



Tales from the Riverbank

Poetry Activity Guide

Hello, writers!

In this guide, we'll create a poem inspired by the wild world of chalk streams.



About chalk streams

Did you know that there are only 220 chalk streams in the whole world, and 85% of those are in England? Here in Hampshire, we're lucky to have quite a few, but what makes them so important?

A secret source

The water in our chalk streams comes from a huge layer of chalk hidden deep underground. This rock "aquifer" has lots of tiny holes, allowing it to soak up rain like a giant sponge. When all of the holes get filled, the water comes back up to the surface!

Super-powered water

Because it comes from the aquifer, the water in chalk streams is very special. It stays cool in the summer, is clear like glass, and contains lots of oxygen. This means that chalk streams are great habitats for many different plants and animals.

Wonderful wildlife

Lots of wildlife species call our chalk streams home. Above the water, you can spot kingfishers, damselflies, and scarlet tiger moths. On the banks you might find otters and water voles. Below the surface live brown trout, eels, and white-clawed crayfish.

Places to protect

Chalk streams are amazing places, but they need our protection. Many of their animals are endangered, and their habitats aren't always healthy. Learning about these unique streams helps us to care for them, both now and in the future.



Where to go

Hampshire has lots of places where you can explore chalk streams. You might have one flowing through your village, town, or city - even if it's hidden from view!

Don't worry if there isn't an accessible chalk stream on your doorstep. Ask your parent or guardian if you can visit one that's nearby. Here are four of our favourites...

Alresford

You can find a lovely streamside walk right in the town centre. Combining the Millennium and Arle Valley trails, this footpath runs along the River Arle. Look out for the historic Eel House, the old Fulling Mill, and lots of ducks, swans, and moorhens.

Andover

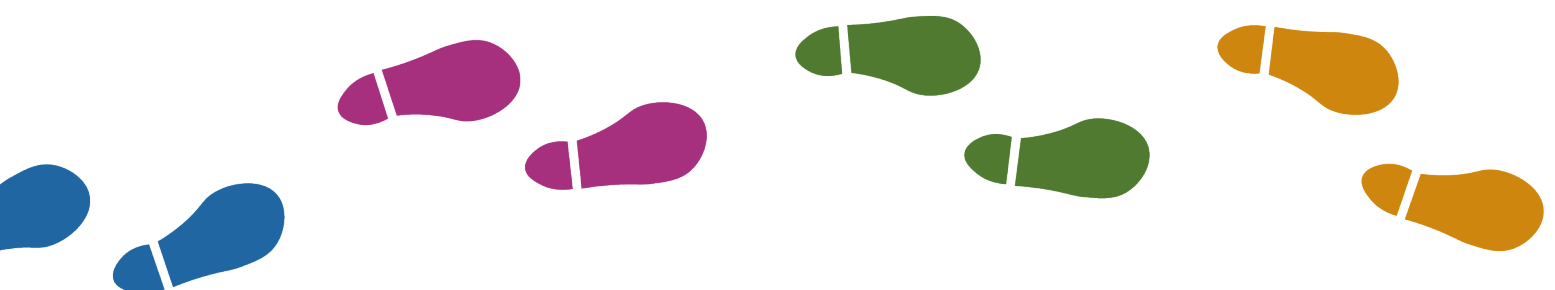
This town has several great nature reserves along the Upper Anton. Charlton Lakes, Anton Lakes, and Rooksbury Mill are all filled with wildlife, and some of their footpaths are wheelchair-friendly. You can spot lots of birds, and sometimes water voles.

Overton

Flashetts footpath is a local treasure: it's only a ten-minute walk from the High Street, and right next to the Upper Test. Pause at the gravelly area to watch for small fish in the water. Remember to keep your eyes peeled for dragonflies and kingfishers.

Whitchurch

This town has many places where you can enjoy the Upper Test. Check out the Millennium Green - a peaceful meadow where you might see water voles. For a longer walk, visit the Silk Mill or follow the streamside footpath from Town Mill Lane.



