



WILD TROUT
TRUST

AUTUMN 2019 NEWSLETTER



TEST & ITCHEN RIVER
RESTORATION STRATEGY
Winner of the Outstanding
Habitat Improvement Project

WTT ANNUAL RAFFLE 19 DECEMBER: FABULOUS
PRIZES, SEE PAGE 10. DO PLEASE BUY A TICKET OR TWO

WILD TROUT TRUST

CONSERVATION AWARDS 2019: JUDGES' REPORT



TEST & ITCHEN RIVER RESTORATION STRATEGY

Winner of the Outstanding Habitat Improvement Project

BOTH the Test and the Itchen in Hampshire are conservationally-significant chalkstreams, officially classified in “unfavourable condition”. The objectives of the Test & Itchen River Restoration Strategy, led by the Environment Agency, are to determine the impacts of physical modifications (past and present) on the form, natural processes and ecology of the rivers, then to provide an outline restoration plan for the river on a reach-by-reach scale and do the work where possible. The focus of any restoration project within the Strategy is to ensure the condition of the habitat rather than the preservation of the species directly, with the principle being that good chalkstream habitat and unconstrained natural processes is more likely to support characteristic flora and fauna.

The Strategy was introduced to

local landowners and fisheries interests in October 2012, with a series of events leading to its launch in March of the following year. Working collaboratively with these stakeholders is imperative to the success of the project, with early partners coming from famous fishery interests on the Test. In some cases, hearts and minds have been won over slowly, as long as 20 years, from project inception to implementation.

The Strategy and its projects are part-funded now by the Environment Agency's Flood & Coastal Risk Management function, with financial input for the first years from Natural England; project partners are expected to 50:50 fund the work, though a number of riparian owners have contributed more. Over £1M has been spent to date, 60% (all cash) from the 26 contributing owners. One aspect of the Strategy, costing little or no more, is to encourage more sensitive management of the river by, for example, reduced mowing and cutting of the banks; a poll of river keepers suggests that over 60km of Test-bank length alone is now

managed more sensitively.

A range of techniques have been used including barrier removal, channel narrowing and the addition of woody material and gravel. Eight barriers and 1km of steel and wooden sheet piling have been removed, 16,800 tonnes of gravel added and 40 hectares of flood storage created; in total, over 10km of river has been significantly restored. Monitoring is being undertaken by EA survey teams, Southampton University and Sparsholt College and information disseminated through the River Restoration Centre and a variety of local routes.

WTT judges appreciate the breadth of this project and the socio-political context in which it has succeeded and is producing beneficial change for these iconic chalkstreams. The range of techniques and the scale of some individual projects is impressive; the role of the project manager and his relationships with local stakeholders, crucially with the riverkeepers, is noteworthy, producing physical improvements and a cultural change in how these rivers are perceived and managed.

LEVEN WILD FISHERY PROJECT

Winner of the Outstanding Contribution to Wild Trout Conservation

HUTTON Rudby Fly Fishing Club is a small club with fishing on the River Leven in North Yorkshire. Over the past 30 years, and in partnership with (at various times) the Environment Agency, Tees Rivers Trust and WTT, the club has transformed its management of the river.

In 2009, a carefully-monitored logbook scheme was introduced to track the performance of stocked trout, revealing that very few were caught and much money wasted!

The club decided in 2010 not to stock any longer, a decision carried through to today. In addition, a number of barriers on the Leven have been eased, habitat improved with woody debris, considered tree management carried out, *Ranunculus* successfully transplanted and invasive plants (Himalayan balsam and giant hogweed) tackled, including working with CABI on balsam rust trials: early signs suggest success. The members logbook scheme has revealed interesting information, not only on catch rates and thus the fishery performance, but the trout population too; effort-normalised catch rates indicate a progressive rise over time. The logbooks also provide detailed information on when, where and how much members are fishing –

all useful for the management of the club and its waters.

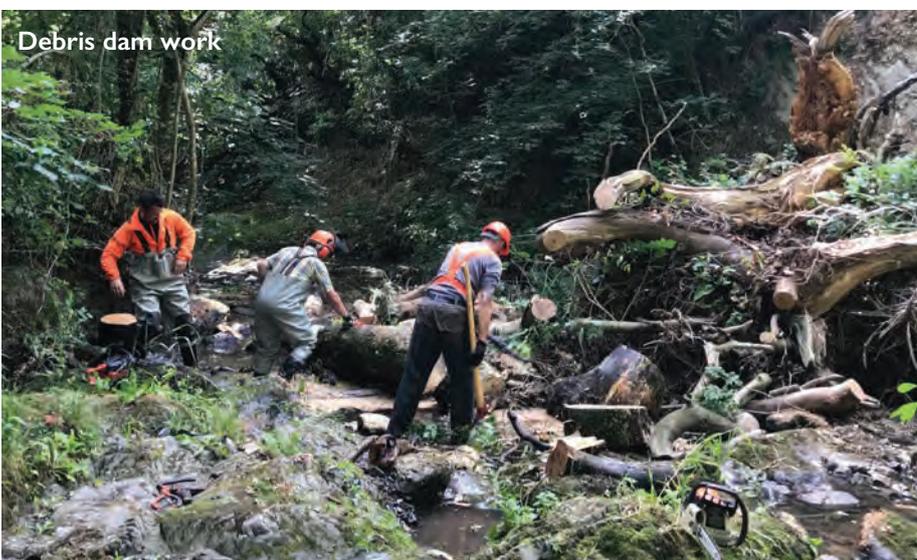
The club's stated aim is to "work with nature to create as near as possible a wild fishery supporting a good population of naturally sustainable brown trout" and a survey of members (current and lapsed) indicates a high degree of buy-in and success with this aim. Hutton Rudby's work has inspired other angling clubs, locally and nationally and featured in articles in the local and national press, EA and WTT publications.

Not only do the brown trout appear to appreciate the club's work, grayling appear to be doing well and the habitat improvement is proving of benefit to many other species, including otters, kingfishers, dippers and herons.

The WTT judges appreciated the comprehensive application from the Hutton Rudby club, including excellent data on members' catch returns. The judges viewed the club as open to their members and new ideas, with a willingness to share, to be informed and inform others, including the community's youngsters. The club has fully bought into the 'wild' philosophy in its management of the river, with strong local support; they are seen as the river guardians by their community.



River Leven: a wild trout fishery



Debris dam work

ADOPT A TRIBUTARY

ADOPT a Tributary" and water quality awareness work across the River Towy has been a project headed by Carmarthenshire Fishermen's Federation (CFF), representing anglers, angling clubs and riparian owners across rivers in West Wales. The project set out to initiate a Towy-wide "Adopt a Tributary" project and raise awareness of the state of the counties' waterways. The success of the project has outgrown the voluntary capacity



Rubbish removal

of CFF, with management passing to the West Wales Rivers Trust (WWRT) from summer 2019, formally funded by Welsh Water (WW) and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and supported by Afonydd Cymru (AC)

and private donations.

CFF remains a lobbying group but, since 2018, has also looked to practical work, including the removal of in-river blockages, fly-tipped waste (including plastic,

metal and all sorts of other debris) and invasive plants, especially Himalayan balsam. The scale of the waste that CFF volunteers have encountered is staggering, especially since much of the catchment is rural.

CFF works in close partnership with many other organisations including WWRT, AC, NRW, Welsh Government and farming representative groups. The project is lobbying hard across many sectors, expanding its area of influence and now involving non-angling community groups.

The WTT judges especially recognise this involvement of non-angling groups including family-based activities, extraordinary levels of voluntary input from CFF and its associates and the lobbying effort (from farmers on the ground to politicians in Welsh Government). That the project is being taken on formally by WWRT with viable funding from WW and NRW is testament to the tremendous voluntary efforts of CFF.

AIRE FRESHENER

THE Aire Freshener project, headed by Bradford City Angling Association (BCAA), supported by the Environment Agency, Yorkshire Farming & Wildlife Partnership, Aire Rivers Trust and WTT, tells the story of an angling club that has changed both the philosophy and practical management of its fishing on Yorkshire's River Aire, near Gargrave. The river has a chequered 200-year history of neglect and abuse from various forms of industry but BCAA has established a vision for a river which:

- follows a naturally-developed course, unshackled as much as possible from its historic constraints;
- has natural riparian vegetation and varied in-stream habitat, enabling wild trout (as our indicator

- species) to thrive and benefiting a wide range of other wildlife;
- has varied flows and water depths, which offers vastly improved spawning opportunities for fish and habitat for all life-stages;
- and has an ability to self-mitigate the threats posed by erosion and riparian landowner mishap or malpractice.

BCAA ceased stocking and, on a shoestring budget with much volunteer input, installed 2.3km of fencing, planted 2,850 trees and wildflower seeds into the newly-created buffer strip, transplanted water crowfoot, removed invasive plants and ragwort and installed woody debris in various forms into the river.

Monitoring is ongoing, through invertebrate sampling, electric fishing, angler catch returns and

redd counting: the signs are promising! Longer-serving members report good fishing with strong year classes of younger fish evident, plus numbers of trophy fish. The benefits for other wildlife are apparent too, with regular sightings of otters, many bird and butterfly species, hares and roe deer; mayfly have returned in numbers to one improved reach.

Dissemination of wild trout conservation messages comes through a club Facebook page, an annual open day and articles in the local and fly fishing press.

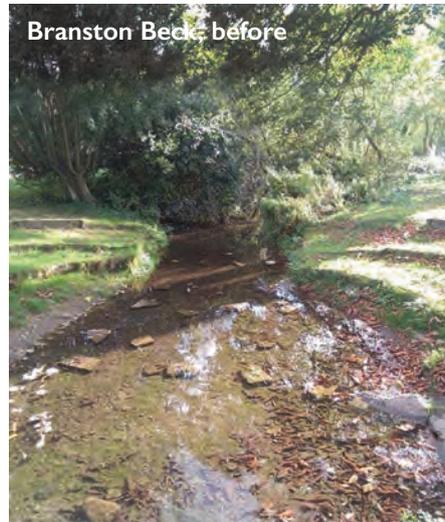
The WTT judges very much liked the strong partnership ethos in BCAA's project, its clear plan, huge changes to the river for a project costing perhaps no more than £20k so far, effective application of fairly simple and effective techniques and multi-species benefits: overall, a brilliant project.

