

River Wandle Wildlife Guide

Text and illustrations by Tony Drakeford

birds

fish

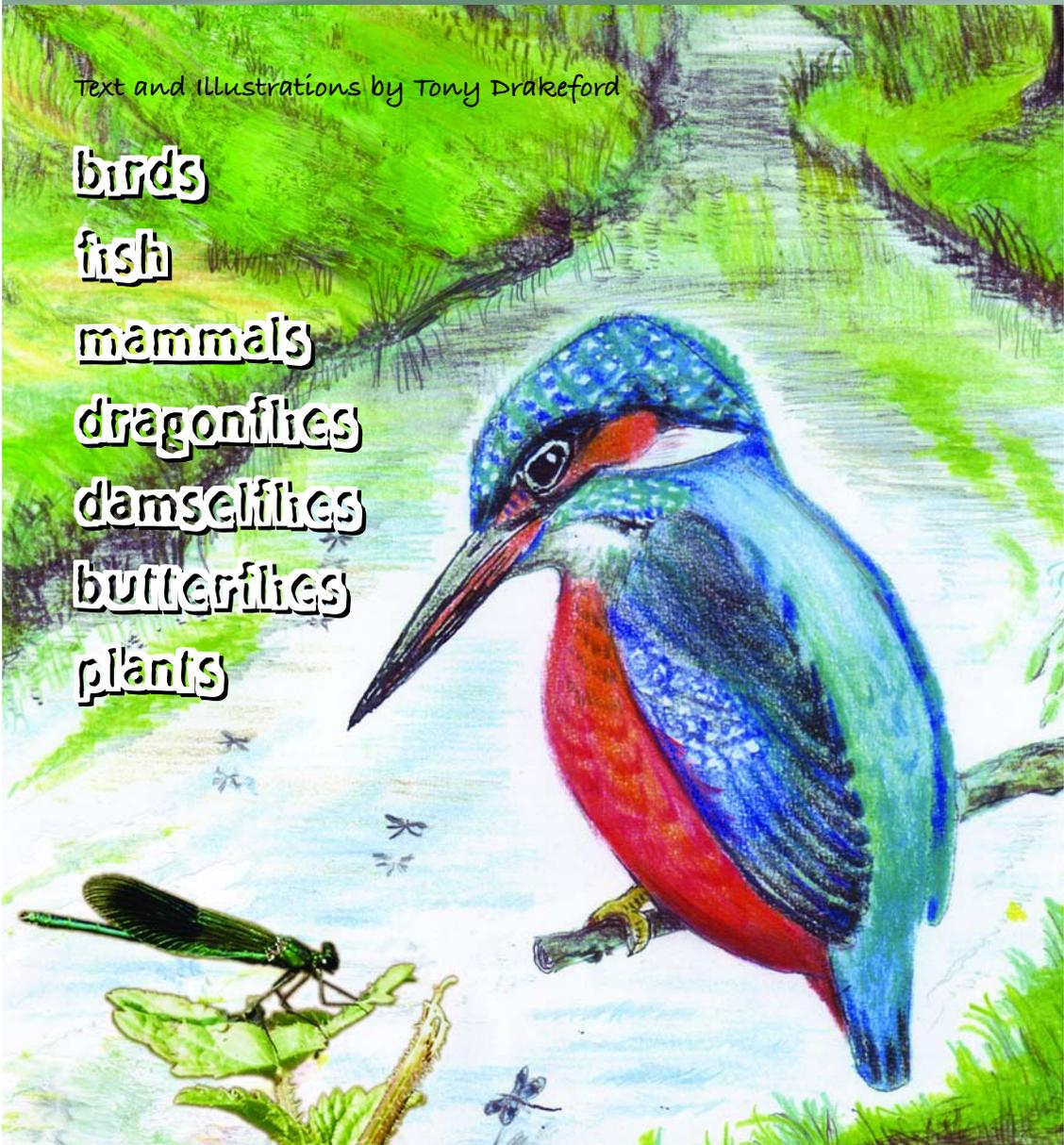
mammals

dragonflies

damselflies

butterflies

plants



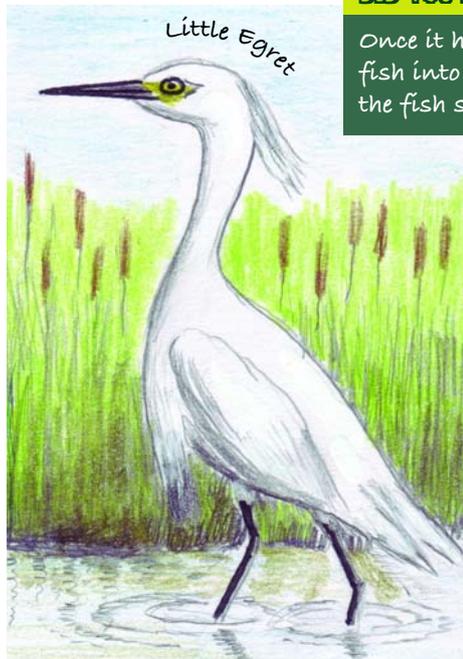
Birds of the Wandle

The **Grey Heron** is one of our most familiar birds. Large and of unmistakable appearance, it can be seen all along the Wandle. Sometimes they form small heronries, building large bulky nests high in trees. Usually we see the birds knee-deep in water, upright and motionless, ready to strike and impale fish, frog, vole, dragonfly or fledgling water bird.



DID YOU KNOW?

Once it has caught its prey, the Heron tosses the fish into the air and swallows it head first so the fish scales and fins don't catch in its throat.



The stunning **Kingfisher** breeds along the Wandle, nesting in bankside holes. Very shy, the bird is usually seen as a vivid electric-blue streak, speeding along the river uttering a single high-pitched piping call. Kingfishers perch on overhanging branches, ready to dive onto unsuspecting sticklebacks, their main diet. The best chance of watching the birds is to sit quietly on the river bank, wait for one to appear and hopefully perch close by. Kingfishers are well worth waiting for!

