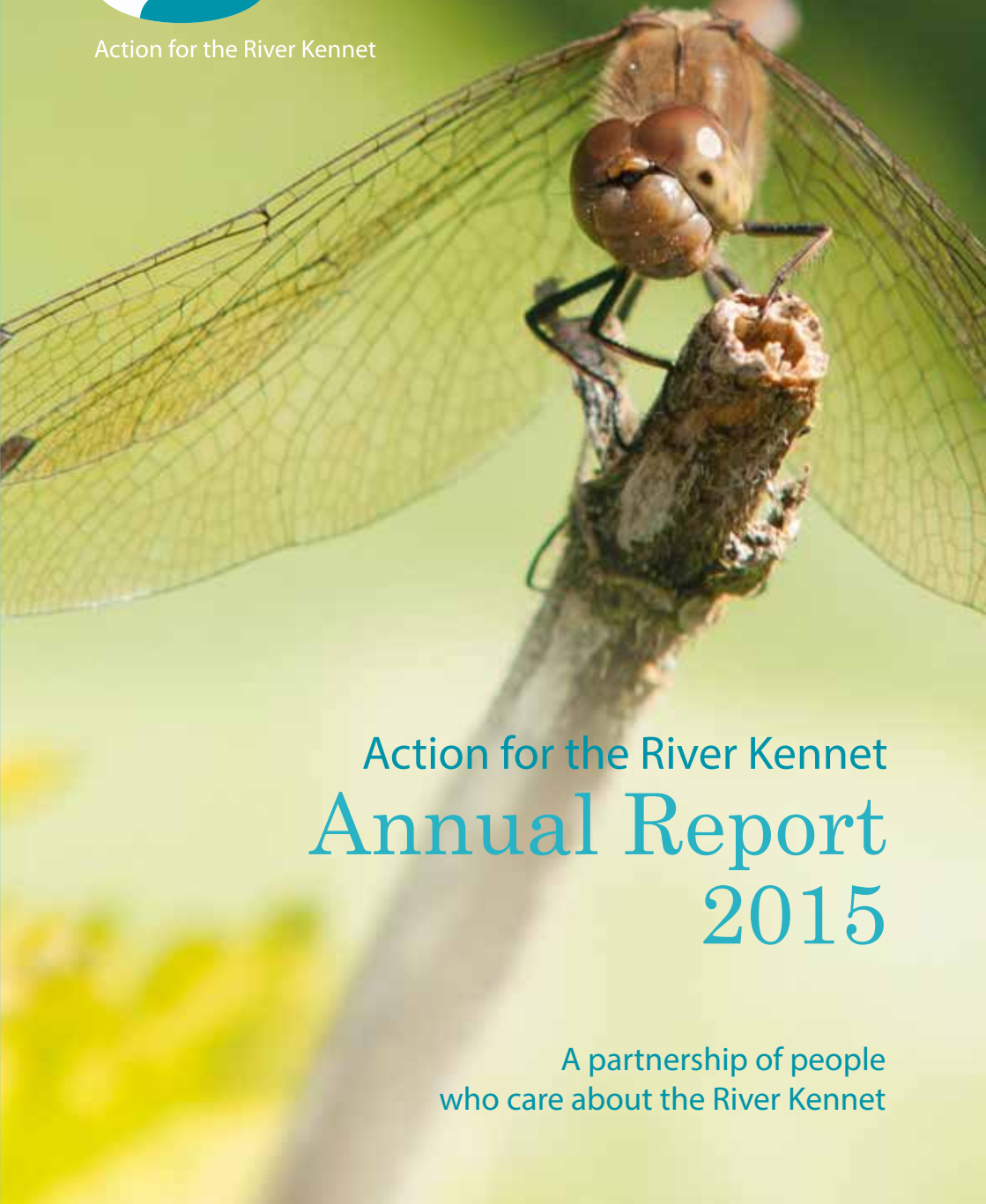




Action for the River Kennet



Action for the River Kennet
Annual Report
2015

A partnership of people
who care about the River Kennet

Executive Committee

President	Sir Nigel Thompson
Chairman	Geoffrey Findlay
Hon. Treasurer	Martin Gibson
Technical Adviser	John Lawson
Ecological Advisers Committee	Peter Marren and John Hounslow Richard Clarke, James Dallas, Sean Dempster, Don Harris, Kevin Light, Dr Rodney Owen-Jones
Director	Charlotte Hitchmough

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

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The Bell, Ramsbury
The Blunt Trust
Wild Trout Trust
Town and Manor of Hungerford
Waitrose