BRANSTON BECK COMMUNITY PROJECT

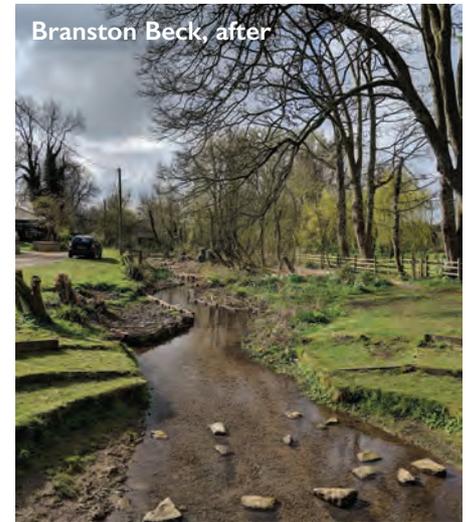
THE limestone becks of Lincolnshire can be home to important species such as the water vole, brown trout and native crayfish, alongside a substantial array of regionally and nationally rare insects, but historic changes to the becks including dredging and straightening along with more recent stresses from abstraction and pollution have resulted in degraded habitat for wildlife.

The Community Project site upstream of the village of Branston near Lincoln offered a great opportunity to improve habitat for spawning brown trout and other wildlife and also involve locals in creating an attractive yet biodiverse section of accessible stream. This project, led by Lincolnshire Rivers Trust, set out to:

- install brushwood mattresses to create some channel sinuosity and improve in-stream habitat



Branston Beck, before



Branston Beck, after

- to clean the gravels;
- selectively coppice trees to let more light into the stream
- add pollinator and aquatic plant interest;
- connect the community with their local stream.

Volunteer work parties carried out the physical in-stream habitat improvements and local young people were involved in a bird and bat box making day; those boxes now form part of a village trail.

Schoolchildren were also involved in planting by the beck.

WTT's judges recognised the project's success in bringing together a diverse, involved group from the local community, Rivers Trust, EA and Internal Drainage Board, the latter in an exemplary way.

This project will pave the way for large-scale work across Lincolnshire's beleaguered limestone becks and benefit trout and other wildlife, even where there are no angling interests.

HOWDEN ROCK CAMP

THIS vast project to build a rock ramp on the River Almond in West Lothian was led by Forth Rivers Trust (FRT), in partnership with West Lothian Council and Edinburgh City Council, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Scottish Government and SEPA's Water Environment Fund. The Almond is fragmented by barriers including a large weir at Howden, removal of which is deemed impossible because of an upstream road bridge.

So, Atlantic salmon, sea trout, eels and lamprey were severely restricted, barely able to access more than the bottom third of the catchment. The solution was a huge rock ramp that would not only improve fish passage but provide educational opportunities, create



Howden Bridge weir, before

employment and a place for the community to visit, improving physical and mental wellbeing. The broader project is to tackle seven barriers, with the Howden rock ramp one of the most technically challenging, the UK's longest at 185m! Construction of the ramp was completed only in May 2019, so it's hard yet to tell if it's completely successful, but FRT expect it to be so, for all species and sizes of fish. However, otters are clearly visiting this area as are people from the local community – 350 children from 12 schools have taken part in FRT's work and hundreds of volunteers involved in litter picking, electric fishing, invasive weed spraying and path building. Social media reach from the project has been great, reaching a high-point of 58,000 followers in the autumn of 2018.



The rock ramp working

WTT's judges appreciated the engineering feat of the rock ramp: not only is it the UK's longest (185m long, 105m wide), it involved 8 men working on site for 28 weeks to put in 2,500 tonnes of rock. 50-60km of main river and tributary have been opened up with this ramp.

The work continued to a successful end despite a series of huge floods. This truly is a flagship project which we hope will encourage others to take on the challenge of working at such scale. There is a brilliant time-lapse video at: https://youtu.be/_qBdaW21pV8

RIVER DERWENT (CUMBRIA) CATCHMENT-WIDE HABITAT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

THE Cumbrian Derwent is a Special Area of Conservation and Site of Special Scientific Interest, with important species of fish, invertebrates and plants. The river was subjected to huge and damaging flooding in 2009 and 2015, making enhancement of available habitat imperative.

The River Derwent Catchment-Wide Habitat Improvement Project is delivered under the umbrella of the River Corridor Group (RCG), a partnership of the Derwent Owners Association, the Environment Agency, Natural England, West Cumbria Rivers Trust, National Trust, Lake District National Park Authority and the Woodland Trust. The project is long-term and ongoing, with the key objectives of improving riparian habitat through stock-exclusion and riparian planting, tree management, improving in-river



Oak field school tree planting day

habitat for fish species through the introduction of large woody debris, providing spawning gravels, creating wildlife corridors through assisted natural recovery projects and contributing to natural flood management processes.

The key to the success of the RCG is that all parties work together in a spirit of co-operation, openness and understanding to deliver the overall project aims.

All decisions taken by the group are guided by these aims rather than

by any individual party gain. Partners work together to secure funding, delivering a wide range of habitat improvement works, enhancing the conservation status of the SAC, contributing to natural flood management and engaging key stakeholders and the local community in this work.

Since 2016, the RCG has contributed to:

- 38 habitat improvement projects;
- over 16 km of riverbank fencing
- extensive willow spiling work and tree planting;
- large woody debris and gravel introductions;
- demonstration days and guided walks with local stakeholders;
- non-native species control, including Himalayan balsam rust trials and signal crayfish trapping
- another 3 years of electric fishing surveys;
- Yearl Mill Race bypass restoration;
- 6,000 hours of voluntary activities in the catchment.

All of this activity tops-up the extraordinary work of RCG in its previous seven years of existence since 2009. Surveys indicate improvements in the juvenile salmonid populations of the Derwent and many other plants and animals associated with RCG's improvement works. WTT judges were impressed by the value for money of RCG's work, the sheer number of the outputs from volunteers contributing to the project, their geographical reach, the planned approach to improvement projects and the undoubted open partnership of the group.



Sandy Beck WTT workshop

ROADFORD MITIGATION PROGRAMME (FROM HATCHERIES TO HABITAT)

THE construction of Roadford Reservoir, in Cornwall's Tamar catchment, led to the loss of natural flows, spawning areas and habitat for all wild salmonid life stages; for over 30 years, compensation from South West Water took the form of a fish rearing and stocking programme.

This project, however, a collaboration of Westcountry Rivers Trust, South West Water and the Tamar & Tributaries Fisheries Association, aimed to work on habitat improvement across the entire catchment, dividing it into three parts: the Lyd, the Inny and the upper Tamar. A suite of interventions

has been implemented, including the reduction of abandoned coppice, gravel cleaning, debris dam removal and electric fishing monitoring.

The project has mapped areas for rehabilitation through 11km of walkover, established 16 new electric fishing monitoring sites, cleaned gravel at 65 sites (approx. 1,300m²), thinned abandoned coppice on 27 sites along 3.8km of river to increase light penetration to the river and tackled six



Gravel cleaning



impassable debris dams. The aim, exceeded by more than double, was to increase smolt output by nearly 4,000 fish, excluding any increased migration from the debris dam work.

A major feature of the project has been a shift in focus from the hatchery to habitat improvement,

benefiting not only migratory salmonids but also those that stay at home and the entire river ecology. Monitoring is ongoing and is key to demonstrating the impact of the work. WTT judges appreciated the whole ecosystem habitat approach of this project; many species (of fish

and other organisms) are benefiting, trout perhaps most so. The messages gleaned from this project will hopefully influence management practice across the West Country, precipitating less interest in hatcheries to attempt to support fish populations.

A TALE OF TWO WEIRS

THIS project, led by the Environment Agency in partnership with Birdsgrove Fly Fishing Club and WTT, involved the removal of two large weirs on the River Dove in the English Midlands. The Dove is a river with a long history of re-alignment, straightening and weir-building, for land drainage, purportedly to reduce flooding and for fishing. This project set out to restore the longitudinal connectivity of the river, improving sediment transport and habitat connectivity including migration of trout, eels and other coarse fish and to restore the river's natural processes, physical structure and habitat availability for the ecology to flourish.

Using £15,000 of EA Fisheries Improvement Programme funding, with co-funding from the fishing club and WTT, the project removed two large weirs built in the 1980s as pool-creating angling features.

Photographic monitoring and frequent site visits post-weir removal show clear evidence of habitat availability and variability which was lacking before the work was carried out; various juvenile fish and lampreys have been seen at the work sites. Before the weir removal, the upstream impounded sections were only suitable for adult fish; now, with changes in the habitat, both river reaches provide excellent spawning areas. Fresh new gravels are now transported to the downstream reaches and this will provide new habitat for fish and other organisms.



Upstream Gothard weir: an impounded river



Gothard weir gone: the river released

Fixed point photography, time lapse cameras, water level monitoring and habitat mapping is in place to monitor the physical responses of the river after the weir removals.

Fishing club members have been generally supportive and, following on from these removals, another weir on club waters has been earmarked to go.

WTT judges noted the apparent shift in attitude in the fishing club for the weirs, full weir removal as the preferred option, good value for money of the project and the profound and beneficial changes to the physical structure of the river above and below the weirs; fish and other organisms now have 4km of uninterrupted river to move along.



Left: Andy Stott and right: John Gifford of Hutton Ruddy FFC, winners of the Outstanding Contribution to Wild Trout Conservation Award 2019 for the Leven Wild Fishery Project

Left: Hannah Barclay (Environment Agency), centre: Heb Leman (EA), and right: Jenny Wheeldon (Natural England), winners of the Outstanding Habitat Improvement Project Award 2019 for the Test & Itchen River Restoration Strategy

WTT CONSERVATION AWARDS 2019

MORE than 100 guests came to London's Savile Club in October, to celebrate the extraordinary projects up for the WTT 2019 Awards.

Tony Juniper, Chairman of Natural England, opened the evening, highlighting how this time could just be a sweet-spot for the environment, with change for the better brought by top-down policy drivers from global-scale climate change and bottom-up work on the ground by the hands of many, including the river improvement projects we came to applaud.

