

Waterside habitats

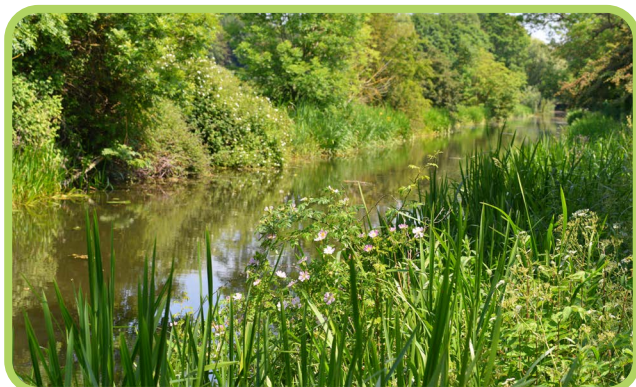
A habitat is a place where animals or plants live. It provides the resources needed for living things to survive; food, water, shelter and a safe place to reproduce. Different plants and animals live in different habitats.

Our canals and rivers are becoming increasingly important for wildlife. In just a 10-15m width they can offer 5 different habitats for hundreds of different trees, plants, birds, butterflies, fish and other wildlife. Many of the iconic species that live on our canals are protected including otters, badgers, water voles, crayfish and even floating plantain.

Protecting wildlife around our canals and rivers

Our canals and rivers have been recognised for their importance to nature. There are 63 sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and over 1,000 other conservation sites along our waterways. In fact, over 30% of our network has been identified as having special environmental value.

The Trust's team of ecologists and environmental scientists works to protect the natural environment, reduce harm to natural habitats, and create new ones to encourage canal and river wildlife to thrive. All work is planned carefully and phased by season to avoid disturbing wildlife and to protect those species identified as priorities for conservation due to rapidly declining populations.



Drakeholes Chesterfield Canal

Spotters' tips

- Look out for kingfishers and herons by the water.
- Keep your eyes peeled for dragonflies and shrews by the bank.
- Badgers and foxes stay near or in the hedgerows.
- Listen up for owls and woodpeckers in the trees.



Water

Canals are good habitats for animals and plants that like slow moving, deep water. Some rivers flow more quickly and attract different kinds of wildlife.

What to spot

Insects - dragonflies, damselflies, water boatmen, freshwater mussels, water snails

Fish - perch, roach

Birds - swans, mallard ducks, coots, moorhens



How do we look after this habitat?

We test the water to make sure it is safe for wildlife and remove algae, weeds and sediment that might be polluted. We even release weevils into the water - they eat water fern that blocks the light.

Canal and River Banks

The land at the edge of a canal or river is called a bank. Even in towns and cities the banks can provide a good habitat for many types of plant and animal.

What to spot

Lots of different creatures live in the plants at the edge of the water. Some creatures are quite rare. Water birds, dragonflies and damselflies are quite easy to spot but you have to be lucky to see a slow worm, grass snake or water vole.

How do we look after this habitat?

We work hard to protect banks against erosion, planting new vegetation to make them stronger so they can provide food and shelter for small mammals.



Drakeholes Chesterfield Canal

Towpath Verges

Towpaths were built next to canals for horses to walk along pulling boats. Plants grow either side of the towpath providing seeds for birds and nectar for insects. In turn the insects provide food for birds.

What to spot

Lots of small invertebrates like bumblebees, woodlice and snails and larger animals like field mice.

How do we look after this habitat?

We keep the towpaths clean and free from litter, cut back brambles and plant new reeds.

Hedgerows

Canal hedgerows were first planted when canals were built over 200 years ago to keep cows and sheep away from the canal. A good mix of plants, such as hawthorne and blackberry, in a hedge provides food and shelter for many different animals.

What to spot

Blackberry flowers in spring provide nectar for bees, caterpillars eat the leaves in summer and in autumn the blackberries are loved by mice and birds.

How do we look after this habitat?

We maintain the existing hedgerows, and plant new ones to fill in any gaps to create better corridors for wildlife to travel along.

Wildlife action



Volunteers hedgelaying in the Macclesfield Canal

Cuttings and Embankments

Sometimes canal engineers had to build canals under or over a big hill or across a valley. By building different canal structures they created many new habitats. Embankments are quickly covered by wild plants and shrubs as the seeds can spread easily.

