



Spring Newsletter 2016.



As postage costs increase and we all become more willing to use digital media, I hope that members will accept a digital Newsletter. I know that I and many other members miss the regular communication of the original print Newsletter, and hope that this new, more economical approach will go some way to filling that gap. We intend the Newsletter to be a regular service to our members, and warmly invite contributions, whether in the form of articles, photographs, fishing tales and reminiscences – whatever you would like to share. Send copy to me, at the address below.

The Newsletter will be posted on the Association website, and I will send as many individual copies as I can to those members whose e-mail addresses I have. Club and Association officers will receive the Newsletter, and we would be grateful if they would repost it on their own websites, or forward it to members if they are able to do so.

That brings me to the issue of e-mail communication in general:

If you are happy for the Association to have your e-mail address, that is a great advantage to us as e-mail is now the communication method of choice for speed, convenience and low cost.

- If you have already given us your e-mail details, thank you.
- If those details have changed in the last 18 months or so, please send us an update.
- If you have not yet given us your details, but wish to do so, thank you, and simply send an e-mail to me, Bob Male, on

rmale123@virginmedia.com

I'll add you to the Association mailing lists.

Security. The Association will never share your private contact details with any third party.

From the Chairman.

Welcome to the latest WFA Newsletter, which I hope you will find informative. This is the first newsletter since I took over as Chairman from Paddy Douglas-Pennant at the AGM last Autumn. Paddy has ably chaired the Association for a gargantuan seven years, during which time we have faced a number of important challenges. Not least of these has been the Environment Agency's decision to reduce its involvement in funding the removal of cut weed: a function which so vital in enabling us to cut weed for fishery management purposes on the Upper Avon and Wylye. I think it is fair to say that the new regime and mechanisms for funding it are now pretty well settled in and are working well. Our thanks must go to the efforts of weed cutting sub-committee and Paddy for steering us through it all. As one would expect from a retired accountant he leaves us on a secure, if modest, financial footing: something any incoming chairman is always grateful for!

For those of you who do not know me, I am a lifelong trout fisherman with a particular passion for the chalkstreams. I have been a Wilton Club Member for fifteen years, and a WFA committee member for the last eight. Following a professional career as a geologist and environmental specialist in the mining industry, I ran the Test & Itchen Association for five years and was the first director of the Wessex Chalk Streams and Rivers Trust, retiring from both in late 2014.

With the establishment and now solid footing of the Rivers Trust, I believe there remains a very important role for the WFA in local, tactical and specifically fishery matters, working closely alongside the Trust, whose focus is more regional, strategic and ecologically broad-based. It will probably come as no surprise to hear that my key concerns for the WFA rivers relate to flows, the impact of abstraction and water quality.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions concerns or ideas about how the Association may better serve its members – probably best by e-mail on Tom.Davis@redsedge.com .

The Rivers.



After a worryingly dry year, its good to see the aquifers recharging and some healthy flows again. We must all hope that things remain in proportion and we are spared the floods and inundations that have affected other regions. Spawning conditions for trout and grayling look promising and several people have reported salmon redds in the upper rivers.

Cormorant control has been a big issue this past year, and with the introduction of catchment- wide licensing and coordinated control measures, positive effects are already being noticed. Serious thanks are due to the river keepers for their ongoing efforts to monitor the cormorant roosts and feeding habits, to disturb and move the birds away from vulnerable places, and to participate in organised shoots where these are necessary. Many thanks also to Andreas, who coordinates the operation, and to Jake Davoile, the Angling Trust Fisheries Management Advisor for this region, who collates data and is our main liaison with Natural England.

Swan numbers on the upper rivers are lower this year, with fewer and smaller groups of un-mated sub adult birds, and less destruction of spring weed. Let us hope that this pattern continues.

2015 was not a heavy weed year, and some waters looked a bit bare by the end of the summer. It is not wise to predict weed growth, but perhaps 2016 will be a bit more generous!

Let me wish us all good fishing!

Bob Male

Subscriptions.

Many thanks to all who have renewed their membership.

If you have not yet done so, there is still time. The subs are unchanged from last year.

If you need any payment details or other information, please contact;

Bob Male (Hon. Sec. /Treasurer)

rmale123@virginmedia.com

01722 503939

Weed Management.

2015 was not a big weed year on most waters. The Environment Agency charges for the year have now been paid and Club Treasurers or Secretaries will soon be receiving requests for their contributions for the 2016 season. We agreed at the last Committee meeting that the contributions would remain at their 2014 levels for another year, to ensure some financial manouvering room should we have an exceptionally heavy weed year in the future.

Weed cutting dates for 2016.