Five short-listed projects then presented their work, but, in announcing the winners, WTT Director, Shaun Leonard, noted that guests on the evening had not heard of some amazing work including a massive project in West Lothian to create the UK's longest rock ramp, a 3km-long restoration of a river in Kent or a flagship Westcountry project to focus on river habitat, not hatcheries. More elsewhere in this newsletter and on the WTT website.



Carmarthenshire Fishermen's Federation, represented by the Loziou gang: their Adopt a Tributary project was one of the highlights of the Conservation Awards 2019



Jim Munden of Bradford City AA, presenting their brilliant Aire Freshener short-listed project

BERNARD VENABLES AWARD 2019

WE present the Bernard Venables Award to recognise those who, voluntarily, have given great service to wild trout conservation and to WTT and whose vital work, perhaps unusual, sometimes outstanding, often goes unrecognised.

Our 2019 Bernard Venables Award winner is Paul Jennings, of the River Chess Association.

While Paul's focus has been on his home river, the Chess in Buckinghamshire, his work and influence (all voluntary) stretches along the rivers of the Chilterns and North London and further to the chalkstreams of Yorkshire. He fights and lobbies for those rivers at many levels: local and national government, regulators, water companies, and won changes for the better. On the Chess, he teaches children with learning needs how to fish and he leads groups bug hunting in the river; he's hugely popular with the kids and their teachers.

Paul couples energy and enthusiasm with a big personality and a great deal of charm; he has an ability to communicate and engage with a wide audience, from schoolchildren to Members of Parliament. His network



Left: Paul Jennings of the River Chess Association, receiving the Bernard Venables Award 2019 from Tony Juniper

of senior contacts listen to and respect his views. Paul is invariably keen to share what he has learned, doing so on many occasions with fellow WTT supporters.

WTT ANNUAL DRAW 2019

7PM, 19 December 2019

The Ship & Bell, Horndean, Hants

Do please buy a ticket or two or more... and encourage your friends and colleagues to do likewise. Tickets cost £1 each. We have some lovely prizes as listed below and all proceeds are used wisely in our habitat restoration work.

Please use the order form enclosed with this Newsletter or visit the shop on our website at www.wildtrout.org. We will complete the counterfoils and send you the corresponding tickets by post or ticket numbers by email, whichever you prefer.

Thank you for your support and good luck!

1ST PRIZE KINDLY DONATED BY SAGE, WORTH APPROX £1000+

A Sage Single Handed Fly Rod of your choice from the range current at the time of the draw to which will be added an appropriate reel and line.

2ND PRIZE KINDLY DONATED BY THE PEACOCK AT ROWSLEY & HADDON FISHERIES, WORTH £470

1 night's accommodation in a large double/twin room for 2 people with 3-course dinner and buffet breakfast,

plus 2 low-season tickets to fish the Derbyshire Wye, 2020 season.

3RD PRIZE KINDLY DONATED BY WILLIAM DANIEL, FAMOUS FISHING, WORTH £450

A day's fishing for 3 rods on 1½ miles of the Lambourn at Weston. 2020 season by arrangement on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday after 30 June.

4TH PRIZE KINDLY DONATED BY GEORGE & ANN EATON, WORTH £120

A day for 2 or 3 people (can be parent and child) to watch wildlife from a 'high seat' in a tree at Rectory Farm, Bucks to see badgers, muntjac deer, hare, owls and foxes. Summer 2020.

5TH PRIZE KINDLY DONATED BY JAMES LANFEAR, JIM'S LURES, WORTH £80

A pair of exquisite, wooden fishing lures handcrafted in Devon by James Lanfear of Jim's Lures.

**PLEASE ENSURE ORDER FORMS ARE RECEIVED
IN THE WTT OFFICE BY TUESDAY 17 DECEMBER**
(allow 3 working days using the PO Box and Freepost addresses). Tickets can be ordered via the shop on our website until 5pm on Thursday 19 December.

OBITUARY

In Memory of Tony Donnelly

His passion for trout and grayling conservation, in addition to salmon, demonstrated his broad knowledge and understanding of fishery management



ALL of us here at WTT were incredibly saddened to hear of the untimely passing of Tony Donnelly. Those who have visited the River Annan in recent years may remember Tony as the Trust and Fishery Board Director, where he worked until very recently, before heading north to take up the Director's role at Cromarty Firth

Fishery Board and Trust.

Tony has been a good friend to WTT over the years, and a mate of our staff, supporting conservation work through project collaborations and guiding lots on the Annan for our auction, which proved ever-popular with bidders. His passion for trout and grayling conservation, in addition

to salmon, demonstrated his broad knowledge and understanding of fishery management.

Tony was an accomplished fly tyer and trout, grayling and salmon angler himself and his presence will be sadly missed on the banks of rivers, burns, lakes and lochs around Britain.

Our deepest condolences to Tony's family.

LOVE FLOWS

#worldfishmigrationday | 16 May 2020 | #happyfish



“The more people we can make aware of the huge challenges faced by fish, in order to survive in the modern world, the more opportunities we have to give them a helping hand”

Join World Fish Migration Day!

Jeremy Wade

Host of *River Monsters* & *Mighty Rivers* TV Series (Animal Planet/Discovery/ITV)

16 May 2020



register at: www.worldfishmigrationday.com | #worldfishmigrationday | @fishmigration



WTT's 2018-2019 Year in Photos



The River Gwash: before (above), during (left) and after (below) the practical efforts of Gwash A.C., the Environment Agency and WTT. Looks a bit more like a trout stream now



So, you twizzle it like this...

Balsam bashing on the River Dearne



Below: dismantling a weir on the River Brue



The work party gets its briefing: "...and the river's over there..."



Softening the hard edges of the River Colne



Marginal planting on the River Lee



WTT's forte: practical training in the river



Letting light into the Taw



Serious woody debris on the Hampshire Avon



Heavy plant narrowing the Hampshire Avon



Dismantling Gothard weir on the River Dove

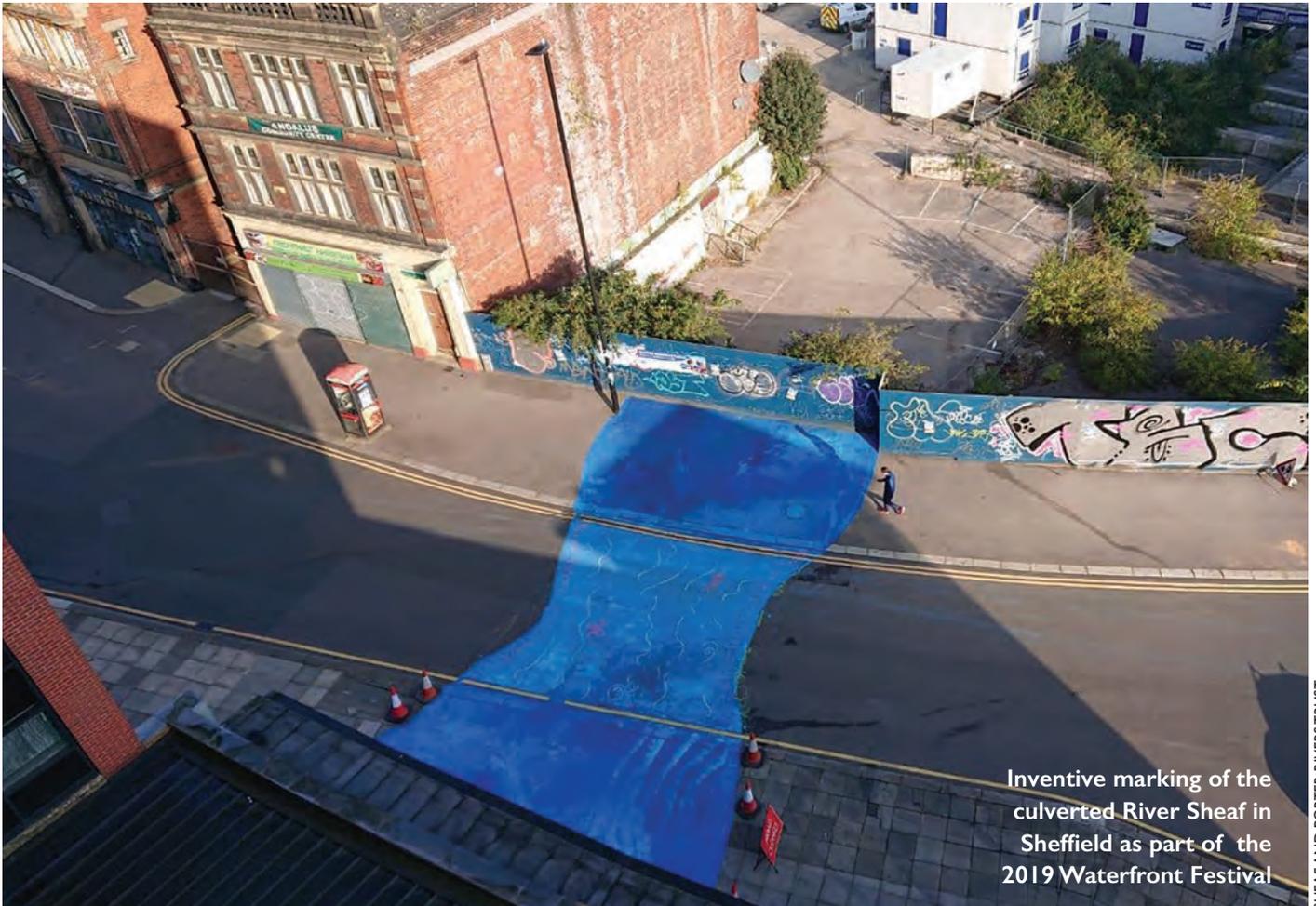


River Aire: a 19 wide, 1.4m high weir goes in double-quick time, releasing the river for over 20km upstream



The Trout in the Town Conclave 2019

Between 27 and 29 September, thirty of the country's most ardent urban trout heroes gathered in a rainy Stalybridge to exchange instruction and inspiration. By Paul Gaskell



Inventive marking of the culverted River Sheaf in Sheffield as part of the 2019 Waterfront Festival

SHEAF AND PORTER RIVERS TRUST

JOINTLY hosted by WTT and Mersey Rivers Trust, attendees came from all four corners of England to contribute and to benefit from this, the fourth, Urban Conclave gathering.

