

Tales from the riverbank

A regular series of stories from the Great Ouse Valley Trust

CRABS IN OUR RIVER? SURELY NOT!

Be careful the next time you fancy a swim, or even just to dip your toes, in the Ouse next summer. You might be in for a surprise. Helen Quest from the St Ives Rowing Club certainly got one when she joined a team of paddle-boarding litter-pickers the other day. Floating in the margins she fished out a weird-looking crab with furry claws. A quick bit of research revealed it as an alien – a Chinese Mitten Crab no less.

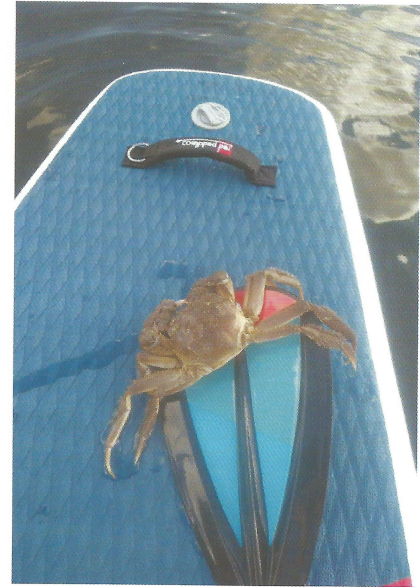
This is just one of a number of animals and plants that the Wildlife Trust calls invasive non-native species, and the crab appears to be the latest to be found locally. Other invertebrates include Zebra Mussels, Killer Shrimps, Signal Crayfish and Asian Clams. The key word is invasive. This means they can cause serious and permanent problems by harming our ecosystems. They can be bigger, faster-growing and more aggressive than native species. And they have fewer predators to control their numbers. They are bad news and we are urged to report sightings.

Chinese Mitten Crabs, however, are the only freshwater crabs to be found in the UK but they appear to be now establishing themselves in the Great Ouse. The particular

problem of this species is its habit of making holes in the riverbank which can cause extensive damage and erosion. How did they get to the UK from China? Probably by hitching a ride on the undersides of ships.

So do keep your eyes open for the furry crabs, and if you spot one you can do your bit by telling the experts at www.nonnativesspecies.org/recording

Thanks to Bridget Flanagan for research and to Hazel Quest for the photograph. If you are interested in learning more about the Great Ouse Valley Trust please visit www.greatousevalleytrust.org.uk and follow us on Facebook



Great Ouse Valley Trust
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