



Action for the River Kennet



Action for the River Kennet
Annual Report
2016

A partnership of people
who care about the River Kennet



ARK'S WILD RIVER RESERVE, INCLUDING STONEBRIDGE MEADOW, WAS JUDGED 'OUTSTANDING' IN THE 'IT'S YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD' CATEGORY OF THIS YEAR'S SOUTH WEST IN BLOOM AWARDS.



There is much good news to report this year; but also a degree of uncertainty about the future.

The good news first. The river is generally in good heart. Otters are back; evidenced by the half-eaten fish they leave on the bank, to which they return for second helpings. Water vole are increasing – bucking the national trend of decline. New species of moth seem to be identified in Stonebridge Meadow almost every Moth Evening, the total now more than 290. We continue to increase the range and coverage of our out-reach programmes.

Thames Water's new north-south pipeline is progressing well with to date only minor delays caused by having to work around an archaeological site. This represents a major plank in ARK's long-term campaign to reduce the strain on the Kennet catchment, and hence the river itself, in periods of low flow and high demand. While celebrating this

Creating a better future for the Kennet through:

- 1 Citizen Science**
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- 2 Creative Conservation**
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- 3 Influencing Others**
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wholeheartedly, we shall nevertheless continue to campaign to ensure that our unique chalk-stream habitat is protected from over abstraction in future.

As part of our interest in the river downstream to Reading, we have worked on projects large and small as described elsewhere in this report. These include both practical projects, the training of volunteers and educational/schools projects, such as Eels in Schools and A River in My Classroom.

In these and other ways, we play a significant role in the Catchment Based Approach launched and supervised by the Environment Agency (EA), which has funded ARK to manage and chair the Kennet Catchment Partnership. This comprises all organisations with an interest in the river from its source to Reading. Under ARK's leadership, the number of organisations attending meetings has increased and the partnership is driving habitat and



water quality. While we believe that a comparable system will operate under any new post-Brexit environment policy, nothing can yet be certain.

Nearer to home, our 15 acre Stonebridge Meadow, jointly owned with Marlborough Town Council, has literally blossomed under the indefatigable leadership of Anna Forbes and thanks to our volunteers and the Council's Richard Beale. We were delighted that MP Claire Perry and the then Mayor Councilor Margaret Rose joined us to open the new wheelchair-friendly boardwalk funded by the Big Lottery Awards for All and described by Claire Perry as 'a unique treasure on Marlborough's doorstep'. We have also made great use of the Meadow to run Tour and Explore events for Scouts, Beavers, Brownie and school groups – funded by the local branch of FatFace – as well as our popular well-attended Moth Nights and Bat Nights.

With funding from the AONB and Natural England, we are helping farmers adopt water-friendly practices, and have run successful trials and open days. Major river habitat improvement projects include a stretch of the River at Mildenhall and at Foudry Brook, near Reading, funded by the Environment Agency via the Catchment Partnership Action Fund and Thames Water.

For the first time ever, we now have our own office in Manton, shared with the Marlborough Brandt Group, which Charlotte and Linda Nemeth tell me has greatly improved their efficiency compared to working from home.

Our volunteer monitors and surveyors donate a huge amount of their time and energy to the river. We are now able to carry out riverfly, water vole and redd (trout 'nests') surveys as well as taking

