

THE STRIPLING

Newsletter of the Upper Thames Protection Society



Issue 41, October 2021

Open Meeting and AGM

Wednesday 10 November, starting at 7.00pm

For those wishing to join please register for attendance via the CONTACT page on the website:
www.upperthamesprotection.org.uk/

The agenda and meeting login details will be forwarded to you the day before the meeting

Alternatively, please send an email to helengoody@talk21.com

Membership £3 a year. Non-members welcome

Upper Thames Protection Society - Registered Charity 299418

The State of Our Rivers – Restoring our rivers, naturally

England has an incredible natural river heritage. Our country is home to 85% of the world's chalk streams—some of the most ecologically rare habitats on the planet. Rivers provide two thirds of our water supplies, give us sanctuary and adventure, plus they support a huge variety of wildlife.



The public recognise our rivers as the national treasures they are—yet none of our rivers are in good overall health. They all fail chemical standards, and just 14% pass the bar for good ecological health. This has huge implications for nature and for all of us.

On 24 September 2021, The Rivers Trust published the *State of Our Rivers Report* which, for the first time, brings together the data and tools you need to learn about the true health of your river, both on a national and local scale.

- Agriculture contributes towards nearly two-thirds of rivers failing to meet good status; the water sector over a half; and the urban and transport sector a quarter.
- With no significant improvements in the last 5 years our rivers are flatlining – we need a radical rethink for rivers.

- Nature holds the key - we need real investment in nature-based solutions, at scale.

To restore nature and clean up rivers with minimal carbon and chemical footprints, we need to work with nature. There are a wide range of Nature Based Solutions which could be rolled out across the nation; on farms, in the uplands, in city centres and at water treatment works. These solutions have the potential to prevent pollution, reduce flooding, and increase the landscape's natural ability to store water for times of drought.



This can include things like:

Leaky dams: strategically placed, locally-sourced wood is placed into the river to hold and slowly release water over time

Riparian tree planting: trees are planted along the river to intercept surface runoff, reducing the speed at which rainwater reaches the river

Floodplain restoration: reconnecting our floodplains and their wetlands, keeping them safe from development can help to store excess water when rivers are overwhelmed

<https://www.riverstrust.org/key-issues/state-of-our-rivers>

How Healthy is the Upper Thames?

This year's staycation summer has seen an increasing number of people using the UK rivers as a source of recreation. However, the news in July 2021 that Southern Water had been fined a record £90 million for deliberately and systematically polluting rivers and the coastline of Southeast England over a number of years raises concerns as to how clean our rivers actually are for recreational purposes.



All users of the river deserve safe water

In the UK there is "a combined sewage system" which means that rainwater and waste water from homes and businesses goes into the same pipework and onto the sewage treatment works for treatment and discharge into the river system as clean water.

A period of heavy rainfall, and climate change will no doubt make this more problematical, can cause the drainage system to become overloaded and the sewage treatment works cannot cope with the increased volume of water. To avoid the possibility of back up into homes, businesses, roads and open space, Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO's) were instigated to allow overflows of diluted, but untreated, sewage from the sewage treatment works into a waterway associated with that sewage treatment works. These are known as "sewer storm overflows".



Photo Credit: Windrush Against Sewage Pollution, Sewer Storm Overflow, October 2020

The treatment of sewage on the Upper Thames is primarily the responsibility of Thames Water, and along with other water companies, is now publishing annual event duration monitor data which reveals the extent of the potential discharge of untreated sewage into the Upper Thames and its tributaries.

In 2020, from data available from the River Trust, the major sewer storm overflows for the Upper Thames not including Lechlade were as follows:

Cricklade	52 occasions for a total of 475 hours
Purton	33 occasions for a total of 367 hours
Cirencester	72 occasions for a total of 735 hours
Fairford	138 occasions for a total of 2492 hrs
Ampley Saint Peter	108 occasions for a total of 2316 hrs
South Cerney	72 times for a total of 735 hours

This shows that on 475 occasions for a total of 7120 hours which is equivalent to almost 297 days there were sewer storm overflow discharges actually into the Thames or into a tributary thereby effecting the main river. Inevitably these discharges will be concentrated in the winter months when the river levels are highest and not particularly being used for recreation. In addition, some of those discharges will be occurring from the different sewage works on the same days so the figure of 297 days can be a little misleading. Having said that the numbers must raise concerns for the health of the river generally.

At the time of writing only one river, the River Wharfe in Yorkshire, has been designated as safe for swimming. However, this designation was called into doubt when it was revealed that water samples taken this summer showed bacterial pollution levels higher than those deemed safe for swimming by the Environment Agency.

The Government does say "we also recognise the growing popularity in open water swimming, with many people enjoying wild swimming in rivers. Public Health England and the Environment Agency offer advice as part of the existing 'swim healthy' guidance which is available to read before making any decision on swimming'.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/swim-healthy-leaflet/swim-healthy>

Ben West
UTPS Committee Member

Good News from our Anglers

Swindon Golden Carp Angling Association has held its club waters on the Upper Thames for just over 40 years to date. Originally formed in 1894 as part of the GWR social and sports outlet, the first waters were on the canals around the Marlborough and Savernake area.

Since those early canal days, the shift was made to the River Thames in the late 1970's and from 1980/81 we have been in control of the stretch just downstream of the A419 for approximately 3 miles, the Eysey and Water Eaton area as it is best known.



