

The Green Necklace

(A short story)

Written by Elizabeth Fowler
with illustrations by Endymion Beer



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Illustrations©EndymionBeer2022
Designed, edited and compiled by Endymion Beer



Foreword

By

Short Story Author Elizabeth Fowler

Member of the British Naturalists' Associations Taw & Exmoor Branch

I was born at the beginning of the war into a North Devon farming family, my father taught us to look and enjoy the natural world. Then, I married a Braunton farmer. Later I spend 10 years running a hotel boat, travelling the English Canal, system which allowed me to get close to the birds and small mammals as the boat was not a threat, and I started photographing them. I joined the BNA 20 years ago when I settled back in North Devon and have enormously enjoyed time spent with people who are happy to share their knowledge of all aspects of nature.

Story writing is about letting your imagination take off. This story did start with the necklace that I found in an old box. As I held it the colour and feel conjured up the grass snake which led into the garden and world of wildlife. I learnt as a youngster to really look at everything - you never know what there is until you do. Garden hedges are full of wildlife, a small movement could be a beautiful butterfly, a brilliant blue bug or a cheeky robin watching you!

THINGS TO DO

Fact Files

At the end of the story you will find some basic fact files on some of the creatures Elizabeth has written about. We have included photographs to help with identification.

Optional Task - part one

After you have finished reading this story, perhaps you would like to have a go at writing your own story revolving around some aspect of nature.

Optional Task - part two

Once you have finished writing your story you may wish to decorate it with pictures, perhaps drawings, paintings, photographs or a collage of pictures cut from magazines. This is your chance to become creative so enjoy!



The Green Necklace

The small boy crept into his big sister's bedroom, it was safe at the moment as she was away with friends for the afternoon. The treasure box was sitting on her bedside table, what could really be inside it he wondered. Jackie had told him it was very secret and he must never touch it, in fact he was not even meant to go into her room.

Lifting the box down, he sat on the floor and slowly opened the precious box. Inside lying on a deep red velvet cushion were beautiful jewels, he gazed at them in wonder and delight, ultimately lifting out a lovely sparkly thing. It had a beautiful blue centre and glittery bits all round, but he felt sure he had seen their mother wearing it on her blue evening dress.

Carefully lifting all sorts of pretty things out of the box he came to a green necklace that sparkled with tiny bits of gold colour as he moved it about. This had been right at the bottom and covered by all the rest. It was so pretty he really wanted to keep it. Maybe his sister would never notice it had gone. Trying to remember where everything had been he put the pieces back in the box and returned it to the bedside table.

Tucking the pretty necklace into his shirt he crept down the back stairs and out into the garden, down to his own very private hiding place under the big jasmine bush. Wriggling into the green interior he sat down and took out the necklace. It didn't shine in here in the dim light but he loved the feel of it, it was all smooth and slightly cool. Tied rather tightly around it with horrid thick string was a stiff label that spoilt it, so he started undoing the knots that held it on, it really was very tight.

After working hard for quite a long time the last bit of knot came undone and the nasty little label fell on the ground. As soon as this happened the necklace moved, it wriggled a bit then gave a slight flick to one side then the other.



Illustration: Peter and the magical green necklace.

The small boy stared at it in surprised wonder. Then it curled itself round and lifted one end and looked straight at the little boy with 2 dark black eyes. "Hello" it said, "thank you for freeing me from that strangling string. What time of year is it".

The boy looked back in amazement, "what are you?" he asked.

"A very fine grass snake" was the reply, "and you have not told me what time of year it is"

"I don't know and I don't really understand"

"Well goodness me, has it been snowing recently"

"No"

"Well is it hot and sunny"

"Not any more, we have been to the beach lots of days but it is getting a bit cold now"

"In that case it must be Autumn, which means I need to eat lots and get fat before winter and find a nice warm place to live when it is cold, can you help me?"

So they set off across the garden chatting about things to eat till the little boy stopped and said.

"Do you have a name?"

"No, do you?"

