



Action for the River Kennet

Action for the River Kennet
**Annual Report
2021**



The Rivers Trust for the Kennet and Pang Catchments

ARK's Year 2020-21

April



We share images that River Keepers took of their stretches of river and wildlife through our social media channels to raise the spirits of those unable to access green and blue spaces during the pandemic.

May

Our staff are furloughed during the escalating COVID virus pandemic.



July
ARK Volunteer tasks resume, with a socially distanced in-river litter pick.

August

Our riverbank Vole Strolls continue to connect local people

to their river and nature, whilst promoting good physical and mental wellbeing.



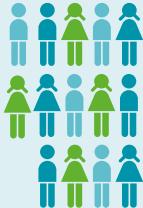
September

Thousands of Snake's head fritillary bulbs are planted by volunteers at Stonebridge Wild River Reserve.



October

We adapt our Water Matters and River School educational outreach projects and begin working online with 20+ schools and over 1,000 children.



November

We are successful with two Green Recovery Challenge Fund partnership bids – Sparkling Streams and Thames Catchment Community Eels Project.

December

420 native trees are planted at the Froxfield Nature Reserve, reducing road pollution and increasing habitats for wildlife.



January
ARK volunteers attend a Zoom presentation by British Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2018 Paul Colley.



February

Online 'Muddy Walks' workshops, empower individuals to report signs of pollution entering the river.



March

Our new staff work with the Wild Trout Trust and begin practical habitat improvements on the Shalbourne Stream.



Clouds, Silver Linings and the Future

We are now in our second year of living under the cloud of COVID-19. Reflecting on the past 12 months and on what I wrote in the 2020 Annual Report I am prompted to ask three questions: what has changed? what hasn't changed? and where might we be going?

It is said that every cloud has a silver lining and I have to say even this COVID cloud has one. Last year I talked about how reduced activity in and around the Kennet Valley had led to the river itself seeming to flow in a fresher and more vibrant way. I spoke of how people really had begun to appreciate the natural environment and these were all positive by-products of the COVID pandemic. This year I can report that the pandemic has brought an additional benefit to Action for the River Kennet in the form of a near doubling in the size of our core team.

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund that was established at the beginning of the year by the National Lottery

Creating a better future for the Kennet through:

1

Reaching Out

Read more on page 6–7

2

Engaging Young People

Read more on page 8–9

3

Sparkling Streams

Read more on page 10–11

4

Influencing Others

Read more on page 12–13

5

Gathering Evidence

Read more on page 14–15

6

Managing Water

Read more on page 16–17

Heritage Fund has enabled ARK to develop two exciting new projects – Sparkling Streams and the Thames Catchment Community Eels Project. Through these projects we have been able to employ new members of staff who have brought enthusiasm and commitment to our work at ARK.

Unfortunately, there is a 'but' to this positive news. The Green Recovery Challenge Fund is only available for 16 months and therefore if we can't find other funding to support the boosted ARK team it will revert back to its smaller pre-Covid staffing level. In the next six months we need to find new funding streams to maintain the enhanced activity. I am currently investigating various options including how we can capitalise on our clear and well-developed technical expertise; how to secure funding from other partners, and how we can use





UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE UK 2021

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ITALY

programmes such as the Farming in Protected Landscapes funding to support the work of ARK.

I welcome other suggestions that you may have to support ARK's finances. If you've got good ideas that don't require a battalion of staff to deliver and can be easily put in place, please send them to us.

