

WILD TROUT TRUST SITE VISITS

DECEMBER 2001

Management Recommendations from Vaughan Lewis, Windrush Aquatic Environmental Consultancy, for the Wild Trout Trust

RIVER MISBOURNE, GREAT MISSENDEN

Upper fields, above Link Road:

River viewed from footpath. River channel dry at time of visit (4 December 2001). Banks heavily poached by cattle. Recommendation to fence using either electric fencing or stock fencing with gates. The channel should be managed by weed cutting. A narrow channel cut through the weed will encourage the river to manage itself. The channel should not be dredged since this is likely to cause problems further downstream.

RIVER MISBOURNE, LINK ROAD CAR PARK, GREAT MISSENDEN

Recommendations to remove dogleg in channel and build either a new bridge or a traditional large brick culvert as a feature. The channel should be trained by careful weed cutting as above. Some bank strengthening using faggots may be needed where the channel is straightened. An unmown margin should be maintained, cut only occasionally to prevent succession to scrub. The entire grass area could be managed as a hay meadow with paths regularly cut through to enable people to comfortably use the site. A quick screening method for the recycling bins would be to use a triangle of living willow hurdles, filled in the centre with soil.

RIVER MISBOURNE, MISSENDEN ABBEY PARK

The sluice under the bridge at the bottom of Warren Water is quite high. This could be lowered by notching or a couple of pipes could be put through the concrete to allow water through. The river itself is good and should be managed by careful hand cutting of the weed to train a channel through.

One or two scrapes could be created in areas that are already low-lying and wet, near the fence downstream of the site entrance. The existing fence could be extended to keep the stock off the scrapes most of the time.

RIVER CHESS, BLACKWELL FARM

Two good stretches of river with great potential for trout fishing. Several redds (depressions in the gravel caused by trout spawning) were observed. Cleaning the gravels with a rotivator in September could encourage spawning habitat.

The riverside willows should be rotation coppiced . The bank should be fenced off behind the trees to prevent poaching by the cattle. The other bank could also be fenced off, with gates put in at the cattle crossing by the bridge.

It may be worth considering stocking this section of river using an incubation box to give the trout a head start. There are several suitable locations for a box, either using the head of water coming through the bridge or the channel from connecting the lake to the river.

The Environment Agency has narrowed the channel downstream of the sewage outlet and this has worked well. There is a stone weir that could be removed, leaving the corners in place, and a series of 2 or 3 riffles could be built back to hold up the water and create good fish habitat. 'Snow shoes' of willow could be attached to the bed to encourage development of patches of *Ranunculus*.

The back stream by the road also had several redds. The edges are concrete gabions on the roadside and it is unlikely that this could be readily changed. Faggots could be pinned to the gabions to trap silt and cress, narrowing the channel and creating shelter for fish and invertebrates. Woody debris should be left in the stream. The trees should be coppiced on rotation to create dappled shade. The fence on the left-hand bank should be brought back behind the trees.

Managed as a fishery, this could generate income in the region of £2000/year for the farmer. The work outlined above would cost in the region of £5-10k.

RIVER CHESS, ANGLING BEAT FROM MILL FARM TO SARRATT

A generally good section of river with many redds, indicating a good fish population. The section below Mill Farm is grazed and a bit poached; there is little emergent vegetation along this stretch, making it poor quality for water voles. This section was identified in the recent water vole report as a priority since it divides two colonies. Fencing would be beneficial but would detract from the open meadow landscape. Temporary electric fencing may be an option.

Further downstream there is an area of woodland and scrub adjacent to the river. This is shading the stream and preventing development of emergent vegetation. Rotational coppicing would allow more light in and the resultant marginal vegetation will help narrow the channel.

There are two weirs along this section, which should be removed. This should not be done until April since the silt will damage the trout eggs that have been recently laid. It is probable that the river will sort itself out after weir removal. Weed should only be cut in a narrow winding channel to encourage natural narrowing. If necessary, gravel riffles could be created but this may not be necessary. The existing gravel could be cleaned each September to make it more suitable for spawning.

The bankside habitat along much of this reach is good, particularly on the left-hand bank. If the fence is going to be replaced then it would be beneficial to move it back another metre or two to keep stock well away from the bank.

The willows have been pollarded and have come back well. A lot of weed has been removed on the right-hand bank along a fairly long section. This is excessive management (may be EA).

RIVER BULBOURNE, BOXMOOR TRUST LAND AT STATION MOOR

Fencing off sections of the bank to prevent trampling and grazing by horses would enhance the habitat. It may be necessary to narrow the channel using faggots but if marginal vegetation is allowed to develop this will probably happen naturally. Open, unfenced areas should be maintained where public access is required for recreation.

WATERCRESS BEDS AT BOXMOOR

This stretch of old cress beds is already quite diverse. The upper section is open water with silt overlying the gravel bed. The sluice could be removed or moved further up to reduce the area of open water but this would create more of the habitat that already exists further down. The silt may also cause problems so it may be best left as it is to maintain open water habitat to attract different species. This area could be made more interesting by installing some floating coir islands. These are available from MMG and cost approximately £300 each.

Below the sluice the channel is narrowing itself by encroachment of cress. A narrow meandering channel should be trained through the weed by careful hand cutting. This will maintain some open flowing water with clean gravels. The area should be surveyed for water voles and invertebrate monitoring would also be useful.

There is an area where weed growth suddenly stops near a discharge from the railway. Testing should be carried out for Simazine and Atrazine to determine whether these herbicides are the cause. Mitigation will be required if this is the case. The Environment Agency should be able to assist with the tests and any necessary follow-up work.

The area of rough grass next to the cress beds should be managed to improve its diversity. Cutting will be needed to keep nettles under control.

RIVER GADE, WATER END MEADOWS, GREAT GADDESSEN

There are a number of weirs along this section of the Gade. Bankside habitat is good and botanically important.

A trial weir removal could be done with one or two of the upper weirs. Some of them are in a poor state of repair.

There is a large weir further down with an online lake above. It may be possible to take the lake offline or bund a section to maintain a channel through it. Ideally, a new channel could be cut to continue the stream round the lake on the right-hand side, linking to the existing flush. This would provide good fish habitat but also maintain the lake for use by the anglers. The new channel would need to be fenced from the stock.

Such a scheme would cost approximately £30-50k.

RIVER BULBOURNE, ST JOHN'S WELL STRETCH, BERKHAMSTED

Upstream of St John's Well, near the lock, the river is heavily over-shaded and full of litter. There is also a wire mesh fence along the bank. It would be beneficial to open the channel up here by coppicing the trees, removing the litter and possibly removing the fence. More light would allow the development of marginal vegetation, which would then help to narrow the channel. This would cost in the region of £3000, mostly tree management.

At St John's Well the river is widened to form a lake. A channel could be formed around the side and separated to create an offline pond or a central channel could be created with an area of reedbed to either side, which would flood during high flows. This would cost in the region of £25k.

Downstream of St John's Well, near Waitrose, a number of improvements could be made. This may be a good lead-in scheme for the larger plan at St John's Well. Riverside trees should be coppiced/pollarded and the poles used to delineate a channel, brash used to backfill. The area of concrete near the bridge should be removed. Gravel should be brought in to raise the bed. This would cost in the region of £20k.