"Yes its Peter, I like my name, would you like to have a name?"

"What use is it, why do you have a name?"

"Well when people say your name you know they are talking to you."

“That might be useful, and you say you like your name, did you choose it yourself?”

“No mummy chose it for me when I was very, very tiny.”

“Well I don’t have a mummy so what should I do?”

“We could choose you a name, would you like that?”

“I think I would, what do you suggest? I don’t know any names.”

“What about Marmaduke?”

“Oh no, that’s not nice”

“Do you like Arthur”

“No”

“Or Basil?”

“No”

“Or Harry”

“No”

“Or Roger?”

“Stop there, Roger, that sounds nice I think I would like that, so I could say Hello Peter and you say Hello Roger”.

“Yes, that’s right, Hello Roger, I think the grown ups say ‘it is nice to meet you’ as well.”

“We won’t bother with that now,” Roger replied “I have a good name which is nice but I must get on with finding things to eat.”

Roger suddenly dived under the hydrangea bush and Peter called after him 'what are you doing,' 'eating a jolly big worm' came the reply. Then Roger reappeared looking pleased and with a slight bump towards his middle. On down the garden they went, Peter remarking that he had never tried eating a worm and did they taste nice. At the bottom of the garden was the potting shed and Roger just slithered under the door into the gloomy space. Peter knelt down and tried to peer under the door but he could see nothing.

"I can't go in there" he said "the door is always locked, are there lots of interesting things inside."

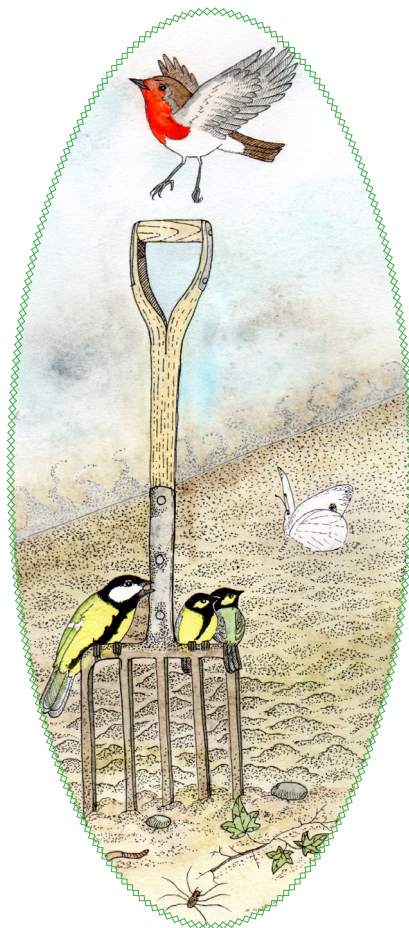
"No, nothing to eat and no nice place for me to sleep, just spades and rakes and a lawn mower, very boring", saying that Roger re-appeared under the door.

On they happily went, through the small vegetable patch. Plenty of things to eat in a vegetable patch so that was good, but no winter home for Roger.

Next they came to the little wild pond, Roger dived in and swam to the other side while Peter ran round.

"That is absolutely splendid" Roger remarked, "ponds are full of good things for grass snakes to eat".

Beyond the pond the garden was rather neglected, it had once belonged to a very busy gardener who grew every sort of vegetable and fruit but Peter's Daddy did not have time to garden and his Mummy liked growing flowers best.



However, almost under the overgrown hedge was a very old compost heap. In under the jumbled twigs Roger wriggled and Peter could just hear him pushing about inside before he popped out again through another space.

“This is the most perfect winter home for me” he said, “thank you Peter for finding it for me.”

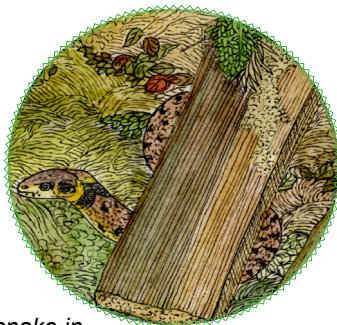
“That’s all right” Peter replied “I do like you and it has been fun. I’m really glad you are not still locked up in the treasure box. Will I see you again?”

