# THE STRIPLING

## Newsletter of the Upper Thames Protection Society

Issue 34, October 2014

**Open Meeting and AGM**

**Wednesday 12th November 2014, starting at 7.30pm**

**The Jenner Hall, Bath Road, Cricklade**

**"Nature Reserves along the River Thames"**

**Speaker: Dick Mayon-White, River Thames Society**

Membership only £2 a year. Non-members welcome

Upper Thames Protection Society - Registered Charity 299418

### Chairman's Statement

Welcome to the annual newsletter for the society which this year sees a focus on work associated with flood prevention and river improvements. It is perhaps a reflection on rainfall. The patterns now experienced do seem to have changed somewhat from the evidence historically recorded.

Government concerns over the impact of flooding has resulted in a greater emphasis on water flow and there are interesting articles from Cotswold Water Park Trust and Gloucestershire FWAG in relation to works they are doing as part of the Government initiatives.

Opportunities exist for all those locally to benefit from this so please contact one of them if it is of interest to you.

As ever we welcome feedback in whatever form so do please contact us, or come to our AGM.

Chris Graham
Chairman, UTPS

**River Thames near Kemble Bridge**, February 2014; Photo by Lois Latimer

### Nature Reserves along the River Thames – Exploring the Thames Wilderness

Dick Mayon-White will be our guest speaker at this year's AGM. His talk will describe a recent project to map the 154 nature reserves with public access and within a mile of the Thames. Many of these reserves were created by local efforts. Combined, they form a "green corridor" across southern England, which is vital for aquatic wildlife.

The River Thames Society, now 52 years old, has always been committed to protecting the Thames for its whole length, from source to sea. The river is now cleaner than it has been for more than 200 years, but human development continues to apply pressure on the wildlife habitats and spaces where people can enjoy the peace of the river scenes.

Dick Mayon-White
RTS River Warden Coordinator (non-tidal Thames)
mayon.white@live.co.uk

### Improving the Nature of the Upper Thames – an Update on the WILD Project

The WILD Project stands for Water and Integrated Local Delivery partnership project. It is a collaborative project including the Gloucestershire Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI), Cotswold Water Park Trust (CWPT) and Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) and is funded by the Environment Agency (EA).

The project aims to enable local communities in the Cotswold Water Park to work to improve the 'water environment'. The key driver in this is the government's responsibility to meet its commitments under the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

Under WFD legislation UK rivers and streams are assessed according to how close they are to a natural state on a number of parameters, namely:

- Hydrology
- Ecology
- Chemistry (pollution)

Jenny Phelps Gloucestershire FWAG is focusing on water courses that are failing for water quality issues, (ie chemistry under WFD) particularly diffuse pollution.

The waterbodies failing good ecological status (GES) for chemistry in the project area are:

- The River Thames (Churn to Coln)
- Cerney Wick Brook
- River Key
- Marston Meysey Brook
- River Ray

Petrina Brown of the Cotswold Water Park Trust has been assigned the following priority water bodies:

- Swill Brook
- Ampney & Poulton Brooks
- River Thames (Kemble to Cricklade)
- River Churn
- River Coln

These watercourses are all failing to achieve the required ecological standard under the WFD for Ecology. There are often a number of reasons that a waterbody would fail for ecology but in the local area it is largely due to historic modification of the watercourse making the river less natural than they should be, this reduces the diversity of habitats within the river and consequently reduces the species that can live there.

Technically all the priority watercourses within the Cotswold Water Park biodiversity boundary have been modified to some extent with most river channels being wider and deeper than they would be naturally due to years of dredging.

The Ampney and Poulton Brooks in particular have been straightened extensively in the past probably hundreds of years ago when flooding of the meadows was the best way to fertilise the land. The River Churn has been split in to numerous channels and impeded by weirs to power mills and on the River Thames trees that were pollarded in the past for animal fodder, are no longer actively managed sometimes resulting in excessive shading.

Initially certain watercourses have been identified for specific enhancement works such as tree works to reduce shading, installing deflectors to vary the channel form or installing a backwater to provide a safe place for fish to rest when the river is flowing fast. Cotswold Water Park work with land owners and managers and raise funds to implement the work.

## Ampney Brook Shade Reduction Work

Work started on the Ampney Brook on what was then Co-operative Farms land back in January 2014. The works involved reducing shading from hazel scrub and some trees. The river is too wide and shallow due to the effect of the overshading preventing vegetation to grow and stabilise the bank, which has lead to very steep eroding banks.

