Issue 16 February 2023

WESSEX RIVERS NEWS

RESTORATION SUPERSTARS

Discover the exciting restoration projects the team have been working on this season

INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Tackling invasive species on the rivers Test and Itchen

Wessex Rivers Trust

www.wessexrt.org.uk

Chair’s Introduction

George Seligman, Chair of Trustees

Writing in January with a hard frost on the ground, it is hard to think back to the drought summer of 2022. Month after month of almost no rain reduced our Wessex rivers to unhealthily low levels. Now, after several weeks of rain giving a strong recharge, they are flowing bank high. This variability is, of course, the normal order of things in our Wessex catchments but it seems increasingly likely that the extremes, particularly the dry summers, are becoming more frequent.

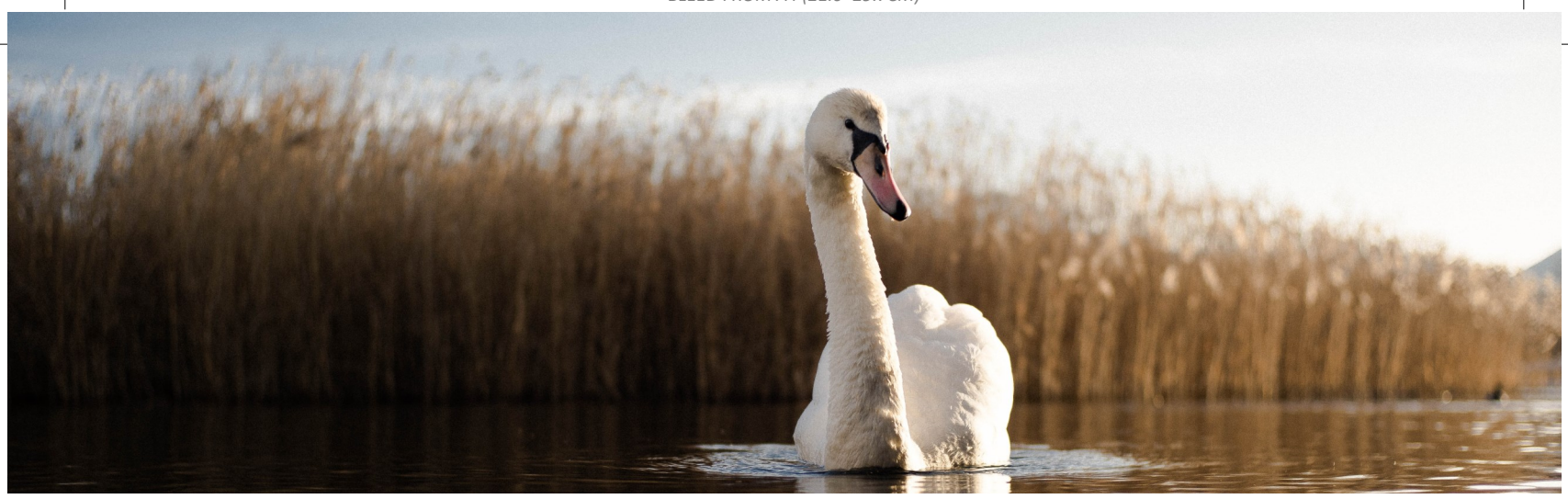
Against this evolving backdrop, Wessex Rivers Trust has seen demand for its river restoration services grow rapidly. From small beginnings over a decade ago, the Trust has managed to deliver more than £1 million of in-river projects in 2022. For me, that is a hugely satisfactory outcome.

Looking ahead, our objective is to deliver river restoration at a landscape scale. As we grow, this aspiration looks more achievable. In some catchments our projects are already joining up to make improvements across big parts of their river systems.

There is no shortage of opportunities for 2023 and beyond with some major multiyear projects in the pipeline. We have the skills needed: the trick will be to keep on finding the money to finance more staff and bigger projects.

Education and engagement are also growing fast. We are now reaching significant numbers of school children and local communities to explain our in-river work and show how they can help preserve our rare chalk environment. We have made a good start in the last year or two and plan to build on our progress in 2023.

Whether this year is dominated by drought or downpour is in the lap of the gods. Whichever way it goes, Wessex Rivers Trust will deliver more restoration projects and education across our catchments. We have a strong, skilled and committed team of staff with increasing numbers of volunteers and supporters. Thanks so much to all of them for their commitment and energy. I look forward to this year with hope and confidence in the outcomes we can deliver.