Staying safe

It's important to stay safe when you're exploring chalk streams. Take an adult with you, or ask your parent or guardian if you can go with just a friend. Here are our top safety tips...

- If you're exploring without an adult, tell your parent or guardian where you're going and what time you'll be back.
- If you have a mobile phone, take it with you.
- Check that the place you're visiting is open to the public. Turn back if you see any signs telling you it's private land.
- If you walk along the stream banks, stay away from the edge.
- If you go for a paddle, avoid fast currents and stick to ankle-deep water that you can get into and out of easily.
- Never go in the water barefoot, because there could be sharp objects on the stream bed.
- Wear trousers and a long-sleeved top, because they will help to protect you from stings and scratches.
- Cover any open cuts or scratches with waterproof plasters.
- Wash your hands before eating or drinking anything.

For advice on keeping a school class or youth group safe around chalk streams, please contact Tracy Standish (Watercress and Winterbournes Education Officer) at tracy@wessexrt.org.uk.



Go exploring

When you arrive at your chosen chalk stream, find a quiet place where you can explore with all your senses.

Look

Study the stream with your eyes. What shapes and colours can you see? Notice how the water moves, and how the plants sway in the wind. If there are animals, what are they doing?

Listen

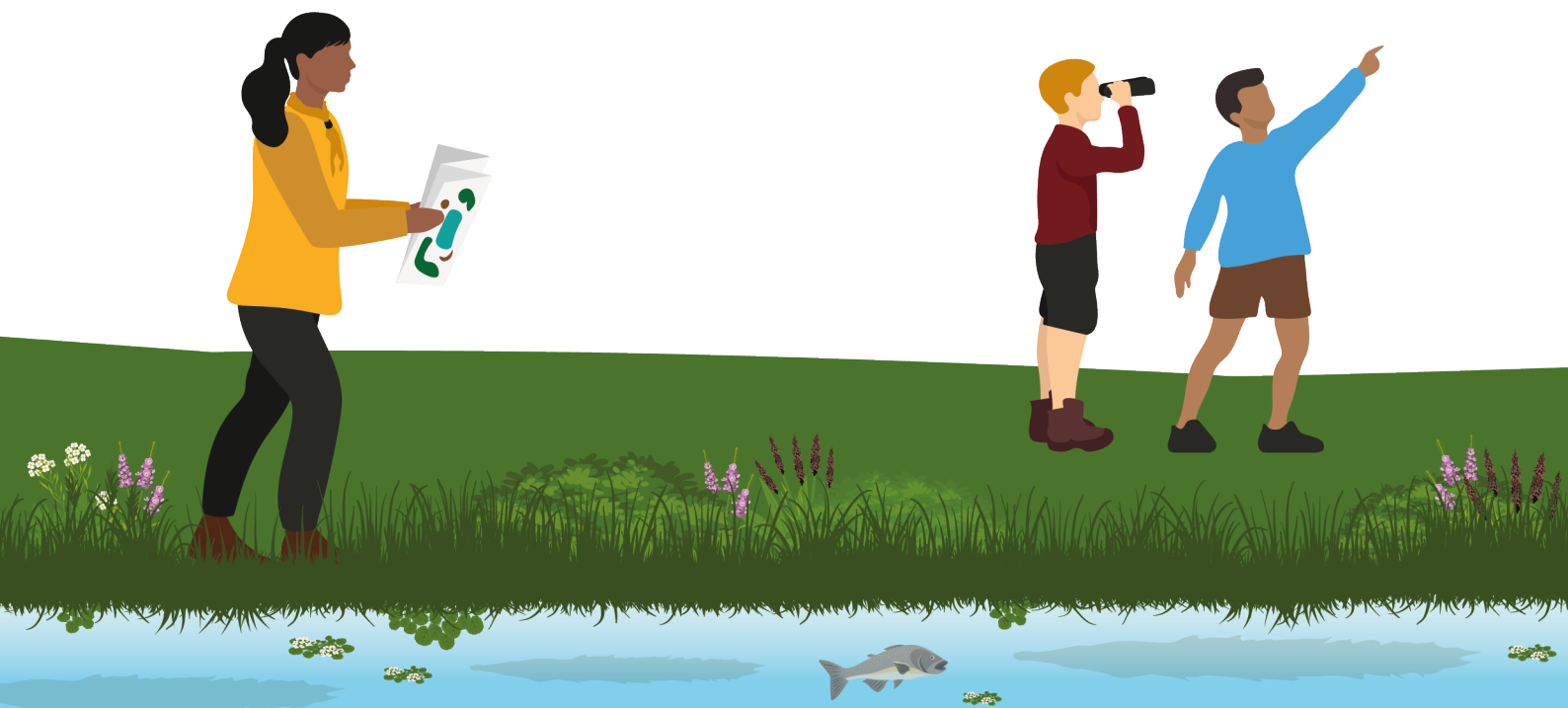
Take in the sounds of the stream. Can you hear birds chirping, people talking, water flowing, or wind blowing? What sound does the ground make when you step on it?

