

There are lots of interesting insects living in or on Britain's waterways. Read on to find out about some of them.

Fact File

Number of legs: 6

Lives: On water plants and in the open water

Moves: By swimming quickly

Size: Up to 30mm

Food: Omnivorous (eats plants and animals)

Interesting features:

Great diving beetles are one of the largest types of water beetles.

They will attack anything they can eat - even each other!

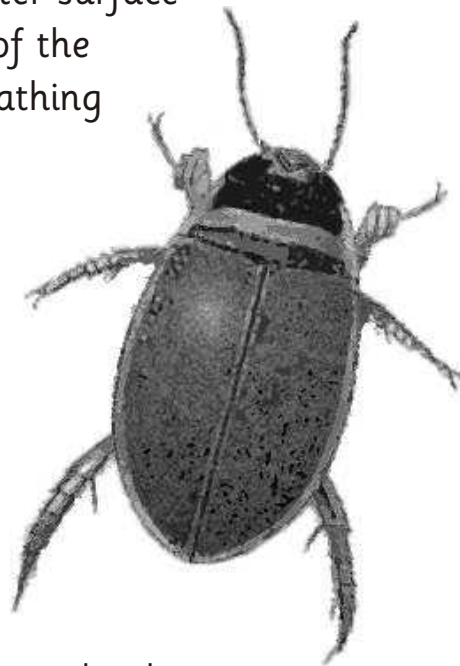
Great diving beetles tear up their prey with their huge, biting jaws.

They breathe by coming up to the water surface and placing the tip of their body out of the water. They store air in two large breathing holes in their body.

Females lay eggs in March and April. Each egg is laid in a slit in a plant stem.

The larvae feed very greedily and are fully fed in 6 to 8 weeks.

They then leave the water and turn into pupae in the damp soil of the water's bank.



Fact File

Number of legs: 6

Lives: Under the surface and on plants

Moves: Swims on its back using its long legs like oars. This is why it got its name of 'boatman'

Size: Up to 15mm

Food: Small animals - tadpoles, small fish, insects, larvae of diving beetle

Interesting features:

Great water boatmen kill their prey by jabbing them with their rostrum (feeding tube) and injecting them with poison.

They breathe by collecting air at the surface and carrying it in bubbles trapped on their hairs. The air bubbles keep them afloat, so they have to cling onto things to stop them bobbing up to the surface!

They mate between December and May.

They lay their eggs between February and May of the following year.

Adult great water boatmen can fly.

The eggs are long, narrow and oval and they are laid in aquatic plant stems.



Fact File

Number of legs: 6

Lives: On the surface of the water

Moves: Runs along the surface

Size: Up to 15mm

Food: Animals caught in, or swimming up to, the surface film

Interesting features:

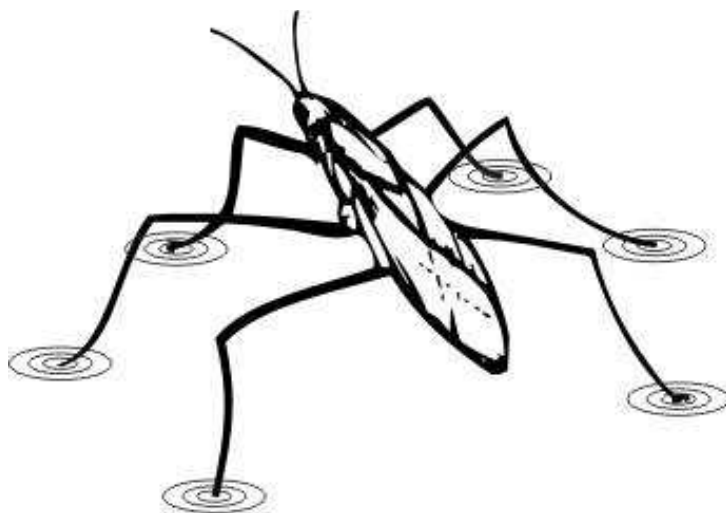
Pondskaters look like long-legged spiders.

A pondskater's body is covered with short hairs which repel water. When it is underwater these hairs trap bubbles of air and make the pondskater look silver.

Pondskaters are one of the first insects to appear on the water in the spring.

Females lay groups of eggs in spring on plants at or under the water surface.

Young pondskaters shed their skin as they grow.



Fact File

Number of legs: 6 (2 forelegs work like pincers)

Lives: On the bottom of canals and on plants

Moves: Crawls slowly

Size: 20 - 40 mm

Food: Small animals - tadpoles, insects

Interesting features:

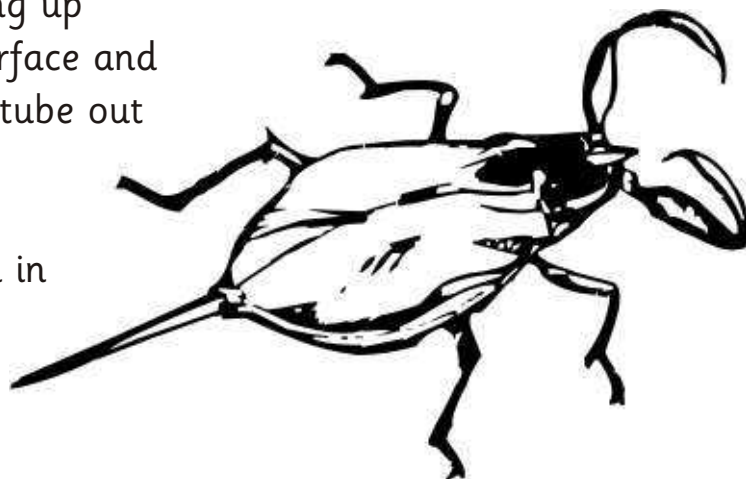
Water scorpions are hard to spot because they are mud-coloured and live on the bottom of canals and ponds - they look a little bit like dead leaves!

They are called water scorpions because they have scorpion like pincers and a long tail - but they aren't related to scorpions at all.

They have a long pointy tail. It looks like a sting but it isn't. It is a breathing tube.

They breathe by crawling up plants to the water's surface and sticking their breathing tube out of the water.

They hang upside down in the water and catch prey in their forelegs.



Fact File

Number of legs: 6 (2 long front legs and 4 short back legs)

Lives: On the water surface

Moves: Whirls around in circles quickly

Size: About 6mm

Food: Small animals

Interesting features:

You can often find lots of these tiny beetles gathered together on the surface of the water.

They are shiny black with yellow, oar-shaped back legs.

Whirligig beetles dive suddenly and quickly if they are alarmed.

Their eyes are divided into two parts!

Two parts are above the water's surface and they look out for danger.

The other two parts are below the water and they look out for prey.

Adult whirligig beetles mate in early Spring.

The larvae take about three months to grow into adults.

