

# Wonderful Wetland Wildlife

## Activities for children aged 5–7 years

WWT has a well-established and well-loved education programme that we run across the UK at our ten wetland sites. We've designed these short activities based on one of our school activities. We've made it to connect you and your family to the natural world and help you to work with your children to feel great about nature and understand some of the things that WWT love and care about.

### Why wetlands?

WWT works across the UK to save, conserve and build wetlands for wildlife and people. Wetlands are one of the most important habitats on earth – storing huge amounts of CO<sub>2</sub>, providing a natural way of stopping flooding and serving as a home for huge numbers of different creatures.

This activity will help you and your children to learn about a range of wetland animals and the wetland places (habitats) they live in.

**These activities link to the National Curricula for science in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.**

### Stuff you need:

- **Set of 20 wetland wildlife cards (see final pages of this document)**

**Note:** Where you see a  this indicates a question to ask your child

## Indoor activities

(1 hour)

**Wetlands are home to some amazing animals. This first activity will introduce you to some of these incredible creatures.**

- Take either all of the cards or a random selection of the cards depending on the age and ability of your child(ren).
- Place them with the picture side face up.

### Which animals can you name?

- Turn them over to see if your child is correct. Don't worry if they don't know the names of all of the animals at this stage. You can simply turn over the remaining cards to reveal their names. Repeating this activity is a good way of helping your child to get to know the name of some of these animals.
- Place the cards picture side up again. Get your child to sort in any way they like (e.g. can fly / can't fly; has legs / doesn't have legs).

## Q How have you decided to sort them?

At this stage there is no right answer. It's just to get the idea that animals (and plants) can be classified or grouped in different ways. Again, this can be repeated multiple times if you wish.

- Lay out just the following cards: stickleback, eel, frog, toad, coot, kingfisher, water vole, otter, grass snake.
- Read through the following information together, explaining that these can be put into the following groups:

### Key word: **AMPHIBIAN**

- Amphibians spend part of their time in water and part of their time on land.
- They are cold blooded: They need to sit in the sun to raise their body temperature or move to a colder place to cool down.
- They have moist skin and most can breathe through their skin.
- They are born in water (usually in the form of eggs know as 'spawn').

### Key word: **BIRD**

- Birds have feathers (no other animals have true feathers).
- They lay eggs with a hard shell.
- Most (but not all) birds can fly.

### Key word: **FISH**

- Fish live in water.
- They breathe through gills instead of lungs. This means they can take oxygen straight out of the water and don't need to come to the surface for air..
- They are cold blooded.
- They have scales.

### Key word: **MAMMAL**

- Mammals have hair or fur.
- They are warm-blooded. This means that they can keep the temperature inside them the same even when it is very hot or very cold.
- They give birth to live young.
- Mothers feed their young with milk.

### Key word: **REPTILE**

- Reptiles are cold blooded.
- They have scales.
- They are born on land.
- They breathe through lungs.

- Ask your child to split the cards into these five different groups. Keep back any they are unsure of. Turn them over to find out if they are correct.
- Go back to those your child wasn't sure of. Turn them over to see which group they fit into. Discuss why they fit into this group and not another.
- Get your child to describe the similarities and differences between the groups using the names of different body parts (e.g. have legs / don't have legs; have wings / don't have wings etc).

- Play 'guess the animal'.
  - Lay out all of the cards.
  - Get your child to choose one of the animals on the cards without telling you (they shouldn't pick it up - leave it with the other cards).
  - Ask your child a yes / no question about their animal (e.g. Does it have fur? Can it fly?).
  - Once they have answered, remove all of the animals that are now ruled out (e.g. if you ask has it got fur and they say yes, you can remove all of the animals that don't have fur).
  - Keep asking questions and removing cards until you only have one card left.
  - Is this the animal your child chose?
  - Now swap over so that you choose an animal and they have to guess which you have chosen.

## Take it outside:

(30 minutes)

- Go to a place outdoors.

### Q What animals can you see?

Which group do they come into (mammal, amphibian, fish etc)? How do you know?

- Ask your child to use the **notes and sketches** pages to think about some of their favourite animals – can they show what they love about them using drawings, words or maybe even a poem?
- Get your child to think about why these are their favourite.