“Oh yes, now that I’ve found a nice winter home and plenty to eat I think I’ll live here”.

With that Roger disappeared back into the old compost heap. Peter walked happily back through the garden, the afternoon had flown by in the company of his new friend Roger. Reaching the back door he went in and found Jackie sitting eating a doughnut. “Could I have one” he asked.

“Only if you have been good” was the reply. “Well have you been good?”

Peter thought about it and said “Yes I think so”, but then he remembered the treasure box. Jackie didn’t say anything about it so maybe she did not know. He happily ate his doughnut and wondered if Roger had found anything as nice as this.



*Illustration: Roger the grass-snake in
the compost heap.*

The next morning just as he was finishing his breakfast Mummy came into the kitchen looking very cross and asked where Jackie was. He said that she was in the sitting room and Mummy went out again. A few minutes later as he started to climb the stairs in the hall he heard a lot of very loud talking and then Mummy came into the hall saying, "I am confiscating this box and putting it in the bottom of my bureau, and you are never to touch my jewellery again". She was carrying Jackie's treasure box.

Peter did not understand what had happened but that didn't matter, the treasure box was being locked away so he'd no need to worry about Jackie knowing the green necklace had gone. Quickly brushing his teeth he then ran down the stairs and out across the garden to the very bottom hedge. He must tell Roger what had happened.

Kneeling down by the twiggy bit of the compost heap he called "Roger are you in there". But much to his surprise a sharp pointy little nose poked out from the other side of the heap and it's owner asked what he was making so much noise for, how was a hedgehog supposed to get his rest with all this shouting going on. He'd been about all night finding snails and slugs and needed to sleep now.

Fortunately Roger then appeared from the direction of the pond.



Illustration: A common frog in the wild pond.

“Oh you have met my neighbour, he is William Hedgehog, but prefers to be called Bill and he was very nice about me wanting to live in the compost heap. He likes the leafy side so he did not mind me moving into the twiggy part.”

But Peter was too excited about his news to concentrate on neighbours at this moment. “I have a good thing to tell you,” he said, “I don’t have to worry about the treasure box any more, Mummy has confisted it.”

“Goodness me what does that mean Peter, that sounds a funny sort of word.”

“Maybe I have said it wrong, but mummy has taken Jackie’s box away and locked it up so no one will ever know about you.”

“Well I wasn’t worried, but that is good for you” commented Roger.

“Now that you’ve said all that” came a voice from beside Peter, “can I get back to my sleep?” and Bill gave a big yawn.

Peter turned, “Oh, hello Bill, I am sorry that I woke you up but I did not know you lived here. I am very glad you are sharing your home with Roger”

“Not sharing, he can have the scratchy, twiggy part because I don’t ever go in there. I have a really nice comfy home on this side and I go out for my night food hunt when Roger comes in in the evening, we just met this morning when I came home.” At this Bill said goodbye and went inside to sleep.



Illustration: William Hedgehog (Bill)

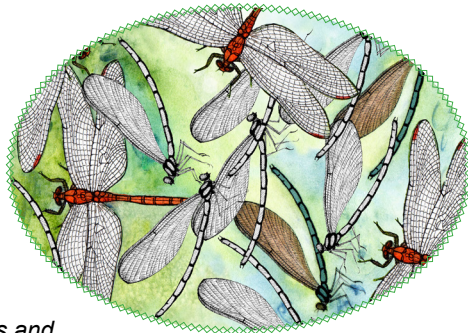
Wondering off to the pond so they wouldn't disturb Bill any more Peter was telling Roger about his doughnut and asked if Roger had found something as nice. When Peter finished telling Roger what a doughnut was Roger didn't think he would like that at all. He usually just swallowed things and would never be able to swallow something as big as that. Then they both started laughing as they thought about Roger with a whole doughnut in his middle.

