

# THE LOST WORDS ACTIVITY PACK



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Oxford Poetry Library

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MIRIAM ELEANOR ART

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# INTRODUCTION

## About this Activity Pack

In 2020, in collaboration with Flo's Place in the Park, and made possible by the generosity of the Midcounties Co-operative and Community Action Groups, we planned to produce a series of workshops for kids inspired by The Lost Words by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris. Due to the coronavirus outbreak in the spring, with public gatherings and events cancelled across the country, we have as yet been unable to bring all these workshops to life! However, you can't cancel spring, and there is still much glorious nature to be found in the gardens and green spaces around our home. We hope this pack will invite you and your family to explore the wildlife around you, and create something wonderful in response.

## About The Lost Words

Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris created The Lost Words after the 2007 edition of the Oxford Junior Dictionary introduced new words such as "broadband" and "blog" while words about the natural world (acorn, wren, otter, willow, to name a few) were lost. The dictionary made this decision based on the idea that children are losing touch with nature, so didn't need to look up these words anymore. It seemed the natural world was disappearing from children's lives.

Enter The Lost Words! This is a magical collection of acrostic poems by Macfarlane, gorgeously illustrated by Morris, which magics these words back into existence, brings them back to our hearts and minds, and helps us to rediscover the natural world around us. Each 'lost word' has its own poem and beautiful watercolour drawing to bring it to life. To explore some of them, you can see pages and poems from the book (and download some other useful Lost Words resources!) here: <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/initiatives/the-lost-words>.

## How to use this pack

This activity pack is designed to mirror the workshops which we have run in the past around Oxford. The idea is to have a resource to help you recreate the workshops at home. We have a different pack for different areas of wildlife including birds, plants, and mini-beasts. Do all, or just those which take your fancy. Each workshop is split into three parts:

The first is the outdoors bit which will involve going outside either into your garden, or nearby green space. It doesn't need to be wild or wildernessy - any park or square will do!

The second part is where we think about how we used our senses and start putting our outside experiences into words. Finally, the third section is when we turn all these words into Lost Words-inspired poems!

All you will need to do these activities are:

- A pen or pencil
- Some paper
- Some art supplies to illustrate your poem (we usually like to have lots of crayons, coloured pencils, marker pens, collage materials and coloured paper)
- A computer connected to the internet

It might be easiest to print out the pack so you can write on the worksheets and fill in the boxes we've made for activities. But if you don't have a printer, just use any paper you have to take notes and do the activities and that will work just as well.

Finally: please do share what you've made! We would love to see your poems and illustrations. At the end of all the workshops, we are planning to collect all participants' artwork and writing in a zine which will be distributed around the city (and of course be free to all contributors). To submit your work, scan or photograph your masterpieces and send them to us at [oxfordpoetrylibrary@gmail.com](mailto:oxfordpoetrylibrary@gmail.com) or share them on social media with the hashtag #TheLostWordsOxford

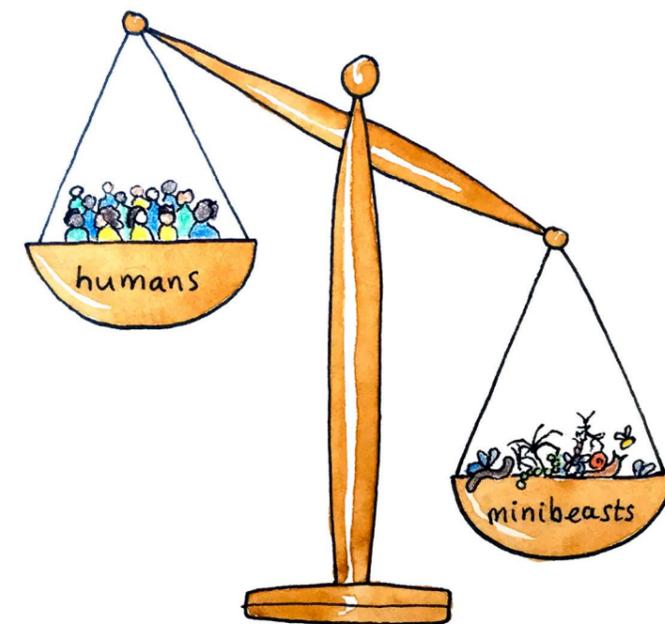
Be safe, have fun, and most of all - enjoy the beauty and magic of the natural world around you!

## DISCOVERING



Today, we're going to enter the world of some fantastic beasts.... Minibeasts! The Earth is the planet of the minibeasts. They can live almost anywhere, from the deepest darkest parts of the oceans, to the slopes of the highest mountains, to the driest deserts. Some of them can even survive in space!

The world just teems with minibeasts. There are around 7 billion people living on the planet, but the minibeasts outweigh us by over 23 times.



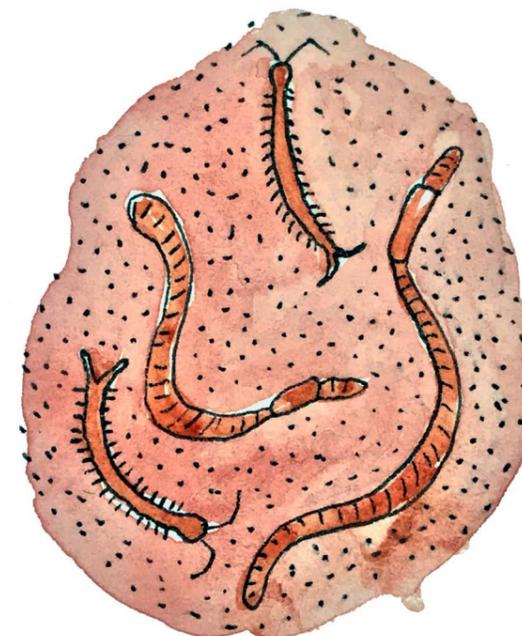
Dig just 8cm down into the soil anywhere in the country and you will find around 77 individual animals wiggling around. Shake a tree in the Amazon rainforest enough and 700 different types of beetle will fall out...There are simply so many, we can't count them all. So far, we've discovered 1.25 million different types or **species**, but scientists have estimated there may be 5, 10, or even 30 million in total!

And I, for one, am glad there are so many. What would summer be like without the hum of the bees and flies visiting flowers, or autumn without bejewelled spiders' webs? Wouldn't you miss the excitement of seeing the first butterfly of spring, or the friendly snails that come out after rain? I know I would!

