

Action for the River Kennet

River talk

A PARTNERSHIP OF PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT THE KENNET

A Clean Home Shouldn't Mean a Dirty River

Chalk streams like the Kennet are characterised by alkaline, crystal-clear water flowing consistently over clean gravel beds.

Naturally occurring nutrients, including phosphates, feed the streamwater crowfoot, starwort, watercress and other green plants that thrive in this environment.

However, too much phosphate upsets the balance by allowing nutrient-hungry algae to out-compete aquatic plants. When algae die they are deposited as sediment that smothers plants, and as the plants decompose oxygen is used up, suffocating aquatic insects and fish.

It is estimated that in England over 50,000 tonnes of phosphorus enters our rivers every year. Farmland only contributes about 10% of this load; the rest comes from wastewater from homes and businesses, including a fifth from cleaning products.

Everyone can make a difference to how much phosphate is in our rivers, by carefully choosing their cleaning products. Dishwasher detergent is a particular culprit, often containing 30% phosphate by weight. But several manufacturers produce

products with <5% phosphate and some don't use phosphate at all.

In 2008, following strong lobbying by ARK, Thames Water began investing in phosphate stripping units at the major sewage treatment works on the Kennet. However, even the best units do not remove 100% of phosphate, and smaller works do not have this advanced technology at all. More critically if your property relies on a septic tank no phosphate will be removed from the effluent, so you can make a big difference to how much phosphate enters the river by choosing your cleaning products with care.

ARK is playing a leading role in a joint rivers trusts campaign to encourage everyone to opt for low- or no-phosphate cleaning products so that we all have a healthy river to enjoy. For a chance to win a whole set of phosphate free products from Ecover just visit our website www.riverkennet.org and follow the link.

Charlotte Hitchmough

Clean for the Queen

It is a regular conversation amongst our volunteers as to why humans throw litter into our river or anywhere else for that matter? We often incorporate rubbish removal into our regular conservation and restoration tasks and hold an annual river litter-pick wading upstream through Marlborough.



When the opportunity to be part of the national Clean for the Queen campaign arose we signed up! The campaign aimed to tidy up Britain ready for her Majesty's 90th Birthday celebrations and our own efforts at Bay Bridge and on the River Og yielded no fewer than 40 sacks of rubbish from in and by the river.

Anna Forbes

News from the Chairman

ARK continues to make good progress on many fronts, thanks to the efforts of our dedicated staff, volunteers and supporters large and small.



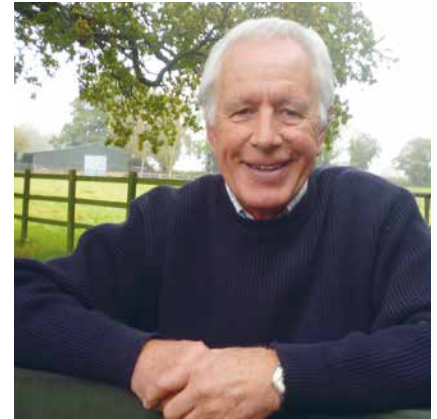
All this has been under the leadership of Charlotte Hitchmough as Director and in the following page we report on some of the highlights of our work over the winter months.

For me, and I hope others, a significant one of these has been acquiring our own office. For over ten years, Charlotte has worked from the kitchen in her home in Manton. I give great credit to her and her family for managing to do so with minimum disruption to their busy family life. However, with a growing workload and the appointment of a paid assistant some two years ago (now Linda Nemeth) this had started to become a real challenge.

We were delighted when the opportunity arose to share offices with the Marlborough Brandt Group (MBG – Marlborough's link with

Gunjur in The Gambia) in Elmtree Park, just west of Manton. We moved in December, and with some very good value second-hand and nearly new furniture (thanks to Linda!) and a couple of bargain laptops she and Charlotte are now firmly established in ARK's new control centre. As a bonus, Charlotte has a 20 minute walking commute to work with the dog, who apparently also likes the office. In itself, this is a minor organisational event, albeit a positive one. But for me it is more than that. It marks a coming of age for ARK as a professional organisation. When I joined ARK and was asked by our founder Chairman Jack Ainslie to join the Committee, it was a small though highly dedicated and skilled group of individuals supported by a part-time secretary. In those early years most of the action and successes were down to the chair and committee members.