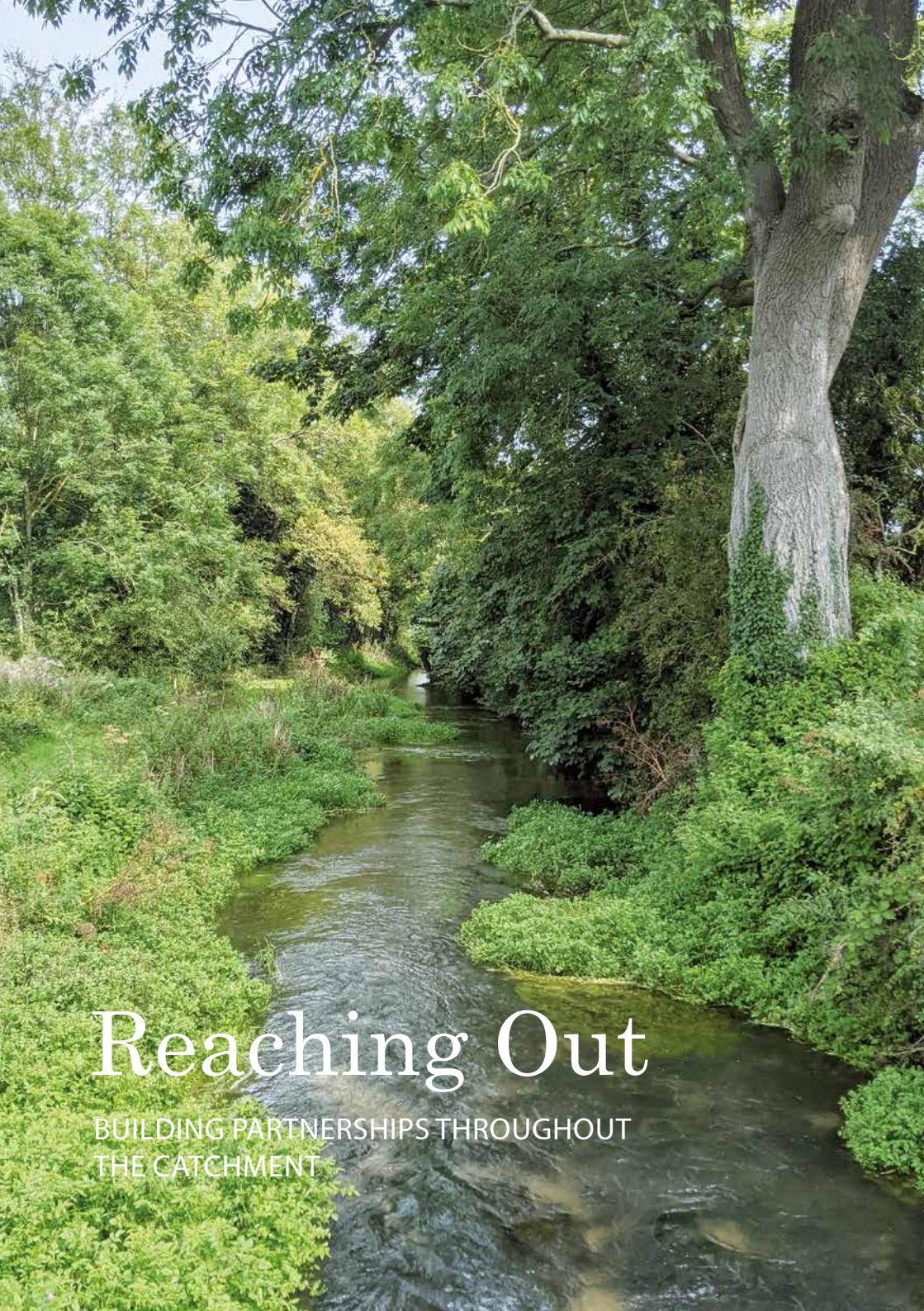
Last year I also suggested that we would have to find new ways of working. ARK has done this very effectively across its activity – from holding zoom meetings to providing socially distanced training and outreach for volunteers, farmers and communities and maintaining a full school's programme. We have adapted and in fact have had our busiest year to date.

Finally, I cannot conclude without mentioning COP 26. In November political and business leaders from across the world's nations met in

Glasgow to agree the next steps in the battle to contain global warming. Here at home we need our own politicians to be even more resolute and far-sighted. The decisions they make will impact on us all and not least on the environment of the River Kennet.

More extreme weather events resulting from climate change may see the river dry up or, as is happening at the moment, become inundated with sewage from infrastructure that overflows. We can lobby and chastise the water companies but the infrastructure, no matter how up to date, will be no match for extreme weather. It will fail and the river will suffer. We must all do our bit to address climate change and encourage politicians of all political persuasions to be brave.

Richard Clarke
CHAIRMAN

A photograph of a river flowing through a lush, green landscape. The river is in the foreground, with its water reflecting the surrounding greenery. To the right, a large tree trunk is visible, covered in ivy. The banks of the river are thick with various types of green plants and bushes. The background shows more trees and foliage, creating a sense of depth and a natural, serene environment.

