



Newsletter. Summer 2016.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON RECENT GOINGS-ON

In the last Newsletter I wondered if I'd been too 'political' in warning about the potential consequences for the protection of our rivers, arising from a decision to leave the EU. Well it's now reality. As far as I am concerned last Friday was a very sad day indeed. Quite apart from all the other economic, political, social and constitutional fallout, the biggest driver for the improvement and future protection of our river environment is now in serious jeopardy. Without the threat of infraction proceedings arising from non-compliance with, and failure to implement the Habitats Directive, the Water Framework Directive and other keystones of EU environmental legislation, we have worryingly little ammunition with which to press the government to act. With an economist as a DEFRA Minister and a Farming Minister who speaks of saving £2bn by doing away with "spirit crushing green directives", we are going to have to work very hard indeed, to prevent deterioration, let alone bring about the improvements to our rivers that we so clearly need. Perhaps the good news is that they are unlikely to be occupying the same positions by the time October comes. But who will take their places?

On a more local level, we had already been told that the implementation of the Avon catchment Diffuse Pollution Plan, which I wrote so reassuringly about in the last Newsletter, has been put on hold or "paused" as the official bulletin says. The originally planned £100k to kick this off has been cut to just £39k and even that will not be spent on the ground, but on "preparing a new business case". As if we needed any more navel gazing! Moreover, we understand that three months into the 2016/17 financial year the Environment Agency has still not had its budget allocation from DEFRA confirmed. How can these people work on such a basis? Was it that DEFRA were simply waiting in case environmental spending could be slashed following a Brexit result?

The Angling Trust has pledged to continue pressing for implementation of EU environmental legislation to protect fish and their habitats, and for sensible regulation and subsidy of agriculture to bring about improvements to the water environment. This is of course alongside the continuing work of Fish Legal. More power to their elbows. I encourage you to continue giving them your full support. S&TCUK and the Rivers Trusts will, no doubt, issue statements in due course. Certainly the invertebrate fingerprinting work being undertaken by S&TCUK and our local Wessex Chalk Streams & Rivers Trust, will be invaluable in providing us hard evidence of

pollution damage. Nick Measham gave us a fascinating talk on this at the recent Wild Trout Trust meeting at Langford. Again I encourage you to support it.

So, am I being too 'political' for the chairman of a sober and respected organisation like the WFA? Well, perhaps I am. But if there is one lesson I have learned from recent months and from the referendum campaign particularly it is that sober, objective experts and scientists need to speak a bit louder if they are to be heard above the din of political spin, and listened to.

Tight lines!

Tom

From the Hon. Sec.

Firstly, may I wish you all a very good summer's fishing. My own season started slowly and, although I have had great fun, I shall not be bragging about my catches. The best is yet to come, I hope!

Next, I would like to invite members to contribute to the Newsletter. It is YOUR Association and you are very welcome to use the Newsletter to ask questions, share experiences and discuss issues that concern you. Pictures, articles, letters, poetry – what you will – all welcome!

E-mail.

More seriously, a matter of communication. It would be very helpful to me if I had more members' e-mail addresses and if those that I have were up to date.

If you have not let the Association have your e-mail address or if you have changed your address, please contact me on:

rmale123@virginmedia.com

N.B. Please do not use the old @wiltshire fisheries e-mail address, as it is no longer functional.

Please let your fellow members know about this as well, in case they have not seen this Newsletter.

I am in the process of updating the Association membership list, and e-mail is the future – faster and more reliable than ever.

Security: The Association will respect your privacy and will *never* share your contact details with third parties.

The 2016 Annual Meeting.

We shall be meeting at Langford Lakes again this year, on Saturday October 8th. The business meeting will begin at 10.30 and, after a break for refreshments and a buffet, we will have a presentation from notable local angler Peter Hayes, who will, no doubt, be advocating a few more heresies and examples of thinking angling. The Association's officers will also report on their work during the season. If you have any experiences or suggestions that you would like to be included, please get in touch.

The committee feels that the Annual Meeting should be recognised as an important social event as well as a business meeting, and we hope that members will support it this year.

I will send out another reminder notice well before the meeting. If you know that you will be attending, please let me know.

The health of our chalkstreams.