As predicted, the early-bird Friday gathering over social drinks created some of the most valuable idea exchanges – with a particular buzz around the colourful and inventive marking of the culverted River Sheaf in Sheffield (as part of the 2019 Waterfront Festival).

Also, the success of the ‘urban caving’ trips through culverted rivers as an engagement tool and a source of significant income for a

new urban river charity was a real eye-opener. See more on the Sheaf & Porter Rivers Trust website, <https://www.sheafportertrust.org/>

Saturday saw some fantastic presentations from Mike Forty (Ribble Rivers Trust, barrier prioritisation), Simon Ogden (Sheaf and Porter Rivers Trust/Sheffield City Council, lessons for ambitious urban river projects), Mike Duddy (Mersey Rivers Trust, Citizen Science and mapping the ongoing recovery of invertebrates in the Mersey Catchment), Joe Pecorelli (Zoological Society of London, Outfall Safaris - a tour of

stinkers and how to report them), plus our very own Theo Pike, launching the brand new *Urban River Toolkit* – see Theo’s piece for more on this.

Again, the Conclave evening meal proved hugely valuable as a networking event and the formation of mutual support relationships between widely-separated projects was a key feature. The expansion of our existing Trout in the Town Facebook group will also allow us to continue those support network interactions – including future training and resource sharing.

Ever adaptable, we managed to



Bream among the trolleys



Aaron Watson invertebrate ID specialist from the Environment Agency & Riverfly Partnership



Stonefly in Tesco's carpark



improvise our way around hugely flooded rivers for our planned practical sessions on the Sunday, with the especially heroic efforts of Arron Watson, invertebrate ID specialist from the Environment Agency and Riverfly Partnership. First up, Shaun Leonard showed another application of citizen science in the form of scale sampling for fish population monitoring (easily and enjoyably coupled with friendly angling matches).

Since the rivers were completely flooded out, we were forced into the handy substitute of the sheltered trolley bays of Tesco's car park (other

I suspect that Tesco's have never thought of using their café tables as invertebrate lab benches...

supermarket brands and trolley bays are available). With the help of some (more or less) preserved and chilled bream from Shaun's post-mortem fish pathology duties, a truly urban biology lesson followed. We followed that up with a combined trolley-bay and supermarket café Urban River Pollution index (preview of a new

Riverfly+ tool) with Arron and a collection of preserved bugs – again our 'Plan C' response to the flooded river conditions. I suspect that Tesco's have never thought of using their café tables as invertebrate lab benches...

Arron and I are planning some future 'webinar' events within the Trout in the Town Facebook group – so everyone can really get a boost to their invertebrate-monitoring skills.

Our thanks to everyone who participated so fully in the event – and huge thanks as always to our guest speakers who gave so generously of their time and expertise.

WTT's Inspiring New Urban River Toolkit

Theo Pike, our Trout in the Town man in the south, describes WTT's latest publication

WTT is all about practical advice that easily turns into really beneficial work on the ground and in the river – inspiring and helping everyone to protect wild trout and their habitat.

Lots of our work is focused around our Advisory Visits and reports, but there's also our wide range of printed publications including the *Wild Trout Survival Guide*, specialist *Chalkstream* and *Upland Rivers Habitat Guidelines*, and helpful two-page guides on topics like managing gravel, trees, weed and invasive non-native species.

And then there's our specialised urban stuff...

WTT's first *Urban River Restoration Guidelines* were published in 2010: written by Paul Gaskell and generously funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

Nearly 10 years later, with even more knowledge and experience under our belts, we decided we should give those guidelines a bit of an update. So, one of my first tasks, as Trout in the Town Officer for the South of England and Wales, was to sit down and think: "What else did we want to know when we started the Wandle project all those years ago? And what's changed since then?"

The result is WTT's new *Trout in the Town Urban River Toolkit*, which was officially launched at our Urban Conclave in September: 98 pages of practical advice for local people to help their urban rivers to recover from centuries of abuse (or simply

being overlooked and under-appreciated in recent years).

As you might expect from the combined experience of Paul and me, the Toolkit includes nearly 20 years of tried and tested guidance on:

- Understanding urban rivers and their surroundings.
- Organising river clean-ups and other events.
- Inspiring and motivating volunteers.
- Funding and fundraising.
- Practical aspects of running an urban river group.
- Exciting project ideas.
- Case studies from successful Trout in the Town groups.
- Getting your group accredited as an official Trout in the Town chapter.
- And much, much more...

In short, it's full of inspiring, empowering advice for anyone who wants to start taking care of their local urban waterway.

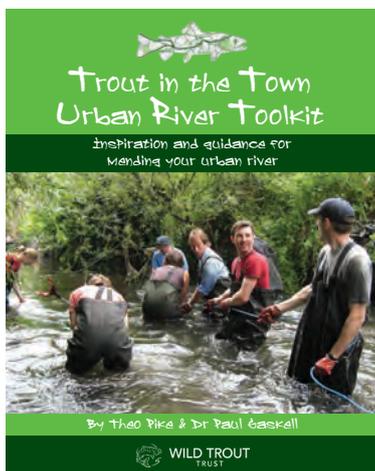
Of course, a project like this is a huge collaborative effort, involving many of our project partners and friends in urban groups across the UK, who have very kindly contributed photos, ideas and stories of their own successes. We're particularly grateful to Gary Hunt (CATCH), Phil Sheridan (Friends of the River Worth), Harriet Alvis (Bristol Avon Rivers Trust), Charlotte Hitchmough and Anna Forbes (Action for the



River Kennet), Joe Pecorelli (Zoological Society of London) and Ben Fitch (Riverfly Partnership).

We also want to say a very special thanks to the Environment Agency for helping to fund this important new publication.

Our designer Rebecca Hawtrey has done an amazing job with a huge file of materials, and Bruno Vincent created a standout new Trout in the Town logo even before he officially started working with WTT. Now that's dedication to the cause!



TROUT IN THE TOWN URBAN RIVER TOOLKIT

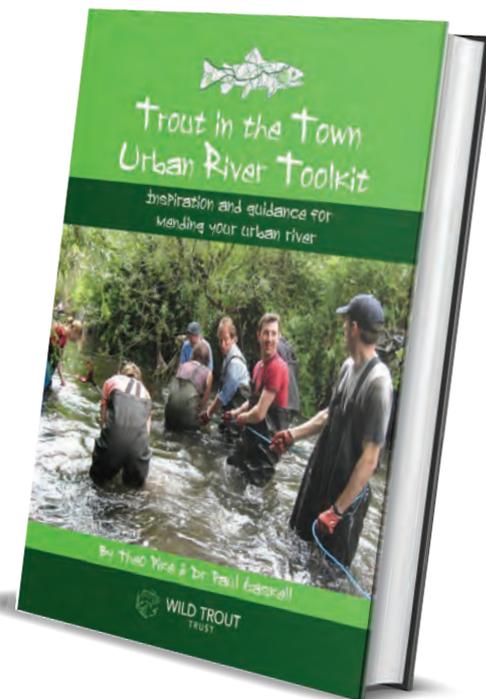
WTT's new *Urban River Toolkit* is available to download (in pdf format) straight from the WTT website: visit <https://www.wildtrout.org/content/trout-town>
Or you can buy a printed copy for just £15.99 via Amazon: search Amazon for *Urban River Toolkit* or type in this link: <https://tinyurl.com/wtturbanrivertoolkit>

If our *Urban River Toolkit* inspires you to take the next steps in looking after your local stream or river, please don't hesitate to get in touch with our Trout in the Town team:

- Trout in the Town (north): Paul Gaskell: pgaskell@wildtrout.org
- Trout in the Town (south): Theo Pike: tpike@wildtrout.org

The Trout in the Town Up North

By Paul Gaskell



HELLO to all urban trout fans! This last quarter was something of a rollercoaster ride in the TinT Northern badlands. Actually, on a national level, we've had the nervous excitement and expectant parent worries that come along with book publication for the new *Urban River Toolkit* print and digital editions (much more from Theo on that front in his report).

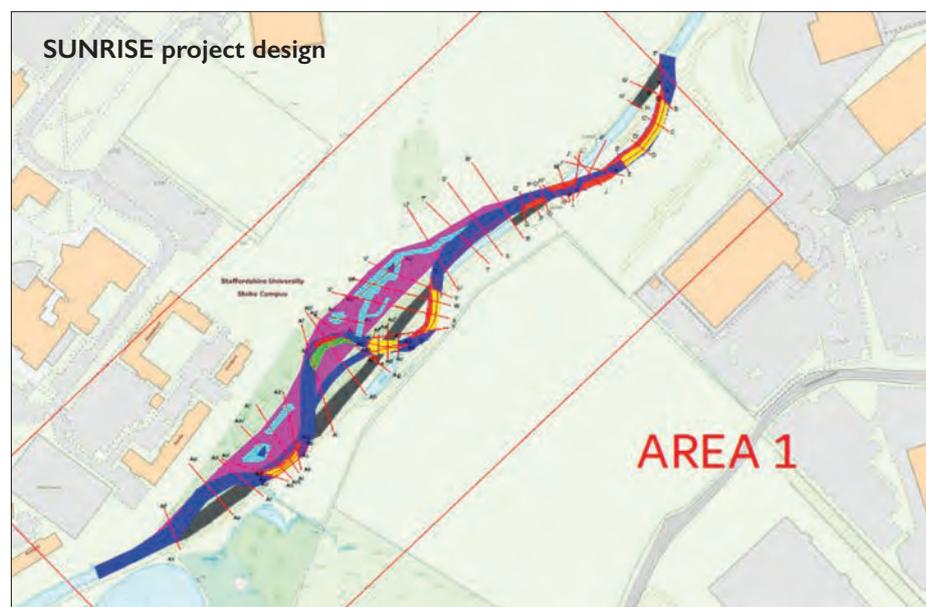
Alongside that, the 2019 Urban River Heroes Conclave on the River Tame in Stalybridge came together through a collaboration with Warren "Woz" Andrew and Mike Duddy at Mersey Rivers Trust, with the urban advocates at WTT. A brilliant weekend was had by all – see a fuller report elsewhere in this newsletter. Keynote talks from the likes of Joe Pecorelli (Outfall Safaris), Mike Forty (Identifying Priority Fish Barriers), Simon Ogden (Getting BIG ambitious urban projects done) and Mike Duddy himself – as well as inspirational accounts of all the attendees projects – really created something to write home about. Not only that, we used the 2019 event to

launch the print edition of the *Urban River Toolkit* – with print copies for all groups attending. Our own Theo Pike inspired the whole audience by walking us all through the genesis and the contents of this new, valuable resource.