Recently another heron-like bird, the **Little Egret**, has made brief appearances along the Wandle in Morden Hall Park. Smaller and more elegant than the Grey Heron, its plumage is overall white with black bill and legs, and yellow feet. These beautiful birds have only been resident in Britain for about ten years but the population is increasing.



Birds of the Wandle



DID YOU KNOW?

There are now more Mandarin Ducks in Britain than in their native Japan.



Birds of the Wandle



Wren

The Wren seems to relish a waterside habitat. It has a very loud song for such a small bird. It often hides in dense vegetation.



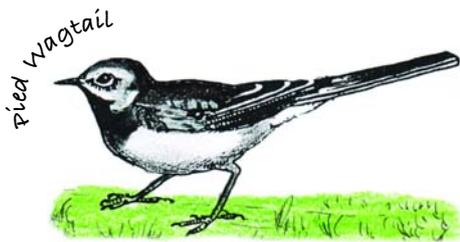
Rose-ringed Parakeet

The **Rose-ringed Parakeet**, an unwelcome introduction whose growing population is taking over nestholes of our native species and causing a nuisance among fruit growers.



Goldcrest

Britain's tiniest species, the Goldcrest, is more often heard than seen and utters a very high-pitched tsi-tsi-tsi call. Often around in small flocks.



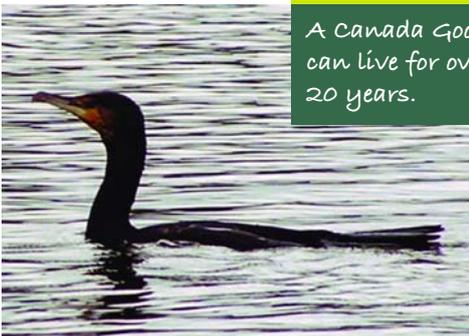
Pied Wagtail



Grey Wagtail

The **Pied Wagtail** and **Grey Wagtail** are sprightly, active birds that run or walk along towpaths and grass verges, tails constantly wagging as they pick up waterside insects. Both nest along the Wandle.

Cormorant



DID YOU KNOW?
A Canada Goose can live for over 20 years.



