

# The Pittville Lake Habitat

## Birds and Waterfowl



### KINGFISHER

A small iridescent blue and orange bird frequenting clear streams, lakes and rivers with steep banks in the vicinity for nesting. They fly rapidly, low over water, and hunt for small fish from adjacent perches.



### MUTE SWAN

The mute swan has a long flexible neck, an orange beak with a black 'berry' or knob, and is between 140 and 160cm long. The male and female look very similar. There have been a pair of swans on the lower lake for many years, producing cygnets in the spring. They are very territorial, will not let other swans on the lake and will even chase off their own young when they can fly.



### GREAT CRESTED GREBE

A delightfully elegant water bird with ornate head plumes which, lost to its being hunted for its feathers, almost leading to its extinction in the UK. They dive to feed and also to escape, preferring this to flying. Very young grebes often ride on their parents' backs.



### MALLARD

A large and heavy-looking duck. It has a long body, and a long and broad bill. The male has a dark green head, a yellow bill, is mainly purple-brown on the breast and grey on the body. The female is mainly brown with an orange bill.



### MOORHEN

Blackish with a red and yellow beak and long, greenish-yellow legs. Seen close-up, they have a dark brown back and wings and a more bluish-black belly, with white stripes on the flanks.



### COOT

All black and larger than its cousin, the moorhen, the Eurasian coot has a distinctive white beak and 'shield' above the beak which earns it the title 'baki'. Its feet have distinctive lobed flaps of skin on the toes which act in the same way as webbed feet when swimming.



### GREY HERON

Tall with long legs, a long beak and grey, black and white feathering. They can stand with their neck stretched out, looking for food, or hunched down with their neck bent over their chest.

## Gulls



### HERRING GULL

The herring gull is large in size, white with a grey back, yellow beak, pink legs, and a menacing eye. The difficulty in identifying these gulls is that they hatch from their eggs with a brown plumage taking 4-5 years to grow their white-grey adult feathers. Any bird with some brown in the plumage will be a juvenile.



### BLACK HEADED GULL

Black-headed gulls are some of the most common birds seen on Pittville Lake. They are smaller in size, and are noisy, sociable birds. They are easy to recognise in summer breeding plumage because of their black (dark chocolate) head, red bill and feet. In winter they lose the black head and only a small black patch remains behind the eye.

Above left: Summer plumage  
Left: Winter plumage

Pittville Lake is home to a wide variety of animal and plant life. This guide will help you to identify some of the most common members of the lake habitat which you may be able to see.



## Pittville Lakes Management Strategy

The lake in the west side of Pittville Park was originally Capper's fish pond. It was extended when the Council bought the land and created the park, which it opened to the public in 1894.

The mature open water lake is an important habitat for all aquatic wildlife on the north side of Cheltenham and beyond.

Over recent years the focus has been to increase and improve the biodiversity in and around the lake.

Bank vegetation is allowed to grow during the summer months to provide nesting protection for the wildfowl. The vegetation is cut down in autumn/winter to prevent

it degrading and entering the lake.

Three water aerators have been installed in the lake to prevent oxygen depletion, and water quality is regularly checked by the Environment Agency, who have control of the water in the lake.

The number of fish are monitored each year to keep a sustainable and healthy population.



Volunteering



Flag Iris



Early 1930s



Lake with Aerator

## Bats

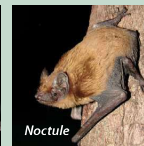
Two species of Pipistrelle bat can be found in the park, the Common Pipistrelle, and the Soprano Pipistrelle. Both look very similar, and are agile flyers that can be seen flying around trees and the paths, and near the lake feeding on small insects at dusk.

The Noctule bat is our largest bat and can be seen flying near treetops. They fly high above the ground in straight lines, swooping on their favourite prey of flying beetles.

The Daubenton's bat is a small to medium sized bat. It is sometimes known as the 'water bat' as it flies very low over water catching small flies, such as midges, caddisflies and mayflies.



Pipistrelle



Noctule



Daubenton's

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## Fish



### COMMON CARP

Covered in a mesh-like pattern all over their body. Normally dark brown or bronze in colour and has barbules along with an under-lip mouth which are used to feed along the lake bottom. Up to 110cms in length.



### ROACH

A small freshwater fish, with a small mouth and extended top lip to indicate its preference for feeding along the bottom of the lake. It stands out by its bright silver flanks with a pale cream underbelly and orange-brown fins. Up to 35cms in length.



### PERCH

A predatory species, that have a row of sharp-pointed spines along the dorsal fin and scales that are rough to the touch. Known for its dark tiger-like stripes, greenish-brown back, humped back and orange-red fins. Up to 38cms in length.



### PIKE

A large predatory fish that is known for its large mouth full of sharp teeth. With large yellow eyes, a flattened snout and a long torpedo-shaped body, pike are built for fast acceleration and hiding, with its olive and cream colouration creating great camouflage. Up to 150cms in length.

## Insects



### WHIRLIGIG BEETLE

Ever wondered what that little black dot whirling in circles on the top of the water of a pond is? Those are whirligig beetles! Often seen shooting across the water surface on the hunt for its next meal.



### EMPEROR DRAGONFLY

The emperor dragonfly is an impressively large and colourful dragonfly of ponds, lakes, canals and flooded gravel pits. It has two pairs of strong transparent wings which are held away from the body at rest (which distinguishes it from a damselfly). It lives between June and August and even eats its prey on the wing.



### DAMSELFLY

Damselflies are flying insects, similar to dragonflies, but are smaller and have slimmer bodies. Most species fold their wings along the body when at rest. Damselflies are predatory and eat other insects.



### POND SKATER

Can be seen 'skating' over the surface of ponds, lakes, ditches and slow-moving rivers. It is predatory, feeding on small insects by detecting vibrations in the water's surface.

## Rodents



### BROWN RAT

The brown rat is an incredibly adaptable mammal and can be found almost everywhere in the UK in any habitat. It has grey-brown fur, a pointed nose, large bare ears and a long, scaly tail. The similar water vole has a much rounder face, small ears that do not protrude, and a short tail. Brown rats are omnivorous, eating pretty much anything, from fruit and seeds to human food waste, insects, birds' eggs or even small mammals.

We acknowledge the local photographers and volunteers who have kindly contributed images for use on this board