REGULAR DUTIES

In the midst of conclave and toolkit preparations, I've put some considerable time and effort into a pretty big and complex permit application for works on the River

Trent, as part of the SUNRISE project. The existing river is a super-straightened, heavily engineered section of channel within the grounds of Staffordshire University. Historic maps show a meandering stream that, over time, was moved to accommodate the encroaching infrastructure (including early and later iterations of sewage works). The channel currently borders the University sports pitches and, along with the surrounding buildings, this



creates some interesting challenges.

Not only is the channel extremely straight, the riverbed is dominated by sand (with only the occasional lump of stone from the walls or chunks of 'large rubbery debris' – AKA tyres – for variety). Working with the specialist geomorphological design team at AquaUoS based in the University of Salford, exciting new possibilities for this section of river are proposed.

Although only an indicative sketch – and subject to the highly detailed permitting process – you can get some feel for the extra sinuosity, adjacent backwater/wetland features and new riffles we plan to re-introduce – the dark blue line represents what we hope will be our new, wiggly, upper Trent. We do, of course, have to minimise the amount of earth that needs to be redistributed around the site and ensure we do not increase the flood risk. More on this project here: <http://www.erdf-sunrise.co.uk/project-site/staffordshire-university-river-trent/>

I've also given advice and contributed to planning for channel redistribution works on Yorkshire's River Went with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (see below), in-channel habitat creation on the River Sheaf with the EA and Sheffield City Council (and similar advice on the Porter Brook with private developers



and Sheffield City Council) along with an Advisory Visit to Wigan's River Douglas.

A really interesting and inspiring 'return visit' from the Douglas Catchment Partnership's Fisheries Subgroup saw me showing folks around the 'Grey to Green' and deculverting/pocket-park creation works on South Yorkshire's River Don. You can see photos and tweets from their visit here: <https://twitter.com/DouglasPilot/>

[status/1166402402280443904](https://twitter.com/DouglasPilot/status/1166402402280443904)

Also, in mid-September, I worked with Alec Boyd and Chloe Rose of Yorkshire Wildlife Trust to re-introduce some structural value to a heavily-impacted section of the River Went. As well as creation of meanders, we'll go back in Spring to plant on reprofiled berms and banks. The removal of a weir that previously impounded at least 600m of river was a key component of this project. The Went is extremely challenging to work in – owing to its history of open-cast mining which has resulted in a complete inversion of the soil horizons. This means that the deep subsoil/heavy clays are now what forms the bed of the river – creating a huge challenge for the stabilisation of reprofiled features. In future, I would like to explore the possibilities of re-introducing gravel and cobble material into key areas – since the prospect of re-inverting the sub/top-soil horizons for the whole valley seems an impossible dream.

The control of silt using 'silt wattles' and mats downstream of the reach that we worked on was a central





consideration for these works. In all, six meander features were created and one boulder weir was removed. Planting will follow in spring – when the chances of establishment are highest.

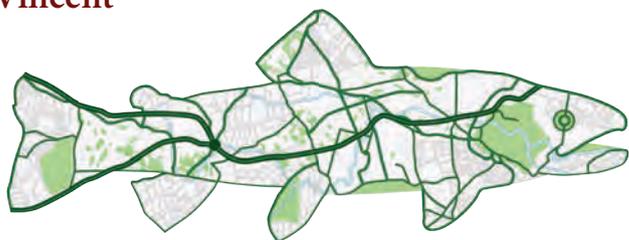
Among the technical work, I also did a quick spot on Matthew Wright's *Talk Radio* show about the surprising news of chemists finding recreational drugs such as cocaine and ketamine in fish and invertebrates from our country's rivers.

There was even time for a very enjoyable (if high-pressure)

challenge for BBC Sheffield...read on...Kat Harbourne (who also presents *The Naked Podcast*) had made a bold claim about fishing being boring and – following an on-air phone-in “gauntlet throw-down” – we met for a city-centre urban trout and grayling challenge. Fortunately, the pictures of Kat with her first grayling (plus several additional grayling and trout captures) meant that Trout in the Town settled that particular score as part of that day's Toby Coe radio show. The fish also liked Kat's festival glitter makeover very much...

Early Days at WTT

By Bruno Vincent



Trout in the Town

BY the time you read this, my role as Fundraising Events Officer will have officially begun. I'm tasked with taking on the auction from Denise Ashton, organising other fundraising efforts (including members' fishing weekends and a new idea of themed lunches and dinners) trying generally to broaden WTT's funding base.

Before my official WTT kick-off, I worked voluntarily with Theo Pike and Paul Gaskell, updating the Trout in the Town branding. This led me down the path of a little urban trout cartography; twisting roads, rails and parks into shape.

I did manage to escape the West Country to join all the other WTT conservation officers and staff for their quarterly team meeting, this time in Derbyshire. Putting faces to names, talking shop and even picking through thousands of assorted flies

in a vain attempt to assemble a fly box for fishing that was washed and blown off.

First off, the auction: with it looming over the horizon, collating lots from around the country, and beyond, will begin. Increasing the range and originality of the offering to best excite bidders will be a major effort; something for all skills, budgets, ages and genders that will enthrall anglers and non-angling supporters alike.

With fresh eyes, I am looking to understand what WTT can do for all its members and how what we do can attract a wider gamut of engaged supporters. This will not only help invigorate the auction but also direct how we organise events in the future. The classic fishing days and get-togethers will all still go on, but perhaps shift and morph into



Above: Bruno Vincent and left: his 'little urban trouty cartography'

something that everyone, members and staff get a lot more from.

Somewhere in amongst the fundraising and comms-thinking, I'd like to find myself on a river or two. In my early days, an Advisory Visit from our former CO, Mike Blackmore, on the River Camel, landed on my desk; having spent the last two and a half years working to improve the Camel and Fowey rivers in Cornwall, I know the reach in question well. With a fair wind, I might be able to carry a little of this work on into the future, partnering with the local EA team and Westcountry Rivers Trust.

The pace and array of new work WTT operate with is already apparent and I can't wait to get my teeth into the role.

Definition of a poacher:

A person who catches or hunts game or fish illegally

Mike Dibden, a keeper on the Itchen, finds some crumb of good in a disaster, with lessons to learn for other keepers, angling clubs and would-be poachers!

I'M lucky that I don't get many 'poachers'; most of the time kids who, like I was, just want to be outside having fun. So, to catch a real poacher red-handed, with the law on my side and more importantly a positive result from catching him, is a rarity. But this is exactly what happened to me...

One recent morning, I spotted someone without permission on the opposite bank, having a great time, spinning away. I called the police: "someone will be with you but not sure how long." Great. To my horror, every trout landed was whacked and shoved into his pockets! I stood watching for nearly an hour, all the time trying to take photos and video, with my patience shortening. If I approached him, he would do a runner and there might be nothing gained.

With his pockets full, the then happy fisherman tried leaving through a field gate, where I was waiting. So, he headed back to the river and, to my surprise, jumped in and waded under a bridge to evade capture! Sadly for my man, I was in peak fitness before the 2019 rugby season and legged it downstream to the next available bridge crossing, heading him off, assisted by an upstream keeper and a police officer.

Job done... man caught with fish and very red cheeks. I recovered my shoe lost in the last 50 yards of the chase and we all marched back to a clearing for him to be dealt with properly by the police; every pocket on him was bulging with fish! Twelve brown trout in total ranging in size from 1-3lb, mostly wild fish.

In Hampshire, the police take

poaching very seriously and our perpetrator was dealt with quickly. Statements were taken from me and my keeper friend and all photographic evidence was handed over. After interview and seeing all of the evidence against him, my poacher paid compensation for the fish that he took, all of which was donated to WTT.

The police asked me for a figure of reparation: I reckoned a rod would pay £250 a day to fish prime Hampshire chalkstream in mid-August and, on stocked water, be allowed to take 3 fish. My poacher took twelve fish, so I reasoned on a settlement of £1,000. An expensive day's fishing for him I thought but also a sum that I didn't think we'd ever see. However, with encouragement, Hampshire Police were very swift in their follow up procedures and the culprit asked to settle up with £1,500 for the fish

and any inconvenience caused, a huge financial loss to him and a day's fishing that I doubt he'll repeat.

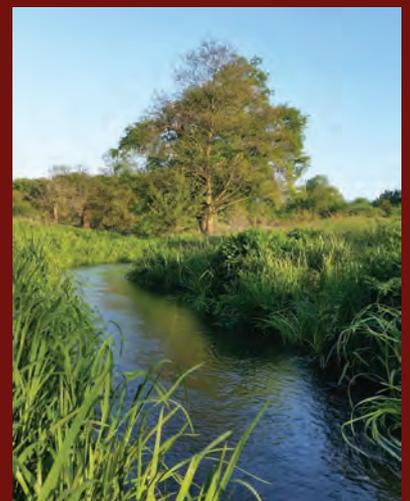
Stories like this travel far among those who poach rivers and the more awareness and positive results we get through such restorative justice, the less problems we'll have with poaching... hopefully!

Here on the Itchen and the Test, we have a messaging group that allows us to share suspicious activity on the river. This group is monitored by the police and the Environment Agency and was very helpful to my case. Being in touch with people is easy nowadays with mobile phones and various apps to help communicate and I would strongly recommend other keepers and clubs out there to stay in touch with their neighbours, look out for one another and use restorative justice to make poachers pay!

THE TILLINGBOURNE

Tillingbourne FFC maintain a small syndicate on their (eponymous) river near Guildford. The members manage the beat, which requires regular access work in spring and summer and more significant projects out of season, with the emphasis on habitat improvement and bank side maintenance to create the best possible wild trout chalk stream fishing experience.

There is potential for a few enthusiastic new recruits in the 2020 season, joining a membership with a passion for conservation and spooky trout. Please send all enquiries to: davidgnaisby@gmail.com.