Canada Geese

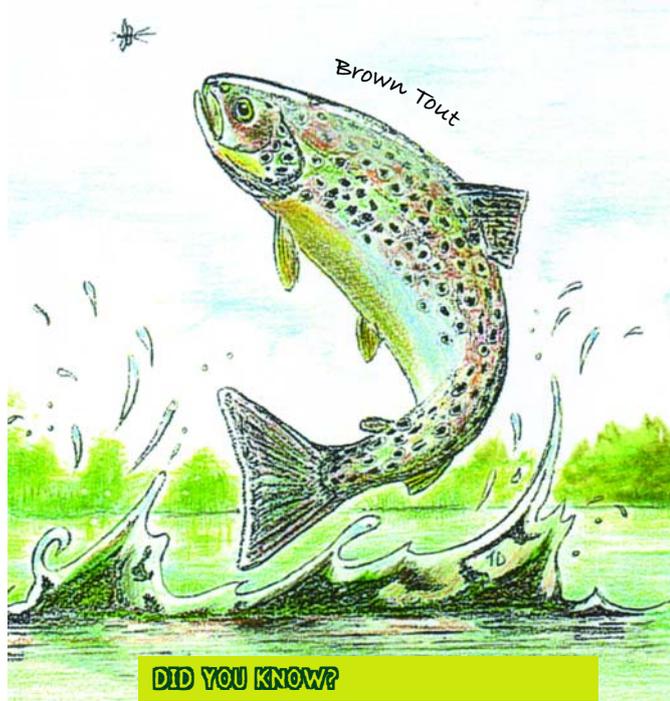
The **Cormorant** is an expert fisher, mainly at the mouth of the Wandle, perched with wings outstretched or frequently diving.

The **Canada Goose** needs no introduction. Now superabundant, noisy and messy.

Fish of the Wandle

Over three hundred years ago Compleat Angler Isaac Walton often fished the Wandle, well known for its specimen trout. Then gradually, industrial pollution 'muddied the waters' and the river declined. In recent years water quality has steadily improved, assisted by regular clean ups' by enthusiastic volunteers.

Trout are returning, as yet in small numbers. Along with other initiatives, a project for local schools to rear trout fry in the classroom for stocking the Wandle will help. **Sea Trout** may also swim upriver from the Thames and breed.



DID YOU KNOW?

If you look down from one of the bridges on the Wandle and see a shoal of fish beneath you, they will probably be chub. They are shy and prefer to lurk in the shade.

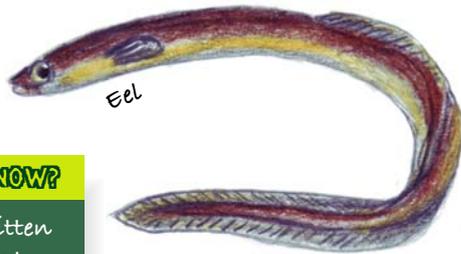
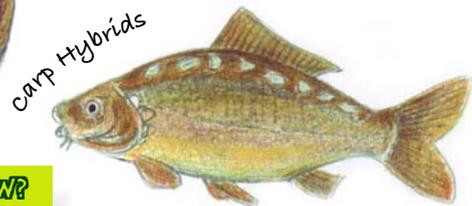
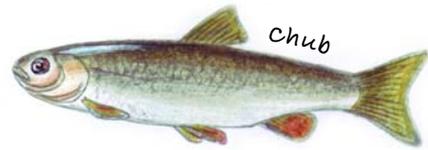


The three-spined **Stickleback** or '**Tiddler**' is very common in the Wandle especially in the slower runs.

Sticklebacks are the only British species to build a nest. In spring, the male, in breeding finery of red and silver, constructs a barrel-shaped nest from pieces of dead vegetation and entices females to enter and lay eggs. Upon hatching, the male vigorously guards the young sticklebacks until they can fend for themselves.

Fish of the Wandle

The mainly swift-flowing Wandle with some quieter stretches, holds a variety of species. Like the Trout, **Chub** and **Dace** thrive in well oxygenated water and are primarily surface feeders. Along with the stickleback, the **Chub** is by far the most abundant fish in the river and can attain weights of several pounds. **Roach** and predatory **Perch** are mid-water species while **Gudgeon** are bottom feeders. **Pike** lurk in quiet reaches preying on fish and sometimes water birds. **Eels** live mainly downstream. **Flounder** and **Smelt** spawn in the Wandle estuary where **Mitten Crabs** burrow into the river banks. **Goldfish** and **Koi Karp** can also be seen occasionally.

