

# What's Beane Happening?

The newsletter of The River Beane Restoration Association  
Issue No 21 • Autumn 2018



## Welcome



This issue of the news letter is a mixture of good news and not so good news. We have had a glorious autumn, and the picture on the left shows yours truly taking advantage of a lovely September day surveying the river as it flows past Walkern. The picture was taken by my name sake, Philip Hewitt, who was my partner for the exercise. *Why does the river flow here but not past Aston or Whitehall Farm?* Read on if you want the answer.

Of course, the lovely weather has not helped the river as we have now had well over two years of below average rain fall. However, the really excellent news is that river fly monitoring has shown the health of the lower river is improving as the flow is being maintained due to the reduction in abstraction at Whitehall. Latest results from Stapleford show the river to be on a par with the Mimram, our sister river that flows down to

Hertford through Welwyn, a river that has always been in a better state of health. This improvement in river fly numbers and diversity is something to be celebrated as it is an essential part of the food chain in the river. And even more good news, our 2019 calendar (see picture right) will be available to purchase at our **next meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> November, 8.00pm at Watton at Stone Methodist Church hall.** Price £6 assuming local delivery.

## Why is there no water in the river from Aston End to Whitehall?

At the Catchment Partnership Meeting on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October Alessandro Marsli of Affinity Water presented a study into the water levels in the Beane now that abstraction has been reduced by 90% at the Whitehall pump station. We were particularly interested, not least because the ground water levels have increased substantially, and are now about the highest levels we have seen, but the river in the area of the pump station remains dry. Alessandro's figures agree with our own findings.

Alessandro explained that Affinity had taken core samples in the field near the Whitehall pump station. These revealed that there was a layer of clay, sand, gravel etc above the chalk in that location which prevented ground water emerging from the chalk, or surface water draining into it. Although the chalk had plenty of water in it, it could not escape into springs near Whitehall. The water runs through the chalk strata and surfaces in springs near Watton as they are nearer the surface. In effect the river goes below ground between Walkern and Aston End and emerges through springs towards the southern end of Watton. Therefore, the lower river is benefitting from increased flows but the upper river still needs a change in the weather! So it's a mixture of good and bad news and there is clearly a need to give the river several years to settle down before we see the full benefit of the reduction in abstraction and the enhancements being carried out by Affinity Water.

## In this Issue

- Good news about the health of the lower river
- The dry stretch explained
- 2019 calendars on sale by the end of month
- Water vole update
- River basin management plans to be updated



## Could Ratty be coming home?

A river corridor survey has been carried out along the River Beane. This citizen science project has been carried out by a trained group of RBRA volunteers under the tutelage of Martin Ketcher and Alex Waechter of the HMWT. The aim of the survey is to find out how well suited the river is to the reintroduction of water voles.

The survey involved recording the types of herbaceous and woody vegetation, the shading effects of trees, the form of the bank, the land use along the river banks and a number of other parameters. In total there are 5 parameters for each bank and 3 for the channel. These parameters were drawn symbolically, in the field, on to a total of 70 scaled sketch maps which cover the river and all its accompanying channels. ( See the picture at the head of this news letter and a copy of a sketch map showing 0.5km of one of the channels on the Goldings Estate near Hertford which is shown on the right.) The information is now being loaded on to QGIS mapping software. This then gives rise to a numerical score from -3 to +3 according to its ecological value in a potential water vole friendly habitat. The results can be seen on a map or a photographic aerial view of the river in the form of a green, orange or red line, according to the suitability of that section of the river for water vole reintroduction (Green = positive; orange = neutral; red = negative).



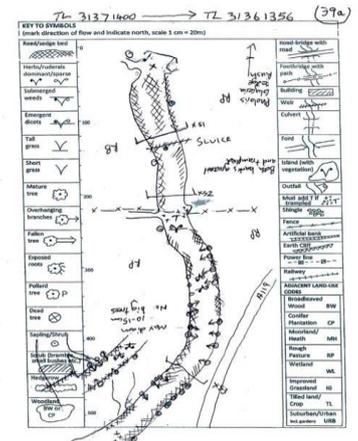
The super model water vole who featured in an earlier issue.



The photo on the left shows the woody plant record for the sketch map channel and a parallel channel.

RBRA volunteers have completed all the sketch maps and the data is being uploaded for HMWT by Bob and Anthea Thornton. As soon as this is complete we will have an overview of the suitability of the river for water vole reintroduction. Decisions can also be taken about work to enhance the suitability of some 'orange

sections'. For example, clearing overhanging tree growth to allow more light through to the river, this in turn will encourage essential vegetation. We hope to have more news by the next news letter.



One of the 70 sketch maps completed by volunteers

## River Basin Management plans are to be updated

Also at the catchment partnership meeting on the 23<sup>rd</sup> October Rob Fox of the Environment Agency explained that the river basin management plans were first published in February 2016 and have now to be updated by end of 2021. There will be three consultations to help shape future plans, the first of which is Working Together. This opened in June 2018 and closes in December 2018. Follow this link to find out more. <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/environment-and-business/working-together/>

Photographs from the meeting can be seen on the right with representatives from The Environment Agency, Affinity Water, HMWT, and the RBRA



Don't forget our next meeting is on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> November at 8.00pm in Watton at Stone Methodist Church Hall. - 2019 calendars will be on sale.

RBRA Chairman: Dave Stimpson  
Secretary: Philip Hewitt  
River Wardens: Bob Thornton  
Editor: Philip Hewitt  
Contact e-mail: office@davestimpson.com

[www.riverbeane.org.uk](http://www.riverbeane.org.uk)  
[www.facebook.com/riverbeane](https://www.facebook.com/riverbeane)  
<https://twitter.com/riverbeane>