

THE STRIPLING

Newsletter of the Upper Thames Protection Society



Issue 37, October 2017

Open Meeting and AGM

Wednesday, 8th November 2017, starting at 7.30pm

The Jenner Hall, Bath Road, Cricklade

Guest Speakers: Richard Mundy, Biodiversity Officer for the WILD Project

Ben Welbourn, Biodiversity & Estates Manager, Cotswold Water Park Trust

Membership £2 a year. Non-members welcome

Upper Thames Protection Society - Registered Charity 299418

Chairman's Report

Welcome to the 2017 issue of The Stripling. Thanks again must go to Helen Goody and all the contributors for another fascinating and detailed note on what is happening in the Upper Thames area.

The focus of the articles this year is on the River Thames and a change in personnel at the Cotswold Water Park Trust. However, your committee members have been working on a wider front in relation to issues in connection with the Upper Thames environs.

It is worthy of note that one of the fallouts from increasing development is a further requirement for sand and gravel. As such, I am sure many of you will have noted the number of new pits opening within the Cotswold Water Park area generally. That produces both opportunities and constraints. Of particular concern would be the impact on infrastructure and the groundwater problems.

It is of course important with all this development to ensure that the environmental impacts are protected. With a national nature reserve located close to Cricklade, there is added importance – hence why residential development requires detailed consideration. All members can voice opinions as always and we will be particularly pleased to see you at our AGM in November. One of the interesting areas which may come out in that discussion is the idea that some of the water bodies within the Water Park may get SSSI designation. This is still in discussion and at a very early stage, so watch this space.

Finally, I congratulate one of our committee members, Richard Rumming, on his success – the details of which are opposite.

If you do wish to become involved or make comment, do please contact one of your committee members. In the meantime, we hope you find this issue of interest.

Chris Graham, Chairman, UTPS

Richard Rumming Awarded Silver Pintail



Waterhay Farm, Leigh, straddles the River Thames near Ashton Keynes, Wiltshire, and has been in the Rumming family for over 60 years. It is a 70 hectare permanent pasture farm producing beef cattle. It is currently home to around 200 cattle, made up of 70 suckler cows, 2 bulls and their progeny.

Richard Rumming (above) is the full time farmer and UTPS Committee Member, and nephew Andy Rumming works part time on the farm after moving to it with his family 5 years ago. Andy Rumming explains.....

We entered the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Groups (FWAG) Silver Pintail competition in 2016. This is an annual competition for farming with wildlife, and the focus was on water. We thought it was worth a try as about a third of the farm is heavily influenced/ flooded by the River Thames, and the grass based virtually-organic system has led to a significant amounts of wildlife. This includes Snakes Head Fritillaries, Great Burnett, Peppered Saxifrage in the spring, large clouds of sand martins and damselflies in the summer, and big flocks of widgeon, lapwing and gulls in the winter. Also over the years Richard has been very involved with various river focused initiatives from building otter holts, fencing sections of the river bank and working with other landowners to manage the river and its banks for wildlife and conveyance.

The judges visited on a lovely day and seemed to enjoy a tour of the farm. They were really keen to see a commercial farm in the competition. They were also

interested in the fact that we do a fair number of farm walks and events where we get a chance to talk about the river and its relationship with the farm. I was also keen to talk about how I use the wildlife and grass based system to market beef direct to customers.

It all must have gone well because we won! This means for a year we are custodians of a solid Silver Pintail Duck trophy, and went through to the South West region Silver Barn Owl competition. The judges for this competition again arrived on a wonderful sunny day, so fingers crossed.

Andy Rumming, Waterhay Farm, Leigh

River Thames Erosion Project at Fairview Fields, Cricklade

Erosion of the River Thames bank near to the Isis Bridge (by the Millennium Stone) has been of concern to Cricklade Town Council and residents for the last few years. The Town Council contacted Highways England, regarding the bridge erosion (Photo 1) as it is their responsibility to maintain the bridge but they were unwilling to pay for the necessary works.



Photo 1 – Showing the Bridge Erosion

In May 2016, the Council obtained expert advice from Hydro Engineers. The Council agreed to the suggested works in July 2016, and the work began to obtain all the necessary permits required. The permits and survey costs were a major element in quite a costly project, which was funded entirely by the Town Council. Two surveys took place in late 2016 and early 2017 for signs of Water Vole.