Smell

Pay attention to the scents in the air. If there are flowers growing on the stream banks, what do they smell like? You could even catch a whiff of the water on a hot day, or the soil after heavy rain.

Touch

Investigate the textures around you. What do the different plant leaves feel like? Try touching soil, grass, and pebbles. If you can reach the water, how does it feel on your fingers?



Take a moment

Once you've finished exploring the stream, you can start to use the power of your imagination.

Change perspective

Choose a chalk stream animal, and imagine yourself in its place. What would it see, hear, smell, taste, and touch? What would it say about its home?

Ask questions

Pretend that you're talking to the stream, as if it's a person. How would it describe itself? What would it tell you about the world around it, and what feelings would it have?

Travel in time

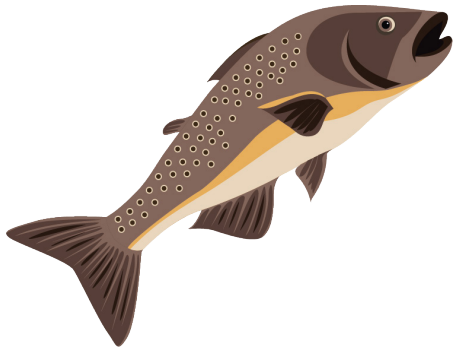
Imagine what the stream might have been like 100 years ago. Who would have visited it, and what for? How might things be different 100 years from now?

Face the unknown

Think about what makes the stream mysterious. What parts of it are secret or hidden? Do you want to discover more about them, or do you like not knowing?



