

Action for the River Kennet

River talk

A PARTNERSHIP OF PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT THE KENNET

A message from Claire Perry MP

I was horrified by the dried up state of the River in Marlborough and Manton when I visited earlier this year.



A perfect specimen of a lime-hawk moth

One of the many amazing species recorded during ARK's Stonebridge Meadow moth evening on 25 June.



What is a Redd?

Redds are the nests in which brown trout lay their eggs on the gravel floor of the river. Recording them is a vital part of ARK's conservation work and we already have a team of about twenty volunteer surveyors, if you would like to become one of them please contact Redd Co-ordinator Harry Forbes at annaforbes73@tiscali.co.uk

The River Kennet is one of the most beautiful natural features in the Devizes Constituency and plays a vital role in the eco system. I also know from letters and emails that many local people feel as passionately about this as I do.

After many years of discussion and lobbying by ARK I am delighted that progress is now being made on the

much-needed North-South Swindon pipeline solution which will reduce abstraction from the Kennet.

ARK does a wonderful job drawing public and political attention to the Kennet's plight as well as fantastic practical work on the ground. I hope to be able to join one of the volunteer working groups, one Wednesday this Summer.



News from the Chairman

As you will see from this edition of River Talk, ARK has been as active – and successful – as ever. And as always, we have good news and less good news.



Winter of Drought

We have been through one of the driest winters in recent history, followed by the one of the wettest springs. The recent heavy rains have restored the flows – at least for the time being. But it is too soon to know what effect the drought has had on the river wildlife, particularly the smaller invertebrates at the bottom of the food chain. The one up-side was that it drew stark attention to the vulnerability of the river – an opportunity that we did not fail to use.

Engaging our MPs

Last September, Charlotte Hitchmough and I met with the Minister for Environment and Fisheries, and MP for Newbury, Richard Benyon, together with our own Deveses MP Claire Perry and Tom LeQuesne (WWF-UK) on the dry river bed in Marlborough. The Minister was shocked by what he saw and referred to it in a speech in the Commons the following day.

That meeting led to Claire Perry inviting the All Party Parliament Group on Angling to visit the river. Accordingly in January Claire and we hosted a visit by Charles Walker

MP for Broxbourne and Chair of the APPG, and Martin Salter former MP for Reading West and now Campaigns Manager for the Angling Trust, to lament the dry river bed in Manton (see front cover).

Water for Life

In January the Government published its White Paper *Water for Life*. In response, we submitted written and oral evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, drawing attention to the Kennet's over-abstraction and broadly welcoming the policy direction, while urging a quicker timetable.

In its report published on 5 July the Committee quoted ARK's description of the Kennet as in 'crisis'. We are also very pleased they wholeheartedly support our argument for much more urgency in reforming the abstraction regime, and like us they call for the Government to introduce water metering much more vigorously.

Now we await publication of the Government's promised water bill. We shall study it and, I hope with Claire Perry's help, press for any necessary amendments.

Solving the abstraction problem

Thames Water and the Environment Agency have told us that funding is at last in place to build a new pipeline joining north and south Swindon – the critical step that will allow Thames Water to reduce its abstraction from Axford. They cannot, however, give us a timetable for its construction before the end of the year. We continue to press for a quicker outcome.

Water Metering

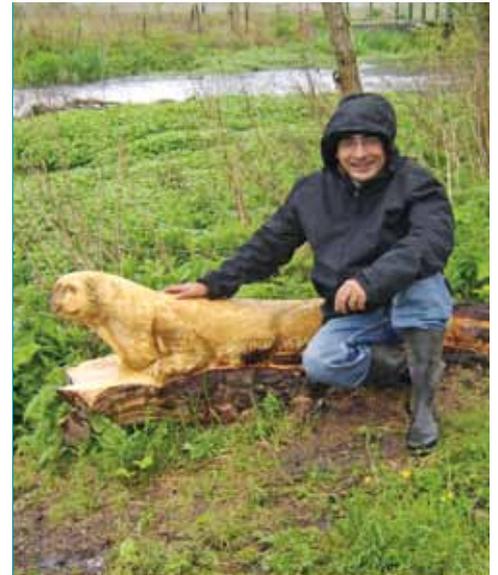
We have also heard recently that DEFRA has finally given Thames Water permission to start its long awaited programme of compulsory monitoring. Their plan is to fit 85,000 meters by April 2015 and then confirm the pace of the future roll out in their 2014 business plan. This is excellent news. All the national and international data shows the extent to which metering reduces consumption

Life for ARK and the river continues to be very interesting. I remain an optimist.

