

Mini-wetland wildlife spotting!

Discover the wildlife that loves to use your mini-wetlands with our spotter guide to the insects, amphibians and other creatures that can be found in and alongside the water.

Mini wetlands amphibians



Common frog

Rana temporaria

Size: 60-90mm

When to spot: March to November

- Smooth, slippery body with dark strip across the eyes like a bandit mask
- Moves by hopping and jumping
- Eats slugs, snails and invertebrates
- Need fish-free ponds to breed successfully
- Mostly nocturnal and live mainly on land, living around 5 to 10 years
- **SPOTTING TIP:** Usually return to the same pond to spawn – look out for them on warm mornings in early spring



Common toad

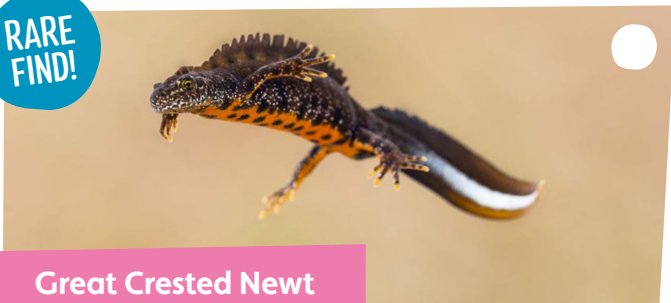
Bufo bufo

Size: 50-130mm

When to spot: March to November

- Broad, squat body with warty, drier skin
- Bulging gland behind their eye, secretes a defensive venom onto their skin
- Crawls rather than hops
- Eats slugs, snails and invertebrates
- Look out for toads away from water in cosy spots like wood piles and under old flower pots

RARE FIND!



Great Crested Newt

Triturus cristatus

Size: up to 170mm

When to spot: March to October

- Our biggest newt – up to 17cm long!
- Mostly black in colour with warty skin and white speckles low on its sides
- The belly is a striking orange with black spots, in patterns as unique as human fingerprints
- During breeding season, males have a prominent ragged crest along the body and another along the tail
- These newts are very rare and protected – take extra care not to disturb them

ALSO KNOWN AS A COMMON NEWT



Smooth newt

Lissotriton vulgaris

Size: up to 100mm

When to spot: March to November

- Our commonest newt; the newt species more likely to be found in a garden pond
- Grey-green-brown, with a pale orange belly
- Males have black spots all over, and in breeding season a continuous wavy crest running along the body and tail
- Females lay single eggs folded into a underwater leaf
- **SPOTTING TIP:** Keep still and quiet to spot courtship displays at the bottom of a pond in spring!
- In late summer, both adult and juvenile newts leave the water and move to damp, sheltered spots under vegetation, logs and rocks



Other animals that may use your pond

Grass snakes are good swimmers and find mini-wetlands rich hunting grounds for their favourite foods of frogs, toads and newts.

Bats love to feed on the **flying insects** that emerge from mini-wetlands – keep an eye on the skies at twilight in the summer months.

Hedgehogs use mini-wetlands to quench their thirst. Make sure ponds are safe for them with shallow sloping sides and plenty of easy ways to climb out such as stones and logs at the water's edge.

Garden birds are glad of the chance to drink and perhaps bathe in a mini-wetland.

Bugs to spot on the surface of water



Greater water boatman

Notonectidae

Size: 5-15mm

When to spot: year-round

- Seen belly-up, often just under the surface of the water
- Long oar-like legs – used to 'row' with and to sense vibrations of prey on the water surface
- A predator and scavenger, hunts insects, tadpoles and even small fish
- If caught by hand, can give a painful nip with their beak, which is normally used to inject prey with digestion enzymes!
- Adults can fly to reach new habitat



Pond skater

Gerridae

Size: 2-12mm

When to spot: April to November

- Skates across the surface on long delicate legs
- Water-repellent hairs on the bottom of its feet help it walk on water and detect vibration of prey
- Flies well and rapidly colonises new ponds
- A predator and a scavenger, has a sharp beak to grab prey



Whirligig beetle

Gyrinidae

Size: 3-9mm

When to spot: year-round

- Small, shiny black beetles that whizz around on the surface hunting smaller invertebrates
- Swim underwater when threatened, using a bubble of air to breathe
- Has two pairs of eyes to see above and below the water!



