

# OUR RIVERBANK

By Andrea Griffiths

Pictures by Jen Pringle



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# *Once upon a time*

Our river habitats were safe and diverse but the introduction of non-native invasive species has had a devastating impact. Invasive non-native species are thought to be one of the biggest threats to global biodiversity, second only to habitat loss. Along our rivers these plants can take over, reducing biodiversity, eroding riverbanks and increasing flood risk. Some plants are also dangerous to touch. Via Heritage Lottery Fund and Environment Agency funding, this educational book has been produced by Medway Valley Countryside Partnership as part of their Past Plants, Future Flora project. The book is intended to be inspiring and promote a general appreciation for nature whilst also telling the tale of how invasive plant life has spread. Raising awareness of this issue reduces the risk of injury with regards to some plants and helps Medway Valley Countryside Partnership decrease the spread of invasive species.

To find out more about the work being carried out by Medway Valley Countryside Partnership, including the control of invasive non-native species, visit [www.medwayvalley.org](http://www.medwayvalley.org)





This is our wild garden which runs down to the river  
Where dragonflies whiz by the small ducks as they quiver.  
Fish starting and darting as the bubbling river chants,  
How we love to play hide and seek amongst all the tall plants!

I sit on the bank, sandwich in hand  
enjoying the nature and feeling just grand.  
Mum sits next to me... cheese and crusty bread,  
'But the river is not what it used to be' she said.

Floating Pennywort  
(HYDROCOTYLE RANUNCULOIDES)







‘Did you know these plants aren’t from this land?  
They’re spreading fast, getting out of hand.’

This one may be pretty and kind on the nose,  
but look at it go....look how it grows!’

Himalayan Balsalm  
(IMPATIENS GLANDULIFERA)





‘And that one over there, I wish people would learn....  
that plant will give you a right nasty burn!  
They’re aliens, though they’re not from space,  
I just hope they don’t take over and harm the place’.

Giant Hogweed  
(HERACLEUM MANTEGAZZIANUM)





I looked at the riverbank, saw the spreading of weeds  
saw the big flowers....and thought of the seeds.  
‘Don’t worry’ said Mum, seeing my face,  
‘we’ll make sure we conserve this place’.





So a few weeks later in early May  
we had a hard, tiring but fun filled day.  
We pulled up the weeds that were spreading fast  
and sowed better seeds so our work might last.