Geoffrey Findlay

ARK Street Collection

In March ARK held its first-ever street collection in Marlborough High Street. Thanks to everyone who gave their time to hold a tin or man the information stand, we raised more than £700 and recruited 19 new members. Courtesy of Thames Water, we also gave away lots of free water-saving gadgets and signed people up to the free water-saving home makeover.



Dr Asghar Nawab meets the local wildlife at Stonebridge Lane Wild River Reserve

Visitors from India

In May, Charlotte and I were delighted to host two visitors from India as part of the new Thames and Ganges Twinning Programme organised by Robert Oates, Director of Thames River Restoration Trust <http://trrt.org.uk> (of which ARK is a member).

We showed the visitors, Mr Manoj Misra (CEO, PEACE Institute, Delhi) and Dr Asghar Nawab (WWF India), around the work we are doing with volunteers in and around Stonebridge Meadow.

They have been remarkably successful in mobilising 14 village communities to monitor and report on the state of the upper reaches of the 1400 km holy River Yamuna – one of the major tributaries of the Ganges. Their rivers suffer similar problems to ours, so maybe we have something to learn here.

Geoffrey Findlay

ARK in the Spotlight

To keep the plight of the Kennet in people's minds we have worked with BBC's Panorama 'Drinking our Rivers Dry?' programme which was broadcast last autumn.

We have also kept up good local and national press coverage with features on BBC, ITN and CNN and articles in *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and local press. ARK and the River Kennet also featured in two of the BBC's regional 'Inside Out

Drought' programmes and in June Geoffrey Findlay was interviewed on the BBC Wiltshire Breakfast Show about the lifting of Thames Water's emergency hosepipe ban, while Charlotte Hitchmough was able to talk about the same subject on the main BBC's TV News.



Businesses and individuals who generously donated prizes to The Grand Pond Raffle:

Beauty Fulltime	Lighting of Distinction
Bertie Maffoon	Littlecote House Hotel
Bowood House & Gardens	Longleat
Bramble & Bows	Mark Carwardine
Castle & Ball Hotel	Marlborough College
Cholderton Charlie's Farm	Marlborough Golf Club
Costa Coffee	Marlborough Parade
Cotswold Wildlife Park	Antiques Centre
David Dudley Jeweller	Marlborough Teak
Deacon & Son	One Stop
Ducklings	Paul Maslin
East	Primrose Lane
Edinburgh Woollen Mill	Ramsbury Soap Bar
Elm Tree Motor Company	Company
Eric's Attic	Sheena Bird
Evergreen Optics	Sound Knowledge
Fair Isle	Studley Grange Butterfly
Fat Moon Trading	World
Geoffrey Findlay	Sumbler Bros
Godot's	The Bear, Marlborough
Haine & Smith	The Food Gallery
Hampton's International	The Lamb Inn, Marlborough
Hungerford Garden Centre	The Polly Tearooms
Kennet Pharmacy	The White Horse Book Shop
Kingsbury Hair & Beauty	WH Smith
Landmark	

This spring the Stonebridge boardwalk was extended so that more disabled people have access for the full length of Wild River Reserve. A beautiful sarsen stone has also been erected to recognise the contribution of WWF-UK and their past President HRH Princess Alexandra.

Stonebridge Lane Wild River Reserve

Stonebridge Meadow Day

Despite torrential rain and gale force winds we had a great turn-out for the Meadow Day on 29 April, organised by Anna and Harry Forbes. Friends and families braved the elements to see and hear about the amazing wildlife that lives in the River Kennet and the meadow that is being managed as a wild river reserve. On the guided walks, one of which was led by local author and wildlife expert Peter Marren, supporters of ARK had good views of an amazing range of species including greater spotted woodpecker, kingfisher, bullfinch, blackcap and four species of snail. There was also much evidence of the healthy water vole population.

ARK's riverfly monitors, who carry out important surveying of river invertebrates were on hand to help the many young children present explore the river and get up close to the wide variety of creatures that live in the riverbed.



Stonebridge Meadow Day – Explaining what the barley straw bales do in the river.

County Recorders at Stonebridge Lane

The Wiltshire County Recorders are a group of wildlife experts who give their time voluntarily to record specific groups of flora and fauna.

Following overtures from ARK, their chairman, Diptera recorder Anthony Bainbridge, suggested that they make the Stonebridge Lane Wild River Reserve their main focus for the year.