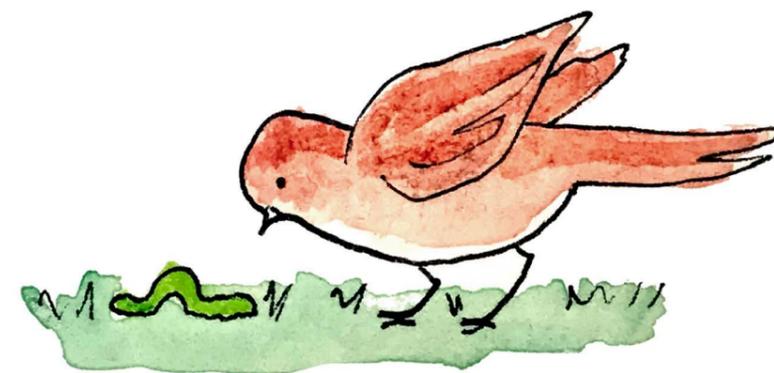


What's more, we need them to survive, and so do most other animals and plants. Some of them turn our soil, breaking down old, dead plants and animals and returning the goodness to the earth so new plants can grow.

Others pollinate plants, taking pollen from one flower to another so the plants can produce fruit, seeds and grain. Some, like bees and silkworms, give us things we can use directly (like honey and silk), and of course, they are food for other wildlife like hedgehogs, badgers, bats, frogs, and many birds.



Excited? If you want to start spotting minibeasts straight away, head to p15, or read on to learn more about the different types of minibeast...



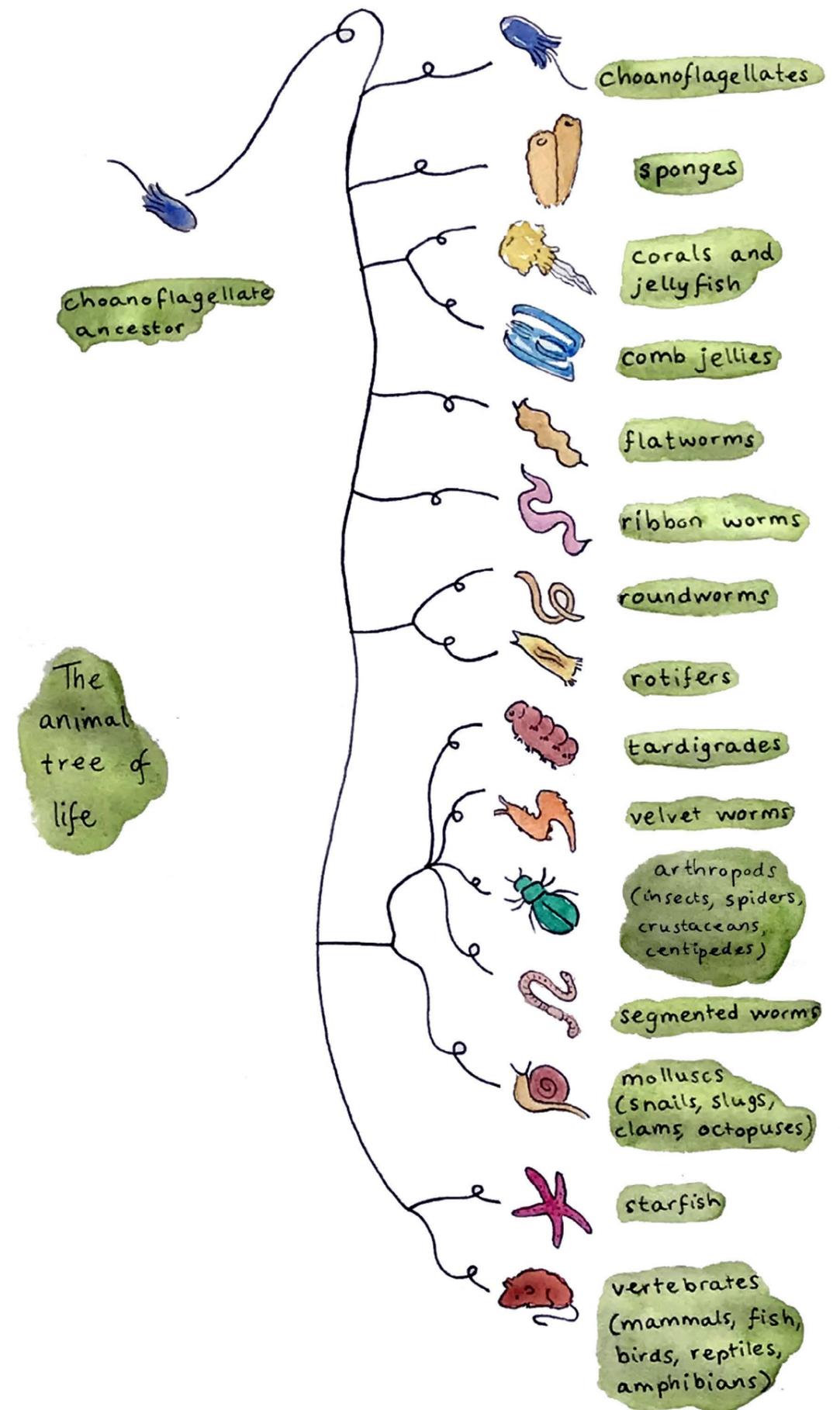
# The Minibeast Family Tree

Minibeasts, or invertebrates to give them their proper name, are animals without a backbone. Ourselves, other mammals, fish, reptiles, birds and amphibians are all vertebrates, and have a backbone. The amazing thing is that there's only one type of vertebrate, but over 20 different types of invertebrate, all as different from each other as we are from them! For instance, we are more closely related to a fish than a worm is to a slug.



Have a look at this family tree of invertebrate groups and see if you can work out who is more closely related to whom... For instance, the roundworm and rotifer branches are right next to each other, which means they're closely related, but the sea sponges are really far away from the vertebrates, showing they aren't closely related at all! From looking at the diagram opposite, can you tell:

- 1) Who is more closely related to a starfish: a human, or a jellyfish?
- 2) Who is more closely related to a spider: a worm, or a snail?



