For our founders, it was how beautiful green spaces benefited people that was key. As Octavia Hill put it in 1888: ‘The need of quiet, the need of air, the need of exercise and, I believe, the sight of sky and of things growing, seem human needs, common to all and not to be dispensed with without great loss.’

In our increasingly busy, increasingly urbanised, increasingly digital world, these founding principles feel even more relevant today. Who doesn’t feel instantly energised after stepping out of centrally-heated fag into the brittle sunshine and crisp air of a winter’s day?

The sight of a duckling waddling after its mother evokes tender emotions. Catching an unexpected shower of fragrant spring blossom can spark a moment of unbridled joy. The relief and satisfaction of heaving reluctant legs to the top of a hill for a glorious view is air-punchingly good. We all need it. Put simply, everyone needs nature.

This year is the 125th anniversary of the National Trust. For 125 years, each generation has come together to look after the nation’s special places, for everyone.

In our region, one of the anniversary celebrations is a wave of song, lighting up like beacons across the region. An anthem is being commissioned with lyrics provided by National Trust supporters to be sung by community choirs on Saturday 16 May. The wave of song will start at Alfriston Clergy House in East Sussex, the first built property to be acquired by the National Trust in 1896. When the song has been sung there, the baton will be taken up by another property, and so on, finishing at Waddesdon in Buckinghamshire.

See What’s On for details of participating places and how to get involved.
2020 begins with a brand new way to enjoy your National Trust membership in London. The National Trust Partners scheme is expanding. From January, the Royal Observatory joins the 12 existing places where members can receive a discount on entry. Overlooking the River Thames, the Royal Observatory is best known for the major role it played in the history of astronomy, navigation and even time itself, as the home of GMT (Greenwich Mean Time).

An interactive exhibition based on the much-loved children’s book ‘The Tiger Who Came to Tea’ arrives at Osterley Park on 11 January. With it comes the chance to play with a life-size tiger, delve into a dressing up chest or make ‘tea’ in a fully interactive play kitchens. Bigger kids will also be able to explore Judith Kerr’s wider life and work, including access to childhood drawings that show how she developed into an acclaimed artist and story teller.

As spring arrives, a seasonal transformation begins at our places across London. In the 300 year-old orchard at Fenton House, a delicate display of ‘pom-pom’ blossoms dangle gently from branches while a blaze of ‘pom-pom’ blossoms dangle gently from branches while a blaze of emerging blue tulips add a splash of colour on the ground. 500,000 bulbs burst through the ground. 500,000 bulbs burst through the ground. Constable famously stated: 'It will be difficult to name a class of landscape in which the sky is not the key note, the standard of scale and the chief organ of sentiment.‘ Sunrises, sunsets and clouds all reveal the spiritual and emotive character of skies, their heavenly symbolism and their vehicle for emotional expression.

This powerful exhibition of aerial landscapes is the backdrop for brand-new studio sessions, workshops and events including highlights such as Petworth Dark Skies (part of the South Downs Dark Skies Festival 2020). Four days of workshops, storytelling, night-time walks, dawn chorus singing and in-conversation events all focus upon people’s fascination with the night sky.

There are also studio masterclasses for adults with expert practitioners and a February half-term art studio week for 8-12-year-olds.

Skyscape exhibition 11 January – 18 March, Petworth Dark Skies 20 – 23 February. Tickets are available from the Petworth website.

From portrait to panorama, from the quirky and amusing, to the outright wondrous, these photographs reflect the everlasting appeal of the garden. Categories include the Beauty of Plants, Wildlife in the Garden and Wildflower Landscapes among others. This year, for the first time, a special Sissinghurst award category has been added and the top three winners work will also be included in this exhibition.

Local floral designers have created an upside-down dried flower garden and brought the outdoors inside with new displays. On weekends, the garden will also be open for visitors to learn a little more about the history and work that goes into preparing the garden for the coming year. The garden structure is revealed through bare branches as small shoots of green emerge from the ground.

From Saturday 7 March, the doors to the expansive showrooms open once again at Knole. New life-sized paper sculptures will be located throughout the rooms. Designed by paper artist Denise Watson of Delicarta, a series of exquisitely created mannequins draw their inspiration from Knole’s many portraits, spanning 600 years of history.

