Britain's most unusual nature reserve could be right outside your back door

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A British conservationist behind a growing UK-wide initiative bringing together more than 30,000 registered gardens is challenging the traditional idea of what a nature reserve looks like. Luke Smout, co-founder of Community Nature Reserve, has received a personal letter of encouragement from Sir David Attenborough, who praised the initiative's continued growth.

A nature reserve stretching across thousands of gardens, rather than occupying one piece of countryside, is the idea behind a British conservation initiative which has now attracted more than 30,000 registered gardens.

Community Nature Reserve brings together individual gardens and outdoor spaces across the UK, with participants encouraged to dedicate just three square yards to wildlife. The individual spaces are not separate nature reserves. Together, they form one collective network, connecting households, schools, businesses, care settings and community spaces through a shared commitment to nature.

The initiative was launched nationwide in 2024 by British conservationists Luke Smout and Dr. Adrian Cooper. Its growth has attracted the attention of renowned naturalist Sir David Attenborough, who wrote personally to Luke in July 2025.

In his letter, Sir David said he was "delighted to learn of the continued growth" of the Nature Reserve initiative and wished Luke "every success in spreading its influence nationwide".

For Luke, the principle behind the project is that conservation should not be confined to large estates, protected countryside or organisations with substantial resources. Ordinary gardens, whatever their size, can have a place in a wider effort to support wildlife.

He said: “I think one of the biggest barriers to getting involved in conservation is the feeling that you need to do something on a large scale to make a difference.

“Community Nature Reserve is built around a much simpler idea. We are asking people to consider what they can do with just three square yards. One garden on its own might not seem like much, but bringing thousands of these spaces together creates something that none of us could achieve individually.

“The nature reserve is all of us, taking responsibility for a little space and making it count.”

The scheme does not require households to have a large garden, specialist knowledge or expensive equipment. Participants can make use of a small patch of ground, introduce wildlife-friendly plants or manage an area to provide food and shelter for local wildlife.

With more than 30,000 gardens registered, the initiative is now looking to encourage further participation across Britain, bringing more households and organisations into the network.

The registrations represent a potential 90,000 square yards of wildlife-friendly space if every participant dedicates the recommended area. That is equivalent to approximately 7.5 hectares, spread across communities rather than concentrated in one location.

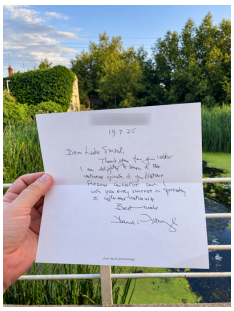
Luke hopes the project will encourage people to look differently at the space immediately outside their homes and recognise the part it could play in supporting Britain's wildlife.

He said: “You don't have to live next to a nature reserve to be part of one. The idea is that people can contribute from wherever they live. Three square yards is a small starting point, but together we can make that idea reach across the country.”

People can find out more about Community Nature Reserve and register their garden at www.communitynaturereserve.org.

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