Anyway Roger had already eaten and wouldn't need any more for a few days. This was a bit difficult for Peter to imagine as he had breakfast, dinner, tea and supper and would be very hungry without that. Roger thought it sounded rather a nuisance having to get food all day long while he could eat once and then relax for the rest of the day and this is what he would do for today, he said, as they settled beside the pond.

Suddenly a whirring noise zoomed past them as something shiny blue and green flew past. Peter had hardly time to catch a glimpse of it. "What was that" he wondered.

"A Dragonfly," Roger told him, "I've been watching them this morning, they seem to like this pond. There are those big blue ones and some very small bright blue ones."

They were so pretty Peter was delighted with them. They were flying very fast backwards and forwards over the pond, but sometimes one stopped and sat on a reed so Peter could really see them. He kept very still and quiet, happily watching while Roger simply enjoyed the sun.



*Illustration: Dragonflies and
Damselflies*

Just then Peter saw a very, very large golden dragonfly that was unfolding its wings clinging to a stiff reed, it looked as if it had come out of a black lumpy shape. He gazed at it quite fascinated when the dragonfly looked at him and said, "Don't you know it is rude to stare".

Peter was quite used to things talking to him so he said he was sorry to be rude but could the dragonfly please tell him what it is doing.

"I am drying my wings and getting ready to fly for the first time. After 4 years living in the bottom of the pond I am really wanting to fly about in the sunshine."

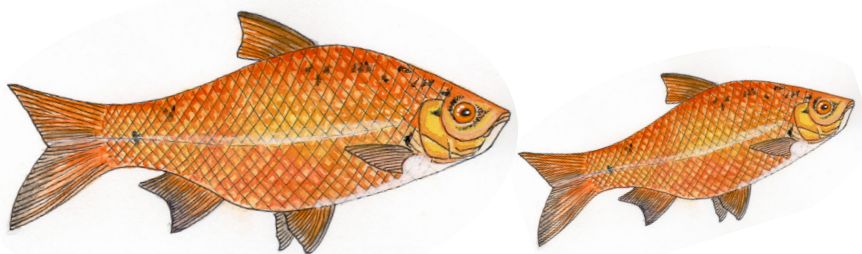
"Didn't you have wings before" Peter politely asked.

"No, I was really quite ugly, sort of dull grey/brown colour and had to live in the pond till I was ready to emerge. Now I can start to enjoy life being a very beautiful golden colour, and flying fast over everything in the sunshine. It was no fun down there in the gloom among the water snails, newts and fish. I never could catch the fish they were too quick, but snails were easy to crunch."

"Was emerging what you were doing just now."

"Yes, at last getting out of my old skin and changing into me. I knew it was time, my old skin was SO tight I climbed up this reed and got out of it. Well I think everything is dry now, my wings seem to work and I will try flying". With that the beautiful creature disappeared, his wings a flash of silver making a buzzy sound.

Peter was sorry to see him go and thought he would not want to have to live at the bottom of a pond. But he would like to know what newts are. He knows about fish because Mrs Kent has a big glass box full of water with lots of pretty fish in it. Sometimes he was allowed to help by giving the fish their food and he liked watching them swimming in and out of the big shells and among the green things in the water. Perhaps Mrs Kent would know about newts, he would ask her next time he went for a visit.



*Illustration: Pond fish -
golden orfe or goldfish.*

He sat happily thinking about all the wonderful things he was finding out from his new friends, this was all so much better than the games he played indoors. Carefully watching the pond as he sat quietly he noticed lots of small animals he had not seen before, tiny black beetles that whizzed about on top of the water and funny things with long, very thin legs that made little dents in the water but did not sink.

Then a flash of something came up through the water and a beetle was gone, was that a fish or a newt, he really wanted to know. It was his fifth birthday soon and he had started to read, perhaps he could have a book that told him about these things. He would ask daddy when he got home and daddy could help him with the reading.

Then he heard Jackie calling him, so he said a quiet goodbye to Roger who was still curled in the sun and went back through the garden, carefully looking at everything around him, what wonderful new things would he find?