What to spot

Embankments are often good places to see birds of prey. They eat small animals like voles, moles and rabbits that live on the embankment. The ground close to tree roots in canal embankment provides an ideal habitat for badgers. They eat mainly earthworms, insects and grubs and sometimes small mammals..

How do we look after this habitat?

We plant and seed native flowers to attract pollinators such as bees, flies, moths and butterflies.

You can help too!

There are lots of community projects to get involved in, from wildlife identification, species mapping and biodiversity recording, to installing bird and bat boxes, and helping improve and maintain local waterways.



Restoration and refurbishment of Regent's Canal's Dead Dog cast iron bridge



Volunteers at Harecastle Tunnel

We love it when people help. It gives us more time to focus on all the other things we do to make our canals and rivers the best possible home for nature.

More ideas

Our Corridor for Nature learning bundle has more activities to help young people learn about the plants and animals around our canals and their habitats. You can download all the resources from our Explorers website: www.canalrivertrust.org.uk/explorers

Going on a Bat Walk



Bats are easier to spot during the summer months as they're out hunting for insects but they are still around on Halloween before they hibernate for the winter. They are fascinating to watch as they dart about catching insects.

What to do

Go on a bat walk at night and see how many you can see? All you need is a torch but please remember to stay safe at night. Stay away from the water's edge, and don't go alone.



Top bat-spotting tips

- Choose a dark area as bats prefer to fly in the dark but don't forget to take a torch with you
- Bats are easiest to spot around dusk when they come out to feed
- Watch the water - bats often swoop down to take a drink from the water
- Go out on a dry, still night as bats don't like hunting insects when it's wet. Flying when it is wet and windy uses up a lot of energy
- Choose a good spot like a bridge or a straight part of the canal so that you can see as far as possible. If you are not near a canal, choose a sheltered area where swarms of flying insects gather

Next Step → → → →

Try to find out about the different species you might have seen, such as Pipistrelle, Daubenton's and Noctule bats.



Pipistrelle



Noctule



Daubenton

Practise spotting

Make your own bats using foil or reflective strips and hide them around the room (or outside). Then use your torch to see how many you can find. You will need:

Bat Template



Paper



Scissors

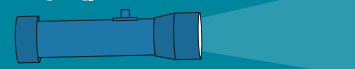


Glow in the dark

pens, glitter or fluorescent strips



Torch



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Stay Away From the Edge



Build a Bat Box

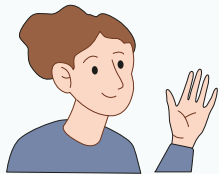
Canal towpaths are great places to spot bats, but did you know...?

- Bats can weigh as little as a 2p piece (Pipistrelle)
- They can live to be 25 years old
- They are not blind
- They are the only mammal that can fly
- A Pipistrelle bat can eat more than 500 insects in an hour!

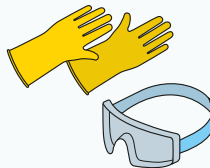


You will need:

An adult to help you



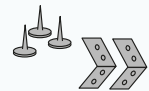
Gloves and eye protection



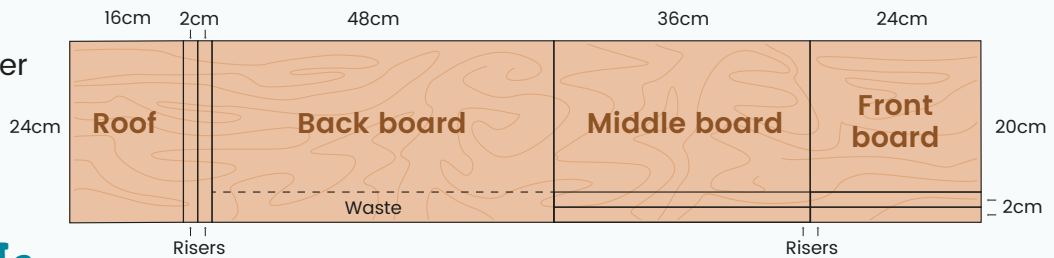
Tape measure and pencil



Nails and Brackets

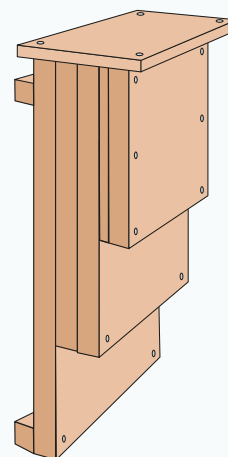
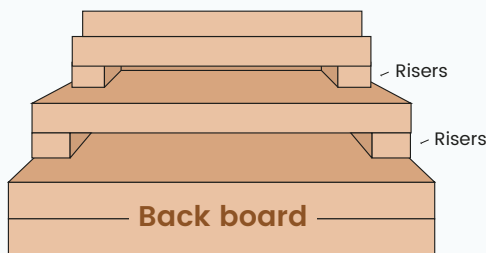


Cut your timber to these dimensions



What to do

Nail together the boards using the risers to create gaps in between



Attach brackets to fix the box to the wall
 Fix the box 4m off the ground in Spring (when the bats finish hibernating)
 Choose a sheltered spot, exposed to sun for part of the day

Top TIP



All UK bats and their roosts are protected by law, which means it is illegal to harm or disturb them. Once up, a bat box cannot be opened legally without a licence. For more information call the Bat Helpline 0345 1300 228.



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on social media #LifesBetterByWater



Best Bugs

Insects that live in water have special ways of swimming, breathing and getting food. Some live in water all their lives and others only when they are young or larvae. Your local canal or river could be a great place to go bug hunting.



In the summer you could spot:



Whirligig Beetle which spins round in crazy circles



Pond Skater which runs along the top of the water



Water Boatman which rows quickly through the water

Carefully take a look in shallow ponds or streams to see if you can spot:



The Great Pond Snail - they like to live where there are lots of water plants



Caddisfly larvae that look like tiny moving pieces of the bottom of a pond



Frogspawn - look out for drops of clear white jelly with small black spots (eggs) inside. The eggs grow tails and tiny tadpoles emerge



Canals and rivers are great places to spot two of Britain's most beautiful insect, as well as bees and butterflies

Dragonflies - their large eyes enable them to see backwards, forwards and sideways. They can hover fast and change direction quickly



Damselflies are smaller and more delicate than dragonflies

Top TIP



Small Dragonflies and Damselflies look very similar. You can tell the difference because Damselflies hold their wings close to their bodies when resting whereas dragonflies hold their wings horizontally.

Next Step → → → →

Find out if you can join in any nature walks or watches at your local canal or river. Design a poster to tell everyone about the bugs that live along our canals.



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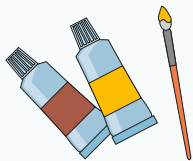
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Build a Bird Bath

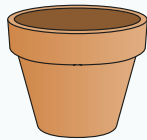
Water helps keep a bird's body cool, both from the inside and from the outside. Having a birdbath in your garden will provide birds with water to bathe in and drink. It will also help them to remove parasites and keep their feathers in good condition.'



You will need



Paint



Plant pot



Saucer

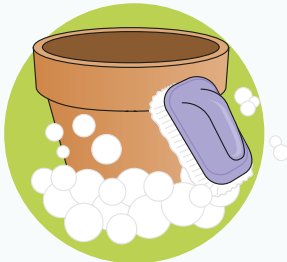


Strong glue

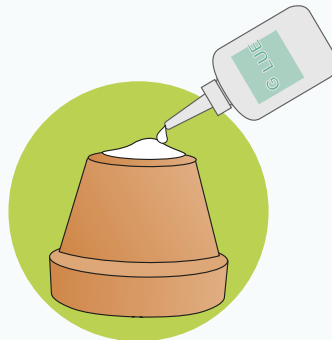


Sealer

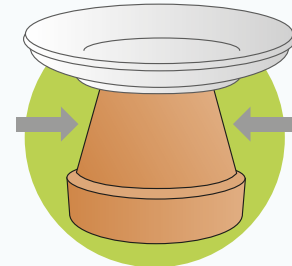
What to do



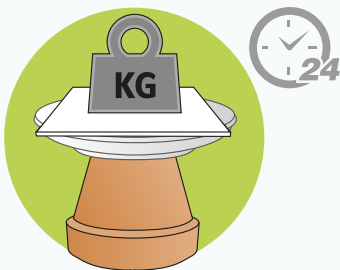
Scrub the base of the pot before applying the glue