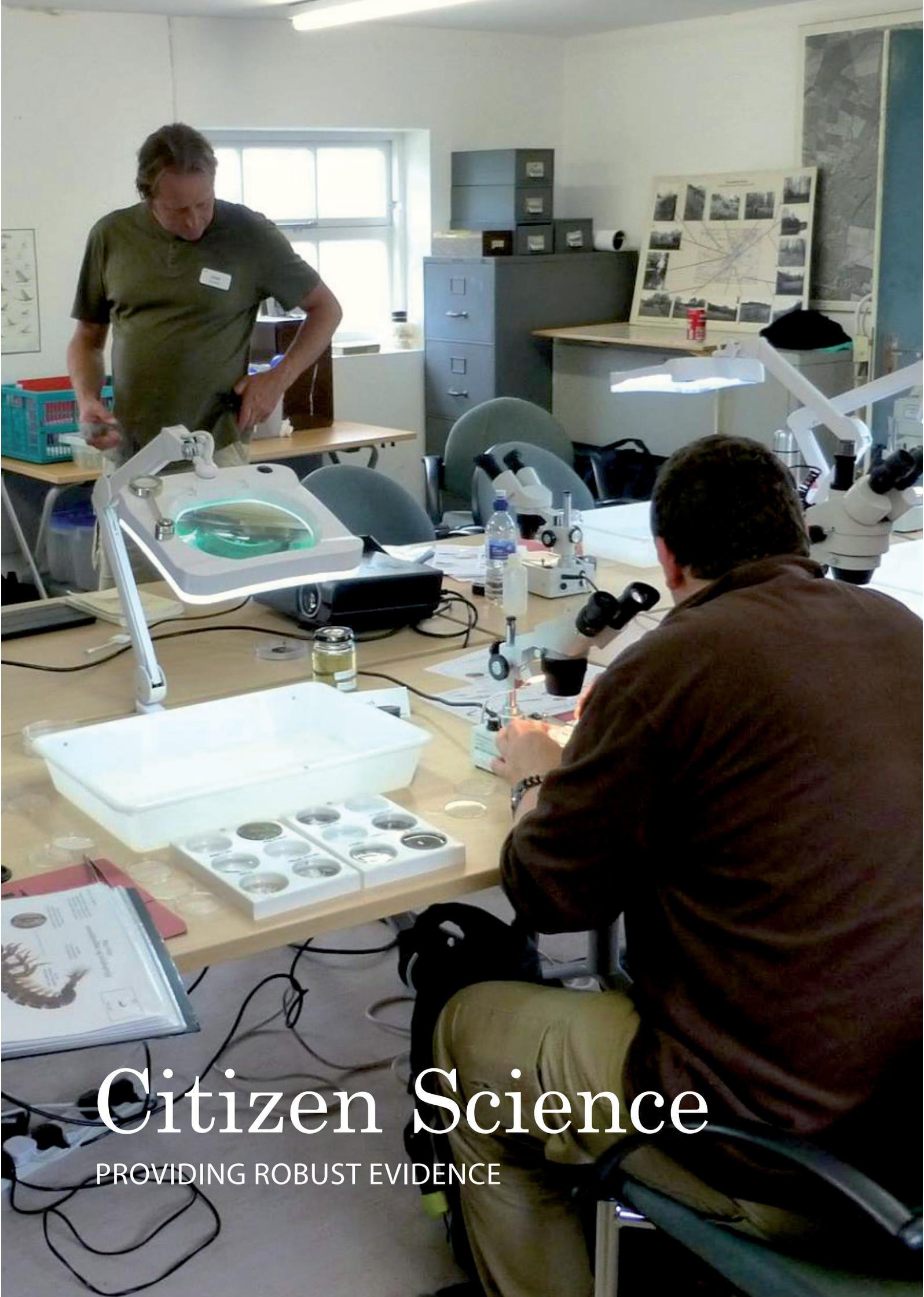
water-quality samples. Our practical volunteers continue to provide a willing and enthusiastic workforce as a vital part of all our habitat projects. To both of these teams we extend our very sincere thanks.

This is all positive. Looking ahead, there lies the uncertainty of Brexit. Much of the UK's present environmental protection derives from EU legislation, which is enshrined in UK law. Currently it gives NGOs such as ARK the right to challenge Government policies and if a breach is proven it can lead to the EU imposing a fine on the UK. How far the new Government will replicate such sanctions can only be speculated at this stage. As ever, it will depend on how high a priority the Government gives to the environment as compared to the demands of economic growth and public expenditure. At this stage, it seems the most that ARK and other such groups can do is to be ready to present our case as strongly as possible, when the time comes.

On that uncertain note, I must express ARK's thanks to all those who make our ever-growing programme successful: you the members, without whom we would not be here; our sponsors (see the outside back cover); our Director Charlotte Hitchmough and her team; the Committee, and our hard-working volunteers.



CHAIRMAN



Citizen Science

PROVIDING ROBUST EVIDENCE



Measuring the health of the river – from water voles to water quality.

As our team of volunteers grows we are able to learn more about our river from the data they collect about water quality and wildlife. And that in turn helps us and our partners to work out how to care for their long-term future.

Seventeen new surveyors are now trained and equipped to record signs of water voles. We share our records with the Wildlife Trusts' Water Vole Recovery Project, contributing to the larger picture and shaping how we restore stretches of the river.

Several mink rafts are now regularly monitored for paw prints by our trained volunteer, thus helping to keep a check on the invasive non-native American mink in order to protect the vulnerable water vole.

