



Stand up for the Kennet

A huge thank you to everyone who 'Stood up for the Kennet' by responding to the Water Framework Directive River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) consultation.

There were 196 responses to the Thames Basin plan with 90 from 'conservation and fishing groups'. Most of these were directly attributable to ARK's members: so we certainly showed that people care about the Kennet. We will have to wait to see which of our comments have been included in the final plan. The plans will be signed off by the Secretary of State in late November 2009.

In the mean time, the good news is that ARK and RSPB are in discussion with the Environment Agency and DEFRA about the possibility of producing a sub-basin plan for the Kennet. This would be a more detailed plan, which reflected the complexity of the issues on the River Kennet. The objectives would be firstly to achieve good ecological status before 2021 and secondly, to develop and test a method of RBMP implementation as a pathfinder for possible widespread use in England and Wales.

This is a positive development, which we hope will translate into real improvements in water quality and river habitat on the Kennet, and accelerate the good work already being done by the Kennet Chalkstream Restoration Project, the Environment Agency, ARK and others.



MP Michael Ancram with ARK supporters 'Stand up for the Kennet'

Autumn River Walk Sunday 4 October 2009 2pm onwards

An exciting new route, starting at the Old Mill in Ramsbury, will follow the river downstream towards Chilton Foliat, taking in some of the most beautiful reaches of the upper Kennet. There is limited car parking at the Old Mill, Ramsbury. The route will be well sign-posted and there will be marshalls along the way.



Upper Kennet in July 2009. Photo credit: Mike Tsang.

The 'Ramsbury Flyer' minibus will be available for people who would like to walk one way only (approx. 2.5 miles).

The terrain is rough and slippery in places and includes short section along the road. Please wear sturdy footwear. Sorry, but to protect gamebirds, no dogs are permitted on this occasion. This walk is open to ARK members only, but anyone can join on the day.

Also in this issue: Cows in Cooper's Meadow, Volunteering, A year in a water meadow, WWF-UK Rivers on the Edge, ARK Trout in School, Spring River Walk, St John's School fundraisers, West Overton's wiggle and a new novel celebrates ARK.

Cows in Cooper's meadow

At the end of May a trio of Belted Galloway cattle arrived in Cooper's Meadow, Marlborough to graze the site as part of the plan to encourage native meadow flowers to grow again.

Maurice Cooper, after whose family the meadow is named said 'It's good to see livestock back on that land, I don't think cattle have been there since the war, my grandfather would be very pleased'.

BBC Radio Wiltshire broadcast the moment the cows were released and Marlborough's Mayor Nick Fogg was in the meadow to welcome them.



Belted Galloway cattle are extremely hardy and adaptable to a wide range of habitats and environmental conditions and are often used for conservation grazing projects. Their gentle, placid nature and attractive appearance makes them ideal for grazing sites with public access. The cattle are on loan from local farmer and ARK treasurer Martin Gibson. After a month in the meadow they returned to Mildenhall until September and now two of them are back for another month or so to eat the grass down for before winter.



Belted Galloway Cattle in Cooper's Meadow

Volunteering

If you have a few hours to spare and would like to get your 'feet wet' helping keep the river in shape we have volunteer activities on some Wednesdays and Friday afternoons during school term time. To find out locations, dates and times take a look at our website www.riverkennet.org. New faces always welcome.

A year in a water meadow

M. Cooper

Water Meadows were a traditional part of the landscape along the banks of the Kennet, probably from the end of the 17th century to the end of the 19th century. Remains of the water meadow systems can be seen today as the undulations of ditches and ridges in fields bordering the river, as well as derelict brick and wood hatch structures, which would once have controlled the influx and egress of water. The operation of the water meadow system was in the hands of a 'drowner'.

The meadow would be floated (deliberately flooded) at the end of the winter for about three weeks. This would enable sheep or cattle to get an 'early bite', i.e. grazing in April for three to four weeks, which is earlier than a traditional meadow. Chalkstreams hold a constant water temperature of around 10 degrees C, so as well as irrigating the meadow the soil temperature was raised enough to stimulate early grass growth.

After spring, the drowner would assess the water levels and grass growth, and float again if required. The meadow could then be left to grow a crop of hay or grass. If the hay was harvested then the meadow would be assessed again and possibly floated so that there would be enough re-growth for an autumn grassing. If the meadow was not harvested for hay it would be grazed by sheep or cattle.

If hay was made, some farmers would let the grasses flower and seed before cutting so that the meadow was re-seeded in the natural way.

In late autumn the drowner would start to repair the drains where the grazing sheep or cattle had trodden them down. He would then check that the hatches were in good working order ready to start another new year in the water meadow.

A detailed book 'Wiltshire Water Meadows' by Michael Cowan includes an interpretation of a water meadow system in Ramsbury and is available from Hobnob Press, Salisbury (01747 830015).

WWF -UK Rivers on the Edge

ARK is delighted to be working with WWF-UK as a partner in their national 'Rivers on the Edge' campaign. The campaign is ambitious and far-reaching and recognises that now is our chance to save our chalk streams. The following extracts from the 'Rivers on the Edge' launch booklet explain more about the project.