# Which minibeast am I?

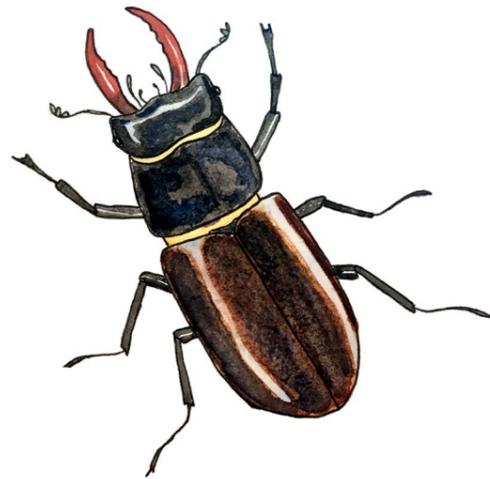
There are 25,000 different species of invertebrate in the UK, but only around 1000 vertebrate species. No-one can remember that many different names, so scientists use 'keys', which are a bit like quizzes, to help them identify them.

Some invertebrate species are quite easy to identify, like an elephant hawk moth:



elephant hawk moth

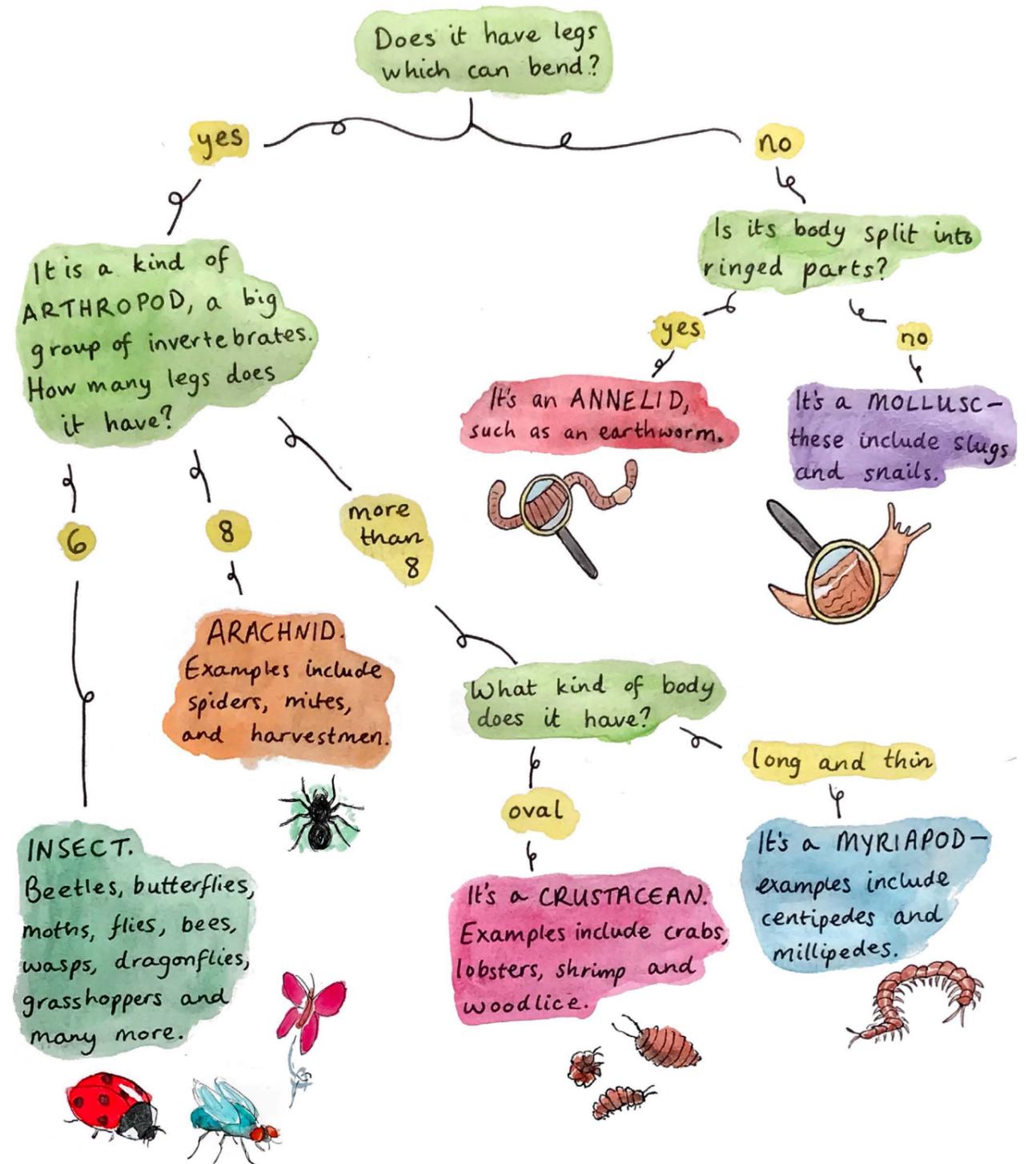
or a stag beetle:



stag beetle

but some are very hard indeed. It can take people years to learn to identify invertebrates, so don't worry if you don't know the name of a minibeast you find straight away (you can always ask an expert for help).

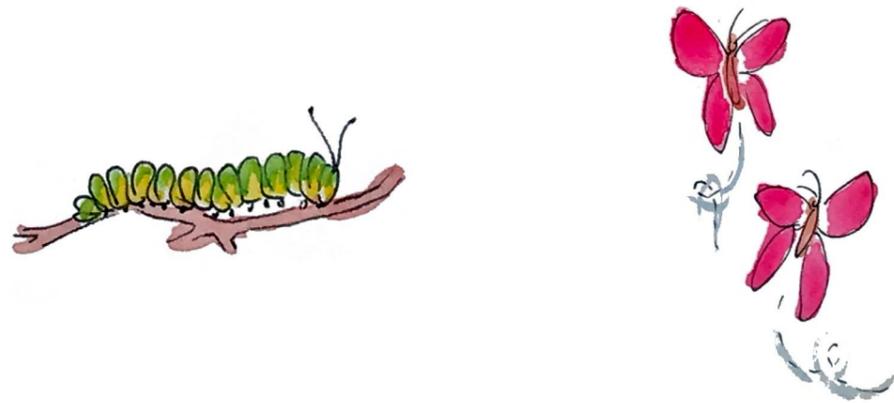
Here's a key you can use to help you identify any minibeasts you find today. Notice that the most important questions are whether or not it has legs (and how many!), and whether or not its body has 'segments' (rings of joined-up parts which help the minibeast move):