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 or contact Linda Nemeth: linda@riverkennet.org

Edited by Rowan Whimster (r.whimster@eclipse.co.uk)
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@ARKennet





SIMON BAKER
WINNER OF THE ADULT CATEGORY
2015 ARK PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION



A year of progress free of flood, drought and major pollution incidents

The good thing about having to prepare an Annual Report is that it requires us to assess the balance of challenges and successes. Once again, that balance is very positive – thanks to the dedication and hard work of our paid staff led by Charlotte, Committee members, the partners listed on the back cover and our growing team of volunteers. Of all ages, the latter play a vital part in so much of our work, from riverfly monitoring and ‘muddy walks’ to redd (trout nest) counting and water-vole surveying, while the Wednesday teams help with habitat projects in the river and along the banks.

Sadly we had to say farewell to our assistant Carolyn White in the spring, and more recently to Helen Kelly – our key outreach person for schools and social media. Our thanks to both for their contributions. We were pleased to recruit Linda Nemeth to take over as Charlotte’s

Creating a better future for the Kennet through:

- 1 **Citizen Science**
Read more on page 6–7
- 2 **Creative Conservation**
Read more on page 8–9
- 3 **Influencing Others**
Read more on page 10–11
- 4 **Agricultural Advice**
Read more on page 12–13
- 5 **Everyone’s River Kennet**
Read more on page 14–15
- 6 **ARK in the Community**
Read more on page 16–17

assistant in the summer, and will be working hard to find a replacement for Helen.

This year – touch wood – we have been spared the crises of recent seasons: no droughts, no floods, no major pollution incidents. Maybe that is why we have been able to achieve even greater success in our core projects to monitor the river and its wildlife, improve natural habitats, provide advice to farmers and raise awareness of pollution risks. We have also continued to make good strides in our work with the wider community – outreach to schools, encouraging people to save water and raising awareness of the Kennet’s wildlife through nature walks, moth nights, bat evenings and children’s workshops.

Stonebridge Meadow, jointly owned and managed with Marlborough Town Council, has been transformed by the construction of a pond and a wetland accessible by a new boardwalk that



gives wheelchair access straight from the existing hard footpath. Already more wildlife species are being spotted there. Next year, with the Council, we look forward to opening up the riverside walk by the River Og below Tin Pit Lane (off St. Martin's) – another riverside experience in walking distance of Marlborough town centre.

Looking more widely, we continue to make progress in developing relationships and activities downstream. As well as working in schools in Hungerford and facilitating habitat projects in and near Reading, ARK remains the lead body in the Environment Agency's Kennet Catchment Partnership. During the year we continued to deliver actions identified in the Catchment Management Plan as well as organising and chairing the key meetings that will transform the plan into more funded activities. However, we do need more downstream individuals and organisations to take on the local organisational work involved. If you might be interested, do let us know.

The fact that we have had no major emergencies this last year does not mean that we can afford to ease up the pressure to reduce abstraction from the Kennet aquifers and eventually to eliminate entirely the export of water from the Kennet Valley to Swindon. On 12 October we were therefore pleased to hear that Thames Water (see statement above) are at last ready to begin work on the North-South pipeline that promises to turn ARK's 20-year campaign of reduced abstraction into reality. We are also reassured that the thousands of new homes planned in Swindon will only marginally affect the benefits of the pipe-line to the Kennet valley.

"Progress for delivery of the scheme remains on track. Pipeline design has been completed and the contract for this component of the works has been awarded. Construction will start in October 2015 and be completed in August 2016. Commissioning will be completed by December 2016."