Freshwater snail

When to spot: year-round

Size 2-50mm

- Feeds on algae and rotting matter



Flying Insects

Dragonflies and **damselflies** are graceful insects from an ancient lineage and were flying the Jurassic skies almost in their present form, 250 million years ago! They have 4 delicate, lacy wings, which they can beat independently to perform nimble aeronautics including flying backwards, hovering and sharp, speedy turns.

Dragonflies

- Larger, more robustly built
- Leave their wings open when they rest
- Eyes touch at the top of their head, better to approach prey from underneath
- Strong and purposeful flight. Even engage in displays of aerial combat!

Damselflies

- Smaller and more delicate
- Close their wings to rest
- Eyes wide apart, better to see prey ahead of them
- Weaker, fluttering flight



Large red damselfly

Pyrhosoma nymphula Size 33-36mm

When to spot: April to September

Male are red with black markings, females range in colour from mostly red to mostly black.



Common blue damselfly

Enallagma cyathigerum Size 32mm

When to spot: April to September

Males are bright blue with black stripes, females have long black markings down the body

ALSO KNOWN AS A DADDY-LONG LEGS



Crane fly

Tipuloidea

Size 25mm

When to spot: year-round

- There are over 300 different species of crane fly in the UK!
- Some lay their eggs in water and love mini-wetlands
- Though their long dangling legs may look alarming, don't fear, crane flies don't bite or sting, most have no mouth parts (and the species that do, only drink nectar)
- Usually nocturnal and attracted to lights
- An important food source for many animals including bats, birds, other insects, and spiders



Common darter dragonfly

Sympetrum striolatum Size 38-43mm

When to spot: May to November

Small dragonflies, males are reddish, females more yellow-brown.



Southern hawker dragonfly

Aeshna cyanea Size 70mm

When to spot: June to October

Males are black with bright green markings and blue stripes at the tip and on the underside of the abdomen. Females are chocolate brown with bright green markings.



Pond dipping

Use a dipping net to discover mini beasts beneath the surface. Empty your net into a white plastic tray, or an empty clean margarine tub, filled with a little pond or rainwater to observe little swimming critters more closely. Use a plastic spoon to gently move the animals. Grab a magnifying glass if you have one. Don't forget to return your finds where they came from and wash your hands thoroughly afterwards.



Water scorpion

When to spot: year-round **Size** 15-45mm

- Lurks in weedy margins
- Front legs used as pincers to catch prey
- Long tail used as a snorkel to breath through



Lesser water boatman

When to spot: year-round **Size** 5-15mm

- Swims near the bottom on its front with two paddle-like arms
- Lays eggs attached to plant stems
- Eats algae and rotting pond matter



Leech

When to spot: year-round **Size** up to 30mm

- Some species like to feed on freshwater snails
- Larger species can be up to 30mm
- Pale grey or fawn in colour with yellow spots



Dragonfly nymph

When to spot: year-round **Size** 40mm

- The larva of a dragonfly before it emerges above water
- Eats tadpoles and small fish
- Easily distinguished from damselfly nymph as it has no 'tails'



Damselfly nymph

When to spot: year-round **Size** 10-20mm

- Slender body with three long flattened 'tails' at the end of the abdomen
- Distinct eyes on either side of the head



Caddisfly larvae

When to spot: year-round **Size** up to 3-40mm

- Most larvae have a case made by glueing together bits from the pond
- They live in clean, shallow ponds with plenty of aquatic plants
- Feeds on algae and decaying matter



Great diving beetle

When to spot: year-round **Size** 30mm

- Voracious predator of other invertebrates, tadpoles and small fish

Try observing your mini wetland at different times of day and in different weathers to see what you can spot.

With a keen eye and a little patience, the wonderful world of mini-wetlands is sure to draw you in!

Let us know what you spot
@WWTworldwide #MiniWetlands
wwt.org.uk/mini-wetlands