



Action for the River Kennet

Action for the River Kennet  
**Annual Report**  
**2020**



The Rivers Trust for the Kennet Catchment

# ARK's Year 2019-20

## April



Work starts on a second river restoration project on the Dun at Bearwater, Hungerford



## May

We run River School events on the Lambourn for near-by schools to get hands-on in their local river

## June

We host a stand all about rain gardens and sustainable gardening at Hampton Court Flower and Garden Show, with Thames Water



## July

Eel release days for five local schools, who've been nurturing their elvers for three months and learning about water efficiency

## August

Students from Japan visit Stonebridge Wild River Reserve to learn about chalk streams and help plant stream-water crowfoot



## September

A community wetland is created close to the Froxfield Stream

## October

Work begins to restore the Dun and create access with our volunteers and the community of Little Bedwyn



## November

We partner with Reading University Canoe Club for a big river litter pick in Reading

## December

River habitat restoration and fish refuge works on the Padworth southern stream and the Kennet at Theale are completed in partnership with KVFA and RDA



## January

ARK speaks at a flood-resilience event, making links with more communities and identifying opportunities for Natural Flood Management.

## February

ARK works with Southern Stream Farmers to host a soil health workshop



## March

Our Ramsbury Mill Stream community

habitat project is completed (later in the year we learn water vole are now present)



It's been a strange year – but one that's opened up some exciting opportunities for both ARK and nature.

At the beginning of January no one would have imagined what the next 12 months would have in store for all of us. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed how we think about life and how we interact with the natural world. It has caused considerable heartache at times and immense frustration and isolation.

There have, however, been upsides. The natural environment has clearly benefited from the lack of frenetic human activity, not just less travelling about but also the temporary cessation of some industrial processes. The rivers in the Kennet catchment have at times seemed to sparkle much more brightly than in the past and the skies over them have seemed more intense and blue.

Creating a better future for the Kennet through:

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After the lifting of the first lockdown people got out into the natural world and engaged in it in a way we have not seen for decades. I witnessed young people really enjoying the River Kennet, whether paddling in it or just sitting next to it; they started to understand and really appreciate the importance of a natural environment that they have access to.

Yes, there were examples of people not understanding how to enjoy the countryside and tales have been told of people taking lambs out of fields to take home as pets. However, most of these stories are no more than rural myths and on the whole the experience of people engaging with the natural environment was wholly positive.

In some ways I hope we will not return to exactly the same normal that we



were following at the start of 2019. Much better, surely, for us to work together to return to a new normal where we appreciate, value and protect our natural environment with refreshed enthusiasm and determination.

Once the coronavirus has been brought to heel ARK will return to doing all the things that it does so successfully, but maybe in slightly different and slightly better ways.

My own vision is one in which ARK works more effectively in partnership with others. This newfound respect and appreciation of the natural environment should be harnessed. We should get more people working towards our own objectives for the River Kennet – and not just members of the public. Local industries and businesses need to take a much more active part in protecting and enhancing our local rivers.

There are already some industries with which we are very closely aligned, for instance those managing the fisheries and the land around the River Kennet. However, there are other businesses bordering the river with whom we would love to be more closely engaged – not only to help them understand the threats they pose, but equally the benefits they could bring to themselves and their customers with a little bit of careful thought and investment.

Another thing we have learned in the last 12 months is the need to co-operate more effectively with like-minded organisations. We are proud to be part of the Rivers Trust movement, and look forward to working with other organisations such as the Woodland Trust, National Trust, and Wildlife Trusts.