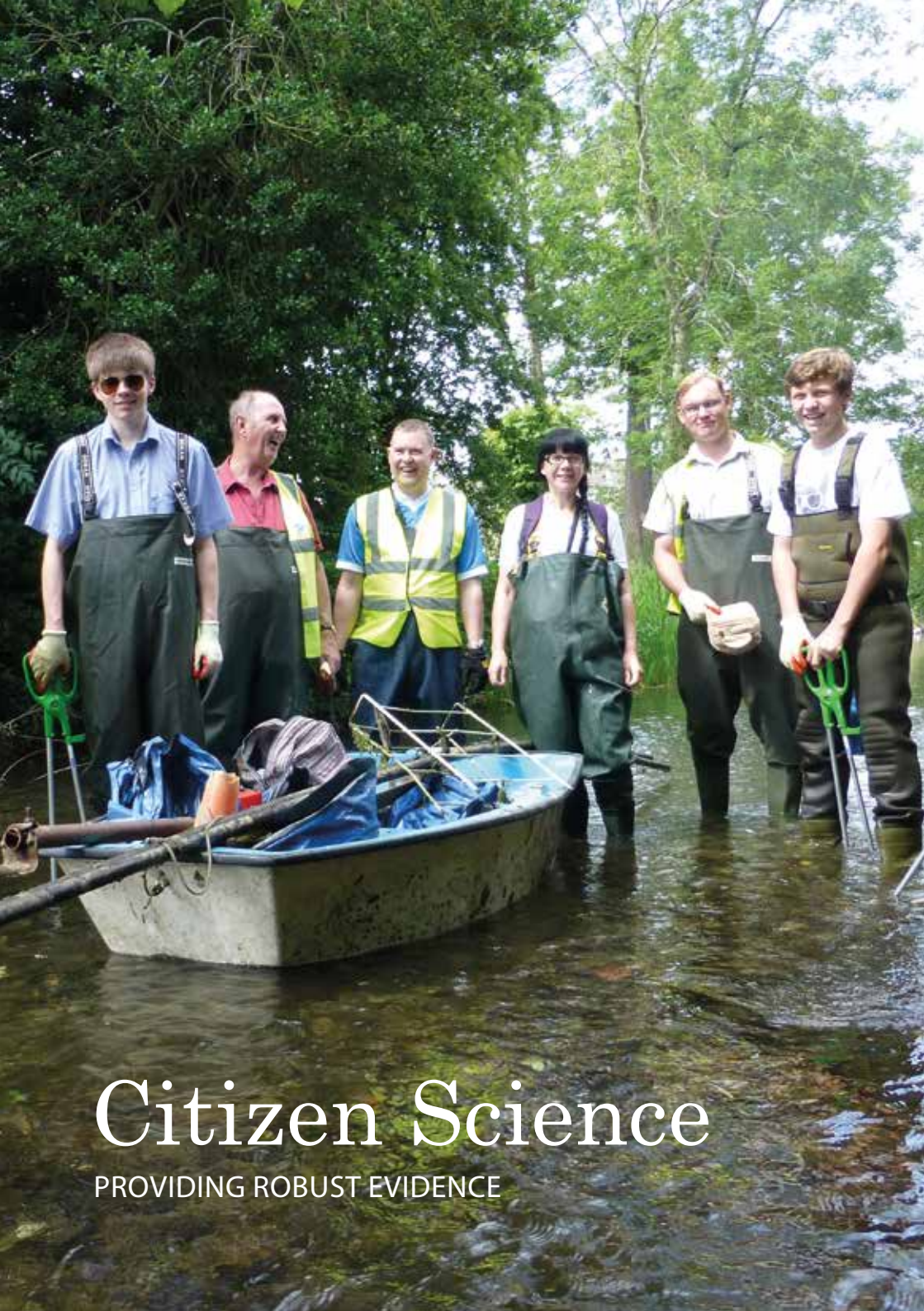
Thames Water, 12 October 2015

At a meeting we convened to learn lessons from the 2013 chlorpyrifos pollution incident, Thames Water and the Environment Agency agreed to draw up a protocol on dealing with future events. Thames Water has now completed a draft Pesticide Pollution Response Protocol, which they hope to share with ARK by the end of November 2015.

The receipt of an award from an external expert body is not only gratifying but reassuring confirmation that we are on the right track. To have received five such awards over the last 12 months is even more encouraging. The tally began with two awards from the Rivers Trust to our technical adviser John Lawson and a third to Harry Forbes for his 'Outstanding Contribution to the Riverfly Movement as a Volunteer'. More recently the Stonebridge Wild River Reserve won an 'Outstanding Award' and the Monk Trophy for the Best Use of Native Plants in the regional finals of the Britain in Bloom competition. Well-earned praise for all concerned!



CHAIRMAN



Citizen Science

PROVIDING ROBUST EVIDENCE



Our trained volunteers have been hard at work monitoring and recording the health of the river.

They are filling in the gaps that would otherwise be left as government-funded bodies are forced to cut back on their scientific survey work.

During the year Imperial College used ARK riverfly data in the final reports of their study of the recovery of the Kennet following 2013's disastrous chlorpyrifos pollution event. We now monitor riverfly populations at 46 sites along the Kennet and its tributaries. We are also delighted that Anna and Harry Forbes have recently received their Riverfly Partnership tutor accreditation to deliver invertebrate workshops, thus ensuring that the training and resulting data are of a high and consistent standard.

