SCOUTS EXPLORERS network

RSPB phoenix

Conservation activity pack

Conservation activity pack

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rspb giving nature a home

The RSPB

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) was formed way back in 1889 and has grown so much since then that we now have over one million members. We manage more than 200 nature reserves in the UK and help protect rare and threatened wildlife all over the world.

Nature is amazing – help us keep it that way by becoming an RSPB member.

rspb.org.uk/join

What do I need to do?

This Conservation activity pack has been created by RSPB Scotland for Scouts, Explorer Scouts and the Scout Network.

We want to help Scouts try new activities, while also learning about wildlife and the great outdoors, by working towards the completion of a number of Activity Badges, Challenge Badges and Chief Scout and Queen's Scout Awards.

This includes activities you can do to help Cub Scouts and Scouts earn their Environmental Conservation Activity Badge, Naturalist Activity Badge and World Challenge for Scouts. Explorer Scouts and Scout Network can help either as Young Leaders, or for the environmental section of their Chief Scout Awards and Queen's Scout Awards.

Once you've done an activity, email us at **youth.scotland@rspb.org.uk** to let us know what you did and tell us any results; we will then send you a certificate. If you complete more than 3 activities we will send you a special award and share your story.

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Where and when?

- It's important to choose a place that you can explore easily, either by yourself or with your group.
- You also need to make sure you're allowed to carry out a survey and explore your location properly.
- Check with your leader about how large your location needs to be – don't make it too big!
- Make sure you have time to complete your investigation properly, because plant and wildlife surveys can take time.
- Make sure you use your eyes, ears and nose to find out more about what's there. You'll find different wildlife in different seasons, so we've included some identification (ID) sheets in your pack to help.
- Make sure that before you get started you have all the equipment you need to carry out your surveys. Some surveys need particular items of equipment.
- When you're out and about, please remember to leave things as you found them. Do not pick flowers or plants, and make sure you put minibeasts and insects back in their own homes.
- Always take photos or draw pictures of your discoveries rather than take them home. This helps us conserve natural spaces. Also, take note of any pollution you spot, such as litter or water pollution.

Keeping safe

- Make sure you have an adult who can help or supervise when you're using tools and carrying out tricky tasks.
- Always make sure an adult knows where you are and when you'll be back from doing your survey.
- If you have any cuts, cover them with a plaster or wait until they've healed before going pond-dipping.
- Don't touch any rubbish you find, unless you're carrying out a clear-up! If you are, wear gloves.

RSPB Scotland nature reserves

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This is a selection of the RSPB nature reserves in Scotland that you can visit, to explore wild areas and carry out surveys. Always contact the reserve first to let them know you're coming – they might be able to provide an RSPB leader for your activity.

Our nature reserves help us conserve a huge range of important wildlife, so why don't you visit us to find out how? Contact details for our reserves can be found at **rspb.org.uk/reserves**

Older scouts could possibly volunteer at an RSPB reserve as part of their service, or for the residential section of their awards. Visit **rspb.org.uk/volunteering** for more information.

Investigating your area
Land explorations

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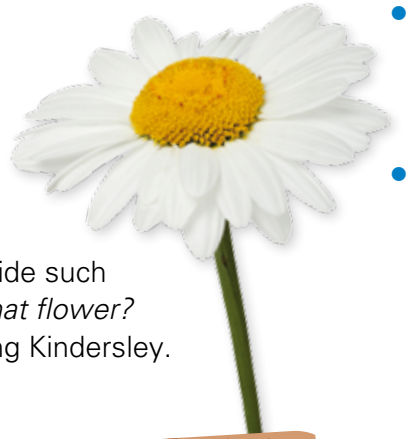
Plants and wildflowers

What will I need?

- 4 x 50 cm lengths of garden cane
- A wire coathanger
- Pliers (take care with these)
- Sticky tape
- Paper and pencil
- A hard surface
- Your wild areas ID and record sheet
- A wildflower ID guide such as *RSPB What's that flower?* published by Dorling Kindersley.



Handy hint

If you don't have the things you need to make your own quadrat, you could use a small plastic hula hoop.

How do I do it?