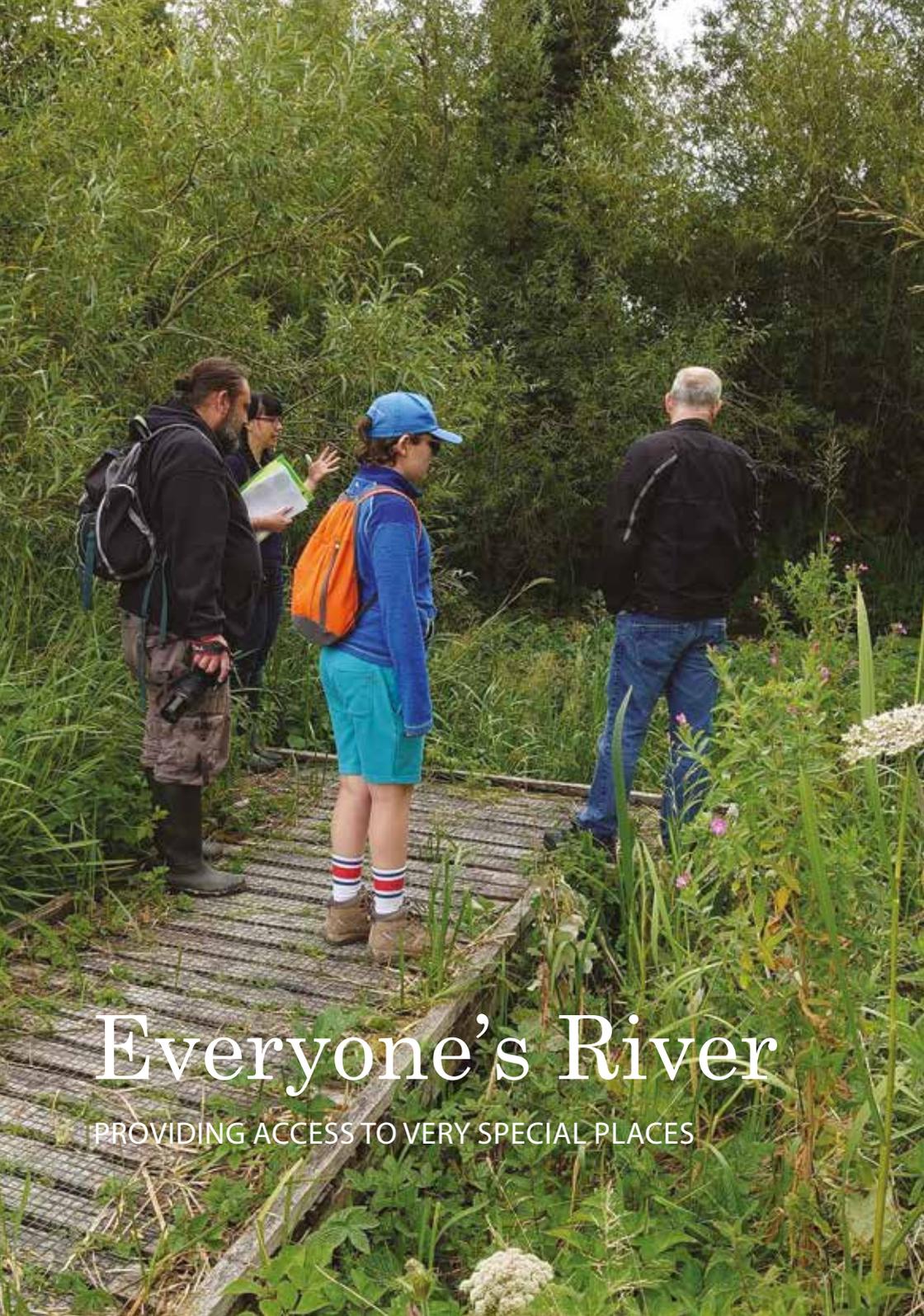
We can all achieve so much more if we work toward shared goals and not against each other trying to plough our own individual furrows.

That means encouraging a climate of collaborative support rather than expecting Action for the River Kennet to be the sole player on this stage. ARK cannot – and should not – be trying to conserve and enhance the rivers in the Kennet catchment on its own. Wherever and whenever possible we should be enabling other people and organisations to play their part in this vital shared endeavour.

*Richard Clarke*

CHAIRMAN

We are very sad to announce that Geoffrey Findley died on Christmas Day 2020. He had been a staunch supporter of ARK for many, many years and was our Chairman from 2011 to 2017. During that time he was responsible for taking ARK from being a small, passionate local charity to a respected and powerful force in the conservation of the River Kennet. Without his vision ARK would not be what it is today; we sadly mourn his passing, but will celebrate his past endeavours.



# Everyone's River

PROVIDING ACCESS TO VERY SPECIAL PLACES



## ARK's Vole Strolls offered a welcome connection with nature during lockdown.

Wherever you look, the evidence is indisputable: blue spaces are good for mental health and wellbeing. Lockdown saw many people taking daily exercise that they perhaps had never taken before.

For these and other reasons, the Coronavirus Spring gave many of us the chance not only to discover new local green and blue spaces but to become aware of the wildlife and beauty of nature – precious things that are all around us but too easily overlooked as we rush about our busy lives.

Our first pandemic events designed to connect people and nature were Vole Strolls. Isolation can exacerbate existing depression, loneliness and anxiety or it can start off new spirals of distress. The Vole Strolls were a simple way for us to provide safe, relaxed guided outdoor walks along the riverbanks of the Kennet, with the chance of seeing one of Britain's best-loved mammals, the water vole.

