

Action for the River Kennet

River talk

A partnership of people who care about the Kennet



In this issue:

HRH Princess Alexandra, outgoing patron of WWF-UK, lends her name to **Stonebridge Lane Wild River Reserve**.

MP Claire Perry visits the River Kennet and gives her **support to ARK** in its river rescue mission.

The River Kennet and ARK feature in BBC Panorama '**Drinking our rivers dry?**' aired on 19th September.

Get involved...
ARK volunteer, Harry Forbes interviews Don Harris about volunteering for ARK.



HRH Princess Alexandra lends her name to Stonebridge Lane Wild River Reserve

HRH Princess Alexandra, outgoing patron of WWF-UK has honoured our habitat restoration project at Stonebridge Lane with a financial gift which will improve access, enabling wheelchairs to wheel along to the end of the boardwalk.

We will be erecting a sarsen stone monument and plaque to mark her support.

The Stonebridge Lane Wild River Reserve was opened in the summer, with a 'Lemonade and Cake' afternoon for residents and the volunteers who helped with the habitat improvements and boardwalk construction. You can find the Wild River Reserve just off Stonebridge Lane, which is the footpath on the eastern outskirts of Marlborough between the A4 and St Martin's. It's a peaceful place to come and watch the wildlife on the river.

The land is owned by the St John's Foundation Trust and leased to ARK to manage it as a wildlife site.

[Charlotte Hitchmough](#)



Lemonade and cake celebration on the board walk at Stonebridge Lane Wild River Reserve.



A view looking across Stonebridge Meadow this summer.

Stonebridge Meadow – a new lease of life

Plans to improve the management of Stonebridge Meadow are well underway.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to respond to the questionnaire asking how you'd like to see the meadow used in future, and how you use it now. Your responses showed that most people enjoy walking in the meadow several times a week, with lots of you specifically visiting the meadow to watch the river and birdlife. The most important thing to most of you was wildlife conservation with quiet informal access as a second requirement. Over half of respondents wanted a dedicated picnic area in a small part of the meadow with many of you suggesting that some parts of the river are opened up for fishing.

All the findings of the survey will be taken into account as we draw up the plan which will have the ultimate aim of creating a mixed wildflower meadow along side a chalk stream which is well managed to support a healthy ecosystem including wild brown trout.

Twenty people have volunteered to become 'Stewards of Stonebridge' to help to manage the site. We will be providing training, funded by the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Anyone who is interested in getting involved please call **Charlotte on 07880 515 859** or email **susan@riverkennet.org** to find out more. [Charlotte Hitchmough](#)

MP Claire Perry supports ARK in its river rescue mission

She zipped up her wellies and waded into the water for a morning paddle, as the cameras clicked and the experts watched.

There may have been an odd fish here, a black coot there and some elegantly growing yellow Iris on the bankside. But what Claire Perry, was witnessing was one of England's rare chalk streams in trouble, the River Kennet at a trickle, its low water level at danger point.

And though she praised the work of Action for the River Kennet in transforming the kilometre-long section of the river as it flows under Stonebridge Lane bridge, in Marlborough, which she visited on Friday, the signals are at red.

Looking at the 15-acre Stonebridge Meadow project, a combined operation with Marlborough Town Council, Mrs Perry declared: "What is being done here is really impressive, quite wonderful.

"Rivers are incredible natural resources. And chalk streams like the Kennet are rather rare. We have them only here, in New Zealand and in northern France."

But she warned: "The trouble is that the abstraction doesn't change, no matter what is happening to the rivers. It's just an extraordinary situation. I just think we have a huge timing problem. We may be running too late and a lot of damage can be done to the river. The Kennet could be dry by the summer."

Now she has joined forces with a group of MPs with similar river problems in their constituencies. They are lobbying nearby Newbury MP Richard Benyon, the Defra minister, who has promised a White Paper on dealing with water problems, especially in light of climate change.

"I think it will come early autumn," said Mrs Perry. "Our group of MPs is working really hard to say this is a common problem for all of us and needs to be tackled."

Gerald Isatram



Claire Perry MP at the Stonebridge Lane Wild River Reserve.



Drinking our rivers dry?

