

Action for the River Kennet

# River talk

A PARTNERSHIP OF PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT THE KENNET

## Kennet Celebration

After more than a quarter of a century of campaigning ARK's founding goal is in sight.

On 23 June more than 100 people joined Action for the River Kennet and Thames Water to celebrate the completion of the new pipeline which will allow Thames Water to reduce the quantity of water they export from the River Kennet.

To mark the occasion Thames Water's CEO Steve Robertson presented ARK's President Sir Nigel Thompson with a photo of the River Kennet (see page 3). Steve thanked ARK for showing Thames Water a new way of doing business which put the environment at its heart.

Minal Cricket Club provided a beautiful venue, with John Gale's field giving access to the river. After a delicious lunch, guests were able to try their hand at fly casting, experiment with the EmRiver stream simulator, play bug bingo and examine some of the amazing archaeological finds discovered in the path of the pipeline.

We were delighted to welcome students from St John's Marlborough, Marlborough College, Ramsbury Primary School and Long Lane Primary School. All the students have played an important part in improving the River Kennet, by becoming more water efficient,



raising eels for release into the River and helping with practical habitat restoration. MP Richard Benyon waded into the river to help the children release their eels.

Among the guests were local river keepers, ARK volunteers and NGOs as well as representatives from Natural England, the Environment Agency, Thames Water, WWF, the Angling Trust and government.

You can read more about this exciting story on page 3.

[Charlotte Hitchmough](#)

**Photo:** Steve Robertson, CEO of Thames Water and Richard Benyon MP help pupils from Ramsbury Primary School release baby eels into the Kennet at Mildenhall during ARK's special day of celebrations.

© Clearwater Photography

# News from the Chairman

Last winter was the driest October to March for 20 years and rainfall since has only been 30% of the average spring rainfall.

The Kennet is suffering; flows in the first week of July were down to 97.3 million litres per day (Ml/d) at Knighton, near Axford. I probably don't need to quote the statistics at you because if you have been to the river recently you will have seen for yourselves how low it is. The water quality looks wonderful and the in-stream and emergent flora beautiful, but there is just not enough water for this time of year. If it stays dry for the next few months the Kennet, its fishery and its wildlife will be put under even greater strain, so let us hope for a typical wet summer.

When Global Warming or, to be correct, climate change first appeared in the media in the mid-1990s, I am sure a few of us had sneaking thoughts that it might lead to glorious Mediterranean summers being experienced in southern England. By 2010 climate predictions for Britain were for cooler and wetter summers. That is the problem with climate change – it is not easy to predict and particularly so for a small group of islands sitting a short distance from a large continent. I once heard an eminent climate scientist describing the prediction of how the British climate will change as being as difficult as choosing the correct lottery numbers.

While we cannot exactly predict climate change, and whether we will

experience wetter or drier seasons we can be fairly sure that the demand for water will continue and may even increase. And the weather patterns we are experiencing seem to favour extreme dry spells followed by cloudburst-type rain, for which we are ill prepared.

This summer's low flows mean that Thames Water's new pipeline is being used for the first time to reduce the quantity of water exported from the Kennet Catchment. Very good news for the Kennet, but not a complete solution. The demand for water in the Kennet Valley has to be met from the River Kennet and its aquifer. And this is where you play your part. Millions of litres per day are taken from the River Kennet for local consumption. Think about how much water you use at home; if you run a business that uses water how much do you use? There is plenty of practical support available to homes and businesses, including Thames Water's Smarter Home visits and WWF's Water Stewardship programme for businesses (<http://catchmentbasedapproach.org/resources/waterlife/business/tools-and-resources-for-businesses>).

So I would like to ask you to use water wisely from your River Kennet and if you could do a Rain Dance that would be much appreciated.



Here is hoping for more rain through the summer, and importantly into the winter, so the aquifer can refill and the river can bounce back again.

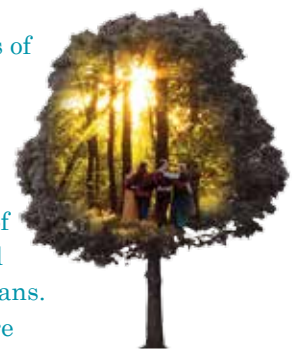
Richard Clarke

## As You Like It Comes to Harbrook

OUDS (Oxford University Dramatic Society) are bringing another stunning open air performance to Harbrook on Saturday 26 August. The performance of Shakespeare's ever-popular play

will be on the banks of the River Kennet in the beautiful gardens of Mark and Sarah Evans.