### Q What is it that you love about these animals?

How does watching them make you feel? Are they beautiful? Can you imagine what they might be thinking right now?

### Q What could we do to help protect these animals?

# Wetland wildlife cards

- To make the cards, cut the line across the width of your paper then fold each half in half again so you end up with a picture on one side and the information on the other. Stick the two sides together with glue.



## Grey heron

**Diet:** Fish, small birds such as ducklings, small mammals and amphibians

**Wetland adaptations:** Long neck allows it to get to its prey beneath the water

**Classification:** Vertebrate - Bird

**Habitat:** Ponds, lakes, rivers and estuaries

**Additional information:** Stands stock still quietly waiting for its prey

Cut



## Kingfisher

**Diet:** Fish, invertebrates, amphibians

**Wetland adaptations:** Their eyes have adapted to make prey look closer to the surface and they have a special membrane to protect their eyes when they hit the water

**Classification:** Vertebrate - Bird

**Habitat:** Lakes, streams, rivers and canals

**Additional information:** They dig nest tunnels in vertical, sandy river banks



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Fold



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## Stickleback

**Diet:** Insects, crustaceans, tadpoles and smaller fish

**Wetland adaptations:** Some sticklebacks have adapted to be able to cope with both fresh and saltwater meaning they can live in both rivers and the sea

**Classification:** Vertebrate - Fish

**Habitat:** Ponds, lakes, ditches and rivers

**Did you know?** The male develops a bright red throat and belly and performs a courtship dance to attract a mate. The male also builds and protects the nest

Cut



## Eel

**Diet:** Plants, dead animals, fish eggs, invertebrates and other fish

**Wetland adaptations:** Long, narrow body enables it to get into crevices

**Classification:** Vertebrate - Fish

**Habitat:** Rivers and ditches

**Did you know?** Adult eels migrate 3,000 miles (4,800 km) to the Sargasso Sea to spawn. It then takes the young eels two or three years to drift back to their homes here in the UK



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## Common frog

**Diet:** Invertebrates and smaller amphibians

**Wetland adaptations:** Eyes are positioned on top of the head allowing the frog to see whilst its body is under the water

**Classification:** Vertebrate - Amphibian

**Habitat:** Ponds during the spring; woodland, gardens, hedgerows and grassland in summer and autumn; hibernate in pond mud or under log piles in winter

**Did you know?** Frogs hop whereas toads crawl

Cut



## Common toad

**Diet:** Insects, spiders, slugs and worms

**Wetland adaptations:** Slightly webbed back feet help them to swim

**Classification:** Vertebrate - Amphibian

**Habitat:** Ponds in spring (prefer larger, deeper ponds than frogs); woodland, gardens, hedgerows and grassland in summer and autumn; hibernate under log piles, stones or in crevices over winter

**Did you know?** Toads usually have dry bumpy skin whilst frogs usually have moist slimy skin



Cut

## Coot

**Diet:** Plants, seeds, snails and insects

**Wetland adaptations:** Flaps of skin on the toes act in the same way as webbed feet when swimming and stop them from sinking in mud

**Classification:** Vertebrate - Bird

**Habitat:** Lakes, ponds and rivers

**Did you know?** The white part on the front of its head gave rise to the phrase "as bald as a coot"

Cut



## Kingfisher

**Diet:** Fish, invertebrates, amphibians

**Wetland adaptations:** Their eyes have adapted to make prey look closer to the surface and they have a special membrane to protect their eyes when they hit the water

**Classification:** Vertebrate - Bird

**Habitat:** Lakes, streams, rivers and canals

**Did you know?** They dig nest tunnels in vertical, sandy river banks

Cut



Cut

## Water vole

**Diet:** Plants

**Wetland adaptations:** Waterproof fur

**Classification:** Vertebrate - Mammal

**Habitat:** Rivers, streams, ditches, ponds, lakes, marshes, reedbeds

**Did you know?** Despite being sometimes referred to as a 'Water Rat', there is no such thing - there are brown rats, black rats and water voles

