

WILD TROUT TRUST
SUMMER 2018

News

WILD TROUT TRUST ANNUAL DRAW 2018

To be drawn at 7pm, Tuesday 11 December at The Ship & Bell, Horndean, Hants.

Tickets are available via the enclosed order form or by visiting www.wildtrout.org.

FIRST PRIZE

Kindly donated by Sage, worth £1099. A Sage MOD Fly Rod, 9ft, 4-weight, 4-piece; a Sage Spectrum Fly Reel 3/4 Platinum; and a Rio Gold Floating Fly Line WF4.

SECOND PRIZE

Kindly donated by The Peacock at Rowsley & Haddon Fisheries, worth £470. One night's accommodation in a large double/twin room for two people with 3-course dinner and buffet breakfast, plus 2 low-season tickets to fish the Derbyshire Wye.

THIRD PRIZE

Kindly donated by The WTT, worth £350. Life membership of The Wild Trout Trust.

FOURTH PRIZE

Kindly donated by The WTT, worth £250. A day of quality fly fishing for wild trout at a location in the south, midlands or north of England, accompanied by your chosen WTT Conservation Officer.

FIFTH PRIZE

Kindly donated by Andy Steer, worth £60. A framed, coloured illustration of a trout head by Andy Steer, number three of a limited edition of 100 prints.



Wild Trout Trust Annual Get Together 2018

WTT's 2018 Annual Gathering descended on North Yorkshire, the beautiful village of Gargrave and its beautifully appointed village hall. We were blessed by spectacular weather and an 80-strong audience for our Saturday of talks and a river walk along the River Aire. This was a WTT Get Together out of the top drawer, with great friends and fellow trout nuts sharing much thinking and talking time together.

After a welcome from WTT Chairman, David Fraser, our day in the village hall at Gargrave started with an overview of the Trust's past year, from the Director, Shaun Leonard. WTT's bread-and-butter work is advisory and practical; in the year to the end of April 2018, the Conservation Officer team carried out 186 site visits, many with subsequent written reports outlining findings and making recommendations for work. In over 90% of cases, that advice turned into work for the river. We dealt with a vast number of ad hoc advice enquiries, using our dynamic website as a reference source. The team also ran 67 practical events, from 1 to 10 days in length and spoke at 47 events from club AGMs to international conferences. This has been a frantic year of consultations, with WTT submitting (with many other NGOs), on those around the future of agriculture post-Brexit, salmon and sea-trout conservation measures in England and Wales, salmon farming in Scotland and EA's charging regime for work in rivers. Shaun applauded an extraordinary team of thirteen staff shouldering the work of WTT, with the pack of nine Conservation Officers front of house, but supported by excellent trustees, a President and his Vice-Presidents, together with an extensive and vital network of volunteers.

Geoff Roberts, Chairman of Aire Rivers Trust, then took the stage to outline the Trust's DNAire project. Geoff took the audience on a

photographic trip down the river, from its source above at Malham down to its confluence with the Yorkshire Ouse, revealing that there is only one waterbody in the catchment not failing under Water Framework Directive classification. However, in terms of water quality, this once open sewer of a river now has no (known) direct industrial discharges to the river – all go to treatment works. There are now salmon appearing in the lower river and the £1.6M DNAire project aims to ease their passage past some large weirs, one day to allow the free movement of salmon and other species all along the river. A big and critical part of the project is involving local communities in their river.

Up next was Don Vine of Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT), describing the Upper Aire Land Management Project, a multi-partner approach to tackling water quality issues caused by diffuse pollution from agriculture, siltation and bank erosion. YWT walked 85km of the river above Keighley, identifying issues, then developed whole-farm action plans. With volunteers, thousands of trees have been planted, 25km of banks fenced, 17 alternative stock watering points installed (pasture and solar pumps), gulleys blocked and leaky dams built.

Jon Grey, WTT's Conservation Officer in the patch, whizzed through some of his work. On many of his local rivers, he sees over-grazing, bank

destabilisation, over-widening and other channel modifications creating 'habitat-free' zones. Much of WTT's work through Jonny and volunteers has been with fencing, tree planting and freeing-up access along spawning trib's off the main river. Jon's other hat with WTT and his part-time role at the University of Lancaster is research, then disseminating word of that research through the WTT website, blogs, *Salmo Trutta* journal, talks to clubs and so on.

Phil Sheriden, arch-protagonist in the River Worth Friends group, gave an impassioned presentation on what his river, a trib of the Aire, means to him and how he's trying to encourage others to see it in the same way. That river means so much, not only to the fish, the mayflies and the dippers that live in or by it but to a legion of other animals, including people, further away in the valley. Phil's philosophical view of life was encapsulated in his quoting of McGuane and of Gierach: "Trout are among those creatures who are one hell of a lot prettier than they need to be. They can get you to wondering about the hidden workings of reality." Nice.

Rick Battarbee, Emeritus Professor of University College London, now champions the cause of four small becks flowing into the Wharfe at Addingham. The Addingham4Becks project has been supported by an Advisory Visit by WTT and is aiming to raise awareness of the value of the



Geoff Roberts, Chairman of Aire Rivers Trust, on the Trust's DNAire project.

becks for both people and wildlife. Local people are deployed as “beck stewards”, checking for pollution, monitoring wildlife, litter picking and clearing culverts along their designated reach of beck. Tensions exist between the flood-risk need to clear the becks whilst retaining debris and vegetation as wildlife habitat. Rick demonstrated results from some sophisticated monitoring of the becks, showing increases in soluble reactive phosphorus within the village, with consequent responses from the invertebrates and diatoms. Diversion of stormwater from housing estates into the becks seems a possible source. Locals record trout and lampreys running into the becks to spawn, though increased run-off and weirs in the backs seem to have stopped those runs.

Gareth Pedley made the second cameo appearance by a WTT Conservation Officer, illustrating the kinds of issues he commonly sees out on the river – over-grazing, bank erosion, siltation and dredging. Gareth described how Defra’s new Farming Rules for Water should address many of these issues, if properly implemented and regulated, though it will require application and resourcing



Jon Bolland, University of Hull.

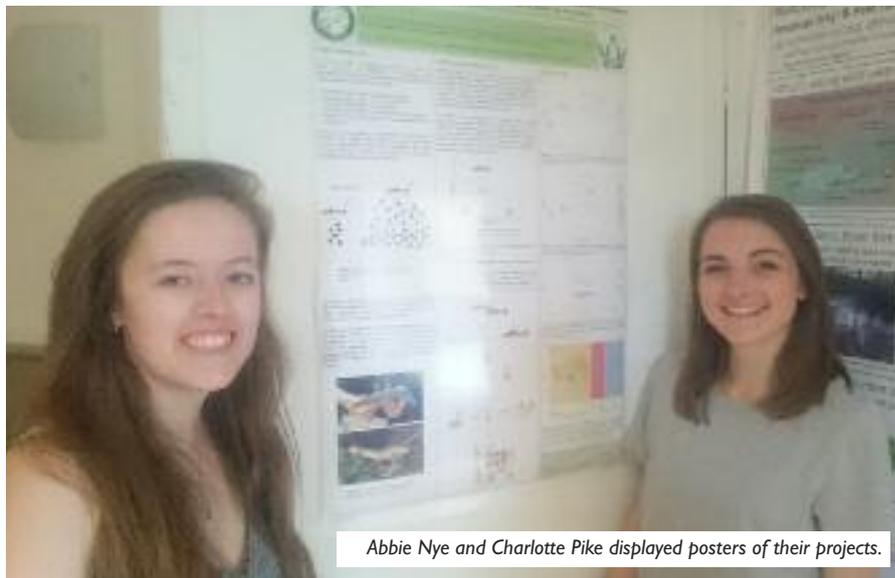


JBA’s sand pit.

by the regulatory agencies.