- Make a **quadrat** by cutting four 10 cm lengths of wire from the coathanger. Cut the lengths with pliers and then use them to bend each length to form a right-angle. That should make the corners of your quadrat.
- Now stick pieces of cane to the wires using sticky tape to form a square, which can be used to mark out the area you will study in your survey.
- Choose a good wild place for your survey (See page 3 for tips on this) then place your quadrat on the ground. Write down the plants you find in your quadrat and record how many of them you find. If you find a plant you can't identify, make a note, take a photo or draw a picture so you can look it up later.
- Now take 10 paces to your left or right, drop the quadrat at your feet, and repeat the process. You should do this at least three or four times to build an accurate picture of the plantlife in your chosen location.

Make sure you do the survey right across your area, not just at the edges or in the middle!

Things to think about

- Is your location on wild or managed land?
- Can you see signs of human development?
- What's growing where?

What to look for:

- The colour, shape, and size of leaves, and their texture.
- The colour, shape, and size of flowers, and the number of petals.
- The kind of place (habitat) you found them in – was it damp, shady, grassy or dry etc?

Wild areas ID

sheet at back of pack

Trees

What will I need?

- Your tree ID and a record sheet
- A good tree and plant guide, such as *RSPB What's that Tree?* (DK)
- A tape measure

How do I do it?

- Trees can look very different in spring, summer, autumn and winter. The first thing to do is think about what season it is, and whether the trees you're looking at keep their leaves all year (evergreen) or lose them in autumn and winter (deciduous). If you're looking at trees in autumn and winter, you'll have to use different clues to identify them.
- In spring and summer, use the colour and shape of the leaves to help. In autumn and winter, use other signs to identify them – like fruits, or branch and trunk shape.
- Using your tree ID sheet, check the leaves and try to match them to the examples provided. Do the same with the shape of the buds and branches if you need to.
- Once you've identified the tree, you can assess how old it is.

How old is this tree?

Take a tape and measure the distance around the trunk, approximately 1.5 metres from the ground. If the tree is growing close to other trees and has a tall, straight trunk, every 12 mm equals one year of growth. If the tree is standing on its own with plenty of branches growing from the trunk, then every 25 mm equals one year of growth.

Are all the trees in your location the same age?

Things to think about

What does the age and type of tree tell you about how it has grown. Can you tell if it was planted by people or grew naturally?

What to look for:

- The colour, shape, and size of leaves, and their texture.
- The kind of place (habitat) you found them in – was it damp, shady, grassy or dry etc?

Handy hint

The method of calculating a tree's age explained here works for deciduous trees. Evergreens grow differently – see if you can find a good way of figuring out their age.

Tree ID

sheet at back of pack

Investigating your area

Creature explorations

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Insects

What will I need?

- Empty clean jars
- A magnifying glass
- Paper and pencil
- Your minibeast ID and a record sheet

There are lots of ways to find and catch insects (or minibeasts). Pitfall traps, sweep nets and pooters are all great examples – see page 9 You can find more ways to help nature at **rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/families/children/makeanddo/activities/index.aspx**

What do I do?

Choose a spot to look for minibeasts. The best spots are often under stones, in bushes, on the bark of trees or in other shady, quiet places.

Once you find your insects, place them carefully into a jar so you can have a closer look. Make sure you release them once you've identified them, and put them back where you found them.

To work out what you've caught, try answering these simple questions:

- Is it an insect? Does it have three pairs of legs, antennae and three body sections? Do you know what the technical names are for the body sections?
- Where did you find it?
- Does it have wings? How many? What do they look like?
- How does it move? Does it jump, run or climb?
- What colour is it?

Make sure you include all the creatures you find in your habitat survey. They're all part of the ecosystem you're exploring!

Handy hint

If you're using a pitfall trap, make sure you only put it out on a dry night so your trap doesn't flood.

Butterflies and moths

Brimstone moth

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How do I identify butterflies and moths?

This will very much depend on the time of year. Because of their lifecycle, you're more likely to find butterflies and moths in spring and summer. But if you're persistent you might also spot them in the autumn and winter – especially when the evenings start getting darker.

In late summer, you can usually find lots of butterflies feeding on buddleia plants. Butterflies are also attracted to plants such as lavender, long grass, thistles and brambles. You can also try leaving out fruit peelings in a sunny spot, as butterflies will be attracted to the sugar as the peelings decompose.

Scotch argus butterfly

Move slowly and steadily to get close enough to see their markings, colours and the shape of their wings. It's important not to touch their wings, as this can damage them.