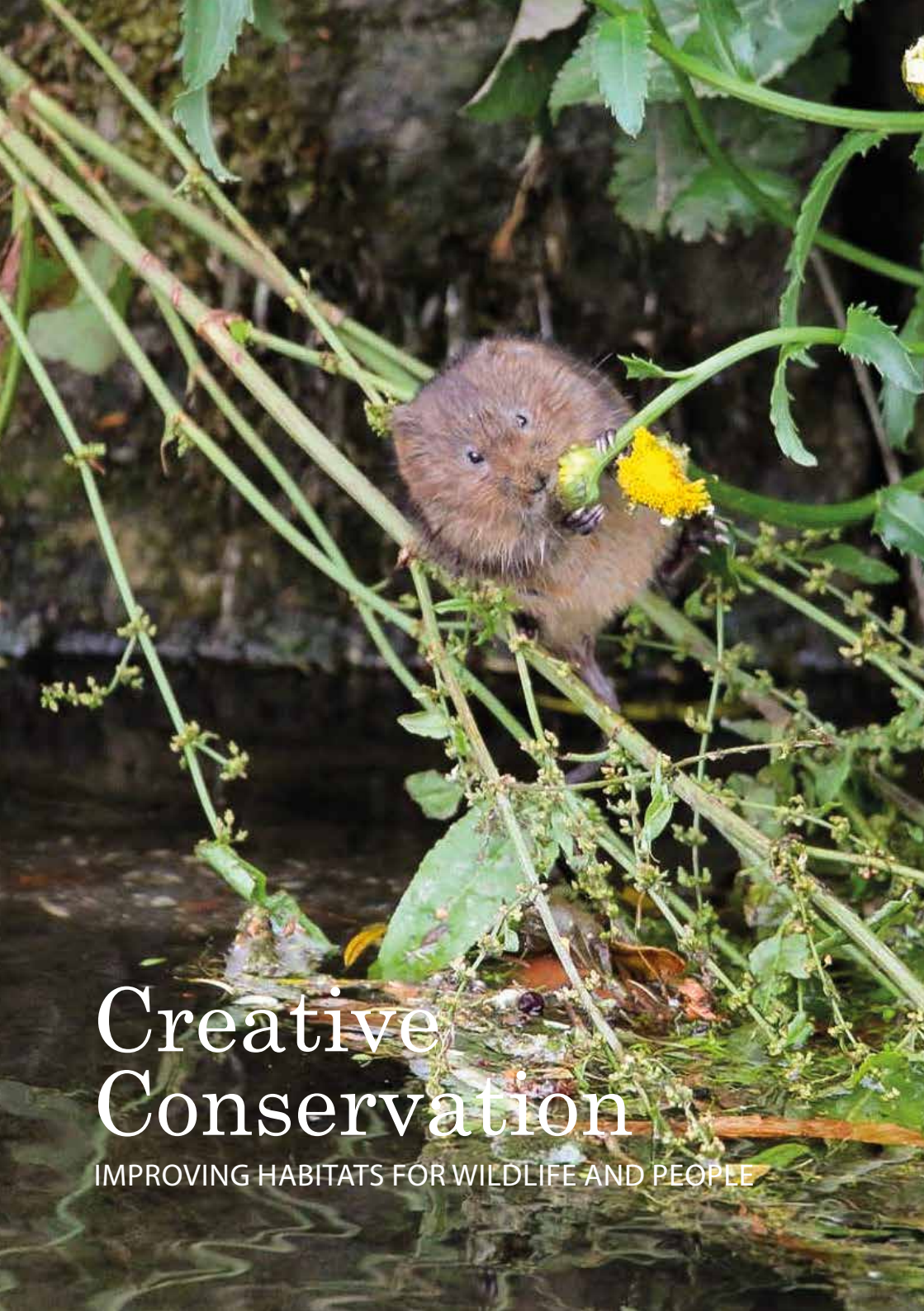
St John's IB students spent a day with us on the river in Marlborough monitoring the Kennet's water quality. One of our volunteers is also working with DelAgua to test water quality at ten other sites over the coming year. Back on dry land, a training day in May means we now have

a team of nine water vole surveyors – if we know where Britain's fastest declining mammal is along our riverbanks we can help protect him.

Our annual Bioblitz at Stonebridge Wild River Reserve in September gave local people of all ages a chance to have fun and explore, but also contribute data to the species list that we share with the Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre.