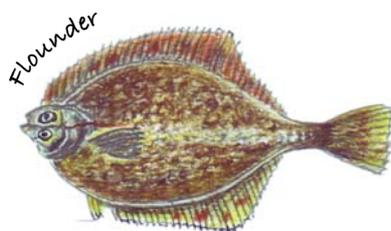


DID YOU KNOW?

Chinese Mitten Crabs came to England in the bilges of cargo ships from Asia.

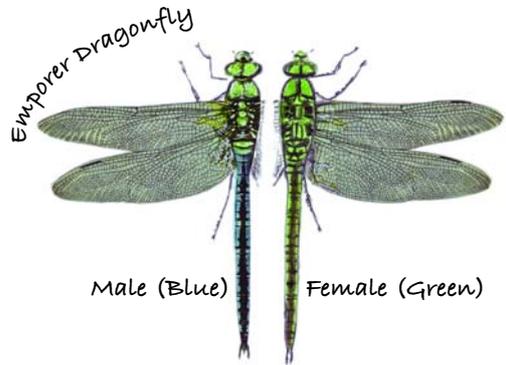
DID YOU KNOW?

Smelt 'smell' of cucumber and were once caught in their millions at Wandsworth to make fertiliser.



Dragonflies of the Wandle

Dragonflies have been on earth for over 300 million years, evolving before dinosaurs, and are still with us today virtually unchanged. The magnificent **Emperor Dragonfly**, Britain's largest insect, is common from early to mid-summer. Other **Hawker** species shown here are common, but difficult to identify in flight. The **Darters** can be seen from late summer to autumn, the **Ruddy Darter** being very similar to the **Common Darter**.



DID YOU KNOW?

The earliest dragonflies had a wingspan of 18 inches.



Wandle Map

Cormorants at Wandle Estuary

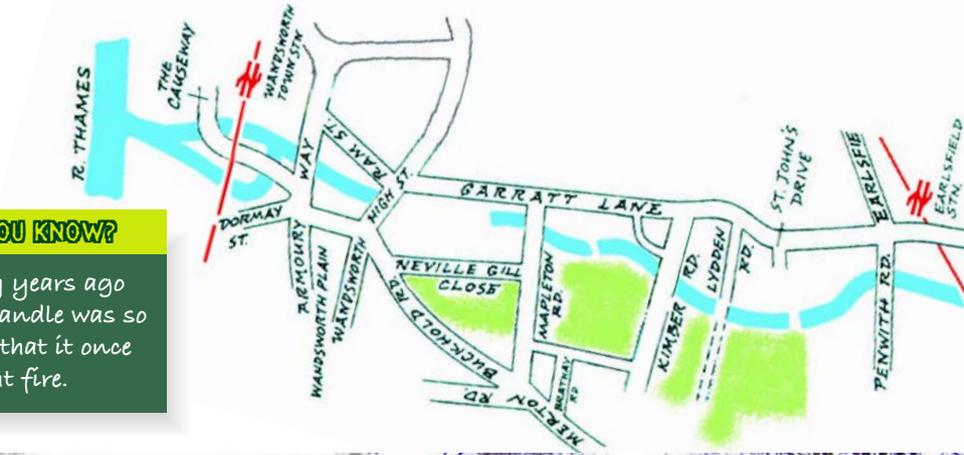


DID YOU KNOW?

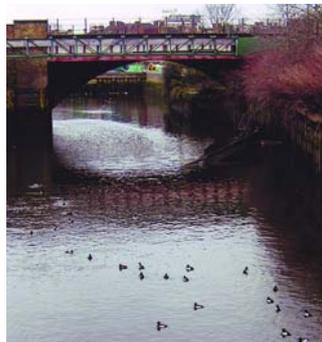
Wetland terraces enhance the value of the river. River Wandle walls have been reduced in height to allow high tides to flood the terraces, creating suitable conditions for wetland plant species.