CEO’s Round Up

Dave Rumble, Chief Executive

This edition of *Wessex Rivers News* provides a snapshot of the Trust’s most productive year to date - the team have truly ploughed through 2022, delivering work at scale. I am always mindful of the bigger picture and the long-term and am delighted when activities spanning different themes mesh together and add value to each other, as is beginning to happen in the Test and Itchen catchment. There are some significant irons in the fire in the Avon and Stour, however, and I look forward to reporting more there soon.

The chalk headwaters are cherished yet remain vulnerable to degradation. It is especially encouraging to report our transformative achievements under the Watercress & Winterbournes scheme (see page 12) hand-in-hand with new efforts to educate people about the fragility of these environments, the need to use water wisely and experience first-hand the treasures within our rivers (see pages 5, 8 and 11), and our continual learning and application of knowledge brought to life in the Stour headwaters (see page 10).

Our guest feature on page 14 adds to what many of us instinctively know already – that drought has far-reaching impacts on our rivers, persisting long after the media interest has evaporated. Resilience to drought sets the scene for river restoration projects profiled from page 16; while the ambitious mission to map and control invasive species in a joined-up fashion brings wider benefits for wildlife and people (see page 4). It is so good to be able to undertake work which can be appreciated by the public and makes a positive contribution to the rural economy as was done at Chilbolton Common (see page 6).

Morale is always boosted when we meet and work with like-minded people on their journey of caring for our rivers. The Trust continues to rely on a relatively small number of very special founding supporters and volunteers, but we are keen to broaden our appeal and spark the interest of the next generation through our new Family Supporter offer (see page 18). Last, but not least, we do try to have fun and my Salmon Dash was just that (see page 19): please sponsor me!

Thank you for your support and please continue to help us grow our work.

Contents of this issue

Tackling Invasives

Dealing with Invasive and Non Native Species in the Test and Itchen Catchment

Courtney Brain , Test & Itchen INNS Project Coordinator

Armed with the data collected during a successful summer survey for invasive non native species (INNS) in the Test and Itchen catchment, we selected several strategic sites for the targeted removal of INNS in July and August. With the help of local landowners and our dedicated volunteers, we removed American skunk-cabbage, Himalayan balsam, monkey flower, and orange balsam across seven sites in the upper reaches of the catchment. Our volunteers did an incredible job, dedicating 60 hours of their time to help remove 172 trugs (large buckets) worth of invasive plant material from the river and margins.

Our summer survey data also highlighted numerous sites where water fern (aka *Azolla*), an invasive species similar to our native duck weed, required management. With the support of landowners and river keepers, we released the water fern weevil *Stenopelmus rufinasus* at 5 sites in July and August, with a further 3 scheduled for treatment next spring. The weevil feeds exclusively on water fern, with both larval and adult life stages feeding voraciously on the plant. Their rapid reproduction rate allows them to effectively eliminate water fern populations.

Weevils ready for release on the Itchen.

Monkey flower removal near Stoke Charity on the River Dever.

The Mink Monitoring Network

Following the inception of the Test & Itchen Mink Monitoring Network in early 2022, with the support of numerous river keepers, we have deployed over 40 rafts across the catchment.

The network aims to monitor mink activity, including pathways of entry into the catchment, to enable the targeted control of this incredibly efficient predator. We anticipate the majority of activity will be recorded in the autumn and winter months when mink typically move through the catchments in search of mates for late winter/early spring time.

The earliest rafts deployed picked up movement in March and April, followed by a quiet summer, suggesting we don't have masses of resident mink. As the year went on, we began to receive an increase in anecdotal sightings on the Itchen in the Winchester area, with the first mink recorded at the end of October. Between October and December there were 5 sightings over 3 rafts, mainly in the middle Test catchment. Trapping followed and a number of mink dispatched by the river keepers.

Overall, it has been an incredibly successful first year for this ambitious multi-year project. A huge thank you to all those involved so far - we are incredibly grateful for all of the support we have received from riparian owners, stakeholders, local communities and our wonderful volunteers! Please get in touch with Courtney if you'd like to get out on the river bank and help with our removal events next summer!
courtney@wessexrt.org.uk

Our River Our Water

Tracy Standish, Education Officer

The water we use in our daily lives is taken from the local environment, which leaves less water for our vital river habitats. Our newest education programme, Our River, Our Water, encourages children to use water wisely to help protect this precious resource and ensure there is enough for everyone and everything.

Following trial sessions with children from Wallop Primary School on the River Dun near Romsey in the summer, we have been busy this autumn engaging with pupils in Chandler's Ford, Southampton and Winchester, resulting in 155 children learning to appreciate the value of our rivers, how to save water and how to engage with our river wildlife in a fun and hands-on way.

