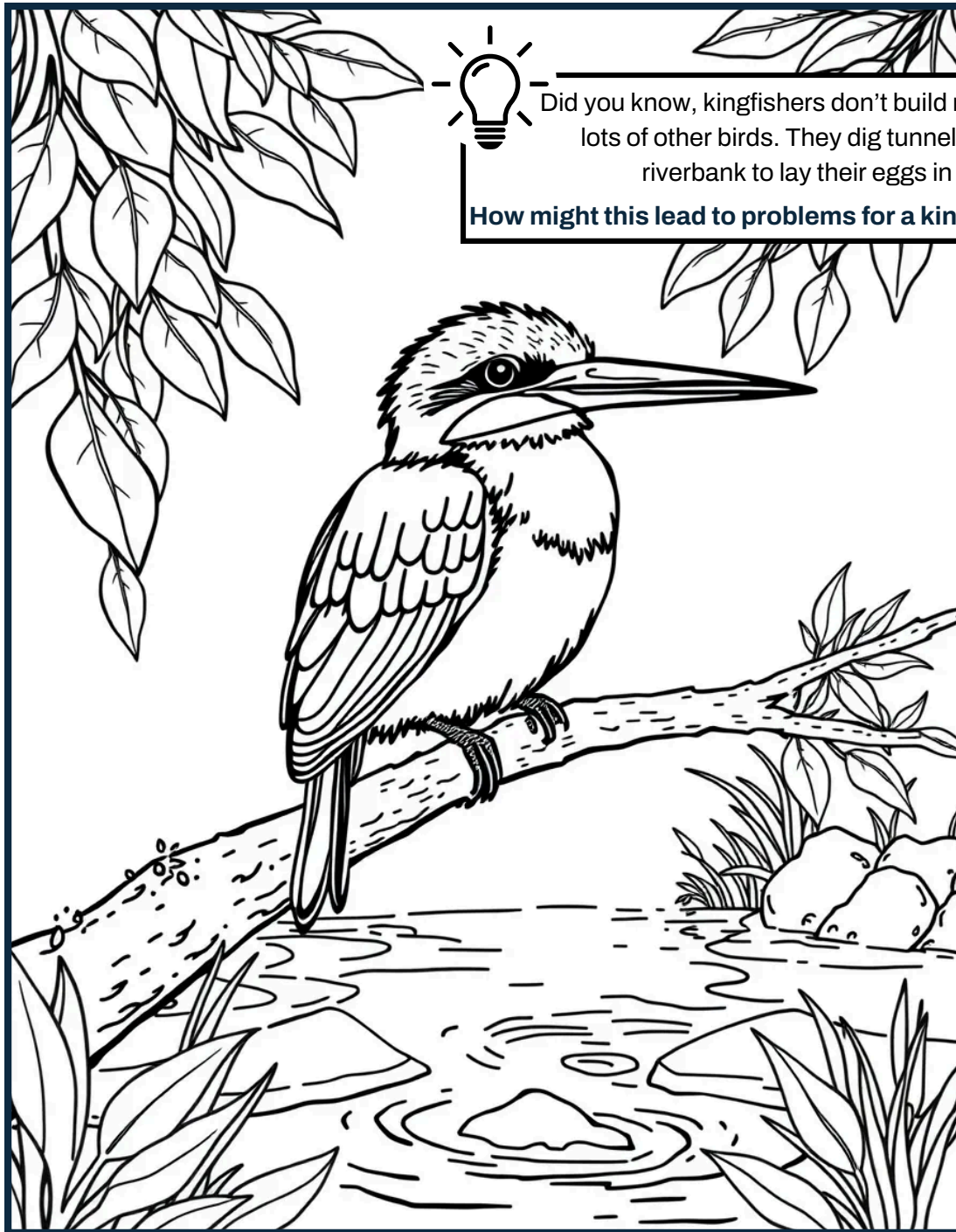


Creatures of the River Wear

Common Kingfisher



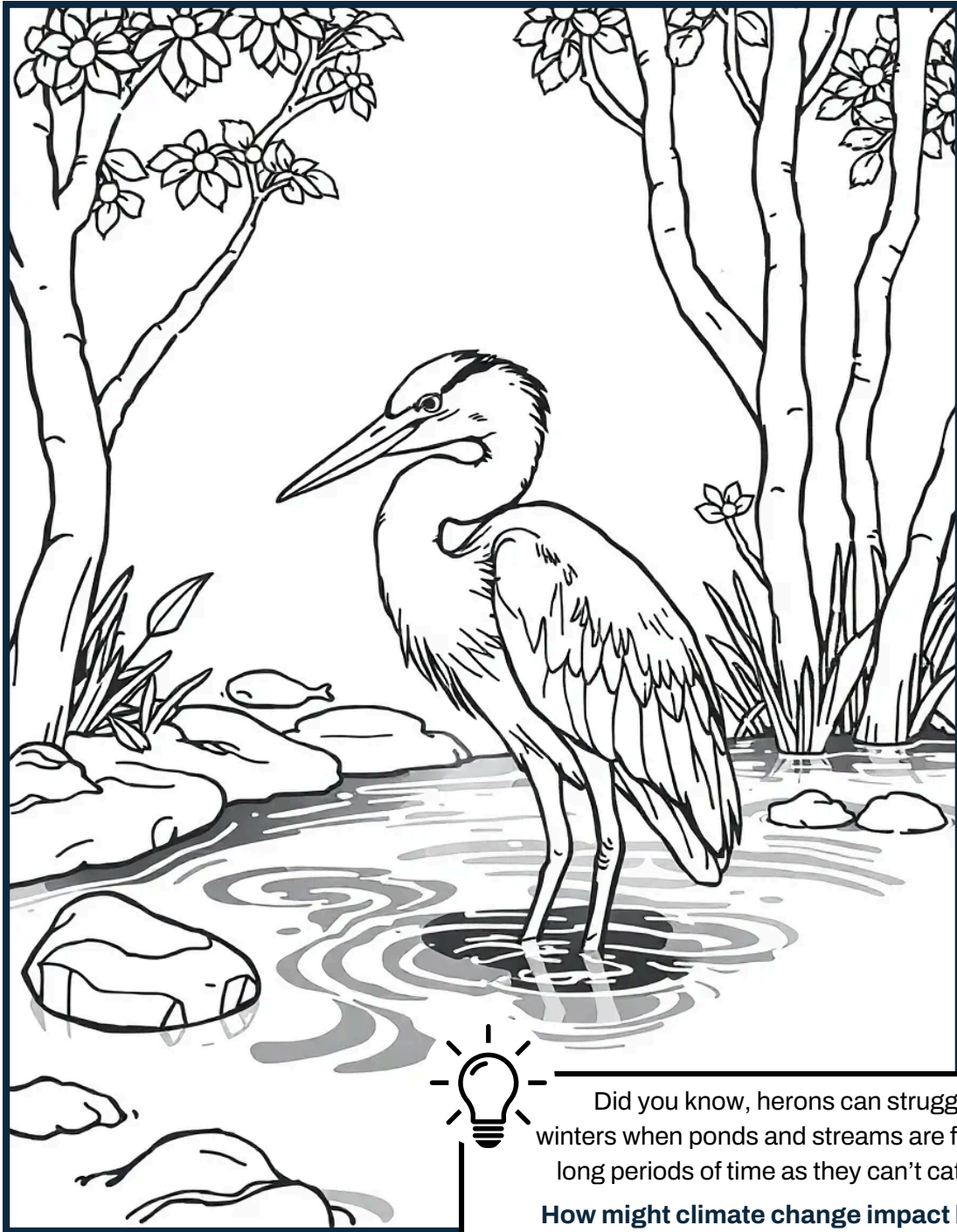
Did you know, kingfishers don't build nests like lots of other birds. They dig tunnels into the riverbank to lay their eggs in instead.

How might this lead to problems for a kingfisher?

Kingfishers are small birds, only slightly larger than a robin, who live in riparian woodland across the UK. Their strikingly bright feathers mean they're often spotted as a flash of blue darting along the river. As their name suggests, they are experts when it comes to fishing. They perch on a branch overhanging the river, wait until they spot a fish, dive in head first and use their long, sharp beak to catch their prey.

Creatures of the River Wear

Grey Heron



Did you know, herons can struggle in cold winters when ponds and streams are frozen for long periods of time as they can't catch prey.

How might climate change impact herons?

The grey heron is a large wading bird commonly found in wetlands, lakes, rivers, and coastal areas throughout Europe and parts of Asia, including along the River Wear and its tributaries. With its long legs and neck, it stands tall, often seen patiently stalking through shallow waters in search of fish, frogs, and small mammals. Grey herons are skilled hunters. They use their keen eyesight to spot movement in the water before swiftly striking with their sharp beak to catch their prey. These elegant birds are also known for their impressive wingspan, which can reach almost two metres when they take flight, gliding gracefully over their habitat.

Creatures of the River Wear

Otter



Did you know, otters have webbed feet and a long muscular tail which help them to move quickly and easily through the water.
What adaptation might help their relative, the badger, to live in burrows?