DID YOU KNOW?

Many years ago the Wandle was so dirty that it once caught fire.



Upstream view with Tufted Ducks



Cormorant Fishing



Sloping Weir



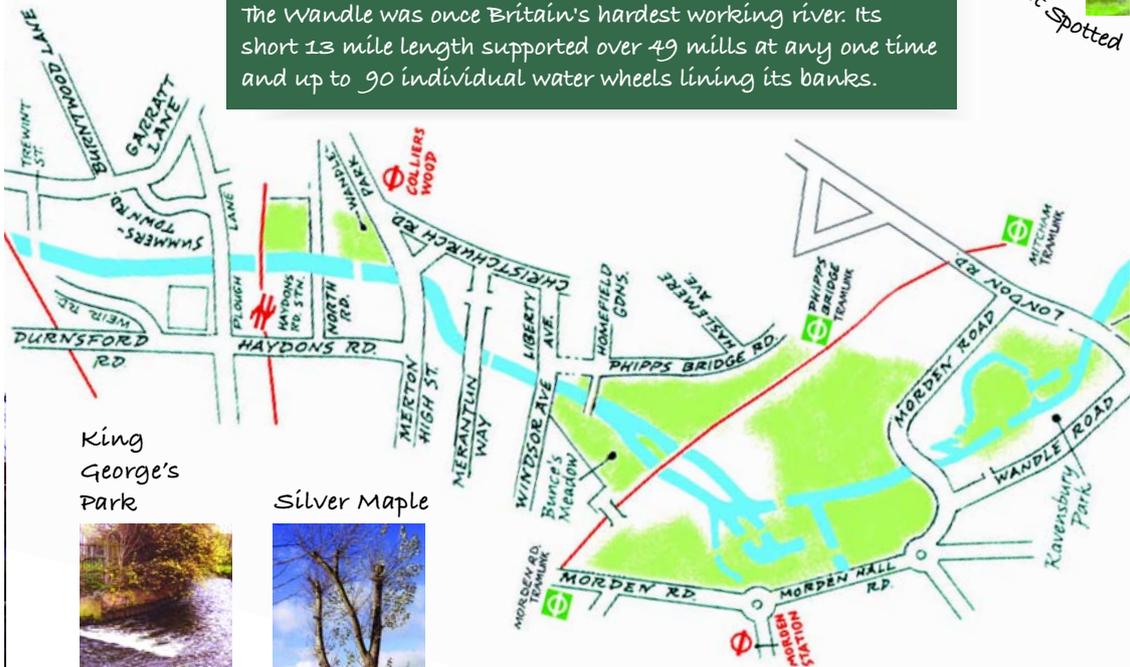
The Great Spotted Woodpecker is often heard uttering his repetitive pick-pick call or drumming proclaiming its territory; usually seen on topmost branch.



Great Spotted

DID YOU KNOW?

The Wandle was once Britain's hardest working river. Its short 13 mile length supported over 49 mills at any one time and up to 90 individual water wheels lining its banks.



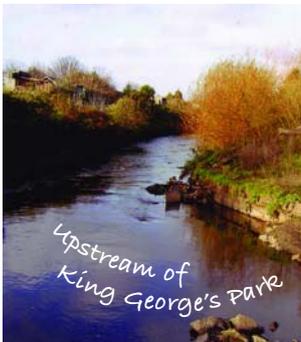
King George's Park



Silver Maple



Willow Pollards



Upstream of King George's Park



Silver Maple Leaf

Green Woodpecker



The Green Woodpecker has a laughing 'yaffle' of a call often heard along the riverbank. Unlike the Great Spotted Woodpecker, the species rarely drums. Often feeds on ground from anthills.