There can't be many of us who will not have read or heard about the S&TCUK Riverfly Census, and the disturbing conclusions that came from it. The press release put it as follows:

For the first time our once pristine, gin-clear English chalkstreams and rivers have been put under the microscope in a national survey to compare and investigate whether they are as healthy as they should be. And the results are truly shocking. The 2015 Riverfly Census, undertaken by Salmon & Trout Conservation UK (S&TCUK) has identified that there were only 14 pristine, unimpacted sites out of a total of 120 sites sampled in the survey on rivers across England.

According to fisheries charity, Salmon & Trout Conservation UK, the threat to our rivers has moved from industrial pollution to a range of subtler but equally damaging impacts from sources such as agricultural and road run-off, poorly treated sewage, septic tanks and discharges from watercress and fish farms.

Although these forms of stress are less dramatic than fish-killing chemical spills, the long-term effects on flylife such as blue-winged olives are equally profound.

Paul Knight, Chief Executive of S&TCUK explains, "Most of the rivers we analysed were impacted to some extent, although the chalk rivers were the worst. England's 200 or so chalkstreams form about 85% of the world's total stock of this richly diverse and complex habitat. Almost all of them are in a dismal state of decline. Plants, insects, fish, mammals and bird-life are suffering as a result of the loss of fly life, which plays a crucial role in the aquatic food chain. Basically lose your fly life and you will lose many other important species too."

Much public hand-wringing, articles in the Times, and a sense of surprise amongst some who should really have known better, that things have got so bad.

One or two people have spoken out to disagree with what they see as overly negative conclusions, arguing that the chalkstreams are still basically healthy and may be undergoing natural cyclic changes. We know that anglers' reports of poor hatches and declining fly life go back to the 19th century, and probably further than that, but we must bear in mind that the evidence that S&TCUK have assembled is good science, based on well tested models and sound samples. We should never discount careful observation, it can be our best evidence in some cases, but good science is powerful, and even the EA admits that 83% of our rivers, many chalkstreams among them, fail to meet the criteria for "Good ecological condition" set out in the Water Framework Directive.

Paul Knight wrote:

“The Water Framework Directive’s measure of water quality struggles to capture the often combined impacts that pollution is having on the invertebrate life in our rivers. The biometric fingerprinting we used in the Census was like examining these systems with a microscope rather than a magnifying glass and, significantly, the results showed that water quality is often insufficient to sustain the life that our target rivers historically supported.”



This winterbourne *looks* pristine, but does it have good ecological status?

So, are the chalk streams dying? I think not. Comfortingly, the Wiltshire Avon sites provided some of the highest scores in the initial S&TCUK Census. If some of our

rivers are looking a bit ill, then the opportunity for good diagnosis, and to use hard data to pressure those who have to power to improve regulation and enforcement is here.

S&TCUK plan to continue their Census on other rivers, and those who wish to carry out their own invertebrate fingerprinting exercise can now do so, with the aid of a training program and a new mobile App that allows precision measurement of river pollution. “Citizen Science” is coming of age fast!

The national 2015 Riverfly Census led to the development of this innovative mobile App, which will help users to monitor invertebrate populations in their own rivers and identify potential pollution threats.

Developed by Salmon & Trout Conservation UK (S&TC UK) in conjunction with Salisbury & District Angling Club, this new App uses high quality digital images provided by Dr. Cyril Bennett MBE.

Dr. Cyril Bennett MBE, said, “If we are going to look after our rivers then we need to do it ourselves, and to do that we have to know our bit of river better than anyone else. Being able to identify and record the invertebrate species expected at our site enables us to keep a closer watch on water quality.”

This important initiative builds on the crucial foundation work carried out by the Wessex Chalk Streams and Rivers Trust, who began the sampling process and collated the existing EA data from earlier years.

The App is available to purchase by all those with an interest in the status of our rivers, particularly those keen to undertake more detailed studies relating to river invertebrates and the specific threats they face through human pressures. However, to ensure robustness of data and to comply with the overall ethos of the Riverfly Census, training of monitors and initial benchmarking of the river is essential. Andreas Topintzis from Salisbury & District Angling Club, said, “The App development is a big milestone for our club. Together with the species identification course and subsequent benchmarking of our rivers, it has enabled our club to understand much better the current state of the fly populations and hence the quality of the waters we fish. It is a powerful tool, which can be used to drive evidence-based conversations, versus opinions. We see it as an absolute must for clubs, syndicates, riparian owners and all those who care about their waters.”

