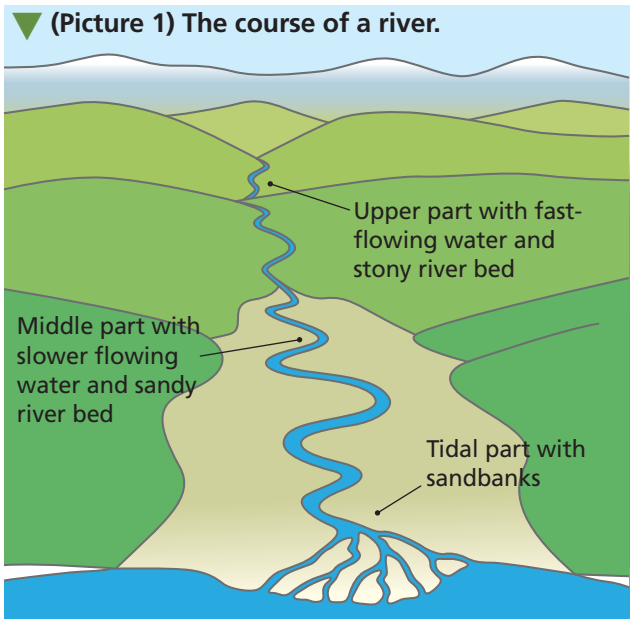
6 Rivers

Rivers often begin as fast-flowing streams with rocky beds, then get slower and flow over muddy beds as they near the sea. As a result, rivers contain many different types of life.

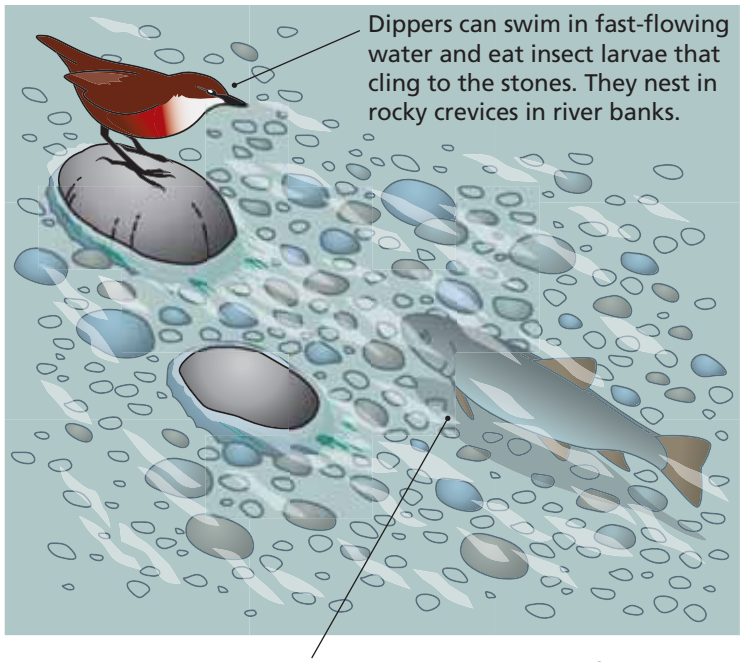
Rivers flow from high land, where they have stony beds, to lowlands, where their beds are made of mud and silt, to the sea where rivers become tidal and where sandbanks and mudflats are common (Picture 1). Quite different types of plants and animals are adapted to live in each part of the river's course.



▼ **(Picture 1) The course of a river.**

The upper part of a river

Rivers flowing quickly over stony beds would sweep many plants and animals away, so most river animals found here are strong swimmers, or can shelter between the rocks (Picture 2). Here, animals feed on leaves falling into the water, or catch insects on or in the water.



▲ **(Picture 2) The upper reaches of a river, where the bed is stony.**

The middle part of a river

Downstream, the water flows slowly enough for sand, silt and mud to settle out (Picture 3). Many animals have made use of this soft material to protect themselves. Animals such as mussels dig deep burrows. Rooted plants can also grow here.

Most small animals feed on dead leaves that sink to the river bottom. More varieties of fish are found here, including those that are less strong swimmers. River banks are soft and provide a home for