Among the many species recorded by the specialists during their frequent visits are more than 40 species of fungi, 13 different snails and numerous kinds of sawfly. The county reptile and amphibian recorder has also suggested that roofing-felt mats, which provide shelter for grass



Door Snail (*Clausiliidae*)

snakes as well as common toads and lots of other wildlife, should be used for regular surveying work by ARK's own volunteers.

Our public moth-trapping nights have continued this year, with one being led every month up until and including October by ARK and the Wiltshire moth recorder. So far this year more than 10 different species have been added to our moth list.

In April the small mammal recorder set 30 Longworth traps in the meadow and on the final day the public were invited to see the shrews, wood mice, bank voles and short-tailed voles as they were identified, sexed, weighed and released. This gave us a snapshot of a healthy and diverse population of small mammals living in the reserve

Others who have visited include the county bird recorder, who was pleased to see our bird-feeding area and fully endorsed the plans to keep a wild scrub area for the benefit of birds, particularly the rare grasshopper warblers that have used the site in previous years.

We also now have data from the recorders for Lichen and Diptera, and received a visit from the dragonfly recorder, who was pleased to hear about our plans for a large wildlife pond and reedbed.

All the information gathered will be used to shape the ongoing management plans for the reserve as well as being submitted to Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Record Centre, where they feed into the local and national data sets that help identify trends in species populations over time.

ARK's Stonebridge Meadow Project Officer Anna Forbes said, "We already know that the meadow is home to over seventy species of birds, we have an amazing diversity of wildlife. The County Recorder's skills are a fantastic asset. I am particularly enjoying the current reptile and amphibian surveying work and can't wait to find out what else we have living and growing here."

Harry and Anna Forbes



Common Shrew
(*Sorex araneus*)

Kennet Catchment Partnership

On 18 June ARK hosted the Kennet Catchment Partnership Habitat Restoration Workshop.

The event was held at the Nature Discovery Centre, Thatcham and was attended by invited landowners, fishing clubs, river managers and environmental professionals. Its aim was to identify areas of the River Kennet and its tributaries downstream from Hungerford that need work to help them to reach 'good ecological status'. Charlotte Hitchmough, who co-ordinated the meeting said 'The event was incredibly successful, I was hoping to come away with ideas for two or three projects and the group came up with 27 ideas – many of which I think we will be able to turn into positive action on the river'.

The speakers included expert in river restoration Vaughan Lewis, and Environment Agency technical specialist Paul St Pierre, as well as speakers from Natural England and ARK. The meeting and the projects that emerge from it are part of ARK's work as Catchment Hosts for the River Kennet Catchment Management Plan. The plan is designed to show how the Kennet and its tributaries can meet 'Good Ecological Status' as defined by the European Water Framework Directive.

Charlotte Hitchmough



Riverfly Training Day

On 16 June ARK held a riverfly monitoring training day at Marlborough Town Football Club and Stonebridge Meadow.

Organised by ARK's Riverfly Co-ordinator Harry Forbes, the course was funded by the Environment Agency through the Riverfly Partnership (RP) and led by RP-accredited tutors Cyril Bennett, Warren Gilchrist and Peter Francis. It was attended by nine ARK volunteers, some of whom had already been given informal training and been monitoring for several months.

Riverfly monitoring is carried out by anglers, conservationists, river keepers and others interested in the health and biodiversity of rivers. ARK currently has 17 riverfly sites, which we aim to monitor once every month. Soon the number will be rising to over 25 sites, with many more planned for the seriously under-monitored Berkshire Kennet.

The data which ARK currently collects has proved invaluable for assessing the relative health of different stretches of river and trends in riverfly populations. Riverfly monitoring is often the first way of telling if a watercourse is polluted and in other parts of the country it has allowed incidents to be resolved before they become really serious. ARK would like to thank Cyril, Warren and Peter for holding their last-ever riverfly training day on the Kennet and making it so informative and enjoyable.

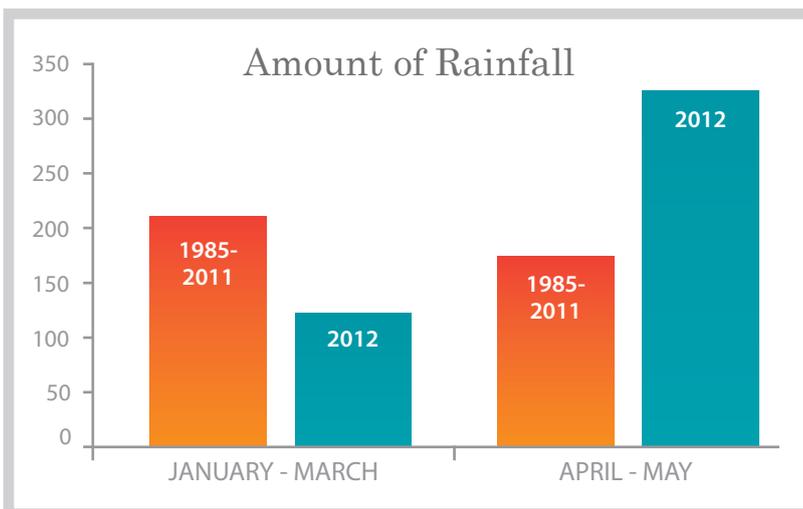
If you would like to become a riverfly monitor at a stretch of river on the Berkshire Kennet please email ARK's Riverfly Co-ordinator Harry Forbes at annaforbes73@tiscali.co.uk

