

Wildlife Identification Guide

There are many different species that can be found living in or around our waterways. Here are a few examples of the more common wildlife species:



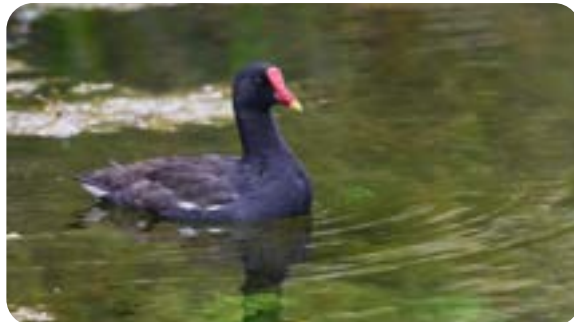
Ducks

There are many different species of duck, each with large bills, short necks and webbed feet. The mallard is one of the UK's best-known ducks; males have a green head, and females are brown.



Swan

Swans are large white waterbirds, with elongated s-shaped necks, orange bills and a large wingspan. You might also see younger swans, known as cygnets, which are grey/brown before they turn white.



Moorhen

Moorhens are about the size of a duck, but are largely black with a yellow and red, long green legs and un-webbed feet.



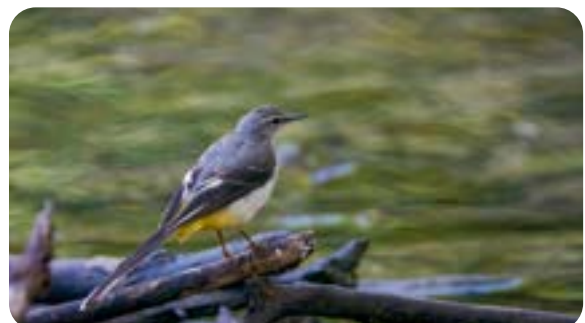
Coot

Coots have dark black feathers, a bright white bill and white feathers that extend backwards over their forehead.



Heron

Hérons are large, up to a meter in height. They have mainly grey plumage, long yellow legs and a long neck leading to a pointed yellow bill.



Grey Wagtail

These small birds have slate grey plumage on their upper parts, and a vibrant yellow underside. They nest near fast-flowing water and eat insects found at the river edge.



Kingfisher

These small, fast-flying birds are always a treat to see. Spot their bright blue and orange bodies as they perch on branches, or dart quickly into the water to catch fish with their long black bills.



Dipper

Dippers are small, dark brown birds with a white breast patch that extends down their throat. In fast-flowing rivers they often bob up and down on rocks on the water's edge searching for insects.



Dragonflies or damselflies

In the summer you might see varying sized and coloured dragonflies and damselflies; These thin insects have dark wings, large heads and long abdomens, and hover and fly over and around water. The wings on a resting dragonfly extend out to the sides of their body, while the wings on a resting damselfly, which are normally smaller, reach backwards.

Mayflies, caddisflies, and stoneflies

Collectively known as 'riverflies', the larvae of these winged insects spend most of their life in the river, where they are a great food source for large fish. They emerge as flying adults for a short period of time to reproduce and are often under 3 cm in size. Many are not tolerant of pollution, so their presence can be used to indicate good water quality.

Images:

Thanks to Steve Woodard., Matthew Woodard, Pixabay.



Fish

A large number of different fish species can be found in rivers in the UK and Ireland. They vary in size and shape, and it is not always possible to identify them just by sight from the riverbank. So, for this survey, simply record whether you saw any fish or not during your river observation.



Beaver

Beavers are becoming more common across the UK. These large, semi-aquatic rodents have brown fur, a flat paddle-like tail and can sometimes be seen swimming or eating willow on the riverbank. You're most likely to spot them at dawn or at dusk.



Otter

Otters appear brown or grey, have slimmer bodies than beavers and a long thin tail. They're a top predator in a river habitat, can be playful and are very fast swimmers with an impressive ability to hold their breath underwater.



Rat

Rats are strong swimmers and can often be found around rivers, particularly in urban waterways. They are brown with short fur, a pointy face and a long pink tail. Rats can carry some human diseases and so it is important to always wash hands carefully after being in contact with river water.



Our rivers face threats from many different pollutants, but understanding where and how bad the issues are is essential to create change.

Download the free Big River Watch app, spend 15 minutes by your local river, and use the simple survey to tell us what you see.