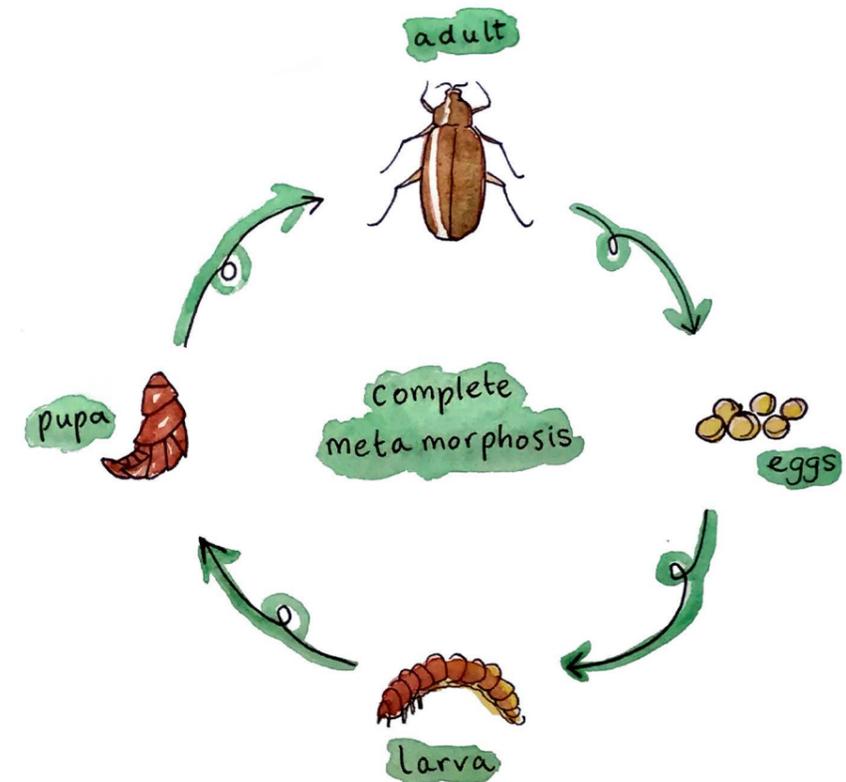
# Metamorphosis, mimicry and camouflage

The only time this flowchart might not work is if you were looking on the seashore, which has many more types of invertebrate, or if you found a young insect like a caterpillar.

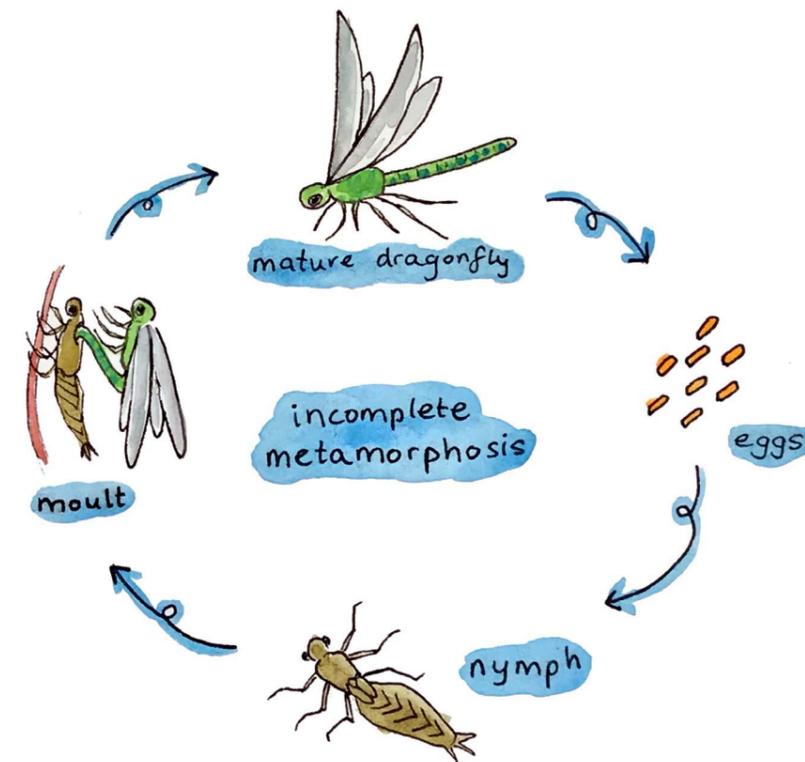
Lots of young insects don't look like the adult, and at some point go through a sudden change in shape to look like the adult, which is called **metamorphosis**.



Some insects, like beetles, butterflies and moths go through "complete metamorphosis". The adult lays an egg, which hatches and grows into a soft-bodied larva, which at some point makes a case around itself and becomes a **pupa**. Inside the pupa, the body of the larva turns into a mushy soup and then reforms in a completely different, adult shape. After a while the case breaks open and the adult emerges.

