

# What's Beane Happening?

The newsletter of The River Beane Restoration Association  
Issue No 27 Summer 2020



## Welcome

In our Spring issue we celebrated the fact that, after an exceptionally wet winter, the drought had broken and the river was flowing again along its full length... There followed the driest April and May on record! Once again the upper river struggled from Aston (Stony) Ford down to Frogmore. *But peculiarities were noticed.* Read more about this and the breach in the bank at Horse Shoe Falls later in the news letter. At least the river is flowing again through Walkern. The picture on the left was taken during April along the

footpath to Walkern from Aston Ford. Here a huge willow bough has collapsed forming a spectacular archway over the river with fresh 'trees' growing straight up from it in mid air!

## Corona Virus and our AGM

Our last newsletter came out in March just before the Corona Virus lockdown. Like everyone else, we had no idea this would happen, or the effect it would have. Our regular borehole dipping activity stopped and we haven't been able to have any meetings. June is usually when we have our AGM, but this can't take place at present. We will be in touch when we can, however, we are now gradually starting our activities again in line with government guidance.

## BBC Look East

A BBC Look East news item on 29<sup>th</sup> May reported on water supplies in the region including an interview with Chairman Dave recorded at Whitehall Ford. This was heavily edited so not much local content was included in the broadcast version, but all publicity is useful.

## Borehole Dipping and River Status

We stopped borehole dipping in April to comply with Gov. Covid19 regulations. Thanks to Alesandro Marsili of Affinity Water we will complete our database with data from the Affinity Water electronic monitoring programme. With the regulations changing on June 1st, we 'snuck' in a borehole reading for May, albeit a few days late. A small reduction in water table levels during April & May is evident; perhaps not surprising given the total absence of rainfall this last month. However, the levels are still way above those recorded in December 2019. The EA are reporting normally restored local aquifers too. The biggest dip level reduction is evident in the immediate vicinity of the pumping station at Aston Ford, where abstraction has continued at pre-April 2017 levels. River status reflects this too, as some significant flow continues in the upper stretches, but disappears from downstream of Aston Ford until re-starting at Frogmore.

### **Peculiar Flow at Aston Ford**

The picture on the right was taken on 14.4.20 a few hundred yards up river from Aston Ford. On the same day the pool at the ford was completely dry! Even stranger - two days later the pool was full again and the river continued to flow downstream! Later in the month the pool dried up once more but this time it did not return. The river continues to flow until it is a short distance away from the ford!

## In this Issue

- Peculiar flow at Aston Ford
- A breach in the bank at Horseshoe Falls
- Borehole dipping restarts
- River fly monitoring
- Chalk Aquifer Alliance
- Some creatures to spot on a walk along the Beane
- Giant hogweed



The picture above shows the river flowing strongly from Walkern down past the bridge at Aston End. Next stop Aston Ford (below). Sadly, we do mean 'stop'.



## Problems at Waterford Weir

We reported the problems at Horseshoe Falls at Waterford in our last issue. Part of the river bank has collapsed which allows the river to bypass the weir which in turn has led to a reduced water level on the marsh behind the weir. There is no threat of flooding. This is affecting the marsh itself and Stapleford Parish Council, who own the marsh, are concerned. The ownership of the collapsed bank isn't known and can't be found. This is important because, in law, the owner is responsible for it.

RBRA has been in touch with the Environment Agency who has sent us guidelines for action under these circumstances. Since our last report, a local Molewood residents group has been active in trying to find a practical solution to the problem and we have sent them the EA advice which we obtained. They are hopeful that an acceptable resolution can be implemented shortly.

## River Fly Monitoring

Riverfly sampling was suspended during March and April and given the go ahead again in late May. The river is currently flowing very well from Watton at Stone downstream to Hertford, receiving water from Stevenage Brook and the springs which occur in the river channel along this section of the river. Those springs benefit from the reduced abstraction at Whitehall. The table below compares a few sites this year with the same time last year. A score over 20 is an excellent indicator for a river. Our sites are showing good consistency but only Stapleford comes close to the 'excellent' standard.

Sites	May/June 2020	May/June 2019
Wychdell Stevenage	4	5
Lammas Watton at Stone	7	8
Stapleford	17	18
Bulls Mill	10	10
Waterford	13	13

## Chalk Aquifer Alliance

Successive governments have promised to 'safeguard' and indeed 'improve' the condition of the country's rare chalk streams, in this they appear to have failed. This has led to the formation of numerous local groups such as the RBRA with the aim of championing their local chalk stream. There have been two debates in the House of Commons, and although there have been some notable successes, we still see over abstraction and pollution of our rivers.

In an attempt to give ourselves a bigger/louder voice several local river groups are trying to form, 'The Chalk Aquifer Alliance'. So far we have interest from: The River Beane Restoration Association, The River Hiz Conservation Group, The Mimran Group at Whitwell, The Ver Valley Society, The Friends of Rib and Quin, The Revlvel Association and The Bury Water meadows Group covering the Lark and Linnet in Bury St Edmonds. We hope that by working together under a single charter we can have more influence with our Politicians as they ultimately set the agenda for the Environment Agency and water companies.

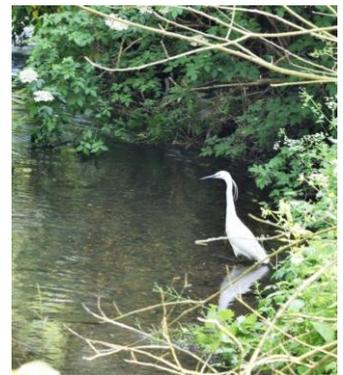
If you are interested or know anyone involved with a group trying to protect a chalk stream and would like to get involved with the Alliance or would like more details please contact me at [rbra.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:rbra.secretary@gmail.com). Hopefully we will be able share more news in future issues of 'What's Beane Happening'.

### A walk along the river

The following photos show a little of what you might spot if you take a walk along the Beane this summer. They were taken by Bob Thornton near Waterford.



Damselfly



Egret



Mullane Moth Larvae



Giant Hogweed (see below)

**Giant Hogweed – Don't Touch – Dangerous!** One thing you don't want to come across on your walk along the river is giant hog weed! Fortunately Bob Thornton and Dave Ashby have been trained to spray and deal with it. Contact with the skin produces very unpleasant blisters which become worse while they are exposed to light. Heavy infestations have been dealt with (among other places but not actually on the Beane) on Stevenage Brook opposite the Three Horseshoes and the golf course. For more information CTRL + click <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCTB5Ln1Ego>. If you suspect you have spotted it contact an RBRA member or use the e-mail below.

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