

# Foraging Policy for Barking & Dagenham Country Parks and Nature Reserves

## Introduction

Foraging, the practice of gathering wild food resources, has seen a significant rise in popularity across London in recent years. While this activity can be a delightful way to connect with nature, it also poses potential risks to the delicate ecosystems within our country parks and nature reserves. This policy aims to balance the enjoyment of foraging with the need to protect the natural resources that wildlife depends on.

## Objectives

1. **Protect Natural Resources:** Ensure that foraging activities do not deplete the natural resources that are vital for local wildlife.
2. **Promote Sustainable Practices:** Encourage foragers to adopt sustainable practices that minimise their impact on the environment.
3. **Educate the Public:** Raise awareness about the importance of conservation and the potential impacts of foraging on local ecosystems.

## General Guidelines

1. **Permitted Areas:** Respectful foraging is allowed throughout the Dagenham Corridor sites, except for The Slack Bird Sanctuary on The Chase Local Nature Reserve, as no public access is permitted to this area. Please stay on footpaths at all times throughout the parks to decrease disturbance to wildlife.
2. **Permitted Species:** Foraging is permitted for blackberries, apples (although not from the Eastbrookend Country Park Orchard as it is still being established), elderflowers/berries, rosehips, nettles, dandelions, puffballs, and field mushrooms. Always ensure you have the correct identification, as some fungi and berries are poisonous. We advise using a guide-book or mobile app such as iNaturalist (<https://www.inaturalist.org/>) when foraging to check the identification and conservation status of each plant. Please avoid foraging any uncommon or rare species. Please avoid removing mosses and damaging any living or dead trees (puncturing or removing bark, breaking branches etc).
3. **Quantity Limits:** Foragers are allowed to collect only small quantities for personal use. Commercial foraging is strictly prohibited.
4. **No Digging permitted:** Digging or uprooting any plants is strictly prohibited. The use of spades, knives, and other cutting tools for foraging is not allowed.
5. **Respect Wildlife:** Foragers must ensure that their activities do not disturb wildlife or their habitats. This includes avoiding nesting areas and not removing plants that provide food or shelter for animals, including mosses, lichen and living or dead trees/bark.

## Specific Restrictions

1. **The Slack Bird Sanctuary:** Located within The Chase Local Nature Reserve, The Slack Bird Sanctuary is a critical habitat for many bird species. To protect these birds and their environment, public access to The Slack is strictly prohibited. No foraging or other activities are allowed in this area.
2. **Seasonal Restrictions:** Certain areas may be off-limits during specific times of the year to protect breeding or nesting wildlife. These restrictions will be communicated through temporary signage and updates on the Barking and Dagenham Country Parks website: <https://barkinganddagenhamcountryparks.com/>

## Legal Considerations

1. **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981:** Under this act, it is unlawful to uproot any wild plant without permission from the landowner or occupier. Uprooting is defined as digging up or otherwise removing the plant from the land on which it is growing, whether or not it has roots. This law is crucial for protecting the integrity of our natural habitats and ensuring that plant populations remain sustainable.

You can find a list of plant species protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 here: <https://www.ukwildlife.com/index.php/wildlife-countryside-act-1981/schedule-8/>

2. **Biosecurity:** Since foragers may be visiting multiple sites it is crucial that biosecurity is considered and appropriate measures taken. Please clean containers, clothing and footwear thoroughly with water and soap before and after visiting, do not transport plants or fungi between sites, and be aware of invasive species that could damage the native habitats.

A guide to identifying invasive species can be found here:

<https://qlnp.org.uk/images/uploads/services/nature-strategy/invasive-species-id-guides.pdf>

## Enforcement

1. **Monitoring:** Park Rangers and volunteers will regularly monitor foraging activities to ensure compliance with this policy.
2. **Penalties:** Violations of the foraging policy may result in fines, confiscation of foraged items, and/or bans from the parks and nature reserves.
3. **Reporting:** Visitors are encouraged to report any illegal foraging activities to the Ranger Service (see contact info below).

## Education and Outreach

1. **Workshops and Events:** The Ranger Service organise walks and events on wild food and medicinal plants to educate the public about sustainable foraging practices and the importance of conservation and the reasons behind it. We also work with [Company Drinks CIC](#) (a community social enterprise that makes drinks while connecting people with each other and local green spaces) and allow them to forage in our parks. Company Drinks teach sustainable harvesting techniques during their

free picking trips, so that anyone can participate and learn with them how to take care of the natural spaces.

### **Contact Information**

For any questions, or to report issues related to foraging, please contact the Ranger Service:

- **Address:** Eastbrookend Discovery Centre, Eastbrookend Country Park, The Chase, Dagenham, RM7 0SS
- **Telephone:** 020 8227 2332
- **Email:** [rangers@lbbd.gov.uk](mailto:rangers@lbbd.gov.uk)
- **Twitter/X:** @BDParkRangers

### **Conclusion**

By adhering to this foraging policy, we can ensure that Barking and Dagenham Country Parks and Nature Reserves remain vibrant and healthy ecosystems. Together, we can enjoy the benefits of foraging while protecting the natural resources that wildlife depends on.