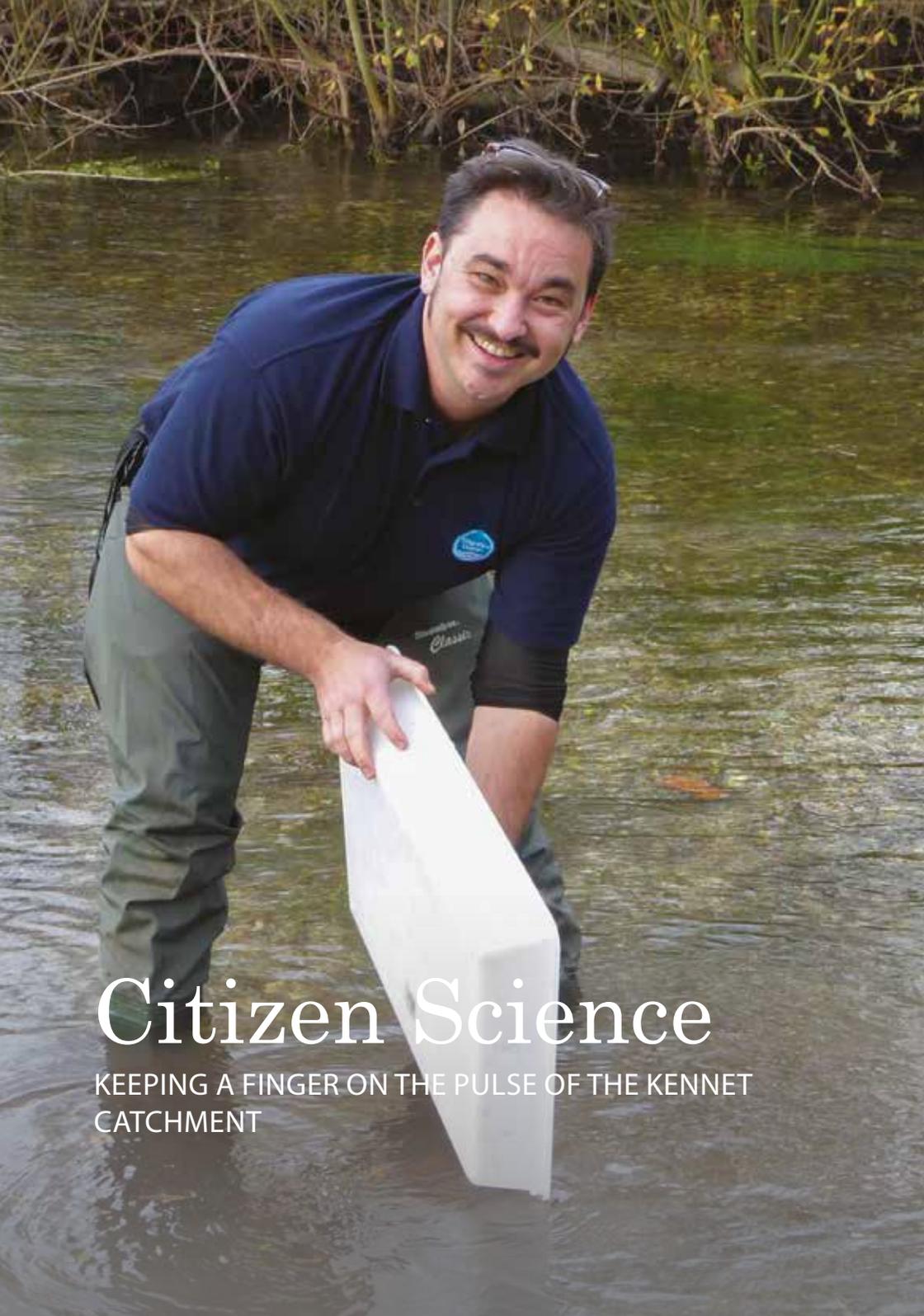
As well as being an opportunity to take in beautiful stream-water crowfoot, a

glimpse of a brown trout or the sounds of bird song and the tranquil river, the strolls also gave people a chance to see and chat with other humans.

Thanks to funding from Wiltshire Community Foundation, Waitrose Community Matters and Co-op we ran 14 strolls between July and September. These were tailored for families, ARK volunteers, the general public and clients from the Richmond Fellowship (individuals on the journey to recovery from long-term mental ill health).