The appointment in 2004 of Charlotte Hitchmough, already experienced in both hydrology and public understanding, started the move towards where we are today – a charitable trust with a range of part-time paid staff and unpaid volunteers who deliver the programme you read of in these pages. I want to use this opportunity to give credit to her for this achievement. As well as generating the necessary funds and



managing several substantial projects, she has acquired great respect from the agencies with which we work such as the Environment Agency (EA), Thames Water and the World Wildlife Fund. An example of that high regard was the EA's invitation for her to manage and chair the multi-agency Kennet Catchment Partnership, a role she has since carried out with great effectiveness.

Now read on – to learn more of what ARK has been doing, thanks both to Charlotte and to you our members, supporters, fellow agencies, and volunteers. I hope you will enjoy it.

Geoffrey Findlay

Did you know that if you shop online, you can raise funds for ARK while you shop?

By visiting the [easyfundraising website](#) (see back cover for details) and registering as a supporter of ARK, when you shop, the retailer will give a donation of your total spend to ARK. It's really easy to use and can earn valuable donations which will help us continue our work on and around the River Kennet. So far we have raised over £150 through Easyfundraising, so happy shopping!

Restoring the River Bed

One of ARK's biggest projects has been the restoration of the river around Minal (Mildenhall) as part of the Minal River Project.

In Issue 32 of River Talk we described how the construction of a new fish bypass beside the Mill House would allow fish to swim upstream more easily. By lowering the bed of the stream in the garden we were also making sure that carrier streams won't dry up in normal summers.

A year later, the second phase of the river habitat restoration work in Minal is moving towards completion. The biggest change has been the hundreds of tonnes of gravel brought in to replace the gravels dredged out of the river during the 1970s. Gravels are an important element of chalk streams. They provide essential material for brown trout and grayling to dig their nests (known as redds) so that they can lay eggs. The composition of gravel means that the fish can use it to cover over the newly laid eggs in a way that allows oxygenated water to flow between the gaps in the gravel and keep the eggs from suffocating. Gravel is also important as a substrate for plants such as stream water crowfoot and water parsnip to take root.

The banks have also been re-worked to create a more sinuous river. Variations in the plan-form and bed profile of rivers provide important habitats for wildlife. For instance, some riverfly species like Stonefly flourish in fast-flowing shallow water. Just as importantly, fish need different environments to support their different life stages. Trout eggs need a good flow of water over clean gravels, but tiny trout fry need quieter margins where they can hide in the shelter of reeds until they become strong enough to live in the main river.



The habitat restoration work is putting back many of the features that have been dredged out over the years. New baffles have been added to the weir at Elcot to create fish and eel passage, which complements the work already done to create fish passage around Durnsford Mill. The combined projects have opened up 3 km of river to free fish movement again.

We are delighted that our volunteer team have been working hard under the watchful eye of River Keeper John Hounslow to plant up the banks, fill in berms and build flow deflectors. John himself has been planting new hedging and coppicing overgrown trees to create a mix of light and shade along the river. Work will continue throughout this summer and Savernake Flyfishers will be hosting a river walk on 27 August so people can see what has been done. Do come and join us.

Thames Water and the Environment Agency have funded the habitat restoration and the river walk will be funded by Thames Water.

Charlotte Hitchmough



Stonebridge Boardwalk

It is a year since the creation of our wetland at Stonebridge Wild River Reserve. The plants have thrived and a non-slip recycled plastic boardwalk and pond dipping platform have been installed.

The wildlife has moved in and we have a beautiful new amenity for visitors to use. To celebrate this special project we are holding an opening ceremony at 2pm on Friday 6 May, when Claire Perry MP will be officially opening the Wetland Project. Please do come along and join us!

Be Prepared

Aldbourne protects itself from the effects of flooding.

In the last issue of River Talk, Nick Josephy explained how a community has worked constructively with businesses and authorities to reduce the frequency and impact of flooding in Aldbourne.

ARK welcomes the most recent development: temporary installation in South Street of an innovative mobile sewage filtering unit, which is ready to be switched on in times of emergency as part of Thames Water's ongoing work.

The £20,000 unit is currently on standby. It is very much a last resort but a welcome investment to protect the environment. In previous years raw sewage has had to be pumped into the Bourne in order to stop it overflowing over the streets. The bio-filter has been on site since mid February, but happily has not yet had to be put into operation as the few flooding instances there were this winter could all be effectively managed in other ways.