Look out for



Brown trout



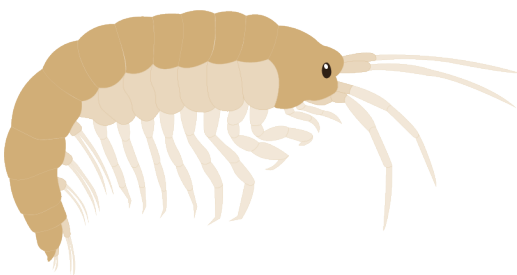
Water vole



Scarlet tiger moth



Caddisfly



Freshwater shrimp



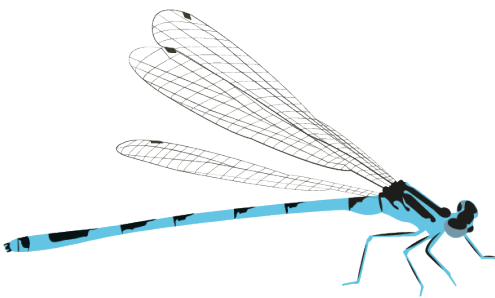
Coot



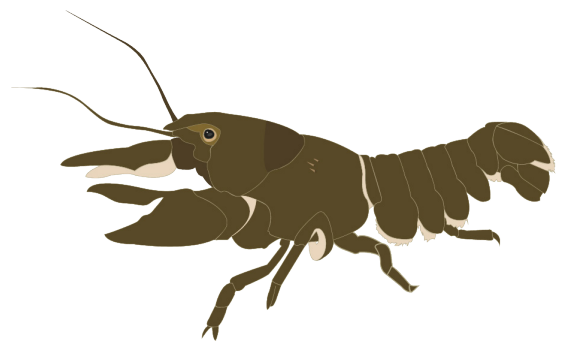
Kingfisher



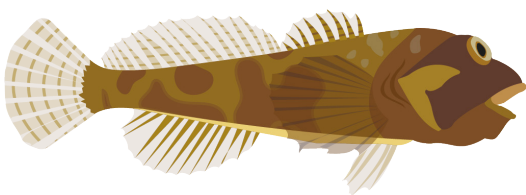
Otter



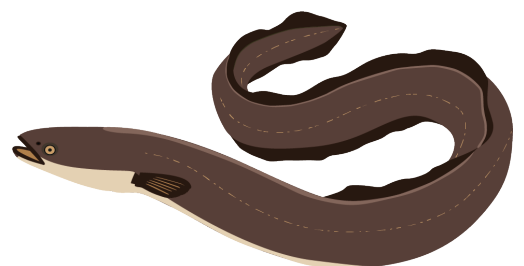
Southern damselfly



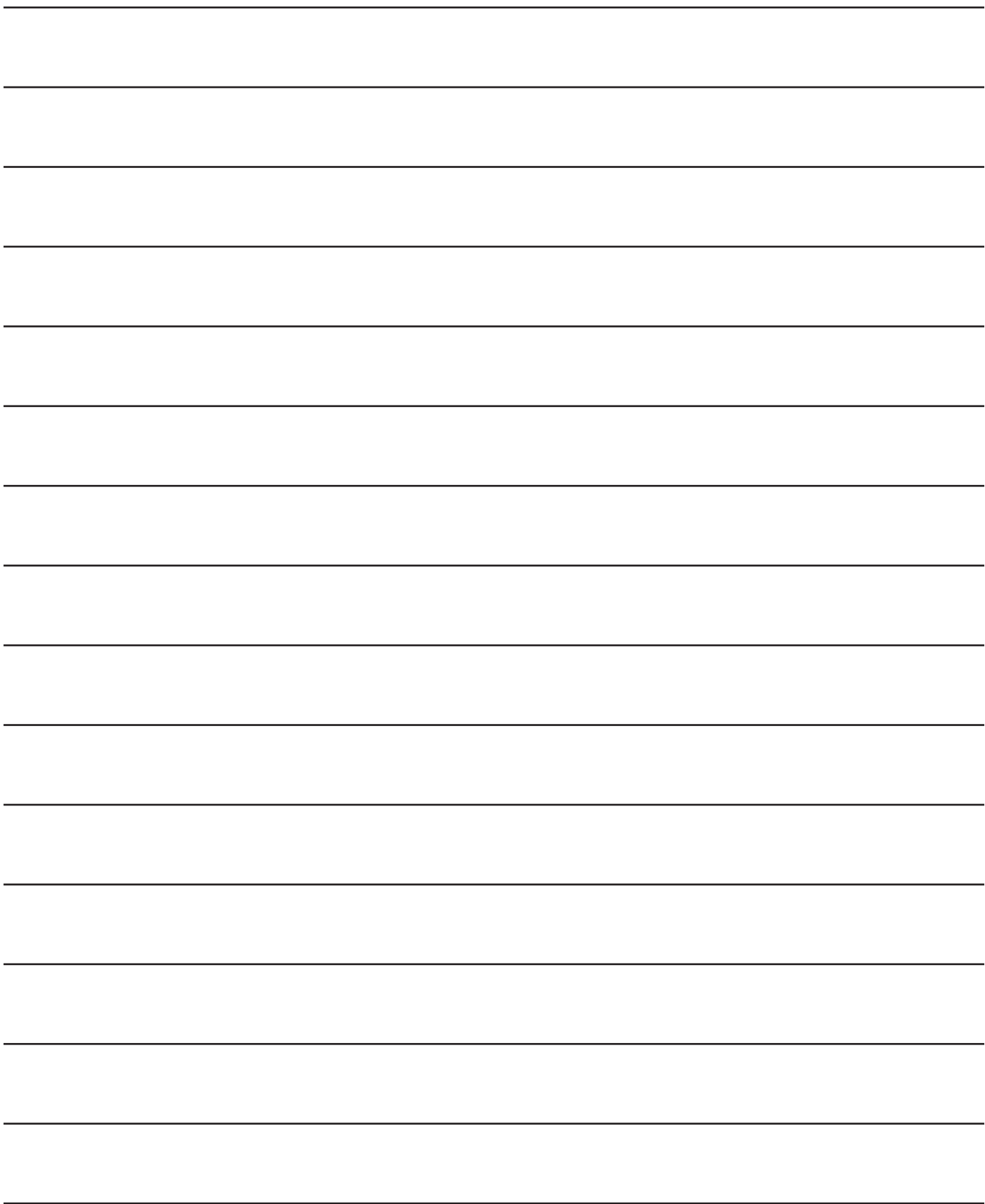
White-clawed crayfish



Bullhead



Eel



Get poetic

Now it's time to start writing your poem. Grab your pen and paper, and think about what you want to say.

Try new words

Choose a word you want to use, then think of other words that have a similar meaning (synonyms). Don't be afraid to use a thesaurus! Do you like any of these other words better? How do they change the sound or meaning of your poem?

Play with sound

Try out words that start with the same sound (alliteration) or contain similar sounds (assonance). Your poem might rhyme, or have a rhythm (its "metre"). You could also use words that describe sounds (onomatopoeia) like "splash" or "buzz".

Compare and contrast

Have a go at writing a metaphor (when one thing "is" another: "the stream is a blue ribbon") or a simile (when one thing is "like" another: "the stream is like a blue ribbon"). You could also describe how things are different from each other (juxtaposition).

Experiment with structure

Write phrases on pieces of paper, and arrange them in different orders. How does this affect the story you want to tell? Your poem's structure (its "form") could reflect the subject: long lines might sound calm, but short lines might sound excited.



Curriculum links

Poetry remains a key part of the English curriculum in schools, through reading (comprehension), writing (composition), and speaking. This makes it a great way to learn literacy skills!