Guests are invited to bring a picnic and enjoy the setting before sitting down to watch the performance. Tickets will be on sale at £25 per person and numbers will be limited, strictly on a first come first served basis. If you would like to reserve places please email [linda@riverkennet.org](mailto:linda@riverkennet.org)



# At Last!

ARK has been campaigning since 1990 for a reduction in abstraction from the River Kennet...

... And now the new pipeline that has been constructed by Thames Water between Farmoor in Oxfordshire and Swindon makes it all possible.

The £25 million investment gives Thames Water the ability to reduce the quantity of water they export from the catchment to Swindon by linking South Swindon to Farmoor Reservoir as well as the Kennet aquifers. When river flow at Knighton (near Ramsbury) falls to 100 MI/d, abstraction will be reduced to 7MI/d with only 3MI/d exported to Swindon in order to protect the river environment.

Thames Water shares ARK's view that there are benefits to the environment from reducing abstraction further. They have made a commitment to limit abstraction at Axford to 7.9 MI/d or lower, when the flow in the River Kennet reaches 166 MI/d and water from Farmoor is available. While welcoming this commitment, ARK would like to see the export of water from the Kennet catchment reduced to zero, with water consumption limited to local use only. We look forward to working with Thames Water to achieve this goal.

[Charlotte Hitchmough](#)

# The Big Picnic

We've always involved people of all ages with ARK but are thrilled to be running a project specifically for local teenagers at Stonebridge Wild River Reserve, Marlborough.

Stonebridge Get Involved is possible thanks to a successful funding bid to the Local Youth Network (LYN). The project has several elements including a focus group of local teens playing a key role in organising The Big Picnic.

This free event will take place on Saturday 9 September and is for everyone of all ages. Families or individuals – the old, the young and all ages in between – are invited to bring a picnic and enjoy it in the water meadow. Whether you're a regular visitor to the reserve or have not yet discovered this beautiful 15 acre water meadow that is jointly owned by ARK and Marlborough Town Council we'd love you to come along.

For those wanting to find out more about the wildlife that lives in and by a chalk river you can take part in our popular River School sessions and participate in some river dipping. You can also go on a wildlife stroll with award-winning natural history author Peter Marren who will be sharing his extensive knowledge on the flora and fauna at the reserve.

[Anna Forbes](#)



**Photo:** Steve Robertson, CEO of Thames Water presents ARK President Sir Nigel Thompson with a framed picture of the River Kennet to celebrate the opening of the new Farmoor to Swindon pipeline. © Clearwater Photography

# Farmers Joining Together to Tackle Environmental Challenges

## Why are English farmers so bad at co-operating compared with their French and German counterparts?

In Europe, all sorts of cooperative agricultural organisations seem to be able to rub along together quite well, benefiting from the economies of scale that co-operation brings. How is it then that the Facilitation Fund, launched by DEFRA three years ago, has been such a success?

The Facilitation Fund is a pot of EU money that farmers can access if they come together to form a group. The group can be based on geography (for instance farmers whose land makes up the catchment of a particular stream) or landscape (for instance farmers in a particular part of the North Wessex Downs) and the group can be big or small (minimum 2000 hectares and four farmers). The farmers together decide what training, information and resources they wish to access; they also decide what they want to do in their catchment or area, rather than being told by others what they should be doing.

By taking ownership of the environmental challenges in their area, the farmers in the group are more likely to be successful in

meeting those challenges, backed up by the resources provided by the Facilitation Fund. So it was no surprise that the meeting that ARK held in Eastbury in March was well-attended by over 20 farmers. Charlotte Hitchmough (ARK), Tim Clarke (FWAG SE) and Gemma Batten (Black Sheep Agronomy) explained to the farmers how the Facilitation Fund worked in practice. Gemma recounted her experience of bringing together a Facilitation Fund group in the Marlborough Downs.

One big advantage to farmers of being members of a Facilitation Fund group is that when they apply to join the Countryside Stewardship scheme (to get paid to help biodiversity, water quality, farmland birds and mammals, invertebrates and the historic environment), their application will be looked at in a favourable light.

So far, uptake of the Facilitation Fund has resulted in the setting up of over 60 groups in England involving more than 1300 farmers and farm managers who collectively manage over 270,000 hectares.

What's more, every round of the Facilitation Fund bidding process has been oversubscribed. What happens in the future is uncertain, but if the popularity of the fund signifies anything, it is that there is an appetite among farmers to work together to nurture and improve the environment.