Hopefully 2021 will see the return of our traditional ARK Members River Walk, but in the meantime an excellent way to see more of the Kennet catchment rivers is to volunteer to help with one of the practical restoration projects we organise with local fisheries and other riparian owners – lots of fun and great for physical and mental health!

**Anna Forbes**  
ARK Project Officer



# Citizen Science

KEEPING A FINGER ON THE PULSE OF THE KENNET CATCHMENT



## ARK's volunteers work tirelessly to collect the data on which a healthy river depends.

In September 2020 the Environment Agency (EA) published its latest data on the condition of England's rivers. Sadly, the percentage achieving good ecological status in 2019 remained unchanged, at 14%. More alarmingly, not a single river met good chemical status.

These findings are a wake-up call for every sector to play their role in a Green Recovery, especially now that the EA is carrying out less regular monitoring of its own. As a Rivers Trust, ARK is ideally placed to train its growing team of volunteers to carry out this vital survey work on everyone's behalf.

By improving our understanding of the sources of pollution we can work with householders, farmers, industry and water companies to keep our rivers cleaner. We are particularly pleased that our volunteer monitors include farmers who are taking a great interest in the cleanliness of the streams that flow across their land.

Looking ahead, we would welcome investment to build up a comprehensive

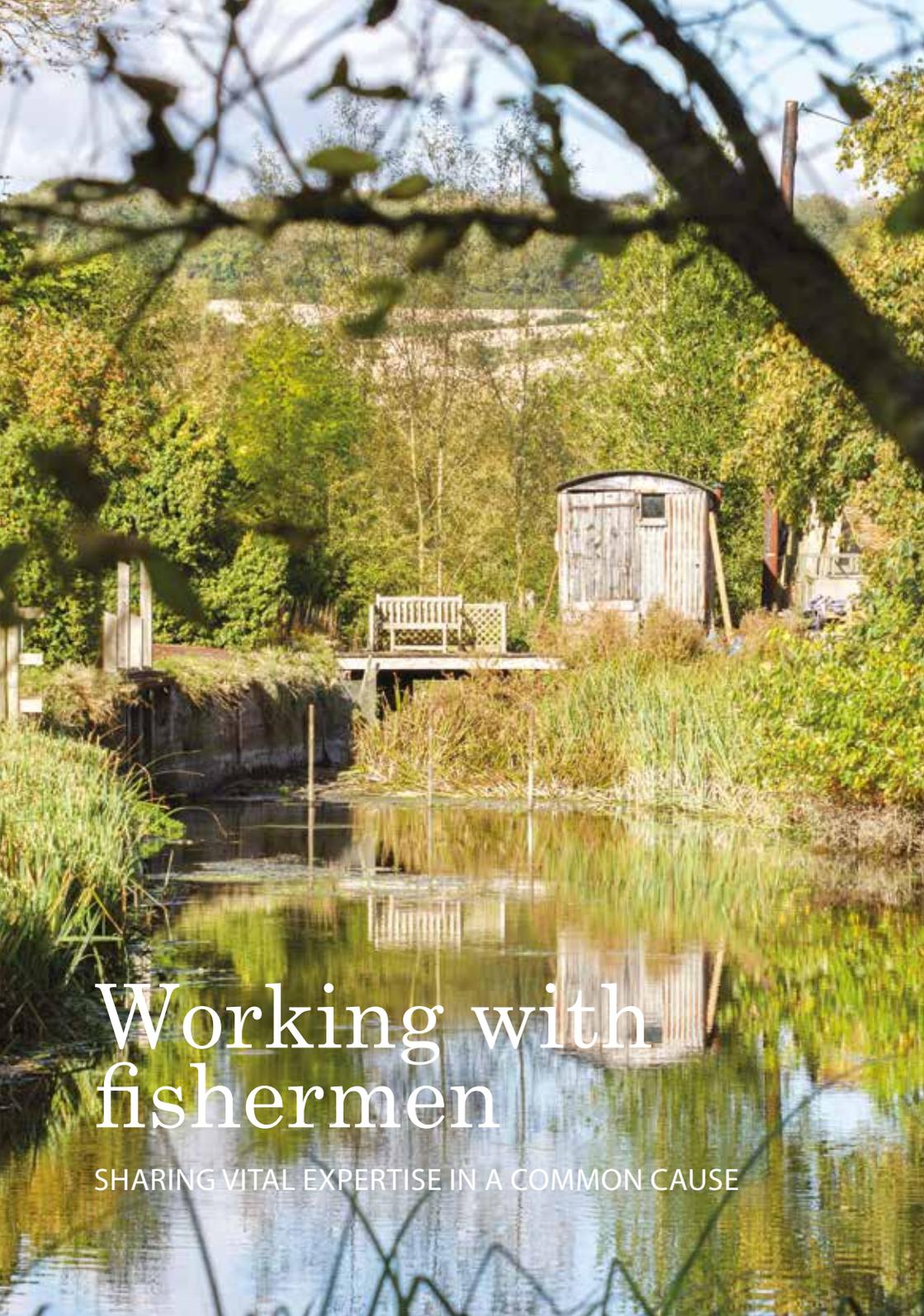
long-term picture of the condition of all the rivers and streams in the Kennet and Pang catchments