Like the canary in the coalmine, moths play a vital role in telling us about the health of our environment. Our monthly public moth nights by the river are attended by the County Moth Recorder, whose fifty years of experience is helping us not only to identify species but train new recorders for the future.

Anna Forbes
Stonebridge Project Officer



Creative Conservation

IMPROVING HABITATS FOR WILDLIFE AND PEOPLE



We have been making new habitats, improving the river and planning projects.

Our work to restore a section of chalk stream habitat on the Lower Og is now complete, including fencing and alternative drinking supplies for the horses that graze there. The fencing creates a new easily accessible path for visitors as well as stopping the horses trampling the banks.

In the village of Mildenhall near Marlborough we are restoring habitat and fish passage to almost a kilometre of river. With funding from Thames Water, Natural England and the Environment Agency the project has re-introduced thousands of tons of gravel to provide spawning sites for fish as well as modifying the historic mill structure to reduce its impounding effect.

At our Stonebridge Wild River Reserve a whole new wetland habitat and boardwalk have been created thanks to funding from our members and supporters, the Environment Agency and the Big Lottery Fund. The wetland performs an important 'eco-system service' by filtering runoff from the

London Road before it reaches the river. The Stonebridge Meadow site is jointly owned by ARK and Marlborough Town Council, whose estates team do a wonderful job maintaining the footpaths and emptying the litter bins.

Guided by advice from the Wild Trout Trust and led by ARK committee members, the volunteers at Marlborough College have ensured that the river alongside Treacle Bolly and beyond is in much better shape for fish and wildlife.

Downstream at Kintbury another volunteer team is continuing to work alongside the river keeper to improve carrier streams and establish marginal plants. The landowners here have kindly hosted river walks and school visits, thus allowing more people to enjoy this important and beautiful stretch of the Kennet.

Charlotte Hitchmough
Director



Influencing Others

ARGUING THE CASE FOR ACTION



ARK's ambition of an end to export of water from our aquifer takes a step forward.

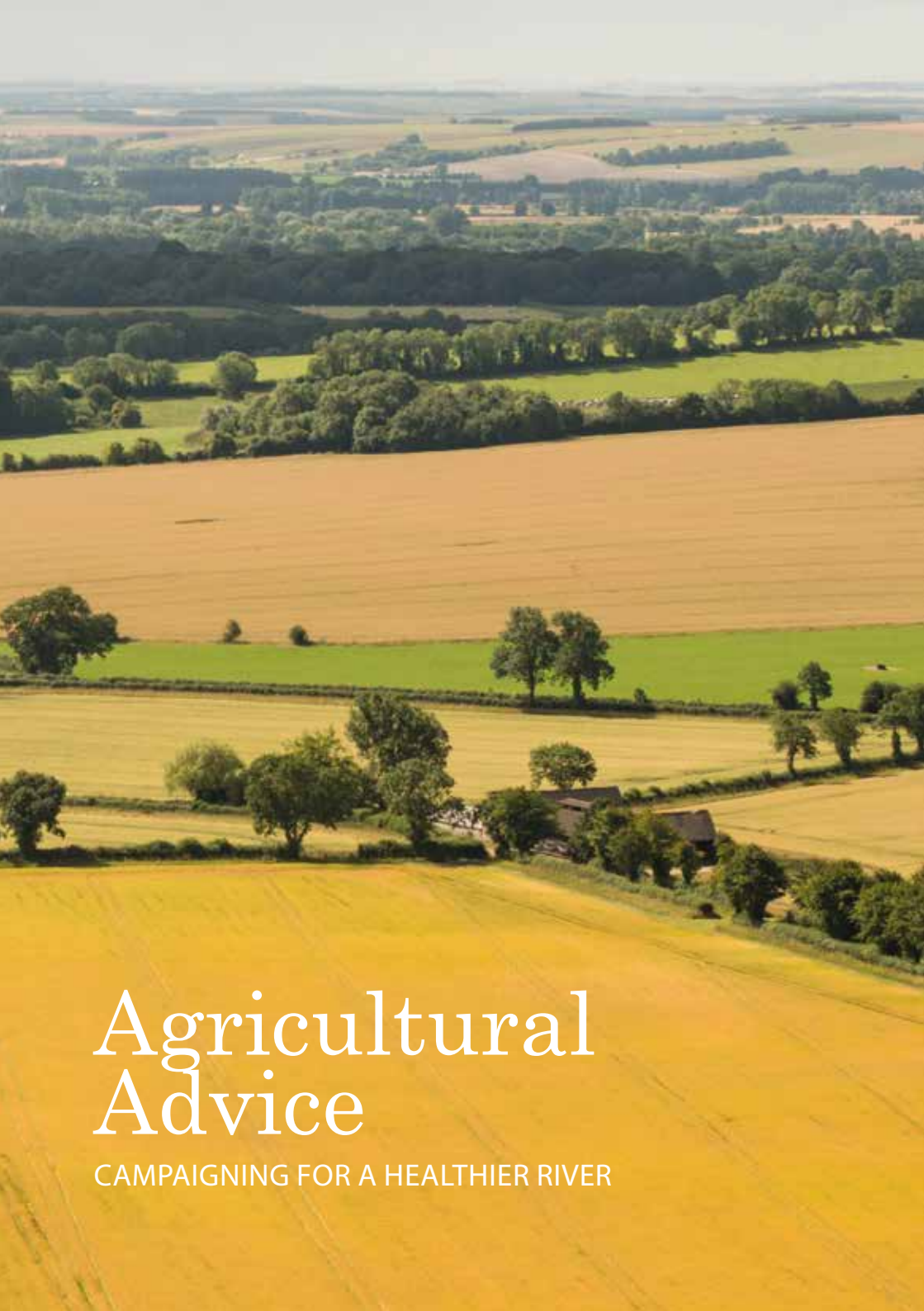
We are encouraged by the news that good progress is being made to build the pipeline that will allow Swindon to rely less on the River Kennet for its water. This reduction in water abstraction will help the river to be healthier, particularly in dry years. We are committed to ensuring that the benefits that this pipeline offers the river are maximised.