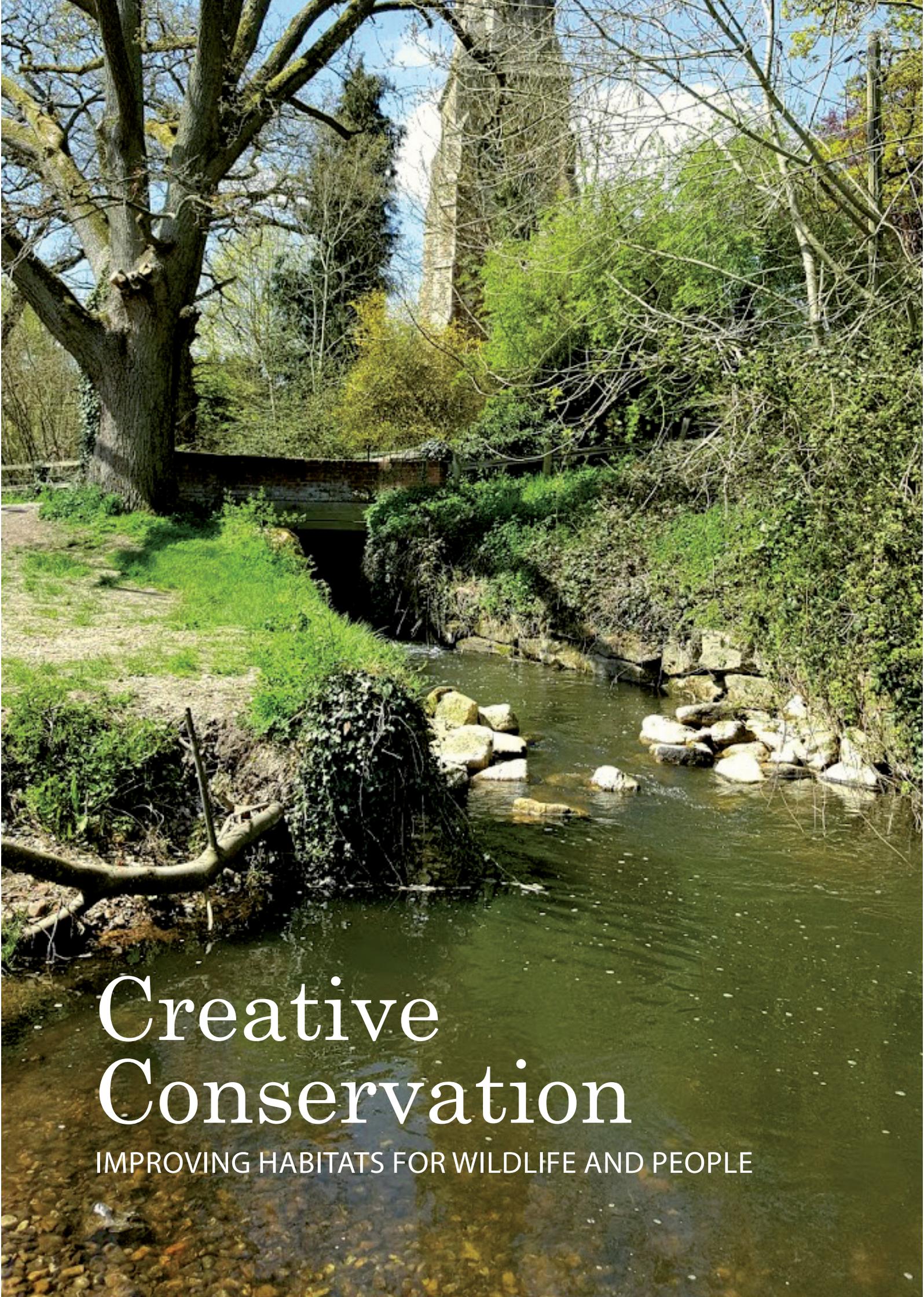
Sixteen new riverfly monitors have been trained, providing continuity at existing sites and allowing us to establish new sites where there are gaps to be filled.

We would like to thank Riverfly Co-ordinator Harry Forbes who for the

last nine years has built up and trained our riverfly team, as well as diligently monitoring his own sites; he has now moved on to study Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Magdalen College, Oxford.

This year we have a new team of people testing the water quality of the Kennet and its tributaries every quarter. Nitrate and phosphate levels are recorded as well as turbidity and general hydrological conditions. This data will complement riverfly monitoring data and help us to target conservation work. Water-quality testing has been funded through the Catchment Partnership Action Fund and is in partnership with the Earth Watch Freshwater Watch programme. It builds on research carried out free of charge for ARK by Del Agua, which has given us further insights into water quality in the Kennet.

Charlotte Hitchmough/Anna Forbes
Director/Project Officer & Volunteer
Co-ordinator



Creative Conservation

IMPROVING HABITATS FOR WILDLIFE AND PEOPLE



Bringing neglected rivers back to good health is one of our top priorities.

