

# What's Beane Happening?

The newsletter of The River Beane Restoration Association  
Issue No 35 Spring 2022



## Welcome

The picture to the left (from *Marcella Randall*) shows how the Environment Agency together with Hertfordshire County Council has continued to improve conditions around the breach site at Waterford. In March the EA team strengthened the bank and the adjoining footpath.

In our last issue we spoke about the importance of winter recharge. After a very dry January we had been hoping for a wet February –

our prayers were answered. As a result, despite drought conditions in April, the river is still flowing strongly along its most degraded stretch past Aston. The pictures to the right show there is still a narrow, clear fast flowing channel through the reeds and a gravelly bottom. River fly monitoring at Aston Ford in April returned one of the best ever scores for the location which is very encouraging. Fingers crossed for continued flow over the summer.

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## Let there be Light! From Dave Standing

Work has been going on to remove the overgrown tree canopy over the river Beane in Walkern from behind the allotments upstream to Winters Lane bridge. The work has been organised by the River Beane Restoration Association (RBRA) and kindly sponsored by Affinity Water. Our thanks go to the Parish Council and Walkern Hall for giving their permission as land owners.

This clearance work means that sunlight can now reach the water encouraging plants to grow on the exposed banks and invertebrates to thrive in the bed of the river, thus improving the biodiversity. We hope to carry out similar projects next winter.

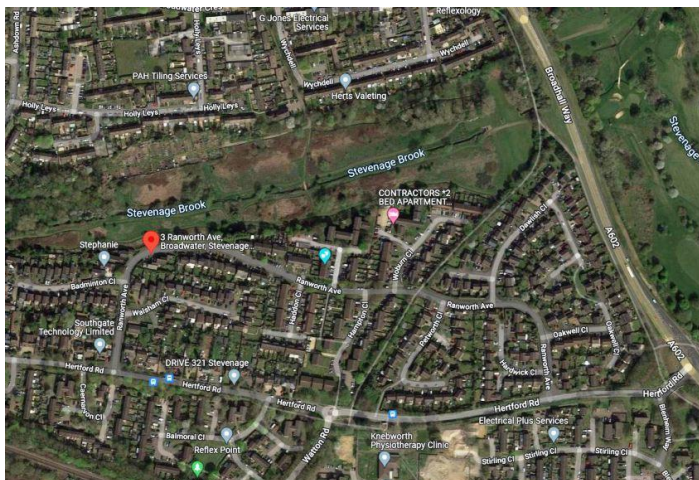


*This stretch of river by Aston Ford was completely covered with reed last summer and as a result it silted up. Only one of the target species for monitoring remained in the shallow water – fresh water shrimp. As you can see, a fast flowing narrow channel and gravelly bottom have returned and fresh water shrimp has been joined by cased caddis and olive baetidae to produce one of the best ever monitoring scores for the location.*

*Above - the gravelly bottom at Aston Ford which is needed to encourage river fly and fish to spawn.*



## Public Field trip to Wychdell Flood Storage Reservoir



8SL where there are steps down to the brook at the spot marked on the attached map.

The RBRA are holding a presentation at Wychdell on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> May at 10.30am. The theme of the presentation is Non-Native Invasive Species, in particular how the RBRA is planning work parties to control the spread of Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed. We hope to actually pull up some balsam. Everyone is welcome, the talk is free of charge and will last approximately an hour. Wychdell can be found off Ranworth Avenue SG2



*Himalayan Balsam, an invasive species that drives out native plants and leads to the erosion of river banks in winter. Shame, it looks beautiful, but looks can be deceptive!*

## The RBRA 30 Years On from Marcella Randall

Last year the RBRA passed its 30th anniversary. But in 2021 there were few opportunities to celebrate that landmark, of course. So perhaps now we can reflect on some successes as well as look ahead to new projects and ways of dealing with the constant challenges.

Under the leadership of our former Chairman, Dave Stimpson, for much of that time, the first priority for the RBRA was to campaign to restore more flow in the river, where its northern reaches frequently ran dry. So a major milestone was reached in 2018 when Affinity Water reduced its abstraction operation at Whitehall pumping station by 90%. Replenishing underground aquifers takes time, and the local geological conditions are complex, but we are still hopeful that flows will improve, especially in the upper Beane.

As the RBRA's membership increased, our partners' input also grew and they were key players in the expanding agenda around chalk stream restoration. As well as Affinity Water, the EA and Herts County Council's countryside team, it was the role of Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust which was so influential. The whole of the upper Lea catchment came under their remit and they appointed a dedicated rivers officer. They even added a new nature reserve at Beane Marsh, on the Beane! Within this broader catchment partnership the RBRA could link up with other local chalk stream campaigns, as well as benefit from the HMWT's expertise and advice. When our ground-breaking film premiered to a large audience at the Hertford Theatre in 2014, we increased our support from the community, which already included some Hertfordshire MPs. These politicians then formed an APPG group in Parliament so that chalk streams became an important element in debates within the wider environmental agenda.

More recently the EA has teamed up with the County Council to remove or bypass some of the weirs along the Beane. This work is still in progress, but already there are visible improvements to the health of the river. Another whole section of its original course has been restored at Woodhall Park, with Affinity Water a major supporter for the estate's historic project.

Demands for cleaner water and growing awareness of our degraded biodiversity have now reached a much wider audience in the UK. The RBRA can be proud to have been part of that movement. This passion to keep campaigning will continue and we will maintain our strong record of, for example, monitoring ground water levels and sampling for river fly species. We surveyed the whole river channel in 2018 with the hope of reintroducing critically endangered water voles and this gave us much useful data about the condition of the Beane. We have also increased our capacity to deal with invasive species along the river and with testing water quality. Engaging with new communities, including with local schools, will be a priority in the coming months as will providing information to the public on the footpaths, bridges, fords and in the villages along our beautiful river. We are always, of course, eager to attract new members and volunteers so please get in touch if you would like to be involved.

**Rosemary Cooper**  
(A message from Malcolm Hadley, committee member)

*Rosemary Cooper was an old member of the Association - she has just passed away. It was through this lady I was introduced to the RBRA. Our condolences go to her friends and family.*



*The pictures above show filming for the RBRA's award winning film in 2014, and John Waite interviewing Charlie Bell, the Living Rivers officer at the time, for Radio 4's 'Face the Facts' in 2013.*

## Bijou the Kingfisher is Nesting Again!

From Dave Standing

A pair of Kingfishers have been nesting in the bank of the upper Beane and are back again this year. The female has been given the nickname 'Bijou'. They are nesting in a steep bank, the male takes up a lookout position on a branch overlooking the nest site to protect the female. I'm not sure if they have eggs/young but time will tell but they are a wonderful sight.

## Presentations

The RBRA, as part of its environment improvement programme is considering offering a series of presentations about its work. We are happy to offer a presentation to any organization or school. If you are interested can you please contact Dave Standing: [rbra.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:rbra.secretary@gmail.com) or phone: 01438 861248.



Free stock photo (not Bijou)

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