**Timothy Clarke**



# Riverfly Monitoring Going From Strength to Strength

2017 marks the 10th anniversary of ARK's vital programme of scientific survey

It is hard to believe that it is ten years since our initial Riverfly Partnership training day. Its aim was to empower local people to monitor the health of the river and detect pollution at just a couple of sites. We've come a long way since then, thanks to the time and long-term commitment from our dedicated and growing team of volunteers.

Fifty two sites along the River Kennet and its tributaries are now being monitored on a monthly basis by trained volunteers who have attended Riverfly Partnership accredited workshops and shadowed existing monitors to gain confidence and refine their skills.

Our Project Officer Anna Forbes is an accredited Riverfly Partnership tutor (ARK is the partnership's hub for the Kennet catchment) and monitor. She also oversees and supports our other monitors and processes all of the monthly data, which is shared with the Environment Agency and Riverfly Partnership (the umbrella organisation for the riverfly movement).



This year we have run two workshops in Ramsbury on the Kennet and one in Newbury on the Lambourn, as a result of which twenty more attendees are now recognised monitors. The workshops are a combination of informative presentation, a practical session in the river refining sampling techniques and then back to a local hall with the kick samples to hone identification expertise. The workshops are also a good way for our volunteers to meet other

monitors and see they are part of a team working collectively to protect the river. In 2013 it was the vigilance of our riverfly monitors that first detected a major pollution incident involving the release of the deadly insecticide Chlorpyrifos into the Kennet in Marlborough and as a result allowed swift remedial action to be taken – powerful evidence that citizen science really does play a crucial role.

[Anna Forbes](#)

## Hungerford's Eddington Mill

**Could sluice failure be re-wilding opportunity?**

The River Kennet, like most English rivers has been constantly modified over hundreds of years. Each modification, whether to power mills, irrigate fields, supply drinking water, fill lakes or provide navigation takes the river a step away from its natural state.

We know that rivers in their unmodified state are more resilient to floods and droughts. They also support a wider variety of wildlife. Steps towards rewilding can often be very beneficial.

In June 2017 the sluices at Hungerford's Eddington Mill failed, releasing water and allowing the river upstream to revert to its natural state for the first time in hundreds of years. The structure originally held back the river to supply water to the mill, which was mentioned in the 1086 Domesday

Book, and was developed and expanded during the 20th Century when it provided flour to Bath and the West Country. The mill ceased operation around 1950. Since then the impounding structures have been in place, but only served to feed a small fishing lake.

The failure offers an opportunity to explore options for creating a wilder river upstream, at the same time as finding a different way to supply water to the fishing lake.

[Charlotte Hitchmough](#)



## Gardening With a Difference

ARK is very excited to be working with Preshute School to create a rain garden.

The centrepiece will be a new rain wall to catch, slow and filter water draining from the school roof. As part of the school's entry for Britain in Bloom, school volunteers have been smartening up the front of the school and planting lots of new plants. These will all protect bare soil, slow down and filter water, as well as improving air quality and making a more pleasant environment for students and staff to enjoy. Run off from the tarmac playground will be caught and filtered through a new planted rain garden instead of rushing along the road into drains and into the river.

The garden is designed by Wendy Allen, winner of an RHS Gold Medal at Hampton Court Flower Show for her Rain Chain show garden.

Charlotte Hitchmough

## ARK Community Restoration Project Complete

The River Dun at Hungerford has undergone a transformation thanks to our Bearwater Community River Days project.



During April and May we invited Hungerford residents to join our regular volunteers in returning this stretch of the Dun to a more natural state.

Forty seven volunteers contributed 600 hours of work to create a new habitat for many chalk-stream species. The thousands of native marginal plants they planted will send out roots and hold together the newly constructed sinuous riverbank corridor revetments. It is hoped that in time fish will benefit from the cover, freshwater invertebrate populations will increase and wildfowl have new places to nest. We're also confident that water vole will soon be back as permanent residents. A pre-project survey recorded no field signs of the animals but in July we not only saw but filmed one – proof that putting back the missing piece in the corridor allows populations to successfully spread out and colonise.

Bearwater's elderly residents were a major part of this project, from overseeing deliveries on the first

day and running a fund-raising coffee morning to baking cakes and making teas and coffees to keep our volunteers fuelled.

Anne Maddison, Bearwater Manager, and her staff got into the river to join in, as well as organising car parking for volunteers, storing our equipment and liaising with the Methodist church to let us have free use of their hall for lunch breaks and loos. Directors and other managers from Cognatum, the not-for-profit organisation that owns the Bearwater residential estate, took part too by getting into waders and helping out in the river.

The weather was kind to us and while participants gained knowledge about chalk streams and river restoration everyone had a really good time too.