Gareth Pedley's Northern Adventures

Spring and summer are generally walkover season for me when the more stable river conditions (sometimes!) allow for better assessment of the habitat quality and issues along our rivers. It's always a slight trade off, as wet conditions can also be useful in identifying surface runoff and other land management problems, but low, clear water allows for accurate assessment of in-channel habitats and is usually conducive to longer days surveying

AMONG the general Advisory Visits and advice, this season's larger pieces of work commenced with baseline habitat assessment for the Red and Birkey Burns in Northumberland, in partnership with the Environment Agency.

These walkovers were aimed at identifying the basic habitat quality and fish-holding potential for these burns, prior to the planned installation of natural flood management (NFM) measures; these baseline habitat data are really important to ensure that fragile fish populations and habitats are not

impacted by any such work. We also fed back to the EA on the proposed NFM measures, highlighting modifications to the design and installation of structures that could mitigate for any impact on fish and physical river structure.

The next large piece of work was also undertaken with the EA on the River Nent in Northumberland, a heavily mine water-polluted system where high levels of metals greatly limit the species present. Again, I carried out a baseline habitat assessment prior to work being undertaken on the catchment, this

time to improve the mine water quality but involving flow depletion over an extended reach of the river. Aside from the general habitat observations there, I was astonished to see wild brown trout in all accessible reaches, demonstrating the incredible resilience of our enigmatic emblem – even in the face of extreme water quality issues.

Significant channel realignment, modification and poor water quality on the River Nent – yet our beloved brownies persist!

In August, southern Conservation Officer Andy Thomas and I teamed

Many sections of the River Fane have been realigned, but lush riparian and in-channel vegetation still provide areas of high-quality habitat for trout



up for a trip over to the Irish border, to report on some long sections of the River Fane (over 30km in total). This visit was at the request of local angling clubs who had sought external funding to provide them with a comprehensive habitat assessment and recommendations on how to improve the habitat for their salmon, sea trout and brown trout. The system is a particularly interesting one, containing several loughs, one of which has a dam and water regulation system at the

downstream end. As is all-too-common, the Fane has been significantly modified in many sections and no longer displays a naturally varied course or physical structure – it's been straightened and dredged. Nonetheless, areas of generous riverside buffer strips and

The sad state of one Trout Beck tributary impacted by fine sediment input (left), contrasted with the high-quality substrate of its neighbour only 10s of metres away (right)



natural channel recovery over time are allowing the river to produce and hold salmonids, with healthy numbers of wild trout throughout; we saw some big ones among them too! Another river in which trout display their ability to be able to adapt to major physical changes in habitat quality and diversity. The recommendations of our report will highlight ways in which the habitat can be tweaked, to provide localise improvements or more majorly restored to deliver multi-species, catchment-wide benefits.

Many sections of the River Fane have been realigned, but lush riparian and in-channel vegetation still provide areas of high-quality habitat for trout.

I've also been out assessing the habitat on around 60km of the Trout Beck in Cumbria, informing plans for watercourse fencing, alternative livestock watering, and fish passage and in-river habitat improvements. As I see on much of the River Eden catchment, the walkovers so far have identified that livestock access and fine sediment input is one of the major impacts, but using the information gathered through the walkovers, Eden Rivers Trust should hopefully be able to deliver habitat and water quality improvements that will benefit a range of fish, invertebrates and other species.

Is this a sea trout or a brown trout?

This was the question that accompanied a photograph on social media recently, alongside a rather large trout. And the answer is... well, it's complicated, but interesting. Denise Ashton tackles a tricky one

TO start with what may not be obvious: we think that sea trout and brown trout are the same species, *Salmo trutta*. A sea trout is a brown trout that has decided to go to sea and in order to do so, it has been through a process of 'smoltification'. This process means trout change in some amazing ways: for example, they become silvery by producing guanine crystals on their scales, their eyes enlarge and their internal organs adapt to cope with the moves between fresh and seawater. It is the distinctive silvery colour that most people associate with sea trout, so a silver trout is a sea trout and a brown trout is... well, a 'resident' brownie. Isn't it?

Certainly, a trout that is very silvery and perhaps has a couple of sea lice attached to it is very likely a sea trout (or maybe a salmon – but that is another story). Fresh from the sea, this is what you would expect of an adult sea trout. A very small silvery trout, perhaps less than ten inches or so, is most likely to be a smolt on its way downstream to the sea. Smolts tend to migrate in shoals downstream at night in April /May and possibly also in the autumn. Apparently, they swim backwards, and hate going over weirs which is why weirs can be a problem downstream as well as upstream migration (again, another story).

The story gets a little more complicated when sea trout return to fresh water. This may not be a simple upstream migration from sea to spawning gravels. In some



PAUL SHARMAN

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places, sea trout 'slob' back and forth from river to estuary. And sea trout are great explorers. Vagrants may have a nose around a few local rivers before returning to their natal river to spawn. Some will stray to spawn – this is how trout arrived in our rivers after the last Ice Age and how *Salmo trutta* has become such a successful non-native invader in the southern hemisphere. During these wanderings, and whilst holding up in the river waiting to spawn, sea trout start to lose their silvery colour and revert to looking like in-river (or

lake) brown trout. Being brown and spotty is a much better camouflage in the river than standing out, all bright and shiny silver.

Once the obvious silver colour has gone, there are some clues that will tell you it is a sea trout, but they are not absolutely reliable. The most obvious is size. One reason that sea trout follow the often-risky strategy of going to sea is because the food supply at home is poor, but the benefits must outweigh the costs. In order to grow big and produce lots of eggs to pass on genes to the next generation (most sea trout are female), it pays to go to sea to grow large. The (often male) resident trout stay rather small in comparison.

However, there are sea trout in chalk and limestone rivers where there is plenty of food and in these rivers, there may not be such a big difference in size. Why would a trout go to sea, if there is plenty of food at home? That is a question that still puzzles scientists. It's clear that anadromy (migrating to sea) is a function of environment (e.g. food availability) and genetics (all trout were once sea trout and retain a propensity to migrate) but a recent (2019) scientific paper by Prof Andy Ferguson and co-authors suggests that it's an individual decision – a layman's version of that paper will appear in WTT's 2020 journal. So, genetics alone is not going to tell you if your trout is a sea trout or a river 'resident' trout.

A rather more unreliable clue is behaviour. Sea trout like to jump out

A silver sea trout in the River Cothi.



DAVID MILLER

of the water especially at dusk and at night, they tend to move upstream at night often quite noisily and are more likely to be in close proximity to one another than wild resident brown trout. However, a trout caught on a dry fly in the middle of the day might still be a sea trout, especially if water levels and light levels are low.

The next clue is not for the riverbank and requires a modest amount of science. A trout scale has growth rings in the same way as a tree has growth rings. A sea trout scale should show a period of rapid growth due to the extra food it has found in saltwater. Sometimes it is obvious, sometimes not, and accurate scale reading needs a good level of skill and lots of experience.

So finally, the most likely source of a definitive answer is proper science – and one powerful technique which can be applied non-destructively to the fish is stable isotope analysis

(SIA). Different food webs have very distinctive chemical signatures which stay in fish scales and this means that it is possible to trace where the fish has been feeding. Unfortunately, this technique isn't readily available to anglers! Our own Jonny Grey is an expert in SIA and is supervising students using this technique to establish whether the surprisingly large trout in some streams in eastern England are sea trout or not.

One final note. Some trout in freshwater seem to be real homies

but many trout are wanderers, sea trout perhaps most famously. 'River' trout may well move huge distances at certain times of year (e.g. running upstream in the autumn or winter to spawn); some might nose into the estuary or an on-line lake for a feed. 'Lake' trout might migrate big distances within large lakes or into in- or out-flowing rivers, again perhaps to spawn. So, mooching around a good bit is in a trout's blood, a big factor in why the species is so successful and incredibly interesting.



ALAN KETTLE-WHITE

For more information on the topics covered in this article, go to the Wild Trout Trust website. Use the 'search' box (top right) to find articles, web pages and blogs on topics such as scale reading, genetics, sea trout and stable isotope analysis. See also our Trout Facts and Sea Trout pages in the 'About Trout' section.

News from the Desert of Eastern England

By Rob Mungovan Conservation Officer for the Eastern Region



River Welland, bank regrading and new marginal habitats

WHEN I last wrote for the newsletter, I had promised some before and after pictures of my work on the River Welland at Ashley in Northants which started this time last year and just after that autumn's WTT newsletter hit the streets. Partnering with the excellent local EA team and working just before the trout turned up to spawn, we installed three new riffles, flow deflectors, cattle drink and re-graded about 100m of riverbank to form a two-stage channel, able to function at low flows and carry big flood water. I was in the thick of things as site clerk of works, ensuring that the contractor interpreted the plans properly, placing posts for the flow deflectors and so on; essential detail to make the whole thing work as planned.

Our labours settled in fine, with the EA undertaking extensive riverside planting through a Green Action Day for their staff, to ensure that the new habitats are as rich for insects as the

river is for fish. Future fish surveys will tell in time what has benefited the most but it was a real lift to see a pair of trout hanging over a new riffle last November, not long after the job was completed; all the more gratifying as the locals had never considered that reach a 'trout river'.

Through last winter, I continued to support the River Lark Catchment Partnership (RLCP) with practical work on a small tributary, the Lee Brook. RLCP always get a great turn-out for their days, even offering their hardy volunteers a winter BBQ lunch. RLCP has now secured charitable status with the ambition to achieve even more; I'm standing by to offer support as they deliver a Lottery-funded project, Breckland to Fen Edge Rivers.

I've continued with Advisory Visits, taking me to trout(?) rivers from Bedfordshire to Suffolk. A memorable one was to the River Fynn in Suffolk, on a reach with

many challenges from historical land drainage work. But, a short distance upstream, where the machines couldn't get to, a little hidden gem: a wooded, steep-flowing stream rich in coarse gravel. This relatively short reach seems to have been a saviour for trout in the Fynn – one even rose freely in a pool as we watched. Protect the best and enhance the rest is the way forward for the Fynn.

Other work days have seen me out on the Welland at Harringworth, guiding the Welland Mayfly Fishers on the installation of flow deflectors and brushwood ledges. It's great seeing anglers learning new things about their rivers. On one occasion, we had spawning brook lampreys doing their thing all the days, while we very carefully worked around them. Through getting to know the Mayfly Club's water in more detail, we've been able to put together a package of improvements that we

expect to take forward over the coming years. The start should be quite interesting though as it will see Tim Jacklin and I giving EA Operation teams training on how to drop trees into a river, something that some of them would probably never have thought they'd be doing! But they will in fact be involved in some work to slow the flow – using increased channel roughness to reduce the rate of flood flows through a river reach. Hopefully, happy EA Ops staff pictures to come.