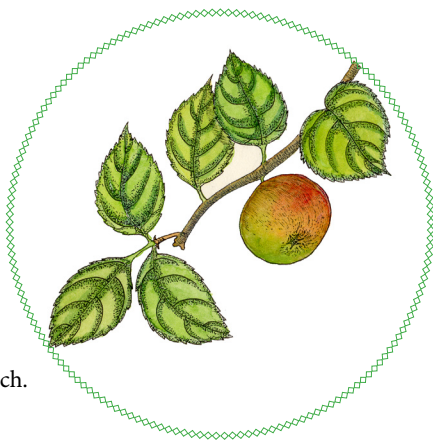


Illustration: Apple tree branch.

The next afternoon Peter climbed onto a low lying branch of the old apple tree where he found Roger basking in a patch of sunlight shining onto the moss in the fork of one of the other branches, a perfect spot for a comfortable quiet snooze, and was telling him about his morning shopping with mummy. Roger did not seem very interested in new shoes and a winter coat, but he listened politely till the tale was interrupted by a noisy little Robin wanting to know why Roger was talking to a small boy.

So Roger introduced Peter to Robin, which was also his name, and repeated the exciting story of how Peter had set him free.

Illustration: A robin.



“Oh well that’s different, now I can understand”, commented Robin and then went into a long and complicated tale about a new cat that had appeared in the garden. In fact it went on so long with detailed descriptions of the cat, comparisons with the tabby cat from Primrose cottage, exactly where the cat went and who it had scared that Roger went back to sleep.

Peter was really interested and chatted to Robin about cats, he didn’t know anything about them as his family didn’t have one. He then explained that they were talking about getting a dog because daddy said it would be good company for Peter, however now that Peter had lots of new friends here in his garden he certainly did not need a dog. Robin agreed with this and pointed out that dogs would not sit quietly listening to a robin or a grass snake, they were always rushing about barking and chasing things. So Peter decided he would say he did not want a dog.

Suddenly Robin burst into an agitated song, it was so loud it made Peter jump. “What is the matter Robin” he asked
“That cat is back, I just saw it stalking the young blackbird from the nest in the Berberis bush, I really needed to warn everybody”.

Peter then also saw the cat, a rather large black and white one which was now lying intently watching something by the pond, so he jumped down, ran over the vegetable patch and chased the cat away. It streaked out through the brambles and into the lane. Unfortunately a bramble tripped Peter up and he fell over scratching his hand on the thorns. Doing his best not cry he ran back to the house and found mummy.

After being gently washed, the blood cleaned up and tears wiped away, some plasters were applied in a rather fine pattern on his hand. Jackie, hearing him running in, came down from her bedroom and was eagerly wanting to know

what had happened to her small brother, who she did rather like even if she hid that. So Peter told them about the big cat frightening everything in the garden. Jackie got quite cross about it as on their last Forest Classroom lesson a lady from the Wildlife Trust was telling them about the damage to small birds that cats do and said all cats should have a bell on their collar.

Mummy and Peter agreed that really was a good idea, then everything would know a cat was about. Mummy said she would talk about it at the next Women's Institute meeting, maybe they could do something. That pleased Jackie and Peter. Mummy then found some Jaffa Cakes and milk for Peter and Jackie to share. After a while feeling better and rather pleased with the plasters on his hand Peter went out into the garden again.

Roger, Robin and even Bill were waiting anxiously for him under the apple tree. He was greeted as a hero for saving them from the cat and he told them what Jackie said about bells and that mummy was going to talk about it at a meeting, she often goes to these meetings Peter explained. This made everyone feel a lot happier.

Just then the big golden dragonfly zoomed past, saw Peter and the others talking and did an abrupt turn, dragonflies are really good at that, and settled on a bush beside them.

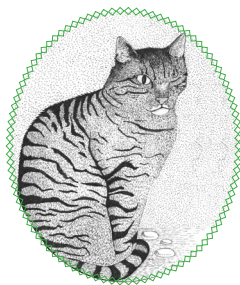
"What are all of you talking about" it asked.

