

# Pond-dipping

**Plants can be examined fairly easily because they stand still. Animals can be a little more elusive! When this is done methodically, it can be the most rewarding of pond activities.**

## Equipment

Useful equipment for pond-dippers includes wellies, other waterproofs, white plastic trays, pots or ice-cream tubs, sieves, magnifying glasses, white plastic spoons for handling creatures, notebooks, pencils, identification guides and pond nets. If expense is a problem, bear in mind that most of the creatures caught in nets can also be found by simply dipping pots into the water and mud.

Aims: To learn how to find and handle pond animals and plants, developing a respect for them.

## How to pond-dip

1. Approach the pond quietly as you may see birds, frogs or mammals around the edge of the pond. Spend some time looking for activity on and below the surface.
2. Then get things ready, e.g. half-fill the plastic trays and pots with pond water.
3. The first pond net sweeps, long and gentle, can be in the open water. Empty the net contents by turning the net inside out into the plastic tray, then observe and record your findings. Some things don't look like animals at first, so you may have to wait until they start to move!
4. Next sweep the net gently around the submerged plants, being careful not to damage them. Look at your catch in a new tray of water.
5. Now sweep the net along the stems of the emerging plants around the edge of the pond. Observe your findings.
6. Then the net can be swept along the bottom of the pond, taking a very small amount of mud and washing this in the net before emptying the contents into a new tray of water.

You could try other places in the pond too, e.g. shaded and light areas. Also try dipping at different times of the year or in different ponds.

Findings can be recorded at the pond for writing in pond diaries and for maths and English exercises.

## Safety with water

Working outside, particularly near water, can be hazardous. However, a sensible approach to organisation will help you spot, and even solve, many of the problems before they arise. The following are a few points to consider:

1. Choosing a site

Always inspect the site and carry out a risk assessment before taking your group out. Check for unstable or slippery banks - is there any evidence of recent collapses? Test the depth of the water with a stick - is it shallow and slow enough to allow the children to wade out to welly depth? Check up and downstream (in running water) for any potential hazards. Avoid the area if the water seems very scummy or smelly. Never work on a river in flood conditions.

## 2. Taking your group out

Do not take more children than you can easily supervise (we suggest six per adult). Make sure the children are adequately clothed and that you have plasters and rubber gloves to cover cut fingers. Teach the children the safety code which follows and tell them to stay near you at all times. Take a first-aid kit and a throw-line, and ensure you know the location of the nearest telephone.

## 3. At the water

Follow the safety code and stay alert - don't get too absorbed in an activity and forget to check on the rest of the group. Watch out for any child who becomes very cold - provide extra clothing and return home immediately.

Weil's disease is a rare bacterial infection carried in rat urine. It is possible to contract the disease from infected water or river and pond banks. Chances of infection are slight, but sensible precautions should be taken. Avoid full immersion in water and cover any broken skin. Wash all exposed skin thoroughly at the end of the exercise, and before eating. Do not allow water, or objects which have been in contact with it, to enter the mouth. If any illness occurs within two weeks of the field work, consult a doctor and inform him/her of the contact with untreated water.

Blue-green algae occasionally bloom in ponds and rivers during hot weather and appear as a paint-like scum on the water surface. Avoid contact as the algae can irritate the skin. Seek medical advice if there has been ingestion of, or extensive contact with, the scum.