Reaching Out

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS THROUGHOUT
THE CATCHMENT



ARK has been forging new partnerships across an ever-wider geographical area.

This year we expanded our geographical area of work to include the River Pang, a chalk stream with many of the same characteristics as we are familiar with in the Kennet Valley. This means that our existing skills and experience can be easily transferred across to this new catchment.

ARK is working alongside Thames 21 and the Chilterns Chalk Stream Project to co-host the South Chiltern's Catchment Partnership. Our first project is a partnership with the Pang Valley Flood forum. Supported by funding from the Environment Agency, this will allow us to map the state of the river before going on to repair a stretch of chalkstream habitat and design a new area of wetland.

Building on this work, we are looking forward to a new partnership with the South Chilterns AONB to bring the creation of that wetland to fruition in 2022. Over the next 12 months we also plan to support new citizen science groups and work more closely with the emerging farmer groups in the area.

The Pang has the dubious accolade of being the home of the sewage treatment works that discharges more often and for longer than any other in the Thames Water area. Combined with habitat degradation and barriers to fish migration, this means that there is plenty of work to be done to bring the river to good health with the help of the amazing volunteers who have already assessed and mapped the condition of the entire river.

Working with our Project Officer Mia, they are also surveying the channel for barriers to fish migration, with a focus on the European eel. This obstacle data collected by our citizen scientists on the Pang and Kennet will inform decisions for future eel and fish passage and monitoring projects, thereby improving the overall river ecosystem.

Mia Ridler
ARK Project Officer

Charlotte Hitchmough
Director



Engaging Young People

TEACHING TOMORROW'S CITIZENS THE
IMPORTANCE OF HEALTHY RIVERS



Every year we work with young people through our Water Matters and River School activities.

Waters Matters is funded by Thames Water alongside the River School sessions for brownies and cubs that are supported by a variety of funders. This year adaptability and innovation have been key.

Who would have thought we would go from live trout releases into the river at the end of March 2020 to Zooming from our Senior Project Officer's kitchen into schools in October 2021? What's more, this later morphed into virtual meetings with teachers and their students in their own homes.

At times it was chaotic, but essentially it worked. We created new resources and worked with schools to use whichever online platforms they preferred and swapped dates and timings to fit in with their own 'bubbles'.