**Ampney Brook** - Before any shade reduction work was carried out

**Ampney Brook** - Immediately after shade reduction work

Just nine months on, the river is already showing signs of recovery with bank-side, emergent and aquatic vegetation starting to establish. When the river was first surveyed back in summer 2013 there was no sign of any aquatic plant or animal life, and now there are aquatic and wetland plants, invertebrates and frequent shoals of fish.

**Ampney Brook** - September 2014

Further works are due to start soon on the Ampney Brook at Ampney St Peter. This will involve fencing, installing livestock drinking bays, channel narrowing,

installing deflectors and reducing shading. These works are being made possible thanks to £4,000 funding from the Summerfield Trust along with contributions from the Environment Agency, the landowners and tenants themselves.

Petrina Brown, WILD Biodiversity Officer
Cotswold Water Park Trust
petrina.brown@waterpark.org

## Flood Reduction Measures at Upper-Up – South Cerney

Local mapping by walk-over surveys by Siddington Parish Councillor, Chris Rumble and Jenny Phelps of Gloucestershire FWAG identified that old ditch and pond networks might help with issues of water quality, restore fish habitats and reduce flood risk affecting the River Churn at Upper Up, South Cerney.

Work was carried out at Upper Up with the aims to:

- improve ecological status of the Churn and Shire Brook by: reducing diffuse pollution from agriculture by reducing flood risk to Cross Roads Farm through ditch and land management;
- improve water quality by restoring a pond to act as silt trap, tertiary water treatment for agricultural runoff and as a fish refuge in high flows.

The works should also help reduce flood risk in to the village of South Cerney by enabling water to flow from the Churn into the Shire Brook at times of flood and so reduce household flooding in the village. It will also reduce agricultural land flooding, reducing soil and input loss, stagnation and eutropification.

The project has had contributions from an extensive partnership working together at a local level. A particular thanks to the landowners and tenants and Moore Allen and Innocent and the FWAG volunteers led by Chris Rumbold and Archie Lelieveld. It is hoped that by supporting the restoration and simple maintenance of ditches and ponds, there will be cost benefit for all the organisations, land managers and villagers working together that will act as an example for other parishes to see if they would like to build preparedness and resilience in this way. If anyone would like to get involved in their own area please contact:

Jenny Phelps, FWAG
jenny.phelps@gloucestershirefwag.org.uk

## To Dredge or Not to Dredge

You will have heard about the dredging that is now taking place on the Somerset levels to help flood water away from properties and farmland. Although some of this silt would have come from farmland, some of it would have come upstream on the incoming tides.

The situation on the Upper Thames and its larger tributaries is totally different. I am old enough to remember the Thames Conservancy Board bringing a machine along the bank every fifteen years or so during the sixties and seventies, removing all traces of silt and reeds and piling it up on the bank. When the silt had dried out, it was formed into a dome shape along the bank and was reseeded. These banks now often prevent flood water from returning to the river. All the Farmers at that time thought the dredging to be a wonderful job to speed the flow of water, but little thought was given to the plight of the fish and wildlife in general.

This type of hard bed dredging stopped in the early eighties and since then the Environment Agency only occasionally removes silt at specific areas.

That type of large scale dredging on the Upper Thames will almost certainly never happen again. Apart from the cost, many of us now have a much better understanding of the impact this had on the habitat of so much wildlife.

But the main reason I am against large scale dredging is that it is simply not needed. The three most important issues that need addressing are, firstly to prevent soil runoff from farmland, secondly to stop bank erosion by cattle by fencing the bank and creating proper cattle drinking areas and thirdly, but possibly most importantly, to remove much of the large woody blockages created by fallen trees. The first two issues have improved considerably over the last few years and will continue to improve. Some Farmers and Landowners are still realising the fact that although the Thames Conservancy Board used to do the job of removing fallen trees and debris, it is in fact the responsibility of the riparian owner.

Through the WILD project we are all working together to address this issue and I am in no doubt that when unimpeded, the flood water will naturally move any build up of silt on downstream.

Richard Rumming
Waterhay Farm

## Himalayan Balsam

Since May 2014 the Cotswold Water Park Trust has been busy recruiting volunteers to help tackle the highly invasive Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* on the River Churn.

Photo by Dave Kilbey

Because the plant is an annual, it dies back en-mass in the autumn, which can leave a bare riverbank vulnerable to erosion and thereby facilitate sediment pollution washing into the watercourse. It is spread by seeds being washed downstream and settling on river banks. Consequently removal of the plant (before it seeds) starting from the most upstream point and working downstream is required in order to have any chance of controlling the plant. During the winter

floods the Churn and canal spread seeds back and forth between them through connecting ditches and field drains making the problem particularly noticeable in and around South Cerney and Cerney Wick.