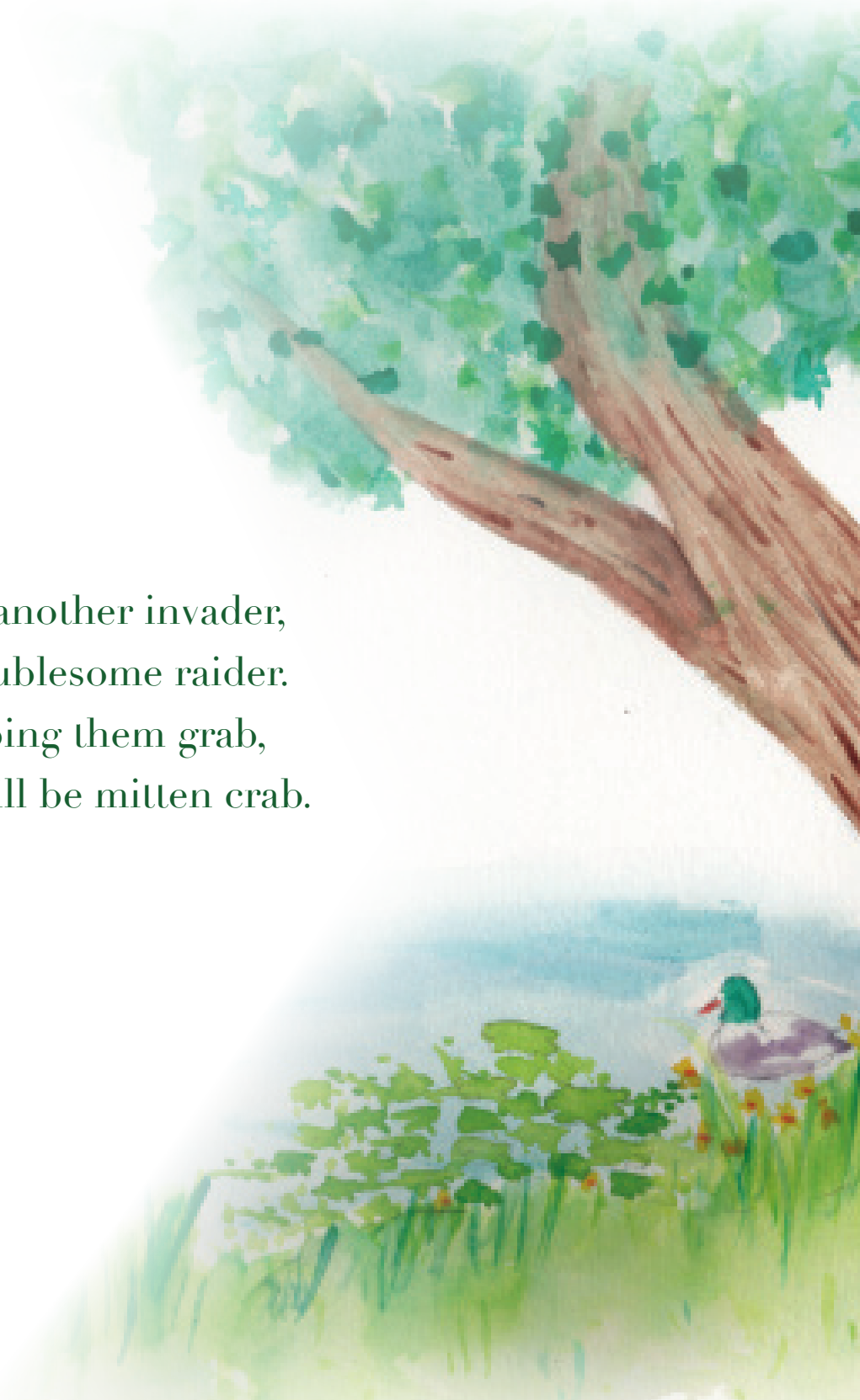


We saw the fish spook as a pike gave chase  
and watched the wrens by the river, having a race.  
We put all the weeds into a big tall heap,  
the perfect place for a grass snake to sleep.





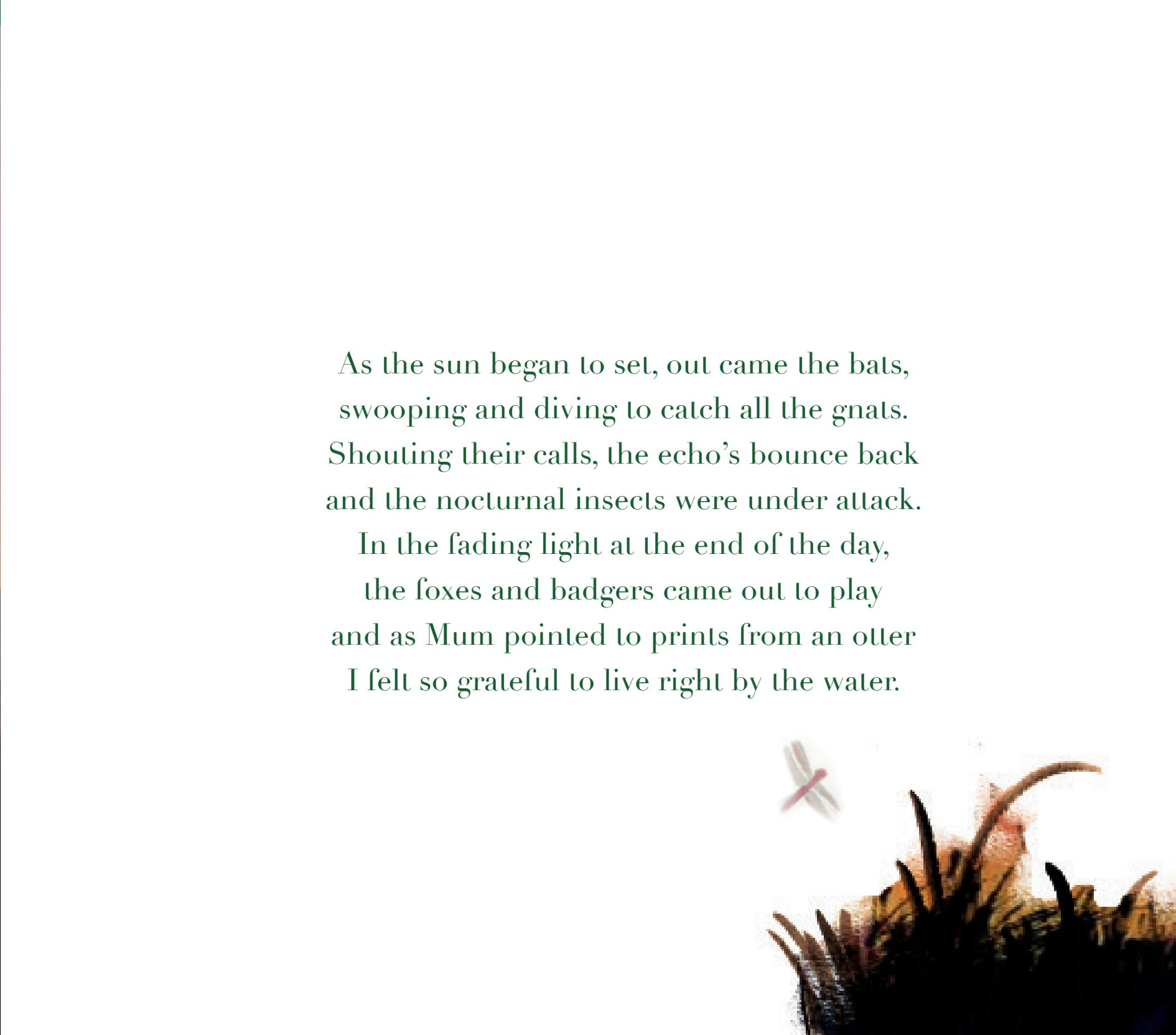
On the opposite bank skulks another invader,  
the brown sleek mink is a troublesome raider.  
And with big fluffy claws helping them grab,  
I bet under the water there will be mitten crab.





