



Wildlife

This document contains information on some of the wildlife you might see within the Medlock Valley.

Green spaces in East Manchester provide important habitats for a wide range of plants and animals. Some of them are easy to spot because of their size or abundance, or perhaps because they are loud, colourful or just plain curious! Other species are more difficult to discover due their rarity and lack of numbers, or because they are so small, well hidden, or simply shy around people.

Most importantly, all of the different species work together, recycling waste and helping to look after the environment. Please make sure that you protect this balance by not interfering with any plants or animals when visiting the Valley.

Many creatures are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside act 1981, so please leave these creatures in their natural habitats and help keep them safe by putting litter in the appropriate bins.



Amphibians

Amphibians are animals that live both on land and in water, but must lay their eggs in water.

Common Frog



What is it?

A small amphibian, 6-10cm in length, with a robust body, relatively short hind limbs and webbed toes. Its skin varies in colour from grey, olive green and yellow to various shades of brown, and is covered with irregular dark blotches. Common frogs also have the ability to lighten or darken their skin to match their environment.

Where are they found?

Widespread and native to mainland Britain. Common frogs are largely terrestrial outside the breeding season, and can be found in meadows, gardens and woodland. They breed in puddles, ponds, lakes and canals, preferring areas of shallow water.

Eats?

Any moving invertebrates of a suitable size, such as insects, snails, slugs and worms, which they catch with their long, sticky tongues.

Special Note: The common frog is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside act 1981.

Common Toad



What is it?

Europe's largest toad, 8-15cm in length, with a broad, squat body, short toes, webbed hind feet and a rounded snout. Their eyes are orange with black horizontal pupils. They are covered in raised warts, particularly on the back and sides. Skin colour varies according to time of year, area, sex and age - though is typically dark brown, grey, olive, red/brown or sandy coloured.

Where are they found?

Widespread in mainland Britain, inhabiting damp areas of deciduous woodland, scrub, gardens, parks and fields. In the breeding season, they live in ponds, lakes, ditches and slow-moving rivers.

Eats?

Common toads are opportunistic feeders, catching invertebrates such as insects, larvae, spiders, slugs and worms, on their sticky tongues. Larger toads also prey on slow worms, small grass snakes and harvest mice, which are swallowed alive.

Smooth Newt



What is it?

Also called the Common Newt. It grows to 7-11cm in length, typically pale brown or olive green in colour, often with two darker stripes on its back. It has an orange belly and a pale throat with conspicuous spots.

Where are they found?

One of the most common amphibians in Europe. They can be found in a variety of habitats outside the breeding season, inhabiting deciduous woodland, wet heathland, bogs, marshes, gardens, parks and farmland.

Eats?

When on land smooth newts tend to feed on insects, worms and slugs by projecting their tongues to catch prey. Shrimps, water lice, insect larvae, water snails and frog tadpoles form their diet in the water.

Special Notes: Smooth newts are protected in Britain under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Birds

Blue Tit



What is it?

A blue, yellow, white and green bird.

Where are they found?

Likes oak trees and deciduous woodland. Can also be found in gardens, conifers and parks.

Eats?

Insects, seeds, caterpillars and nuts.

Coot



What is it?

Related to the Moorhen, it is a black bird with white beak. Its feet are webbed to help with swimming and make a noisy 'tapping' sound on the water before taking flight.

Where are they found? Breeds in shallow, standing freshwater with lots of vegetation on the edge.

Eats?

Vegetation, snails and insect larvae.

Robin



What is it?

A bird with a bright red breast. Their young have a golden brown breast.

Where are they found?

Likes parks, gardens and woodland.

Eats?

Insects, seeds, fruit.

Song Thrush



What is it?

A garden songbird and a 'red list' species, meaning its numbers are declining rapidly.

Where are they found?

Woodland, hedgerows, parks and gardens.

Eats?

Worms, snails and fruit.

Wren



What is it?

A tiny brown bird with short, round wings and a short and narrow tail.

Where are they found?

Breeds in deciduous and mixed woodland. Can also be found in parks, orchards, gardens, hedgerows, farmland and moorland.

Eats?

Insects and spiders.

Plants and Trees

Alder



What is it?

A rapidly growing tree - 1/2 metre per year for the first 30 to 40 years. Reaches maturity at about 60 years, with a long trunk and a narrow crown. Requires plenty of light.

Where are they found?

Native to the UK and very tolerant of waterlogged conditions whilst dormant.

Common Reed



What is it?

A type of grass that grows all year round (a perennial) and is highly tolerant to flooding. Grows to a height of over 2 metres.

Where are they found?

Highly abundant in reedbeds on river floodplains.

Dog Rose



What is it?

A deciduous shrub that grows to more than 3 metres in height, with long arching green or purple stems. Tolerates a range of soils, but not very dry or very waterlogged soil.

Where are they found?

A common plant in woodlands, shrub-land and hedges throughout most of Britain (rarer towards the north).

Japanese Knotweed



What is it?

A large, herbaceous plant that grows all year round, native to eastern Asia. It has broad, oval leaves and hollow stems, 3-4m in height.

Where are they found?

Abundant in riverside habitats, including the Medlock Valley.

Special Notes:

Japanese Knotweed is a problem plant that takes hold and spreads quickly. It was originally introduced by the Victorians as an ornamental plant. Today, it is illegal to purposely spread Japanese Knotweed and any that is removed must be disposed of at specialised facilities.

Manchester Poplar (aka Black Poplar)



What is it?

Medium-sized deciduous tree, which grows up to 30 metres in height.

Where are they found?

Generally found in the north of city in parks and gardens. It tolerates polluted air and was widely planted during the 19th Century, at the time of the Industrial Revolution.