"Cats" they replied all together, "there is a new one that was in the garden until Peter chased it away".

"Oh, cats don't bother me," the dragonfly said", although sometimes I do like zooming past them just out of reach which really annoys them. That makes them chase after me trying to catch me with their sharp claws, but they can never move as fast as me".

"That must be fun" said Peter, "I think I would like to see that. In fact it would be nice to be able to fly just like you".

Illustration: A Tabby Cat.



“Well flying might be good but I can roll myself into a tight ball so all my prickles are sticking out, a cat would never try jumping on me”, added Bill. “How do you do that”, Peter asked quite amazed.



Illustration: Bill the hedgehog demonstrating rolling into a ball..

“Just like this” Bill replied as he tucked his nose underneath himself and rolled into a very prickly ball. Peter was delighted but said he did not think a prickly ball like Bill would be nice to play with and Bill explained he did this whenever there was something about that might harm him.

Robin was feeling quite left out with all this showing off so he started singing all the best songs that he knew, and being a Robin he could sing very well.

The End - To Be Continued....



*Illustration: Peter in search of his friend
Roger the Grass-snake in the compost
heap.*

Fact Files

By Endymion Beer



Fact File - Grass snake

- * The scientific name for the grass-snake is *Natrix Helvetica*.
- * Grass-snakes are reptiles and are harmless.
- * They live an average of 15 to 25 years old.
- * They are usually between 90 to 150cm when fully grown.
- * They like to live in grass-lands and wetlands and on hot days you may find them lounging in your garden pond.
- * During winter grass-snakes hibernate so the best time to see them is from April to October.
- * They live on toads, frogs, lizards, and newts, small mammals, and some times fish, and birds.
- * Females are bigger than males.
- * Females lay gelatinous eggs in the warmth of a compost heap or in rotting vegetation.
- * They may lay 10-40 eggs.
- * Grass-snakes have a distinctive yellow and black collar, pale under belly and are usually greenish with black flecks.
- * They are easily distinguished from Britain's only venomous snake, the adder, by lacking the distinctive black zig-zag pattern that adders have all down their bodies.
- * However, like adders, grass-snakes are a protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. Priority Species under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework.
- * Grass-snakes are widespread in Wales and England.

Fact File - Hedgehog

- * The scientific name for the European hedgehog is *Erinaceus europaeus*.
- * Hedgehogs are nocturnal – active by night.
- * They are mammals.
- * They are omnivorous eating a wide range of species such as beetles, other invertebrates, young birds and birds eggs, baby mice, caterpillars, worms, carrion, fruit, but contrary to belief only a small percentage of their diet is made up of slugs and snails.
- * They rely on their keen sense of smell and hearing to compensate for having poor eye-sight, although they can see well enough by night.
- * An average sized hedgehog can have between 5,000 to 7,000 spines,
- * A hedgehogs spines last a year and as they are shed the are replaced by new ones.
- * Hedgehogs curl up in a ball and extend/protrude their spines for protection.
- * Badgers predate hedgehogs.
- * Hedgehogs hibernate during the winter months.
- * Baby hedgehogs are called hoglets.
- * Young hedgehogs go it alone after only 4 to 7 weeks of nurturing from their mother.
- * Hedgehogs are immune to adder venom.
- * Hedgehogs are lactose intolerant so never feed the bread and milk.
- * The collective noun for hedgehogs of an array of hedgehogs.
- * They are solitary creatures except when they pair up to breed.
- * They make lots of grunting, snorting noises when snuffling about and eating.



Hedgehogs were once called urchins.

Fact File - Dragonflies and Damselflies (Odonata)

- * 17 species of damselflies and 25 species of dragonflies been recorded resident and breeding in Britain with some others either now sadly extinct or vagrants.

- * Damselflies perch with their wings closed.

- * Dragonflies perch with their wings open.

- * Dragonflies and damselflies are insects.