My main project this year has been a real treat as it's something I've been waiting 13 years to see; habitat restoration to the last 700m of the River Shep, as it meets the Rhee at Barrington in Cambridgeshire. The EA were keen to see improvements that would benefit the Rhee with its many problems: generally poor habitat and lots of signal crayfish. I've long promoted the Shep as a key nursery ground and tributary stream; much easier to deliver habitat gains to this small chalkstream with one landowner than to tackle the main river (at this stage, anyway). Our project re-graded 120m of riverbank (where water voles were not present), using a 14T excavator to push a toe of cobbles and gravel into the bed and bank to armour it against further crayfish burrowing, and to make it resilient to people and dogs where the river is close to a footpath. In total, 200 tonnes of mixed gravels hit the bed of the Shep, combined with new habitat ledges for the water voles, flow deflectors and some mini-riffles. We did the work in the hottest week ever (yes, 38.7°C in Cambridge) and, phew, I'm glad the river kept flowing and no fish went belly up. Locals received the project warmly, as children have another safe and clean stream to explore, dog walkers have less distance to travel before they can wet their hounds (that was actually part of the plan, I'm drawing them away from a more sensitive spawning area) and around

My main project this year has been a real treat as it's something I've been waiting 13 years to see; habitat restoration to the last 700m of the River Shep

20 people actively joined me for a community planting event. I was able to get a happy story into the local press and even a short piece on the BBC regional news.

As we move into autumn from another hot dry summer, I have to write about our lack of water out east. How can the authorities in the eastern region not recognise the drought and dire river flows that we have? From late August to early September, I was getting almost daily reports directly and through social media of rivers suddenly drying up as the chalk aquifer beneath them had nothing more to give. It's a desperate situation with conservationists, anglers and owners powerless to do any more for their rivers. We can restore

habitat but without water, rivers cannot exist (obviously). So, I've joined the Twitter campaign to raise awareness of the drought (that's not apparently an official drought) and after seeing the River Granta run dry in its lowest reach, I've started writing to MPs, local councils and growth partnerships. We've got such a messed-up situation out here as a result of abstraction, river support schemes and sewage effluent that some of our rivers dry at their lower end! If Cambridge Water Company has concern at meeting their current customer needs (see their website), what is going to be left of our rivers when we see a further 50,000 homes around Cambridge alone? Will the supply of water be the factor that limits the growth of this area?



Left: The River Shep before habitat restoration – no flow diversity and not a great deal different from a ditch! Right: The River Shep after habitat restoration – a new riffle and marginal shelves create habitat suitable for trout



Left: The community planting event was a great success and gave locals a chance to come and see what had taken place Right: Wot no water? The dry River Granta at Stapleford (Cambs) – not how a 29km-long river should be

Mostly Silver Linings

By Professor Jon Grey

RELECTING upon this season of practical in-river projects, it's been a bit of a mixed bag on my patch. The site formerly known as Coniston Cold Weir, where in partnership with the EA and Aire Rivers Trust I coordinated the full removal of the weir, continues to develop and our ongoing monitoring has revealed some interesting change.



reported) made more passable with technical fish passes. Unfortunately, the gold standard full removal is not an option at any of these because of the human infrastructure associated with them.

The cloud to these silver linings has been the falling through of another mainstem Aire weir removal, a project I had thought was a dead

on the Nidd. The club committee members were keen to reduce stocking and instead plough some of the money into habitat for a more sustainable wild population. They admitted that they had struggled to initiate some of the ideas presented in an earlier Advisory Visit report by one of my colleagues. We walked Dauber Gill and Foster Beck, and the

Left: Drilling up woody deflectors for rebar with Nidderdale AC members
Right: Burying the deflectors with gravel before letting the beck do the work

Below left: Two hours on from installation and the gravel was already being redistributed through these paired deflectors

Below right: Electrofishing survey of Lothersdale Beck



In a nutshell, trout density is 4x higher post intervention and I would definitely file that under success. Other local wins for connectivity have been receipt of a feasibility study from JBA Consulting into options for fish passage at Gargrave on the Aire (including complete removal), and the full funding of the DNAire project. Developing the Natural Aire boasts the tagline 'returning salmon to Skipton' and will see the last four large weirs on the Aire upstream of Leeds (where salmon are already

cert! Everything was in place: searches completed, funding secured, bespoke permit signed off, pre-and post-monitoring lined up, contractor champing at the bit... and then a change of mind from the landowner. Disappointed doesn't quite cut it. Hey ho! It's not like I'm short of things to do to improve the lot of local rivers and their spotty denizens.

One particular project this year has stood out for me. I was invited by Nidderdale Angling Club to revisit some of their spawning tributaries

mainstem Nidd below Gouthwaite Dam. Channel straightening everywhere had effectively stripped out gravel of a suitable size for spawning, and the presence of the dam for >100 years had prevented more gravel being resupplied from upstream. Now I must acknowledge inspiration gleaned from the Wye & Usk Foundation (particularly an illuminating chat with Simon Evans) and Westcountry Rivers Trust for their work on introducing gravels to spate rivers that have had their

supply-lines severed. So, a project idea coalesced as a little experiment.

We planned to install 30+ woody deflectors to take the sting out of the gradient of Dauber Gill and introduce 25 tonnes of Nidderdale river-washed gravel (sufficient to cover the bed of the beck by 50mm for 300m) as a spawning substrate. Of course, 50mm evenly spread is not what we wanted, but the beauty of a spate stream is that it will readily and very efficiently redistribute material for you! And of course, we wanted some idea of whether what we were doing might have improved the odds, so we factored in some electrofishing

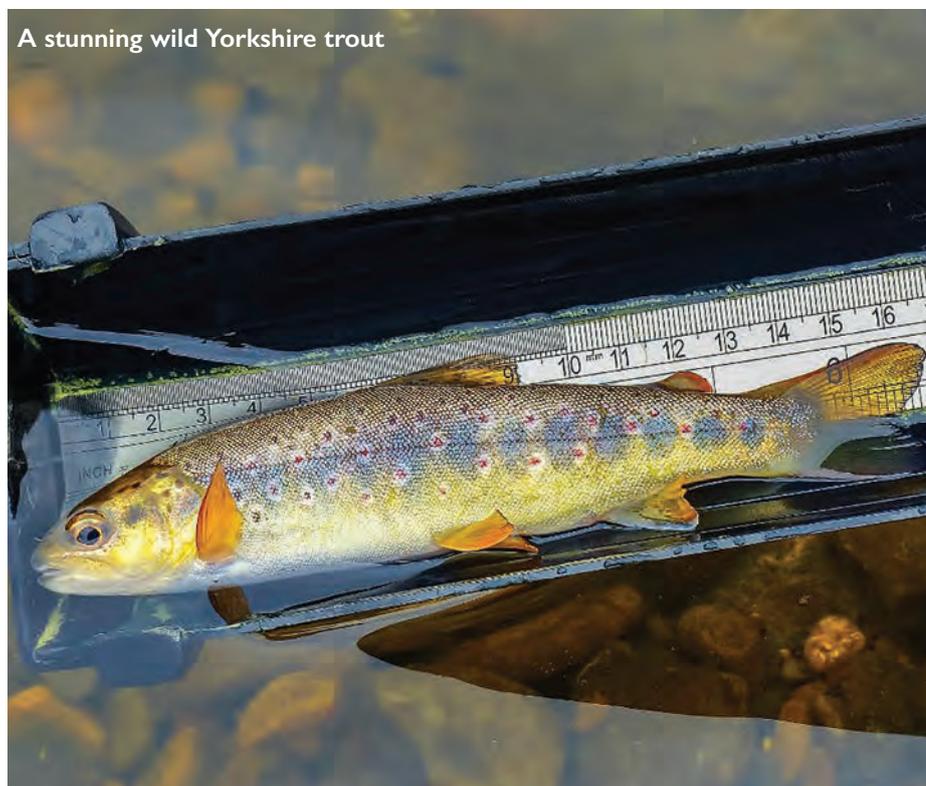
The landowner organised for delivery and storage of the gravel, and the cutting of woody deflectors to size and their delivery via quad-bike to wherever they were required along the bank. The club organised a tractor and front-loader for distributing the gravel, and mustered a willing workforce which I supplemented by coordinating with Dr Marie Taylor at Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust for their volunteers to join us. The weather was kind and the sandwiches and other 'refreshments' laid on at the local pub not 100m from the bank were very welcome. All I had to do on the day was hare

and even if it is all ultimately washed into the mainstem Nidd, it will surely be doing some good somewhere along the way. Who knows, if we can demonstrate improvements, then maybe, just maybe, we can encourage a local utilities company to consider emptying the gravel traps above their reservoirs and reintroducing that gravel below their dams in mitigation?

One other specific project close to my heart and to my home that I'll mention here again relates to a dam. Last winter I received permission from North Yorkshire County Council to open the sluice-gate at the bottom of the village dam (a formidable structure >5m in height) and leave it open from October to March. There were two aims: for the 'empty' dam and sluice-gate to act as a choke on the system, holding back spate flow and reduce the risk of flooding in the village below; and to allow trout to potentially migrate further upstream over the spawning period.

Electrofishing the beck with keen volunteers has since revealed trout above the dam for the first time since I started monitoring three years ago, so it has apparently worked. Unfortunately, we did not record any young-of-year above the dam for which there are several not mutually exclusive reasons. I would favour Storm Gareth as a potential culprit though. After what seemed like a perfect winter for salmonid spawning on my local rivers, Storm Gareth blitzed through at exactly the wrong moment as eggs hatched into weakly-swimming emergent fry, perhaps the most vulnerable life-stage. Many of my sites had very low numbers of young-of-year this summer; indeed, some had none. While this is not great news, nature prevails: cue compensatory growth of those fish remaining that had little competition for resources and the result was some of the fattest trout I have seen.

Fingers crossed for this winter!