As the sun began to set, out came the bats,  
swooping and diving to catch all the gnats.  
Shouting their calls, the echo's bounce back  
and the nocturnal insects were under attack.

In the fading light at the end of the day,  
the foxes and badgers came out to play  
and as Mum pointed to prints from an otter  
I felt so grateful to live right by the water.





# INVASIVE SPECIES EXPLAINED



Giant Hogweed

HERACLEUM MANTEGAZZIANUM



Introduced in the late 19th century this plant is dangerous. **Don't touch it as it can burn!** Its bright green leaves are sharply divided and the stem has blotchy red or purple spots and bristles. The plant can grow to 5 metres tall and has a large white umbrella shaped flower head, often a metre wide when fully grown. Each plant can release 50,000 seeds!

Himalayan Balsam

IMPATIENS GLANDULIFERA



This is a tall, pretty plant with large pink-purple flowers a fleshy stem and slender, oval shaped leaves which often have a red visible line (midrib) down their centre.

Introduced as a garden plant in the early 19th century and first recorded in the wild in 1855. The plant spreads solely by seeds, which are small, burst from the parent plant and are easily carried by wind or water.

Floating pennywort

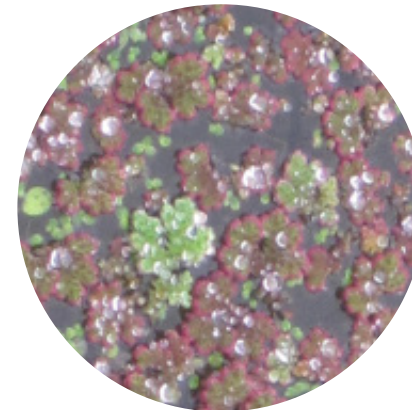
HYDROCOTYLE RANUNCULOIDES



This very invasive plant can grow up to an impressive 20cm a day and can quickly take over a habitat, where it forms thick mats. It has round kidney shaped glossy leaves which can either be floating on or standing up above (emergent) the surface of the water. It has very fine roots and stems.

Water Fern

AZOLLA FILICULOIDES



Leaves of this plant look like a collection of scales and are about 20cm wide. This plant can form thick mats on the surface of water and it can be green or red. We use North American weevils to control this plant. This is a biocontrol method.

Japanese knotweed

FALLOPIA JAPONICA



This is a common plant now and is very invasive and strong. It spreads via long roots below the surface of the soil or via small bits of leaf or stem which get broken off. It's very important that this plant is not cut as cutting might make it spread further. It has purple speckled thick stems and looks a bit like bamboo. It has glossy green shield shaped leaves on red zig-zag stems and often grows as a thick bush.

Find out more

If you'd like to find out more about invasive non-native species in Great Britain, the Non-native Species Secretariat (NNS) provide great online resources at [www.nonnativespecies.org](http://www.nonnativespecies.org)

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