



## ACTION FOR THE RIVER KENNET

Newsletter Number 18

### Axford: better, but not good enough

ARK is pleased that the Environment Agency has rejected Thames Water's application to renew the variation on their licence to abstract water from the Axford borehole. We are also pleased to hear that Thames Water are not planning to appeal against the decision.

However, the modified variation the Agency has permitted does not deliver as much benefit to the river as could have been achieved. The Agency's decision will prevent any increased abstraction, and reduces the average quantity of water abstracted at Axford by around 4% per year.

ARK's technical advisor, John Lawson, said 'I think the Environment Agency has missed the opportunity to reduce the annual total back to the base licence amount of 3410 Ml per year or 9.3 Ml per day . This would have given a 23% reduction, which would have been a substantial improvement. It could also have signified an intention to get a further future reduction.'

The Environment Agency insists that the reduction they would like to see at Axford 'will not happen with a single 'quick fix' solution.' They go on to say that the licence determination is an 'important first step towards a more sustainable abstraction regime at Axford.' Representatives from ARK will continue to meet and discuss with the Environment Agency to ensure that all the options for water use in the Upper Kennet are fully explored.

The full licence determination can be seen at:  
[http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/subjects/waterres/564321/566207/516505/1935864/?version=1&lang=\\_e](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/subjects/waterres/564321/566207/516505/1935864/?version=1&lang=_e)

### Spring River Walk Sunday 30 March 2008, 2pm Manor Farm, West Overton

This year's Spring Walk will be a chance to explore the headwaters of the Kennet, from West Overton to the Swallowhead Springs source of the river near the pre-historic Silbury Hill. The walk will follow both private land and public footpaths. There will be a choice of three distances, the shortest less than one mile. The Ramsbury Flyer mini-bus will be available for those who wish to walk one-way only (approx. 1 hour walking). The entire walk takes approximately 2 hours at a leisurely pace.

The route will be signposted and marshalled. There are several stiles and wellington boots are recommended. Dogs on leads are welcome and parking is available at Manor Farm. We look forward to seeing you there.

**We are looking for volunteers to serve refreshments, could you help? If so please call Charlotte on 01672 513672 or email [info@riverkennet.org](mailto:info@riverkennet.org).**

### Congratulations ARK members

Thank you to everyone who returned the 'Gift Aid' forms. We were delighted by the number of you who not only responded promptly, but also enclosed a donation. Thank you.

### Riverfly Monitoring

We now have 5 months data at two sites following our Riverfly Training Day. Many thanks to all our volunteers. The floods prevented any sampling in January, but the drop in water levels should allow the programme to resume in February. Anyone wishing to join the team of volunteers can contact [info@riverkennet.org](mailto:info@riverkennet.org).



## Trout ARK gets afloat

The Trout ARK project has got off to a great start, thanks to the enthusiastic support of the two head teachers at Preshute and Ramsbury Primary schools who have welcomed several hundred trout eggs into their classrooms.

The project, to hatch brown trout in school for release into the river Kennet, has caught the children's imaginations and they have already produced some beautiful work inspired by Trout ARK.



*Michael Stevenson, Berkshire Trout Farm, donated the eggs from his trout for the project.*

The eggs arrived at the two schools ready for the first week of the January term. They hatched out into healthy 'alevins' with their sacs attached and are now 'fry' needing daily feeding.



*Ramsbury School Wildlife Club taking delivery of the first eggs*

The fish are in an aquarium equipped with a 'life support' system to imitate the conditions in a chalk stream. A chiller keeps the temperature around 10°C, a filter system and UV steriliser keep the water clean, a pump circulates the water to imitate river flow, while an aerator pumps air into the water to keep the dissolved oxygen content high. Thanks to Martin Gibson and Michael Maude for supplying water straight from boreholes.

Through the project children are learning to:

- raise trout from eggs to fry
- study chalk stream habitats using the River Kennet as a focus
- learn to value water resources
- understand ecosystems, food webs and landscape
- Understand the importance of the river to wildlife
- understand and monitor water quality using chemical testing and invertebrate sampling.

John Hounslow has visited both schools to explain his job as a river keeper and answered the hundreds of

questions that the children had about the river and its wildlife.