Focusing on river wildlife, river features and how we use water in our daily lives, the session highlights how hugely important rivers are as a habitat whilst providing us with an essential resource.

A partnership between Southern Water and a number of Rivers Trusts in the southeast of England, the free sessions are available to primary schools in the Southern Water supply area, which includes in and around Romsey, Winchester, Southampton, Eastleigh and Totton. By delivering sessions close to schools and placing an emphasis on their local river or stream, children can develop and strengthen a sense of belonging to their local community and schools are able to avoid ever increasing transport costs, the biggest barrier to outdoor learning.

To find out more, email tracy@wessexrt.org.uk

"From communication in advance about arranging the session and tailoring it to our class, to the warm welcome we received on arrival and the perfectly pitched and paced session, our whole experience was fantastic. Thank you - we'll definitely be back!"
Teacher, Wallop Primary School

Chilbolton ‘Your River’

Matt Irvine, Senior Project Officer and
Andy Blincow, Senior Project Manager

The Trust recently completed delivery of a river and floodplain restoration project on the River Test at Chilbolton. Chilbolton Common is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), designated for both the River Test itself and an extensive area of species rich floodplain marsh maintained through centuries of management. .

The river channel was significantly overwide through the 320m reach and valuable marginal habitat had been lost. The project proposed to narrow the channel and reinstate sinuosity and flow diversity through the creation of low-level marginal brushwood berms (aka brushwood mattresses), whilst reducing erosion to 40m of bank with the creation of a gently sloping gravel bank.

The project was unusual in that it deployed staff from across the Trust’s teams, with particular input from the Education and Engagement team. This holistic approach to the development and delivery of the project was also reflected in the project outputs, which in addition to physical habitat improvements, included a significant amount of community engagement.

The emergent gravel margin was installed by contractors Enviroaqua and carried out separately from the volunteer labour.

Approximately 55 people from the local community and further afield (including Sparsholt College and West Country Rivers Trust) lent their valuable time to the project, equating to an amazing 475 volunteer hours. Without this vast volunteer resource, the project would not have been deliverable within the time or budget constraints. Volunteer tasks included carrying materials across the common, driving posts into the riverbed, securing hazel faggots within the channel, erection of temporary chestnut paling around the newly installed berms, and extensive planting of the new

Before—failing oak revetment

After—gently sloping gravel bank

Before—overwide channel with limited marginal community

After—narrower channel with increased sinuosity

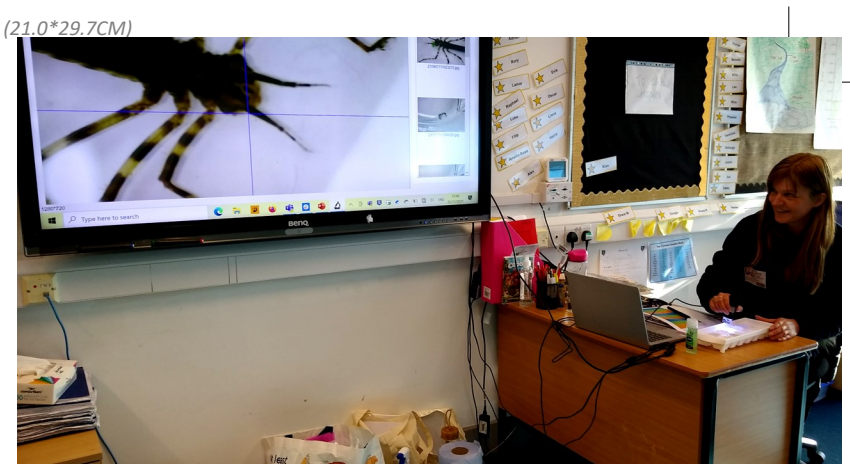
berms with plants sourced from the wider common. For many of the volunteers this project was not their first this year, having worked with the Trust on a number of activities within the headwaters of the Test & Itchen Catchment (see our Watercress & Winterbournes project update).

Due to a lack of available woody material, hazel faggot bundles were imported to construct the brushwood marginal berms. These bundles were sourced locally from a copse on Stockbridge Down, just a few miles from site. Coppicing is a traditional woodland management practice dating back to neolithic times. Following a steady decline since the 1800's, coppicing of hazel especially in southern England has seen a recent revival, including the production of new products including faggot bundles for river restoration works. The management of woodlands through coppicing creates a rich mosaic of habitats, benefitting a wide range of flora and fauna within the wider catchment. Sourcing material locally is also a sustainable approach which establishes ties with the wider rural economy.