Photo 2 – Isis Bridge and the Area Accessed by Dogs

The area by the Isis Bridge (Photo 2) is subject to constant dog access. To help limit erosion in the future, erosion resistant dog access area was created with a 4 metre incline to the waters edge.



Photo 3 – The New Erosion-Resistant Dog Access Area

The dog access area consists of two tiers of oak steps at a height of 200mm, backfilled with stone. All available turf from the bank adjacent to the new dog access area was used to ensure that the site recovered quickly, so that any existing habitat was not lost. Due to confluence with the River Key, regrading work was undertaken to the side of the dog access area to provide a more stable profile. The new banks were then top soiled and re-seeded. Finally, a hazel and coir toe was installed to protect the new bank and aid establishment (Photo 3).

The erosion to the existing bank gabion protection (Photo 2), slightly upstream, was repaired with new oak revetments. The Environment Agency requested a modification to the design to include some pre-planted coir rolls in front of the oak to provide additional habitat for the resident Water Voles. As much as possible the in-situ vegetation was incorporated into the new oak retaining structure (Photo 4).



Photo 4 – Bank Protection and Coir Rolls for Water Voles

The project was completed in April 2017 and Cricklade Town Council is very pleased with the results.

Tina Jones, Town Clerk, Cricklade Town Council
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Get Involved with Restoring Swill Brook

The project brings local communities in Minety and Ashton Keynes together through volunteering activities

that help alleviate local flooding, protect and enhance wildlife, improve water quality and flow leading to the Cotswold Water Park. The Swill Brook banks need stabilising, channeling and the vegetation cutting back to stop erosion, which will increase biodiversity and enhance public enjoyment. 24 work parties will be organized, made up of volunteers from the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and FWAG and the local community, to carry out the delivery over winter 2017.

www.fwagsw.org.uk/get-involved-restoring-swill-brook

Himalayan Balsam – An Invasive Species

Increasingly large swathes of Himalayan Balsam can be seen lining the banks of the Upper Thames. It is a highly invasive species and one that needs to be tackled.



Himalayan Balsam along River Thames, Cricklade, September 2017
Photograph by Helen Goody

It is the tallest annual plant in Britain, growing up to 3m high. When the seed pods mature, they explode when touched, scattering the seed up to 7m away. Seeds are also spread by water and they may remain viable for up to two years. Himalayan balsam plants grow in dense stands that suppress the growth of native grasses and other flora. In autumn the plants die back, leaving the banks bare of vegetation, and therefore liable to erosion.

Control measures should aim to prevent flowering, and are best carried out before June for maximum effectiveness. Chemical control near water can be carried out with certain herbicides. However, cutting, strimming or pulling on a regular basis for about 3 years will be effective. Plants must be cut below the lowest node to avoid re-flowering. Perhaps the time has come to plan some local “balsam bashing” events for next Spring.

Monitoring River Thames Fish Populations

As with many lowland rivers there are increasing pressures on fish populations in the River Thames. The most limiting factor is the paucity of clean gravel which species such as barbel, chub, dace and trout need to successfully spawn. Gravels become smothered with sediment from agriculture and road run off. Much of the habitat improvement work, carried out on the Upper Thames and tributaries, is to address this

issue. We put in new gravel or use log deflectors and river narrowing techniques to keep gravel free of silt.



The Environment Agency monitors fish populations by electric fishing. On small water courses, nets are set, to enclose a 100m stretch of river, wade the section stunning the fish so that they can be captured, measured, and returned unharmed. Where the river is larger we use a combination of electric fishing from a boat and hydroacoustic (sonar) techniques to assess the numbers of fish.

Fish populations on the Thames remain relatively constant & typically we record up to 14 species. Barbel, chub and trout, iconic fish species of the Thames, have fared differently over the last two decades: Barbel have been in decline but are showing gradual signs of recovery following a concentrated stocking programme. Chub populations remain stable but show cyclical variation. Trout numbers have shown a dramatic increase.