Jon Bolland, of the University of Hull, presented a talk prepared by him and a colleague, Jamie Dodds, pleading for more monitoring on the effectiveness of fish passes. Jon noted that 120 fish passes have been built across England in the last 5 years at a cost of £23m, with less than 5% monitored. There is often an untested assumption that a pass will work because a similar design has been used elsewhere. Jon graphically illustrated the cumulative effect on fish passage of certain rates of passability of individual structures. On a river like the Aire, with two dozen barriers, 90% passability at each structure has a cumulative effect such that less than 6% of fish will ascend the uppermost barrier. If this is where good spawning grounds are and fish need to reach, a viable population is unlikely or impossible. Jon outlined some individual studies from low cost baffles on the Eshton Beck, a bypass channel at Rodley weir and a pass by an Archimedes Screw on Ruswarp Weir on the Yorkshire Esk.

Last up was Rob Smith, whose book *The North Country Fly: Yorkshire’s Soft Hackle Tradition* is in part a who-dunnit investigation of many traditional fly patterns, seeking answers to who created these patterns. Rob’s meticulous investigative work and painstaking tabulation of detail has produced a fascinating story, wonderfully illustrated. Rob shared with us some incredibly valuable manuscripts and Victorian fly patterns, an absolute treat for the avid fly fisher and tyer. Rob’s investigations also allowed an intriguing insight into the



Abbie Nye and Charlotte Pike displayed posters of their projects.

lives of Victorian fishers, how far they travelled and how many were fishing the same waters, in pursuit of fine trout.

The talks and a late lunch were followed by a walk along a nearby reach of the Aire, including a look at a ghastly weir that EA, Aire Rivers Trust and WTT have their eyes on for removal, a low cost baffle system on the Eshton Beck, tree planting and fencing, a solar-powered livestock watering point and some in-river woody debris stuff.

We had some excellent extra features at Gargrave. Abbie Nye and Charlotte Pike, MSc students at Queen Mary London, displayed posters of their projects; in Abbie’s case, using Stable Isotope Analysis (SIA) to try to tell if some large trout showing up in the River Welland are river fish or migrating to and from the sea and in Charlotte’s case, using SIA to assess the success (or not) of river improvement techniques in developing food webs. There’s more on this pair’s work on the WTT blog: <https://www.wildtrout.org/wttblog/wtt-twitx-research-conservation>.

We also had a nice display from the Aire Rivers Trust on the DNAire project of which Geoff Roberts spoke and an intriguing piece of kit demonstrated by Jon Whitmore of JBA Consulting of Skipton: a sand pit overlain by interactive computer wizardry that allows ‘players’ to manipulate how water moves through a catchment – great for kids of all ages and showing really clearly the impact of land management on minimising or exacerbating flooding.

The Craic

One of the truly great bits of a WTT Get Together is the fun to be had around meeting friends old and new. At Gargrave, the WTT team saved

money we can put into the river by bunking up in Jon Grey's house (thank you Sam and Nattie for giving up your house for a weekend), we spent time

with members in a fabulous pub in Lothersdale and 26 WTT friends enjoyed a Saturday night with a pint and a curry. All great craic and part of what WTT is all about.

And then came Sunday morning

WTT is not an angling organisation – it's a conservation charity. However, most of us share a passion for angling and for conservation, so we try each year to sample the local fishing around the venues we choose for our Get Together. This year, we were so blessed to have the support of many clubs and fisheries on the Aire, Wharfe and Ribble to be able to give our guests a little go on the river. All the rivers were thin, the sun shone brightly and the fishing was tough, but some usual suspects overcame this adversity to bag some whoppers, including this wild brownie of 3lb 12oz to WTT Conservation Officer, Gareth Pedley. Such a fish would make anyone's day on the river; Gareth seems to have quite a few days like this... probably just a fluke...



Gareth Pedley with his beautiful trout on Sunday morning.



A Legacy for Rivers and Trout?

For most people, the first consideration in making a Will is their family. Once you have made provision for your family, we hope that you will consider making a gift to the Wild Trout Trust as a way of giving something back to an environment and a sport that has given you much pleasure. Every gift we receive makes a vital contribution to our work, and we promise to use it

wisely.

Any gifts that you make to us will be exempt from Inheritance Tax, and if you leave at least 10% of your estate after any exemptions to a registered charity this reduces the rate of Inheritance Tax from 40% to 36%.

A Will is a formal, legal document that must comply with certain legal requirements to be valid, so ideally should be drawn up by a solicitor. We

have a short guide on our website that explains the different types of gift you can make in your Will, and suggested wording. If you do decide to make a gift in your Will, please let us know so that we can thank you.

Please contact Denise Ashton on 07802 454157 or dashton@wildtrout.org for more information.

The Lapsley Legacy

Regular readers may remember that the late, great Peter Lapsley left his fly tying kit to WTT, we auctioned it and used the proceeds to kit out the River Chess Association (RCA) with complete sets of Snowbee gear to teach kids fly fishing. Recently, Liza Lapsley and Shaun Leonard visited Paul Jennings of RCA and saw his work and Peter's legacy in action. It was a simply brilliant, inspirational afternoon, watching kids with various learning-needs catch fish, under the caring and careful eye of school staff, Paul and his fellow Chessers. As Liza noted "I wish Peter could see that – he'd be so thrilled to know that his kit had helped to enable something so good." Well done Paul and chums.



Liza Lapsley and in the background, Paul Jennings racing to the aid of a pupil wrestling a whopper.

Great Use of Conservation Awards Winnings

Here's what the Botany Bay Community Interest Group (BBCIG) did with their £1,000 winnings from the WTT 2017

Conservation Awards. BBCIG used the money on their Botany Bay site in Sussex, including the East Lavington stream, to create some amazing pyrographic artwork to adorn an outside classroom. Artist Emma Lush has been carrying out creative research at Botany Bay since the conservation project began and has been documenting her response to this special site. She has been greatly influenced by the rarity and fragility of the chalkstream and her work encapsulates the true essence of this unique biodiverse environment. Her message reflects the importance to conserve this natural emerald gem and

the recognition for the need for action to protect our natural resources... our living, flowing history. In the words of Leonardo da Vinci 'Water is the driving force of all Nature'.

Great job all at BBCIG.



The Botany Bay outside classroom and its beautiful pyrography (copyright Emma Lush).

A Weil's Tale

WTT's Assistant Conservation Officer, Ed Eley, shares his horror story of Weil's Disease – please heed his advice.

My first few months as Assistant Conservation Officer with the WTT was everything I had hoped for from a new job, learning the ins and outs of habitat restoration and hopping into a different river most days. That was, until I contracted Weil's Disease. I'm sure most of you have heard of Weil's Disease or Leptospirosis, but for those that haven't, it's a zoonotic infection, meaning diseases existing in animals that can infect humans. It is caught through contact with infected animal urine, generally in contaminated water, and typically enters the body through cuts and scrapes, or the lining of the nose, mouth, throat or eyes. Therefore, anyone working in rivers or even just fishing runs the risk of exposure. My colleagues often refer to it as rat fever and although rats are considered to be the most common vector (and thought to harbour more virulent strains of the disease), other animals such as cattle, pigs, dogs and other rodents like water

voles can also pass on the infection. Leptospirosis (from now on referred to as leptos) is a bit of a mouthful) can present itself with a wide range of symptoms, making it difficult to diagnose. Mild leptos is the most common form and usually presents itself as a fever and headaches, whilst second-phase leptos can cause myalgia (muscle pain), redness of the conjunctiva, jaundice, severe headaches, and again fever, with symptoms presenting themselves anywhere from 2-30 days after exposure. With my leptos bout, the timeline in which events took place was quite shocking. I went to work on Friday feeling a bit peaky and by Monday morning I was in an ambulance, followed by an eight-day stint in intensive care with a few subsequent days in a geriatric ward. I only tell you this as it is really important to act as soon as possible. Luckily for me, I was well informed about leptos and visited my GP over the weekend, telling him that I was high risk. If I hadn't done so, it could have been a different story. After about a month off work, I was keen to get back and carry on. The disease hadn't put me off getting back in the river and getting stuck in with all the great things WTT do. All of us at WTT have tried

to learn from my experience and are now more stringent with measures to reduce the risk of exposure. There are some simple steps that can help: cover all cuts with durable, water-proof plasters and wear gloves to avoid skin breaks as you work. It's important to point out that dry or new gloves should be used each day, as a wet pair used over a long period of time might be harbouring the bacteria. Once out of the river, antibacterial wipes and gels should be used, especially if you intend to have a snack or a drink. And if you show any of the symptoms outlined above, seek medical advice quickly and let medical professionals know of your increased risk from leptos. It may be a rare disease and the level of knowledge amongst clinicians is variable, in my experience. My story is not intended to scare you from getting involved in river restoration, it's truly rewarding work and if you haven't given it a go yet, I urge you to do so. The only positive I can draw from my experience is being able to share my story to raise awareness of this truly horrible disease. There's good information available on line about leptos e.g. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/leptospirosis>

Thank you!