Key Stages 1 and 2 pupils are taught to...

- Develop pleasure in and positive attitudes to reading, by listening to and discussing a wide range of poetry.
- Recognise simple recurring literary language and some different forms of poetry.
- Read and write poetry at an age-appropriate interest level.

Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils are taught to...

- Write accurately, fluently, effectively, and at length for pleasure and information through different formats, including poetry.
- Improvise, rehearse, and perform poetry in order to discuss language use and meaning, using role, intonation, tone, volume, mood, silence, stillness, and action to add impact.
- Read and appreciate the depth and power of the English literary heritage through poetry.



Find inspiration

If you'd like to see how other young writers have been inspired by the wild world of chalk streams, you might like to read our poetry anthology. In 2024, we awarded prizes to 16 poets aged 7-17, and put their brilliant poems into an anthology.

An anthology is a collection of written works, like stories or poems, by different writers. Although they're written by different people, they might have the same style, or "genre", of writing (like scary, funny, or mysterious). They might also be about the same subject.

The poems in our anthology talk about themes like learning, memory, and using your senses to explore nature. They're brought to life by colourful illustrations of chalk stream animals. You can read the anthology for free by visiting www.hiwwt.org.uk/tales/poetry.

This competition was part of the Watercress and Winterbournes Landscape Partnership Scheme, which is made possible by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Learn more about the scheme at www.hiwwt.org.uk/winterbournes.