Whilst delivering a river restoration project on a publicly accessible site had its challenges, the subsequent ecological and aesthetic benefits will be experienced by a wide audience. An interpretation board will be appearing shortly, explaining the project objectives and the national importance of the site.

We would like to thank our project funders the Test and Itchen Drought Resilience Fund and the Environment Agency Test and Itchen River Restoration Strategy, who made this project possible.

A pre-delivery public communications event on the common



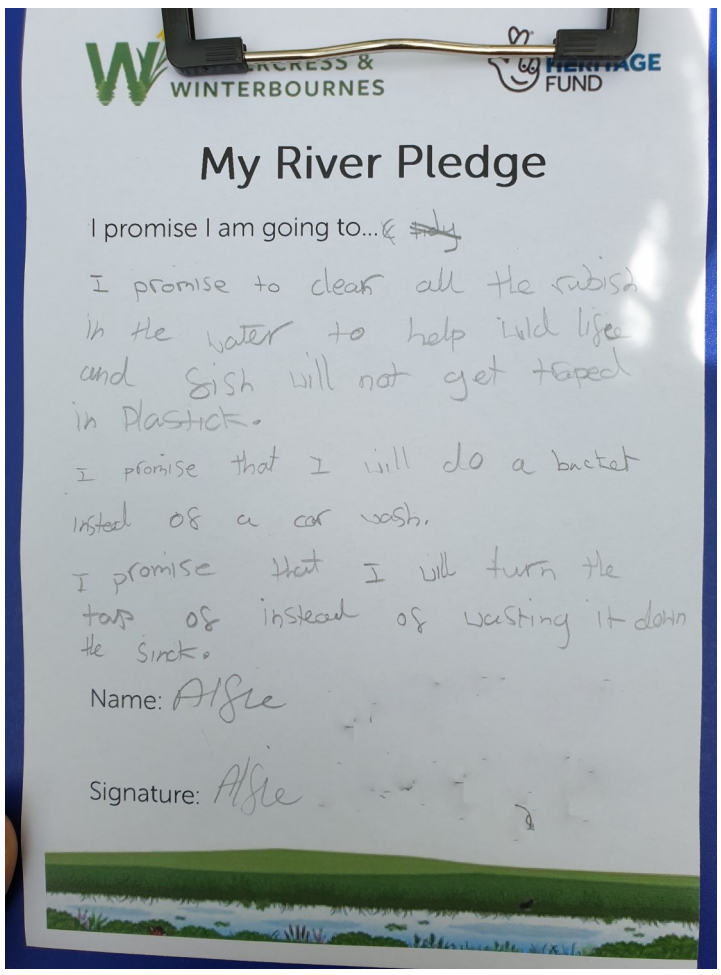
Our Education Offer

Amy Ellis, Senior Education & Engagement Officer

As you may have seen from recent issues of Wessex Rivers News, we have been growing our education programme. There has been a rapid growth in this team over the last two years, thanks to a number of funded projects, resulting in a comprehensive education offer. With four education staff (2.1 FTE) we have produced activities covering the following areas:

River Dipping – The most interactive, immersive and, therefore, most popular activity is river dipping. Where possible, children are encouraged to step into the watery world and see what wildlife hides beneath the surface. Freshwater invertebrates and small fish are collected from the river for a closer look and identified using keys.

Geography Field Studies – Measuring the river's flow and profile provides opportunities for children to work on their geography skills. Some classes run term topics on river processes, and field studies help bring these concepts into the real world. Studying water quality is also a wonderful way of teaching the impacts humans have on rivers, a topic that is becoming more prevalent in the media.



Wildlife Studies – At Wessex Rivers Trust, we love looking at freshwater invertebrates. Their adaptations are incredibly complex and fascinating to observe. We can study wildlife on the riverbank using magnifying glasses and pots. More detailed observations are carried out back in the classroom with the use of digital microscopes. Scientific drawings, or clay modelling, help children take note of the "creature's features" and provide an opportunity to explore how and why animals are adapted in different ways.

Water Conservation – One of the most important lessons we want to teach children is of water conservation. We run games, activities and trails all focusing on the water-saving message. Children will leave with the knowledge that their positive choices made every day will have a positive impact on the river and wildlife they learn to love during our sessions.