Parish Councillor Nick Josephy, who chairs the Aldbourne Drainage Improvement Group, said: 'Thames Water's proactive approach to try and prevent the sewer flooding problems is very welcome. I hope it will not be necessary to put the filter unit into use but it's certainly very reassuring to know that, should the weather take a turn for the worse, then it's here and ready for action'.

This new equipment means, should the situation arise again, the most harmful elements in the sewage will be filtered out by the unit before the water enters the environment. It will stay in place for as long as there is a risk of flooding.

Charlotte Hitchmough



Counting our Precious Water Voles

When you are lucky enough to have water voles living along the river it is vital to look after them.

Water voles have undergone a long-term decline in Britain, yet their requirements are not niche. They require well-vegetated riverbanks – no fewer than 227 plant species have been recorded making up their diet and they eat about 80% of their body weight every day!

Poor riverbank management, degradation and pollution have all contributed to this mammal's reduction in numbers. They have also suffered from predation by the non-native American mink.

Last year ARK organised a training day at Minal for nine enthusiastic volunteers to become water vole surveyors. Their newly gained skills have enabled us to have our own trained team able to survey stretches of riverbank prior to restoration projects so that areas containing water voles can be managed appropriately and legally. Water voles are legally protected in Britain, whatever the season.



The surveyors have also been systematically surveying the banks of the Kennet in Marlborough to record signs of the presence of water voles and during the coming summer months will be extending their recording further upstream and downstream.

If you are interested in water vole training, TVERC are running a course. To find out more visit: www.tverc.org/cms/content/events

Anna Forbes

Riverfly Monitoring

Why do we do it? And what happens next?

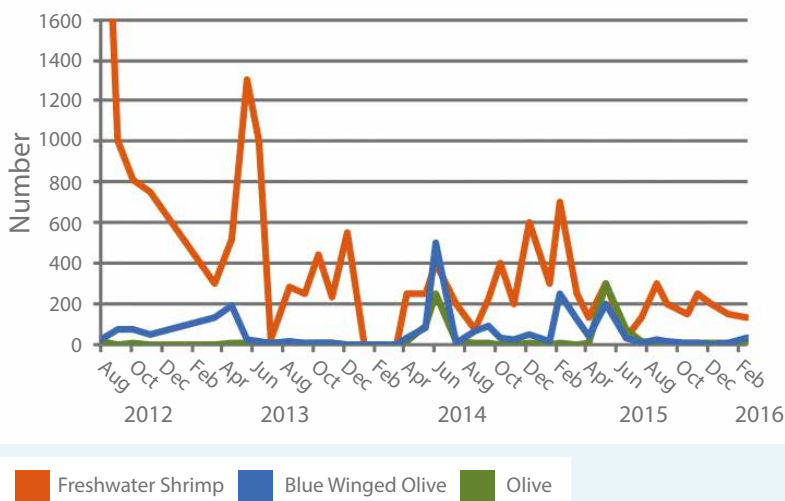
Back in 2007, Savernake Flyfisher Stuart Gould motivated ARK to embrace riverfly monitoring and helped us to secure funding to run the first Riverfly Training course on the Kennet. By 2010 we had 15 monitors, including Harry and Anna Forbes, monitoring their sites once each month. The monitoring has now spread to monthly counts in 46 sites with the help of 28 monitors.

Each month our volunteers count eight types of invertebrates called the 'indicator species'. The rise or fall of the counts gives an indication of the health of the river. The benefit of this was shown when Anna and Martin Harrison doing their monthly count in June 2013 at Elcot noted very low numbers, thus raising the alarm about the devastating organophosphate pollution incident

that had caused them. Happily, dramatic findings like this are not common but the challenge now is not to let this huge amount of evidence gather dust but to use it.

ARK's Technical Adviser John Lawson, working with the Natural Access information platform (www.naturalaccess.org.uk), has set the ball rolling by creating a structured dataset that is already allowing us to learn some important lessons.