These are already circulated to clubs and associations, and are on the website, but here is a reminder, just in case:

| RIVER WYLYE - Bathampton to Chilhampton | |
|---|--|
| CUTTING | CLEARING DOWN |
| Friday 8 th - Friday 15 th April | Saturday 16 th & Sunday 17 th April |
| Saturday 7 th - Friday 20 th May | Saturday 21 st & Sunday 22 nd May |
| Thursday 30 th June - Friday 15 th July | Saturday 16 th & Sunday 17 th July |
| RIVER WYLYE - Below Chilhampton | |
| CUTTING | CLEARING DOWN |
| Friday 15 th - Friday 22 nd April | Saturday 23 rd & Sunday 24 th April |
| Saturday 14 th - Friday 27 th May | Saturday 28 th & Sunday 29 th May |
| Thursday 7 th - Friday 22 nd July | Saturday 23 rd & Sunday 24 th July |
| RIVER AVON - Above Crossing 'C' | |
| CUTTING | CLEARING DOWN |
| Friday 22 nd April - Friday 6 th May | Saturday 7 th & Sunday 8 th May |
| Wednesday 15 th - Monday 27 th June | Tuesday 28 th & Wednesday 29 th June |
| Friday 22 nd - Sunday 31 st July | Monday 1 st & Tuesday 2 nd August |
| RIVER AVON - Below Crossing 'C' | |

| CUTTING | CLEARING DOWN |
|---|--|
| Monday 25 th April – Monday 9 th May | Tuesday 10 th & Wednesday 11 th May |
| Friday 17 th – Wednesday 29 th June | Thursday 30 th June & Friday 1 st July |
| Monday 25 th July – Wednesday 3 rd August | Thursday 4 th & Friday 5 th August |
| RIVER NADDER | |
| CUTTING | CLEARING DOWN |
| Friday 8 th - Tuesday 19 th April | Wednesday 20 th & Thursday 21 st April |
| Monday 13 th – Monday 27 th June | Tuesday 28 th & Wednesday 29 th June |
| Thursday 28 th July – Sunday 7 th August | Monday 8 th & Tuesday 9 th August |

IMPORTANT NOTES

Under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010 - 'Exempt Water Discharge Activity' – The Environment Agency allows members of the Wiltshire Fishery Association to cut weed on the agreed dates and in accordance with the conditions of the exemption.

This programme of dates is now agreed for 2016 and there is no intention to amend it, unless circumstances arise when this is necessary. In that event, the changes will be posted on the WFA website

<http://wiltshirefisheryassociation.org> under "NEWS" and circulated to River Email Groups. Before you cut weed, it is your responsibility to check both the website and your email group.

1. Cutting MUST start at the beginning of the dates allowed.
2. You MUST inform your downstream neighbour before cutting and when you have finished clearing down and of any subsequent problems. Regular communication with your upstream and downstream neighbours is essential to ensure trouble-free weed cutting and clearing down.
3. Cutting of weed outside of the authorised dates, without the Agency's consent, constitutes an offence under Section 90 of the Water Resources Act 1991.
4. Unauthorised cutting should be reported immediately to the Environment Agency using their Pollution Hotline Tel: 0800 80 70 60 – Note the exact location (grid reference), date & time & take photographs. Do not enter neighbouring property unless you have their permission to do so.
5. Weed cutting should be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive to the needs of the river habitat. Overzealous cutting of in-river weed (or marginal vegetation) can significantly reduce water levels, which can have a negative impact on invertebrates, fish and other wildlife.

6. In all cases the final two days, as shown separately in the table above, MUST be regarded as 'clearing down only' days and any weed not cut before these days, left uncut. In some circumstances, especially in low water periods, you may need to extend the period of clearing down beyond two days, to ensure there's plenty of time for cut weed to move through the system.
7. Report all blockages and any other weed related issues immediately to:

Bob Wellard Office: 01985851813 Mobile: 07872583910 Email: robertwellard@btinternet.com

WATER QUALITY AND THE CURRENT HEALTH OF OUR RIVERS.



Healthy weed growth on a carrier.

Over the last year or so a number of people have raised concerns about water quality in the upper Avon catchment, and in that I include the Wylfe, Till, Nadder, Bourne and Ebble as well as the upper Avon itself. They have quite rightly pointed at perceived deterioration in the health of the river habitat, asking what is causing and what is being done to address it.

It is generally acknowledged that nutrient enrichment and excessive inputs of fine sediment to our rivers are two of the key factors causing the ills we observe. However the reality is that such stresses have probably been building over quite a number of years, indeed decades, as land use and agricultural practices have

changed, combined with the effects of population growth and economic development. It is possible that the actual impact of these changes on our rivers over the years may have been masked by the great richness and resilience of the chalkstream habitat, and it is only when additional confounding factors come together in combination that we really notice major change. Examples of such factors include periods of low flow, unseasonably high temperatures and over-grazing by swans.