Wildlife and Night Walks – To enrich learning, wildlife walks and night walks are offered to schools and groups throughout Spring, Summer and Autumn. Opportunities for sweep netting, bat detecting, moth trapping and bird watching are all part of the immersive experience, proving rivers are not just homes to fish!

Water Safety – The Trust's education team believe strongly in helping children manage their own risks. When working, and playing, in and around rivers children need to be taught how to stay safe in that environment and how to make safe choices. Children learn how to use throw ropes and manage potentially dangerous situations through fun, interactive games and activities.

Our unique selling point (USP) is that we are river experts who can travel to the school or group's local river and connect children with their closest, accessible "blue space". We aim to locate a site within walking distance of the school or group or, if this is not possible, a short drive away. This way the children can create a bond with the natural open space and return with their friends and family, time and time again.

We offer sessions throughout the Wessex region, from Blandford Forum in the West to Portsmouth in the East, from Bournemouth in the South to Andover in the North. Some areas can offer fully funded education sessions, under specific projects, while other areas have subsidised sessions, supported by the Linbury Trust grant.

For educational videos please visit our YouTube channel, for more information please visit www.wessexrt.org.uk/education.html or contact info@wessexrt.org.uk

THE LINBURY TRUST

Monitoring, Research & Project Evolution

Alex Deacon, Catchment Partnership Manager

Looking back over the last five or so years, the nature restoration agenda has placed an increasing emphasis on a more joined-up, landscape scale approach to conservation projects. All our native flora and fauna requires access to a diversity of healthy, connected habitats on a landscape scale, including the wildlife associated with our rivers. Smaller patchworks of isolated habitats are less resilient to change, such as pollution, or drought.

Since joining the Trust in 2019, I've witnessed both the size and nature of our projects evolve with this more holistic approach to conservation. Although monitoring and research makes up a relatively small piece of the Trust's overall output, the diversity of surveys, studies, and science based partnerships has had to keep up with this change.

Collecting the right environmental data is key to informing both the design phase of a project, and to assessing the outcomes delivered by our hard work. The past 12 months paints a good picture of this progression, with our monitoring programmes including surveys and assessments of both aquatic and terrestrial flora, fauna, soil health, and water quality. Whilst the team have a good knowledge and experience of undertaking surveys in the river, we are less familiar with the environmental survey techniques required beyond the river bank! This has meant working with a wide range of new partners and specialists throughout Wessex and further afield.

Earlier this year, the Trust began work on a river and floodplain restoration project on the Upper Crane, a chalk stream tributary of the upper Stour. With over 6km of river valley under their ownership, the landowner was keen to explore opportunities to improve water quality and habitats in both river and the adjacent floodplain.

Working with locally based terrestrial ecologists, the team established an environmental baseline to help inform options and assess future changes to life in the valley. Surveys included fish, aquatic macroinvertebrates, river habitat, terrestrial vegetation, insects, and saproxylic beetle communities (associated with deadwood). Plans are now being developed and funding sought to deliver actions on the ground here over the next couple of years.

Trust staff scoping opportunities to secure wider ecosystem services in the floodplain

Downstream on the middle Stour, we are currently working with one of the largest landowners in the catchment to investigate opportunities for restoring 2.5km of river and 43 hectares of former arable and pasture floodplain.

As well as benefiting both aquatic and terrestrial ecology, a wide range of ecosystem services are available when the river is given space to naturally flood and meander through a healthy floodplain. With large areas of floodplain open for restoration, the Trust have included soil health surveys to assess the current levels of phosphate, nitrate, and carbon contained within the floodplain. In the long run, naturally functioning floodplains can sequester and store excess nutrients and carbon, helping improve water quality, quantity, and carbon stocks (carbon held in our soil is the nation's largest store of carbon).

More on all of this to come next year!

Watercress & Winterbournes Education

Tracy Standish, Education Officer

Knights Enham Junior School, Andover, Anton Lakes

Since April 2021 our Watercress and Winterbournes education programme has grown from strength to strength as more schools and groups have become involved: to date we have engaged with 12 different schools and 18 different groups, inspiring 1022 children and young people to connect and engage with their local chalk stream across 64 different sessions.

Whilst riverbank sessions remain our most popular, a varied offer of activities including assemblies and classroom sessions for schools and night and wildlife walks along the river corridor for groups, has enabled us to expand on their breadth of learning and offer opportunities for repeat engagement.