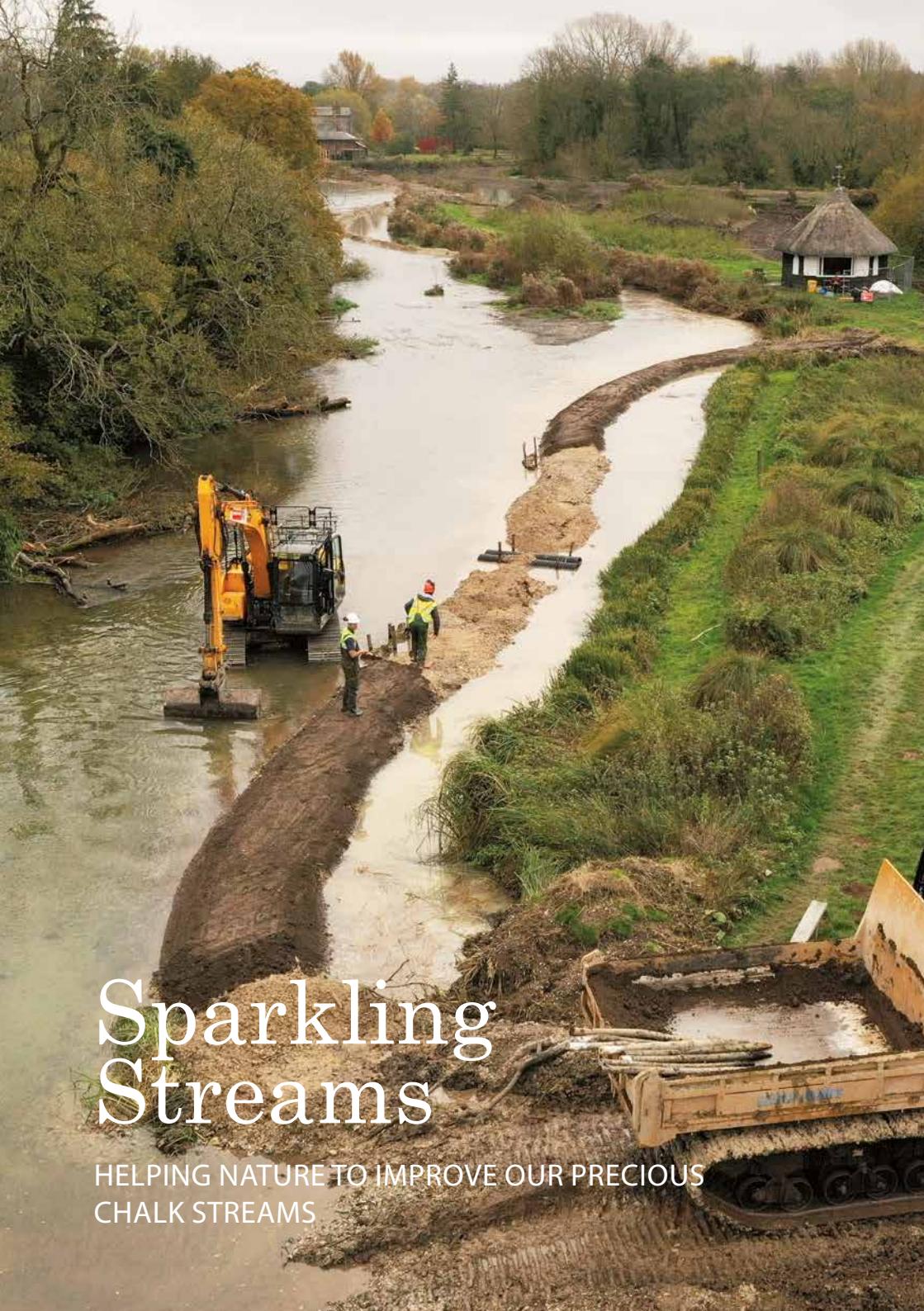
Our sessions were interactive, educational and above all a fun way for us to continue to connect with children and develop their understanding and passion for their local rivers and ecology.

While river visits were off the table, buckets of freshly caught river life were dropped off at the school gates by our fantastic volunteers. Meanwhile, Anna sat at her laptop ready to make sure the students got the most out of the workshop, which meant learning about the connection between what comes out of their taps and the water the invertebrates and fish were swimming in.

This made the plight of our chalk streams real and relevant, helping the students to grasp how the use (and abuse) of water in their homes and schools can have a direct impact on their local river. Better still, feedback analysis showed how much students' knowledge and understanding improved through the sessions.

During the academic year we worked with 20 schools and more than 1,000 children, all the way from the rural village of Lockeridge to more urban schools in Newbury and Reading.

Anna Forbes
Senior Project Officer



Sparkling Streams

HELPING NATURE TO IMPROVE OUR PRECIOUS
CHALK STREAMS



A Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) comes to the aid of the Kennet's tributaries.

The Sparkling Streams Project (SSP) has been a key element of ARK's work this year. As well as enhancing the quality of local streams and their wildlife it is helping to connect people with nature.

SSP is a partnership between ARK, the Southern Streams Farm Cluster Group and Hungerford Town & Manor, co-ordinated by the North Wessex Downs AONB. Over £400k was awarded to the project through the first round of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund, which is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England and the Environment Agency.

Halfway through the project we are already able to report some significant outcomes, from wetland construction to the design and build of a rain garden. Several other small-scale restoration works have already been carried out by our volunteers, with lots more due for completion at the end of March 2022.

The SSP is a perfect example of the power of a catchment-based approach.

Working with the Southern Streams Farm Cluster, we have been delivering a suite of interventions for improving water quality in the Wilton Water catchment as well as reducing flood risk in surrounding villages.

Likewise, on the Dun and Shalbourne, we have been working with riparian owners, Wiltshire Highways and parish councils to restore habitats in reaches that have been significantly degraded by earlier modifications and more recent pollution.

We hope that CaBA's recently published Chalk Stream Restoration Strategy will act as a catalyst for similar investment in the future, especially in catchments like the Shalbourne, Dun and Froxfield Stream that are overlooked as 'chalk streams' in terms of their statutory designations and protections.