Thank you for being a member of the Wild Trout Trust! Here's how you're helping us, and how you're benefiting too:

- being part of our vital work to protect and improve our rivers and lakes for the wild trout that live in them;
- joining a close community of friends who love fishing for wild trout;
- getting priority access to exclusive trout and grayling fishing through our weekend events;
- discounts from Orvis & Sportfish;
- receiving our regular newsletters and internationally-respected annual journal, *Salmo Trutta*;
- keeping up to date with topical trout issues through our website and social media.

If you're enjoying all this (and of course we hope you are) why not get

one or more of your friends or family to join, or even give them membership as a gift?

Joining the Wild Trout Trust costs from as little as a pint of beer a month – or a pint of beer every two months for retirees.

To chat it over, call the Director, Shaun Leonard on 07974 861908 or Christina in the WTT office on 023 9257 0985, or just join via the website, www.wildtrout.org



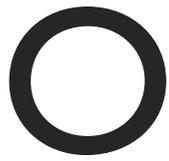
Thank you, Richard

We have been blessed for 10 years to have Richard Handley voluntarily doing the design and layout this newsletter. I receive lots of really positive feedback from each edition, testament to Richard's expertise. All the more extraordinary when you realise that Richard is not a professional designer, but actually an ecologist and conservationist by trade.

Huge thanks to Richard for so many years of gargantuan effort and superb results.

Richard says, "It has been a real pleasure to contribute, in a small way, to what the extraordinary WTT team achieve."

Glorious spotties



One of the many pleasures of catching wild trout in different places is to see what they look like. Trout

colour and spot patterns vary enormously and all are beautiful in their different ways. So huge is the variation in colour and spots that at one time *Salmo trutta* was divided into more than 50 species, based largely (but not exclusively) on appearance. In these days of genetic analysis it takes more than just a different colour or pattern to define a species or sub species with the taxonomic fraternity, but the fantastic variation in trout appearance (or phenotype) is a good illustration of how remarkably well trout adapt to different habitats. Trout in the same river or lake can look quite different because they have adapted to their particular habitat and lifestyle. I have caught small trout on the sparkling clean gravels of the Lambourn that are silvery with just a handful of spots and one or two lunkers on the same beat that live in the dark depths of undercut banks and overhanging weed – these look more like tench than trout, with dark backs and almost no spots and they come out at dusk or after dark to feed. I am told by my colleague, Andy Thomas, that these are very similar to the Kennet 'greenback' trout. Acidic waters, especially the Scottish lochs, often contain golden 'butter' adult trout of the three-to-a-pound variety, whilst a chalkstream trout of the same size will probably have fingerprint parr marks on its side, suggesting it is still just a baby. Most beautiful of all, I think, are the trout with cobalt blue patches on their gill plates especially those found on some stretches of the Eden where they can also have thousands of tiny, inky black spots. Some phenotypes are also proposed as distinct sub species, most famously perhaps the ferox, sonaghan and gillaroo trout of Lough Melvin which are not only different in size, colour and spotting pattern but also in feeding and spawning habitats. Analysis by Professor Andy Ferguson has shown them to be genetically distinct too. In the Adriatic catchments of Slovenia and Bosnia, huge effort has gone in to preserving the unique marble trout – *Salmo trutta marmoratus* – rather than



spots they have a swirly, marbled effect which seems to render them invisible in spite of their huge size as they lurk amongst the boulders in clear, often turquoise blue waters of rivers like the Soca. Confusingly, trout in other countries can also look 'marbled' but they are not genetically *marmoratus*. Mediterranean trout in France and Spain often look very distinctive and are sometimes called 'tiger trout' because they appear to have vertical stripes which look like long parr marks that stay with them as they grow. One thing a true trout will never have is yellow or lilac spots. These are found on brook trout and bull trout, but these are char (*Salvelinus fontinalis* and *confluentis*) not trout (*Salmo trutta*).

The huge variation in trout appearance has inspired some wonderful art, most famously perhaps the water-colour illustrations in James Prosek's book *Trout of the World* and (on a smaller scale) Scott Winstanley's watercolours of trout from Cumbria and Sam MacDonald's 'Trout in Detail' series where trout are constructed from metal and enamel with a background of their detailed spot patterns. Our love of trout variation has also inspired Jonny Grey to launch an appeal for photos of trout in order to create a celebratory map of trout patterns across the UK and perhaps beyond.

This is his blog post from the WTT website:

Gather some fine fishy folk into a room and get them talking (as if you could stop 'em) about brown trout. How long do you reckon it would be before the topic of colour or more likely spotting pattern would creep in? Let's face it, we love our spotties! It's just such an integral part of their beauty and wonderful diversity.

So, for no other reason than the sheer beauty of 'em, I'm going to ask you good supporters of WTT to snap a few images of wild brown trout spots when you're out this season but specifically trying to focus on one area – square on and below the dorsal fin. In fact, just like the images scattered around this page, trying to avoid any large patches of glare / reflection / contrast. These images were lifted from 'whole' fish shots, and hence aren't the best quality. I'm hoping you can provide some close ups of the fish flank.

Obviously, fish welfare takes priority here, so I don't want you to spend ages composing a finely focussed still-life. The good thing about this exercise is that it can be done in the net. I'll be cropping everything down to focus on the spots.

If you can send them to me at a reasonable resolution size for printing, I'd like to create a map of the UK (and further afield depending upon uptake) to demonstrate how spotting pattern can vary, as a bit of an engagement tool for

WTT. Spot the difference as it were! So, I'd need the river or lake name too. But that's it. Big fish, small fish, all good...

Of course, some of you may have something similar already – and I'd gratefully accept those too.

Tight lines! Jonny
jgrey@wildtrout.org



Doing stuff with your money

Regular readers may remember that, as often as we can, we like to turn people's incredibly generous donations into tangible stuff that we can use to improve life for trout and rivers. Here's a flavour of what we've done with a couple of recent donations.

The Leney Laptop

In this period, we were delighted to receive £350 from an Ednaston Estate sweepstake, through WTT member, Michael Leney. With Michael's consent, we put this money towards a laptop for our latest recruit, Theo Pike, as he beavers away for urban rivers in the south.

As an aside, I personally was delighted to strike up correspondence with Michael, in part because he's obviously a gentleman and also because his father is a legend in fishing and fishery management, albeit not with trout, but with carp. Donald Leney was one of the UK's early commercial carp farmers and produced a 'strain' of carp still very much revered in carp circles. The picture (right) illustrates one of my encounters with a Leney carp. This fish was netted in January 2006 at a weight of over 38lb; even trouty types must admit that this is a spectacular fish, all the more so when you realise that its



unique scale pattern identifies it as one of a batch stocked into this lake in the early 50s. So, on this day in January 2006, this fish was somewhere around its 55th birthday. To add to the tale, the lad holding the fish is WTT member and now environmental contractor, Ben Kavanagh.





Butts Brewery

Chris Butts regularly donates to WTT, a product of a 5p donation from the sale of each bottle of his delicious Barbus beer. In the past, Chris's money has become chainsaws and chainsaw PPE. This time, £339.60 from Chris has gone towards a tool locker for Mike Blackmore, so he can keep his invaluable kit and caboodle in a safe and dry place and return his garage to domestic, rather than WTT use. Here's Mike, delighted with his new store...

Finally, huge thanks to Cressbrook & Litton FFC who have, once again, been very generous in donating their AGM raffle takings to WTT. We'll make good use of over £470.