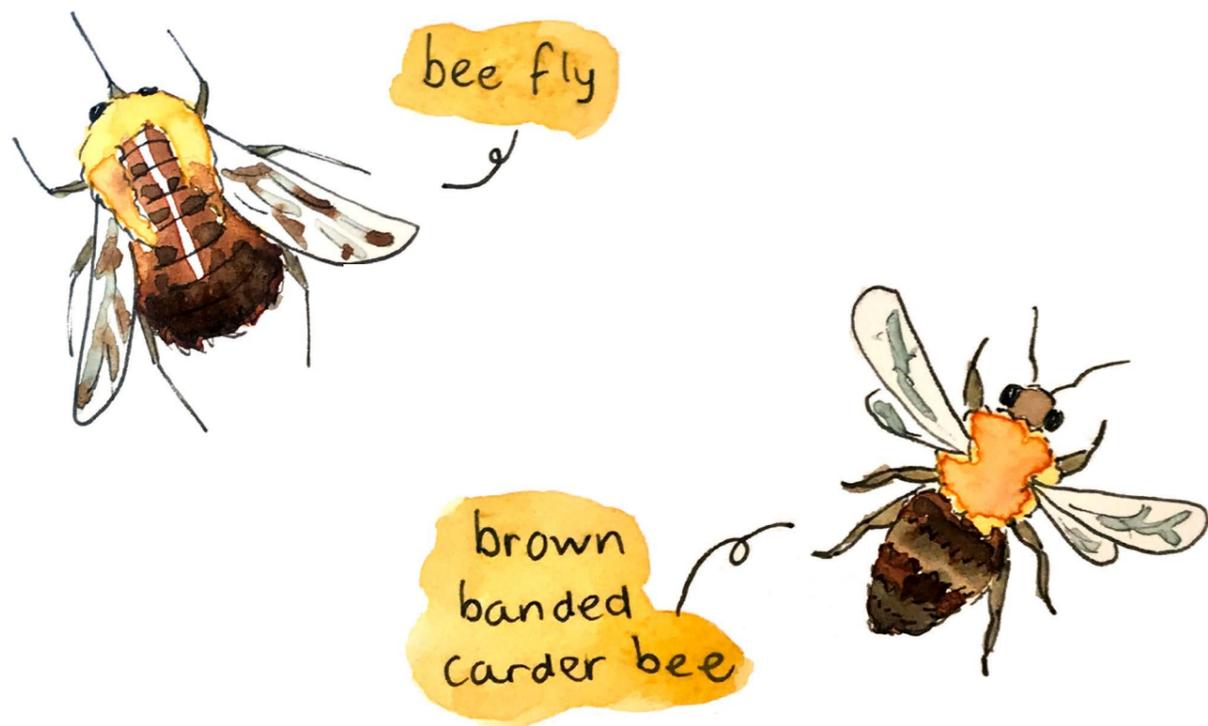


On the other hand, with 'incomplete metamorphosis', the egg hatches into something which looks quite similar to the adult, called a **nymph**. At some point, the outer case of the nymph will break open and a fully grown adult will emerge. Dragonflies do this, and their nymphs live in water.



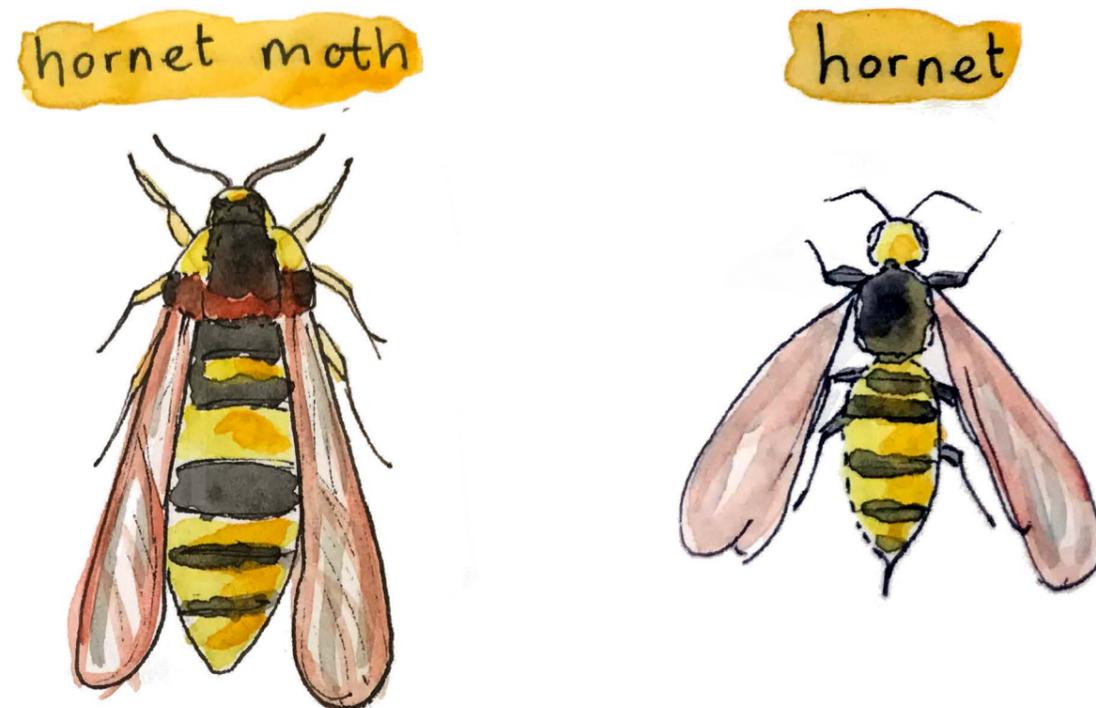
Another reason you may not identify your minibeasts correctly is that lots of insects **mimic** other insects. This means that some insects can look a lot like a different kind of insect which can sting or do harm, to trick others into thinking they're dangerous! That way, they are protected from other animals eating them.

One example is a bee fly (which is harmless), and the brown-banded carder bee (which can sting)... Spot the differences!



Did you spot any? Bee flies have only one pair of wings, but the carder bee (and other bees) have two pairs. Bee flies also have a longer tongue, and their eyes are much bigger than bees.

Let's try another! On the left is a hornet moth, and on the right is a hornet... again, can you see any differences?



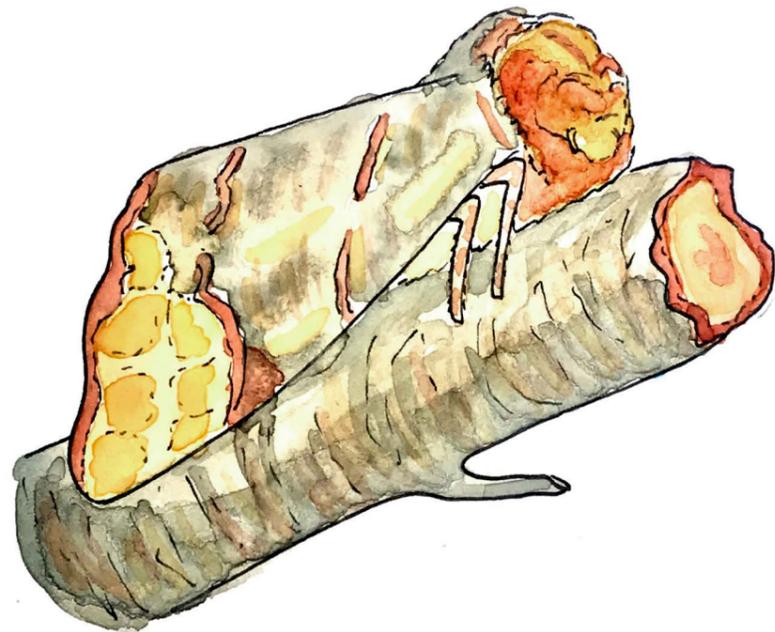
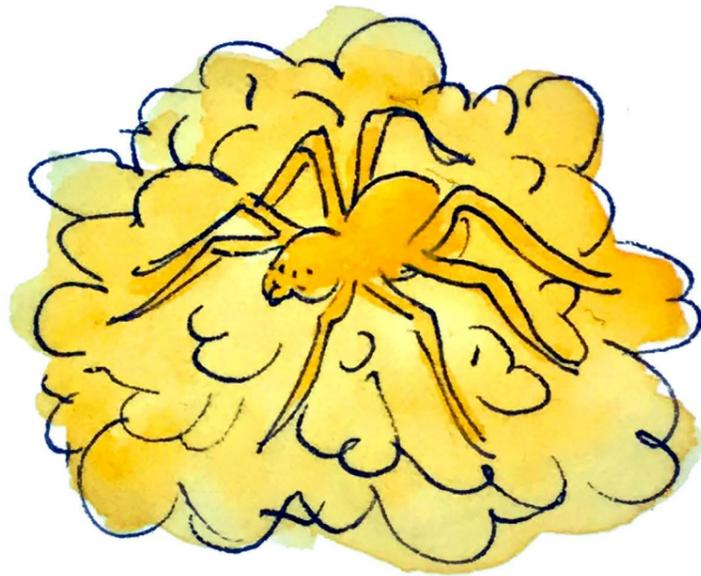
Did you notice the moth's yellow legs and thicker antennae? Its wings are furry too, and it doesn't have that narrow 'wasp waist'!