Over the last five years we have supported Thames Water's Save Water Swindon Campaign, which has reduced consumption in Swindon by 1.78 million litres per day. Closer to home, in partnership with Thames Water, we have been running 'Care for the Kennet' and 'Get Water Fit' campaigns in the Kennet Valley. More than 1 in 4 households around Marlborough and Hungerford have had water saving gadgets installed in their homes as a result. The importance of using water wisely is critical for the survival of chalk streams as population increase and climate change put more pressure on limited water resources.

We have successfully raised funds to extend awareness of water quality issues. In 2015/16 we will expand the 'yellow fish' campaign downstream to include Newbury and Reading, and we have partnered with a group of other rivers trusts to look at the impact of septic tanks on water quality.

The interaction between the Kennet and Avon Canal and the River Kennet continues to have a negative impact on the health of the river, which is why we are working with the Kennet Catchment Partnership to make sure that this important issue is not ignored.

Charlotte Hitchmough
Director



Agricultural Advice

CAMPAIGNING FOR A HEALTHIER RIVER



Healthy soils mean a healthier river – which is why ARK is encouraging farmers to adopt new ways of working.

You might have heard that this is UN International Year of the Soil. You might also have heard that we only have 99 harvests left due to the poor state of the soils on UK farms. A University of Sheffield study in 2014 found that nutrient and organic matter (OM) levels were at a significantly low level when compared with soils from non-farmed areas. This is obviously worrying from the point of view of crop yields but also has serious implications for the health of rivers in the UK, as soils deficient in OM are more prone to compaction and erosion.