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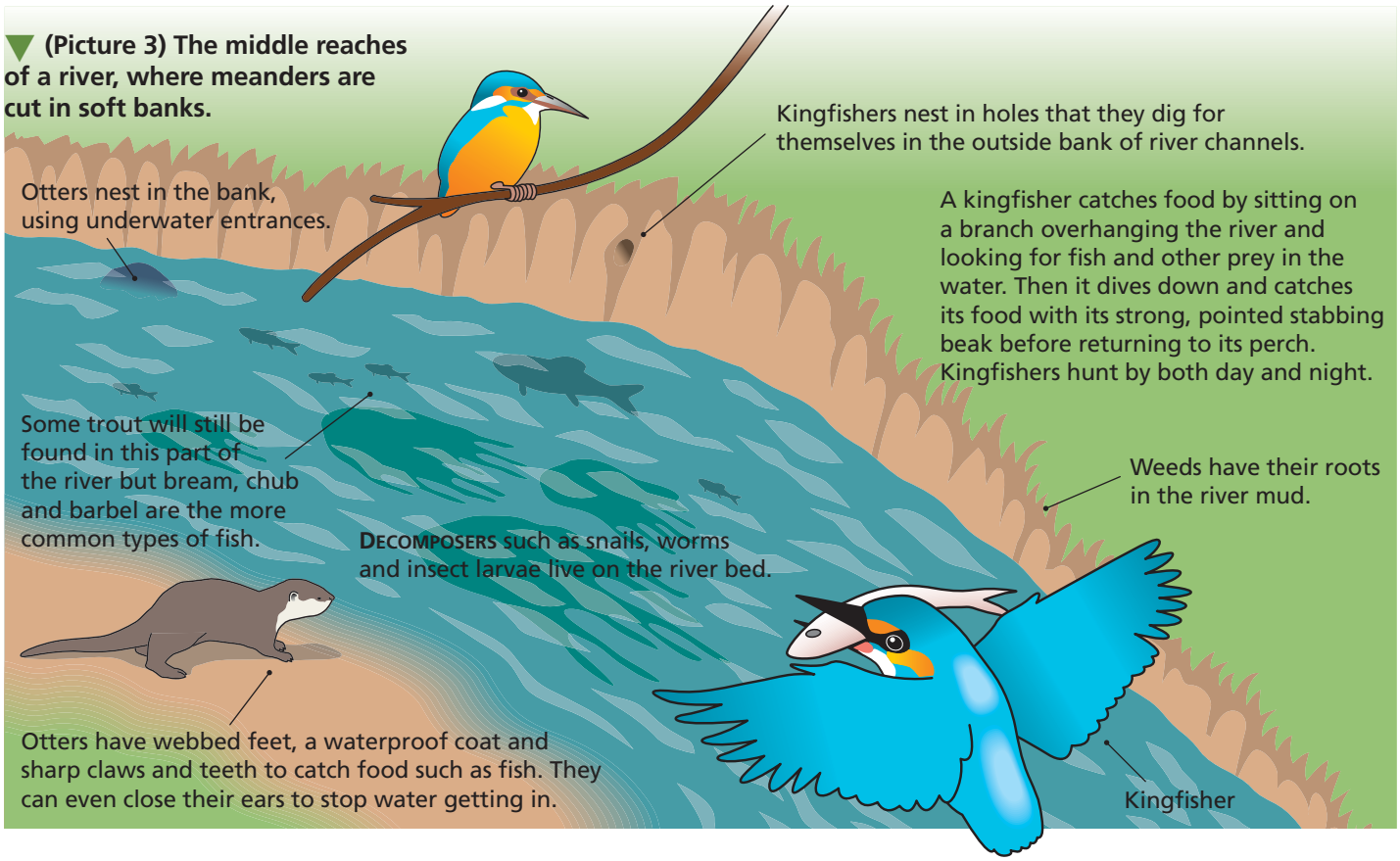


▼ (Picture 3) The middle reaches of a river, where meanders are cut in soft banks.

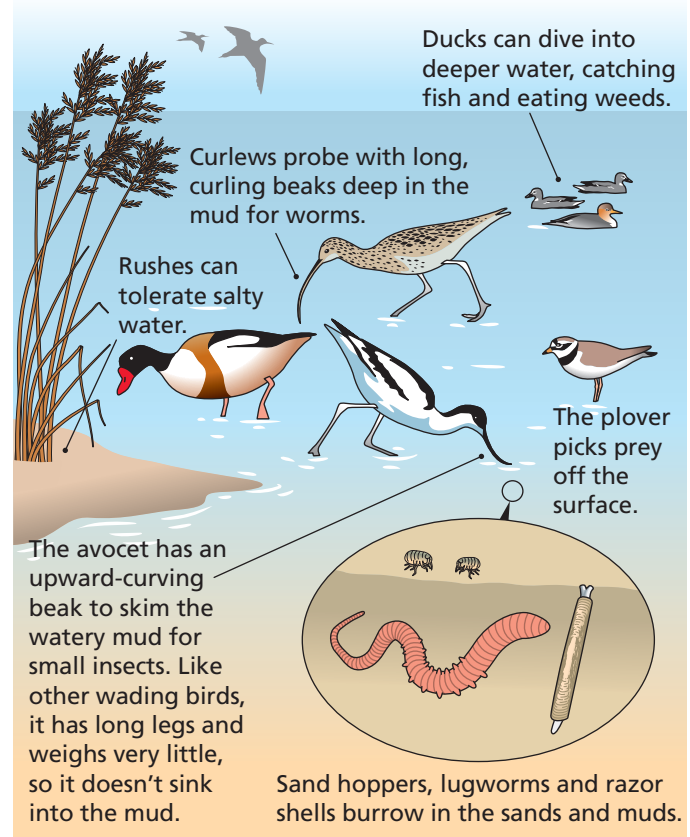
burrowing birds such as kingfishers and MAMMALS such as otters and water voles.

The tidal part of a river

At the mouth of the river the water is very sluggish and the bottom muds become thick. More plants can take root and huge numbers of burrowing animals, such as worms and snails, can thrive. Wading birds of all kinds are adapted to find the food buried in the sand and mud (Picture 4).

Summary

- **Habitats change as the river changes along its course.**
- **So that they can live together, different wading birds have different shaped beaks to find different food.**



▼ (Picture 4) The tidal reaches of the river, where mudflats and sandbanks are common.