Graph 1: Littlecote Upper Weir

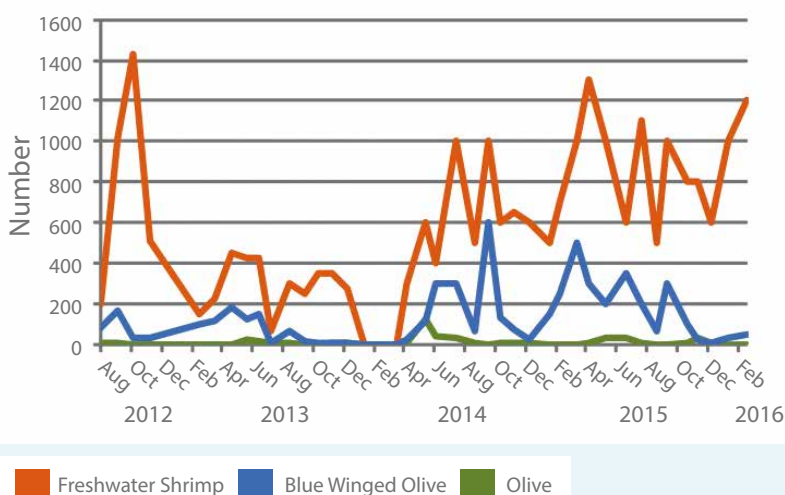


Graph 1 records the incidence of Shrimps, Blue Winged Olives and Olives at our Upper Littlecote site immediately after the chlorpyrifos incident in July 2013 and a month later. Look carefully at July 2013 and the numbers go down to nil due to the chlorpyrifos pollution but quickly pick up. The graph shows how far downstream the problem went.

Now compare Graph 2, which relates to a site about 400 metres downstream of Graph 1. Here extensive work to narrow the channel and decrease the river depth, by Rob Hounslow the keeper and Windrush AEC, with excellent support from Mr Hambro, the riparian owner, began in late 2012 and won a Wild Trout Trust Conservation Award. The practical benefits of restoration can be seen by looking at the differences in the counts. Graph 2 is much better despite the two sites initially being very similar and close by.

We are also starting to monitor the levels of nitrates and phosphates entering the river. Raised levels may indicate leaking sewers and septic tanks or runoff from fields and farmyards. Also in future ARK may look more closely at the relationship between water depth and riverfly counts.

Graph 2: Littlecote 2nd Weir



Rodney Owen Jones



Creating Better Soils

Cover crops such as oil radish, rye, phacelia and vetches are sown after the harvest to help improve the health of the soil.

On 8 December 2015, I was so fortunate to attend the seminar on the subject run by the Campaign for the Farmed Environment, ARK and Catchment Sensitive Farming, as the target audience was local farmers and land managers. The session was held in the impressive conference room of the Ramsbury Brewery.

The expertise of the speakers was evident and was matched by the knowledge and engagement of the audience, who contributed greatly to a lively debate. It was inspiring to see how actively the local land managers were engaged in implementing the newest research. Indeed, many of them were well ahead of the curve! I feel that I gained real insight into the multiplicity of benefits which cover cropping can bring, not only to the field itself, but also to landscapes, helping to preserve the diversity of nature and quality of production that the South West is renowned for.

Alexander Coles
ARK member

Yellow Fish – Only Rain down the Drain

Never heard of it? It's spreading through Marlborough, thanks to an enthusiastic St John's Students.

Yellow Fish – Only Rain Down the Drain is a nationwide campaign raising awareness that most surface water drains feed directly into water courses and not via water treatment works. By marking drains with a Yellow Fish and concurrently raising local awareness of what shouldn't go down drains it hopes to persuade local people to help improve the quality of their local water courses. Oils, paint, detergents, chemicals and rubbish all cause blockages, pollute the river and become hazards to aquatic life, so the message is don't flush them down the drain!



ARK are working with St John's Students 'Beyond Me' group to develop the idea locally. The first step was to educate and inspire the young people to understand the principles and become advocates to the message. They have embraced the challenge and, in late 2015, started marking drains with self adhesive Yellow Fish stickers which they had designed – complete with the tag line 'Rainwater Only – Drains to River'. Initially the stickers were difficult to apply in real-world conditions so we've procured a different sticky pad and tubes of adhesive for the group to trial and feedback their findings. They're now working on a media campaign to support their drain marking efforts.

Of course, identifying pollution incidents is always important. Optical brighteners, used in many laundry detergents to make whites seem whiter, are illuminated under ultra-violet light. At a recent Institute of Water event, we heard of an ultra-violet torch that we believe will simplify the process of detecting water from sewers entering the river. We plan to buy one for use by the Yellow Fish and other groups.

The next steps will be to mark more drains and to engage younger students, their families and the wider community with the principles of Only Rain Down the Drain.

Juliet Bonser

Team Stream Project

Last November saw the transformation of a barren and eroded stretch of the River Kennet at the rear of Hillier's Yard car park in Marlborough.