Woodpecker



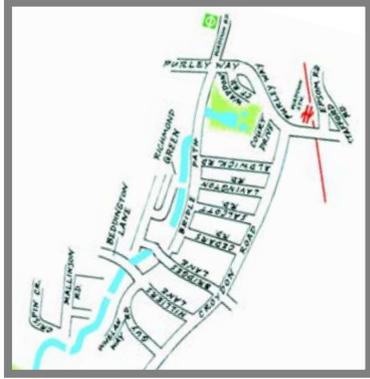
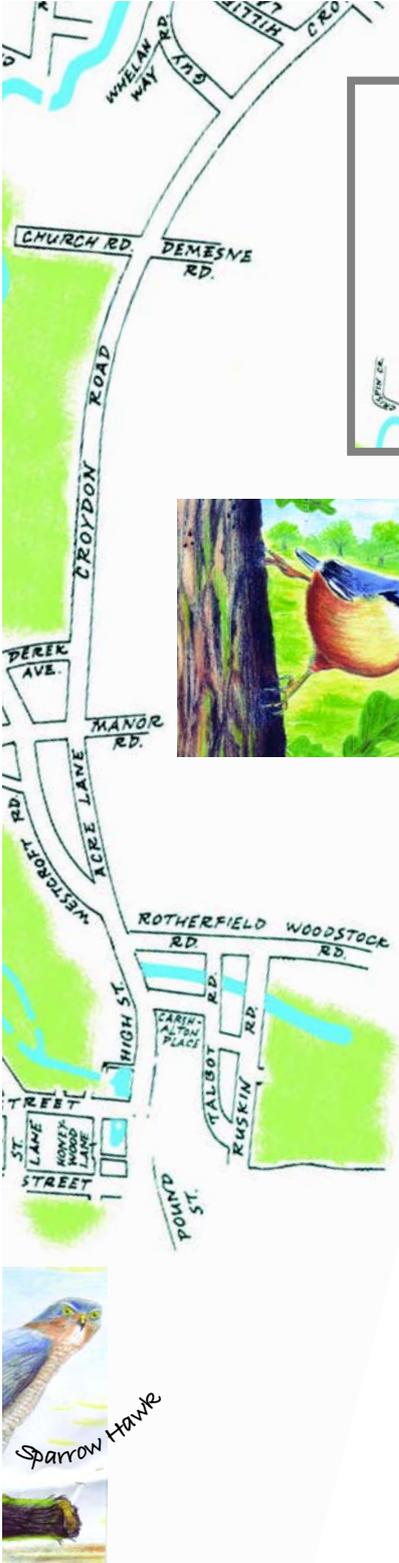
Long-Tailed Tit



Wetland habitats



Beddington Park



Chub

DID YOU KNOW?
 Except for the robin, only male birds sing.



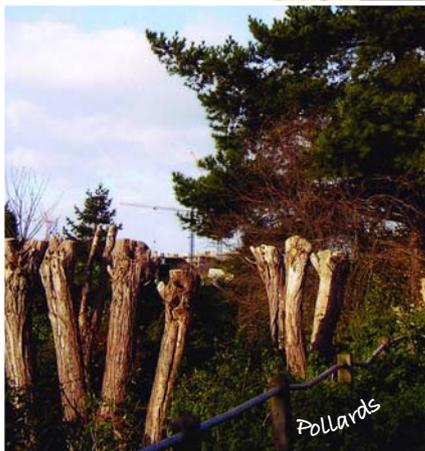
Kingfisher



Robin



Willow



Pollards



Sparrow Hawk

Damselflies of the Wandle

Damselflies evolved later than dragonflies and appear less robust with fluttering helicopter-like flight. The largest and most beautiful species **Banded Demoiselle** is super-abundant along the Wandle all summer. The **Large Red Damselfly** is the first species to emerge in spring. The other species appear from May and fly into late summer. The **Azure** and **Common Blue Damselflies** look very similar.

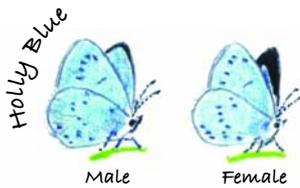
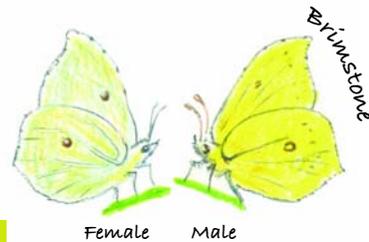
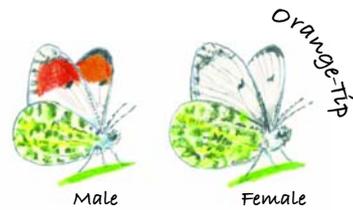
DID YOU KNOW?