Overton Cubs, for example, have joined us for a night walk along the banks of their closest stretch of the Upper Test, a riverbank session (which included water safety activities) and an art session where they focused on a favourite invertebrate and had a go at sculpting it out of clay:

'We found every session very informative, useful and fun. Teaching the next generation to respect our natural surroundings.' *Group Leader, Overton Cub Scouts*

In addition, our Chalk Stream Challenge has allowed for further engagement both inside and outside the scheme area. 300 challenge badges have been awarded to 12 different groups, with Whitchurch, Andover and Alresford all being used as locations by groups.

Alresford and Cheriton Scouts, Cheriton Stream

To find out more, email tracy@wessexrt.org.uk

Watercress and Winterbournes is a Landscape Partnership Scheme protecting, enhancing and celebrating the seven chalk streams that make up the headwaters of the Rivers Test and Itchen. The scheme is supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and brings together 16 partners, including Wessex Rivers Trust who host the education programme.

WATERCRESS & WINTERBOURNES

Made possible with Heritage Fund

Watercress & Winterbournes Capital Works

Moragh Stirling, Projects and Conservation Officer

Made possible with Heritage Fund

WATERCRESS & WINTERBOURNES

Working in the headwaters, Watercress and Winterbournes delivers smaller scale projects than further down the catchments, meaning we can involve volunteers in more projects. Although, the Chilbolton Common works featured in this issue show how that can be achieved in larger sites too, with tremendous impact.

Here we showcase projects in the Upper Test (Flashetts), Pillhill (Abbotts Ann), Anton (Carters Meadow) and Cheriton Stream on the Itchen (Tichborne).

At Flashetts, a popular local footpath allows rare access to the river in Overton. The channel had suffered from high footfall in this stretch as there is such limited access elsewhere in the catchment. Very overshaded with uniform age woodland on the southern bank, the overwide channel accumulated silt and inhibited fish migration to good spawning habitat upstream. Poor light limited riparian vegetation resulting in further bank erosion, and virtually no in-channel plants.

Working with the Wild Trout Trust, our objectives were to increase light, reverse bank erosion, provide refugia and narrow the channel with large woody material and publicly accessible gravel berms, and provide an attractant flow to the upstream reaches.

Flashetts before and after

Carters Meadow before and after

At **Carters Meadow** in Andover, an 'on-line' pond in the gardens of a sheltered housing complex built in 1989 had accumulated silt to a depth of nearly 2m and leached nutrients downstream. The area had become a serious hazard to the residents and provided little aesthetic benefit. Our aim was to reinstate a functional headwater chalk stream while retaining the benefits of a smaller wetland. Our challenges were to protect water voles and their burrows but avoid working in the wettest season given the quantities of silt handling required. Careful design allowed work to be carried out in September when the winterbourne was not flowing.

The Pillhill, at **Abbotts Ann,** runs behind properties with hard revetments bordering their gardens. Inputs of fine sediment and nutrients and an overwide channel result in a smothered bed, and low flow encouraging excess algal growth. Characteristic channel vegetation like *Ranunculus* has suffered and the residents are eager to champion the health and biodiversity of their stream. Our aim was to soften the hard revetments with a toe of brushwood trapping sediment, providing refugia and speeding the water during periods of low flow. Our volunteers really stepped up and the homeowners are very happy with the results so far. We will return next year to continue the work.

Near **Tichborne**, the Cheriton stream was realigned in 2017. Natural England's objectives led to trees being removed along this reach and there had been limited encroachment of marginal vegetation. The resultant overwide channel has not evolved as envisaged with low stream energy resulting in a uniform profile and bedform. Poor marginal habitat and refugia meant low redd numbers have been recorded in a reach that would be expected to provide good spawning opportunities. Our aims were to improve morphological and hydrological diversity by introducing a narrower and more sinuous channel and provide refugia for juvenile and adult fish. Our intrepid volunteers pulled out all the stops installing 21 structures in three days!

We will continue monitoring to assess the effects of these works. As part of our legacy, we are creating volunteer-based monitoring hubs which will continue beyond the lifetime of the Landscape Partnership.

Abbotts Ann before and after

Tichborne before and after

Long Term Effects of Drought

Matthew Woodard, The Rivers Trust

We are becoming more familiar with droughts, as they become increasingly frequent and severe. The summer of 2022 exemplifies this. However, we are less familiar with the long-lasting impacts of drought that extend beyond the period of heat into times of heavy rain. Despite multiple months of storms and rain, many people are unaware that we have been in “drought” for much of Autumn, with the hosepipe bans across Southern England only starting to be lifted in December. Therefore, understanding the lasting nature of drought and the ongoing issues is key to mitigating them.