Jim Seymour, Fisheries Field Team
james.seymour@environment.agency.gov.uk

Farmer Guardians of the Upper Thames

There has been much activity this quarter from the Farmer Guardians of the Upper Thames, a group now of 53 farmers covering over 20,000 hectares of the Upper Thames. The focus of the group, supported by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, funded by Natural England, is on sustainable soils underpinning sustainable food production, water quality and wildlife protection. The aim is also to share the knowledge of farmers and landowners with policy makers and agencies of the multiple benefits good land management can offer society. Farmers have become interested in how to build organic matter in their soils and have been exploring ways to do this.

On the 29th June the Farmer Guardians of the Upper Thames hosted an integrated catchment management policy event organised in partnership with the EA and the Upper Thames Catchment partnership where 50 policy makers visited 4 farms to demonstrate the opportunities being delivered and current barriers to delivery. The aim is that this will feed in to and join up policy for sustainable land management post Brexit.

Jenny Phelps MBE
Senior Farm Conservation Adviser, FWAG SW
Jenny.Phelps@fwagsw.org.uk

Navigating the Upper Thames: The Challenges of Fallen Trees and Branches

In 1885 the Thames Preservation Act granted public rights of navigation for both pleasure and profit over every part of the Thames through which Thames water flowed from Teddington Lock to Cricklade. This right of navigation on the river is now under the jurisdiction of the Environment Agency and that Agency now maintains the navigation channel.

In June 1984 a narrow boat called the "Token Ton" arrived at the Town Bridge, Cricklade having made a journey from Coventry via various waterways carrying one ton of cargo. This trip was an affirmation by the Inland Waterways Association of that right of navigation up the Thames. There is an oil painting to commemorate the arrival of the boat at the Town Bridge and it can be seen on display in the Cricklade Town Council offices.

Any attempt to repeat this navigation today would probably end in failure. Unfortunately going downstream from Cricklade to Lechlade the river is obstructed by fallen trees, and in some sections impassible.



Fallen Tree across River Thames near Eysey, September 2017
Photograph by Helen Goody

Now even the smallest of craft would, perhaps, only be able to complete the journey by frequent portages to get around these obstructions.

As a keen kayaker, I contacted the Environment Agency to ask what plans it has to ensure that the section from Cricklade to Lechlade is navigable by small craft. This is the reply I received from the Thames Waterways Team in September 2017:

"The Riparian owner of the banks of the River Thames has the responsibility for trees which encroach into the river channel. We do encourage riparian owners to maintain their trees and as a last resort have power to deal with encroaching trees and invoice the riparian owner for the cost, resorting to court action for recovery if necessary. We do regard this route as a last resort and would only go down that path for trees which constantly encroached on the fairway".

With all parties working together, it should be possible to restore a passage for canoes and kayaks from Cricklade.
Ben West, UTPS Committe Member

Richard Mundy Joins Cotswold Water Park Trust as WILD Project Officer

Originally from Lewes in East Sussex, Richard is an ecologist by profession and a life-long naturalist with a particular interest in birds. He is a full member of the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). UTPS welcomes him and looks forward to supporting Richard on future projects.

We are also delighted Richard will be talking at the UTPS AGM about his experiences working as an ecologist in various situations, and how he hopes to apply what he has learned to the WILD Project here in the Upper Thames. Richard writes... I am deeply committed to the need for biodiversity conservation and I believe that our most important conservation opportunities lie in motivating and mobilising people to conserve landscapes, habitats and species within their own local area.



I have only been in post for a few weeks so I am still finding my feet but I am hugely impressed with the partnerships that have been developed and the community-led nature of the work that is being done through the WILD project. I am very excited to be part of it and I hope that I will be able to meet the challenge of continuing Petrina Brown's great work helping the people who live in the water park area to become fully involved in protecting and enhancing their local environment and looking after the valuable wildlife that it supports. I have heard a little about the valuable work done by the Upper Thames Protection Society and I very much look forward to meeting all of you at your AGM in November and working with you into the future.

Richard Mundy, Biodiversity Officer (WILD Project)
richard.mundy@waterpark.org

Good Luck Wishes to Petrina Brown

UTPS sends Petrina Brown all good wishes in her new role with the Environment Agency, West Midlands. Petrina worked hard to improve the river environment in our area. Most recently, Petrina organised the significant improvement work to the Rivers Thames and Churn around North Meadow.

Note: The opinions expressed by correspondents are not necessarily those of the Upper Thames Protection Society. Please send contributions, letters, comments to Editor: helengoody@talk21.com

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