Checking the health of the rivers on a monthly basis is the job of our riverfly monitors and it has been reassuring that whenever any of them has to leave the area, other enthusiastic volunteers quickly step forward to fill the gap.

Alongside them, our water-vole surveyors have continued to enjoy wading the Kennet (albeit in socially distanced teams) looking for signs of this much-loved mammal that has nationally undergone a long-term decline. We were delighted that this summer's surveys also strengthened evidence of the presence of otters.

We recently discovered we are the only group sending in data for water voles in Wiltshire, so every record really does matter.

**Anna Forbes**  
Project Officer



# Working with fishermen

SHARING VITAL EXPERTISE IN A COMMON CAUSE



## ARK has forged a creative partnership with the Kennet's professional fishery managers.

Over the past three years, ARK has forged excellent relationships with the major fishing organisations in the Kennet catchment. As well as providing us with generous financial support, the fisheries have been extremely supportive in a variety of ventures such as hosting riverfly monitoring and redd-spotting courses. We are also delighted that the ARK committee now includes both a river keeper (Rob Starr) and an estate manager (David Hill).

In non-Covid years, the highlight of our Trout and Eels in Schools programmes are the days when the children release the little fish they have been nurturing in their classrooms. These are always enhanced by the presence of enthusiastic river keepers who delight the children with their knowledge of the river.

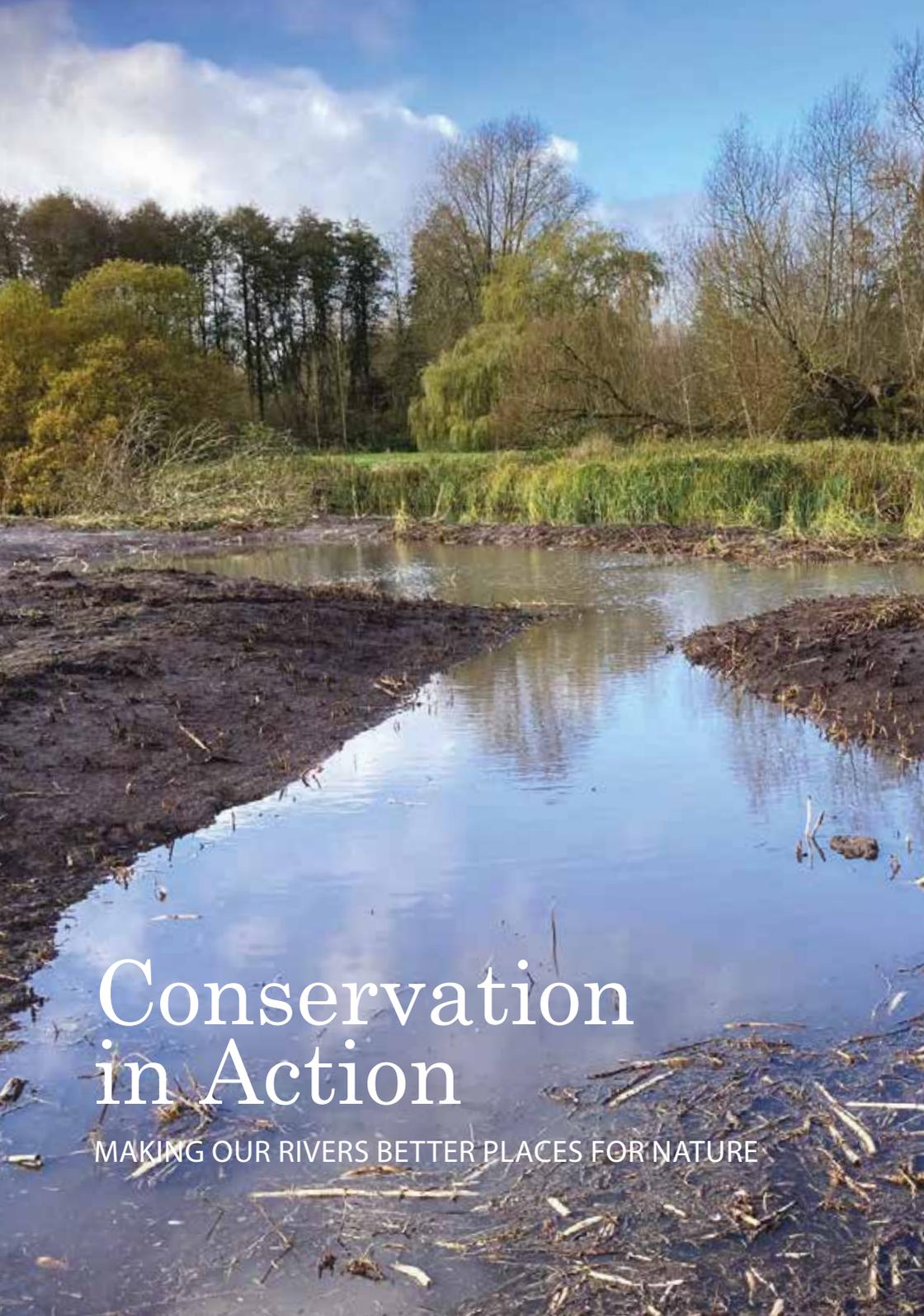
After the fish have been released, the children walk along the river where they are shown a variety of wildlife, the most exciting being the rather scary American signal crayfish whose pincers are best