The CWPT has recruited a small but dedicated team of volunteers to pull out and cut back the plant, upstream on the River Churn and its associated channels in the vicinity of Cirencester and Siddington. This has amounted to a total of 15 days of activity clearing a good 2km of channel from the weed.

We will still need to be vigilant and cover old ground next year because seeds remain viable for up to 3 years so more help is always welcome.

For more information please contact:

Petrina Brown, WILD Biodiversity Officer
Cotswold Water Park Trust
petrina.brown@waterpark.org

## Childhood Memories of the River Thames

Now in my 80s I have recently returned to Cricklade, the town of my birth and the place where I lived for the first 44 years of my life.

One of the pleasures I was very much looking forward to was re-living those lovely walks along the River Thames.

Sadly I have been bitterly disappointed. The river is just not what it used to be when I was a boy. Now the river seems so overgrown and neglected. I remember my boyhood walks and seeing fishes, water voles, kingfishers, moor hens and swans. Now it is a job to see parts of the river, it is so obscured by plants. As a boy, I remember walking up from the Town Bridge, across into North Wall and up "The Stank" and seeing the river flow along, deep enough to jump in for a swim. We would continue on to West Mill Pond where many of us learnt to swim. Walking round West Mill pond, I would head to the top of North Meadow, to the brick Aquadock bridge, now a wooden replacement with just the stone footings showing in the river below. Back home via North Meadow, but even here "Little Meadow" the once enclosed area I used to love to be in, is now so overgrown you can't get to the river.

During my childhood, I remember the "Brookers" arriving in Cricklade every 2 years, with just hand tools to remove weeds from the river, widen the banks and to leave water clear. How fine the river looked after they had been and the wildlife and fish appeared to continue to thrive.

April each year saw North Meadow covered in a blanket of snakesheads, it was a job not to step of them. Every Sunday families would process to the Meadow to pick the snakesheads, by plucking the stem from the bulb, leaving the bulb intact in the ground. Gypsies would fill their peg baskets with armfuls of the flowers and head to Swindon to sell them in bundles. The following years the snakesheads would return in number and it is my belief that regular picking helped to stimulate flower production and maintain the numbers. Today, the fritillaries, as they are known now, are much decreased in number.

Some things have improved. The signage of the Thames Path is wonderful and it is marvellous to think some walkers have followed the path all the way from London.

Les Mutlow
Heberden House, Cricklade

## Second Wettest Year for 100 years and the Driest September since 1959

In the driest September since 1959, West Thames Area received 11 mm of rainfall, which is just 18 % of the long term monthly average. Extended dry periods were broken by localised downpours, most notably on the 18th September, when a rain gauge in Marlborough in the Berkshire Downs recorded 62 mm of rainfall in 24 hours.

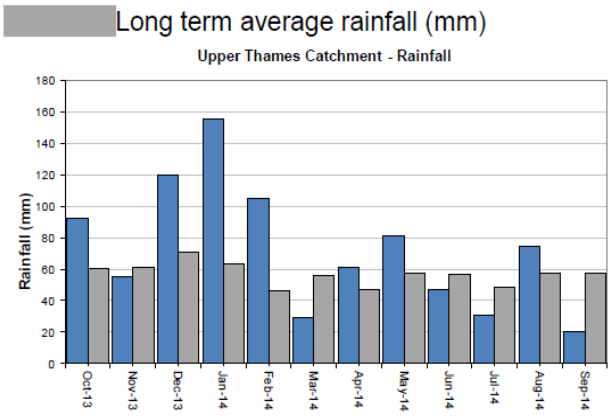
**River Thames Near Kemble Bridge**
Photos by Lois Latimer

January 2014

September 2014

Total rainfall during the six summer months from April 2014 to September 2014 has been close to the long term average (LTA), but the unprecedented amounts of rainfall during the winter months meant that the water year from October 2013 to September 2014 was the second wettest for 100 years.

**Upper Thames catchment and upper River Thames**




Source: Monthly Water Situation Report, West Thames Area, Environment Agency, September 2014

From mid-December 2013 to February 2014, the UK experienced a spell of extreme weather as a succession of major winter storms brought widespread impacts to the UK.

The Somerset Levels were very badly affected, with large areas remaining under water from late December through the winter period, and severe flooding also affected much of the River Thames through Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Surrey.