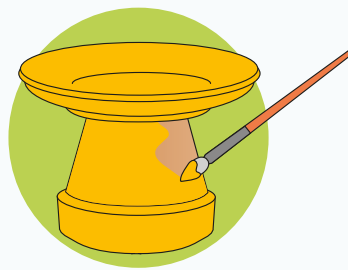
Be generous with the waterproof glue



Make sure the saucer is centred over the pot



Press the saucer down and leave to dry for 24 hours



Paint it and add a coat of sealer to protect it



Top TIP



Add stones or pebbles so birds can perch to drink fresh, clean water. This will also enable thirsty bees to drink from the bath without danger of drowning.



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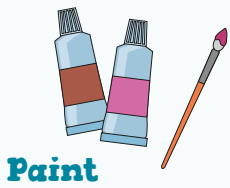


Build a Bird Feeder

Canals are a great place to spot birds. Your garden, balcony or group meeting space are good places for bird-spotting too. Look after the birds near you by making this bird feeder.



You will need

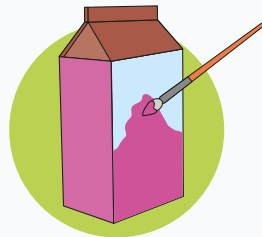


What to do

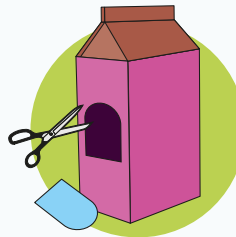
Wash and dry the carton



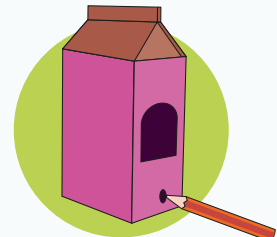
Paint the carton



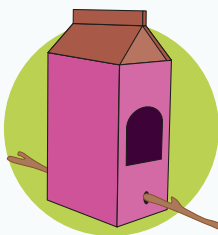
Using scissors, cut windows in the sides



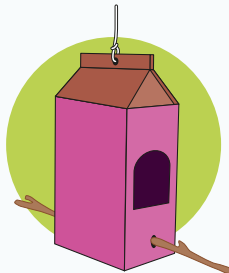
Make holes at the base of the feeder



Push a twig through the holes to make a perch



Push the wire through the top of the feeder and tie a knot



Sprinkle some birdseed in the bottom of the feeder – and keep watch!



Top TIP



Hang the feeder on a high branch outside so that cats can't reach it.



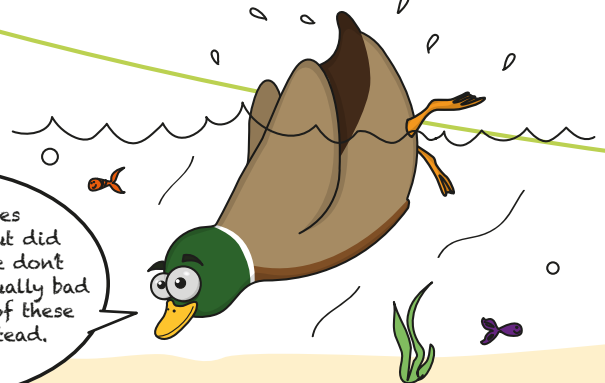
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Feed the Birds

Help the ducks improve their diet by packing some healthy snacks. Here's a list of some of their favourites:

Everyone loves feeding ducks but did you know that we don't love bread? It's actually bad for us! Try some of these alternatives instead.



Not just for ducks!

Moorhens, coots, geese and swans also like this food. Feed small amounts of food to the birds so that they eat it all before giving them more. If you can, it's better to throw the food on the water's surface rather than the land.



Top TIP



Don't follow the crowds, spread the love and visit a new family of birds who may need a new friend. Larger birds can be aggressive and peck at you for food. Be sure to throw your bird food far enough away.

