Finding out what’s there

Minibeasts close up

What it’s about
Finding and catching minibeasts so that you can have a close look at them and identify them (see page 19 for recommended identification charts). Here are three ways you can do this:

- Pitfall trapping. Pitfall traps are containers set into the ground to catch minibeasts that creep along.
- Sweep netting. You use a special net to catch minibeasts in long grass.
- Pooter. Pooters are a special collecting bottle that you use to catch insects by sucking through a tube.

Getting started
It’s a good idea to put your catches into a pot or jar so that you can look at them. You can also make a pooter to pick up tiny insects without damaging them (see next page). See page 19 for recommended books that can help you to identify the minibeasts you catch.

You don’t need to buy any special equipment – you can make everything with things you can either find at home, or buy cheaply.

How to make and use a pitfall trap

What you need
- A margarine tub (put some holes in the bottom to let water flow out)
- A trowel
- A banana

1. Choose a site for your pitfall trap – try somewhere with plenty of plants, eg under a shrub, tree or hedge, or in a flowerbed.
2. Dig a hole the size of the margarine tub that you are using. Take the lid off the tub and put the empty pot in the hole so that its rim is level with the ground.
3. Place some banana in the tub to attract the minibeasts.
4. Leave the pitfall trap overnight and check what is in it in the morning. Take the pot up once you’ve collected the creatures. You don’t want anything to get stuck in the pot for a long time.
5. Release any creatures that you caught once you have identified them.

Note: Only put out a trap out on a dry night as minibeasts will drown if the trap fills with rainwater.

How to make and use a sweep net
What you need
- A cane
- 1.5 m of fine cloth like muslin or a pillowcase
- A wire coathanger
- Sticky tape
- A pair of pliers

1. To make a pooter, first punch two holes in the lid of the smoothie bottle using a hammer and nail. The holes should be the right size to fit the tubing.
2. Cut the tube in half (or use two straws). Cover one end of one of the pieces of tubing with the fine cloth and fasten in place with a rubber band. Take the lid off your pot and push the tube that has the cloth-covered end through the lid so that the cloth-covered end is in the jar. Secure the lid back down and then put a little piece of coloured tape around the top of the piece of tube that sticks out of the jar.
3. Push one end of the other piece of tube into the other hole in the jar.
4. Use glue, such as pva, or sticky tape, to fill in around the holes.

Illustrations by Anthony Rule

1 Under 8s activity
Go on a minibeast hunt.

1 Take your piece of cloth or pillowcase and sew a wide hem at both ends.
2 Fold the cloth in half and sew up the sides, as far as the hem to make a bag.
3 Using pliers, straighten out your coathanger then shape it into a loop.
4 Gently push the wire through the hem of the bag. Twist the ends together with the pliers and push them into one end of the length of cane.
5 Use sticky tape to secure the wire firmly to the cane.
6 To use your net, sweep it gently through long grass or other plants.

How to make and use a pooter
What you need
- Plastic tubing or bendy drinking straws
- A plastic smoothie bottle
- A hammer and nail – take care with these
- Glue – pva is good
- Small piece of fine cloth such as nylon tights
- Rubber band
- Piece of coloured tape

1. To make a pooter, first punch two holes in the lid of the smoothie bottle using a hammer and nail. The holes should be the right size to fit the tubing.
2. Cut the tube in half (or use two straws). Cover one end of one of the pieces of tubing with the fine cloth and fasten in place with a rubber band. Take the lid off your pot and push the tube that has the cloth-covered end through the lid so that the cloth-covered end is in the jar. Secure the lid back down and then put a little piece of coloured tape around the top of the piece of tube that sticks out of the jar.
3. Push one end of the other piece of tube into the other hole in the jar.
4. Use glue, such as pva, or sticky tape, to fill in around the holes.

5 To pick up a minibeast, place the tube that doesn’t have coloured tape next to an insect. Then suck on the tube with the cloth on the end that you have marked with the piece of tape. As you suck, the insect will be drawn into the jar and the cloth will stop you from sucking the insect up.

Note: Only put the tube up against insects small enough to travel safely down the tubes. Remember only to suck the tube with the coloured tape on.

To look at the minibeasts when you have caught them:
- Use empty jars with lids. Take care if you’re using glass jars; clear plastic ones are better.
- Be careful not to hurt any minibeasts. If you look at them in jamjars, make sure not to leave them in the sun as they will get too hot.
- Always put minibeasts back where they came from.

What to send us
Send us details of where and when you looked for minibeasts, which techniques you used, and what you found.

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