We are working with teachers to develop lesson plans based on the river, which link with the National Curriculum.

This year's project is a pilot to test the system and develop educational resources, so that next year we can offer a complete package to more schools, which will include full instructions, tried and tested lesson plans as well as contacts for school visits and ideas for fieldwork. The fish will be released at sites near each school around Easter.

Huge thanks to all the companies and organisations who have sponsored the project so far: The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty awarded a grant of over £2,000. The following organisations have been extremely generous, providing funding for this year and in many cases also promising support in future. They include:

Marlborough Area Development Trust, Marlborough Town Council, Ramsbury Parish Council, Wooley and Wallis, Brewin Dolphin, Berkshire Trout Farm, TH White Group, RSM Bentley Jennison, and Wood Awdry Ford.

We will be needing funds for future years so any other donations would be welcome.



*Ramsbury School's Class 5 teacher, Jenny Harker with some of the 'trout inspired' work.*



*Brown Trout 'alevins' a week after hatching.*



*BBC Radio journalist, Annie Weston interviewing Class 3 at Preshute School.*



*Taking a peek at the developing 'alevins'.*

## State of the river— —Winter 2007/8

John Hounslow, Charlotte Hitchmough and Sean Dempster

Following the wet summer, the autumn rainfall was disappointingly low until December and January, when rainfall was above average. Large areas of water meadows flooded in January and river flow was slightly above average. Groundwater levels are good for the time of year.

Weed growth has been kick-started by the strong river flow and water clarity was good until the flooding in early January, since when water has carried a high sediment load and is cloudy as a result.

Otters are back on the upper Kennet. Sean Dempster writes 'We had an otter here on Saturday afternoon. It was very fearless and took two trout in succession from above the weir'.

Another otter was seen in Ramsbury in December and at Mildenhall there have been recent signs that otters are present.

*Rainfall, riverflow and groundwater graphs will be back next issue.*

## Cooper's Meadow, Marlborough Half-way to funding habitat restoration

We are delighted to announce that Kennet District Council has awarded ARK £23,000 to restore the river banks and water meadow in the centre of Marlborough. We are working to secure the other half of the money needed to get the project underway. The project is a joint venture between ARK and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and is supported by the Marlborough River Restoration Scheme partners.

## Mill Lane Triangle

Martin Gibson

ARK and Ramsbury Parish Council are delighted to announce that they have jointly purchased a small parcel of land at Mill Lane in Ramsbury. The land is bounded on two sides by the River Kennet and covered in wet woodland.

The fundamental management plan is that the land be disturbed as little as possible, to maximise the benefit to flora and fauna. Ramsbury Parish Council will manage the trees while the river banks will be the responsibility of ARK.

The only immediate change planned is to cut down a small number of the planted poplar trees, leaving the timber in-situ. Action will be taken to increase the amount of light reaching the bed of the main river by removing certain minor trees. ARK, advised by John Hounslow, will attempt to encourage river weed growth such as Ranunculus.

The existing foot path will be left much as it is and remain open to visitors. Features designed to improve wildlife such as otter holts, bat or owl boxes, or bird, bee or insect nesting boxes will be created under the advice of Peter Marren and John Hounslow.

The baby trout hatched at Ramsbury Primary School as part of the 'Trout ARK' project will be released here.



Mill Lane, Ramsbury

## Do you run a farm or business in the Kennet Valley?

Wise water-use and careful soil management could save you money (up to 40% of your water bill) and help the Kennet. Free water audits for farms and businesses, and soil management plans for farms are available through two initiatives designed to improve the health of the river.

Often simple changes in business or farming practices can have a major benefit to the river, both reducing water abstracted from the aquifer and minimising the sediment and nutrient-rich runoff that reaches the watercourse. In some cases grants may be available towards the costs of remedial work.

Take a look at: [http://www.liv.ac.uk/swimmer/surcase/water\\_audit\\_website.html](http://www.liv.ac.uk/swimmer/surcase/water_audit_website.html) to find out more

about water audits or, if you prefer, telephone Chris Sollars (SURCaSE) on 01483 470129 or email: [chris.sollars@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:chris.sollars@liverpool.ac.uk).

