



Crayfish campaign



Hugh Fearnley Whittingstall and the production company 'Keo Films' visited the River Kennet in May to look at the problem of the invasive 'American Signal Crayfish' species. After three days filming the story was shown in episode two of 'River Cottage Spring' on Channel 4.

American Signal Crayfish are voracious creatures which have driven out our native crayfish by out-competing them and by spreading a virus which is fatal to the native crayfish. As a result native crayfish are now thought to be completely absent from the Kennet.

ARK ran a two week intensive crayfish trapping experiment with Hugh Fearnley Whittingstall and the River Cottage team. We set 20 traps in a 40 metre stretch of mill stream. ARK Treasurer, Martin Gibson emptied the traps each day and monitored the results. We expected that over time the number and size of crayfish caught would diminish. Amazingly, although we caught over 140 crayfish there was no pattern of reduction, suggesting that there are hundreds of thousands of crayfish in the upper Kennet. To have any real impact we would need to scale up the project and set more than 100 traps in a similar length of river.

From an ecological perspective, simply catching large crayfish has no positive impact

Crayfish expert, Professor David Rogers said 'it is essential to take out the young as well as the adult crayfish if you want to reduce the population'. From an ecological perspective simply catching large crayfish has no positive impact: taking out the mature crayfish from the top of the food chain releases a space for the smaller crayfish to grow and flourish and upsets the established status quo. However, mass intensive trapping using traps adapted to take young and adult crayfish could be an effective way to create a breathing space for a number of native species usually eaten by crayfish, these include caddis-flies, bullheads and trout.

So, the challenge we then set Hugh was to find a recipe that made good culinary use of the tiny crayfish that are just too fiddly to bother with normally. It's fair to say he came up trumps. Starting the recipe by frying up baby crayfish, shells and all, he created a base for the delicious bisque. Hugh added the whole

cooked crayfish tails and claws to the bisque and served it with fresh Kennet brown trout, homemade bread and green leaves straight from the polytunnel at River Cottage—scrumptious!

Keo films have kindly provided funding towards the cost of crayfish traps and we will be starting an experimental intensive trapping programme in the near future.



Filming in Mildenhall, May 2008

Abstraction at Axford —good news at last?

Thames Water has announced its aspiration to reduce abstraction at Axford to 6 mega-litres per day during low river flow periods. This compares to the current average daily abstraction of 11 mega-litres per day and 13 mega litres per day peak. The new regime would come become effective by 2016. Thames Water announced this in their recent draft Water Resources Management Plan. The future of Axford now lies with OFWAT (the regulatory body for the water industry), which has to approve the plan. The figure of 6MI/d is the amount recommended by the Environment Agency's 'Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy'. John Lawson, ARK's technical adviser said 'This reduction represents the best outcome ARK could realistically hope for, and I hope OFWAT will support Thames Water in this proposal. We will press for the reduction to take place before 2016, if possible'.

Roger de Vere, Vice Chairman and co-founder of ARK said 'We have been battling against this water abstraction since Jack Ainslie, Alistair Service and I set up the first ARK meeting 18 years ago. It's taken a long time, and I hope this turns out to be the solution we have all been working for'.

Jubilee Field, Manton

Thanks to all the Manton residents and ARK members who turned out in force in May for a maintenance morning at the Jubilee Field, Manton.

We cleared overgrown vegetation, removed bottles and litter from the river, shored up an undercut bank, raked off cut grass from the meadow area and enjoyed the sunshine. The river is looking in good shape on this reach thanks to the efforts of all the volunteers over the last two years. The Town Council has adopted a new grass cutting regime to encourage meadow flowers and to reduce erosion at the river's edge.



Tim Clark and Richard Pitts manhandle a Sarsen stone into place. Photo: Richard Clark

'Reclaim our River' - Priory Gardens official opening

The Mayor of Marlborough, Peggy Dow, officially opened the 'new' riverbank at Priory Gardens in July. She is pictured below sitting on one of the 'trout benches' carved from oak by local craftsman Raymond Wirick. The event was the final stage of the 'Reclaim our River' project, funded by the Big Lottery Fund People's Millions. Thank you to everyone who helped this project come to fruition.



Peggy Dow enjoys the novel seating. Photo: Pete Davison

Crayfish 'dos and don'ts'

Do make sure you have permission from the riparian owner. The fishing rights on the river are closely guarded and to take crayfish from part of the river without permission is poaching.

Do make sure you have a valid EA trap licence. It's free, but you need one to be legal.

Do make sure you can recognise the difference between American Signal and Native crayfish. It's thought that the native species have been eradicated in the Kennet, but in other rivers across England they still thrive. The native crayfish is a protected species (see newsletter supplement.)

Do kill your crayfish by freezing them. This is believed to be the most humane method.

Do consider cleansing your crayfish by leaving them in a tank of clean water with some par-cooked potato for them to eat before you cook them.

Do check traps regularly.

Don't ever put an American Signal Crayfish back into the river. They are an alien species and its illegal to put them into any water course.

Don't ever release crayfish or let them escape! If you catch one you must kill it (even if it's a tiddler).



Small signal crayfish

Cooper's Meadow, Marlborough

We are delighted to announce that in addition to the funding given by Kennet District Council and MADT, we have just been awarded further funding from the Thames Rivers Restoration Trust for the Cooper's Meadow river and habitat restoration project.

We have been working with our 'Reclaim our River' partners on a plan to revitalise both the river and the meadow at Cooper's Meadow, Marlborough.