Next Step → → →

Feed the birds outside your home or meeting space. Cut an apple in half, scoop out the core with a spoon and fill the hole with peanut butter or lard mixed with bird seed. Attach string to each side of the apple and hang it in a tree.



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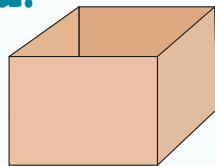
Helping Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs need to eat a lot of beetles, earthworms, caterpillars and other creepy crawlies before they hibernate and like to shelter in log piles, long grass and in different plants. They look for somewhere to hibernate between October and March and make nests under hedgerows, fallen logs and brambles. You can help them by making a hedgehog home.



You will need:

Thick card board box



Newspaper



Scissors



Grass and twigs

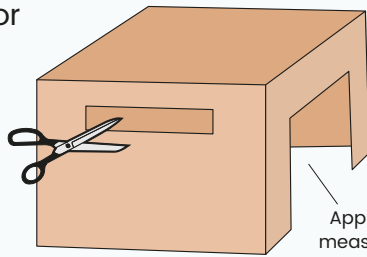


Black bin liner



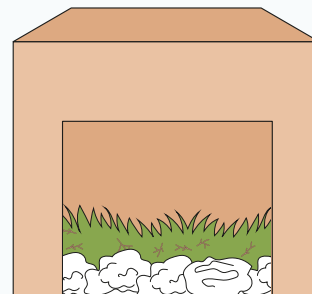
What to do

Cut a little door out on the front of your box and two vents in the sides for your hedgehog



Approximate measurements
15cm x 15cm

Put some torn up newspaper inside your box and some clean, dry grass on top



Find a nice quiet spot in your garden near a bush or hedge. Put a black bin liner over your hedgehog house and cover with twigs, grass and leaves



Top TIP



Leave some seeds or worms out for your hedgehog to nibble but not too close to the house so that other creatures don't bother your hedgehog.

Next Step → → → →

For a stronger home you could use a plastic storage box or even ask an adult to help you make one out of wood.



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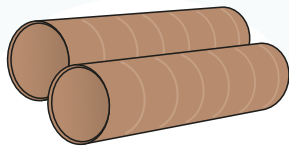


Make Your Own Bug Hotel

It can be hard for wildlife to find safe hideaways in gardens. You can make an outside space more inviting and provide just the nooks and hollows they might be looking for by building a bug hotel – you never know who might come to stay! From hedgehogs to toads, solitary bees to bumblebees, and ladybirds to woodlice. Visitors looking for somewhere dry and sunny will be different to those who like to stay somewhere damp!



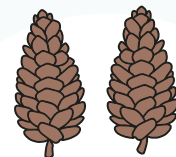
You will need:



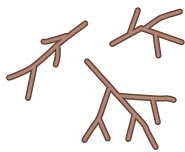
Cardboard tubes



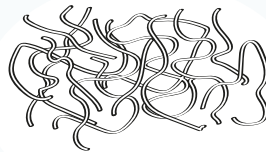
Dried leaves



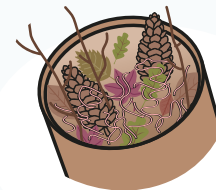
Pine cones



Twigs



Shredded paper



Completed hotel

What to do

Fill the cardboard tubes with a mix of twigs, dried leaves, pine cones and other biodegradable materials you can find

Stack the tubes in a flat shaded area

Make sure the twigs are big enough to stick out of the ends of the tubes



Top TIP



Build your hotel away from growing vegetables – you don't want visitors to help themselves!

A planter or seed tray makes a great roof.

Sow wildflower seeds to attract more guests.

Next Step → → → →

You can build bug hotels of all different sizes using materials such as bricks, bamboo canes and wood or wooden pallets.



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Pond Dipping

All sorts of animals live in and around freshwater, such as canals, rivers, ponds, streams and even ditches. Check out what lives in your local canal or river.



You will need

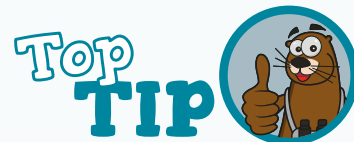
- A clean empty tub (large ice-cream container is good)
- Waterproof gloves
- A fine net
- A safe place to sit, kneel or stand
- Something to wash your hands with

What to do

- Half fill your tub with pond water
- Scoop the net in a figure of 8 to pick up tiny creatures
- Empty the contents into your tub
- When you've finished, release any creatures back into the water. Then wash or sanitise your hands to get rid of any germs



REMEMBER: Don't lean too far forward
The water safety section has lots of tips to keep you safe around water.