Auction and website

The final total for the auction held in March was £72,000 – a year of steady growth on previous years but not surpassing the 2017 record. A huge thank you to the buyers and donors who made it such a success, and to the very many people who helped to publicise the auction to a wide audience. The auction is a vital source of funding, enabling us to continue to deliver advice and projects to improve trout habitat. Our focus is very much on the practical work, and the auction funds help pay for the chainsaws, winches, hard hats and other tools that we use in our day-to-day work, as well as directly funding or providing 'kick start' funding to projects. We also have an objective to improve the public understanding of wild trout and their habitats and we do this through talks and workshops with many groups – fishing clubs and the wider public – again, delivered with the help of auction funds. Another component of our education mission is an information-rich website, which attracts over 20,000 visitors a month. Auction

funds are being used to help pay for a refresh which will make it more 'mobile friendly', secure, easier to update and to navigate. All the current content will be moved across but we will gradually expand areas such as the ever popular 'Trout Facts', blogs and website library. The new version of the website will be online in the autumn.

A Very Brilliant Idea – WTT Monomasters

WTT member, Ian Hedley came up with a brilliant idea – in exchange for conversion to Life membership, he gave us a batch of WTT-badged Monomasters to sell through our shop. This clever piece of kit, produced by another WTT member, Bert Vosters in the Netherlands, stores your waste tippet material. For the perfect, inexpensive gift for yourself or your fishing chum (£13 + P&P), visit the WTT shop: <https://www.wildtrout.org/product/>



News from the North

Gareth Pedley, WTT's Conservation Officer based in Cumbria, updates on some of his work in the north.

It's been a while since an update on the far northern WTT work, with several different subject areas covered since the last one. Towards the back end of last year, I undertook some work with Forth Fisheries Trust, initially, running a workshop on brash bank protection, which was actually a recommendation of a previous WTT visit. The day was a great success, ably assisted by a gang of eager volunteers, including several representatives from the local Slamannan Angling and Improvement Association. Further work with Forth FT included two Advisory Visits to sub-catchments of the Forth.

As one of the many aspects of an ongoing Fisheries Improvement Fund Project with the Environment Agency, another brash bank protection workshop was also run in West Cumbria, in this instance, to help retain Sandybeck within its straightened

channel. This is not the sort of thing that WTT would usually do but, in the absence of a full river restoration at the site, something had to be done to prevent the watercourse being lost through its bank and across a field. The work was undertaken in a sympathetic manner, to retain as much of the recovering channel sinuosity and pool habitat as possible, minimising the encroachment of the brash bank work into the channel.

In mid-December, I conducted a redd identification workshop on the upper Eden and tributaries, primarily for the benefit of Kirkby Stephen & District Angling Association, who had previously expressed interest in learning more on the subject, but it was publicised locally as an open invite. The workshop was well attended by representatives from several different clubs but, unfortunately high flows in the preceding month had levelled a lot of the redds. This meant that it was only possible to show what a very faint, old redd might look like. However, gaining the understanding of

the locations in which redds of different species will be found is as important as what they look like if planning to undertake redd surveying. The plan is to run a similar event next year but a little earlier – it's always a trade-off though between allowing sufficient spawning to have occurred and risking wash-out of the redds from floods. Fingers crossed for the next one!

The big piece of work that's been taking up much of my time this spring is walkover surveys, in collaboration with the North York Moors National Park and Environment Agency, as part of the NYMNP's Ryvitalise project. This will involve at least thirteen walkovers (and reports) and, potentially, two workshops. The walkovers are progressing well with a wide range of habitat surveyed and issues highlighted. As usual on upland rivers, livestock access to the river banks, suppression of vegetation and the associated erosion issues are a recurring theme. Several barriers have been highlighted, as well as one poorly maintained septic



Brash bank protection workshop on Sandy Beck – West Cumbria

tank (though there'd have been more), and numerous poor land management practices. Being an area of predominantly sandstone and limestone, with correspondingly sandy soils, sand and fine sediment smothering the bed is creating one of the greatest impacts upon the fish and invertebrate populations of the areas surveyed – again highlighting the importance of livestock exclusion from riverbanks. Despite the habitat issues already encountered, numerous wild brownies have been spotted during the surveys, demonstrating the enduring resilience of our emblem species.



Incredibly poor land management adjacent to a tributary of the Rye – surveyed as part of the Ryvitalise Project. There's only one place all this soil is heading and that's the stream just beyond this feeding station.

Paul Gaskell's view from Trout in the Town

A period of great change, development and activity to be reported in the WTT's urban projects. First and foremost – the most significant development is that of the Urban Trout Stream Warrior ,Theo Pike, joining me to co-manage the Trout in the Town project (TinTT). With the increasing demands of my family, it was becoming very difficult to maintain the country-wide coverage and support originally envisaged for TinTT. Consequently, I've now dropped to three days per week – making two days per week available for Theo to jump on as a broadly South-and-West programme manager. Theo is already developing new areas, projects and ideas and I'm delighted to be working with him – having collaborated on various schemes periodically since I joined the WTT in 2008.

Another potentially large development in progress is the news that, subject to the final official confirmation letter, it appears that the WTT will be partners on a large bid focussing on the urban and suburban tributaries of the River Trent. The project is called SUNRISE and the application was submitted to the European Regional Development Fund. Centring on Stoke and Urban

Newcastle (under Lyme) area and the rediscovery of its secret environments, the WTT has been involved with the development of the overall project over the last two years. Our primary involvement will be with the improvement of habitat in the river running through the grounds of Staffordshire University Campus. There are lots of folks involved with this large project including Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, local councils in both Stoke-on-

Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, the Environment Agency plus the wider network that is supported by the Staffordshire Trent Valley Catchment Partnership.

Following a previous Advisory Visit and then an evening slide-show talk and also contributions to public meetings and engagement events with the great River Holme Connections group (<https://riverholmeconnections.org>),



River Holme Connections group riverside walk.



River Holme trout.

I recently hosted a public riverside walk and talk event. This was a great opportunity to highlight and discuss in detail the crucial factors affecting the rivers in our post-industrial landscape. So much of how rivers (and the wild inhabitants of river corridors) actually behave is completely opposite to what seems obvious or sensible at first glance. Being able to talk about how rivers form and the invisible impacts of channel modifications, surrounding land-use (our rooftops, gutters, roads and drive-ways are the headwaters of our streams after all!) and many other matters that hide in plain sight was extremely useful. Stone-turning revealed a plethora of life which is a common theme as these urban rivers recover from the worst impacts of the industrial revolution while increasingly pressured by intensive land-use that could include development as well as agriculture in almost all catchments. After the official visit was over, I stayed behind for 20 minutes or so and was pleased to get a brief up-close encounter with one of the beautiful resident wild trout; just long enough to snap a photo in the net before releasing. There is something very powerfully persuasive of the value of any river when you have something so undeniably spectacular as a wild trout – especially viewed at close range. What really put the cap on the day was when Kim Warren of River Holme Connections was able to confirm that all the recommendations made in my previous Advisory Visit report for the river around Holmfirth were on track

to be enacted by the end of 2018.

Talks, support, plans and Advisory Visit work have been carried out with Eric Owen of Little Britain Anglers (so named because of the workers housing area called “Little Britain” in the Radcliffe area of Greater Manchester). The River Irwell runs directly behind Eric’s house and he has been

continually active in recent years in both highlighting and tackling fly tipping, constituting and running an angling club to celebrate and protect sections of the Irwell and also the Manchester/Bolton Canal, as well as endless work in support of initiatives such as volunteer bailiffs with the Angling Trust. An evening event that Eric arranged in conjunction with the Environment Agency kindly included my talk on what people can do in support of wild trout in urban rivers. I was also delighted that Warren (Woz) Andrew came across from Stockport so that he and Eric could explore strategies and collaboration for the River Tame as well as the Irwell – which is a great example of the support network which exists between champions of local urban trout streams.