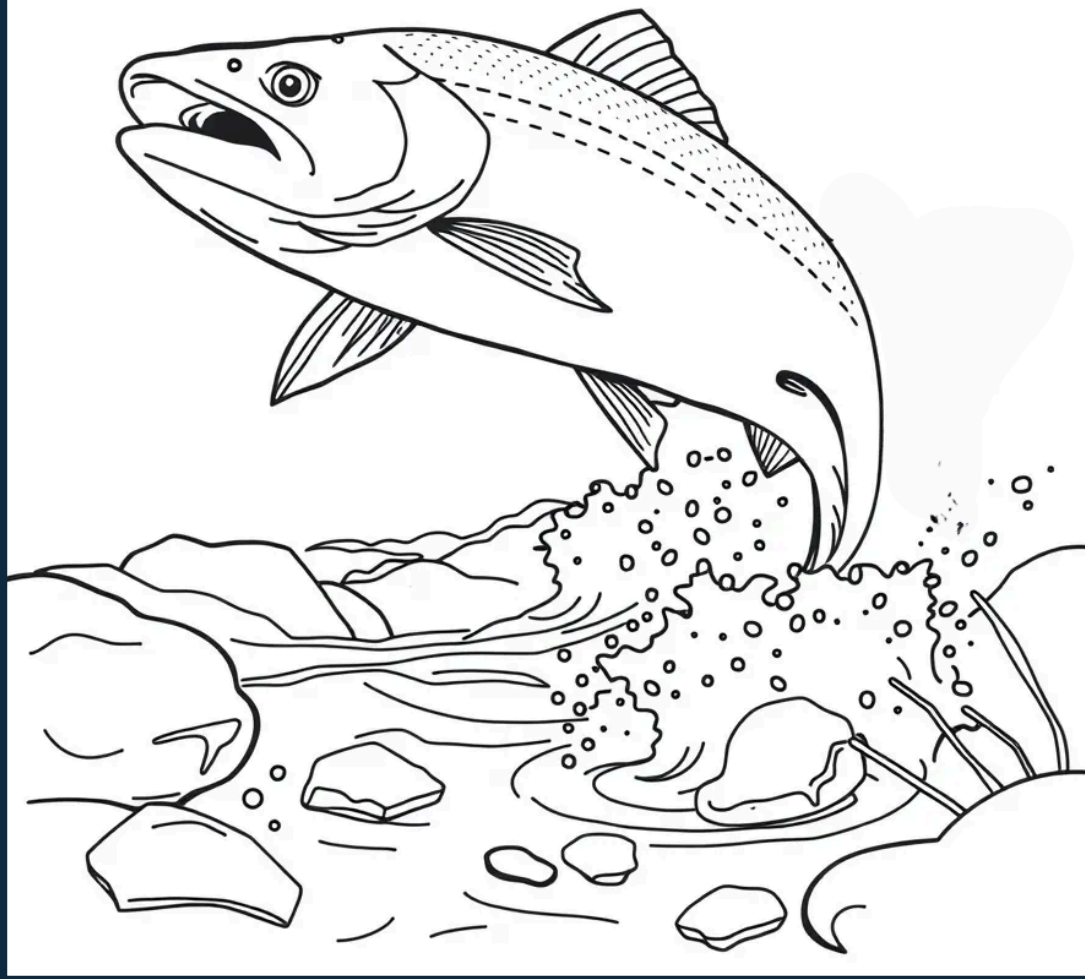
Otters have lived in UK waters for millions of years but in the 1950's, they were at risk of going extinct due to pesticides being used by farmers which affected their breeding. Since then, these chemicals have been banned and otter numbers have made a fantastic recovery. So much so that otters can now be found in every county in England and Wales! As otters are carnivores, you may spot them hunting for fish, crustaceans, amphibians or even small mammals or birds. They are closely related to other native British mammals like badgers, weasels and polecats as well as the invasive American mink.

Creatures of the River Wear

Salmon



Did you know, overfishing has had a severe impact on salmon numbers and the River Wear is the river with the second highest number of salmon caught in England and Wales. **Salmon are also vulnerable to pollution. How could you help to keep rivers clean?**



Salmon are one of the more famous fish in our rivers as they often find their way onto our dinner plates! They start out life in the upper course of rivers feeding on insects and invertebrates like mayfly, stonefly and caddisfly. Around 1-3 years later, they stop swimming against the current and start swimming with it until they reach the sea. Salmon from the River Wear enter the North Sea in Sunderland and will travel all the way to the Norwegian Sea where they eat lots of smaller fish and grow quickly. After a few more years, these salmon make the exhausting journey back to the river they hatched in to lay their own eggs, not eating once they return to freshwater. Unfortunately, up to 95% of salmon die once they have laid their eggs and the life cycle begins again.

