

What's Beane Happening?

The newsletter of The River Beane Restoration Association
Issue No 26 • Spring 2020



Welcome

Our last issue was dominated by the drought, the dry upper river, and low flows. Affinity water were threatening a hose pipe ban come the Spring if we didn't have a really wet winter with aquifer levels set to plummet to a record low in the summer. I don't need to tell you that a wet winter is exactly what we got. Far too wet for people in some parts of the country who have experienced the misery of dreadful flooding. Unfortunately, in our area, so much of the water has been

wasted because we don't have any reservoirs. The picture above was taken at Aston (Stony) Ford in December, a week later the river was dry again, however, it kept on raining and currently the aquifer has risen to its 'normal' level and the upper river is flowing consistently once again. But we can't just heave a sigh of relief and think that the problem is solved. Our chairman, Dave Stimpson, takes up the story.

Widespread concern about water supplies and the environment

At the end of 2019 a new industry wide umbrella organization, Water Resource South East started. This is an alliance of six water companies, government departments, regulators, and others such as WWF. It is trying for the first time to develop regional schemes, not just local ones as previously. There is recognition that existing policies and actions have not worked for the environment leaving many rivers dried up.

At our meeting on 24 February in Watton at Stone we were pleased to welcome Ellie Powers from our own water company, Affinity Water, who gave us a presentation on the latest draft **Water Resources Management Plan** (affinitywater.co.uk search **WRMP**) effective from 2020 to 2080, a 60 year timescale. Although this was a draft, Affinity Water expects it to be adopted shortly by OFWAT, the water industry regulator. The WRMP sets out: how much water will be needed in this period; where it will come from; the effect of population growth and climate change; the targets for water consumption which are lower than today's level; abstraction reductions and habitat improvements, especially to chalk streams.

We acknowledge and are pleased about the improvements to the Beane catchment and the promise not to increase abstraction again in the future. However, we are concerned that the overall plan seems to be too good to be achievable. Reduced per head consumption is factored into the plan but there is presently no evidence on how this can be achieved. It is now recognized that there is not enough water in the catchment and for the first time the company will be allowed to import water from elsewhere. This will include Grafham Water but that won't be sufficient and currently no other options exist. The Abingdon Reservoir has been talked about for 20 years, it has still not been started and will take years to build. There are no reservoirs in existence at the moment. There is a suggestion that water could be moved down the country via canals, but no firm proposals, so in the short to medium term almost all the water will come from aquifers.

There is little publicity about the need to use less water and an over reliance on metering which has small effect. There are no proposals for rain water harvesting, grey water recycling or differential pricing. OFWAT have demanded price reductions which will possibly encourage more consumption. We are skeptical about these plans.

In this Issue

- The drought breaks!
- Lack of water in the environment
- Waterford's redundant weirs and a drop in river level
- Riverfly monitoring
- Chalk Aquifer Alliance?
- Encouraging news about water voles!

The pictures below show the Beane at Whitehall where the river is flowing once again. The lower picture shows the controversial pipes under the road which need to be enlarged to allow the passage of fish.



Waterford's Redundant Weirs



There have been plans for some of the weirs along the lower stretches of the Beane to have 'by-passes' constructed so that fish can travel along the river more easily. Older weir structures create barriers to various species of fish and limit their life chances and thus, their numbers.

Several weirs on Hertford's rivers, including two on the Beane, have been earmarked for such improvements in a

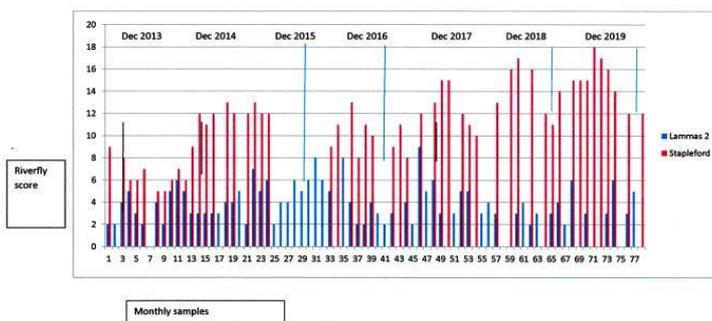
partnership project between the Environment Agency and Hertfordshire County Council. A similar scheme for Waterford, along the Marsh, has also been under discussion over the last two years. But since these plans were announced, a major breach has developed at the 'Horseshoe Weir' at the southern end of Waterford Marsh close to the main A119 road bridge. Water has forced its way through new gaps in the bank and there is no flow over the weir itself. (In the picture above the area where pebbles have collected is where the gaps have appeared in the bank) River levels have been drastically reduced along a substantial section of the Beane and the water channels have changed noticeably.

Stapleford Parish Council has been in discussion with both the EA and the County Council about this problem and both authorities have visited the area and are monitoring the situation. The Parish Council own most of the land along the Marsh but not this section where two channels then diverge under the road into Goldings estate. Nevertheless they are keen to see a resolution to the problem and are liaising with the authorities on a continual basis. Many local people have expressed major concerns about the state of the river around the weir, some even asking if this 'new' water course could pose any sort of hazard, and all are hoping to see a resolution to the issue in the near future.

Riverfly Monitoring on the Beane

We have been running the Anglers Riverfly Monitoring Initiative (ARMI) on the River Beane for over 6 years. This nationwide scheme has been developed over many years as a reliable tool for monitoring the health of our rivers. The assessment is made by counting the numbers of 8 key groups of invertebrate organisms which play an important role in the ecology of a river and which are dependent on the quality of the water that flows. 7 of the key groups are the aquatic larvae of various mayflies, caddis flies and stoneflies with gammarus (freshwater shrimps) completing the list.

The Beane riverfly group currently has 10 active monitors sampling at 9 sites along the river at monthly intervals. Each sample is sorted, counted and given a score. The chart below shows sample scores for 2 sites collected over the last 6.5 years. It shows a marked difference between the two locations, Watton Lammas and Stapleford, which shows consistently 'better' and improving scores. This can possibly be accounted for by the difference in the flow of water at the two sites.



Links with other river groups

In our last issue we reported that Oliver Heald, one of our local MPs was keen for all the various river groups to work together on a unified campaign. Members from a variety of different groups attended our last open meeting and subsequently a meeting has been arranged to discuss forming a **Chalk Aquifer Alliance**. Although this meeting has had to be delayed due to covid19 the organizers still hope to make progress via an email survey of opinion.

Encouraging water vole news

At the River Lea Catchment conference on 22nd January we heard from Tim Hill, HMWT, that a funder has been found to support the reintroduction of water voles on the lower Beane. He stated that 2 years of work by RBRA volunteers couldn't be wasted and that 63% of the area surveyed was positive habitat. The next step is to identify stretches of river that can be improved to link together some of the positive areas to make a continuous stretch of positive environment.

Expect more news over the coming months!

Mayfly and cased caddis fly larvae and adults



New opportunities to observe the development of an aquatic habitat

Following recent rechanneling of parts of the river on the Woodhall Estate there are fresh opportunities for new monitors. A one day training course is taking place on 28th March. Contact Bob if you are interested at antheaandbob@hotmail.com. We would like to thank river monitors past and present - Anthea, Anna, Bob, Ian, Douglas, Dave, Lydia, Jan, Julie, Mick, Malcolm, Philip, Peter E, Peter W, Steve & Richard.

RBRA Chairman: Dave Stimpson
 Secretary: David Standing
 River Wardens: Bob Thornton
 Editor: Philip Hewett
 Contact e-mail: rbrasecretary@gmail.com

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