The best places to pond dip are purpose-built platforms.

Next Step → → → →

Make an underwater viewer to see what you have caught.

You will need

- A large milk or juice carton
- A piece of clear polythene about 20 cms square
- A thick rubber band

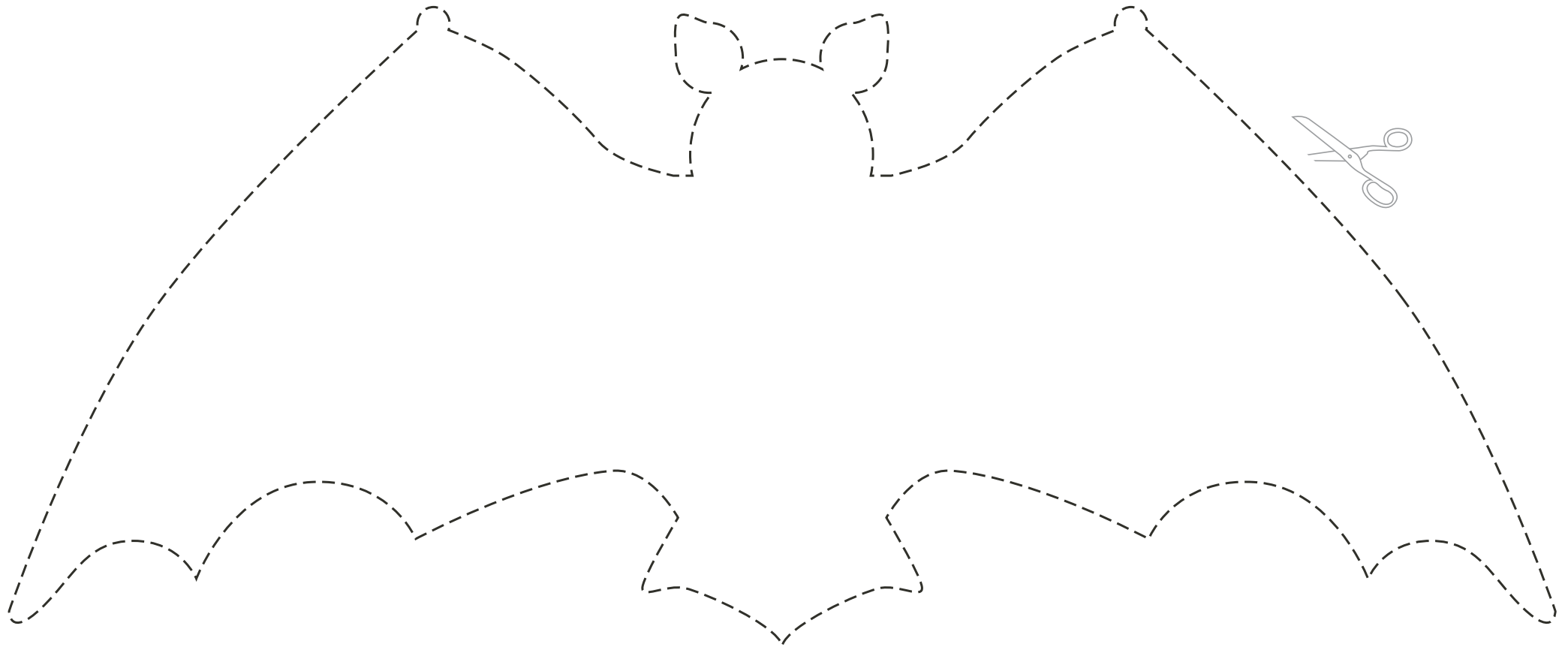
What to do

- Cut off the top and bottom
- Stretch the polythene over the bottom and fasten with the rubber band
- Lower the viewer into the water and look through the open end



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Stay Away From the Edge

Bat template: **Wildlife**



Be careful or
ask an adult for
help when
using scissors.