Water Eaton Bridge

S.G.C.A.A. has seen many changes to the upper Thames in those 40+ years and the fishing has been put under pressure in recent years. However, we are still a very active Angling club, with a good number of loyal members and we are pleased to report that the fishing is, for the most part, very good, with plenty of Chub, Perch and Trout being caught this season, among just a few of the many species that inhabit this wonderful waterway.



*Recent Catches - Trout (above), Perch (below)
Photos provided by SGCAA*



The club can be contacted through Facebook or directly by phone should anyone wish to know more about Swindon's oldest Angling club.

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Willow Tree Pollarding by Cricklade Town Council supported by FWAG

During September 2021, the willow trees lining the southern bank of the Thames on Fairview Fields and Isis Meadow have been pollarded, for the first time for many years.



*Before - Oversize willow trees in Fairview Fields
Photo provided by Cricklade Town Council*

Without this work the 30 or so willows would have continued to grow until such times as the branches fell right across the river causing much greater (and expensive) problems in years to come.

Willows are the most resilient of trees and it will not be long before new growth will be seen.



After – Fairview Fields after willow shearing

The cut branches were chipped on site and then taken away to provide biomass for power generation and a total of 50 tonnes were sold in this way, thereby reducing the cost of the project.

The project was led by Cricklade Town Council, as owner of both sites, but we were fortunately able to obtain match grant funding from the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) which is a registered charity acting to “promote and enhance the conservation of wildlife, the environment and the landscape in relation to modern agricultural needs.”

Mark Clarke, Chairman, Cricklade Town Council
markclarke@crickladetowncouncil.gov.uk

Cotswold Lakes Trust

In 2020, the Board of Trustees of the Cotswold Water Park Trust began a review of the charity's Statement of Purpose, and at the same time, its name.



The name "Cotswold Water Park" itself is rife with misconception, with many visitors believing it refers to an aqua park of some sort, replete with water slides, log flumes and high-octane adventure.

The eventual favourite amongst those tasked with choosing, was the Cotswold Lakes Trust.

The Trust now has a new website www.cotswoldlakestrust.org dedicated to promoting its charitable work, and where you can also find the revised Statement of Purpose. We will also continue to manage the main Cotswold Water Park website www.waterpark.org which helps promote the entire area and its various businesses to the wider world.

Winter Work of a Ranger September brings with it the end of bird nesting season and a return to distant shores for our migratory visitors. It also means that our rangers have to start thinking about habitat maintenance works which we need to squeeze in before spring arrives and nesting begins all over again – we try to leave things well alone once they've started.

In the Cotswold Water Park, we are also at the mercy of rising winter floodwaters, which in a normal winter (whatever that is nowadays) gets a bit dicey from late December, and often through into February. Some years have brought winter flooding as early as October and as late as May, so it's a bit of a moveable feast. Thankfully we have more than enough to do on sites that don't flood.



There's always lots of willow coppicing to be done, particularly in those areas where we try to maintain reed beds or other wetland plant assemblages. Willow tends to grow everywhere in the CWP due to its preference for wet ground. We welcome numerous volunteers, corporate groups, and colleges along during the season to help with this task. If you fancy joining in then take a look at the volunteering page on our website www.cotswoldlakestrust.org/volunteering where you can register your interest.

It is no accident that some parts of the CWP rank amongst the UK's best breeding bird sites. There's a lot to be said for the new movement towards 'rewilding', or allowing habitats to develop how they want to, and in some circumstances this is absolutely the best thing to

do – we do allow some parts of sites to develop naturally in the CWP – but sometimes where more niche and endangered habitats and species are at risk, it makes sense to put in the extra effort to protect them. The key, as always, is balance.

Ben Welbourn, Operations Manager
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RSPCA Oak and Furrows Update

Since reporting on the OAK and Furrows Wildlife Rescue Centre in the October 2018 for The Stripling, things have moved on. Like many other charities O&F had been struggling to raise the full amount of funding needed to keep the centre running each month.

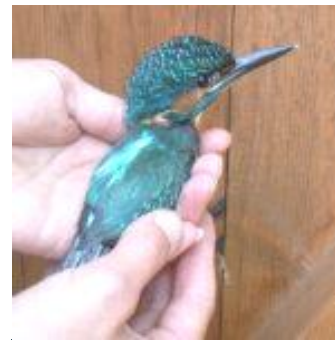
The centre is now known as 'RSPCA Oak and Furrows' and is a welcomed part of the RSPCA North Wiltshire and Newbury District Branch who have 8 shops (Gorse Hill, Swindon; Swindon Town Centre; Royal Wootton Bassett; Chippenham; Marlborough; Warminster; Witney and Thatcham) and a warehouse operation.

The relationship became official on the 1st April 2020 and consequently, the centre's future was assured. This means:

- The centre can continue helping sick, injured, and needy animals
- Further investment in the centre's facilities can be made
- Improvements in all area's keeping in line with RSPCA Standards

The telephone number is now 01793 640136, option 2, the 24-hour cover remains the same. Details on how to contact the centre and ways to help can be found:

<https://www.oandf.co.uk/rspca-north-wilts-and-oak-furrows/>



Here are a few of the precious creatures that have passed through the centre and have been released back into the wild.

RSPCA Oak and Furrows

Note: The opinions expressed by correspondents are not necessarily those of the UTPS. Please send contributions, letters, comments to Editor: helengoody@talk21.com Upper Thames Protection Society - Registered Charity 299418