Other invertebrates avoid danger by blending into the background so predators or prey can't spot them. You've probably heard of the word for this: **camouflage**.

On the next page, you'll see some examples of camouflaged minibeasts!

Can you spot these hidden minibeasts?

the wolf spider changes colour to blend in with the flower it's on.



the buff-tip moth looks like a birch twig.

Now you've learnt all about invertebrates, it's time to go and find some for yourself!

## Go outside!

### Thinking Season

When is the best time to look for minibeasts? Invertebrates are 'cold-blooded' which means they can't make their own heat like mammals and birds can. This means that they're more active and you're more likely to see them in the summer months, between April and October. Some types are only easy to find for just a few weeks every year, so you might find very different things even if you repeat these activities in the same place every month over spring, summer and autumn.

### Thinking Time of Day

Most minibeasts are easier to find in warm, calm weather. Around the middle of the day is the best time to find most species, though some groups are more active at dusk, night or dawn (most moths, spiders and snails are nocturnal, for example).

### Getting Ready

You might want to wear waterproofs or clothes you don't mind getting muddy, as you may find yourself kneeling or lying on the ground to get a better view of some minibeasts. Don't forget your hat and some sun cream. Wear warmer clothes than you would for a normal walk, as you'll probably be keeping still or moving more slowly than you normally would!

Here are some things you might want to take with you:

# Kit List



Optional:

Old metal spoon for digging



Old white sheet or A3 paper



Transparent pot (old yogurt pots work well)



Camera or phone with camera



Magnifying glass or binoculars



... And dress for a bit of mud!

old clothes



wellies

(you can use these backwards to magnify things!)



## Sit and Observe

After stepping outside, you may be tempted to run around looking under leaves and logs straight away, but my advice is to spend a little time staying still and looking around you first. If you can find somewhere to sit or crouch, stay there for about two minutes, seeing if you notice any minibeasts nearby. This is a good chance to focus your senses.

Most minibeasts you'll probably see first, but your listening will be important too - if a big loud bumblebee or beetle flies past the back of your head, you're sure to hear it and turn around.

If it's summertime and you're near some longer grass, maybe you'll be lucky enough to hear a scratchy grasshopper chirp made by rubbing its legs against its wings.

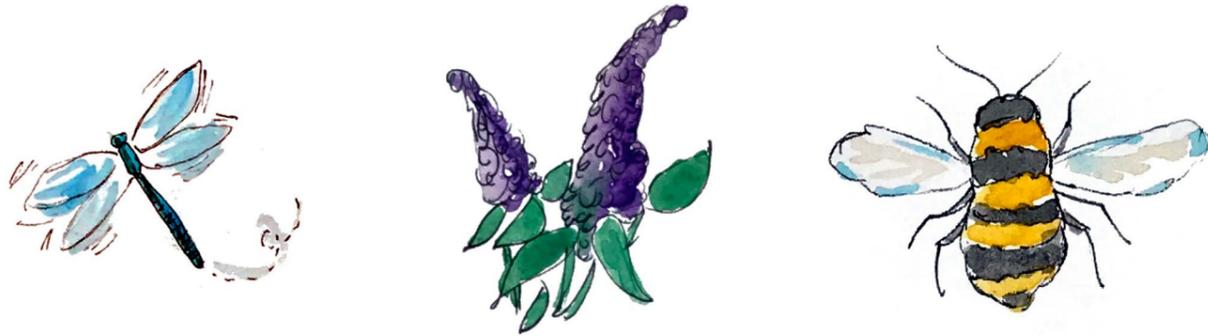
You might not be able to pick out many minibeasts by smell today, but your nose will be important: if flowers smell sweet to you, they probably do to a hungry bee or butterfly as well.

If you're unlucky you might feel a hungry midge or horsefly as it takes a tiny meal of blood. Don't worry though: they're not dangerous!

When you've spent a little time staying still and focusing your senses, it's time to move around and get searching!

## Finding your Minibeasts

Spend 10-20 minutes on your minibeast hunt. You can collect your minibeasts by putting them in your pot, or by taking a photo of them. Or, you can just choose to watch them and not collect them - this is probably the best thing to do, because you're more likely to see the minibeast in its natural habitat behaving naturally. Also, some fast-moving insects like wasps, bees and butterflies won't stay in a pot!



It's really important that you don't hurt any minibeasts you collect. Don't put too many in a pot at once, and always, always put them back where you found them. They were probably doing something important like breaking up old soil or about to be food for a hungry chick!



Here are some top tips for finding your minibeasts:



Turn over a log: be ready with your spoons and pots, because some minibeasts move fast! Remember to put it back afterwards, and be careful of your toes!



Dig with your spoon in the dirt: I bet you'll find a worm!



Look on the underside of leaves: caterpillars and other bugs like to hang out here, especially if it's been raining.



Put a big white sheet or piece of paper under a branch and shake the branch!



Look at a patch of flowers for 5 minutes and note what visits it.

Now, we're going to focus on the three most interesting minibeasts you found!

Here are some boxes for notes and sketches of each of your minibeasts. Try thinking about the following questions:

How is it moving? Is it scuttling, sliming, fluttering, buzzing, crawling, racing?