Rupert Kelton
Project Manager



Influencing Others

CAMPAIGNING FOR CLEANER, HEALTHIER CHALK STREAMS



At ARK we are a small team tackling some big issues.

This year sewage in rivers has been much in the news. This is because the water companies are now required to report how frequently and for how long their treatment works release untreated sewage into rivers. Our umbrella body The Rivers Trust brought this data to life by creating the 'Is my river fit to play in?' map, which for the first time revealed the huge scale of the problem.

The rivers in the Kennet and Pang valleys are some of the most seriously affected by sewage discharges in the Thames Catchment. Working with the Rivers Trust, Surfers Against Sewage and the Angling Trust we have made good progress raising awareness of the scale and frequency of storm discharges and briefing our MPs on how this national problem relates to their constituencies. Our members have also responded positively when we have asked them to add their voices to calls for cleaner rivers.

As a result of ARK's long-term campaigning, the Kennet was one of

the first rivers to have water abstraction reduced to protect ecology. We are pleased to support the CaBA Chalkstream Strategy and are calling for all chalk streams to be given robust protection in law.

In 2021 the impact of abstraction on flows in the upper Kennet (above Marlborough) is being properly investigated for the first time. Our team have been supporting this work by collecting monthly data on river levels as a small part of a more complex study.

Everyone has a part to play in sharing knowledge about chalk streams and the ways in which our everyday actions can help protect them. Whether this is using water less wastefully, keeping cooking fats out of sewers, or building a rain garden, all of us have the power to make river-friendly decisions in our own lives, and to influence friends and family too.

Charlotte Hitchmough
Director

Gathering Evidence

MONITORING THE HEALTH OF OUR RIVERS
AND THEIR WILDLIFE





ARK's volunteer citizen scientists play a vital role gathering data about our streams.

Looking after our rivers depends on a constant flow of information about how healthy they are.

As soon as volunteering was given the COVID go-ahead our specially trained riverfly monitors and water-vole surveyors were back out in the river. During 2020 the water-vole team upskilled their mapping capabilities so that they can now survey independently and supply consistent data.

In February 2021 Mia Ridler joined ARK to take charge of our contribution to Thames Catchment Community Eels Project, of which ObstacEELS is an exciting new citizen science component. Mia is now helping the volunteer 'Eel Force' to identify and assess barriers to eel migration in the lower and middle Kennet and the Pang.

This new evidence will drive future ARK projects and enable us to work strategically to support the 'Critically Endangered' European eel and the many other species that need free passage up our rivers to fulfil their life cycles.

Supported by the Environment Agency and DEFRA, we have expanded our work to build a more detailed picture of changing water quality through the catchment. It's not a perfect system yet but every year it is improving.

Gathering robust evidence about the state of our rivers not only strengthens our campaigning efforts but can also help secure investment for future projects.

ARK's increasing data collection activity is set against a backdrop of reduced government support for the Environment Agency's monitoring work, which means it's critical that our own data is robust and reliable. So, thank you to all of our diligent volunteer scientists for making this possible.

Charlotte Hitchmough
Director

Anna Forbes
Senior Project Officer



Managing Water

SHOWING PEOPLE HOW WE CAN ALL MAKE
A DIFFERENCE



Action to fix our rivers needs to happen on a catchment scale.

There is no doubt that the combination of climate change, population growth, changes in farming practices and a decaying sewer network have put untold pressure on our rivers, particularly our chalk streams.

Over the last year ARK has been taking action to slow the flow of water through the landscape. We've been doing this by building leaky dams in the highest reaches of the catchment, planting hedges to interrupt overland flow pathways, and building wetlands to store and filter water.

Alongside that physical activity we have provided advice to farmers on soil health and track management. Healthy soil rich in organic matter can store up to 200mm rainfall. What's more, better track management can prevent sediment-laden stormwater rushing off into rivers.

At every turn we are looking to provide opportunities for rain to soak in slowly close to where it lands. We are therefore

working with Reading University's Landwise project to provide new links between researchers, farmers and communities that will effect real change on the ground.

