My RSPB NATURE CLIPBOARD

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Welcome to your nature clipboard!

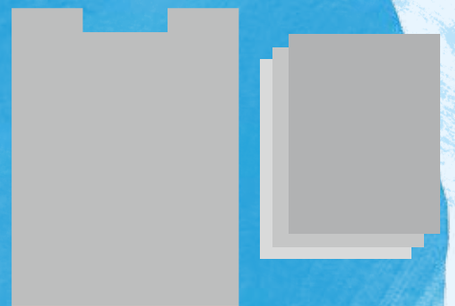
Nature is everywhere you look – from your garden or balcony to the local park, woodland, field or lake. In the pages of this book, you'll find all sorts of activities and ideas for encouraging, observing and enjoying wildlife. All you need to do is step outside and start spotting what's all around you!

THIS BOOK COMES WITH YOUR VERY OWN NATURE KIT, TO HELP YOU TO BECOME AN EXPERT NATURE DETECTIVE.

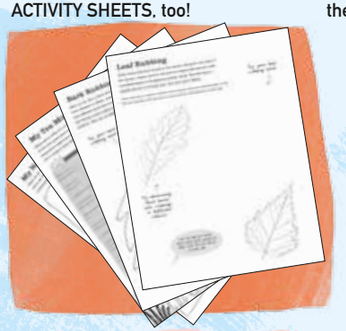
WHAT'S IN THIS KIT

1. Take a look through this BOOK for some fun activity ideas you can try in the great outdoors.

2. Some of the activities might help you to attract animals and insects into your garden, others will lead you out on a nature adventure. Wherever you are, make sure you always have your SPOTTER SHEETS and CLIPBOARD to hand so that you can identify what you see.



3. Don't forget to have a go at the ACTIVITY SHEETS, too!



4. To help you keep count of what you spot, there's a handy TALLY SHEET…

5…and then, when you're back indoors, you can track your progress on your POSTER, too!

WHAT YOU NEED

Apart from this kit and a pen or pencil, you don't need any special equipment to get started, but these things might come in handy when you're out and about:

NOTEBOOK – for sketching and making notes about what you discover

A TORCH – for any night-time detective work

SNACKS and WATER – if you are going out for the day

WARM CLOTHES and WATERPROOFS if it's wet, and SUN CREAM if it's sunny

A MOBILE PHONE – so you can be contacted if you have permission to explore without an adult

THE NATURE DETECTIVE CODE

There are a few golden rules every nature detective needs to follow to keep yourself and the wildlife around you safe.

- Make sure you have permission to go outdoors – or take an adult with you
- Always put things back where you found them
- Never pull a wild flower or plant out of the ground
- Never pick up a wild animal
- Never touch a bird's nest – you may do them harm without meaning to
- Take any litter away with you
- Never stray far from a path
- Be patient and be quiet – this is the best way to spot the most wildlife!

WHAT IF IT RAINS?

Most of the activities in this book are fine for rainy weather, but some are best left until the weather dries up a bit. If you're waiting for animals to come out from their hiding places, you might have to be even more patient than normal.

TIPS TO GET STARTED

Here are some signs to look out for that wildlife has been nearby:

FOOTPRINTS – can you spot an animal's tracks in sand, soil or snow?

FUR – on trees, bushes or fences. An animal may have brushed by and caught itself

DISCARDED BONES – from an animal's dinner

DROPPINGS – are they tiny, like a mouse's or a rabbit's, or big and full of berries and bones, like a fox's? Use a stick to break them apart – never touch poo with your hands

PELLETS – animals such as owls spit out fur, feathers and bones they cannot digest as pellets

TRAILS IN GRASS

STRIPPED PINE CONES – a clue that squirrels are close

MOLE HILLS

Make a butterfly feeder

Butterflies are attracted to the bright colours of flowers because of the food they provide. They feed on the nectar and pollen from the flowers but also enjoy eating the sugars of fruits and tree sap. Here's a way to attract butterflies to a colourful feast in your garden or on your balcony.

YOU WILL NEED:

A pencil

A large foil pie tin (a plastic one is just as good)

4 equal lengths of string

Scissors

Colourful card

4 pieces of cotton wool

4 plastic bottle tops

Glue

Sugar solution (made from sugar mixed in hot water – get an adult to help and wait until it has cooled down before using)

Some beads for decoration

Some slices of orange

1. With your pencil, poke a hole through four evenly-spaced points round the edge of the pie tin. Thread a length of string through each hole, tying knots to keep them in place.

3. Cut out four flower shapes from different colours of card. Take care using the scissors.

5. Find a branch or suitable hanging spot in the sunshine for your feeder and tie the four lengths of string together around it. Do this on a dry day so the card flowers won't get soggy.

2. Soak four pieces of cotton wool in your sugar solution and place in the bottle tops.

4. Thread your beads down the lengths of string to make your feeder as colourful as possible. Tie knots in the top of each strand – but make sure you leave enough string for the next step.

6. Stick your flower shapes on the feeder, then stick your bottle tops in the middle of each one. Scatter orange pieces around the tray, then take out your clipboard and get spotting butterflies!

ATTRACTING BUTTERFLIES

You could also grow butterfly-friendly plants to attract butterflies to your garden or balcony. Here are some plants you could use:

LAVENDER – this herb has a beautiful scent and is a real favourite of butterflies.

VALERIAN – this plant will also provide pollen for bees.

WILD BERGAMOT – this plant attracts other insects as well as butterflies.

Butterflies like warm spots, so choose a sunny, sheltered position for your plant.

Why not try hanging pieces of orange from a tree or bush to attract more butterflies?

Animal tracking

Even if you live right in the middle of a city, the chances are that a range of animals will occasionally visit your garden at night. Many will sneak by unnoticed, but they will usually leave little clues to show that they've been there – look out for hairs, droppings and the remains of prey they might have eaten. But to make it easier to track who's been visiting you, why not have a go at making this footprint trap?

YOU WILL NEED:

Water

Sand

Large mixing bowl and spoon

An old baking tray

Ruler

A small shallow dish of cat or dog food, or mealworms

Wait until a dry night to try this activity.

1. Mix your sand with a tiny bit of water in a large mixing bowl. It just needs to be damp to the touch – think of it as the type of sand you would like to build a sandcastle with!

2. Fill a baking tray right up to the edges with the sand. Use your ruler to smooth out the surface of the sand so that it's flat. This will be your blank canvas for collecting footprints.

3. Test that it will work by pressing two fingers into the sand – do they leave a mark? If not, you may need to add a little more water to get the sand to stick together.

4. Smooth over your fingerprints with the ruler so that you have your blank surface again. Place the dish of cat or dog food in the middle of your tray.

5. Put your tray in the garden and wait for your visitors to come. To get to the food they will have to cross the sand, leaving tell-tale footprints for you to spot the next day. If you want to try again, put fresh food out.

WHAT SHOULD I FEED THE ANIMALS IN MY GARDEN?

If you want to attract animals to your garden, make sure they will be able to get to you safely – it can be dangerous for them if they need to cross busy roads. It's also important not to make wildlife too reliant on your food – it should only supplement their normal diets. With that in mind, here are some ideas for what to leave out as a treat for garden visitors:

MEALWORMS

SEED MIX

ROOT VEGETABLES such as carrots and parsnips – badgers love these!

FRESH FRUIT such as apples and plums

DOG OR CAT FOOD

Never try to feed a wild animal from your hands or attract them into your home – they belong in the wild!

Make a mini pond

Ponds can be little havens for wildlife and certain plants that need boggy or wet conditions to grow. Insects, newts and frogs are all common visitors to ponds, and you might even spot a bird taking a bath at the water's edge. Here is a way to bring a miniature version of a pond to your garden or balcony.

YOU WILL NEED:

A large, 30 or 40-litre container (an old washing-up bowl will do). Make sure it won't leak.

Enough rainwater to fill the container

2 or 3 clean bricks, tiles or flat stones

A bag of clean gravel

Aquatic plants – see opposite page for some ideas. A mixture of 1 or 2 oxygenating plants and 1 or 2 marginal plants is best

A small stick

If you have space, ask an adult to help you dig a hole for your container. Use the soil you've dug out to make a bank around your pond.

BEFORE YOU START, DECIDE WHERE YOU WANT YOUR POND TO BE AND MAKE IT POND THERE, SO THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO MOVE IT ONCE IT'S FULL OF WATER. A PARTLY SHADY SPOT IS BEST.

1. Put a layer of gravel in the bottom of your container. Lay your bricks or stones flat around the edges inside. Ask an adult to help with the heavy bricks.

2. Fill about two-thirds of your container with rain water.

3. Take your oxygenating plants out of their pots and put them into the container. If you've bought them from a shop, the labels will tell you whether they need to float on the surface or if you need to bury their roots in the gravel to hold them down.

4. Put a handful of gravel on the tops of your marginal plants' containers. This will help weigh them down in the water. Stand your marginal plants in their pots around the edges, on your brick or stone platforms

5. Fill your container up to the top with water. Lay your stick with one end on the edge of the container and the other end buried in the gravel. This will help any creatures to climb out if they fall in your pond. Then use your clipboard and tally sheet to keep track of any wildlife that visits!

CHOOSING YOUR PLANTS

Oxygenating plants add oxygen to your water, which helps animals like tadpoles to breathe. They include plants like hornwort, water milfoil and willow moss. Some sit under the water and others float on the surface. You'll need submerged pondweed to help the water stay clear. Marginal plants like brooklime, lesser spearwort, water mint and water for-get-me-not provide shade for your pond and can be pretty as decoration.

IMPORTANT:
If you use tap water instead of rainwater, make sure you leave it to stand for a few days first, so that any chemicals evaporate. Chemicals such as chlorine are harmful to animals like fish and frogs.