The cost of the App is £29.99 and is available for both Android and Apple devices and can be downloaded from the special website together with information on river profiling and details of training courses. More information can be obtained from: www.riverinvertebratarvae.co.uk.

Some more good news;

A three year grant from the John Ellerman Foundation has enabled leading fisheries charity, Salmon & Trout Conservation UK (S&TC UK) to strengthen its science team.

This newly created post will help to further drive forward its ongoing campaign to clean up our rivers and precious chalkstreams.

Lauren Mattingley, who is the new scientific assistant with S&TC UK based in Fordingbridge will support the research work of both Dr Janina Gray, as well as Nick Measham, who is overseeing the national Riverfly Census, which reported the shocking state of our rivers and chalkstreams this year.

Lauren, who achieved an MSc in Applied Marine and Fisheries Ecology from the University of Aberdeen, is a rising star in fisheries research, having used science to encourage actions that reduce anthropogenic pressures on charismatic marine species, such as dolphins. She recently played a significant role in shaping fisheries policy based on her research to improve the management of aquatic resources in northwest Sri Lanka. She is well qualified to help provide the scientific evidence and data needed to support S&TC UK's role in protecting our freshwaters, fish stocks and wildlife from the increasing human pressures from abstraction, fish farming, sewage treatment works and diffuse pollution from agriculture.

Lauren Mattingley, is equally delighted to be joining S&TC UK. She said, "Science roles of this nature are rare and I am therefore thrilled to join the team. Already I have found serious gaps in the quality of data provided by Government agencies, and it is shocking that important policy decisions are being based on inconsistent and inferior data. This needs to change, which is why the research carried out by S&TC UK is so vital to gauge the extent of the problems we are facing and to identify workable solutions to restore degraded watercourses to their pristine condition."

Perhaps we can all look forward with some optimism towards a period of analysis and diagnosis that will lead to action at national level to reduce the stressors on our river systems. Join in the process, support the Census in whatever ways you can, and we may see some real improvements yet!

Let me know if you decide to get started or if you have questions. Your contributions to future Newsletters would be very welcome on this or any other relevant topic.

Chalk stream watermeadows receive Lottery funding

Chalk stream anglers spend a lot of their time amongst Watermeadows, but not all of us are aware of the purpose and historical significance of these unique and artificial landscapes. Now, thanks to a grant of £28,900 from the Heritage Lottery Fund and funding from Wiltshire Council, the historically and ecologically unique watermeadow systems of the Wylde Valley are to be the subject of an historical research and public awareness project

Local archaeologist, historian and angler Mike Heaton, who is leading the project, said, "*This is a wonderful opportunity to engage local people and communities such as anglers in the investigation and documentation of this unique heritage. and help them to understand and appreciate the historical features and unique habitat*".

The Watermeadows of the River Wylye, which cover the whole of the flood plain between Kingston Deverill and Wilton, were created in the 17th century as the first of an extensive system of precisely engineered water channels and meadows that eventually extended throughout the river valleys of southern England. They increased agricultural yields by a factor of five and provided the food and hard cash that underpinned the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century. They are unique to England and form one of the largest works of civil engineering of the pre-Modern world.

The type of watermeadows that cover the valley floors of southern England – known as ‘bedwork’ systems’ - harness the natural characteristics of the spring water of the chalk aquifers that underlie them. The spring water flows to the surface in the winter at a temperature of c. 5°C above the normal air temperature – and especially so during the ‘Little Ice Age’ that affected northern Europe in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries - warming the ground, promoting early growth of the grass and protecting it from frost, as well as fertilizing the soil.

The project will collate existing historical research into the watermeadows of the River Wylye, including transcription of interviews with the last generation of ‘floaters’; engage the public in the identification of watermeadow systems and their distinctive features; and identify the best sites for future archaeological investigation of how the watermeadows were created and operated. It is hoped that a programme of archaeological investigation involving aerial photography, LiDAR survey, geophysics and excavation will form a second stage of the project in the future. A ‘Facebook’ page has been set-up, from which the public can download a ‘spotters guide’ and to which members of the public are invited to upload their own photographs of watermeadow features.

Anyone who would like to know more about the project please contact Mike on

watermeadows@hotmail.com

Some members will have seen an unfortunate article in the Salisbury Journal that implied that all river walks are rights of way. Our Chairman, Tom Davis has addressed this issue and clarified the matter.