West End Brook and Foudry Brook near Reading make up a tributary of the River Kennet that is failing to reach even 'moderate' health because of low fish populations, poor plant growth and water pollution. To help the river to recover we carried out three projects.

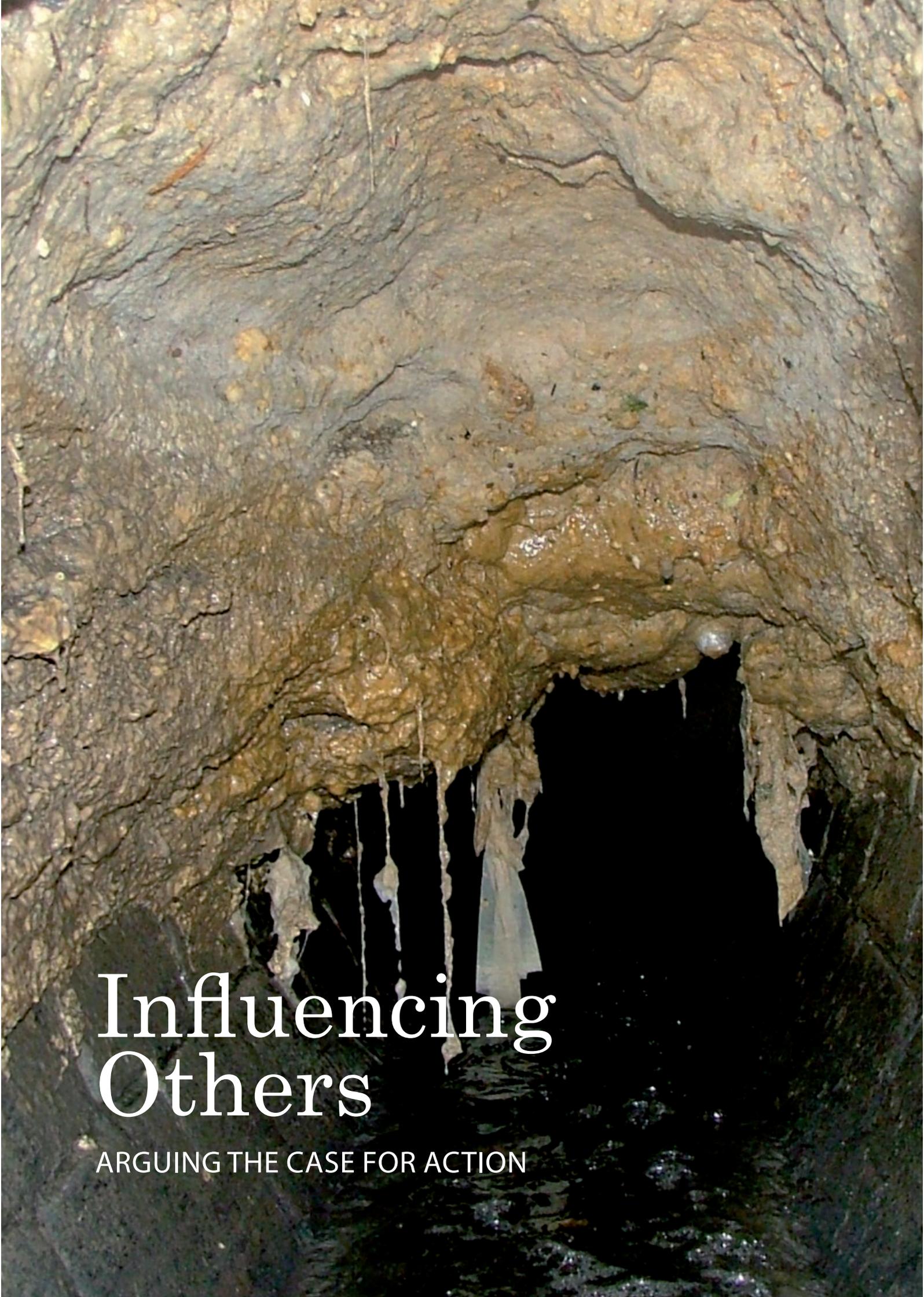
On Foudry Brook at Stratfield Mortimer a new series of pools and riffles has improved fish passage through the weir under the bridge by St Mary's church. Meanwhile, at West End Brook near Simms Farm the contracting team built a series of steps and pools to raise water levels and thereby link a 'perched culvert' back to the river. Perched culverts occur when rivers are diverted into underground pipes set at the wrong level to start or left isolated by subsequent erosion. As a result, fish are unable to swim through, leaving isolated and dwindling populations. Re-linking sections of river gives fish a much better chance to increase their numbers. We have already seen brown trout swimming upstream through Mortimer so we are optimistic that our interventions will help fish to thrive.