Reduced river flows

During prolonged periods of low rainfall, river levels typically drop. This is exaggerated by human abstraction of water, causing a reduction in river flow and groundwater levels. This has immediate impacts on both nature and humans. Rivers and other water bodies form essential ecosystems, and as they dry up, these can be lost. Reduced water levels also impact crop production and exaggerate pollution issues, a negative for both wildlife and humans.

Extreme weather

Droughts often cause and lead to further extreme weather events, with wildfires as the initial concern. Observed across the globe in recent years, we saw an abundance of devasting fires in the UK during the summer of 2022. Posing an obvious risk to human life, they also put pressure on food production if crops and fields are lost. Additionally, they impact wildlife through the destruction of habitats, often taking decades to recover, and hinder conservation efforts. As seen at Wild Ken Hill in Norfolk, where a fire destroyed 33 hectares of habitat and killed a significant amount of wildlife. Many of these habitats store large quantities of carbon and act as natural flood protection, therefore their loss further contributes to climate change and can act as a feedback loop, increasing the likelihood of future droughts and potentially worsening their impact.

Droughts also lead to flash flooding. Extensive dry

Extended recovery

As mentioned above, it takes more than a few heavy rainstorms to compensate for months of dry weather. It is predicted that if the UK receives 80% or less than the average rainfall through winter, then drought conditions will likely extend into the 2023. The continuation of drought adds further pressure to food production and water resources, exaggerating the issues observed during the initial drought period and furthering the problems facing both humans and wildlife. Ultimately, without ample recovery, the issues surrounding drought accumulate overtime and the pressures increase.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, whilst it covers the news over the summer, all mentions of drought disappear once the rain starts. However, we will be facing potentially worse conditions in the following years if we do not try to mitigate the impacts. The weather may be out of our control, but there are steps we can take to aid recovery following drought. Hosepipe bans are common during dry periods but taking precautions year-round to ensure that water is not wasted is key to reducing over abstraction. Droughts are inevitable as climate change progresses, therefore raising awareness of campaigns that support habitat management, rewilding, and natural flood management can help ensure that going forward we are better equipped to cope with future droughts and the lasting impacts.

periods cause the ground to become compacted and baked, making them less able to absorb water. When the rain does eventually come, rather than replenishing lost groundwater, it simply runs over the ground, resulting in flash floods. As with the fires, this not only poses a threat to human life and infrastructure but also negatively impacts ecosystems.

BLEED FROM A4 (21.0*29.7CM)

Riparian re-roughing. Diversifying habitat on the River Dever.

Restoration Projects Round Up 2022

Mike Blackmore, Director of Operations

For the first time Wessex Rivers Trust has delivered over a million pounds worth of river habitat and fish passage improvement projects in a single year. The focus has been primarily on the River Test and its tributaries, but we've also undertaken works on the River Meon and headwaters of the Itchen, and have been working hard on an exciting pipeline of projects for the Avon and Stour.

Giving each of this year's projects justice would probably require a whole additional magazine, so instead I'll focus on some of the statistics…

We've delivered **14 projects across 10 waterbodies**. This work required 19 excavators, 10 dumpers, an estimated 7500 tonnes of gravel, and countless bits of tree. In all we've un-straightened, un-widened, un-dredged, and untidied a total **8.4km** of chalk stream!

Of these projects 9 were designed completely in-house, 3 with the help of the Wild Trout Trust, and 2 were designed by external consultants.

12 of our projects were delivered within a 12-week autumn window, with 7 delivered simultaneously within the latter 6 weeks. 4 projects were delivered in-house with the Trust's staff leading specialist contractors, supported by local suppliers and a total of 95 volunteers. We

Re-shaping rivers. Un-straightening and un-widening a slack and silty section of the River Test using floodplain gravel and bankside trees

procured the services of 8 river restoration companies, 5 specialist contractors, 2 surveyors and 7 river keepers. We've also worked closely with our very good friends at the Wild Trout Trust, our regions' Wildlife Trusts, and local officers at the Environment Agency and Natural England.

Obviously, our autumns are hectic, but that busy period is actually when my personal anxiety levels drop. The start of capital works is the final straight of a marathon assault course of ecological and topographic surveys, stakeholder engagement, design, re-design, costing, permitting and procurement. There are multiple points of potential failure, and for more than one project it's

Replicating reality. A naturalistic "fallen tree analogue" woody habitat installation on the Bourne Rivulet

appeared at times that we wouldn't finish the race at all. Getting a project started on the ground is an exercise in gritted-teeth determination, saintly diplomacy, and (to a certain extent) blind faith. Above all it takes a huge team effort, and I'm immensely proud and privileged to have such a strong team of professionals to work with. The team is close-knit, supportive and above all committed to the cause. They've pulled together to cover each other over holidays, illness, operations and even weddings and parental leave.