Visit the same place at different times of the day to see if what you can spot changes.

Moths come out in the evening and at night, so **make a moth trap** to see how many are out and about while you're in bed. **This is not easy so talk to your leaders before trying. There's information online to help...**

Moths are attracted to light, so the simplest ways to see them is:

- Hang a white sheet in the garden and leave a strong torch shining on it.
- Go out with a torch to look for moths feeding on flowers at dusk.
- Mix a fizzy drink with treacle to make artificial nectar and paint it on tree trunks or fence posts at dusk.

Handy hint

Try not to cast your shadow on the butterfly or moth, as this can frighten them away.

Things to think about

Once you've identified your moth or butterfly, find out about its lifecycle and what habitats it prefers. Does this species migrate to Scotland, or is it here all year round?

Butterflies and moths ID

Sheet in the pack

Small tortoiseshell butterfly

Make and do!

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Making a pitfall trap

What will I need?

- A margarine tub with holes in the bottom (you don't need the lid)
- A trowel
- A banana

Choose a site for your trap – somewhere with plenty of plants, like a flowerbed. Dig a hole the size of the margarine tub, so when you put your tub in the ground its rim is level with the edge of the hole. Put pieces of banana in the tub to attract minibeasts.

European spider

Making a sweep net

What will I need?

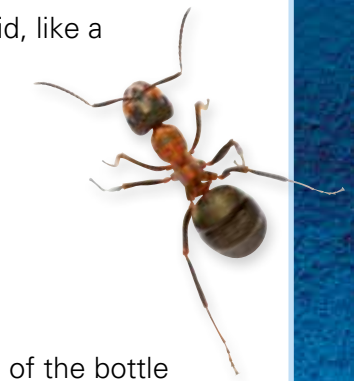
- A cane
- 1.5 metres of fine cloth – or an old pillowcase
- A needle and thread
- A wire coathanger
- Sticky tape
- A pair of pliers

If you're using a piece of cloth rather than a pillow case, sew a wide hem at both ends. Fold the cloth in half and sew up the sides to make a bag. Shape your coathanger into a loop with the pliers, then push the wire through the hem of the bag, or the folds of the pillow case. Twist the ends together, then push them into one end of the length of cane. Now use the sticky tape to secure the wire, which should complete the net. To catch minibeasts, sweep your net through long grass or other plants.

Making a pooter

What will I need?

- 2 bendy drinking straws
- A plastic bottle with a wide lid, like a smoothie bottle
- A hammer and nail
- Glue or sticky tape
- Old tights
- A rubber band
- Piece of coloured tape



Punch two holes, one in the lid of the bottle and one in the base, using the hammer and nail. The holes should be big enough to fit straws. Take one straw and cover the end of it with a piece of the tights, fastening it in place with a rubber band. Push this through the hole in the lid of your bottle, and put your piece of coloured tape around this straw.

Push the other straw into the other hole, then use glue to fill in around the holes and wait for it to dry. To pick up a minibeast, position the bottom straw near your insect, then suck on the straw at the top of your bottle (the one with the coloured tape). As you suck, the insect will get drawn into the bottle, and the material on your top straw will stop you sucking it up!

Birds

Pink-footed goose

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What will I need?

- Binoculars are useful, but not essential
- Paper and pencil
- Your bird ID and record sheet
- A good bird ID guidebook (DK), or go to **rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife**

How do I do it?

Find a location where you'll see some unfamiliar birds. This might be your garden if you're a beginner, or a nature reserve or local wood.

Stand or sit where you can see the birds without disturbing them. Because you'll be keeping a record, it will be useful to choose somewhere you can visit each day of the week at a similar time.

Look closely at each bird – drawing a sketch is an excellent way to make sure you do that. Try to include as much detail as possible in your sketch.

Woodpigeon

What to look for:

- The size of the bird
- The shape of the bird – is it duck shaped, sparrow shaped etc?
- The colours of the bird
- The size and shape of its beak
- The length and shape of its tail
- What is the bird doing?
- Where is it (wood, farm, lake, river, seashore, etc)?

Use your record sheet to note which birds you see on each day. Practise identifying the common birds highlighted in your ID sheet.