Speaking of Woz, as I write this, myself and Theo are fresh off the railroads from a lightning-fast ‘day-visit-by-train’ where we challenged ourselves to find urban trout and see the River Tame from both street level and then also down with our feet in its waters below the footings of the buildings, roads, bridges and



pedestrians. You'll have to wait to see the full story of our day in the upcoming edition of *Fly Culture*; a print magazine from Pete Tyjas and the team who brought you *Eat Sleep Fish* e-zine.

Finally, although I can't do justice to all the separate urban projects and involvements that me (and now Theo too) are involved with at any one time, there does seem to be a real spike in interest and requests for info on *Mayfly in the Classroom*. If you'd like full instructions and a lot more background on that, then you can find it here:

<https://www.wildtrout.org/content/mayfly-classroom>

Here's to a great summer and don't forget to check out the WTT's various contributions to World Fishing Day on 23 June 2018 (with re-runs on *FishingTV* after that). Currently, Matthew Wright and Jon Beer are slated to be hosting all things Wild Trout-related by flying the WTT banner. For my part, I'll be hosting the Japanese leg of the 24-hour marathon broadcast. You can find out more from <https://www.fishingtv.com/>



Woz and Theo on the River Tame.



River Tame trout.

It's not too late

It's not too late to enter for the 2018 WTT Conservation Awards. We're keen to hear from improvement projects for trout, rivers and lakes from all corners of Britain and Ireland and at all scales, from bottom-of-the garden to landscape scale stuff. More details at www.wildtrout.org/content/conservati

on-wards, including an application form. This form is brief and quick to complete – if we like what we read and you are short-listed, we'll interview you by phone and extract more, hopefully prize-winning, detail. Our splendid, celebratory event will be on 17 October 2018 in London. Give it a go; what's to lose?



The Botany Bay Project Award Winners 2017, pictured at our presentation evening in London.

Trout in the Town – in the South!

Theo Pike

As I'm writing this, I've just come to the end of my first month as the WTT's new Trout in the Town officer for the south of England and Wales – and I'm more delighted than I can say that I've officially joined this legendary crew of river-mending experts.

The WTT has always been one of the environmental organisations I've admired most, ever since walking ten miles through south London with Vaughan Lewis for the Wandle's first Advisory Visit in 2005. Sometimes it seems that almost everything in the world has changed since I was part of that occasional group of anglers who began by pulling shopping trolleys out of that funny little urban chalkstream, and then started thinking much bigger. Apart from more global issues, the single-catchment Wandle Trust has grown up into the wider South East Rivers Trust – and the whole idea has spread so that the UK is now completely covered by rivers trusts and catchment partnerships looking after rivers from source to sea.

But underneath all of this, I firmly believe there's still lots of room for local people to start taking personal pride and responsibility for the little urban rivers on their own doorsteps. And of course that's where the WTT comes in.

Most of our towns were built where they are because of their streams and rivers, and all of us feel an instinctive connection with running water. According to some calculations, more than 90% of the UK's population will be living in urban areas by 2030, and it's already well established that rivers and green spaces have a hugely positive effect on people's health and happiness. Clean, healthy, freely-flowing waters completely transform the areas where we live, and I think the Trout in the Town project could have a huge part to play in making sure that our future towns and cities are places where people actually want to spend their time – maybe even sometimes fishing for, catching (and carefully releasing) some of those iconic wild urban trout.

To help that hoped-for future happen faster, I've spent my first month of two-days-a-week getting up to speed with the things that the WTT does best – including shadowing Paul Gaskell on an AV on the Moat Brook in Codsall, just outside Wolverhampton, where he's running an exciting project with the Friends of Bilbrook and Groundwork West Midlands. I've also spent some time in Wincanton with CATCH (Community Action to Transform Cale Habitat), a Trout in the Town chapter I've been helping Mike Blackmore and Luke Kozak to mentor

for the last few years.

After that, it was off to West Sussex with Andy Thomas, to look at a decidedly non-urban stretch of the Western Rother through his experienced eyes. We looked closely at the river's structure and habitat bottlenecks, and then, while Andy ate his sandwiches on the bank, he briefed me to go 'sampling with rod and line' at the invitation of the syndicate manager, to give us some idea of the wild stocks in the river at this time of year. (Result: a bouncing healthy wild trout of 11in – a superb indication of the stamp of fish that the Western Rother can naturally produce).

By the time you read this, I hope to have met up with lots of WTT members at the Trust's Get Together in Gargrave, as well as contacting old friends from *Trout in Dirty Places* to see if there's any more help that WTT can offer you. We'll also have set up a new 'Wild Trout Trust: Trout in the Town' support group on Facebook, where we can all share urban river inspiration and war stories...

So, if you'd like to talk about mending your own city stream, get in touch with Paul or me. It might change your life. It certainly seems to have changed mine!

Theo Pike: tpike@wildtrout.org and 07941 955511



Western Rother trout.



Millwood Brook demonstration day.

Tim's Turn from the Midlands and Lincolnshire

WTT Conservation Officer, Tim Jacklin on what he's been up to.

Despite the wet winter and high river levels, trout conservation work has carried on apace in this part of the world.

Advisory Visits (AVs) have been completed on the River Onny, Shropshire; River Meden and Millwood Brook, North Nottinghamshire; Hoo Brook, Worcestershire; the upper River Dove, Derbyshire and a 3-day walkover of the River Alne, Warwickshire. The AVs in Nottinghamshire have resulted in practical in-river improvements on the Thoresby and Welbeck Estates; the former works are imminent and will be completed by the time you read this, the latter were undertaken on a refreshingly brisk day in late March.

WTT conservation officers Tim Jacklin and Ed Eley carried out a demonstration day on the Millwood Brook on the Welbeck Estate in Sherwood Forest, North Nottinghamshire. Staff from the Estate joined forces with volunteers from RSPB, Canal & Rivers Trust and a local angling club to install brushwood 'mattress' structures. Historically, the brook course has been extensively straightened and is heavily shaded by trees, which has led to a uniform

channel with a silty bed. The Estate is carrying out a programme of woodland management which has created the opportunity to use the brushwood to enhance in-stream habitat. The techniques learned on the day will be put to good use by the Estate staff as the work continues.

The Welton Beck in Lincolnshire benefited from habitat improvement works carried out in late February under the Lincolnshire Limestone Becks project, a partnership between Lincolnshire Rivers Trust, the Wild Trout Trust, the Environment Agency and landowners and local

communities. Sixty metres of channel have been improved, providing a new home for fish and wildlife in the heart of Welton village, near Lincoln.

The Welton Beck is a groundwater-fed stream, rising from the Lincolnshire Limestone aquifer and flowing into the Barlings Eau (a tributary of the River Witham). Around ten years ago, a drought and over-abstraction caused the Beck to dry up and its fish population, including wild brown trout, were lost. Since then, despite the abstraction issue being addressed and flows restored, surveys have shown a very poor recovery of fish stocks, with



Millwood Brook demonstration day – before.

only small species such as sticklebacks present. This was surprising, as the Barlings Eau supports a reasonable population of trout.

Last year, a WTT walkover survey revealed an obstruction to fish passage (a 'perched culvert') close to the Barlings Eau confluence. This was rectified by the introduction of gravels to raise the river bed and water levels downstream of the culvert and encouragingly signs of trout spawning were seen further upstream this winter.

The recent works were completed alongside the playing fields in the heart of Welton village and involved creating a narrower low-flow channel within the existing over-wide, shallow channel. Around 100 paving slabs which formed a vertical wall (and very 'sterile' marginal habitat along one bank) were removed. The river bank was reprofiled behind the new margin to retain the high-flow capacity of the channel and to provide a softer, vegetated edge to the Beck. Great support was received from volunteers including residents of the properties bordering the opposite bank. The improvements will provide much better habitat and encourage trout to recolonize the beck, along with other wildlife.

The Government's Water Environment Grant Scheme was launched in March and closed to applications in early May, which provided a lively few weeks of activity pulling together several bids! I am working with partners including National Trust on the Letting the Dove Flow Project (previously mentioned in these pages) and projects to remove or reduce the impact of weirs on fish passage and habitat on the middle River Dove, to install a fish pass on the Bentley Brook (Derbyshire) and to create riffle habitat on the Great Ouse (Buckinghamshire). We will know the outcome of the bids by the end of August.