avoided. These non-native invasive species are damaging to the fragile chalkstream habitat, so many river keepers are keen to remove them.

In return, ARK volunteers undertake riverfly monitoring to assess the health of the river and provide early warning of pollution events. We have also assembled work parties to help river keepers with habitat improvement and the planting of stream-water crowfoot (*Ranunculus penicillatus*), which provides food and shelter for a myriad of invertebrates and fish.

We also assist in planning river enhancement projects, particularly through liaison with the Environment Agency and Natural England. We can help to source funding and assist with grant applications and we take issues of mutual concern to the Kennet Catchment Partnership.

Sean Dempster  
Trustee



# Conservation in Action

MAKING OUR RIVERS BETTER PLACES FOR NATURE



## Covid-19 rules meant we were able catch up with vital maintenance in and beside the river.

Working on a larger scale we helped coordinate a professional river restoration project at Old Mill, Ramsbury which has transformed a uniform 'U' shaped, dredged channel into a sinuous stream with gently shelving margins creating a mosaic of wildlife habitats. We are particularly excited by the creation of some new areas of wetland reedbed, as well as two kingfisher nest boxes.

Elsewhere we had to adapt the way in which we organised our practical community conservation tasks during this challenging year, but their popularity was proved yet again by the flow of new volunteers joining us and the number of tasks that ended up fully booked.

Before these strange times, a wetland was created in the Froxfield water meadow. This was followed by a big community wetland planting day and the first phase of native hedge planting between the meadow and the busy A4.

Our volunteer digger operator at Froxfield was Wiltshire Councillor

James Sheppard, who also helped with wetland maintenance at Stonebridge Wild River Reserve in Marlborough. It's the willingness of members of the community like James to share their skills that allows us to deliver such high-quality projects, while keeping costs down.

To ensure social distancing much of our conservation this year has focused on maintenance – a welcome opportunity to catch up on boardwalk repairs and hedge pruning, not to mention a big litter pick in the river itself.

We are also gradually removing barriers to the movement of fish around the catchment – the next will be on the River Dun at Bearwater.

Heading into 2021, we are looking forward to new projects on the Rivers Og, Lambourn, Shalbourne and Pang, as well as developing plans for the lower river.

Charlotte Hitchmough  
Director

Anna Forbes  
Project Officer



# ARK in Schools

INTRODUCING YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE MAGIC OF FRESH WATER



## This may have been the year of the virtual classroom but it was still lots of fun!

Forging creative partnerships with local schools is one of ARK's top priorities. We believe it is vitally important that the next generation grows up feeling connected to their local river and its wildlife. And what's more, that they understand that it's everyone's responsibility to help ensure that those streams have lots of clean, healthy water flowing through them.

While some environmental charities closed, we chose to keep our workshops with schools in the Kennet catchment running as near to normal as social distancing allowed.

Supported by Thames Water and through the power of Zoom, primary school classes joined us for three sessions during which our Project Officer led from her kitchen table with the help of a tankful of European eels.