The themes of fashion, paper and the characters depicted in the installations will be reflected in a programme of events running throughout the year, including workshops and children’s activities.

For more information on the above and other news from London head to nationaltrust.org.uk/london
From the first tender snowdrop to the colourblock drama of daffodils and bluebells, appreciating spring’s procession of flowers carries us through those still-chilly days to warmer times.

Bateman’s is known for the beauty of its spring gardens. Throughout the season, different varieties of spring flowers come to life. There’s a carpet of pale blue scilla in the wild garden with daffodils livening to life. There’s a carpet of pale blue scilla of different varieties of spring flowers, including rhododendrons.

There are spring bulbs everywhere at Sissinghurst. Stone troughs and urns bloom with bright coloured tulips, and rows of narcissi in every shade of yellow line the borders along Lime Walk. Splashes of yellow daffodils spring up through the grass across the orchard.

Angel tear daffodils blanket the South Garden at Emmetts Garden and snakeshead fritillaries bob their heads in the North Garden later in spring. Set against the backdrop of the Kentish Weald, hundreds of pink, red and black tulips create a spectacle between rows of blossoming cherry trees.

Poleden Lacey comes to life with snowdrops in the Winter Garden, then heritage daffodils in the beds and banks. There are violets in the Rock Garden, tulips bursting into bloom along the house borders and bluebells in the wider estate. Small, beautiful art installations pop up around the garden from March.

Tulips feature in the Spring Spectacular at Standen from mid April. The majestic wisteria along the lavender lawns in late spring, scenting the air and buzzing with bees.

At Sheffield Park and Garden, there are early spring daffodils, bluebells and dazzling displays of rhododendrons and azaleas. New for this year are Forest Bathing sessions amongst the carpets of bluebells in Walk Wood and free guided walking tours amongst the rhododendrons and azaleas.

The joy of birdsong
You don’t have to know the words of a song to appreciate the music. Likewise, you don’t need to know the name of a bird to be uplifted by its song, or be a twitcher to enjoy watching birds wheeling and soaring in a clear sky.

Spring is a great time to appreciate them, as our fairweather visitors are returning for the summer. The call of a cuckoo is the classic sign of spring, but often it’s our native blackbird who is first with his bubbling song.

Look up at this time of year and you’ll see the migration underway. Millions of birds are on the move, urgently heading home to reclaim their breeding grounds. Visibility (visible migration watching – it’s a thing!) is easy and you don’t need any technical knowledge.

Nicky Scott, Lead Ranger for Leith Hill, says: ‘Thanks to ongoing restoration of the heathland at nearby Duke’s Warren, we see stonechats, siskin and goshawks, and even nationally rare birds such as woodlark and nightjar. More than 5000 house martins passed through Leith Hill last year.’

Good served warm with clotted cream as a pudding, or allow to cool for a lovely afternoon tea treat.

Why not send us a photo on Twitter @southeastNT or Facebook? Or email lse.customerenquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk

Bake…
Rhubarb, orange and almond slice
This is a lovely recipe using the first forced tender stems of early spring rhubarb.

Makes 12 slices

Ingredients
450g self raising flour
450g caster sugar
1 large orange
225g fresh rhubarb
1 tsp baking powder
450g butter, softened
6 medium eggs, beaten
pinch salt
110g demerara sugar
110g flaked almonds

Method
• Line a 30cm rectangular deep-sided baking tray with greaseproof paper.
• Heat oven to 150°C.
• Cut rhubarb into small chunks and cook on a low heat in a small saucepan until the rhubarb is tender. No need to add liquid as the rhubarb releases a lot of liquid when it starts to cook. Don’t overcook as you want to keep the lovely chunks.
• Cut up the orange and place in a food processor until chopped to a pulp.
• Cream together the sugar and butter until light and fluffy then add the orange pulp and mix well.
• Add the flour and baking powder to the sugar and butter mixture and stir the eggs in gradually.
• Spoon the mixture into your baking tin. Top with the cooked rhubarb, sprinkle with demerara sugar and scatter the top with flaked almonds.
• Bake for about 30-40 minutes until firm to the touch.

