



Learn about canal and river habitats

To understand more about what we do, and why the way we do it is so important, let's take a look at all our canal and river habitats. Each one attracts different wildlife and presents unique challenges.



Waterway banks

Where the land meets the water, these banks attract dragonflies, waterbirds, water voles, crayfish and otters. Birds such as coots, moorhens and mute swans build their nests here, water voles like to burrow in the soft banks, and the grassland attracts amphibians and reptiles such as lizards, slow worms and snakes.



Cuttings and embankments

With sloping sides which can include rocks, grassland and scrub, many of these areas are special sites for conservation.

Grassy embankments are full of wildflowers, butterflies and insects. Lots of smaller mammals live here too, which attract barn owls and badgers, who like to build their setts on the slopes where woodland meets grassland. The setts can cause structural problems or leakage so we need to monitor these closely.



Built structures

These include bridges, tunnels, locks, cottages and weirs providing homes for bats, white-clawed crayfish, mussels and nesting birds such as housemartins and wagtails. The ferns and moss that grow on structures are micro habitats for spiders and other invertebrates, and freshwater sponge can be found growing on wet structures.



Towpath verges

These run for many miles along the waterways and are a great place to spot wildlife in urban areas. Even the narrowest are home to meadow plants such as gypsywort, cow parsley and even orchids, which attract bees, butterflies and other pollinators. The nettles are a favourite for tortoises, and the taller vegetation provides food and shelter to larger amphibians such as newts, frogs and toads.



Hedgerows

Planted by the original canal companies hedgerows are found along most of our canals. We look after over 600 miles of hedgerow, made up of hawthorn, ash, blackthorn, hazel and elder.

Our hedgerows are protective corridors for nature on the move. They connect patches of woodland or grassland and provide shelter, food and a place to breed. At least 30 species of birds nest in hedgerows, including blackbirds, robins and yellowhammers; and slow worms find places to hibernate here.



Open water

This habitat is made up of reservoirs, lakes, ponds, feeders and streams. Many are designated wildlife sites (at local, national and international level) because of their importance for water birds, from wintering wildfowl to waders, warblers and herons. Equally important is the 'Draw Down Zone,' the large area of mud that is exposed when water levels drop in summer, which provides a valuable habitat for rare plants, mosses and invertebrates.