The final phase of the Foudry Brook work was to reduce pollution by diverting water which flowed from the farm to the brook into a safe area of wet woodland where it will be naturally filtered before seeping slowly into the river.

Alongside the work at Foudry Brook we have seen our Minal (Mildenhall) River project develop with river bank planting and revetment to complement the huge river-gravel replacement that we completed last year. The reach is looking much more like a chalkstream again now the grass along the river bank has been seeded with a wild flower and grass mix. We are also delighted that brown trout have already been recorded using the newly restored reach for spawning. In Marlborough, volunteers have transformed the river by Waitrose car park into home for water voles and other wildlife.

These major habitat restoration works have been funded by the Environment Agency and Thames Water.

Charlotte Hitchmough
Director



Influencing Others

ARGUING THE CASE FOR ACTION



ARK and its partners has been promoting practical new ways to protect our rivers.

In ARK's day-to-day activities we have contact with a wide range of people from politicians to school children, and including groups like Rotary, the Women's Institute and Probus. This year we have focused our public outreach on keeping rivers clean.

Our campaign to remind people 'only rain down the drain' has accelerated with around 1,500 drains now marked with Yellow Fish plaques. The project is moving down the valley and we aim to mark a further 1,500 drains in the coming year.

We have created new publicity and demonstration material to explain to people the dangers of putting fat, oil, grease and wet wipes in sewers. We are encouraging people to 'bin it don't block it' to prevent the build-up of fat bergs and blocked pipes in future.

Working with a number of other Rivers Trusts and with support from Ecover, the eco-friendly cleaning products company, and the Environment Agency we ran a 'Say no to phosphate' campaign, explaining the negative impacts of

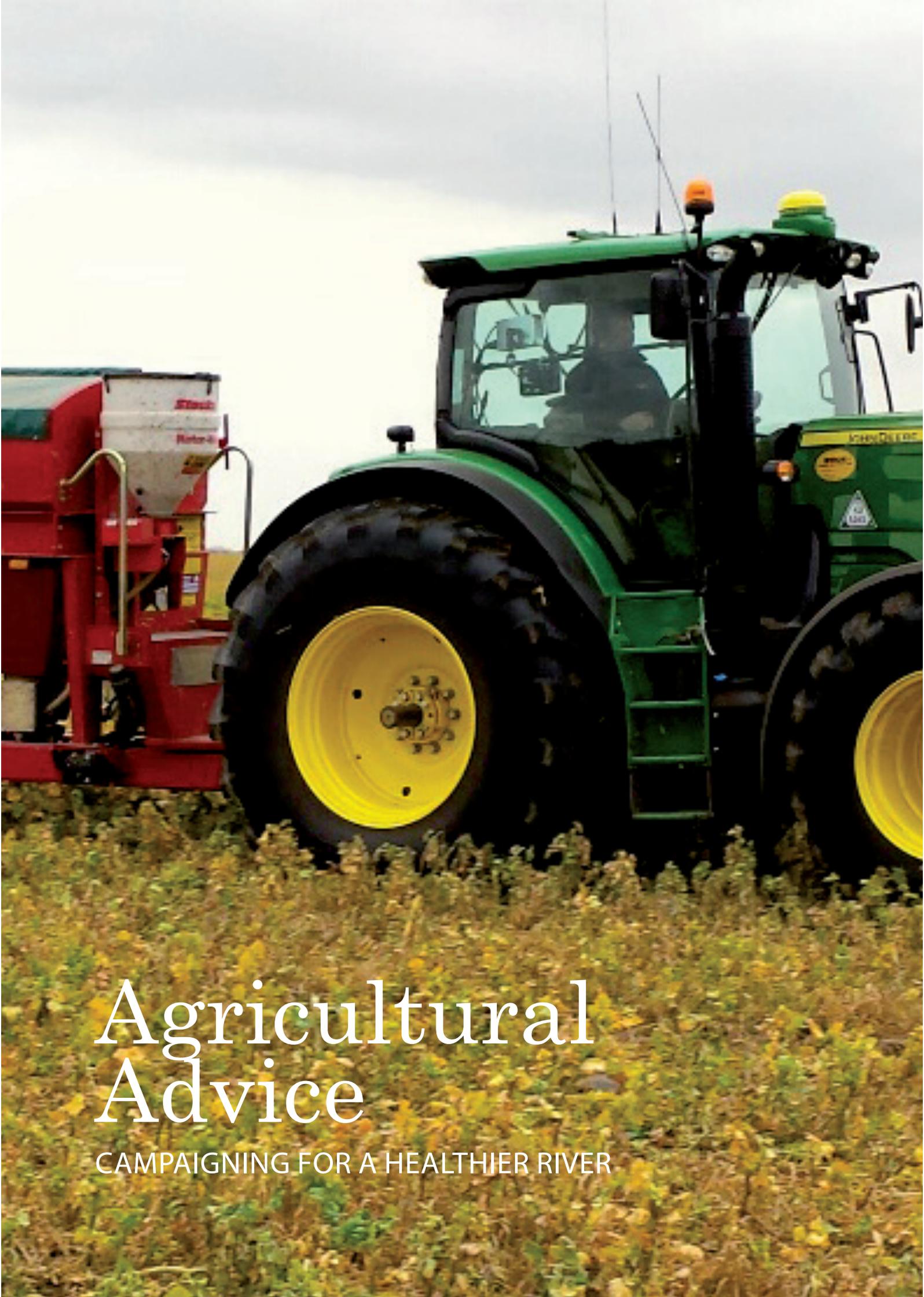
elevated phosphate levels in rivers and showing that choosing different cleaning products can reduce the quantity of phosphate in our rivers and streams.

