

# River Detectives' Handbook



In partnership with



One of the biggest threats to your local river is pollution caused by harmful chemicals and litter entering drains along roads. These drains often lead to the local river so **we must all remember...**

## ONLY RAIN DOWN THE DRAIN

To stop pollution from drains entering our rivers, we need your help.

## Here's what you can do:

- If you see a yellow fish stencil next to a drain, explain to who you are with that the fish is reminding us that the drain leads directly to the river. Only Rain Down the Drain means that we should never put anything down drains in the road, not even small things like sweet wrappers
- Put all litter into bins (a recycle bin if you can) so your litter does not end up in the river
- If you see anything bad in the river tell an adult and ask them to report it to the Environment Agency (Tel 0800 80 70 60)
- Ask an adult to take you for a walk along your local river, enjoy it, get to know it, and use this handbook to record what you see
- Once you have completed this handbook, return it to the address below so we can see what you have found and let us know if you would like another handbook to continue to monitor your river
- Use the pictures and descriptions of plants and animals in this booklet to see what you can find when visiting your local river
- Write down how many you see, where they were (use any nearby landmarks such as near the school, church or street) and on what date
- Bad plants and animals are ones that shouldn't be there and can stop good plants and animals from surviving
- Some plants and animals are hard to find or very rare so don't be sad if you don't find these on your river, it doesn't mean they aren't there or that your river is bad. Also, some may only be around sometimes, so if they disappear don't worry they will probably be back.

**Finally and most importantly -  
Have Fun!**

Return completed handbooks to: **Eddie Yellow-fish**

At: Groundwork East, Unit 3 Hill Farm Barns,  
Ashbocking Road, Henley, Suffolk, IP6 0SA





# How to keep safe

- **NEVER** enter the river or go too close to the river edge – so you don't fall in
- **ALWAYS** wash your hands when you get home and don't put your hands in your mouth – there are nasty germs in some rivers which can make you unwell
- **NEVER** walk along the river if it is flooded or it is raining heavily – rivers can be dangerous after lots of rain
- **NEVER** walk along the the river during strong winds – as there are usually lots of trees and these could fall and hurt you
- **ALWAYS** have an adult with you to help keep you safe
- **ALWAYS** wear sunscreen in hot weather and warm clothes in cold weather
- **THINK** about what you wear – rivers often have plants like stinging nettles and thistles so these will hurt if you have bare skin. So it is best to wear trousers, socks and shoes that cover all your feet such as trainers or wellies.



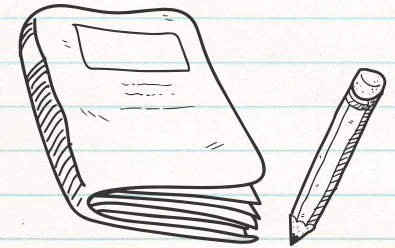
# What to take with you

☐ This handbook

☐ Pencil

☐ Note book

- For anything else you want to record or if you want to draw a picture of anything you see (I would love to see a copy of any pictures you draw).



☐ Magnifying glass

- Don't worry if you don't have one, but they can be useful to see mini beasts.



☐ Phone or camera

- This is so you can take photos of anything you see but are not sure what it is, or just something you really like (I would love to see copies of these). Ask an adult for permission before taking a phone or camera on your river walk.



# Plants



## Nettles

Often found along riverbanks. They usually sting you if you touch their leaves, so be careful. They have longish toothed leaves that end in a point and are covered in small hairs. If they have flowers they are small and green or white

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Water Mint

Found in shallow water along the edge of rivers. It has a very nice smell, like mint but sweeter. It has long rounded leaves and purple flowers.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Reeds

A type of grass that grows in shallow water so will be found along river edges and in shallow rivers. It can grow very tall, up to 5m (16.5ft). It has stiff, smooth stems, broad leaves and feather-like flowers.

Date seen:

Place seen:

# Plants - Problem Plants\*



## Giant Hogweed

A very tall plant and can get as big as 3m (10ft) in height. It has very large leaves and lots of small white flowers in a bunch in the shape of an umbrella. The sap from the plant burns your skin so NEVER touch it or get too close.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Himalayan Balsam

Has hollow stems that are easy to crush in your hand and very pretty pink flowers. This plant can get quite tall and can be over 2m (6ft) high. It likes growing in wet areas, such as river banks.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Japanese Knotweed

Can grow in dense bunches. Its stems are thick and woody with purple spots. When it has flowers they are small and white. This plant is very strong and can grow through concrete pavements.

Date seen:

Place seen:

\*Problem Plants are ones that cause damage to other plants or the environment. These plants have usually been brought to the UK from other countries and are referred to as Invasive Non-native species.



# Mammals



## Otters

Otters are quite large animals, similar in size to a small dog. They have brown fur with a brownish white chin, a long body and a long thick tail. They are not easy to find so you may not see them but you can look out for their paw prints on muddy river banks.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Water Voles

Water voles are about the size of a rat, with round bodies and long tails. They are difficult to see but you might hear a plop as they enter the water. They eat plants and will often leave neatly chewed plant stems in the water. They will not be found in fast water and live in the river bank, where they make small holes to live in.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Foxes

They are often seen near rivers. They are about the same size as a medium sized dog. They are dog like, with red fur and long bushy tails.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Badgers

Badgers are large animals and a similar size to a medium dog. They are mainly black/ grey with white stripes on their face. They are very hard to see as they are shy and mainly come out at dusk, but you may see their paw prints.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Rats

Rats are often seen as bad but they are part of the river ecosystem and in small numbers they are not a problem. We can catch diseases from rats, which is why we must wash our hands after being near the river and touching the water. They are brown or grey in colour, have long bodies and long tails.