This project was funded by Thames Water Rivers and Wetlands Community Days, Co-op Local Community Fund, Bearwater and the Bearwater coffee morning.

Anna Forbes

# Eels in Schools

Thanks to Thames Water funding, ARK's Eels in Schools project continues to make great strides.



Three primaries and one secondary school enjoyed the project this year. After collecting the tiny glass eels, fished from the River Severn, each school looked after about 100 of them for two months, watching them grow and develop the adaptations that will be vital for survival to adulthood.

We've explained the incredible journey and amazing capabilities of the European eel to over 400 students. We've also wowed them with facts like the eel's ability to survive out of water for several hours and that it adapts its biochemistry throughout its lifecycle to live first in marine waters, then fresh before returning to a marine environment to spawn.

Each group of students has been inspired to learn scientific investigation techniques, develop their creative confidence writing poetry or hone maths skills. Our Invertebrates Sessions, part of the

project, not only introduce food webs but the importance of conserving water to ensure that all aquatic and other river dependent species are able to thrive.

The grand finale of the project is a trip to a local river when the students release the elvers into the wild with a richer understanding of the river ecosystem and the precious value of water.

**Juliet Bonser**

**Photo above:** *Children from Colleton Primary School release baby eels into the Osier Bed Stream near Reading, thanks to the generosity of Sportfish for allowing us access to this beautiful little stream.*

**Photo top right:** *The River Lambourn with M4 bridge above.*



## Roads and Rivers

Rivers and roads don't always have a harmonious relationship, as rivers are often the recipients of pollution that runs off the road.

This is usually because rivers have historically been used as safe places to drain storm water. A good example of this is the beautiful River Lambourn, which receives storm water draining off the M4 motorway, just upstream from the Special Area of Conservation.

Ali Love and I went out to track drainage routes from the motorway to the river and then, with help from the EA and National Laboratory Service, looked at what impact the drainage was having on the in-river sediment.

The contrast between clean upstream samples and sediment quality near the drainage outlet was clear to see.

We have forwarded our results to Highways England to build a case for routing runoff through constructed wetlands so that it can be cleaned before reaching the Lambourn.

**Charlotte Hitchmough**

## ARK People

### Wendy Allen



I live in Ramsbury and am a freelance garden consultant. As well as being an ARK member, I'm really enjoying working with the dedicated and enthusiastic team at ARK on several exciting environmental projects we have in the pipeline for local schools, featuring rain gardens, green roofs, rain walls and stormwater planters.

### John Colley



I have worked on the Kennet for just over 15 years and find the job of riverkeeping both challenging and rewarding. Being outside, working alongside nature allows me to undertake conservation work and my passion for habitat enhancement. Having worked on the Test and the Piddle, the Kennet is in my opinion the best place I have worked.

### Dominic Greenbank



I've been involved with ARK since I moved from London 6 years ago. It's pretty special to have such a unique habitat here in Wiltshire and I think it should be our priority to preserve it for the future. I became a riverfly monitor 1½ years ago, taking over at Cooper's Meadow and I have recently completed a week of work experience with ARK.



Learn how you can support ARK every time you shop online just visit:

[www.easyfundraising.org.uk/arkactionfortheriverkennet](http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/arkactionfortheriverkennet)

## Dates for Your Diary

### Friday 18 August

River Restoration and Conservation afternoon for 13–19 year olds at Stonebridge. Contact [anna@riverkennet.org](mailto:anna@riverkennet.org) for more information.

### Saturday 26 August

OUDS As You Like It performance and picnic at Harbrook, Ramsbury. For more information see page 3 or contact [linda@riverkennet.org](mailto:linda@riverkennet.org)

### Saturday 9 September

The Big Picnic at Stonebridge Wild River Reserve. Bring your own celebratory picnic and enjoy an optional wildlife walk led by award-winning natural history author Peter Marren. 1.00pm onwards; for more about the event, see page 5. Contact [anna@riverkennet.org](mailto:anna@riverkennet.org)

### Thursday 9 November

ARK AGM 6.30pm at Marlborough Town Hall.

For more details on all these events see our website or contact [anna@riverkennet.org](mailto:anna@riverkennet.org)

## Websites Worth Visiting

The Catchment Based Approach (CaBA) is a community-led way of engaging people and groups from across society to help improve our precious water environments. CaBA Partnerships are now actively working in more than 100 catchments across England and Wales.



[www.catchmentbasedapproach.org](http://www.catchmentbasedapproach.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](http://www.riverkennet.org) or email [anna@riverkennet.org](mailto:anna@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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