We have begun to address the impacts that septic tanks have on water quality and we will be continuing this work by providing advice and raising awareness amongst septic tank owners and operators.

We continue to promote water efficiency, particularly publicising Thames Water's Smarter Home Visits, which help people to use less water. The two issues of water quantity and water quality are inextricably linked. Pollution has a greater impact on low flow rivers because it is less diluted.

Our relationship with WWF remains strong and we are working with them to provide evidence to influence policy relating to the water environment.

Charlotte Hitchmough
Director



Agricultural Advice

CAMPAIGNING FOR A HEALTHIER RIVER



ARK encourages farming practices that reduce pollution to our precious rivers.

Over the last ten years, there have been changes in the way farmers view and manage their soils. Arable soils, previously regarded as simply a growing medium for crops, are now recognised for what they are: complex ecosystems that support an astonishing diversity of biota. We are just beginning to learn how little we know about the soil.

With this increasing awareness of the importance of micro-organisms has come a change in management of the soil. Cover crops, direct drilling and controlled-traffic farming are all management techniques that are now being widely adopted.

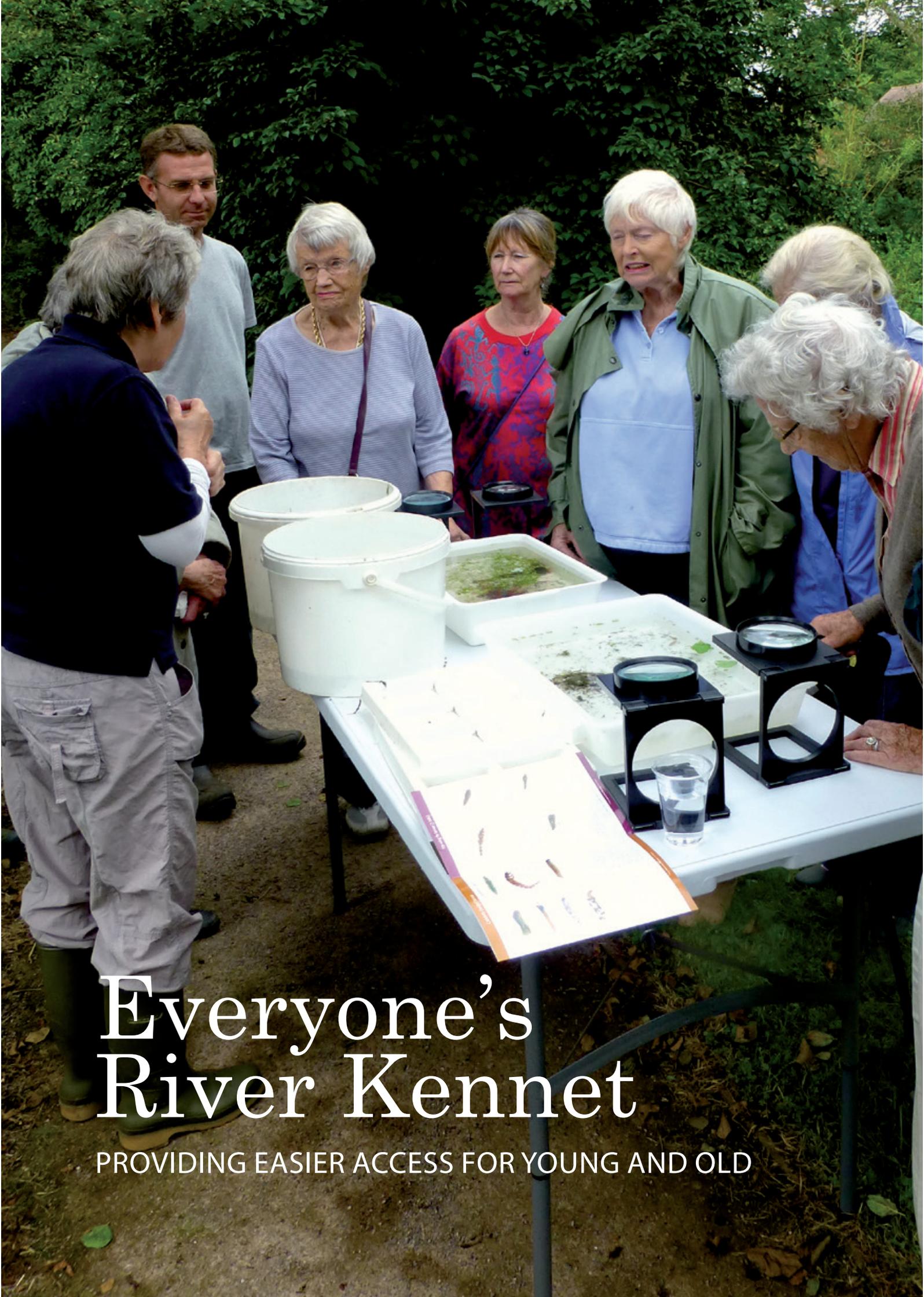
- Cover crops add organic matter, help stop nitrate leaching and protect the surface of the soil.
- Direct drilling ensures the soil structure and organisms are not harmed by cultivation.
- Controlled traffic farming minimises soil compaction which destroys soil structure and restricts plant growth.