Special Note:

This rare species is under attack from a disease known as 'Poplar Scab', which kills the tree by preventing it from producing leaves. The disease causes black spots to appear on the leaves, which eventually turn light brown and shrivel up.

Mammals

Fox



What is it?

The Red Fox is commonly 50-90cm in length, with red/brown fur and a long, bushy tail (or "brush"), often tipped with white.

Where are they found?

Red Foxes are widespread across the UK. They are typically found in woodland and open country, but their presence in urban areas is increasing.

Eats?

Foxes are opportunist feeders and eat insects, earthworms, fruit, berries, wild birds and small mammals, as well as scraps left by humans.

Hedgehog



What is it?

A small mammal, 15-30cm in length, named after its pig-like habit of rooting through the undergrowth for food. The upper parts of the head and body are covered in short, yellow-tipped spines. The rest of the body is covered with brown fur.

Where are they found?

Their preferred habitat is forest, hedgerows, scrub and cultivated land. They are also commonly found in gardens.

Eats?

Slugs, snails, beetles and earthworms. They also sometimes feed on eggs and chicks of ground-nesting birds.

Pipistrelle Bat



What is it?

The Common Pipistrelle is the smallest and most common bat in the UK. It has a body length of just 3.5-4.5cm, with dark red/brown fur on their backs and yellow/brown undersides. The ears, nose and wing membranes are black/brown.

Where are they found?

They occupy a variety of habitats, including open woodland, parks, marshes, farmland and urban areas.

Eats?

Small moths, gnats and other small insects. A single Pipistrelle may consume up to 3,000 insects in one night!

Grey Squirrel



What is it?

A small mammal, 23-30cm in length, with grey fur, small ear tufts and a large bushy tail.

Where are they found?

Common in deciduous and mixed woodland, they are also found in hedgerows, trees, parks and gardens.

Eats?

Grey squirrels feed on acorns, tree shoots, flowers, nuts, fruits, roots and cereals. They bury surplus food 2-5cm below the soil or in tree hollows.

Special Note:

Grey squirrels are an alien species and were introduced to the UK from America in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. Their success has been to the detriment of our native red squirrels.

Creepy Crawlies

Common Earthworm



What is it?

Varying in length from 9-30cm, earthworms are made up of many small segments called 'annuli'. These annuli are covered in tiny hairs that grip the soil allowing the worm to move. At about a third of the worm's length is a smooth band known as the 'clitellum'. The clitellum is responsible for secreting the sticky clear mucus that covers the worm.

Where are they found?

Widespread in Britain, living in the soil at depths of up to 2m.

Eats?

Decaying organic matter in the soil.

Special Notes:

Earthworms help to fertilise the soil by bringing nutrients closer to the surface.

Common Snail



What is it?

A common invertebrate with pale grey moist skin and four tentacles on its head - the shorter two are for feeling, the longer pair are eyestalks. The shell of these snails is light brown with darker brown bands following the spiral.

Where are they found?

They are widespread in Britain and live in varied habitats including gardens, parks, forests and dunes.

Eats?

They are herbivores and feed on decaying vegetation, algae, fungi, lichens and plant leaves.

CraneFly



What is it?

An insect resembling a giant mosquito (also known as Daddy Long-Legs). It has a long and gangly appearance, with very long legs and a slender abdomen. Temperate species range up to 6cm in size.

Where are they found?

Most species are associated with moist temperate environments, though they can be found in amazingly diverse habitats - from fields, parks and gardens, to cliff faces, woodlands and riversides.

Eats?

Adult crane flies feed on nectar or not at all, while their larvae, called leatherjackets, consume roots and other vegetation.

Garden Spider



What is it?

The best known orb-weaving spider in the UK. The female of the species ranges from 10-13mm, and the male is 4-8mm. They vary in colour from pale yellow or brown to almost black, but they can always be identified by the white cross-shaped group of spots on their abdomens.

Where are they found?

Most commonly on bushes and other vegetation in parks, gardens and woodland.

Eats?

Flying insects including butterflies, wasps and flies.

Honey Bee



What is it?

Honey-coloured insect with a few scanty hairs, a small waist and a sting. Honey bees become active in the spring and venture out on flower forays in search of nectar and pollen. They are renowned for their delicious honey, which humans have harvested for centuries.

Where are they found?

Honey bees can be found worldwide in gardens, orchards, woodland and meadows where flowers are abundant.

Eats?

Pollen and nectar.

Tortoiseshell Butterfly



What is it?

A small and attractive butterfly that is often seen in gardens. The wings are orange with a thin border of brown with small blue dots along the sides. At the front edge of the upper wings there is a pattern of black and yellow or orange marks. Small tortoiseshell caterpillars are yellow with dense black speckling and two yellow lines down their back and one along each side. They have black spines along their sides and back.

Where are they found?

Widespread across the UK.

Eats?

Caterpillars feed on nettles. Adults drink nectar from flowers such as thistles and buddleia.

Dragonfly



What is it?

A dragonfly can spend long periods perched on vegetation, walls, fences and even garden canes and washing lines. It suddenly darts out from its perch in pursuit of a fly and often returns to the same perch.

There are different from Damselflies in that they do not close their wings when they land. Colours include reds, green-browns, blue and green.

Where are they found?

Their larvae (young) begin in the pond and stay there for approximately 2 years before emerging and shedding their skin to become Dragonflies. Can be seen from mid June right through into sometimes as late as November in some sheltered parts. Can be seen flying around lakes, ponds and rivers.

Eats?

The larvae are aquatic and eat anything small enough for them to catch. Adults eat just about anything they can catch, mainly flying insects.

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This is only a small selection of the fantastic things you can see within the green valley. Take time out, have a walk and watch nature as time slips by.

If you see any of these species or other wildlife in the Medlock Valley, why not let us know.

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