- * They live mainly on flies, midges, mosquitoes, butterflies and smaller invertebrates. Some species predate smaller species of Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies).

- * Prey is usually caught on the wing.

- * Dragonfly eyes meet in the middle.

- * Damselfly eyes sit separately, either side of their head.

- * Damselflies have a relatively weak and fluttering flight.

- * Dragonflies are larger and are more robustly built.



- * Eggs are laid in water on aquatic vegetation.

- * Once hatched, nymphs may spend up to 3 years in the water depending on the species.

- * Nymphs crawl up out of the water on vegetation and after metamorphosis hatch into the adult insect. Metamorphosis is the physical change that occurs when a larva changes into an adult creature.

- * Adults may live for a few weeks to a few months on the wing, depending on the species, just enough time to mate, and secure the next generation.

Fact File - Newts

- * Newts are most active at night.
- * Undisturbed, they can live 6-20 years.
- * Newts are able to regenerate limbs, jaws, intestines, heart, eyes and spinal cords.
- * They are amphibians.
- * The three species of newt in the UK are smooth newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*) palmate newt (*Lissotriton helveticus*) and the great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*).
- * Smooth newt (pictured below) may also be referred to as common newt, European Newt or Northern Newt.
- * The great crested newt is a protected species under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.
- * Newts are toxic to touch so make sure you wash your hands if you do touch one. They contain TTX (Tetrodotoxin) which is the same toxin found in puffer-fish.
- * Newts eat worms, insects, slugs, water snails, tadpoles, shrimps and small crustaceans.
- * They live in marshes, wet heathland, boggy areas, ponds, woodlands and similar habitats.
- * The best time to see them in from April to September because they hibernate during the months of winter, perhaps in a compost heap, muddy pond bottom or even under paving slabs or other large stones.



Fact File - Pond Skaters

- * The scientific name is *Gerris lacustris*.
- * They are also known as water bugs, pond skeeters, water scooters, pond skaters, water striders and water skimmers or water skippers.
- * The water repellent hairs on the bottom of their feet, the hairs are scored with tiny grooves which trap air enabling them to skate over the surface of the water.
- * They can support up to 15 times their body weight without sinking. Up to 1.5cm in length.
- * Seen April to November.
- * Found in ponds, pools of water, slow moving rivers puddles and marshes.
- * They feed on small insects especially mosquito larvae and if food is scarce they become cannibalistic.
- * They can detect the smallest of motions in the water.
- * They can fly to a fresh habitat if they need to.



Fact File - Whirligig Beetle

In the story Peter observes “Tiny black beetles that whizzed about on top of the water Whirligig Beetles and funny things with long, very thin legs that made little dents in the water but did not sink. (Pond Skaters)”

- * The scientific name for whirligig beetles is *Gyrinus substriatus*.
- * Whirligig beetles are water beetles.
- * They are usually about 5-7mm long and can be seen all years round.
- * They have two pairs of compound eyes, one pair to look down into the water and the other to look up over the surface.
- * They are carnivores and eat small insects or insects which have fallen in the water.
- * They swim on the surface of the water but if disturbed they will dive below the surface, carrying a small bubble of oxygen under their hardened wing cases (elytra).
- * The collective name for whirly gig beetles is a raft, swarm or school.
- * They secrete a waxy smooth layer over their hardened body armour (exoskeleton) which makes it very difficult for predators to catch hold of them.
- * They will create their own surface waves in order to receive information about their environment – they have highly sensitive antenna which can detect the smallest motion.

Fact File - Robin.

- * The scientific name for the robin is *Erithacus rubecula*.
- * Robins eat worms, fruit, seeds, and invertebrates.
- * They live in gardens, parks and woodlands.
- * Robins are a resident species and can therefore be found all year round.
- * They have a wingspan of 20-22cm and measure 14cm in length.
- * They weigh between 14-21g.
- * Robins are Protected by The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981



Story Planner Your Notes:

My Story Outline:

My Characters:

The beginning,

The middle,

The Conclusion / end.

I will decorate my story with: