



Bedford River Valley Park through the seasons

Spring



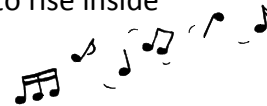
The Bedford River Valley Park changes through the different seasons.

As spring approaches, the hours of daylight increase and temperatures begin to rise. Spring is the time for new life and new growth following months of winter.

Things to look and listen out for in the Grange Estate:

Buds growing on trees as the sap starts to rise inside

Birdsong

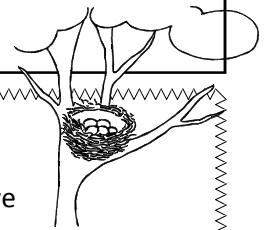
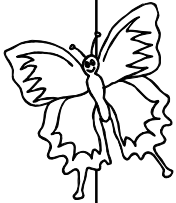


Early flowers such as snowdrops

Daylight for longer each day

Insects like butterflies and bumblebees waking from hibernation

Adult birds feeding young with insects.



Spring wildlife:

April is nest building time and many birds return to the same territories where they have successfully raised young before.

Migrant birds such as Swallow, Swift and House Martin also return around this time to spend the summer with us in warmer climates. In this area you may also be lucky enough to see Sand Martins. These birds will have crossed the Sahara desert to return and build their nests in sandy areas like the River Valley Park!

In late Spring the dragonflies will clamber out of the water and hatch as flying adults and newts and toads will make their way back towards water to breed after hibernation. Can you spot any on your visit?

Look carefully in the grazed fields and you may be lucky enough to spot new-born lambs or if you are really fortunate you could spot badger cubs that most often emerge from their sets to play in late Spring.



You could:

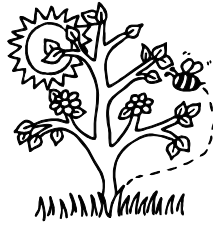
Learn to identify 2 different birds by listening to their song. Remember they may have a number of different calls for finding a mate, calling a warning etc.

Find the white blossom of the Hawthorn bush, called 'May' because it used to appear in the month of May but now it sometimes appears earlier. A true sign of Spring.

Record the hours of daylight every day and see if you notice any changes.

Bedford River Valley Park through the seasons

Summer



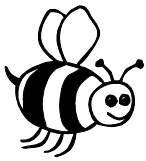
The Bedford River Valley Park changes through the different seasons.

Summer days in the Grange estate are longer and warmer meaning everyone, including the wildlife, is out and about more.

Things to look and listen out for in the Grange Estate:

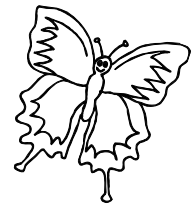
Green leaves on trees and other plants

Warmer temperatures (and cool shade under the tree canopy)



The buzzing of insect activity

Busy butterflies searching for nectar



Anglers fishing on the river

Summer Wildlife:

Hedgerows and verges along the paths and cycle routes should be alive with flowers such as White Campion, Rosebay Willow herb and Cow parsley attracting butterflies and other insects.

Near ponds and streams you should see several of the 21 different species of dragonflies and damselflies recorded here. Remember, very generally, the dragonflies are larger and hold their wings at right angles to their bodies, the damselflies are smaller and hold their delicate wings parallel along their bodies. Look out for the pretty banded demoiselle or a large brown hawk.



Look out for fledgling birds, youngsters that have left the nest but not quite fully grown and may be still fed by their parents.

You could:

Count how many different visitors to the Grange Estate you see? Are there more than there were in the Spring?

Create a butterfly transect - a set route to walk each day and count the number and species of different butterflies. Use an identification guide to help you.

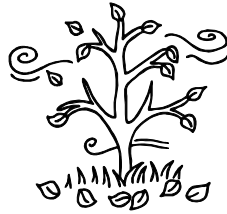
Listen for Grasshoppers 'singing' in the long grass. Try and pinpoint the noise they are making (by rubbing their legs over their wings creating vibration) to find them before they jump!



Identify three different trees by their leaves—look at shape and size and feel them. Use an identification guide to help you.

Bedford River Valley Park through the seasons

Autumn



The Bedford River Valley Park changes through the different seasons.

Autumn often brings a quieter time for the wildlife and many birds leave us for warmer countries.

