

SOMERSET LIFE

JULY 2026

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INTO THE WILD

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How to start a
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How to create your own nature journal

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GARDEN COLOURS

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Dear Diary

Keeping a nature journal can create a more profound connection with the natural world around us – and it has mental health benefits too. We hear from passionate journal-keepers about how you can start your own

WORDS: Catherine Welton

The blue tit at the bird feeder outside my window was the perfect excuse to drag my eyes from my laptop screen and rest them on something else. As he pecked at the seed, I marvelled at the vivid cobalt blue that capped his tiny head. I opened my nature journal and jotted down what I'd observed. In doing so, I paused my busy day and my busy mind, for a few precious moments.

Nature journalling is the practise of observing and recording what you see in nature. You can write, sketch, paint – how you express your observations is up to you – and it's become an increasingly popular way of connecting with the natural world around us, in a slower more meaningful way. It's thought to reduce stress, boost creativity, increase focus and even improve memory.

Anna Baker, an artist based in rural Somerset, has been working with journals for several years now. 'They began informally as part of my daily practice – a way of being present with what is around me, bringing experiences home with me. Whether that be a colour, a sound, a sense of movement, tracks along the lane or ploughed furrows in the field. The journals are a way of paying attention to the landscapes I move through every day.'

Like many searching for solace during the long days of lockdown, Frances Eustace's love of nature journalling began during Covid. 'I enjoyed art classes at school but didn't have time when I was working. Then Covid happened and I couldn't work, but I found my late mother's art materials and started drawing and painting things in the garden.' As a retired professional musician, the creative freedom of nature journalling particularly appealed. 'I enjoyed doing flowers, leaves, feathers etc, but I found botanical drawing too controlled and intimidating. The thing I like about nature journalling is a 10-minute sketch with added notes can be useful as a record of a time, a place, a feeling, a memory, or equally a one-hour painting can be totally absorbing and full of detail. It's very interesting to look back at different months, seasons and years.'

Connecting with the seasons is important to Anna too. 'Every season changes the way we notice things. Spring and early summer are full of movement – everything is emerging and shifting quickly. In winter, with the leaves gone, the structure of the land becomes clearer, the bones of hedgerows, the shapes of trees, the way the land folds and opens.' But autumn is her favourite. 'It's the time I look forward to the most, the browns, oranges and golds.'



Anna Baker shares her concertina journals with her local community. Photo: Anna Baker



above and below: Jules Woolford has been keeping journals for over 14 years. Photos: Jules Woolford

There's a magic that shifts with the days shortening.' Artist and environmental educator Jules Woolford has been keeping nature journals for 14 years. 'I was inspired by Edith Holden's *The Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady* and Beatrix Potter's natural history paintings,' she explains.

She has journalled all over Somerset, with Exmoor one of her favourite places to visit, but points out that nature can be observed in all sorts of surprising places. 'My previous "patch" in Bristol was a former landfill tip on scrubland near Avonmouth. You don't need to be in a National Park, or in a countryside location.

'There is beauty and wonder all around us, wherever we are: tiny plants sprouting from pavement cracks, lichen on concrete posts, watching the behaviour of pigeons and herring gulls.'

Jules explains that how you choose to record your observations is down to personal choice. 'There's absolutely no right way to do it. There are people who keep journals in a more scientific way, others are more literary, you can mix it up. Whatever works for you, is the right way.'

'When I started, I tried different approaches, and different kinds of journals, but settled into using my favourite mediums; graphite pencil and watercolour in an A5 landscape sketchbook. It's lightweight and portable for outdoor sketching, whether that's on my local patch, or walking through the Horner Valley outside Porlock, which is possibly my favourite nature spot ever!'

Viv Grant is a coach, educator and poet who lives near Taunton. She has been nature journalling for nearly 40 years. 'The first line in my first journal, on February 5, 1988, has pictures of the sea, I started it at Culbone Church in Porlock. I'm on my 125th journal now!'

Over the years, she's experimented with a variety of different mediums, more recently embracing technology. 'The physical act of writing with a pen on a page is still really valuable and important, but I've also started using my phone to record sounds and voice notes, narrating a stream of consciousness.'

Viv brings a strong environmental purpose to her nature journalling. 'I do worry about the environment that I've come to know so well. Nature journalling can be a sort of stewardship of nature, watching how it's being managed and looked after.'

One of her favourite places is Blue Anchor beach which, for her, blends the bigger environmental picture with her own personal story. 'I've been documenting how my walks from Blue Anchor up to Minehead have changed, the physicality of the changes of the landscape but also the inner landscapes of my own life, how I'm changing as a person walking through those landscapes.'

Although for many people, nature journalling is a deliberately solitary pursuit, Viv points out that it can be enjoyed in company too. 'When you go out with somebody





else in nature, there's a collaboration that happens, it creates a discussion.'

In Anna's case, her 'concertina' journals have become a shared resource with her local community. 'I began making journals in response to a threatened green space in the village where I live. The journals became a way of quietly celebrating what already exists here, the habitats, the landscapes but also the community itself. Over time, they've grown into a collaborative project where others contribute their own drawings, words and observations.'

If starting a nature journal feels a little daunting, the advice is to start with what you know. 'It could be an intimate personal connection with a field at the bottom of your

'The journals are a way of paying attention to the landscapes I move through every day'

garden, or a stretch of river you know really well; find that starting point for you,' says Viv.

'Start small and local,' agrees Anna. 'Draw something simple, write a few words about the weather, note a sound or a smell. It doesn't have to be polished; the value is in the act of noticing.'

It's also worth reaching out to others on social media for inspiration. 'Nature journal-keepers are a niche group but we're extremely friendly and welcoming,' says Jules, who is one of the co-founders of International Nature Journaling Week (June 1-7, 2026). 'This year will be our sixth worldwide event. Thousands of people from over 90 countries have taken part to date. It's totally free and open to everyone, regardless of artistic ability – often encouraging 'pencil

miles' rather than perfect art. It's a great way for new nature journalers to begin their journey and be inspired.'

As life feels busier and busier, and time more and more precious, nature journaling is a wonderful way to be present. 'It offers a small pause, a way of reconnecting with place, with the seasons and with the landscapes,' concludes Anna.

For Viv, there's no better place to practise it, than here. 'There's always an adventure in the landscape of Somerset; there are so many hidden beautiful places. Even after thirty years.' ●

For more inspiration visit:

Jules Woolford: [@drawnintonature](#)

Viv Grant: [vivgrant.co.uk](#)

Anna Baker: [@anna_e_baker](#)
[naturejournalingweek.com](#)

above: Viv Grant has been nature journaling for over 40 years. Photo: Viv Grant

below: Nature journaling is a way of connecting with the natural world around us.

Photo: Gettyimages