A stunning wild Yorkshire trout

monitoring of pre and post works. Of all the sites that I routinely monitor, Dauber Gill has the most 'balanced' population of wild trout; i.e. most individuals are young-of-year and the numbers decrease proportionately in the older cohorts. However, there could be more and that is what we will hopefully see next year if we can open the perceived bottleneck on the population via this project – a paucity of spawning habitat.

To say the practical element went smoothly is an understatement!

around and coordinate the placement of wood and delivery of gravel at each location along the reach! Hurricane Lorenzo has since pushed a bit of water through the system and I have been back to assess our works. The redistribution is certainly underway, and not everywhere I thought might hold gravel has, but ramps of sparkly substrate are certainly holding and will hopefully soon be exploited by spawning spotties.

The project has contingency to 'top-up' with gravel over several years

Debut Innings

By Nick Lawrence

SINCE I started on the Glorious Twelfth, it seems to have been a bit of whirlwind, a steep learning curve, but extremely enjoyable.

What have I been up to? Well, I've visited various rivers across three counties: the Narrator Brook in Devon, the Allen in Dorset and the Alre, Itchen, Meon and Pillhill Brook in Hampshire. I've also talked of visiting many others including planning habitat enhancements on the Avill in Somerset and the Camel in Cornwall.

It really started on my second day in the job when I was handed a project by the old pro of our ranks, Andy Thomas, which just so happened to be the local stream in my village of Abbots Ann – the Pillhill Brook, one of the less famous tributaries of the Test. Sadly uncommonly, this river, is super-thin, suffering from low aquifer recharge over the last few years; working on the Watercress & Winterbournes project managed by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, we want to build some resilience into the Brook. I have designed a project with some woody habitat features, pool-and-run creation and new drinking wetland features to keep cattle out of the river.

The week after I carried out my first official Advisory Visit as a Conservation Officer, I visited the Upper Alre, upstream of Alresford, which is very close to the source of the river. This was a good one to get my writing skills honed, and to check out the local trout populations!

After three weeks in the job, I had the pleasure of meeting the rest of the WTT team, many of whom I have met before, this time in Derbyshire, Tim Jacklin's stomping ground. We had the unique chance to critique some of his handy work, extensive improvement of the



I'm keen to work closely with my local fishing clubs to develop some habitat restoration projects that can benefit wildlife and fishermen alike

Brailsford Brook, including the removal of 40-odd weirs!

My most recent expedition was some habitat restoration on the River Allen in Dorset, a partnership project in its third year with the Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT) and Wessex Chalkstream Rivers Trust (WCSRT). It was also a good chance to work for a day with my predecessor, Mike Blackmore. We were blessed with fantastic weather, and armies of volunteers produced by DWT – one day we had twenty of them! This made moving woody material around very easy, and the project was completed within the week.

Looking ahead to next month, I

have a month-long project at Longparish on the Test again with Mike Blackmore who planned the project during his WTT days but we'll now do the job together, with Mike wearing his WCSRT (hard) hat. We've re-assembled the team that did great river improvement work on the Dever (a Test tributary) three years ago, including keeper Jonny Walker who recently moved from the Dever to Longparish and is already making great strides with his new river. The Longparish project will be a major transformation for this previously, heavily-managed reach with seven weir removals and the addition of numerous woody habitat features.

During my time with WTT, I'll keep in touch with the network of contacts built up in my previous life as a river contractor and fishing guide; hopefully I'll have the chance to share with them the benefits of habitat and good river management. I'm keen to work closely with my local fishing clubs to develop some habitat restoration projects that can benefit wildlife and fishermen alike. I am passionate about reducing stocking in rivers as I have wild fish swimming in my blood; I'd like to share my experiences with riparian owners and fishing clubs on the benefits of a wild fishery, which hopefully will leave the rivers in a better state for future generations.

I also hope to work closely with my new colleague, Bruno Vincent, on a couple of events that we are planning, to involve some nippers (Hampshire-speak for people under 45, though more mature types are welcome too). For example, we'd like to organise an event for fishing guides to discuss the benefits of good habitat – they may well be excellent emissaries of conservation messages to their clients.

News from the Midlands and Lincolnshire

By Tim Jacklin, WTT Conservation Officer

FISH spawning habitat in the upper Great Ouse in Buckinghamshire has been greatly improved by the creation of six gravel riffles using over 200 tonnes of stone and gravel. The riffles were installed in late August 2019 in a partnership project between the Wild Trout Trust, the Environment Agency and local landowner and farmer, George Eaton.

The upper Great Ouse was severely affected by pollution incidents in 2017 and 2018 resulting in fish being killed from Brackley to downstream of Buckingham. Prior to this, the river supported a range of fish species including brown trout, chub, dace, roach, perch, pike, gudgeon, bullhead, stone loach, brook lamprey and minnow. Water voles and otters were regularly observed on this part of the river, but it is thought the latter have been displaced since the loss of fish.

The riffles restore a habitat that was identified as lacking (during previous Wild Trout Trust Advisory Visits) because of historic land drainage works and will assist the natural recovery of fish stocks. Many of the species listed above need clean gravel with good flows of water over it in order to breed successfully. There are known to be healthy fish populations upstream of the reach affected by the pollution incidents, which will drop downstream and colonise the affected area and use the riffles for breeding. The project also complements initiatives to enable fish passage across weirs downstream of the polluted reach, which when realised will enable fish to repopulate from downstream.

Following soon after the habitat improvement works were



Above: A typical view of the upper Great Ouse prior to riffle installation dominated by a silt bed and emergent vegetation, a result of channel over-widening and dredging for land drainage in the 1970s and 1980s

Below: The silt has been replaced with stone and gravel within the appropriate channel dimensions, re-creating a habitat suitable for gravel-spawning fish such as trout, chub and dace

completed, an open day was held for local landowners and angling clubs whose sections of river were affected by the pollutions. The event showcased the recent works and provided a forum for discussion about aiding the recovery of the river through improvements to fish passage and habitat quality. Local Environment Agency Fisheries Technical Specialist, Kye Jerrom, and the WTT's Rob Mungovan gave presentations, followed by a walk and talk and practical demonstrations of habitat improvement techniques on the river. Many thanks are



due to George and Ann Eaton for kindly hosting the day and their unwavering support for the river improvement works.

Elsewhere in the patch, there has been a multitude of Advisory Visits, project proposals, small project deliveries and a great deal of planning, surveying and liaison for larger projects that will hopefully come to fruition in the future. The latter includes plans for some significant fish passage improvements on the rivers Dove and Ecclesbourne in Derbyshire, and flood storage and river habitat improvements on the upper Witham and a tributary in Lincolnshire.

Advice has been provided on rivers including the Perry and Roden (Shropshire), Manifold and Ordley Brook (Staffs), Shelf Brook, Alfreton Brook, Oakerthorpe Brook and River Erewash (Derbyshire), Bottesford Beck (Lincolnshire), Smestow Brook (Wolverhampton) and on the Ouse Dyke, River Maun and Alfreton Brook (Notts). Several hundred metres of riparian fencing has been installed along the River Dove and Bentley Brook in Derbyshire and several habitat demonstration days were held in conjunction with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust on the Cuttle Brook and Long Brook, giving Wildlife Trust volunteers and members of a local farming and conservation group the opportunity to learn hands-on habitat improvement techniques.

New Kennet Wild Trout Fishery

THE once-famous Upper Benyon's stretch of the Middle Kennet at Padworth has seen a noticeable increase in the population of sizeable wild trout, seemingly filling a gap left by declining numbers of chub and barbel. Spring-spawning coarse fish seem to be suffering in the Kennet – maybe it's a product of enrichment of the water or something to do with the hordes of signal crayfish, the trout encountering less difficulties with juvenile survival by winter spawning, when the crays are less active.

Of all the middle river stretches controlled by Reading and District Angling Association (RDAA), the near mile-long Upper Benyon's has huge potential to deliver quality spring fly fishing for large wild trout, particularly during the mayfly, a view confirmed by Charles Jardine during a recent visit.

This reach has produced fish to five pounds to both fly and coarse anglers and the lower river has thrown up specimens approaching ten pounds. RDAA has agreed to establish a specific 20-member Trout Section for a trial period of three years and will be inviting



applications from new and existing club members. The annual cost is a snip at £70, plus another £80 for main club membership, making it some of the most affordable chalkstream wild trout fishing in the country.

Trout Section members will be entitled to exclusive fishing on Upper Benyon's from 15 April each year until 16 June, thereafter shared with the coarse fishery.

Demand is expected to be high when applications go live in November and if any WTT members are interested, you need to drop a line to rdaatrout@gmail.com ASAP to register an interest and explain why you'd like to be considered for membership.

THE WILD TROUT TRUST

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CONTACT US

Wild Trout Trust Office
Christina Bryant (Trust & Data Manager)
The Wild Trout Trust
PO Box 120, Waterlooville PO8 0WZ
Tel: 023 9257 0985
office@wildtrout.org
www.wildtrout.org
Director: Shaun Leonard
director@wildtrout.org
Trust Secretary: David Marriott
office@wildtrout.org
Finance Officer: Alan Pickstone
office@wildtrout.org

Communications Officer: Denise Ashton
dashton@wildtrout.org
Fundraising Events Officer: Bruno Vincent
bvincent@wildtrout.org
Projects Coordinator: Shaun Leonard
director@wildtrout.org
Annual Auction: Bruno Vincent, Christina Bryant, Sean Flanagan, Patrick Lloyd
Salmo trutta annual journal: Tim Jacklin
tjacklin@wildtrout.org

CONSERVATION OFFICERS:

Dr Tim Jacklin: Midlands, Lincolnshire, N Wales – tjacklin@wildtrout.org
Andy Thomas: Southern England, Thames
athomas@wildtrout.org
Nick Lawrence: South West England, Mid Wales – nlawrence@wildtrout.org
Gareth Pedley: Northern England, Scotland – gpedley@wildtrout.org

Rob Mungovan: East Anglia
rmungovan@wildtrout.org
Dr Paul Gaskell: Trout in the Town (North)
pgaskell@wildtrout.org
Theo Pike: Trout in the Town (South)
tpike@wildtrout.org
Research & Conservation Officer:
Professor Jon Grey – Yorkshire, Lancashire
jgrey@wildtrout.org

Other Executive Committee Members, the President, Vice-Presidents and Trustees should be contacted via the WTT Office

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