The River Kennet and ARK feature in BBC Panorama 'Drinking Our Rivers Dry?' aired on 19th September. The programme explores whether the water industry and its regulators are doing enough to protect the nation's rivers. Demand for water in some parts of England is so close to outstripping supply that we now have our first desalination plant, a last resort to keep the taps of the capital flowing in an emergency.

Most of our water comes from rivers, and environmentalists fear we are pushing some of them and the wildlife they support to the edge. With fears over climate change and population growth, Simon Boazman investigates.

You can still watch the BBC Panorama programme on BBC iplayer

The Kennet reaches above Marlborough are totally dry this autumn.

Getting involved

Many people help ARK in many different ways and without them ARK would not be where it is now.



ARK volunteer, Harry Forbes interviews Don Harris about his experiences, interests and his volunteering for ARK.

A resident of Stonebridge Close and regular visitor to the Wild River Reserve, Don volunteers with his wife Pat in a variety of valuable ways, he also logs down all interesting wildlife sightings at the meadow.

How long have you been a member of ARK?

We joined just before ARK and the Town Council purchased Stonebridge Meadow. The circular to raise funds made me aware of what ARK is doing.

What do you do as a volunteer?

Quite a few things, I sample riverflies, redd spotting, cutting the grass around the sides of the meadow footpath, tidying up, litter picking, doing odd jobs and building and erecting bird and bat boxes.

What do you enjoy most about volunteering for ARK?

I find it rewarding, putting things back into the community and it enables myself to pass on my enthusiasm for wildlife on to other people.

Do you have a favourite stretch of river and if so why?

No, I think each section has something different to offer in each season, you might see more in one stretch in one season than another.

Have you got any memorable experiences?

That's a difficult question to answer because it's all interesting. But, I think the most memorable experience is seeing the kingfishers — I saw one again today.

What would you like to see happen at Stonebridge Meadow?

Continued development of walkways on a natural basis. I would like to see grazing in the meadow as that would help the owl population feeding on small mammals. To see some litter bins.

Do you have any more comments?

ARK's doing a wonderful job. It's great to see the success in Cooper's Meadow and I think ARK have done a brilliant job. I would like to see the development continued at Stonebridge Lane and Meadow.

A big thank you to Don for all of his valuable volunteering work.



Top: Don Harris surveying for riverflies.

Left: Clearing Himalayan Balsam in Hungerford.

Right: Painting railings at Stonebridge Lane.



A beautiful Swallowtail Moth landed close to one of the moth traps at ARK's Moth evening held in Stonebridge Meadow.

Moth trapping at Stonebridge Meadow

On a warm June evening, Marc Taylor of Butterfly Conservation came to ARK's Stonebridge Meadow to run two moth traps.

He found nineteen species of moth. Bats and a Barn owl were seen and a Grasshopper warbler was heard. Moth evenings are open to anyone to come along.

In Britain there are about two and a half thousand species of moths, though only a small percentage of these fly in the day and so the rest are not usually seen until the sun goes down. Moth trapping is the best way to record the majority of moths.

Moth traps use a ultraviolet light to lure in the moths. They fall into a box below the light and cannot escape. Once

caught the moths are recorded and at the end of trapping released.

If you would like to see photos of the moths we caught and a full list of species found at Stonebridge Meadow go to ARK's Flickr site www.flickr.com/groups/actionfortheriverkennet or if you'd like to come to a moth trapping evening later on in the year then contact Anna and Harry Forbes on annaforbes73@tiscali.co.uk for more information.

We will let you know when the next moth trapping evening will be.

Dates for your diary

12
OCT

Volunteer working party

Barton Holt, Kintbury
Call 07880 515 859 or
email: susan@riverkennet.org
if you would like to take part.

20
OCT

ARK's AGM

6.30pm for 7.00pm
Ramsbury Memorial Hall

ARK is now on flickr™

ARK now has a page on the online photo sharing site Flickr. Volunteers and ARK members can post some of their best photos of the Kennet and it's wildlife. There are already over 100 fantastic photos uploaded.

Simply go to www.flickr.com/groups/actionfortheriverkennet

Please join...

Whether to add your own photos, comment on some of ours, ask ARK a question, start a topic on the discussions page, or just to enjoy the photos.

Outdoor Conservation Task Leader

We are looking for someone with experience in practical conversation techniques to co-ordinate and lead groups of volunteers on a Wednesday afternoon.