Dragonflies rest with wings outspread while Damselflies rest with their wings up together.



Butterflies of the Wandle

There are several butterflies which can be commonly found along riverbanks and in damp places. Prominent among them is the **Orange Tip**, a species of springtime whose larvae feed on lady's smock and garlic mustard as do the caterpillars of the **Green-Veined White**. The **Brimstone**, our longest lived species, is often the first butterfly to be seen in early spring, laying eggs on buckthorn. **Red Admiral**, **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Comma** and in some seasons the **Painted Lady**, lay eggs on stinging nettles. The **Holly Blue**, chooses holly and ivy as larval foodplants. The **Speckled Wood** loves the dappled shade of woodland margins and leafy river banks. Eggs are laid among grasses.



DID YOU KNOW?

The noun 'butterfly' comes from the butter-coloured fly originally called Brimstone



Mammals of the Wandle

Water vole



Tails of the river bank

Famous as 'Ratty' of Wind In the Willows, it is not a rat at all but a **Water Vole**. Slightly smaller than the Brown Rat, it has a blunt 'face', concealed ears and shorter tail, typical of all Vole species. Its diet consists solely of waterside vegetation. Once common along the Wandle, plans are afoot to re-introduce the animal to stretches of the river where habitat is suitable. But, keep a look out... he may be here already!

Brown Rat



The **Brown Rat** has a typical pointed 'rat face', prominent ears and a long tail. Like the Water Vole he is an excellent swimmer, digs burrows and breeds along the river bank. Regarded as a pest, the rat will eat anything.

Woodmouse



The dainty **Woodmouse** lives in thick cover. Both Bank Vole and **Field Vole** small versions of the **Water Vole** will be there too, but are very secretive.

DID YOU KNOW?

Water voles can have four or five litters (each of two to five young) during the summer.

The **Grey Squirrel** is a common sight among riverside trees. It can be destructive, stripping bark and raiding birds' nests.



The **Fox** can sometimes be seen loping along the river bank, increasingly in daylight.



Plants of the Wandle



British native plants that grow in their natural habitats along the river. Some provide important shelter and food sources for many of the creatures in this booklet.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Yellow Flag Iris was chosen by Louis VII as a 'fleur de lys'.



Floating Pennywort



There are also some 'invasive' species, such as the **Floating Pennywort**, which have to be regularly removed.

Species Identification Chart

Tick boxes for the species you have seen. You may spot species which are not listed here. You can tell us about these or contact us with any questions or comments about the booklet at wildlife@wandlevalleyfestival.org.uk

Birds

- Heron
- Little Egret
- Kingfisher
- Mallard
- Mandarin
- Dabchick
- Tufted Duck
- Mute Swan
- Coot
- Moorhen
- Wren
- Goldcrest
- Pied Wagtail
- Grey Wagtail
- Parakeet
- Cormorant
- Canada Goose
- Blackbird
- Songthrush
- Mistle Thrush
- Long-Tailed Tit
- Bluetit
- Great Tit
- Goldfinch
- Chaffinch
- Greenfinch
- Dunnock
- House Sparrow
- Chiffchaff
- Nuthatch
- Tree Creeper
- Gt Spotted Woodpecker
- Green Woodpecker
- Magpie
- Jay

- Crow
- Jackdaw
- Woodpigeon
- Kestrel
- Sparrowhawk

Fish

- Trout
- Chub
- Dace
- Carp
- Stickleback

Dragonflies

- Emperor
- Migrant Hawker
- Southern Hawker
- Brown Hawker
- Common Darter
- Ruddy Darter
- Black-Tailed Skimmer

Damselflies

- Banded Demoiselle
- Large Red
- Blue Tailed
- Azure
- Common Blue

Animals

- Water Vole
- Bank Vole
- Field Vole
- Brown Rat
- Woodmouse
- Fox

Trees and plants

- Willow
- Osier
- Silver Maple
- Common Reed
- Reedmace
- Pennywort

Additional Species Spotted

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Wandle Heritage