

Pond life

Ponds contain many strange looking creatures. Because they all live in water they are very different from the animals which live on land. They have special adaptations that help them to live in water. One of the problems they must solve is breathing in water. They do this in a wide variety of ways. Also they have to eat. Some eat plants while others eat other pond creatures. The creatures you find will have a lifecycle. For example a tadpole is a stage of a frog's lifecycle. Some of the creatures you find may be part of the way through their lifecycle and therefore the juvenile creature may look very different to the adult creature. Below is information about some of the creatures you may find in a pond habitat. This information tells what size they are, what they look like, what type of animals they are, how they breathe, what they eat and some of their habits.

Creatures with no legs

Pond Snail

Pond snails have spiral shells which end in a point. They are herbivores and can grow up to 50mm. They cannot breathe under water so they hold air tight in their shells and return to the surface of the pond when their air runs out.

Ramshorn Snails

Ramshorn snails have coiled shells they are also herbivores and can grow up to 30mm.

Midge larva

Midges are tiny flies whose juvenile stage is spent in ponds, rivers and streams. Midge larvae are only 10mm in length. They look like tiny worms and are often C shaped. They feed on debris.

Leech

Leeches are a type of worm. They have a sucker at each end for feeding and are mainly parasites. Leeches can grow up to 50mm in length.

Tadpole

In spring time and early summer you will find tadpoles at various stages of development. It takes about 15 weeks for the tadpole to develop from frog-spawn into a fully formed frog. In early spring the frogs come to the pond and lay their eggs. The tiny tadpoles hatch from the spawn and gradually grow bigger. At first they're like fish and breathe through gills. Gradually they develop lungs. When they first hatch they graze on algae. As they grow bigger they become carnivorous eating smaller creatures and even each other. Many creatures also eat them so as the summer progresses there are less and less of them in the pond. Eventually in early summer they leave the pond as fully formed but tiny frogs.

Creatures with 6 legs

Caddis Fly Larva

The adult caddis fly looks a bit like a moth. The larva is about 20mm in length and has 6 legs. It uses materials such as sticks, pebbles, sand, leaves and other bits of debris to create a protective cocoon around its body so that it is camouflaged from predators.

Great Diving Beetle Larva

The larva of this beetle is the largest larva you will find in a pond. It has a long segmented body, 6 legs and is about 50mm when fully grown. Its tail points upwards like a scorpions. It's a ferocious predator and eats tadpoles, other insects and even small fish.

Pond Skater

Pond skaters are the first creatures you will see on the water. They are about 20mm across. They have 6 legs which are held out from its body so it can spread its weight as widely as possible. This allows it to walk across the surface of the water where it catches its prey.

Whirligig Beetle

In spring time and early summer the whirligig beetle is obvious on the surface of the water. You will see them whirling about in the manner that gave them their name. They are small beetles about 15mm long. They whirl about on the surface to disturb the small creatures they eat.

Greater Water boatman

The water boatman is about 16mm long. It has 6 legs but its hind legs are like long hairy paddles which it uses to propel itself across the water. It swims upside down on the surface where it catches its prey. It can fly but tucks its wings away when it's in the water. The water boatman cannot breathe under water so it makes frequent trips to the surface.

Lesser Water boatman

The lesser water boatman is very similar to the greater water boatman except it does not swim upside down.

Damselfly Nymph

The damselfly spends most of its life underwater as a nymph. It can grow up to 25mm in length and has 3 long feather-like tails which it uses as gills and to swim. They swim quite slowly. Damselfly nymphs are predators and eat other pond creatures.

Dragonfly Nymph

The dragonfly nymph is the "teenage" form of the dragonfly. They are chunky insects that have 3 stubby tails. They crawl along the bottom of the pond and prey on other smaller pond creatures.

Mayfly Nymph

The mayfly nymph will only live in very clean water. It has 6 legs, 3 very long tails and it swims very quickly. The mayfly spends nearly all its life under water. When it becomes an adult mayfly it only lives for 1 day, just long enough to lay its eggs.

Water Scorpion

This insect is called a water scorpion because its front legs are adapted for catching prey much like a scorpion's pincers. It crawls along the bottom of the pond searching for prey. It also has a breathing tube at the end of its body which it uses as a kind of snorkel.

Creatures with more than 6 legs

Water Spider

Water spiders can be about 16mm long. They are arachnids and so have 8 legs. They cannot breathe under water. They spin a web and use it as an air bell. They are able to breathe in this air bell only coming out to catch the small creatures they like to eat.

Freshwater Shrimp

The freshwater shrimp is about 16mm long. They have 7 or 9 pairs of legs. They swim on their sides. The shrimp is a crustacean and is related to crabs, lobsters and woodlice. It breathes using gills. Shrimps eat floating dead matter in the pond. They will not live in polluted water. If you find them in your pond it means that the water is nice and clean.

Water Mite

Water mites look like little fat spiders. They are very small, 5mm in length, have 8 legs and feed on tiny bits of plant and animal matter.

Water Louse

The water louse is closely related to the woodlouse. It has 14 legs a segmented body and they eat both plants and animals.