



Birmingham River Champions volunteer group participant information sheet

Overview

Birmingham River Champions (BRC) is a citizen science project led by the University of Birmingham, partnered by the Environment Agency, Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust and Severn Trent's river ranger team. We are connecting with volunteer groups delivering conservation work across the West Midlands, providing the training and equipment to monitor different aspects of river health. We suggest groups commit about 1-2 hours per month alongside their normal volunteering activities. See our website for more information on the project.

BRC monitoring and participation

Individuals **over 18 years old** that are associated with a **BRC-registered volunteer group** can participate in the BRC project, and can do so by completing this [sign up form](#). Before signing up, volunteers should consider the **physical demands** of the different monitoring techniques. The most exhaustive exercise is the 3-minute 'kick sample' in Urban Riverfly, but only one volunteer per group needs to do this (ideally the same person each time). The other physical actions required during BRC monitoring includes bending down to sample water and walking along riverbanks. Volunteer group leads can choose to participate in whichever monitoring technique they feel physically and mentally able to undertake.

Individuals making up the group's sampling team (including the group leads) can vary between dates, and those attending should only do so when they are **free** and **willing** to participate. We advise that volunteer groups should repeat Urban Riverfly and water chemistry sampling **every month** where possible. Any volunteer undertaking BRC monitoring can upload citizen science data *via* our [online form](#).

Individuals associated with a BRC-registered volunteer group can withdraw from the initiative at any time by informing the BRC project team, who will then remove their name and email address from our records (see below for further information).

Privacy information

When signing up to the BRC, individual volunteers will need to provide their **name** and **email address**, which will be stored in a password-protected electronic spreadsheet held by the BRC project leads within the University of Birmingham's secure OneDrive storage environment. These details will be stored alongside whether or not the individual wishes to subscribe to the mailing list, where subscribers will receive useful information, help and updates on the project (at roughly monthly to quarterly intervals). But individuals can subscribe or unsubscribe from the mailing list at any point. The names and email addresses of individual volunteers **will not be shared with any third parties**.

Health and safety

Health and safety is of **paramount importance** and **every individual** within a volunteer group undertaking BRC monitoring should comply with the following health and safety procedures. Volunteers should ensure they have read and understood the health and safety information below and a separate risk assessment provided before undertaking monitoring. Once that you are signed up to the BRC project, you will be covered by the University's public liability insurance and employers liability insurance when monitoring.





When working in or near water, **another person** should always be in attendance. For techniques requiring access into the water (i.e., Urban Riverfly and water chemistry sampling), volunteers should only sample rivers that are **easy to access** and have **water depths below welly height**. The weather forecast should be checked before sampling as water levels can rise rapidly after high rainfall, and monitoring should be immediately abandoned should this occur. Before entering the water, the riverbed should be checked (e.g., with the kick net base or a staff) to ensure **stable** materials are underfoot. Check for and avoid any **sharp** and **cumbersome** materials and any potentially **dangerous** or **hazardous** features (e.g., needles, syringes) in the water. Also check for and avoid [giant hogweed](#) along riverbanks (its sap can cause nasty burns), and any other [toxic plants](#) whilst monitoring. Extra caution should be exercised when undertaking **water chemistry** sampling as some techniques use **dangerous solutions**. **Broken skin** should be covered with a waterproof dressing. Hands should be **washed** after sampling and before eating, drinking or smoking to reduce chances of illness. Practising good sanitation is important for reducing the chances of contracting [Weils](#) disease (or Leptospirosis), and extra precautions (e.g., wearing disposable gloves) should be adopted when sampling rivers surrounded by pasture that likely contain animal urine. Volunteers should also be aware of [Lymes](#) disease, and aim to take precautions (e.g., wearing long sleeved clothing and tucking socks into trousers) when walking through grassy or woodland areas, and check for ticks after sampling.

Further information on all of this health and safety information can be found within the BRC risk assessment that will be emailed to all volunteer group leads and volunteers under their direction.

If you have any questions about the project please contact Dr James C. White at [<birminghamriverchampions@gmail.com>](mailto:birminghamriverchampions@gmail.com). For enquiries on your participation or privacy information, please contact the University of Birmingham's Research Ethics team [<s.l.cottam@bham.ac.uk>](mailto:s.l.cottam@bham.ac.uk).