While the children have sadly been unable to join us at the river, nor we to visit them in their classroom, the river life can! Sanitised equipment was

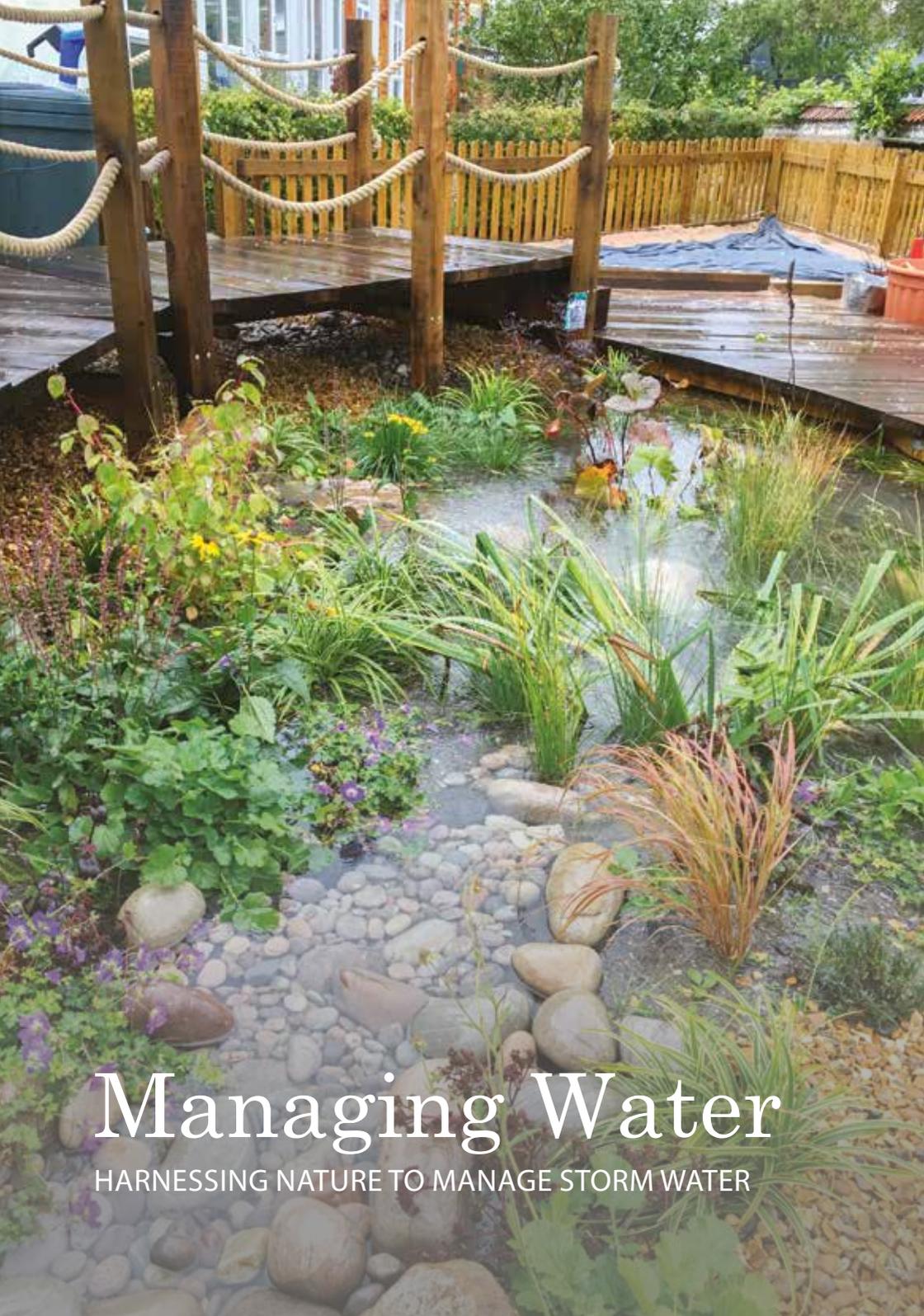
dropped off in advance and buckets of invertebrates and fish were then left outside the school office on the day of the virtual workshops.

Students have embraced these new virtual lessons. It may not be the same as getting out into the river, but the excitement when they started to investigate what was in their trays could be clearly heard across the internet.

We also made our Powerpoint presentations as interactive as we could, with clips of Kennet wildlife film interspersed with team activities and a quiz to help the children find out how to be Water Smart Champions!

In the new year we are hoping to add yet more schools to the 12 we worked with during the initial months of the Covid-19 emergency – just another example of the way in which ARK's programme of educational outreach never stands still.