Date seen:

Place seen:

# Mammals - Problem Mammals



## Minks

Mink are often confused with Otters but they are much smaller and are similar in size to a ferret. They are a problem because they kill large numbers of baby water voles and the eggs of birds such as kingfishers, reducing the numbers that can survive along our rivers.

Date seen:

Place seen:

# River Birds



## Kingfishers

Kingfishers are brightly coloured and live along rivers. They nest in holes in the river banks and catch small fish. Even though they are brightly coloured they are very small so are difficult to spot.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Coots

Coots are small duck-like birds that you will often see swimming on the surface of rivers, lakes and ponds. They have black feathers and a white beak. They are often confused with a moor hen but they have different coloured beaks.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Moorhens

Moorhens are very similar to coots but are smaller. They have dark feathers but have a mainly red beak instead of white like coots. They are often seen swimming on the surface of rivers, lakes and ponds.

Date seen:

Place seen:

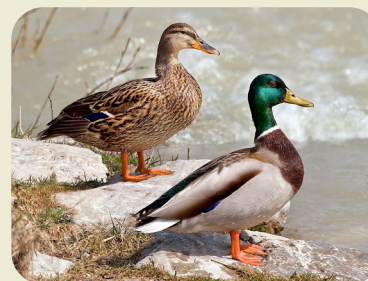


## Hérons

Hérons are large birds with grey backs, long white neck and a yellow beak. They also have very long legs. They can be seen on river banks but will also enter shallow water to hunt for fish.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Mallard Ducks

Mallard Ducks are commonly found near water. The picture shows a male and female. The males are more colourful with green heads and the females are mostly brown.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Cormorants

Cormorants eat fish so are often seen sitting high up on the water edge looking for fish to catch. They have long necks and dark/black feathers.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## White Egrets

Small White Egrets also eat fish and will be seen near the water edge looking for food. They have white feathers, long necks, beaks and legs and yellow feet.

Date seen:

Place seen:



# Mini Beasts



## Mayflies

Mayflies have clear wings that look like lace and 3 very long tails. When they land they will sit with their wings and tails pointing upwards. There are many species so they come in a variety of colours.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Banded Demoiselle

Banded Demoiselle is a type of damselfly. The male has a blue body and a large black spot on their wings. Females have green bodies and pale wings with no spots.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Caddis Fly

Caddis Fly looks a bit like a moth but they fold their wings over each other along their backs. They are a dull colour and some species have long antennae.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Emperor Dragonflies

Emperor Dragonflies are large and have a black line running down their bodies. Males are pale blue and females are a dull green.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Common Darter

Common Darter is a dragonfly that can be found anywhere water is near by. The males are red, while females are yellow/brown.

Date seen:

Place seen:



## Ruddy Darter

Ruddy Darter, like the common Darter, the males are red and the females are yellow/brown. To tell the difference between them, look at the tail. The Ruddy Darter's tail gets thicker at the bottom but the Common Darter's doesn't.

Date seen:

Place seen:

## Mini Beasts



### Migrant Hawker

Migrant Hawker are mostly dark brown or black with blue and yellow patches along their bodies.

Date seen:

Place seen:



### Broad-bodied Chaser

Broad-bodied Chaser has a flat wide body. The male's tail is pale blue with yellow spots, the female has a green/brown body.

Date seen:

Place seen:

Kingfishers are brightly coloured and live along rivers. They nest in holes in the river banks and catch small fish.





# Other things to look for

Tick the answers that are most like your river

Is there a lot of weed blocking the top of the water?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, how much water can you see?

- ☐ Most of the surface water
- ☐ Less than half the surface water
- ☐ None of the surface water
- .....

Is there any damage to the river bank

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, how is it damaged? (tick all that apply)

- ☐ Parts of the bank falling into the river
- ☐ There are lots of holes in the bank
- ☐ There are only a few plants covering the bank
- .....

How many trees are there along the river?

- ☐ Less than a quarter of the bank
- ☐ Less than half of the bank
- ☐ Most of the bank
- ☐ The river is in woodland

Number of fish seen? .....



# Thank you for completing this handbook

I hope you enjoyed spending time along the river and trying to find all the plants and animals that live there. I would love to see what you have found and if you would like to share it with me, please send it to:

**Eddie Yellow-fish**  
**Groundwork East**

Unit 3, Hill Farm Barns,  
Ashbocking Road,  
IP6 0SA

To ensure all the good plants and animals can continue to live in and along our rivers, we need to make sure the water stays clean so it is a nice place for them to live. You can help with this by remembering the Yellow Fish message and sharing this with everyone you know.

## Can you complete the message?

O \_ \_ \_ R \_ \_ \_ D \_ \_ \_ T \_ \_ \_ D \_ \_ \_





# River Detectives' Handbook

**Groundwork East,**  
Unit 3 Hill Farm Barns,  
Ashbocking Road, Henley,  
Suffolk IP6 0SA

**E:** [suffolk@groundwork.org.uk](mailto:suffolk@groundwork.org.uk)  
**T:** 01473 350370