Millwood Brook demonstration day – before...



The Welton Beck, before...



...and after.

How buying flies, beers, T-shirts and hats can help WTT

A big thank you to Richard Fieldhouse of Barbless Flies for a donation of £500 to the Wild Trout Trust – and to all of his customers who chose the ‘minimum packaging’ option which results in 50p per order going to the WTT. This is a real win for the environment – less plastic, easier catch & release and more funds for habitat improvement!

Barbless Flies have just launched a new website to help you select the right fly in the right place at the right time. GEO-Intelligent Fly Selection is a new FREE web service: www.which-fly.co.uk.

It's a website, accessible on any device, which shows you which flies should be hatching on your river (or stillwater) based on your location, date and time of day. For each insect, it gives you details of the fly imitation to use, including hook sizes and photos. You even get the option to have the results emailed to you. Don't forget – when you buy the flies, choose the ‘minimum packaging’ option so that a 50p donation comes to the WTT.

Vision Fly Fishing, a Finnish company, has chosen the Wild Trout Trust to be their nominated ‘Save the Natives’ campaign charity this year. Inspired by a proposal made by Jasper Pääkkönen, highly valued spokesperson

for endangered fish species, an avid and skillful fly fisherman and an actor currently starring in the History Channel TV series *Vikings Vision* created the *Save the Natives Fund*. Vision annually make a donation to a selected project aiming to improve the conditions of endangered native trout and/or Atlantic salmon stocks in Europe. The money comes directly from the annual sales of Save the Natives t-shirts and caps. You can support the WTT and buy these at www.fly-fishing-tackle.co.uk or call 01363 777783.



Vision's Save the Natives t-shirt and cap.

Jonny's Northern Nuggets

Jon Grey, WTT's man in Yorkshire, on some of his doings in recent times.

So far, 2018 has been a really mixed bag but that is just a part of the reason I love this job of mine! In stark contrast to much of the country, in my patch, we've barely had any rain since Easter weekend. While it made conditions challenging for those gathering for the Wild Trout Trust weekend which I 'hosted' recently in Gargrave, it has allowed me to assess several weir removal projects more effectively. One major coup for me is that in collaboration with the Environment Agency and Aire Rivers

Trust, I have been planning, and have just received the bespoke permit for, the complete removal of Coniston Cold Weir on the Aire. All the negative impacts of this 19m wide and 1m high (plus 4m of stone apron on the approach) obstruction accrued over the past 150 years or more will hopefully be removed in 2-3 days! Researchers from Durham University who are working on the EU-funded AMBER project (Adaptive Management of Barriers in European Rivers) have just completed a pre-works assessment of the fish populations above and below the weir, and will return once it is gone, thereby contributing to the ever-expanding

database on impacts of weirs.

That weir is upstream of the extent of the DNAire project (Developing the Natural Aire), a Heritage Lottery funded project hosted by the Aire RT & EA (with a tag-line of returning salmon to Skipton) to tackle the largest four remaining weirs upstream of Leeds. Dr Jon Bolland pointed out in his fabulous talk at the WTT Get Together that the cumulative impact of each of these weirs to fish species that migrate long distances is frightening. While we celebrate the fact that some fish make it, the (much larger) number of fish that don't is rarely considered. Since the 3rd biennial World Fish Migration Day, a one-day global



Newsflash! This weir has now gone; see the WTT website for an update.

Topographic survey of the Coniston Cold Weir to assess the potential redistribution of sediment, post removal.

celebration to create awareness on the importance of open rivers and migratory fish, was planned for 2018, I came up with an 'aire-brained' scheme to promote the DNAire project; by kayaking with colleague Tim Jacklin from Gargrave to Leeds to highlight the plight of downstream migrating fish. This turned out to be just one of 552 events in 63 countries!

It was a very informative trip, being able to see various parts of the river from a completely different perspective and we collected a lot of useful information along the way. For example, I mapped as many of the larger stands of invasive plants as possible, noted areas of major fly-tipping (one of which has already been addressed by the local council), and it provided some evidence for me to submit as part of a recent Water Environment Grant funding bid. It was also great to see the support of so many of the angling clubs in the local area, both along the route and at the pub which just so happened to be the haul out point at the end of Day !!

We might have only kayaked 58 river kilometres on our 2-day journey, a 'Weir'd Way to Travel', but the potential reach of our effort was much greater. We were mentioned on Classic FM (5.6M listeners), I was interviewed on the river by BBC Radio Leeds (200k), and the combined Twitter statistics alone, drawn from the hashtag #DNAire during the journey, reached >150k. I've yet to fully edit the time-lapse footage from the prow of the kayak, but I will be putting together a more detailed blog post at some point soon. We even raised a bit of money:

<https://mydonate.bt.com/fundraisers/jonnygrey1>



Tim (left) and I at the start, Systagenix weir at Gargrave, of our 58km adventure to highlight World Fish Migration Day.



Even small steps onto culvert aprons are an obstacle to fish. This structure at Kildwick Bridge has effectively prevented barbel from colonising upstream.

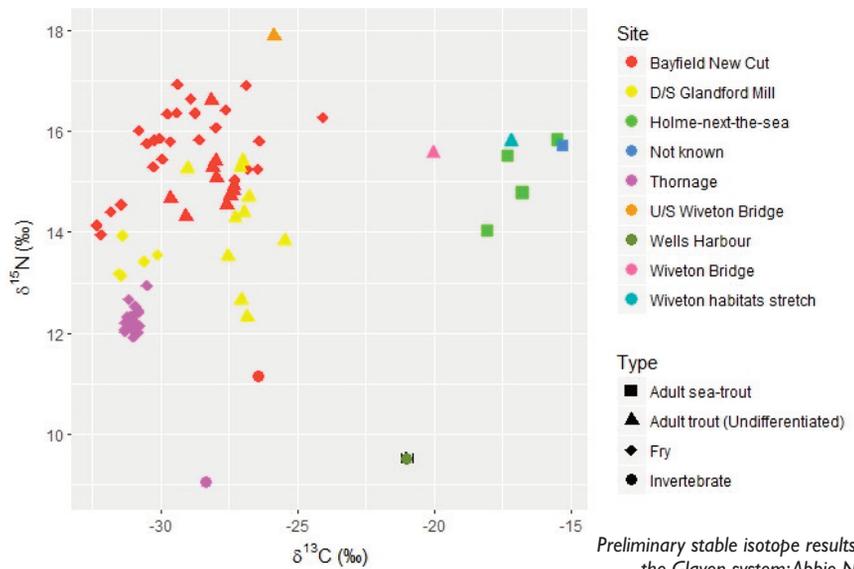


A fridge over troubled water: an unwelcome addition to an obsolete structure – Bingley Weir.

On the research side of things, my two MSc students based at Queen Mary University of London have been working very hard on their projects and it was great that they could both join us at the WTT Get Together where they presented a poster of some of their preliminary findings. Abbie Nye has been working with Dr Adam Piper at the Zoological Society of London to use stable isotopes to determine the proportions of trout fry found in some Norfolk rivers contributed from river-resident trout or sea-trout females. Early days yet, and the figure does not tell the complete story, but it appears that ~25% at least of the fry in Bayfield New Cut may be derived from sea-trout (based upon their position in 'isotope space' relative to adults of known provenance).

Charlotte used the trip to Gargrave to tie in with some fieldwork for her project using stable isotopes to characterise the architecture of the food web at sites pre- and post-restoration interventions. We spent an intensive three days electrofishing and collecting and sorting invertebrates from the Calder and Bashall Brook with Mike Forty of the Ribble Rivers Trust. In a nutshell, we expect the food webs at impacted sites to be truncated and/or narrower in terms of food chain length or food resource use, but hopefully the samples collected from the restored sites will be much more like the control sites which have been monitored concomitantly.