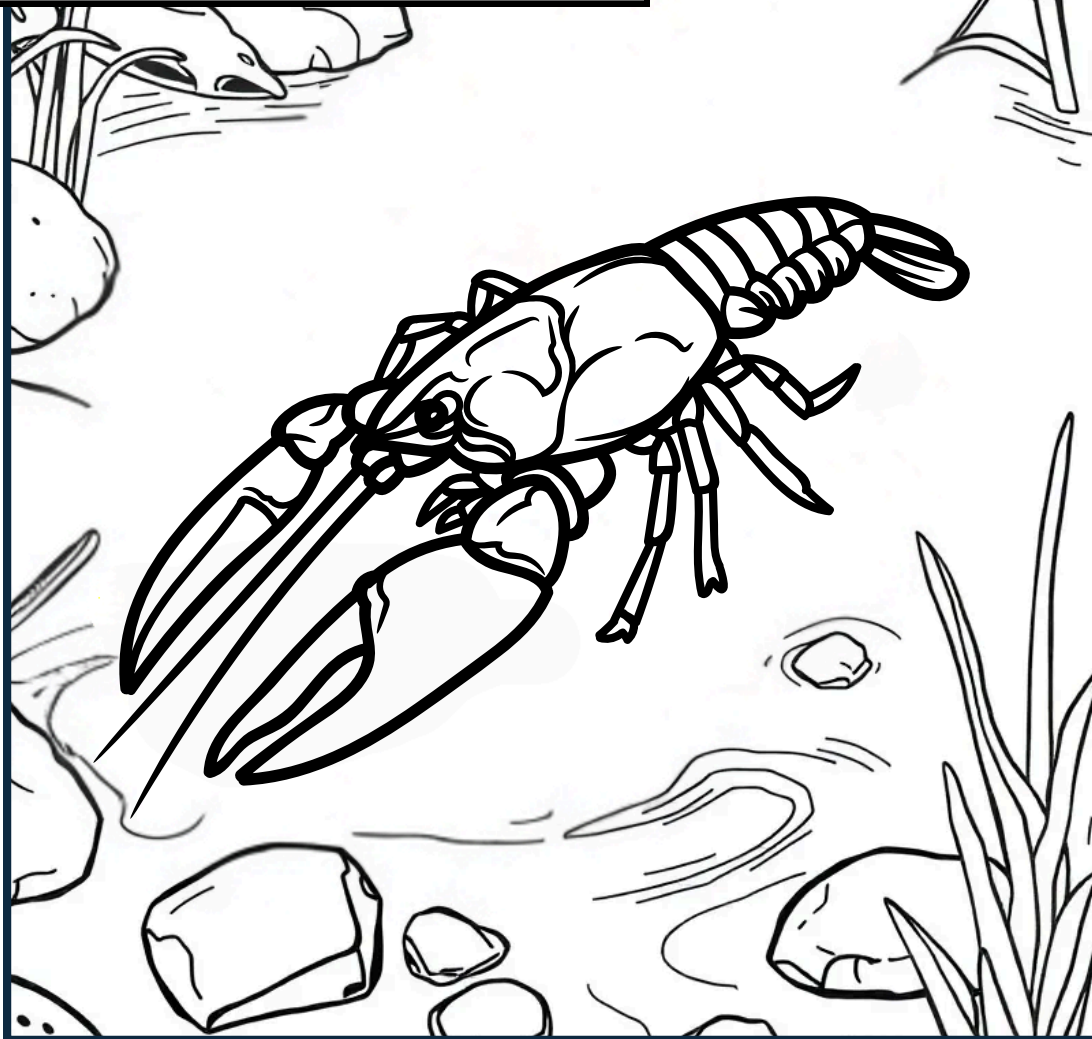
Creatures of the River Wear

Signal Crayfish



Did you know, signal crayfish can burrow up to 2m into river banks to create a network of interconnecting tunnels.

What problems could these burrows cause?



The signal crayfish is an example of a creature which is not supposed to be found in the River Wear or its tributaries! It is an invasive non-native species, originally from the United States, which was brought to the UK in the 1970s to be farmed for food. Ultimately, some crayfish escaped and have since spread across the country. They can now be found in England, Wales and parts of Scotland and it is impossible to know how many of them there are. Signal Crayfish are opportunistic omnivores which means they will eat anything they can get their claws on. This can include algae, plants, small invertebrates, dead fish and even other crayfish including our native white-clawed crayfish which have become endangered since the arrival of their American cousins.