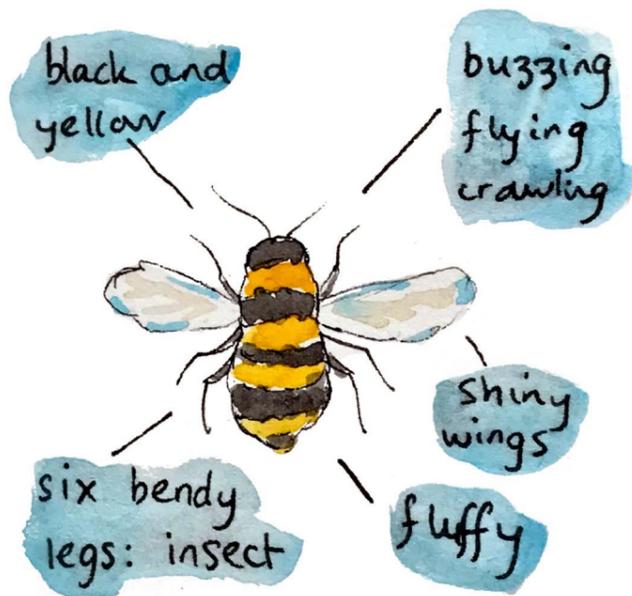
What are the textures on it like? Spiky, or smooth, shiny or dull, fluffy or squidgy?

What about the colours?

Does it have any legs? Can you work out what type of minibeast it is? (see page 9)

What do you think it eats? What do you think eats it?

You can write the answers to this, or you can draw a picture with labels. Here's one we've done below:



The first minibeast I saw was...

The second minibeast I saw was...

The third minibeast I saw was...

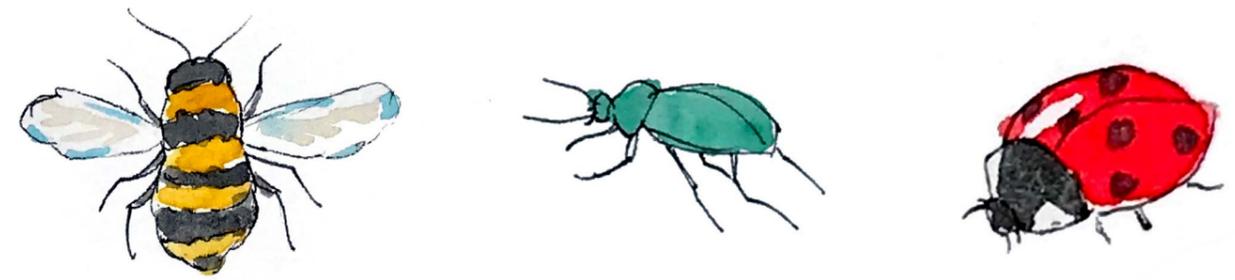
Finally, give your minibeasts a name. If you don't know its name, ask an adult, ask an expert (see the next page!), or just make one up! People have been making up names for common minibeasts for a very long time. For instance, woodlice are called different things in different parts of the country, like cheeselogs, chiggypigs or gammerzows! Snails used to be called limaxes and bumblebees were called dumbledores.

My first minibeast is called:

My second minibeast is called:

My third minibeast is called:

Now you've finished observing your minibeasts, go and put them back where you found them.

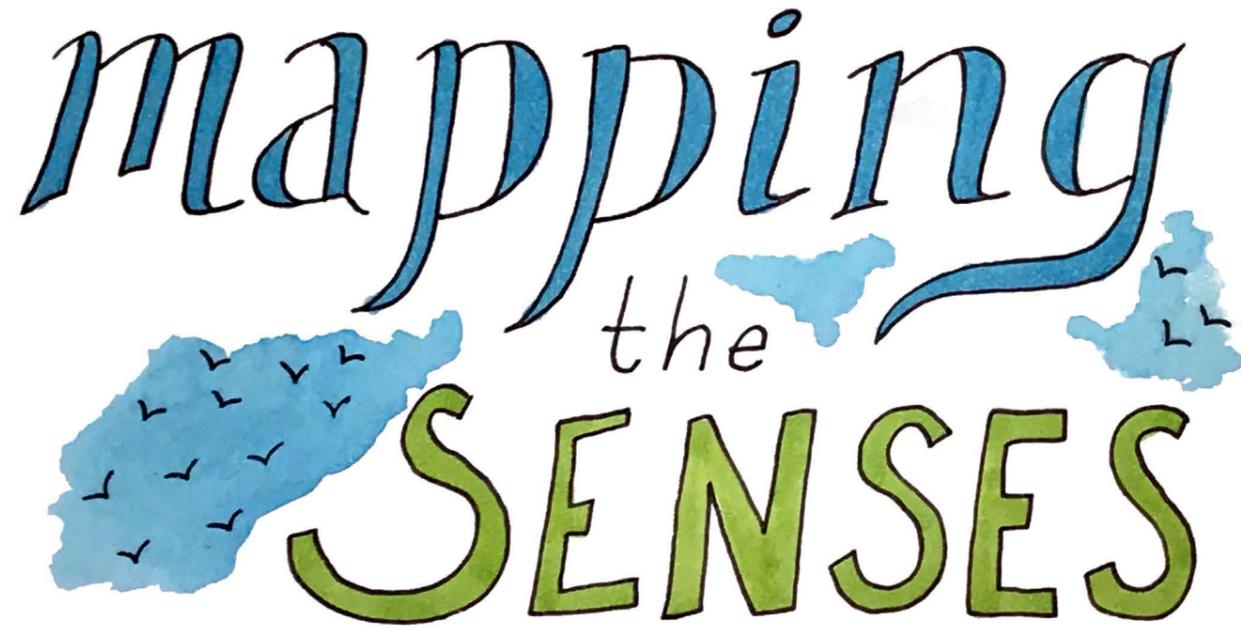


## ASK THE EXPERT

While you were out and about, did you find something you had a question about? Maybe a minibeast that you wanted to know the name of? Or maybe you want to know why an insect was doing a particular thing? Or you wanted to know more about the life of a minibeast you spotted? If you have questions, we have experts on hand to answer them! Send us your questions with any descriptions, photos, video clips, or sound recordings via email to [oxfordpoetrylibrary@gmail.com](mailto:oxfordpoetrylibrary@gmail.com) and we will pass your questions on to one of Oxford's local minibeast experts and send you back their personalised reply.