At an ARK event in February, these techniques were showcased to 70

farmers, farm managers and agronomists who came to George Hosier's farm at Wexcombe. George uses cover crops extensively and a direct drill to establish all of his crops. Tom Sizmur of Reading University talked on the subject of soil health and three farmers who were also employing these techniques spoke of their experiences, the pitfalls and the advantages.

This event concluded a series of cover crop demonstrations throughout the south east of England, including two more in the Kennet catchment, at Farnborough and at Ramsbury. As well as the cover crop demos, ARK has been supporting farmers with one-to-one advice on a variety of other topics. These included including building sprayer-filling facilities that minimise the risk of chemical pollution, upgrading livestock handling areas and farm tracks to avoid run-off, and nutrient management planning for more accurate fertiliser applications.

Timothy Clarke
Farm Advisor



Everyone's River Kennet

PROVIDING EASIER ACCESS FOR YOUNG AND OLD



We want everybody to have a chance to enjoy this very special river and its wildlife...

... and that includes its beautiful tributaries as well as the main River Kennet.

During the last year we have worked with The Renewal Project whose focus is a one and a half mile stretch of the River Lambourn. By sharing our knowledge, skills and equipment we are enabling them to restore their river and learn a variety of wildlife monitoring techniques.

We visited residents at Bearwater Retirement Properties in Hungerford, who have the River Dun flowing through their grounds, for a 'What lives in your river' session. Tables were set up to display trays of chalk-stream creatures that were caught while residents watched from the bank and magnifiers allowed them to see the invertebrates and fish from their stream in all their glory!

On a very wet August afternoon 40 people took part in our summer river walk along usually private reaches of the Kennet from Marlborough to Axford and sheltered at Werg Mill to enjoy tea

and cakes. We would like to thank all the riparian landowners for their support with this event.

Earlier in the month we were thrilled to host a fundraising members-only evening within the stunning grounds of Howe Mill, Ramsbury thanks to Sir Martyn and Lady Sally Arbib. The event was a huge success and an opportunity for our members to enjoy a superb example of a well-managed stretch of the River Kennet.

In September we got adults and children into their local stream, the Dun, as part of Bedwyn Community Day – a walk and talk with river-dipping equipment that proved extremely popular.

As well as running activities in and by rivers within the Kennet catchment, we have been guest speaker at clubs and organisations, including Marlborough Rotary, the Women's Institute and Marlborough Area Board.

Anna Forbes
Project Officer & Volunteer Co-ordinator



ARK in the Community

EXPLAINING THE STORY OF A PRECIOUS RESOURCE



During 2016 we have reached out to more schools, organisations, groups and individuals than ever before.

