

# Discovering Wildlife on the Avon New Cut

## Birds

Over 30 species of birds have been seen along the Cut, including the grey heron and the cormorant. Both of these birds eat fish from the Cut, their presence being an indicator of the health of the waterway.



The **cormorant** is a large dark, almost black sea-bird which catches fish and eels by swimming powerfully under water. It can consume its own weight of fish in a day. The cormorant needs to stretch out its wings to dry and to oil its feathers from a gland near the base of its tail as it lacks the waterproof feathers of other water birds.

cormorant

Of several species of gull seen on the Cut, the **black headed gull** is easily distinguished by its red legs and beak. In spring it has a dark chocolate brown head (not black) which turns to white in the autumn. Its call is much higher pitched than the larger gulls and has a somewhat peevish sound.



black headed gull



grey heron

The **grey heron** is a regular visitor to the Cut and with its long legs and pick-axe bill is easily recognised. It is a solitary feeder, usually standing motionless in shallow water where it will strike swiftly for fish, eels, and frogs. Herons nest together in a heronry, usually in tall trees. There is a nearby heronry at Eastwood Farm, St Annes.

To Temple Meads and St Annes

Bedminster Bridge

Gaol Ferry Bridge

## Wildflowers

Over 90 species of flowering plants are present between Gaol Ferry Bridge and Ashton Bridge.

Look out for the rare **ivy broomrape** growing on the grassy banks of the Cut. Recognised by a yellowish-purple stem and creamy flowers in summer, it is unusual in that it is a parasite of ivy roots.



ivy broomrape

**Purple toadflax** grows alongside the railway line. It has small purple flowers with a spur arranged in a spikelet.



purple toadflax

The **sea aster** is a tall plant which grows on the mud banks. It has yellowish flowers in summer. Overhanging the banks is **common scurvy grass** with white flowers from April to August.



common scurvy grass

These 2 plants grow along the banks of the Cut because they can withstand being covered by the brackish tidal water.



red admiral

Butterfly Junction

Ashton Bridge

To Avon Gorge

## Trees

Over 30 species of trees can be seen along the Cut, including one or two fig trees which are believed to have grown from fruits discarded by passing sailors in times gone by.

Tall broad-leaved **London Plane** trees can be seen along Coronation Road and on Commercial Road (near Bedminster Bridge).



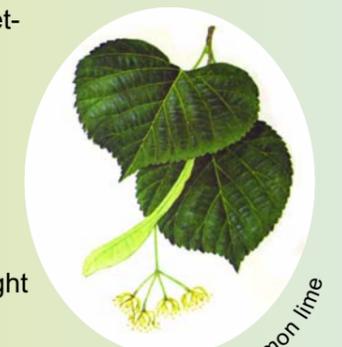
London plane

Birds enjoy eating the fruits of the **Cherry** trees growing on the banks adjacent to Coronation Road.



cherry

Look out for the **Common Lime**, with sweet-smelling yellowish-white flowers in early summer and small round green fruit in the autumn. Its inner bark can be used to make matting and ropes.



common lime

Also the **Whitebeam** with white flowers, leaves with white hairs on the underside and small bright red fruits.



whitebeam

## Butterfly Junction

Over 20 species of butterfly and day moth have been spotted on this abandoned industrial site since 2002.

**Marbled white**, **ringlet** and **skippers** breed here on grasses - as does the **common blue** butterfly, probably on bird's-foot trefoil. Others such as **gatekeepers**, **small tortoiseshell**, **red admiral** and **peacock** regularly pass through the site to feed or rest.

The site is monitored and maintained by local people.



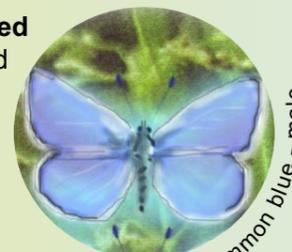
marbled white



ringlet



common blue - female



common blue - male

# Discover a wealth of wildlife close to the City Centre!

This leaflet provides an introduction to some of the wildlife that can be seen along the Avon New Cut – a tidal waterway in the heart of Bristol. Only a selection of the birds, butterflies, trees and wild flowers of the Cut is included. A fuller list is available on the Southville Centre website.

## A historic waterway

This waterway was excavated between 1803 and 1809 as an essential part of the development of Bristol's Floating Harbour. Along its banks many new industries grew, including Acramans Ironworks (on the site of the General Hospital) and a shipyard below Vauxhall Bridge.