If you are a farmer and would be interested in discussing land management please contact: Robert Isles by email: [robert.isles@environment-agency.gov](mailto:robert.isles@environment-agency.gov). Robert has been to several farms belonging to ARK members and they found his visit helpful. He can offer very practical advice, including detailed soil management plans where appropriate. Robert is also looking for examples of 'good practice' to get a picture of the overall situation in the Kennet Valley, so please do take advantage of this free opportunity. Robert is funded by the Thames Rivers Restoration Trust as part of the Kennet Chalkstream Restoration Project.

## In praise of Chilton Foliat

Poem by a US serviceman

kindly contributed by Lynne Quinton, Chilton Foliat

We've wandered on your shady roads  
And breathed your fresh, sweet air,  
And oft-times lingered on the bridge  
That spans the Kennet fair.

We've watched the trout besport themselves  
In water crystal clear.  
The swans with family all afloat  
Have nothing there to fear.  
The homely villagers we've met,  
They made us welcome there.  
Their cottages so neatly thatched,  
So picturesque and rare.

Your neat, old fashioned country inns  
The Wheatsheaf and The Stag\*  
Where folks can meet and have their chat,  
And drink and smoke and brag.

We love to hear the cuckoo's call  
Oft from the nearby wood,  
The pigeon and the blackbird,  
To us they all seem good.

The church so old and beautiful  
Where we can go and rest,  
To us it may look empty  
But is filled with unseen guests.

And Littlecote we'll not forget,  
Its wall and garden fair,  
Its old trees, its fruits and flowers  
There's nothing wanting there.  
And now to all we say adieu,  
In memory they will remain.  
If we are spared, some other year  
We will return again.

*\*Can anyone tell us where this pub used to be?*

## Tottenham House Water Supply

Planning permission for the new golf course and large hotel at Tottenham House in Savernake Forest was granted in 2006, despite strong objections, from ARK and others, that water resources in the Kennet Valley were insufficient to support the development .

Thames Water and the developers have still not reached a decision about where the water will be supplied from. ARK is concerned that they may resort to abstracting more water from within the Kennet SSSI, despite the Environment Agency's determination that the valley is already 'over-abstracted'. Additional abstraction from the Kennet Valley is likely to further reduce river flows and result in habitat degradation.

This newsletter is published 3 times a year. We welcome articles from readers. Please contact Charlotte Hitchmough at [info@riverkennet.org](mailto:info@riverkennet.org) if you have any comments or suggestions.

## Volunteers

Charlotte Hitchmough

ARK could not exist without the great help we get from our volunteers. In addition to the work done by the committee, many members volunteer their time to work on river habitat restoration projects, deliver newsletters, take photographs and help with research and monitoring.

I'd like to particularly thank Ian Finlayson and Charlie Gauntlett, two upper sixth students who give up every Wednesday afternoon during term-time to help with whatever needs doing, be it stuffing envelopes, moving soil, or planting riverside plants.

They work with cheerful enthusiasm and good humour and have helped keep the office running smoothly this year. So, thank you to them and to Marlborough College for letting us make good use of their time.



Charlie Gauntlett (left) and Ian Finlayson (right).

## Sewer leaks and overflows

The ARK newsletter last spring highlighted the problems caused by leaky sewers, particularly during wet weather. Sewers can become inundated with water as well as raw sewage, causing manhole covers to lift and the effluent to spill out. In some cases this effluent overflow makes its way straight into the river, adding to the nutrient load and leaving an unsightly and unhygienic trail. In other instances sewer pipes are just damaged and leaky as a result.

We are pleased that members responded by alerting us to examples, and the Environment Agency and Thames Water have fixed the problems.

Thames Water reports that an increasing problem is mis-connection of sewers, where drainage from domestic premises is connected to stormwater drains instead of the foul sewer system. Stormwater drains discharge into water courses and do not reach a treatment works. If you come across any pollution incident first call the **Environment Agency incident line on 0800 807 060**, and then let us know by email: [info@riverkennet.org](mailto:info@riverkennet.org) or call: 01672 513672.