Potential sources of excess nitrogen and phosphorus include agricultural fertilisers (including slurry), fish farms, cress farms, sewage and sewage effluent, amongst others. Symptoms of nutrient enrichment (eutrophication) include the planktonic algal blooms and water discolouration, which we often now experience in the early part of the season, as well as the brown bottom-hugging algae which stifles *Ranunculus* growth, so often in the spring. Warm, sunny conditions in March and April are often associated with these planktonic algal blooms and low winter/spring flows prevent the bottom-hugging algae from being swept away. Increasingly we seem to experience large amounts of filamentous algae in late summer; especially under lower flow conditions such as in 2015. Nutrients, in particular phosphorus, can also be transported to the river bound to fine soil particles contributing to this over enrichment. Alternatively it may be stored in banks of silt and slowly released to the water column subsequently. At the same time this fine sediment may result in physical changes to the river bed and deterioration of the gravels, which play such an important role in the reproduction of trout and salmon. If there is significant organic content in this silt its breakdown may deprive trout and salmon eggs from oxygen with fatal consequences.



“Grey water” on the Wylde, April 2015.



Grayling over blanket weed – 2015 was a bad year for this nuisance algae.

When we see such symptoms occurring year after year we naturally become frustrated, and worried about the future of our rivers we love. We begin to point fingers at the Environment Agency and Natural England and other organisations to whom we look for protection of our river environment. We demand to know what is being done, since we don't think we see very much evidence of action. The truth is I'm pleased to say that things are moving forward, even if the rate of progress may not be as fast as we would all hope.

First and probably most important we now have acknowledgment from the government environmental authorities that there is a problem. Some may say that this is an achievement in itself within the current political environment. Certainly, without this there would be little foundation from which to move forward. Evidence gathering initiatives, such as those under the umbrella of the Avon Demonstration Test Catchment, have conclusively shown that there are significant issues with both nutrients and fine sediment in the upper Avon catchment. Few are arguing any longer that the numbers are within regulatory targets (which were probably not stringent enough anyway). The data set is now much bigger and the evidence of impact is there. This is quite graphically illustrated by the Wessex Chalk Stream and Rivers Trust's Invertebrate Fingerprinting Study which looks at the response of certain invertebrate indicator species to assess the health of the river in terms of organic pollution, phosphorus enrichment, fine sediment and flow. This is summarised on their website, and makes interesting reading.

In April last year the Environment Agency and Natural England finally published the Avon Nutrient Plan for Phosphorus. This provides further acknowledgement that there is a significant problem. There are than 40 recommendations for farmers and landowners to modify agricultural and land use practices to reduce the delivery of phosphate to surface waters. In addition new targets are proposed for phosphorus levels in sewage effluent and recommendations are made for private sewerage systems. Cress growing and fish farm discharges are also addressed.

In 2010 the Environment Agency and Natural England published a Diffuse Pollution Action Plan for the Hampshire Avon. In addition to addressing nutrients this plan highlights a range of priorities for reducing the run-off of fine sediment into the rivers, particularly from agricultural activities, tracks and roads.

These are just some of the important locally-focussed initiatives that have recently been taken. Whilst it is certainly good to see that we now have both acknowledgement that there is an issue, and proposals for how to address them, there is little doubt that the challenge will be in getting the recommended actions moving. Economic factors for farmers and other businesses will play a significant role in determining whether or how quickly actions are taken up. There is a distinct lack of appetite in government for new regulatory measures, so will economic incentives such as farm payments be sufficient? There is a particularly heavy onus on the Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative in delivering agricultural improvements, but this scheme is worryingly underfunded. Not only that but we have just lost our local Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer! Wessex Water are some way down the road with a programme of investment in phosphate stripping in sewage treatment works. Whilst some good reductions in effluent P levels have been achieved so far, further reductions will, we are told, be technically challenging.

So it's good to see that some progress is being made. However we have to recognise that the delivery of actual improvement may take some time. This is one area that I see an important role for the WFA, working alongside the Wessex Chalk Stream and Rivers Trust and other members of the Avon Catchment Partnership, to encourage, press, cajole, and keep the momentum going. Lastly, it's worth remembering that European legislation (the Water Framework Directive and Habitats Directive in particular) provide a vital lever in getting our government to invest in the protection of our rivers. There is little doubt that without the force of these two directives the future health of the rivers we love would look grim. It may be worth bearing that in mind in the context of the upcoming referendum on this country's future participation in the European Union. I hope that isn't too political!

Tom Davis