Cooper's Meadow is the area of grassland in the centre of Marlborough between Town Mill and George Lane. The river here is in a sad state, at a point where it could be a classic sparkling chalkstream alive with water weed, reeds, fish and water vole.



View from footbridge looking along the river between Cooper's Meadow and Town Mill, showing tall poplars.

The first priority for the project is to restore the chalkstream habitat by building a new bank structure; creating a better channel shape and planting native riverbank flowers. We have asked for permission to remove the tall poplar trees, which shade the river. They are an exceptionally tall, fast-growing non-native species and have a limited future in

Water weeds, like water crowfoot and starwort, are essential to a healthy chalk stream, providing both a place for insect larvae to develop and a refuge for fish.



Bare banks (left) will be re-profiled and planted with native marginal plants to look create a faster flowing, more natural river, similar to that now in Manton (right).

their current site. More light reaching the river will encourage water weeds like starwort and water crowfoot to flourish and allow marginal vegetation like rushes and flag iris to grow. Water weeds are essential to a healthy chalk stream. Weed provides a place for insect larvae to develop and a refuge for fish.

The second stage of the project will be to revitalise the water meadow by planting traditional meadow flowers and digging areas, called 'scrapes', which stay marshy all year round. This will provide habitat for water-loving plants like marsh marigold as well as typical meadow plants like meadowsweet and hemp agrimony.

The aim is to create a space that's better for people and for wildlife, with a walkway and interpretive panels pointing out wild plants and animals to see.

Marlborough Town Council, who manage the meadow on behalf of the Town are actively supporting the regeneration and have welcomed the proposals.

Much of the hard landscaping work will be done by contractors, but we will be looking for volunteers to help with planting and other elements of the project. If you'd like to help, please register your interest at volunteers@riverkennet.org and keep an eye on our website for more information.

Photographic survey of the Kennet

We would like to compile a photographic survey of the River Kennet as it is now and as it was once. So we are inviting all members and others interested to

- let us have any photos they have already got of the River, either recent or from previous decades; and
- to take new photos of any stretch or stretches at different times of year.

To add interest we will run a competition with a prize for the three best photos submitted; and we will publish the final collection of photos in a booklet. To give plenty of time to take photos all year round, we are setting a deadline of next (2009) midsummer day. Entries must state where and when they were taken. Photos will be returned on request. Start looking out your old photos now; and start taking new pictures and we will give more details in the next Newsletter.

Autumn River Walk & Teas

26th October 2008, 2pm
Elcot Lane, Marlborough to
Stitchcombe



Walkers on the stepping stones at Swallowhead Spring, the traditional source of the Kennet (March 2008). Photo: Val Compton

Following the very successful Spring River walk from West Overton to the Source of the Kennet at Swallowhead Springs, our Autumn river walk will follow the popular route from Marlborough to Stitchcombe. David and Mary Fishlock are kindly providing teas at their riverside house. As usual the 'Ramsbury Flyer' minibus will be on hand to ferry walkers from Stitchcombe back to Marlborough, although everyone is welcome to walk both ways! The walk is approximately 3 miles each way. **Sorry, no dogs on this occasion.** Parking is available on Elcot Lane. All welcome.

Riverfly monitoring

The riverfly monitoring programme has completed its first full year, with data from August 2007 to July 2008 at two sites. This has provided a valuable 'base line' of information on riverfly populations. River Keeper Eddie Starr has also joined the scheme at a third site at Ramsbury.

July's monitoring in Marlborough was done by Malcolm Hanson's teenaged fly-fishing students from Marlborough College Summer School. Many thanks to them, and to young ARK member Harry Forbes who has been helping with monitoring all year.

Could you spend two hours twice a year to help us keep this valuable monitoring going? Please email volunteers@riverkennet.org. It's a great way to learn more about the ecology of the river at the same time as contributing the national Riverfly Partnership initiative. To find out more visit www.riverflies.org.

Annual General Meeting ARK AGM

Minal Village Hall, Mildenhall 6.30pm

Wednesday October 22nd, 2008

This newsletter is published 3 times a year. We welcome articles from readers. Please contact Charlotte Hitchmough at info@riverkennet.org if you have any suggestions.

Trout ARK: Bear Grylls releases Ramsbury School's baby trout



Adventurer and TV star Bear Grylls visited Ramsbury School to help the children release their 'Trout ARK' fish. In true adventurer style Bear refused to don wellies and instead rolled up his trousers and waded into the water to help each child choose a fish from the bucket and release it into the Kennet. Bear said that the opportunity to rear fish from eggs and then release them into the river was providing a valuable lesson in ecology and he encouraged the children to 'get out and enjoy the outdoors and the water'.

Preshute School's trout were released just before the Easter holidays by Cllr Peggy Dow, Marlborough's Mayor, and both schools will be running the project with a new group of children next year.

MADT have donated £2000 to enable a further two schools to participate in 2008/9. If you know a primary school, close to the Kennet, that would like to take part please call Charlotte on 01672 513672 or email info@riverkennet.org.

Thanks to all our sponsors especially the North Wessex Downs AONB, TH White Group, Marlborough Town Council, Ramsbury Parish Council, Wooley and Wallis, Brewin Dolphin, Berkshire Trout Farm, RSM Bentley Jennison & Wood Awdry Ford.

Mill Lane Triangle

Bear Grylls was also able to join ARK and Ramsbury Parish Council opening the Mill Lane Triangle site in Ramsbury. The two



organisations have purchased the land to safeguard it for future generations to enjoy. Many thanks to Alistair Ewing for his kind donation of Ramsbury Ale to help the event go with a swing.

