

What's Beane Happening?

The newsletter of The River Beane Restoration Association
Issue No 16 Autumn 2017



Welcome



Yes, it's those celebrity, BBC water voles again. A group of volunteers from the RBRA have been working hard to provide them with a new luxury home in the Beane Valley, but more of that later.

The big news from this summer is that despite several months of average rainfall it has not been enough to counteract the 12 months of well below average rainfall which came before, therefore we are still in the midst of a drought. Although there has been no hosepipe ban, the

environmental impact has been significant with stretches of the upper Beane remaining dry. Monitoring has shown that reducing the abstraction by 90% which we reported in our last news letter had an almost immediate impact on the water level in the lower river (Watton-at-Stone to Hertford) and the level of the aquifer in the upper river, even as far as Aston Ford where there is another small pumping station. However, the river was already in such a poor state that water has not started flowing again yet. It may take a while, but we are still optimistic that without the excessive abstraction we will see a more stable flow of water in years to come once the river has recovered from its current state.

The Big Project

Wouldn't it be great if once again we could see water voles along the river Beane. It's been over 20 years since they were last seen along the river. The Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) is championing the water vole in its current 5 year plan, and it is putting its faith in the people of the Valley to host the reintroduction of this iconic river mammal.

Before that can happen we have to know that the river is fit to welcome Ratty and his mates. At the moment this involves 2 major pieces of work.

1. We have to show that the invasive mink is under control. This is being monitored by using a dozen mink rafts which have been set up along the river. Mink are nosy creatures and will always investigate a raft if it comes across one. When it does it will leave foot prints behind, then we know to set up a trap so the animal can be caught and destroyed humanly. If anyone sees a mink along the Beane please let us know through the RBRA web site.

2. The river is being surveyed to find out if the vegetation and the structure of the river bank is water vole friendly. This is known as a River Corridor Survey and is being carried out by a team of 12 volunteers. The river and the other water channels in the valley have been divided into about 50 half kilometre reaches, each with its own large scale map. The surveyors walk the river bank noting the vegetation types and the shape of the banks and recording them on the maps.

This information will be fed back to HMWT for analysis. The results may show that some of the river is not suitable for the voles. We are already beginning to prepare for the possible planting up of the poorer stretches to improve the habitat.

So watch this space, your valley may need you in the not too distant future to get things ship shape for Ratty's return.

In this Issue

- News about the Water Vole project
- Information on the drought from Affinity Water
- 2018 calendar photos
- A new secretary
- Date of the next meeting



Above - Some of the volunteers who have been surveying the river this summer.
Below - Bob Thorton in action. He is our link with HMWT and has put in an exceptional amount of work coordinating the volunteers.



Concern about low rainfall over the past year

Early in August, Affinity Water circulated their Water resources update which we copied to our members for information. With Affinity Water's permission, we have reproduced extracts from their update with the diagrams below.

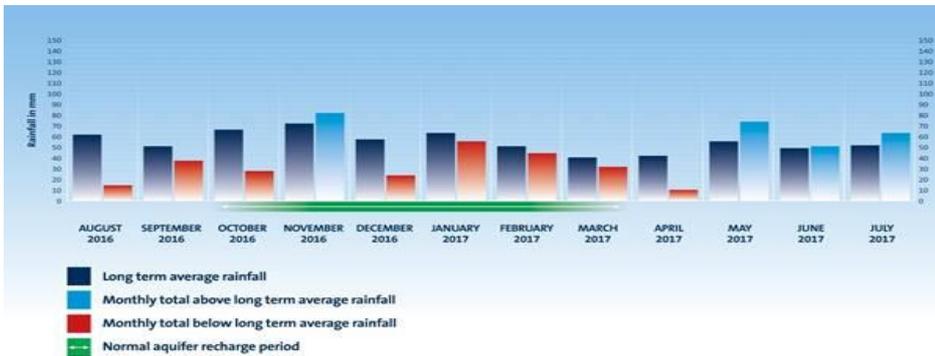
Since July 2016 there has been low rainfall and the water in the aquifers (porous rock where groundwater is stored) and rivers that are used to supply your water has dropped below average. This is important because the water we supply to you comes from underground sources and aquifers that usually only fill up from rainfall during autumn and winter when there is less plant growth and evaporation.

We welcomed the rainfall in May, June and July. This benefited the environment and helped reduce the demand for water. However, this was limited in comparison to the low rainfall over the last 12 months, particularly during the autumn and winter recharge season.

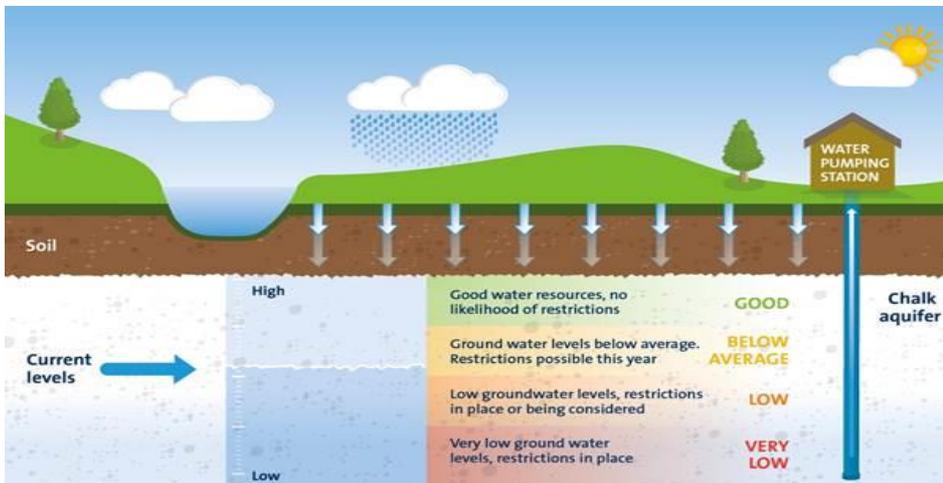
We continue to monitor the situation closely with clear plans in place to make sure we're fully prepared, should the dry weather continue through the autumn and next winter.

In June, Affinity launched their 'Keep Track of the Tap' campaign to ensure customers have the advice and practical help needed to save water. Affinity delivered their 'Keep Track of the Tap' leaflet to approximately 1.7 million households during July. This led to a substantial increase in water saving device orders and visits to their save water web page.

Here is a graph showing the average rainfall for the past year.



Here is a diagram showing current groundwater levels



The message from Affinity Water is that they are working to reduce leakage and have made significant progress. They are beating industry targets, but if we have a dry autumn and winter, then restrictions may be needed to further conserve water.

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2018 Calendar



Now is the time to start sending your photos for the 2018 calendar. Or, if you haven't taken any yet, why not have a go. Send to dave@davestimpson.com. Many thanks.

A new secretary

After very many years as secretary, **Ian Knight**, one of the original members of the RBRA, has decided to step down for a well earned rest. Our grateful thanks to him for all his hard work, enthusiasm, perseverance, and attention to detail, which has been a big factor in our successful campaign to reduce abstraction at the Whitehall pumping station. His role will now be filled by Philip Hewitt (*not the editor of this news letter*) and he has already taken to the job like a duck to water (*if you'll pardon the river reference*).

Date of next meeting

Tues. 8.00pm, 19th September in the Methodist Church Hall, Watton-at-Stone.