

Prison Reading Groups (PRG) was created in 1999 to set up, support and fund informal reading groups in prisons. We now support more than 60 groups in over 45 prisons nationwide. PRG is part of Give a Book.



First featured in Inside Time in July 2022

Finding a Good Read: Nature

A regular column to help you find a good read even if you can't get to the library yet!

Note to readers: Your library may not have all of these titles or even any of them, but it's sure to have some of the authors and subjects touched on. So if you like the sound of any of the books mentioned, just include 'or any other books by / about ...' on your request app.

Nature is a powerful force that connects all humans together. From breath-taking natural settings in novels to memoirs about nature and mental health, we can access the natural world through the books written by authors inspired by nature. Here are some recommendations.

Fiction

The Call of the Wild by Jack London: a classic novel from 1903, set in Yukon, Canada. It follows a dog named Buck, who is stolen and made to work as a sled dog in Alaska. ***The Salt Path*** by Raynor Winn: based on the true story of a married couple who decide to walk from Somerset to Dorset with little money and no shelter following the news that one of them is terminally ill. ***The Word for World is Forest*** by Ursula Le Guin: a science-fiction novel that explores the themes of colonialism and oppression, in a setting where the natural world is being exploited. ***Wuthering Heights*** by Emily Bronte: this classic novel is set in Yorkshire and has become known for its descriptions of the wild moors. It tells the story of the intense and passionate love between Heathcliff and Cathy. ***The Island Home*** by Libby Page: this feel-good book follows a woman returning to her childhood home on a small island off the Scottish coast, with themes of community and accepting your past. ***Where the Crawdads Sing*** by Delia Owens: this book has been referred to as an ode to the natural world, with its evocative descriptions of a marsh on the North Carolina coast. When a person is found dead, a woman who lives in the marsh becomes a suspect.



Non-fiction

The Hidden Life of Trees by Peter Wohlleben: the author describes trees as a social network, explaining how groups of trees work together like families.

Living Planet by Sir David Attenborough: a biography of our world, exploring plants and animals across the globe, including fish that walk and snakes that fly.

H is for Hawk by Helen Macdonald: a powerful memoir about a woman's relationship with a hawk, and how the hawk helped her during a bereavement.

The Wild Remedy by Emma Mitchell: a beautifully illustrated diary that takes you through the seasons, showing how the natural world can benefit your physical and mental health.

Wild: From Lost to Found by Cheryl Strayed: a memoir from a 26-year-old woman whose world was torn apart when she got divorced and lost her mother to cancer. This book tells the story of her decision to hike alone along the west coast of America, and her encounters with the natural world.

Wilding by Isabella Tree: an account of 'rewilding' a farm in England, where cattle, ponies, pigs and deer are now allowed to roam freely, and rare species like the turtle dove come to breed.



Poetry

A Nature Poem for Every Day of the Year by Jane McMorland Hunter: a collection of poems by different poets that follows the seasons, including Wordsworth's daffodils and Keats' descriptions of autumn.

Death of a Naturalist by Seamus Heaney: an Irish poet who vividly describes the nature of rural Ireland in this poetry collection.

Children's

The Animals of Farthing Wood by Colin Dann: this is a series of books that was later turned into an animation. It follows a group of animals living in a wood that is being destroyed by humans, led by Fox and Badger.

Diary of a Young Naturalist by Dara McAnulty: a memoir by an autistic teenager who explores the wildlife around his home in Northern Ireland, highlighting how essential nature is to our health.

What to Look for in Spring/Summer/Autumn/Winter: these classic Ladybird books have recently been updated. They are non-fiction titles that explain what happens in nature each season, using colourful illustrations. (Ages 7–9 years.)

This month's column is by Lily Ross, a PRG volunteer from Penguin Random House.

If you've read a good book recently send a review in no more than 100 words and mark it 'Finding a Good Read'. We'll print the best ones. And if you have suggestions for other city settings, let us know and we'll search out some titles.