'Rivers on the Edge focuses the lens on the Kennet, the Upper Lee and the Itchen, three of England's iconic chalk streams - fragile and beautiful systems that are unique to this country and host an abundance of native wildlife - that if lost through our over-exploitation will be lost to the world forever.

By acting now we can preserve our precious resource, and the special places it gives us. If we fail, as we look towards a future of a changing climate and rising population, we are risking catastrophe.'

'The simple message is that we must waste less water if we are to save our precious freshwater environment and make sure it is resilient to the impacts of climate change. But how? Rivers on the Edge aims to help thousands of homes, schools and businesses cut water use, saving millions of litres of water for our rivers. We call on government and regulators in England and Wales to meet the targets below in the next two years to ensure that we stop using water wastefully; that abstraction does not unacceptably damage our rivers now and in the future; that we adapt to the potential impacts of climate change; and that we protect the future security of our water supplies.'

The specific aims of the campaign are to:

1. Develop water efficient housing fit for the future

Make every home water efficient by 2050, linking water efficiency with energy efficiency retrofit schemes.

Create green jobs in the water and energy sectors to implement large-scale efficiency retrofitting schemes as part of a green 'new deal'.

Encourage partnerships to deliver water efficiency schemes between local authorities, social housing providers, water and energy companies and other stakeholders that will ensure cost effectiveness and give a consistent message about modern, sustainable lifestyles.

Make every new home water neutral, by building them to the highest standards and ensuring that there is no net increase in water consumption by making existing buildings - schools, hospitals and businesses - more water efficient.

2. Provide strong incentives to promote water efficiency

Require a water meter in every home by 2020 with a pricing structure that provides an incentive to be water efficient, without penalising vulnerable households.

Regulate to create incentives to reduce demand: so water companies can give equal importance to demand reduction and supply infrastructure. Remove the UK accounting requirement for water companies to treat all water efficiency schemes as operational expenditure.

Promote adaptation to climate change by placing a statutory duty on Ofwat to allow, oversee and encourage mitigation and adaptation solutions.

Steer the market towards water efficient products: create a fund that makes Government lead the way by ensuring that all public buildings are water efficient.

3. End damaging abstraction

Increase abstraction prices significantly in areas of scarcity, to encourage water companies and other water users to reduce damaging abstraction.

Deliver the requirements of the Water Framework Directive by identifying funding for and developing a programme to end damaging abstraction, and base identification on the precautionary principle. This delivery should include monitoring and research and a review of the Environment Agency's Restoring Sustainable Abstraction programme and Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies.'



After another successful year ARK's 'Trout in school' project will be running again from December 2009. During the project school children raise brown trout from eggs to fry, which are released in to the Kennet around Easter time. The children learn all about brown trout and their lifecycle, and about chalk streams, in particular the River Kennet.

The project is most suited to year five pupils and older. This year we will be running it in both primary and secondary school settings. To find out more or to register your school as a participant please contact Charlotte@riverkennet.org.

Spring River Walk

Over 100 walkers joined our Spring river walk from Manor Farm, West Overton, downstream to Fyfield in Spring. The weather was beautiful and the river was looking very pretty, with the ranunculus just flowering. The upper section of river is a winterbourne, although until this summer it had flowed all year round for two years, and was looking in particularly good health.

Our thanks to the landowners who opened their land and gardens, especially Michael Maude and Peter Griffiths Jones for their preparation work. Many thanks also to Janice Clay for driving the Ramsbury Flyer mini-bus for us.

St John's Students help ARK

A team of budding entrepreneurs raised GBP 88.58 for ARK as part of an end-of-term 'Apprentice' project in July. Many thanks to them for their efforts.

More St John's pupils have been helping with the project at Cooper's Meadow, building new bank structures and planting new plants, we look forward to working with you all again.



This newsletter is published 3 times a year by Action for the River Kennet

West Overton's Wiggle

At West Overton the diggers have been busy though the summer digging a new course for the River Kennet.

The field, behind the Bell Pub, is part of Manor Farm and is owned by ARK Committee member Michael Maude.

Sometime during the 1970's the river through the field was made completely straight so that the field was easier to farm. However, Mr Maude decided to re-instate its original meandering course and, at the same time, improve the river habitat and create a deep pool for fish to take refuge when the river dries up.



Mr Maude said, 'It's horrible to see fish stranded when the river dries up – this year we had to drive dying fish to Marlborough and release them into deeper water there. Hopefully, with the new holding pool more of them will survive in future.'

The project has taken several years to come to fruition, because good summer water levels have kept river flowing all year round, but this summer the water level dropped and the diggers have been able to excavate a new channel along the river's original course. As the water table naturally rises after the Autumn the river will fill and flow. The new 'wiggly river' will offer a much better variety of habitat for all the wildlife that lives there.

New novel celebrates ARK

Novelist Richard Bramhall's latest novel, published by Sosiumi Press, features Action for the River Kennet and the battle against abstraction at Axford. Set in 'Middle Bedwyn' the novel is packed with local references to the Kennet, the K&A canal, local traditions and local customs. We have a review copy to give away to any member who would like to write a review for our next newsletter.