Many leaves start to turn brown and orange and fall, leaving bare branches.

Things to look and listen out for in the Grange Estate:

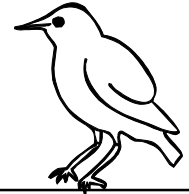
Seeds and berries on the trees and bushes

Piles of crunchy, colourful, fallen leaves

Shorter and cooler days with the sun low in the sky

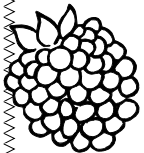
Fungi when damper weather arrives

Starlings and blackbirds arriving in large groups



Autumn Wildlife:

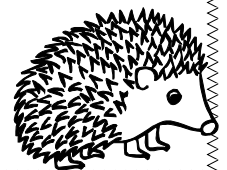
Autumn is the time of the harvest and fruits, seeds and nuts are plentiful on the Grange estate. Animals will begin to prepare for the cold winter ahead and feed well to build strength.



Fruits you may spot on a walk include the blackberry (from bramble), sloes (from Blackthorn) rose hips (from Dog Rose) and Haws (from Hawthorn). Birds will be keen on finding nuts such as acorns (from Oak trees) hazels (from Hazel bushes) as well as feasting on insects and even snails!

Flowers and will also begin to seed and you may find flocks of seed eating birds like finches on teasels in the Estate.

Voles and mice, just like the grey squirrels will be gathering seeds and other foods for their winter stores and you may even be lucky enough to spot a hedgehog in longer grass or hedgerows.



You could:

Count how many different visitors to the Grange Estate you see? Are there more or less than there were in the Summer?

Identify three different trees by their shape and their bark—compare size, shape and also feel the bark on the trunk. Use an identification guide to help you. Collect fallen leaves and make leaf rubbings using wax crayons or sew them together to create mobiles.

Bedford River Valley Park through the seasons

Winter



The Bedford River Valley Park changes through the different seasons.

As winter arrives, some wildlife will begin to hibernate and others will become less active. The temperatures drop and days are shorter

Things to look and listen out for in the Grange Estate:

Frost, snow and ice covering the ground

Evergreen trees and shrubs such as Holly

Flocks of birds such as Redwing and Fieldfare

Visitors enjoying the park



Winter Wildlife:

Trees and shrubs with no leaves give an excellent view into the world of some wildlife and you may be able to see birds clearly in the branches.

Mammals may be hard to spot as many are inactive or hibernating, but wildfowl in the Grange Estate, on the wetland areas, should be easily spotted.

Look out for Canada geese moving between feeding areas and other birds such as coot, moorhen, mallard, teal and swans. Herons are also often found in this area, with long legs well adapted to wading at the edges of the ponds and pools.

If you are lucky you may hear woodpeckers drumming on trees in late winter, they begin courtship rituals early.

Evergreen plants are easy to spot in winter and can provide berries as food and rare shelter for some species. Look out for holly (did you know that only the female plant has the bright red berries) and ivy wrapped around branches and trunks of other trees.



You could:

Check out the ponds and pools you know, especially the shallow scrapes and see if they are frozen. (Remember to stay well away and discuss potential dangers with any group).

During a thaw, look for areas of flooding and note how far the water levels rise.

Look out for footprints and animal tracks in the mud or snow. Use an identification guide to help you. Can you follow a particular set of footprints? Take photographs and compare the sizes and shapes inside in the warm.

Look for other evidence of wildlife, dreys and nests, holes and droppings which may be clearly visible.





Suggestions for work:

- Introduce and discuss the term **Hibernation** with the group. Do all creatures hibernate? Think of examples of creatures living in the BRVP that do. Talk about how creatures prepare for hibernation and what the advantages would be?
- Use **Creative writing** to write a poem or a story about hibernation. Imagine that you hibernate and base the writing around this.
- Introduce the term **Migration** to discussion and talk about species that arrive in Britain and those who leave us for the warmer countries.
- Try and visit the same place on Grange Estate once in each of the seasons. Record the temperature, weather, number of people you see etc. Discuss differences between the four seasons and how the landscape changes as a result. Use **sensory activities/games** such as a 'blindfold walk' or a 'touchy feely test' to help compare the site at various times of the year.