Volunteer tasks will generally be along the river between Marlborough and Hungerford. This is could be a paid post on a self-employed basis, or might suit an enthusiastic volunteer. If you would like to discuss this opportunity please call Charlotte on 07880 515 859.

Those joining us for the Summer meadow day were treated to a fascinating guided walk by Peter Marren and Harry Forbes, highlighting the plants, trees, birds, fish and insects which are so easy to walk past without noticing.

Bumblebees by the river

The many flowering plants of the riverside and meadows of the River Kennet provide nectar and homes for different species of bumblebee. In Britain there are twenty three species, though of these only six are very common and most are declining.

Stonebridge Lane is a perfect habitat for bumblebees. Plants such as greater hairy willowherb and marsh marigold provide food.

On our walk Harry showed us a variety of different bumblebee species including Common Carder, Buff-tailed, White-tailed, Red-tailed but other species you might spot are Early, Garden, Tree, Southern Cuckoo, Gypsy Cuckoo, Field Cuckoo, Barbut's Cuckoo and Red-tailed Cuckoo bumblebees. As its name suggests the Cuckoo bumblebee invades other bumblebees' nests, kills the queen and uses the workers to feed themselves and their offspring.

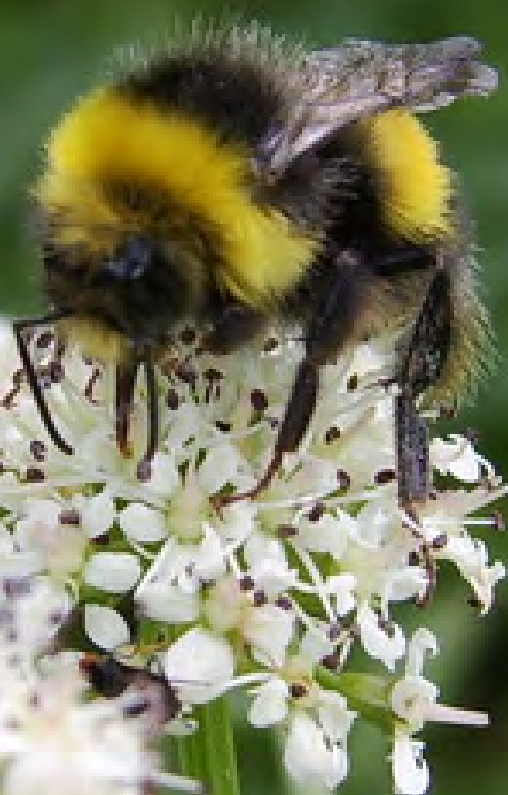
You can tell if a bumblebee is a bumblebee because all females (except Cuckoos) have pollen baskets, on the outside surface of their hind legs. Are covered in tiny hairs, whereas honeybees and solitary bees are not.

The bumblebee can be put into three castes; **The Queen** - She is the biggest bee and the only one to survive the winter; **Workers** - The most numerous bee and they are all female; **Males** - These are usually the same size as the worker or slightly larger, have curved antennae unlike the female's elbowed antennae. They are not as common as workers.

Bees are an important part of the river Kennet ecosystem, they pollinate the flowers in the meadows and at the rivers edge.

For more info on bees go to the Bumblebee Conservation website
www.bumblebeeconservation.org
[Harry Forbes](#)

A male White-tailed Bumblebee feeding on Water Dropwort in Stonebridge Meadow.



An evening by the river



ARK and WWF hosted a magical evening at a private home on the River Kennet in Ramsbury a few weeks ago.

'Rivers on the Edge: A Midsummer's Evening' raised an impressive £10,000, to be shared by ARK and WWF towards their joint work on the River Kennet. All was due to private donations towards tickets, raffle and an auction from 135 local guests, who were looked after with the help of Ramsbury Scouts and Aldbourne Youth Club.

The event was a fantastical staging of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' by the young thespian talents of the Oxford University Dramatic Society. Forest scenes were played out amongst the uplit trees of the stunning garden setting, while Puck herself (played as the character was by the very talented Sarah Perry) paddled through the river separating cast from audience at regular intervals – a small reminder of how low the river has become after continued over-abstraction. Guests had dined beforehand, arranging themselves, Glyndebourne-style, on picnic rugs along the banks of the trickling river.