Elsewhere on the more practical side of my role, the habitat workshops funded by Yorkshire Water are winding up this year. I recently had the pleasure of coordinating one of these with some super keen members of Wetherby Angling Association on one of their sections of the Wharfe. As they have a mixed fishery, it was interesting to think about the habitat requirements for species other than salmonids, and amongst other things, we did a bit of brash mattress work to accentuate backwater refuges for fry, as well as talk about creating 'artificial' spawning habitats for species like perch and roach. The thing of note for me was that one of the members who is a very keen diver and amateur underwater film maker returned soon after with his camera and captured some great footage of fry using those very structures – have a look at: <https://youtu.be/UldPX3W9dc4>



Preliminary stable isotope results for the Glaven system: Abbie Nye.

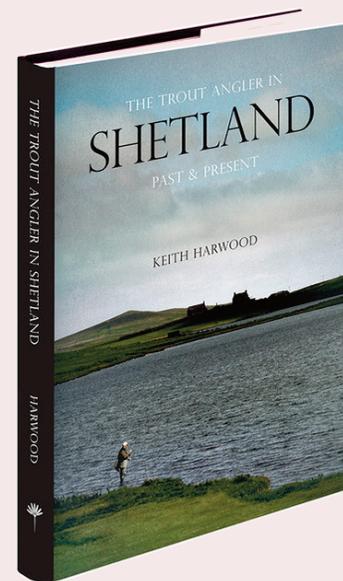
The Trout Angler in Shetland Past & Present

Jon Beer, WTT President and frequent traveller to fishing in Scotland, reviews a new book on trout fishing in Shetland.

The Trout Angler in Shetland Past & Present by Keith Harwood does pretty much what it says on the tin. And as there's been a lot more past than present, so it is with this book. The biographical notes on the sleeve tell us that Keith trained in archaeology and his interest in the history of these northern isles shines through on every page. He looks at the early development of Shetland angling in the Victorian era, the history of the fishing clubs and angling hotels and their guide books for visiting anglers.

More than half the pages are then devoted to the great and the good of the angling world who have visited the islands during the past couple of centuries and left first-hand accounts of their travels and travails. These chapters are a joy and well worth the price of admission on their own for they've introduced me to many characters and authors, some obscure, others famous in other fields, all of whom came to the islands, fished for its trout and left us their memories of the place and people.

Most of those earlier fishermen had come for the celebrated sea trout of



the voes. But, as the sea trout fishing declined towards the end of the 20th Century, visiting anglers discovered that the brown trout fishing in Shetland's 300 or so lochs could be just as rewarding. Keith Harwood, sensibly, does not attempt to describe these lochs and their fishing for today's visitors. He leaves that to the locals, pointing the reader towards the Shetland Anglers Association whose guide book, brochure and comprehensive website complement Keith Harwood's splendid historical perspective.

The Far East

Rob Mungovan, WTT Conservation Officer, pens words of lots of work in central and eastern England.

The autumn and winter saw lots of action with a wide range of river groups from the west of London to the east into Suffolk.

In late October and early November, I was very busy on the Misbourne delivering a partnership project for the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust, Wildlife Trust and the Environment Agency. This was a fun piece of work as every day saw me working with volunteers to deliver brushwood ledges, flow deflectors and tree hinging. By training volunteers over the course of several days, the Wildlife Trust now has a team who have some of the skills to take forward their own work.

2017 low flows on the Misbourne again, so it was challenging at times to decide how far we should take the river narrowing. But when I returned in January 2018 to guide some dig and dump work (after having undertaken redd surveys to see if the trout had spawned) the river flow had returned and the Misbourne was looking good as the golden gravel was being washed clean of the autumn leaves and silt. This work at Denham Country Park is also in a super location for the public to see river restoration and for young children to get close to the river by paddling in it, on a newly constructed access beach (no more mud-covered little ones emerging from the river).

I've been able to support the River Lark Catchment Partnership and enjoy the infectious enthusiasm of working

with Glenn Smithson (recently-crowned RRC River Champion). We've now completed work at two main areas: 50m+ of brushwood ledges at Fornham to provide a rooting substrate for marginal plants to help the river narrow itself, and we had the fun task of recreating a mini-river where the Lark once ran wide and shallow at the rear of properties near Bury St Edmunds. We were faced with a river that had compacted gravels and little energy to initiate natural bed scour. The course of action was to arrange a large work party with the support of the EA. They were able to provide water jets to blast the gravel loose again, and I did what was useful using a leaf blower (which was surprisingly effective in shallow water once the gravel had been loosened). Our volunteers then had the task of carefully moving the gravel around using rakes to create mini-pools and riffles complemented by flow deflectors and lots of brushwood ledges to catch the fines that we'd blown out of the gravels.

I've continued moving forward a project on the River Welland at Ashley. A bespoke Environmental Permit has been issued by the EA and that will allow us to undertake 100m+ of bank re-grading, installation and enhancement of 4 riffles, flow deflectors and more brushwood ledges. We'd hoped to reconnect some of the former meanders that had been cut-off when the river was straightened and dredged, but the river is now simply too far incised to make this a simple task without having consequences for the wider floodplain.

When I was undertaking my first visits to the Welland, I'd have to admit that it didn't look too trouty with filamentous algae smothering the bur reeds. Yet come early November a smile was put on my face as I discovered a massive trout redd during a topographical survey of the river. Was it a sea-trout or one of the Welland monster brown trout?

The River Ter in Essex has also been a regular destination for me. I've been working closely with the EA's Ben Norrington thanks to funding from rod licence sales. We've overseen the removal of shading scrub to simply rediscover parts of this little stream. We're concentrating on improving the habitat in the lower reach (initially to draw in more coarse fish). We've even had great support from the EA's own Flood Defence Operations team who've completed much of the heavy work. We've then stepped in to teach local anglers the techniques of bashing down posts and tying in woody features. Again, it's been very rewarding working with enthusiastic volunteers. I leave those days tired and all talked-out, but have a great sense of satisfaction.

Being enthusiastic and maybe something of a newbie still, I'd tried to arrange for further river habitat workshops to take place in March. In recent years, we've had many mild winters, but not this one. Our first attempt was frozen off, and re-

Before (left) and after pictures of work on the River Misbourne. Note how in the right-hand photo, water is flowing after dig and dump work, with a new ledge including buried logs as bolt holes for fish. The soft bank will also provide suitable habitat for water vole burrows.



scheduled for April. But April stayed cold, and then the river went up and down as we got wave after wave of rain – not great for attracting volunteers to come and stand in cold water. We managed to fit in two days of training on the Colne at Oxhey Park where, with the support of my colleague Ed Eley, we got people into the river to demonstrate how brushwood ledges are formed and how tree hinging can provide instant flow deflection and overhead cover. I'll think twice about running such an event in the cold months again though.

And on home territory, I supported the Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook on the placement of gravel by wheelbarrow, shovel and metal chute to rebuild the brook by raising its bed between a series of failing flow deflectors (there simply wasn't enough gradient for them to deflect the flow). When gravel is added to these very small, low energy streams, you have to get it right as the river has not got the power to move the substrate to correct any human mistakes. I was the bossy one for 2 days. It was my role to make sure we had the correct fall through the reach and I had to keep asking people to bed the gravel down and rake a little bit more here and then to re-adjust it again. On completion, the volunteers could understand what it was all about as a new stream



Before and after gravel placement into the Cherry Hinton Brook, Cambridge.



emerged from the mud. The work has been completed alongside the Cambridge Sainsbury's supermarket, so hopefully hundreds of people will get to see the great work and may even stop to watch the minnows as they spawn in the spring sunshine (no trout yet as there's a few more challenges to address). This is a nice little piece of action that has come about from my first Advisory Visit – great to know the reports result in action.

Other bread-and-butter work has been a number of Advisory Visits from Northamptonshire to Uxbridge and walkover surveys along the Rhee (only a mile from my house!) and the Hiz (a rather nice chalkstream but largely unknown). Plus support has been offered for a number of groups as they put together bids for Defra's Water Environment Grant. We'll have to wait until the summer to see if that work picks up.



Working with the Friends of the Cherry Hinton Brook and Cambridge City Council to place gravel to form a new river bed.

Goldilocks weather

WTT Conservation Officer, Andy Thomas, reflects on the impact of the weather on trout survival.