Cut



## Otter

**Diet:** Fish, waterbirds, amphibians and crustaceans

**Wetland adaptations:** Webbed feet; dense fur to keep them warm; can close their ears and nose when underwater

**Classification:** Vertebrate - Mammal

**Habitat:** Lakes, rivers, streams, coasts

**Did you know?** After disappearing from large parts of the UK numbers are growing due to improved water quality



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## Grass snake

**Diet:** Amphibians, fish, small mammals and birds

**Wetland adaptations:** Have developed very strong swimming technique

**Classification:** Vertebrate - Reptile

**Habitat:** Ponds, lakes, grassland, woodland

**Did you know?** Grass snakes are Britain's largest reptile

Cut



## Pond skater

**Diet:** Small insects

**Wetland adaptations:** Have water-repellent hairs on the bottom of their feet, enabling them to walk on the surface film of the water. They hunt by detecting vibrations in this film

**Classification:** Invertebrate - Insect

**Habitat:** Ponds, lakes, ditches and slow-flowing rivers

**Did you know?** Pond skaters can actually skate, jump and fly



Cut

## Daphnia (water flea)

**Diet:** Plants, bacteria

**Wetland adaptations:** Antennae have developed for use in swimming

**Classification:** Invertebrate - Crustacean

**Habitat:** Lakes and ponds

**Did you know?** They are transparent. You can even see their heart beating inside them

Cut



## Water hoglouse

**Diet:** Decaying animals and plants

**Wetland adaptations:** Its gills are at the back of its body, allowing it to breathe when its head is buried in mud

**Classification:** Invertebrate - Crustacean

**Habitat:** Ponds and ditches

**Did you know?** The water hoglouse is closely related to the woodlouse

Cut



Cut

## Dragonfly

**Diet:** Small insects

**Wetland adaptations:** Bullet-shaped body allows fast change of direction

**Classification:** Invertebrate - Insect

**Habitat:** Ponds, lakes, canals and ditches

**Did you know?** Dragonflies have been around for 300 million years

Cut



## Ramshorn snail

**Diet:** Plants

**Wetland adaptations:** Can trap and store air inside their shells

**Classification:** Invertebrate - Mollusc

**Habitat:** Ponds

**Did you know?** Their name comes from the shape of their shell which resembles a ram's horn



Cut

## Pond snail

**Diet:** Plants

**Wetland adaptations:** Have a respiratory tube that acts like a snorkel so they can breathe without coming to the surface

**Classification:** Invertebrate - Mollusc

**Habitat:** Rivers, lakes and ponds

**Did you know?** It is thought to have brilliant learning abilities and the snail's memory has been widely studied by scientists

Cut



## Sludge worm

**Diet:** Bacteria

**Wetland adaptations:** Can breathe through their skin

**Classification:** Invertebrate - Worm

**Habitat:** Ponds, lakes, rivers

**Did you know?** They can survive in heavily polluted water



Cut

## Leech

**Diet:** Fish, freshwater snails, tadpoles, worms

**Wetland adaptations:** Can breathe through their bodies

**Classification:** Invertebrate - Worm

**Habitat:** Ponds and streams

**Did you know?** Many leeches feed on the blood of other animals (without killing them)

Cut



## Water spider

**Diet:** Insects, crustaceans, tadpoles and smaller fish

**Wetland adaptations:** Traps air in the hairs on its body enabling it to breathe underwater

**Classification:** Invertebrate - Arachnid

**Habitat:** Ponds, lakes, very slow-flowing streams

**Did you know?** The water spider is the only spider in the world that spends its life under water

Cut



Cut

## Great raft spider

**Diet:** Invertebrates, small fish, water spiders

**Wetland adaptations:** Hairy legs enable them to walk on the surface of the water

**Classification:** Invertebrate - Arachnid

**Habitat:** Ponds, ditches, bogs

**Did you know?** Great raft spiders have been known to hunt underwater by running down the stems of plants to reach their prey

Cut



## Greater water boatman

**Diet:** Invertebrates, tadpoles and small fish

**Wetland adaptations:** Hind legs have developed into paddle shapes to aid swimming

**Classification:** Invertebrate - Insect

**Habitat:** Ponds, ditches and canals

**Did you know?** The greater water boatman can trap air underneath its wing cases so it can breathe under water

Cut