ARK's Rain Gardens for Everyone training courses, run under our Rain Garden UK banner, have been very successful. Participants have left inspired to make real physical changes in their gardens and community spaces that will benefit not only the river, but the whole local environment.

In the same way that it's possible to offset carbon, it's also possible to offset or 'replenish' water use. We have been working with The Rivers Trust to provide opportunities for companies to invest in water management through nature-based solutions like wetlands and river habitat restoration. We see this as an important future funding mechanism.

**Charlotte Hitchmough
Director**

Accounts

Year Ended 31 March 2021

Statement of Financial Activities for the year to 31 March 2021

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £	Prior period total funds £
INCOME				
Donations	56,588	-	56,588	43,441
Grants	35,085	440,412	475,497	82,882
Other trading activities	1,475	-	1,475	260
Investments	1,778	-	1,778	2,100
Total	94,926	440,412	535,338	128,683
EXPENDITURE				
Raising funds	5,353	-	5,353	3,769
Charitable activities	38,692	131,797	170,489	145,266
Governance	2,587	-	2,587	2,796
Total	46,632	131,797	178,429	151,831
Net realised gains/(losses) on investments	847	-	847	(459)
Net income/(expenditure)	49,141	308,615	369,280	(31,901)
Other recognised gains/(losses)				
Gains/(losses) on revaluation of investments	11,524	-	11,524	(8,294)
Net Movement in Funds	60,665	308,615	369,280	(31,901)
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS				
Total funds brought forward	185,869	97,627	283,496	315,397
Total funds carried forward	246,534	406,242	652,776	283,496

Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2021

ASSETS	2020	2019
	£	£
FIXED ASSETS		
Tangible assets	105,147	80,249
Investments	68,254	51,062
Total fixed assets	173,401	131,311
CURRENT ASSETS		
Debtors	373,074	10,757
Cash at bank and in hand	135,868	151,233
Total current assets	508,942	161,990
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(29,567)	(9,805)
Net current assets/(liabilities)	479,375	152,185
Net assets	652,776	283,496
FUNDS OF THE CHARITY		
Unrestricted funds	246,534	185,869
Restricted income funds	406,242	97,627
Total funds	652,776	283,496

NOTE

These financial statements, signed on 1 September 2021, have been prepared under the historical cost convention, and in accordance with applicable accounting standards, the Charities Act 2011, the Charities SORP and the Financial Reporting Standard (FRS 102).

Officers

Patron:	Lord Kennet
Chairman:	Richard Clarke (Trustee)
Hon. Treasurer:	Martin Gibson (Trustee)
Technical Adviser:	John Lawson
Ecological Adviser:	Peter Marren
River Habitat Adviser:	John Hounslow
Committee:	Kevin Light, Judy Pitts (Trustee), Robert Starr, David Hill (Trustee)
Director:	Charlotte Hitchmough

The charity is constituted as a trust governed by a constitution. Trustees are elected annually by the members.

Benefactors and donors 2020-21

Adam Matthew Digital
Environment Agency
G C Gibson Charitable Settlement
Green Recovery Challenge Fund
Revere Charitable Trust
Sandra Charitable Trust
Tesco Bags of Help
Thames Water
Waitrose (Marlborough Branch)
Wiltshire Community Foundation
Wiltshire Covid Fund

Thank you to all the members, individuals and businesses who donate time, money, materials, goods and services to support our work. Without your contributions our work would not be possible.

The fishing estates and organisations who support us:

Barton Court
Benham Estate
Chilton Estate
Cotswold Fishery Association
Craven Fishery
Denford & Avington Estate
Eastridge Estate
Englefield Estate
Hungerford Town & Manor
Kennet Valley Fishery Association
Marlborough College
Moorwood
Newbury Angling Association
Ramsbury Estates
Ramsbury Manor
Wasing
Weston (Famous Fishing)



Action for the River Kennet

Avebury, Elcot Park, Marlborough, SN8 2BG
t: 01672 512700 | e: info@riverkennet.org | www.riverkennet.org
Registered charity number: 1120725

If you'd like to find out more about ARK, volunteering opportunities or membership please visit our website at www.riverkennet.org

Printed on 100% recycled paper



[facebook/riverkennet](https://facebook.com/riverkennet)



@ARKennet



instagram.com/riverkennet