This time last year, I wrote a piece for our summer newsletter about how low-flow adversely impacts our chalk rivers and how we might be able to support our wild trout stocks through long dry periods via habitat manipulation to make the rivers more resilient.

Last year I also resorted to quite a bit of wishing (I don't do praying) for lashings of winter rain to top-up the chalk. Well, all I can say is, be careful what you wish for because as we all know, despite dire predictions from pathetic old soothsayers like myself, it started to rain in late February and virtually didn't stop until we were gripped by the Beast from the East in late March! As Brits and anglers we like nothing more than to talk about the weather but it is interesting that some of the conditions we crave as fishermen are not always that great for the fish themselves.

Take this last year, for example. A dry, low-flow autumn/early winter, followed by a very wet late winter/early spring. What's wrong with that? Well, if you happen to be a trout, quite a bit actually!

The main issue with a low-flow autumn might be that adult pre-spawners find it much harder to get to where they need to be. Browns, as well as sea-trout, are migratory and upstream progress is so much easier on the back of increased flow. If the headwater and tributary springs haven't broken on a chalk river system by mid-January, then many fish are forced to cut redds lower down the river system. This often leads to increased competition and over-cutting on sites that have been reduced in size, with potential spawning grounds further up the system left unoccupied, or literally high and dry!

Now if that wasn't bad enough, what happens to those eggs that have been deposited into a favourable location on a nice ramp of loose, clean gravel when it starts to rain and rain and rain? Well, the first thing that happens following months of below average rain-fall is that every field,



A lovely trout redd on the upper Test in January, clearly visible as the patch of clean gravel in the centre of the shot.

road, ditch, drain and gully has months-worth of fine sediment that's picked up and flushed into the nearest river-system. I always used to think that when chalk rivers morphed from being low and clear, to high and coloured, what I was actually witnessing were sediments being flushed away, leaving sparkling clear gravels ideal for optimum trout recruitment. What I didn't really give much thought to was the impact of massive volumes of new, highly organic sediments that are flushed from the land into the river and being forced through those areas where tender and highly vulnerable eggs are incubating.

Those who know their spate rivers will tell you how catastrophic a big winter flood can be at the wrong time, with autumn redds being washed away as the bed material literally trundles downstream. Redd washout on a low-energy chalk rivers is very rare but what we do know now is that the survival of eggs when exposed to fine, nutrient-rich sediments is very poor. We also know that climate change is highly likely to make our weather patterns even more unstable in the future and it shouldn't be a surprise for us to learn that an 'average' year in terms of water flow and water temperature is going to provide trout with the best opportunities for success. By at least being able to predict what is likely to be a good, bad or average year for trout recruitment might just help to influence some of

our management actions.

So, exactly what kind of conditions are going to give trout the best outcomes in terms of recruitment to the next generation? For adult fish to be able to navigate up to unoccupied spawning sites, they will need strong autumn flows, so for chalk rivers that means at least an average previous winter's rainfall and ideally a wetter than average September and October. These conditions should promote sufficient flow for autumn spawning migrations to be reasonably successful and crucially, should be sufficient to ensure that gravid hens are in the right place at the right time and that the sites selected by the fish for spawning are in good order.

What next? Chalkstream trout tend to spawn later than those of their more northern and western spate-river cousins, although there are chalkstream populations, particularly sea-trout which can and do spawn in November. However, spawning for most chalky trout usually takes place between mid-December and mid-January, with frosty weather that pulls down water temperatures often acting as a cue for the start of spawning activity. The drop in water temperature may only be quite subtle on chalkstreams where the surface water temperature is heavily buffered by the stable groundwater temperatures, but a short period of high pressure often triggers spawning activity. It is likely that these cues are also linked to dry

weather and therefore the prospect of increased egg survival when the eggs themselves have yet to harden.

A nice dry, cool and stable December and January, followed by a mild, damp February and March to recharge the groundwater is what we would dearly love to have. Egg hatching is linked to degree days* and is nature's way of regulating early emergence from the gravels at a time when there might be little to eat. It seems that a low-flow winter will result in improved conversion of eggs to fry but unless fry and later parr habitats are maintained by at least average winter rainfall, then losses to the population described above are likely to occur during their first summer. Heaven knows what a catastrophic drop in water temperature does to newly emerged trout fry, which may well have happened this year following exposure to 'The Beast', but we should assume



that it's probably bad news for fry survival unless those egg sacks have been able to see the bulk of the babies through to a period when the right sized food becomes available as water temperatures climb.

Roll on a 'Goldilocks' year – not too wet, not too dry, not too hot and not too cold but just right!

* Degree days – a standardised way of

describing egg incubation time, a multiplier of time in days and average water temperature. For brown trout, eggs hatch around 420 degree days after fertilisation or 42 days at an average of 10°C.

Side Streams Reflections

This is Ron Holloway's second book, published after Ron's death, by his friend, David Hamnett.

The book's sub-title *Further meanderings of a chalk stream river keeper* gives strong clues about its content: a series of short (or very short) chapters on a wide range of fishing, fishery management and/or environmental issues, with repeated reference back to chalkstreams and especially Ron's beloved Itchen.

I knew Ron, one of many survivors of lunchtimes in the Chestnut Horse and the youthful folly of trying to match him pint-for-pint (only ever one winner there), then attempting an afternoon's river work. As a consequence, I really enjoyed the book, because it echoes all those things that Ron talked about with passion and absolute assuredness.

It's funny in places: cite Ron pinned to the roof of his car, attached by a treble hook that's bitten into his scalp, hat and the car's roof lining, or Ron down to his boxers in the river observing different fly line colours. It's philosophical in other places – Ron pleads for an appreciation of the natural world, for anglers to go away from the numbers game, and elsewhere, the book is perceptive – for

example, his views on climate change and impacts for the river. There are some nice practical bits – look at the chapter on wild trout fishery management that calls for a KISS regime ("Keep it Simple, Stupid"). Typically, the book is regularly (at best) contentious – Ron's ire about the introduction of grayling to the upper Itchen screams out of the pages.

I'd urge you not to digest this book's content as unequivocal truth. Much of what Ron writes is his own view and current thinking and the best knowledge we have has superseded some of those views. For example, Ron asks the reader to return undersize wild trout for "the take home rewards...the odd prize fish...past its sell by date". In wild trout fishery management, we certainly should not be whacking any prize fish that we deem past it. The chapter on producing stocked fish from wild broodstock, while well-meaning, is also behind the curve: we now know this is incredibly difficult to do well, it rarely works and it's potentially actually harmful to the very thing we're trying to support: the true wild stocks.

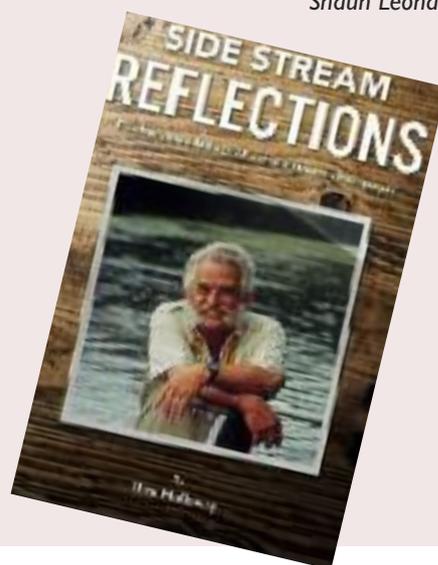
There are plenty of other examples in the book where I personally (and the latest we think we know

collectively) would not agree with Ron, but that doesn't necessarily detract from the book as an interesting and thought-provoking read.

David Hamnett compiled this book in honour of his friend and he's very kindly donating all profits to WTT. Ron was without doubt passionate about his wild trout and it's truly fitting that his book should come to benefit those fish, through WTT and David's generosity.

Side Stream Reflections, is widely available through eBay, Amazon and Paul Morgan at Coch-y-Bonddhu Books for £9.99 plus P&P.

Shaun Leonard



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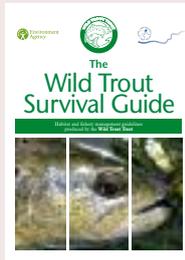
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