Bird ID

sheet at the back of the pack

Robin

Get involved

Every January, take part in the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch and Big Schools' Birdwatch. The results help us shape our future conservation work.
www.rspb.org.uk/schoolswatch

RSPB iPhone app

Another great way of identifying birds is by their song.

You can listen to songs on rspb.org.uk/birdname, eg rspb.org.uk/woodpigeon

Investigating your area

Water explorations

Beach survey

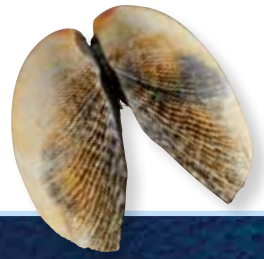
Make sure you're aware of the tides and take care when walking on slippery rocks that are wet or covered in seaweed.

Visit **www.mcsuk.org/downloads/mcs/MCS_seashore_safari_guide.pdf**

o check the seashore code before you go.

Beaches, especially rocky ones, are great places for wildlife. They have to cope with big changes in habitat twice a day because of the tide moving in and out. Creatures at the top of the beach still get freshwater, while those at the bottom need to be able to survive at the lowest tides.

Lots of wildlife gets washed onto the beach by waves, so there's always plenty to see – especially at low tide.



Cockle shell

What will I need?

- A notebook and pencil
- A camera
- A good seashore ID book, such as *The RSPB Handbook of the Seashore* (Bloomsbury) or *The RSPB First Book of the Seashore*
- A bucket

How do I do it?

On one page of your notebook, draw a line across the page about a third of the way down. This is the tide line – the point the water reaches when the tide is furthest in. You should be able to spot it easily, because there will be a line of seaweed and other flotsam and jetsam left there when the tide goes out.

The area above your line is the top of the beach, while the area below it is the main part of the beach, with any rockpools and the sea at the bottom. Make sure you note down what kind of beach you're surveying – is it sandy or rocky, are there cliffs or sand dunes?

Mermaid's Purse

You should also use this page to note down the locations of anything you find on the beach.

Start your survey at the water's edge by looking for creatures swimming in the shallowest water, such as sandeels, crabs, jellyfish or flatfish. Keep a note of what you see in your notebook, or take photographs.

Walk slowly up the beach, noting any other signs of life, such as sandy worm casts, bird footprints or winkle trails. Check the rockpools too, and maybe even do a rockpool dip (see the pond dipping section on page 12 for advice on how to do this safely). Check the tide line carefully, but avoid any human rubbish as it can be dangerous. You might be lucky and find some sea slaters (like huge woodlice).

Finally, back at the top of the beach, look for more special coastal creatures and plants, such as marram grass, sea thrift, rocks, shells and lichens.

Common shore crab

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Pond or river dipping

What will I need?

- Pond fishing net
- Washing-up bowl, or something similar
- Your minibeasts in water ID and record sheet
- A paper and pencil

How do I do it?

When you're dipping in ponds or rock pools, make sure you're standing or kneeling in a safe spot so you don't slip in. Put some of the water from the pond, river or rock pool in your container, to make sure anything you catch is kept safe and wet.

Sweep the net carefully through the water so you don't disturb the mud or sand at the bottom, then place the net in your container. Make sure you gently free anything that might have caught itself in the net, then make a note of what you've found.

Look for creatures that might be clinging to rocks around the edge of the pool. If you're on a beach, or there's mud next to your pond or stream, see if you can spot bird or animal footprints.

Look out for shells or plants that are different from those you find in your garden.

What to look for:

- The colour, size, and type of creature you find.
- How many legs does it have?
- Does it have antennae?
- Does it have a shell or wings?
- Where did you find it?

Minibeasts in water ID

sheet at back of pack

Handy hint

Before you start your survey, spend some time looking into your pond, river or rock pool to see what you can spot. Sometimes there are signs of life, even if there are no creatures about!

Things to think about

Can you group the creatures you've found into a food chain or food web?

Is there anything missing in your food chain?

You should be able to find plants, herbivores (who eat plants) and carnivores (who eat other creatures). If there's a missing link, why might that be?

Recording and reporting your findings

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Things to remember

Always make sure you take clear notes, pictures and photographs. This will not only help you remember what you've found, but will also make it easier to share your findings with other people.

Use titles on your pages for easy reference, such as what the survey is, where you carried it out and what the date and time was. Your notes and drawings should be **short and simple –** you can always add to them later. As long as you record the key features of your creature or plant, you can go back and improve notes or drawings later.