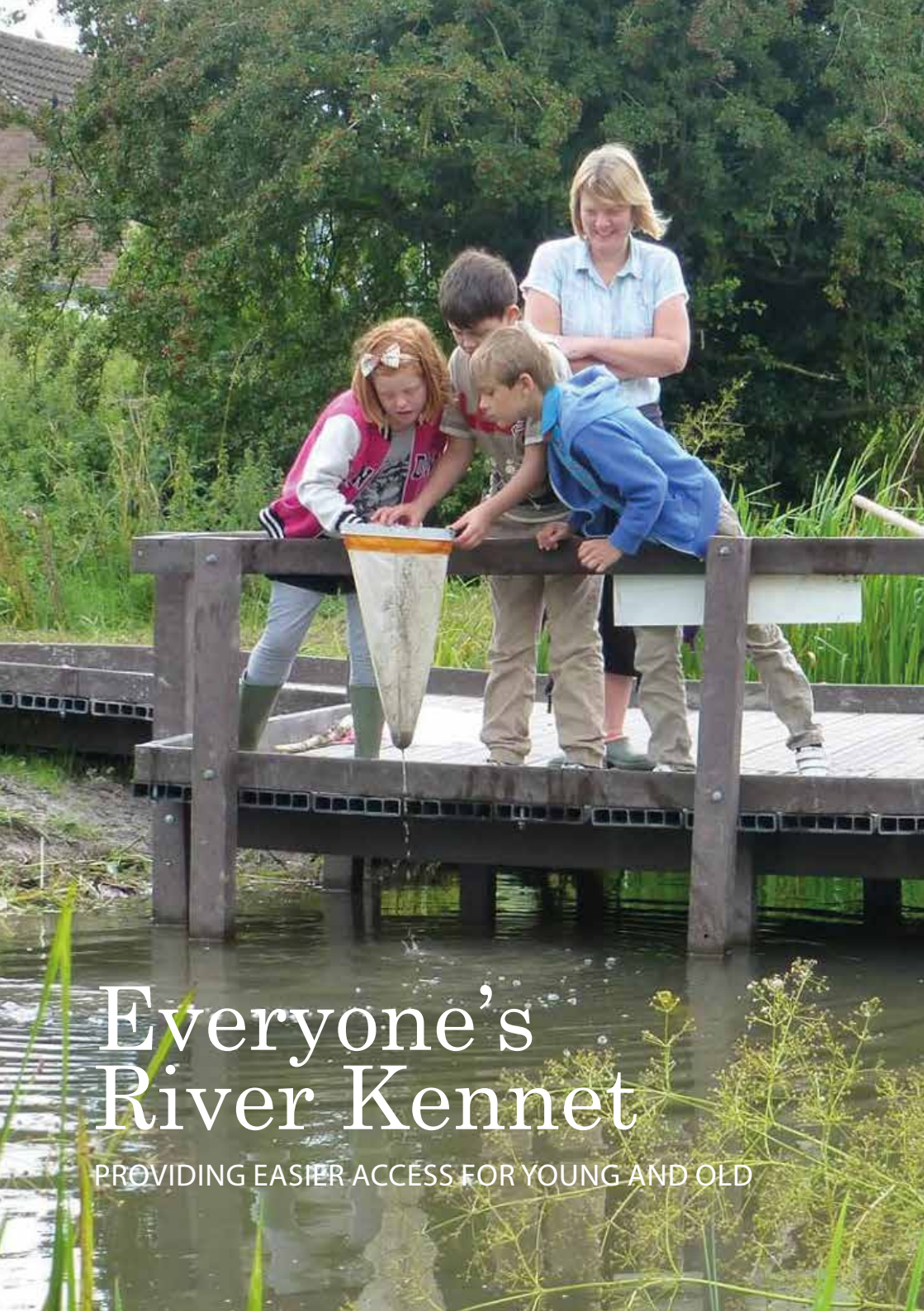
It was therefore appropriate this year to tailor the farm advice offered by ARK to the needs of farmers looking to conserve and improve their soils. To this end a Soil Health Workshop was held at Shefford Woodlands in February, where soil scientist Martin Wood explained the value of OM that can help farmers and described techniques to increase OM in their soils. He likened the soil to an engine and the fuel for that engine is OM. All

sources of OM are valuable, including digested sewage cake, compost and good old farmyard manure. Worms and other soil fauna eat and excrete the OM, releasing nutrients in the process.

What if there are no ready sources of OM available? Well, in that case, simply grow your own! Cover crops such as mustard, oil radish, rye, phacelia and vetches are sown after harvest. They grow quickly in the warm soil and convert sunlight into biomass. When incorporated before drilling the next cash crop, the biomass breaks down and provides OM.

Either way, good OM levels help to keep soils where they do the most good ... in the field.

Timothy Clarke
Farm Advisor



Everyone's River Kennet

PROVIDING EASIER ACCESS FOR YOUNG AND OLD



Helping people to enjoy the River Kennet is one of ARK's core purposes.

It is satisfying to report that 2015 has been another busy year of free public events hosted along different stretches of the river, both private and public.

In July more than a hundred people enjoyed a river walk from Marlborough to Axford, with tea and homemade cakes served at Werg Mill. Later in the summer, local children had a creative day at our Willow Workshop at Ramsbury Triangle. Throughout the year our volunteers have also been busy maintaining the permissive walk around the Triangle and the boardwalk at Stonebridge Wild River Reserve.

To make it even easier for people to enjoy the Stonebridge experience we have installed a new non-slip recycled plastic boardwalk and pond dipping platform. As a result, wheelchairs, mobility scooters and pushchairs can all gain easy access throughout the seasons to this exciting new habitat and educational resource.

