. She had never thought about this deep, dark river, and all the life it holds, snaking its way through the heart of London, connecting borough after borough. The River Thames is home to fish, invertebrates, plants and even mammals, such as seals. But as she paddled, Amelia started noticing the amount of litter floating downstream, getting stuck along the banks and tangled in vegetation, litter that would be damaging for all of the life in the river.

Amelia decided to do something about it. She started by picking up litter every Sunday around Camberwell, where she lived, and she joined river clean-ups and collected rubbish in her kayak. Now that she feels connected to the river it has become her place to protect. For Amelia, the river is the city's mysterious watery heart, and she has become its guardian.

The more Amelia did to help nature, the more she wanted to do. She did a week of work experience with the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT), finding out about the only group of flying mammals on Earth. In many cultures bats are feared and misunderstood, resulting in a lack of protection. Amelia joined a bat survey, where she was able to watch them swoop over her head and listen to their calls on a bat detector. How could anyone fear these beautiful creatures, she wondered. She helped write and edit the charity's newsletter, and the whole experience inspired her to consider a future career in nature conservation.

Amelia felt motivated to shout louder about nature. She contributed to research that the government was doing on the future of the environment and she even featured in a film shown to their Science Advisory Council, a panel of the UK's leading scientists. She applied to join the London Wildlife Trust's Young People's Forum and was the youngest person ever to be selected. As part of the forum, she did some training in Media and Journalism, which has equipped her with the skills to be more effective in making her voice heard as an environmentalist. Now she is working hard to inspire other people to take action too.

AMELIA'S MESSAGE TO YOU

Everybody seems to use the planet for their own gain and one of the easiest ways we can give back is to look after it. I feel like the small changes I started to make at the beginning are now adding up. Small changes add up to make a big difference.

ACTION 1

BUSY SKIES

JOIN AMELIA AND BUILD A RECYCLED BOTTLE BIRD FEEDER TO ENCOURAGE OUR FLYING FRIENDS TO THRIVE

WHY?

- In the UK we have lost 40 million birds in 50 years.
- We are losing at least 40% of bird species globally due to harmful farming practices, the climate crisis, hunting and destruction of their habitats.
- Sadly, for many it is too late, and for some, like the turtle dove, where the numbers have dropped by 98% in the UK in the last 50 years, there is little hope left.

But we know what is causing these losses and we are working hard to turn the situation around. Conservationists are fighting for the future of our birds, and you can help them by ensuring that those we do have survive.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED



A PLASTIC BOTTLE WITH A LID



A PENCIL OR AN OLD CHOPSTICK
(about one and a half times longer than the width of your bottle)



SCISSORS



STRING



BIRD SEED
(or you can make your own – see the next page)



A NEWSPAPER OR MAGAZINE

STEP 1 – IDENTIFY YOUR SPOT

- You will need a tree branch, balcony or another fixed point to hang your bird feeder from. Make sure it is two metres off the ground so that the birds can feed safely out of reach of predators like cats.
- Choose a spot that is either closer than one metre to a window or more than four metres away from a window. This ensures that any birds visiting are either going to be flying too slowly to hurt themselves if they fly into a window or that they have enough room to avoid the window when they visit your feeder.
- Do a simple survey to identify which birds are present in your area before you get started (there are guides and apps on the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds [RSPB] and British Trust for Ornithology [BTO] websites).

STEP 2 – GATHER YOUR MATERIALS

- If you don't have an old plastic bottle to hand, do a litter pick! Always wear strong gloves when collecting litter and make sure to wash anything you find before using it.
- Think about what you are going to feed the birds. You can buy special bird food mixes or make your own.

TIP

There are lots of recipes online for making your own bird seed mix. A simple option is to mix unsalted sunflower seeds, unsalted and chopped peanuts and raisins. Try to source organic ingredients; this means they have been grown in a way that isn't damaging to birds and other wildlife. You can also avoid plastic waste by trying to find a shop where you can buy loose ingredients.

STEP 3 – BUILD YOUR FEEDER

- First make sure your bottle is clean and dry.
- Stand the bottle upright and mark two holes opposite each other at least 3 cm up from the base of the bottle.
- Use your scissors or a barbecue skewer to create the holes and widen them to fit the pencil or chopstick. Make sure it fits snugly in the hole without falling out.

IMPORTANT

Make sure you are careful when cutting plastic and ask an adult to help if you are finding it difficult. Sharp plastic can hurt the birds so try to make the holes in the bottle as smooth as possible.

- Feed the pencil or stick through one hole and out the other side so that it sits level and the ends poke out of the bottle on either side (about a finger's length). This is where the birds will perch.
- Now carefully cut out a circular hole just above the pencil perch on either side. Keep it quite small, around 3 cm. This is for the birds to access the feed.
- To hang your feeder, pierce holes on opposite sides of the bottle just below the lid and feed string through. Create a loop by tying it together at the top.
- Make a cone out of a newspaper or magazine and use it to pour the seed mix into the top of the bottle so that it fills the bottle at least halfway up, making sure it is level with or covers the feeding hole.
- Mark the outside of the bottle with a pen to show how much bird feed you have put in and then monitor how much the birds have eaten.
- Now hang up your feeder and wait for the birds to arrive!

**TIP**

It is best not to put out whole peanuts in spring and summer as this can be a choking hazard for chicks.

STEP 4 – NEXT STEPS

- Make sure to keep replacing the feed as it gets eaten, particularly in winter, and wash the bottle out regularly to keep the feeder clean and the birds healthy.
- After you start to see some birds using your feeder, you can repeat your original survey to see which birds are visiting and whether there is a change.
- You can take part in the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch and the BTO Garden Birdwatch, record what birds you see around your feeder and contribute important data to efforts to monitor the health of UK bird populations.

WHAT WILL IT ACHIEVE?

Survival is hard for birds; they need a lot of food to maintain a steady body temperature and enough energy to fly around. This is especially true for small birds and during the winter months. By providing extra food we will help more birds survive. If every person in the UK helped just one bird survive this coming winter, we would help over 66 million birds soar and sing into spring.