

What's Beane Happening?

The newsletter of The River Beane Restoration Association
Issue No 30 Spring 2021



Welcome

This beautiful picture of a swan on its nest was taken by Sarah Perry (*Living Rivers Officer HMWT*) at the new Beane Marsh nature reserve. More about that later, but a lovely picture to start our Spring newsletter. And more good news, the river is flowing again between Walkern and the junction with Stevenage Brook, something that hasn't happened for some years. With the reduction in abstraction we hope it will continue. Again more on that later together with

encouraging results from River Fly monitoring. As we come out of lockdown many activities are resuming, the new committee is working well, and a group of a dozen people has been established to control invasive species (see pictures to the right of *Himalayan Balsam* and *Giant Hog Weed*). The future has never 'Beane' brighter (*sorry about the pun!*).

Rainfall and the water table

The situation at Whitehall

As we all recall, rainfall in January was quite high, well above average. Feb and March were much drier. The water table responded satisfactorily to the wet winter and climbed nearly 2 ms from July to December since when it has maintained that high level. Dave Ashby (*in charge of bore hole readings*) proclaims it to be the highest on record. April has been a very dry month but the river is still flowing well. May and June are normally low rainfall months, it remains to be seen how the erratic weather pattern behaves over the coming months and what impact it will have.

The water table

The Whitehall pumping station used to induce a cone of depletion stretching from south of Walkern down to North of Watton. This includes the stretch of river that has been dry for some years. Analysis of bore hole readings supports the view that the reduction in abstraction since 2017 has resulted in lifting the water table. Several wet winters have also helped and now the river is once again flowing along its full length.

Walkern, which was upstream of the cone, is shown to be unmoved by the change in abstraction. Similarly, Watton, which was down stream of the cone, and the recipient of year round contributions from Stevenage Brook, is also unmoved. Walkern trundles along below all other boreholes and Watton wanders amiably along 'mid-table'.

*Touching **Giant Hogweed** (right) can result in very serious blistering of the skin. The blistering gets worse on exposure to sunlight. Again it was brought to this country by the Victorians because of its stunning architectural beauty but like Himalayan balsam it has spread and become a curse. It is particularly bad on Stevenage Brook and down river on the Lee.*

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Himalayan Balsam competes with native plants dying back in winter to expose the banks to erosion. It is often thought to be very pretty, which is why it was brought to this country, but it doesn't support any native fauna.



Beane Marsh, HMWT nature reserve, Hertford



This new Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust reserve on the Beane, as we have reported previously, is close to Hertford North station. Views across the river and the marsh are highly valued by the Bengoe community close by although there is no public access at present. The five-acre site provides an enhanced habitat for a variety of river species and is a 'wildlife gem' according to the Trust. They held a webinar event in the winter as a virtual celebration to promote it more widely and have been working with Save Beane Marshes and the local

community to raise further funds to enhance and protect the wetland area. One HMWT plan is to explore 'conservation cattle grazing' which has been successful at other reserves in the county. It is hoped that the RBRA will be more involved with the reserve in future and we look forward to hearing more about future developments.

River Beane Catchment Partnership Meeting report by Sarah Perry

Hosted by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT), a catchment partnership meeting for the River Beane was held on 24th March 2021. This is the first time in over a year that the group has convened owing to Covid-19, and this virtual version was a record breaker, with 37 people taking part!

Members of the RBRA, HMWT, Affinity Water, Environment Agency, Herts County Council and many local farms, residents and volunteers, came together to catch up on the state of our chalk river and all the activities happening along its length to improve its condition for wildlife and people.

We heard about plans at Waterford Marsh to respond to the breach in the horseshoe weir, making the area more passable to fish and other wildlife, as well as working with the local community to maintain its heritage value. An update on plans to adapt the weir for fish at Cedar Close was given, alongside an overview of work to restore Beane Marshes Nature Reserve, both near Hertford. A virtual tour of the Stevenage Brook was given, highlighting the issues and opportunities for this major tributary of the River Beane. Finally, Affinity Water shared the progress made with catchment-sensitive farming pilots and river restoration schemes at Frogmore Hall, Walkern Bridge and Aston Ford. Minutes from the meeting will be shared soon.