Good served warm with clotted cream as a pudding, or allow to cool for a lovely afternoon tea treat.
Meet like-minded members
If you like making the most of your National Trust membership and enjoy some company on your outings, why not join your local Supporter Group? These are groups of Trust members who live near you and get together for talks, walks, outings, day trips and even holidays.

Wherever you live, there’s a group within reach, waiting to give you a warm welcome.

Search supporter groups LSE on the National Trust website or phone 020 7887 8888. T&Cs apply.

Wetland for wildlife at Sissinghurst
Once a common feature of the Kent Weald, floodplain meadows have decreased over time, along with the habitats and wildlife they once supported. All that is set to change at Sissinghurst Castle Garden where a natural flood management project to ‘rewet’ a historic floodplain began in autumn 2019.

Working with the South East Rivers Trust, the project will recreate the floodplain in an area called Frogmead, providing a dynamic resource for wildlife. This name is most likely due to a history of amphibians taking advantage of seasonal moisture when the river was in high flow.

Restoring the floodplain meadow will alleviate flooding downstream after heavy rainfall as the water will be diverted into shallow dips in the field before seeping slowly back into the main channel. It should also attract an abundance of wildlife including wetland birds such as snipe and teal, dragonflies, and encourage frogs to return to Frogmead.

Conservation in action

Tree-ring dating at Alfriston Clergy House
The exact date that Alfriston Clergy House, in East Sussex, was built has always been a mystery. Now, tree-ring dating – known as dendrochronology – has solved the mystery once and for all.

Alfriston Clergy House was the first building ever acquired by the National Trust in 1896. It was in poor condition at the time and cost just £30 to buy, although a further £400 was needed for repairs.

In 2019, we commissioned the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory to sample the building’s timbers. Dendrochronology involves taking cores of wood (which look like cigars) from buildings and then studying the tree rings to provide accurate dates.

The sampling for Alfriston concluded that the trees used to build the original house were felled between 1399 and 1407. Hollie Jones, National Trust Operations Manager for Alfriston Clergy House, said: ‘Being able to pinpoint the age of the house for the first time is a break-through. This wonderful house captured the heart of Octavia Hill, the National Trust’s co-founder. With these findings we are continuing her vision, 125 years later.’

Alfriston Clergy House is open from March to December.

Petworth ‘Beauties’
Paintings of ladies of the Stuart court that had their legs cut off and folded out of sight 200 years ago, are having their legs unfurled again by the National Trust in partnership with Tate Britain. Nicknamed the Petworth ‘Beauties’, the portraits were cut to three-quarter-length after the 3rd Earl of Egremont wanted more space for new artworks. Then, in the 1990s, during conservation work, the hidden canvas folds were discovered.

Two portraits by Michael Dahl have been conserved to their full length and will star in an exhibition at Tate Britain - British Baroque: Power and Illusion. The remaining paintings are still on display in the original ‘Beauty Room’ at Petworth in West Sussex.

Tate Britain is excursively offering National Trust members 2 for 1 tickets to the exhibition British Baroque: Power and Illusion from 5 February to 9 April. Use code NT241 online at tate.org.uk or by phone 020 7887 8888. T&Cs apply.

Royal railings restored
Visit Claremont Landscape Garden, in Surrey, between January and spring and you’ll see the camellias in bloom, bringing beautiful splashes of colour to the wintery garden. But there is more to the Camellia Terrace than meets the eye.

We’ve just finished restoring the Camellia Terrace railings. Decorated with the monogram of Claremont’s former owner, Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, they’re one of the last signs that royalty once walked through the garden.

In recent years the railings had become rusty, with sections of paint flaking away. Paint analysis was carried out, looking at tiny scraps tucked into the curves of the ironwork, believed to date back to 1824. It was discovered that the original colour was dark green, made from Prussian blue and ochre. The shade was known as ‘invisible green’ and was popular in green spaces at the time.

Conservators removed old paint and tended to corroded areas before applying a shade called Brunswick Green. The restored railings give visitors a glimpse of how Claremont would have looked when Prince Leopold and Princess Charlotte used to stroll through the garden.

For a large print version, please call us on 0344 800 1895 or email lse.customerenquiries@nationaltrust.org.uk