Make sure you note the **colour, size, shape** and **number of leaves/petals** on plants. For creatures, make sure you note the number of legs, colour, patterns on the skin, body shape and how they move. **Patterns of movement** can be particularly helpful when trying to distinguish between different bird species.

Ways of recording

Any way you can think of! **Pencil and paper** is absolutely fine, but you should keep your paper in a plastic wallet in case it rains. Written notes and drawings work well, and you could also try taking a **camera or mobile phone** with you to take photographs. You could even take a short **film** or **sound recording** of your location.

Another useful thing to do is collect small **samples**. Things like shells from different sections of the beach, or a leaf from a tree, can be helpful when explaining your survey to other people. But remember not to pick wildflowers, or take any animals home with you.

Making a map

The first thing you need to decide is **which way up** the map will go! Most maps use north as their key reference direction – this means areas in the north of your location will be at the top of your map, while those in the south will be at the bottom. Anything in the east will be to the right, and anything in the west to the left.

Make sure your map includes the **key features** of your location – is there a spot with trees, buildings or a stream running through it? Make a note of where you found special items or creatures of interest, so you can show other people where to find them.

You could **draw pictures** of these things on your map, or make a key where **symbols** represent the features (this will give you more space).

Finally, **show someone else** your map and see if they can understand it. That's a good way of checking that what you've drawn makes sense.

Species research

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There are lots of ways of finding out about the species you've focused on, such as books, the internet, local experts, teachers and conservation organisations.

Here are some suggestions of things you could look up...

1. Is the species you've chosen rare or common? If it is rare, is it endangered?
2. Did you find a male or female? Are they different or the same in the species you're investigating?
3. What is your species' lifecycle? How long does it live? Does it always live in the same sort of habitat?
4. Does the species you've chosen migrate? Where does it migrate to/from? How far does it travel, and why?
5. Where does your species fit into the food chain or ecosystem of your habitat? Is it a predator, or prey?

Human impacts

Just like people, plants and animals need the right places to live. Sadly, in some areas there are fewer wild places for wild plants and animals than there used to be. Humans can do practical things to help by conserving wild places, creating new wildlife areas, and being environmentally friendly in the things they do every day.

You might have noticed during your surveys that there were signs of human activity in the locations you chose. Think about what you found, and list some examples below. They might be things that help wildlife, or things that might have negative effects.

Positive human impacts	Negative human impacts

When you survey an area, keep an eye out for environmental issues such as litter or air and water pollution.

Some problems can be less obvious, such as erosion at the edge of paths, or habitat loss caused by the removal of deadwood. Are there lots of different species in your area, or only a few? In other words, is the area a good example of biodiversity?

If you identify a specific issue, think about what might have caused it, then turn to the next page for ideas on what to do.

Taking action

Conservation can happen anywhere. We can all be more environmentally friendly in the choices we make in our everyday lives, but also by getting others involved and spreading the word. The more people involved in conservation, the more successful it will be!

You may already have taken some actions when you completed the Environmental Exploration Activity Pack as a Beaver or Cub Scout. Here are just some more ideas to get you started...

Clean up your act

First of all, don't drop litter! Secondly, try completing a beach clean or a litter pick. You might have spotted that your wildlife area has a lot of litter, or you might know an area near you that needs clearing up. Either way, get friends to help because many hands make light work.

Remember:

- When you've chosen your area, check who owns it and let them know you're planning a litter pick – they might want to help!
- Decide where you will take your litter. Will you be able to recycle the glass/paper/metal that you find?
- Make sure you all wear protective gloves, use strong rubbish bags and wash your hands afterwards. Don't pick up anything dangerous – if you find items like syringes, leave them where they are and inform your local police. **www.mcsuk.org/beachwatch/greatbritishbeachclean**

The three Rs - reduce, re-use, recycle!

Around the world, more and more wildlife habitats are being destroyed to make products for people. Most of those products then end up as rubbish in landfill sites or incinerators, creating even more problems for the environment.

- Find out what you can recycle and how. Does your council make collections, or can you take things to a recycling centre?
- Think about reducing what you use. Can you use a rucksack or Bag for Life instead of a plastic carrier bag at the supermarket?
- If you have plastic bottles, try re-using them by creating a plastic bottle greenhouse to grow your own vegetables in.
- Get your family and Scout Group involved. How can you reduce the amount of energy you use at meetings? Could you recycle old resources for activities?