The theme of this year's ARK photographic competition was 'Celebrating Our Chalk Stream' at three

locations with great public access – the award-winning Stonebridge Wild River Reserve, the River Og at Tin Pit and the Ramsbury Triangle. The 45 entries were featured in an exhibition and the winning photograph in the adult category is reproduced on the inside front cover of this report

Meanwhile, our ever-popular Bat Night and Moth Nights encouraged people of all ages to venture to the reserve in the evening – if you've not yet been, we'd love to see you in 2016!

Finally, we owe a special vote of thanks to Ramsbury Estates, Savernake Flyfishers and Sutton Settled Estates for hosting river walks and school visits, and to Marlborough Town Council, the St John's Foundation Trust and Ramsbury Parish Council with whom we own or lease riverside land.

Anna Forbes
Stonebridge Project Officer

A group of children in school uniforms and adults are gathered in front of a brick building. They are holding several blue balloons, some of which have the 'LOCK Fyne' logo on them. The building's sign reads 'SEAFOOD BAR & GRILL'. The children are looking towards the camera, and one boy in the foreground is shouting with his mouth open.

SEAFOOD BAR & GRILL

ARK in the Community

EXPLAINING THE STORY OF A PRECIOUS RESOURCE



During 2015 ARK started to take its popular classroom projects further downstream.

In January we were delighted to introduce our long-running Trout in School project to three new sets of primary classes in Shalbourne, Inkpen and the Beechwood School in Woodley, Reading. Each school immersed itself wholeheartedly in the different stages of the trout lifecycle and incorporated it in to their classroom learning. As a result ARK had record numbers of trout fry to release in to the Kennet in April, including our first urban release at Bear Wharf in the Oracle at Reading by the Beechwood School. After the release the children were invited in to the Loch Fyne Restaurant to learn all about sustainable fishing.

Our classroom work with eels has also continued to attract lots of support – not only with local schools but also further downstream where our latest recruit is St Joseph's Catholic Primary School in Newbury – alongside increasing numbers of requests for bespoke classroom sessions from schools all along the Kennet.

In October, with the kind permission of the Sutton Estate, we hosted a river day at The Wilderness in Kintbury for 52 Year 6 students from Mortimer St Mary school. As well as learning about river processes using our Emriver model they braved somewhat challenging weather conditions to tour one of the most beautiful reaches of the Kennet with Anna Forbes and get up close to invertebrates. The day was a great success and we look forward to providing further bespoke events in 2016.

Helen Kelly
Care for the Kennet Co-ordinator

Accounts

Year Ended 31 March 2015

Income and Expenditure Account

	2015	2014
	£	£
INCOME		
Subscriptions	6,335	5,590
Donations	5,846	8,801
Legacies	-	1,000
Raffle income	-	765
Project income	134,172	109,544
Fees and other	3,367	1,238
Interest received	79	13
Investment income	1,457	645
Total income	151,256	126,831
COSTS OF CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES		
Staff costs	35,965	34,560
Project costs	89,389	79,752
Project management and expenses	3,985	2,940
IT, stationery and postage	2,113	2,853
Newsletter and Annual Report	4,964	3,508
Website	2,119	1,350
Training	1,256	590
Insurance	644	643
Subscriptions	50	1,114
Depreciation	901	171
Other costs	-	652
Total of costs charitable activities	141,386	128,133
Governance and accountancy costs	4,351	3,743
Surplus/(Deficit)	5,518	(5,046)
Unrealised gains on investments	974	1,370
Movement in charity funds – surplus/(deficit)	6,493	(3,676)
Charity funds brought forward	164,292	167,967
Charity funds carried forward	170,784	164,292
Restricted funds	-	12,500
Unrestricted funds	170,784	151,792
Total charity funds	170,784	164,292

Assets And Liabilities as at 31 March 2015

ASSETS	2015	2014
	£	£
CASH FUNDS		
Current account	35,392	63,943
Deposits	10,166	10,651
Total cash	45,558	74,594
FIXED ASSETS		
Land	76,563	76,563
Equipment	7,942	1,542
CURRENT ASSETS		
Investments	36,434	33,517
Trade Debtors	27,806	2,250
Total assets	194,903	188,467
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Creditors	-13,152	-15,077
Other creditors	-2,107	-528
Accruals	-8,260	-8,570
Total liabilities	-23,519	-24,174
Total funds	170,784	164,292
Unrestricted Funds	170,784	151,791
Restricted Funds	-	12,500

NOTE

The financial statements have been prepared under the historical cost convention, and on an accruals basis.