Harry Forbes

Drought then rain, rain and more rain

2011 was the second driest year since 1984. Its 663 mm of rain was 79% of the long-term average.

The trend for low rainfall continued into the first three months of 2012 when just 122 mm fell, which is 58% of the long-term average and a shortfall of 90 mm.



The scene changed dramatically from April onwards as the jet stream relocated much further south, allowing successive depressions to traverse the country. The following three months produced a total of 324.8 mm, which is 187% of long-term average. Although May was close to the average there were thirteen days in April (the third wettest on record) and June (second wettest) with daily totals into double figures. In fact there were almost as many dry days in March (26) as the total for April to June (30).

With the level of local aquifers under much attention (by mid-June they had thankfully returned to their long-term average having been exceptionally low throughout

the winter and spring) it is also important to know the amount of evaporation and transpiration over a given period. This loss of water vapour to the air usually starts to exceed rainfall towards the end of March. This year saw a reversal, with a net loss of 25 mm in March but a net gain of 136 mm for April to June.

Eric Gilbert

To learn more about Marlborough's weather data, visit Eric's website at www.windrushweather.co.uk



Care for the Kennet

Care for the Kennet is ARK's community-led project to raise awareness of the importance of the river as a water resource and a wildlife haven, especially among children and young people. With the help of Thames Water, the project is offering all sections of the local community the opportunity to learn more about the river, and giving them practical ways to reduce their impact on it by using less water.

Led by Jenny Harker (see back page), ARK has recently visited schools, colleges, community events, fairs, shops, leisure centres and U3A groups, as well as running a press campaign, a poster campaign and direct letter writing.

This spring 13 local schools have taken part in the programme, with individual projects tailored to the schools' requirements, and run by an experienced local teacher or me. Two of the topics, 'Mayfly in the Classroom' and 'Trout in the Classroom' are all about connecting children with the natural ecology of their local river while 'Water Warriors' is designed to help them learn practical ways of using less water in their homes.

Charlotte Hitchmough

ARK People

Mike Mathews

We are very sorry to announce the death in June of Mike Mathews, past member of the Committee, and Ramsbury resident. A former mining engineer, he applied his professional skills to ARK's abstraction problems, for which we were all grateful. He will be missed by all who knew him, and ARK's sympathies go to his widow Doretta and their family.

Jenny Harker



A professional teacher and biologist, Jenny is our schools officer and has been very busy this term working with schools on Care for the Kennet water saving projects and piloting the first Mayfly Classroom sessions.

Rodney Owen-Jones



A long-time resident of Ramsbury and a keen fisherman and naturalist, Rodney will be helping ARK with its scientific research following his retirement as a local GP.

Rowan Whimster



An archaeologist by training and a Kennet Valley resident for more than 20 years, Rowan has recently become our volunteer Newsletter editor.

Dates for your Diary

7 October - Postponed

This year's river walk will be from Ramsbury to Chilton Foliat. Check the ARK website www.riverkennet.org
New date will be on the ARK website once rearranged

Revised date 22 November

ARK's AGM will be held in the Ramsbury Memorial Hall

November

ARK's new full-colour calendar illustrating the Kennet through the seasons goes on sale in time for your Christmas present shopping!

For up to date news and events please go to the ARK website www.riverkennet.org

Websites worth visiting



The Riverfly Partnership

is a network of nearly 100 partner organisations, representing anglers, conservationists, entomologists, scientists, water-course managers and relevant authorities,

working together to:

- protect the water quality of our rivers,
- further the understanding of riverfly populations,
- and actively conserve riverfly habitats.

<http://www.riverflies.org>



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Members of ARK receive a copy of this newsletter either by mail or email.

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

We hope you have enjoyed this newsletter and if you have any comments or ideas for future issues, do please pass them on!

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