Get creative

It's important to explain to others why conservation matters. Think about the things that get your attention and why, such as your favourite band, music videos or movie trailers.

How could you use those things to tell others about what's environmentally important in your area? Could you create a display, film or radio broadcast? What about a poster or leaflet to persuade others to join in and take action? If it gets your attention, the chances are it will get their attention too!

Taking action

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Home sweet home

You've probably made a bird box before – if not, check out the Environmental Exploration Activity Pack which can be found in the Cub Scout section on the scouts.scot website. Now it's time to take the next step and make an insect hotel!

What do I need?

- Bricks and concrete blocks, preferably with holes
- Roof tiles
- Hollow bamboo canes or plant stems
- Pine cones, wood chips, straw, hay, leaf litter and moss
- Pallets or strips of wood
- Plant pots, plastic or ceramic pipes
- Outdoor plants

What do I do?

Choose somewhere close to a hedge, shrubs or pond that's firm, level and easily visible. Use whatever natural materials you can find nearby. Arrange some of your bricks on their side on the ground, filling the spaces between them with wood chips and leaf litter. Then lay the pallet across your bricks to create the next layer. Fill in gaps with hay, straw, dry leaf litter and wood chips. Place roof tiles on top of the stack to keep it dry, then place your plants on top to provide cover and food.

"Write" choices

We've already talked about your council being involved in The three Rs, but what else could they help with? Perhaps you could get in touch with your local MSP or MP. Some of the problems facing the environment can only be solved if there are changes to laws or government policy – your letter could make that happen!

Think about what you'd like to write about. It might be something you've discovered during your research, or something an environmental organisation is campaigning for. Find out as much as you can, so you're an expert on the issue. You should also find out more about the person you're writing to, so you know what their current policies are.

Your letter will need to explain:

- what the issue is
- why it's important
- what should be done about it and why

Handy hint

You can find out who your MSP is by calling the Scottish Parliament on 0131 348 5000 or visiting www.scottish.parliament.uk

Two (or more) heads are better than one

One of the best ways to continue your valuable conservation work is by finding out about organisations that support the environment. That way, you can keep in touch with their campaigns, and get involved in practical conservation.

Some of the organisations you might be able to support in your area include:

RSPB Scotland **rspb.org.uk**
Scottish Natural Heritage **snh.gov.uk**
Woodland Trust **woodlandtrust.org.uk**
WWF **wwf.org.uk**
Friends of the Earth **foe.co.uk**
Greenpeace **greenpeace.org.uk**

What next?

If you complete any of the 'helping wildlife' activities, such as insect hotel building or bird house making, tell us the location and keep us informed of any visitors? Take pictures and send them in!

Share your experience

- E-mail – **youth.scotland@rspb.org.uk**
- Twitter – **Twitter@rspbscotland**
- Facebook – **Facebook/rspbscotland**

There are other ways of recording your information and making sure your surveys are being put to good use. Use nature apps or websites such as iRecord or iSpot to upload your findings. This information is then sent to a national database and you are classed as a citizen scientist! Great work.

There are even more activities that you can do individually or with your families available as part of our Wild Challenge award. For more details see **rspb.org.uk/schoolswildchallenge** to complete within your Scout Group or **rspb.org.uk/families** for activities to do at home.

You may also want to start to think about volunteering.
If so, please follow this link to find out how you can get involved:
rspb.org.uk/volunteering

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When you've finished

Share your findings, send us information on your surveys and we'll send you a certificate! If you complete three activities, we'll send you a special award and share your story.

Front cover photo by Tony Garrett, RSPB Forsinard Flows nature reserve and common cockle by Sue Kennedy, RSPB Loch of Strathbeg nature reserve by Andy Hay, Queen Mary's Tree by Niall Benvie, girl with ladybird and girls pond dipping by Eleanor Bentall, scotch argus butterfly and silver-washed fritillary butterfly being photographed by Kevin Sawford, pink-footed goose by David Tipling, mermaids perse by Laurie Campbell, great diving beetle by Ray Kennedy and bug hotel by Nick Ganard (all rspb-images.com) other photographs by Fotolia, Shutterstock, Dreamstime and iStockphoto.com.

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