More than 30 dedicated volunteers gave over 200 hours of their time to our Team Stream Project. The supervised team of local volunteers set about creating a sinuous corridor of revetment work by installing faggots (made by the volunteers over the previous winter) and pre-planted coir rolls to create a new more natural bank profile.

This was then backfilled with brushwood from riverbank trees that had been coppiced to produce a better mix of light and shade, with the knock on effect of opening up more views of the river to passers-by.

We were joined by St John's Academy students, who got into waders and helped plant hundreds of attractive native marginal plants within the structures. Once established, these will form the rich vegetation naturally associated with chalk streams and provide the habitat needed by insects, birds and mammals. Water voles already live close by in Cooper's

Meadow and Kennet Place, so we hope that in time they will spread to this stretch too.

Work is also underway to produce a beautiful interpretive panel to accompany the restoration work and give the community and visitors to the town information on chalk streams and wildlife, with a focus on birds to look out for at this site.

The restoration was generously funded by Aster Communities and the Thames Water Rivers & Wetlands Community Days. It was also supported by Waitrose, who own the riverbank, and the Environment Agency.

[Anna Forbes](#)

Keeping the Cattle at Bay

The Reading & District Angling Association is one of the oldest angling organisations in England.

It was originally set up by a group of businessmen in 1877 with the aim to ... 'Increase the stock of fish so as to afford sport for all which so splendid a section of the river will afford'. This statement still rings true today and is why our involvement with the Kennet Catchment Partnership and Action for the River Kennet is so important to us. We are constantly working to improve the instream and riverine habitat in order to negate the impact of the ever-increasing demands put upon the river.



These pictures illustrate just one example of the work we do. This was an area where cattle would walk into the river to drink. Their uncontrolled wading not only erodes the bankside but also puts un-wanted slits into the channel. With a bit of work this area was easily turned into a backwater in which juvenile fish can shelter in times of flood. Obviously, by not allowing animals in, a purpose-built drinking area had to be formed. The new formal drink is designed in such a way as to limit the ingress of the cattle and thus limit the silt entering the channel.

[Del Shackleford](#)
Reading District Angling Association

ARK People

Anna Forbes



Growing up in Marlborough I spent much of my childhood exploring in the River Kennet and did the same with my son. I have been involved with ARK for over eight years and now manage the volunteers and lead the weekly conservation and restoration tasks at the Stonebridge Wild River Reserve.

Juliet Bonser



In eight years living in Manton I've encountered ARK's work when paddling in or walking beside various stretches of our river, receiving 'freebies' through my children and arranging talks and activities for scouts. I was delighted recently to take over the Community Project Advisor role.

Mel Cooper



I joined ARK in January 2015 to see the Kennet in all seasons. As a recently retired office worker I chose conservation as voluntary work. I am now a redd spotter and part of the water vole surveying team, helping to provide indications of the health of the river and its environment.



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

www.easyfundraising.org.uk/arkactionfortheriverkennet

Dates for Your Diary

7 May, 3 June, 1 July, 17 August and 19 September

Moth Nights at Stonebridge Wild River Reserve. Please check our website or Facebook page for more details – times are confirmed closer to the dates. These evenings are dependent on dry weather.

Friday 6 May, 2pm

Wetland and boardwalk opening ceremony at the wetland in Stonebridge Meadow, Stonebridge Lane, Marlborough. Wellies recommended.

Sunday 7 August (for times please visit our website closer to the date)

ARK Family Day at Marlborough College. Come along to find out all about our chalk stream and what lives in and by it. A wonderful opportunity to see a glorious stretch of the river and its inhabitants up close.

Saturday 27 August, 2pm (last starting time 3pm)

Savernake Flyfishers host ARK's Summer River Walk from Elcot Mill to Axford, in partnership with Thames Water. Tea and home-made cakes will be served from the shepherd's hut opposite The Bothy in Minal.

For more details on all these events see our website or contact anna@riverkennet.org

Websites Worth Visiting



The Canal & River Trust

On top of maintaining 2,000 miles of canals and rivers, we are responsible for an enormous network of bridges, embankments, towpaths, aqueducts, docks and reservoirs. From improving towpaths and creating new wildlife habitats, we are constantly working to make our canals and rivers the very best.

To find out more please visit:
www.canalrivertrust.org.uk



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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 or email 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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