



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

Volunteer group **leads** can register their organisation with the BRC using the online [sign up form](#). Volunteer group leads **should circulate** a separate sign up form and the 'PIS 2 - individual volunteers' document to their volunteers. All volunteers in the BRC project must be over the **age of 18**. Groups wishing to collect Urban Riverfly and water chemistry sampling (i.e., needing access to the river) must clarify that they have safe access to shallow sections of river (see the risk assessment). Volunteer group leads 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.

We aim to supply one equipment set to each BRC-registered volunteer group, but if uptake is high then certain groups may be asked to share equipment. 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](#). Volunteer group leads may be contacted by the BRC project team regarding the data uploaded, and could remove any data from our records if deemed necessary.

Volunteer group leads can **withdraw** their organisation from the BRC at any point by emailing the BRC project team, who will then sort field kit returns and ask whether the group's data can remain publicly visible on our app. **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, volunteer group leads will provide their **name**, their **volunteer group's name** and **volunteer group's email address**. These will be stored in a password-protected electronic spreadsheet held by the BRC project leads in the University of Birmingham's secure OneDrive storage environment; these will be kept alongside two privacy preferences outlined during this sign up process:

- Whether they wish to subscribe to the **BRC mailing list**, where subscribers will receive emails containing useful information, help and updates on the project (at roughly monthly to





- quarterly intervals). Any volunteer group leads using their **personal email address** should bear this privacy information in mind, but are free to subscribe or unsubscribe at any point.
- Whether the volunteer group leads want their organisation's name and / or email address (**not that of the lead individual**) to be displayed on our **publicly visible website**.

All of the volunteer group privacy preferences indicated can be changed at any point by emailing the BRC project leads, but please allow the project team 1-month to update our records. The names of volunteer group leads **will not be shared with any third parties**.

Health and safety

Health and safety is of **paramount importance** and is the **volunteer group lead's responsibility** to read and understand the information below and the information in the risk assessment. Doing so will ensure the volunteer group lead is covered by the University's public liability insurance. Individual volunteers that sign up to the BRC will be covered by the same insurance, and it is the responsibility of volunteer group leads to ensure any volunteers participating in BRC monitoring have been sent the risk assessment and are BRC-registered (see above). **All individuals** undertaking BRC monitoring should comply with the following health and safety procedures.

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.

Summary of volunteer group lead responsibilities

- **Register** their organisation with the BRC using the online [sign up form](#);
- **Circulate** resources sent after the group's registration to volunteers under their direction;
- **Upload** the citizen science data *via* our [online form](#);
- If wishing to withdraw your organisation, **email** the BRC project team.

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).