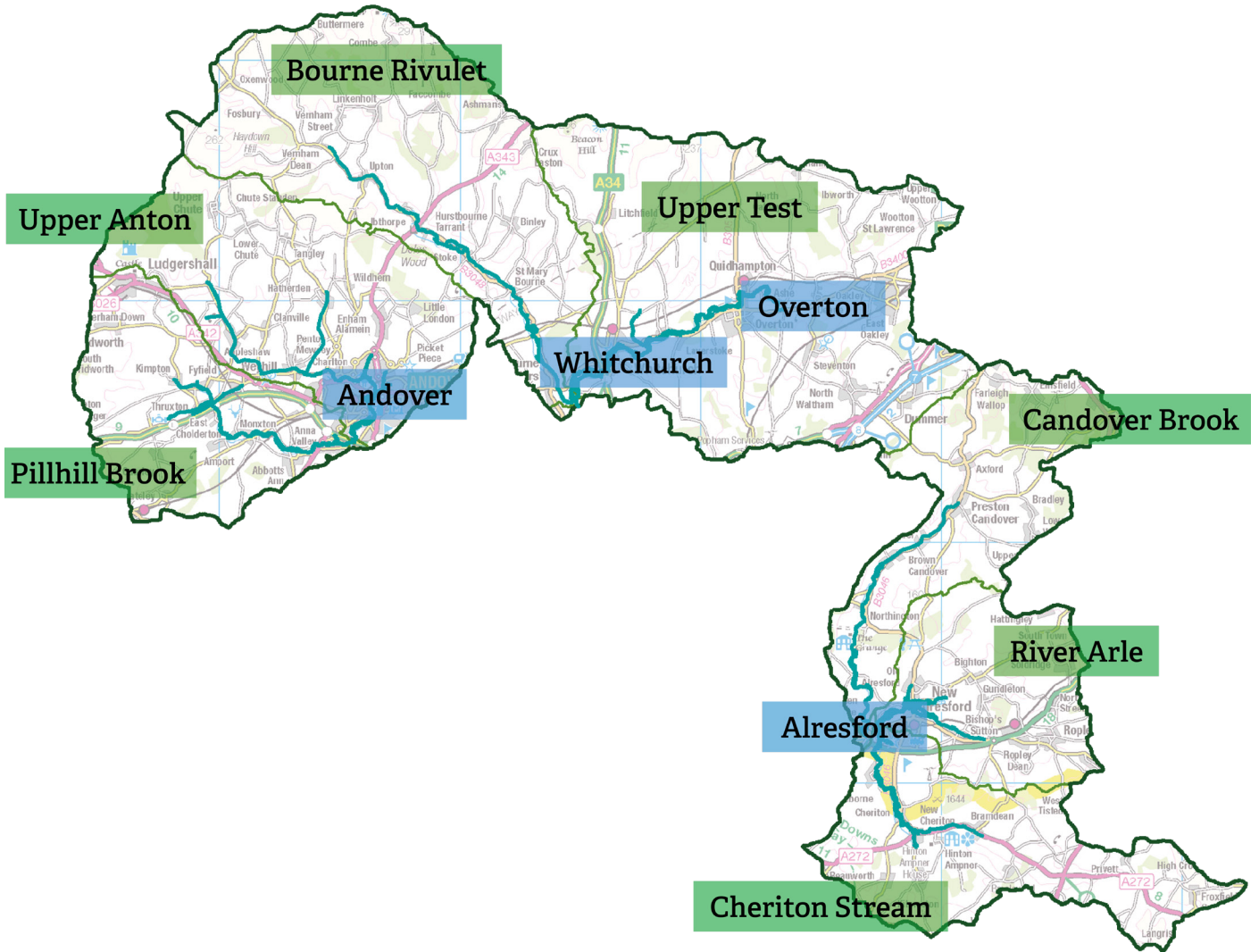




Photo by Matthew Roberts