"The whole evening was utterly enchanting and in such a beautiful location," commented one guest as he departed along the candlelit drive, "which makes it all the more heartbreaking to see the river so low."



Caseless caddisfly are one of the key indicator species-groups' counted during monitoring, they will not tolerate poor water quality.

Riverfly monitoring part 5: Caseless Caddisfly larvae

I am Harry Forbes and I do riverfly monitoring for ARK at two stretches of the River Kennet in Marlborough: Cooper's Meadow and Stonebridge Lane and Meadow.



I survey monthly at each location, by doing a three minute kick sample. On the riverbank I sort and count the six indicator species-groups', which if abundant signify good water quality. Each newsletter so far I have focused on one of the key species, Cased Caddisfly Larvae, Stonefly Larvae, Freshwater Shrimp (*Gammarus*), Blue-winged Olives (Ephemeraidae) and Olives (Baetidae). Finally, in this issue: Caseless Caddisfly larvae.

In the sampling I have found the Caseless Caddisfly larvae to be less common than their cased relatives. Unlike the herbivorous Cased Caddisfly larvae, Caseless Caddisfly larvae are voracious predators, which I have seen eat other invertebrates from the sample on several occasions. In turn they themselves are at all stages of their life eaten by trout.

The life cycle of the Caseless Caddisfly is the same as the Cased Caddisfly, egg, larvae (the stage that is counted in riverfly monitoring), pupa (which they are for two-three weeks) and then finally they hatch out into the adult Caddisflies. These resemble moths, but have tiny hairs on their wings hence the name of their order, 'Trichoptera' which means 'hairy wings' in Greek.

The adults are nocturnal, though in the day you can often find them on waterside plants. They are also eaten by bats.

The larvae comes in a variety of colours, mostly bright green (these are the ones I usually find, from the family Rhyacophillidae), sometimes I find examples from other families which are cream, grey or dull red.

This is the last of my articles covering the six key species used in riverfly monitoring. Next issue I shall focus on all of the other animals that I have found in the riverfly monitoring samples. Although not counted they are equally interesting.

If you would like to get involved in Riverfly Monitoring please contact me, **Riverfly Coordinator Harry Forbes** by email: annaforbes73@tiscali.co.uk or Charlotte Hitchmough: charlotte@riverkennet.org

We need some help...

Riverfly monitors

Riverfly monitoring takes place once a month and takes 1-2 hours on each occasion. Informal training is provided along with all of the kit.

Do you live in Berkshire?

If so then you can help.

The Kennet is currently monitored at 13 sites, this is great however they are all in Wiltshire, between Clatford and Ramsbury, over half of the Kennet is in Berkshire, flowing through Hungerford, Kintbury, Newbury and Reading. Unfortunately the Kennet is not riverfly monitored at any of these places, if you are interested, whether you can fully take on a site or monitor a few months a year please contact **The Riverfly Coordinator**, Harry Forbes on 01672 511 028 or email: annaforbes73@tiscali.co.uk

Do you live in Wiltshire?

If so then you can help.

Also needed is a monitor in Wiltshire, preferably the Marlborough area who can share a site with a current volunteer in training, if you can help with this please contact **The Riverfly Coordinator**, Harry Forbes on 01672 511 028 or email: annaforbes73@tiscali.co.uk

If you would like to see more about riverfly monitoring including photos of all of the invertebrates visit ARK's flickr site www.flickr.com/groups/actionfortheriverkennet

Redd spotters

ARK is now building up quite a picture of trout nests on the River Kennet. The coming redd season has the highest amount of redd surveyors and sites ARK has ever had, however this is currently restricted to Wiltshire, if you live in any of these areas (or in between them) then you can help:

In Berkshire

Hungerford, Kintbury, Newbury, Reading

In Wiltshire

Axford, Froxfield

Training, which takes a few hours is provided along with polarised sunglasses to help see through the water reflection. Redd Surveying is done approximately once every fortnight between December and March, walking the banks of a small stretch of river.

If you can help with this please contact Harry Forbes on 01672 511 028 or email: annaforbes73@tiscali.co.uk



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Front cover image: Thick-kneed flower beetle (*Oedemera nobilis*) on a Buttercup flower.

This newsletter is published 3 times a year by Action for the River Kennet
Designed and edited by Helen Dobie. We welcome ideas and contributions.