**Anna Forbes**  
Project Officer



# Managing Water

HARNESSING NATURE TO MANAGE STORM WATER



## Looking for alternatives to bigger drainpipes and larger sewage treatment works.

Natural Flood Management and Sustainable Drainage are gradually making their way into the mainstream. Designed well, they harness the natural ability of soil, plants and trees to slow and clean rain water while at the same time controlling flooding, reducing river pollution and improving local spaces.

Over the last year ARK has been working with farmers, landowners, schools and parish councils to find new opportunities to include natural flood management in the landscape. We have completed outline designs for three new wetlands and a new school rain garden ready for construction when funding becomes available.

The farmers in the catchment are harnessing nature to manage rainwater too. Well managed soil, full of earth worms, plenty of organic matter and a robust structure soaks up and stores more water. Healthy soils not only benefit crops growing in them, but also the surrounding landscape, rivers and

streams. What's more, they are powerful tools in the battle to reduce flooding.



It is for all these reasons that we have been pleased to support workshops for farmers in the catchment, bringing some of the world's experts on soils, worms and soil management to the Kennet. We have so many interests in common and so much that we can achieve by working together.

**Charlotte Hitchmough**  
Director

# Accounts

## Year Ended 31 March 2019-20

### Statement of Financial Activities for the year to 31 March 2020

	Unrestricted funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds £	Prior period total funds £
<b>INCOME</b>				
Donations	43,441	-	43,441	31,954
Grants	18,845	64,037	82,882	108,641
Other trading activities	260	-	260	94
Investments	2,100	-	2,100	1,753
<b>Total</b>	<b>64,646</b>	<b>64,037</b>	<b>128,683</b>	<b>142,442</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>				
Raising funds	3,769	-	3,769	3,716
Charitable activities	56,432	88,834	145,266	158,952
Governance	2,796	-	2,796	2,842
<b>Total</b>	<b>62,997</b>	<b>88,834</b>	<b>151,831</b>	<b>165,510</b>
Net realised gains/(losses) on investments	(459)	-	(459)	-
<b>Net income/(expenditure)</b>	<b>1,190</b>	<b>(24,797)</b>	<b>(23,607)</b>	<b>(23,068)</b>
<b>Other recognised gains/(losses)</b> Gains/(losses) on revaluation of investments	<b>(8,294)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>(8,294)</b>	<b>(1,579)</b>
<b>Net Movement in Funds</b>	<b>(7,104)</b>	<b>(24,797)</b>	<b>(31,901)</b>	<b>(24,647)</b>
<b>RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS</b>				
Total funds brought forward	192,973	122,424	315,397	340,044
<b>Total funds carried forward</b>	<b>185,869</b>	<b>97,627</b>	<b>283,496</b>	<b>315,397</b>

### Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2020

ASSETS	2019 £	2018 £
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>		
Tangible assets	80,249	81,236
Investments	51,062	59,814
<b>Total fixed assets</b>	<b>131,311</b>	<b>141,050</b>
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Debtors	10,757	16,917
Cash at bank and in hand	151,233	175,650
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>161,990</b>	<b>192,567</b>
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	(9,805)	(18,220)
<b>Net current assets/(liabilities)</b>	<b>152,185</b>	<b>174,347</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>283,496</b>	<b>315,397</b>
<b>FUNDS OF THE CHARITY</b>		
Unrestricted funds	185,869	192,973
Restricted income funds	97,627	122,424
<b>Total funds</b>	<b>283,496</b>	<b>315,397</b>

#### NOTE

These financial statements, signed on 1 October 2020, 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:	Sean Dempster (Trustee), James Dallas (until November 2019), Kevin Light, Judy Pitts (from November 2019), Robert Starr, David Hill
Director:	Charlotte Hitchmough

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

## Benefactors and donors 2019-20

Blunt Trust  
Environment Agency  
G C Gibson Charitable Settlement  
Hobhouse Charitable Trust  
Hugh Pihlens  
Lord Rootes  
Natural England  
Penny Hill  
Revere Charitable Trust  
Richard and Judy Gosnell  
Thames Water

## The fishing estates and organisations who support us:

Avington/Denford  
Barton Court  
Chilton  
Craven  
Eastridge  
Englefield  
Famous Fishing  
Hungerford Town and Manor  
Kennet Valley Fisheries Association  
Marlborough College  
Morewood  
Newbury Angling Association  
Ramsbury Estates  
Ramsbury Manor  
Sutton Settled Estates  
Wasing Estate

## Our members, volunteers and supporters



## Action for the River Kennet

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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](http://www.riverkennet.org)

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