The New Cut was also used for navigation, with early passenger steam packets sailing to South Wales and Ireland from a jetty by the Louisiana (formerly the Bathurst Hotel).

The lower bridges - Vauxhall footbridge and Ashton road and rail bridge – used to open to allow shipping access to the city docks via the now redundant lock gates at Bathurst Basin. By the late 1930s very little river traffic used the New Cut. The lower bridges were fixed and a suspension bridge replaced the ferry near the old gaol.

The New Cut is still vitally important to the function of the City Docks and the surrounding area for drainage. It has now become an area rich in flora and fauna - a green lung in the centre of the city.

# The Avon New Cut

This tidal waterway is a valuable wildlife corridor and a source of enjoyment for people living in the centre of Bristol. This leaflet has been produced by 3 organisations with a special interest in the Avon New Cut.

The Friends of the Avon New Cut (FrANC) is a group of local people aiming to promote a greater understanding and appreciation of the Cut, including its history, geology, wildlife, bridges, and its role in the city.

Southville Wildlife Group is part of the Southville Community Development Association, and aims to protect and increase wildlife habitats in Southville, Bedminster and Ashton.

Both these groups can be contacted through the Southville Centre – tel: 0117 9231039 ([www.southvillecentre.org.uk](http://www.southvillecentre.org.uk)).

Bristol Living Rivers Project is working to protect, restore and enhance the waterways of Bristol for people and wildlife. Contact 0117 9223400 ([www.bristol-city.gov.uk](http://www.bristol-city.gov.uk)).

Production of this leaflet was made possible by:



We are grateful to Jonathan Glanville, Katie White, Peter Smith, Avon Wildlife Trust, the Forest of Avon for providing images used in this leaflet. Also to George Spraggs and [www.bird-watching.co.uk](http://www.bird-watching.co.uk) for use of his photo of the common sandpiper.

# Discovering Wildlife on the Avon New Cut



## Wildflowers

Some of the more common wild flowers to look out for along the Cut:

**Hemp agrimony**, which has small pinkish flowers arranged in clusters from June to September.



*hemp agrimony*

**Chicory**, a tall plant with attractive blue flowers. Its roots can be roasted and ground to add to some kinds of coffee.



*chicory*

**Traveller's Joy**, a climbing plant whose small greenish-cream flowers attract bees. Sometimes called The Old Man's Beard because of the masses of feathery fruits that appear in the autumn.



*traveller's joy*

**Lesser Celandine** grows near to the ground and has yellow flowers that brighten up the spring months.



*lesser celandine*

**Teasel**, a tall plant with tough, prickly, hollow stems. The flower heads often remain throughout the winter, providing food for birds.



*teasel*

## Trees

The **Spindle** is a small multi-branched tree or shrub with yellowish-green flowers and green leaves which turn purple-orange in the autumn. Its wood provides spindles for spinning or can be used for artists' charcoal.



*spindle*

**Hawthorn** trees and shrubs are often found in hedgerows. Their distinctive white blossom produces red berries (haws) in the autumn. The haws provide birds with food during the winter, and the hawthorn wood can be used to make walking sticks.



*hawthorn*

3 white butterflies - large, small and green-veined - are common along the Cut.



*orange tip*

More unusual butterflies include small copper, visiting Butterfly Junction



*6 spot burnet*

and migrants such as painted lady and clouded yellow. Cinnabar, silver Y, and 6 spot burnet day moths can be also seen here - along with grasshoppers, beetles and other insects.

## Birds

The **mallard**, a well-known and most handsome duck, is rarely absent from the Cut. The drake has a glossy green head and purple wing patch. The duck lays between 7-16 eggs, quite often in gardens adjacent to the Cut. The drake takes no part in rearing the ducklings which are vulnerable to predators, especially the larger gulls. Despite this, the mallard population is flourishing.



*mallard*

The **common sandpiper** is a small wading bird, the size of a starling. It has a high piping call and flies low over the water with pointed and drooping wings. It feeds along the Cut on the outgoing tide on insects, worms and small crustaceans that it finds in the mud. When on the ground it has a distinctive head-bobbing motion.



*sandpiper*

**FrANC** (Friends of the New Avon Cut) organises occasional walks to enable people to learn about the history of the waterway and to explore its wildlife. Details of walks are given on the Southville Centre website (see back page).