Thanks to funding from the Marlborough branch of FatFace, we have run well-received Wet Feet Tour & Explore sessions at the Stonebridge Wild River Reserve. These provide outdoor fun and hands-on education about chalk streams and their surrounding habitats and are tailored to age and ability. Many of this year's participants were Rainbow, Beaver, Cub and Scout groups. We also spent two mornings helping 90 St Peter's Junior School students achieve their Geography fieldwork objectives.

Over 120 local people came along to our free Life of the River event held in the Marlborough College Biology Department and along their stretch of the river. Like many of our events, this was suitable for all ages and a chance for people to see many species of freshwater species that are not normally visible from a riverbank.

This year has seen continued collaboration with Thames Water's water efficiency team to engage over 1,000

school children and their families in fun, interactive and educational activities. We've also delivered our well-established Trout or Eels in Schools projects to five different schools, bringing into classrooms the challenges of brown trout survival from egg to adult and the story of the incredible 7000km journey of the tiny glass eel.

Adding in Emriver table-top model visits to five schools, several invertebrate identification events, our newly developed water cycle experiments session and the ever popular fatbergs, it's been a busy, varied and fun year! From St John's School, Marlborough in the upper catchment through to Woolhampton Primary School, downstream of Thatcham, ARK's education engagement area is expanding. Next year sees us spread further still, with two schools in Reading already signed up for 2017's Trout in Schools project.

Anna Forbes/Juliet Bonser
Project Officer & Volunteer Co-ordinator/
Water Matters Co-ordinator

Accounts

Year Ended 31 March 2016

Income and Expenditure Account Assets and Liabilities as at 31 March 2016

	2016	2015
	£	£
INCOME		
Donations	24,627	12,181
Grants	276,787	134,172
Other trading activities	2,713	3,367
Investments	1,621	1,536
Total income	305,748	151,256
EXPENDITURE		
Raising funds	3,758	1,200
Charitable activities	227,137	140,185
Governance	5,264	4,351
Total expenditure	236,159	145,736
Net gains/(losses) on investments	217	-
Net income/(expenditure)	69,372	5,520
Transfers between funds	-	-
Other recognised gains/(losses)	6	973
Net Movement in Funds	69,366	6,493
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS		
Total funds brought forward	170,785	164,292
Total funds carried forward	240,151	170,785

Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2016

ASSETS	2016	2015
	£	£
FIXED ASSETS		
Tangible assets	85,097	84,505
Investments	36,398	36,434
Total fixed assets	121,495	120,939
CURRENT ASSETS		
Debtors	9,438	27,806
Cash at bank and in hand	128,963	45,559
Total current assets	138,401	73,365
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	-19,745	-23,519
Net current assets/(liabilities)	118,655	49,846
Total assets less current liabilities	240,151	170,785
Creditors: amounts falling due after one year	-	-
Provisions for liabilities and charges	-	-
Net assets	240,151	170,785
FUNDS OF THE CHARITY		
General fund brought forward	170,785	164,292
Increase/(Decrease in fund in the year)	-18,252	6,493
Restricted income funds	87,617	-
Total funds	240,151	170,785

NOTE

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

Executive Committee

President	Sir Nigel Thompson
Chairman	Geoffrey Findlay
Hon. Treasurer	Martin Gibson
Technical Adviser	John Lawson
Ecological Adviser	Peter Marren
River Habitat Adviser	John Hounslow

Committee	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.

Benefactors and Supporters 2016

Aster Communities	Marlborough College	St Georges Church, Preshute
Big Lottery	Summer School	Stefan Persson
Cheam School	Marlborough Town Council	Sutton Settled Estates
Chilton Estate	Mole Productions	Tesco Bags of Help
Christopher Gamblin	Mr & Mrs R McMahon	TH White
Ecover	Natural England	Thames Water
Environment Agency	North Wessex Downs AONB	The Blunt Trust
FatFace Marlborough	Penny Hill	The Renewal Project
Grove Farm	Ramsbury & Axford Parish	Town and Manor of Hungerford
G C Gibson Charitable Trust	Council	Walter Marais
Hampshire & Isle of Wight	Ramsbury Estates	Wild Trout Trust
Wildlife Trust	Revere Charitable Trust	Wiltshire Council
In Memory of Peggy Cosham	Rivers and wetlands	
Jeremy Sillem	Community Days	Our members, volunteers and supporters
John & Marianne Adey	Sir Martyn & Lady Sally Arbib	
Lord and Lady Rootes	SITA Trust	



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

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