# mapping the SENSES

The title 'mapping the SENSES' is written in a mix of fonts. 'mapping' is in a blue cursive script, 'the' is in a simple black font, and 'SENSES' is in a large, bold, green block font. There are blue watercolor-style shapes around the text, some containing small black birds.

## THINGS I SAW

Come back indoors, bringing in the notes, drawings, and any bits of the natural world that you've collected while being outside.

Did you use all five senses when you were exploring? Hearing and seeing and touching, but also maybe smelling and tasting?

Print out the following 4 sheets or write the 4 headings in the middle of separate pieces of paper. Write as many things as you can think of around each heading.

Try to give yourself 5 minutes on each piece of paper to write down all your ideas!

Hint: think about things you saw but also colours, textures, patterns.

## THINGS I HEARD

Hint: Try to write a few *onomatopoeia* (a word which makes the sound it describes, like 'bang,' 'whoosh,' 'hiss').

## THINGS I SMELLED/TASTED

Hint: You can write about things you might have smelled/tasted, but also try to imagine yourself as one of the minibeasts. What might they have smelled or tasted while you were watching them?



## THINGS I FELT

Hint: This can be textures or feelings: the breeze on your face, sunshine or rain on your skin, prickly grass. But there are also emotions you might have felt: happy, thoughtful, calm, worried, tired, bored?

In writing the poems for The Lost Words, Robert Macfarlane often uses all five of his senses. Take a look at some of the poems from The Lost Words here:

<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/initiatives/the-lost-words>

Choose one or two and read them aloud to a family member, pet, or stuffed animal. What do you notice about the poems? Have a conversation with someone in your house about them. Think about how the poems use sound, repetition, and images. Do you notice how they use the five senses to bring the natural object to life?

You might also notice that each of the poems is structured with the title-word written down the side. Each letter of the word is the first letter of each line. This style of poem is called an acrostic.

Have a go at writing your own acrostic! It's easy - just follow these steps:

1) Choose a minibeast which you've seen today... something which you really enjoyed seeing, or found inspiring! Or choose a word from your sheets where you noted things you saw, heard, smelled, tasted, or felt.

My word is:

2) Write that word down the side of a piece of paper. For example, if you chose a robin, your paper would look like this:



3) Write a poem with each new line starting with the next letter of the word:



If you get stuck, use images and ideas from your sense mind-maps which you just made. Try to use all five senses in your poem to make it as descriptive as possible! Remember, a poem doesn't have to rhyme, but it can be fun to play with the sounds of words in your poem.

4) Decorate your poem however you like! You can use crayons, coloured pencils or pens, but you can also get even more creative and do some collage with old wrapping paper, coloured paper, even newspapers, magazines or old books (make sure to ask your grown-ups' permission first!). You can even use found objects (including things you found outside: leaves, feathers, flowers...)

For some inspiration, see some of the artwork from previous sessions: <https://oxfordpoetrylibrary.wordpress.com/the-lost-words>

## SHARE YOUR WORK WITH US!

Take photos or scans of your masterpieces and email them to us at [oxfordpoetrylibrary@gmail.com](mailto:oxfordpoetrylibrary@gmail.com) or, if you like, email us for an address and you can post us your work. We're hoping to make a zine full of all the creations from our participants so send us your work to be a part of that!

## FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

We hope you enjoyed the activities in this pack! If you did, and you want more wildlife and poetry resources, we list a few below (some for kids and some for grown-ups).

### For Kids:

Lots of The Lost Words free resources, materials, school projects and information: <https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/initiatives/the-lost-words>

The Lost Words activities and workshops in Oxfordshire: <https://oxfordpoetrylibrary.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/lost-words-school-guide-a4.pdf>

Lots of ideas for nature-based activities to do indoors and outdoors from the Woodland Trust <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/categories/children-and-families>

Free live lessons from fieldwork experts at the Field Studies Council (for a variety of ages) <https://encounteredu.com/live-lessons/fsc-fieldworklive-2020>

Nature activities and outdoor challenges for all kinds of wildlife: <https://handbookofnaturestudy.com/>

### For Adults:

Being a Beast by Charles Foster, (Profile Books, 2016) [local Oxford academic lives as a badger, otter, deer, and other creatures to get inside the head of those animals]

A Prickly Affair by Hugh Warwick, (Penguin Books, 2010) [local Oxford expert tells you everything you ever wanted to know about hedgehogs in an informative, entertaining, and charming way]

The Beauty in the Beast by Hugh Warwick (Simon & Schuster, 2013) [local Oxford hedgehog expert explores Britain's wildlife and the people who love them]

More information about Sarah Watkinson, emeritus research fellow in Plant Sciences at Oxford University, and poet in residence at Wytham Woods <https://sarahcwatkinson.wordpress.com/>

Oxford Plan Bee, research initiative in Oxford about bees and pollinators, running events and encouraging bee habitats in the city <https://oxfordplanbee.web.ox.ac.uk/>

## For Adults and Kids:

Become a citizen scientist! There are many wildlife and nature surveys you can take part in from your garden or as part of your daily exercise, all of which contribute to vital information on the health of our wildlife populations. Here are a selection (all dates are for 2020):

Plantlife: The Great British Wildflower hunt (any date) and Every Flower Counts (23rd - 31st May) <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk>

RSPB: Swift Survey (Late May - Late July) <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/conservation-and-sustainability/safeguarding-species/help-us-help-swifts/>

Butterfly Conservation: The Big Butterfly Count (17th July - 9th August) <https://www.bigbutterflycount.org/>

Blooms for Bees: any time <http://www.bloomsforbees.co.uk/>

## Credits, thanks and acknowledgements

This pack was written and put together by Phoebe Nicholson (founder and director of Oxford Poetry Library), Nick Boyd (ecologist and bird expert), and Claire Robertson (ecologist and pond-life researcher).

We are extremely grateful for the input of the following both in helping us run our workshops and being our resident ecological experts with whom we could not have run this project! Hats off to:

Charles Foster  
Stephen Harris  
Tonya Lander  
Hugh Warwick  
Sarah Watkinson

Many thanks to Miriam Chappell for her gorgeous illustrations throughout this resource pack and for all our Lost Words promotional material. More of her wonderful work can be seen at her website here [miriamleanorart.com](http://miriamleanorart.com)

A huge thank you also goes to Flo's The Place in the Park, and particularly Makena Lohr for her practical (and emotional!) support in driving The Lost Words Oxford.

And finally, thank you to CAG Oxfordshire and Midcounties Co-operative for their financial support in making this project possible.



The **Midcounties**  
**Co-operative**



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