The end result has been a huge increase in habitat quality, diversity, and resilience. The local impact is significant; but more ephemeral, yet no less important, is the journey of discovery for landowners, fishery managers, regulators, members of the public, and other stakeholders. Our goal is to raise the bar of what can be achieved in such a short window, and as the projects recover and "green-up", what ecological dividends such habitat investments can yield.

We have big plans for next year, including major capital works on the Avon and Stour catchments as well as the Test, Itchen and Meon. Over the winter we'll be investigating Natural Flood Management and wetland restoration projects in the New Forest and limbering up for another marathon toward delivery of our 2023 projects. We hope you'll continue to support our efforts.

2022's projects were delivered with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Test and Itchen Catchment Partnership, Environment Agency and Southern Water. With contributions from landowners and volunteers.

Returning riverbanks. Restoration of a hard-engineered mill channel on the River Dun

Reaching the right side. A temporary pipe bridge enabling plant machinery access across the river.

Recruited residents. Volunteers at work at Chilbolton Common

New Supporter Options

Dave Rumble, CEO

You, as a Trust supporter, play a crucial role in keeping the Trust running; furthermore, those who are Founder and Life Supporters have been instrumental in establishing the Trust in its early years. We plan to revamp our supporter options prompted by the fact that 'Founder Supporter' may no longer be an appropriate option now that we are in our second decade of existence! We would also like to reach out to families and children who care about, and are interested in, our rivers.

Please be assured that **nothing will change for existing supporters** – instead we are offering a new Family Supporter option and will be closing the Founder Supporter option to new people. We will, however, be increasing the donation for new Lifetime Supporters but there are incentives to upgrading!

Here are the new Supporter Options which will be going live on our website soon:

Individual Supporter (replaces Regular Supporter) – still £30.00 per year donation. You will receive *Wessex Rivers News*, newsletters via email, and the option to upgrade to a Lifetime Supporter.

Family Supporter (new) - £35.00 per year donation. You will receive *Wessex Rivers News*, newsletters via email, a pack for children and the option to upgrade to a Lifetime Supporter.

Lifetime Supporter - £500 one-off donation. You will receive *Wessex Rivers News*, newsletters via email, and free entry to events & talks.

Supporter Event

Because the Trust is truly indebted to all its supporters, we would like to invite you to an event being planned for the Spring which will be an opportunity to meet staff and Trustees over refreshments and hear about the Trust's work through illustrated talks. The event will be free to Founder and Lifetime supporters - including those upgrading to Lifetime Supporter – otherwise there will be a modest ticket price on a first come first served basis as places will be limited. More details will follow in due course via email.

In Other News...

Dave Rumble, CEO

Salmon Dash

In September, the Trust's CEO Dave Rumble paddled a giant Atlantic salmon 1.5km up the River Itchen estuary to raise awareness of the plight of this magnificent emblem of our chalk streams, and at the same time raise funds for the Trust. The event was a success as well as great fun for the team who formed a flotilla of support craft! The Trust managed to secure good local publicity at a time when the drought of 2022 was painting a bleak picture for our rivers and their wildlife. If you would like to donate to the Salmon Dash please follow this link:

www.wessexrt.org.uk/oneoffdonation.html

Our New Staff Members

The Trust would like to welcome two new staff members; Matt Salter, our Projects Assistant, and Candi Orcheston-Findlay , the Trust Administrator.

Candi is an experienced PA and HR professional. She has been working alongside the senior leadership team at The Trussell Trust, a national food bank charity, for the past 4 years. She is excited to be joining Wessex Rivers Trust to expand her knowledge in conservation, support and equip others, together with learning new skills.

Matt graduated from the University of Exeter with a broad degree in Biological Sciences focused on ecology, conservation, and current issues in marine ecology. Since graduating, Matt has found himself making his way back upstream (much like a salmonid!) volunteering with several trusts in practical river conservation, where he has found his passion. He is excited to be working with our famous chalk streams.

*BLEED FROM A4 (21.0*29.7CM)*

Help us protect and restore the chalk streams and rivers of Wessex. Please consider leaving a legacy for Wessex Rivers Trust in your will or becoming a supporter. Visit our website www.wessexrt.org.uk/becomeasupporter.html

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Image: Re-wiggled riverway. Watercress and Winterbournes volunteers admire their headwaters handywork