The River Beane Catchment Partnership sits amongst a network of other partnerships in Hertfordshire and beyond, each focused on bringing people together with a shared interest in the river and coordinating physical, ecological and social improvements to make our water environment more resilient. There are 8+ catchment partnerships in Hertfordshire and more than 100+ nationwide, all set up in 2012 as a way of getting local communities actively involved in river stewardship and to help meet government targets set out in the water Framework Directive. More information about your local catchment partnership can be found at <http://www.riverleacatchment.org.uk/>



Installing more information boards along the Beane is an idea being considered by the committee. For example, one would be beneficial at Aston Ford where people often gather during the summer but are largely unaware that they are sunning themselves beside a rare and important chalk stream river. The board above is on the Lammas in Watton at Stone. The picture below is of the river as it winds its way along beside the Lammas.



The pictures on the left were taken just next to the ford at Walkern, another good site for an information board. Here several trees have been removed to allow more light through to the water. Light is really important to ensure the healthy growth of plants both growing in and out of the water. Vitaly important for a healthy river.

The picture above is looking the other way at some ducks enjoying the improved flow over the ford.

River Fly Update

(This article should have appeared in our last issue but there wasn't space. There wouldn't have been space again this month so our newsletter has increased to three pages)

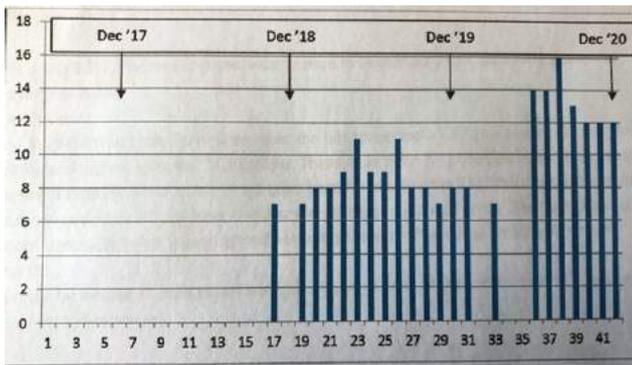
The charts below show the riverfly scores from our sample sites on the Woodhall Estate in the first new bypass channel, and by Stapleford church. The vertical axis shows the riverfly score. The horizontal axis shows the month and year the sample was taken. No.1 on the x axis is July 2017. The new channel was opened in December 2017. Sampling started in November 2018.

Conclusions:

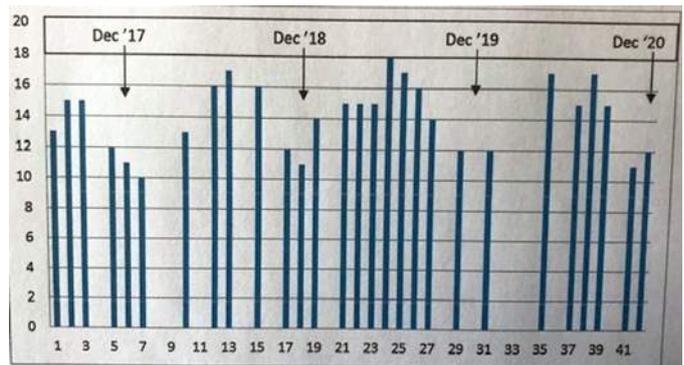
The Stapleford site has been stable over the last three and a half years with relatively high scores and regular seasonal fluctuations. There have been no pollution scares indicated by no sharp drops to a score of 5 (the trigger level for alerting the EA). The riverfly populations at the Woodhall site have been building over the last couple of years. The river channel has been constructed with a good gravel bed and plenty of riffles ideal for a chalk stream habitat.

The 'Old Beane' returns to Whitehall?

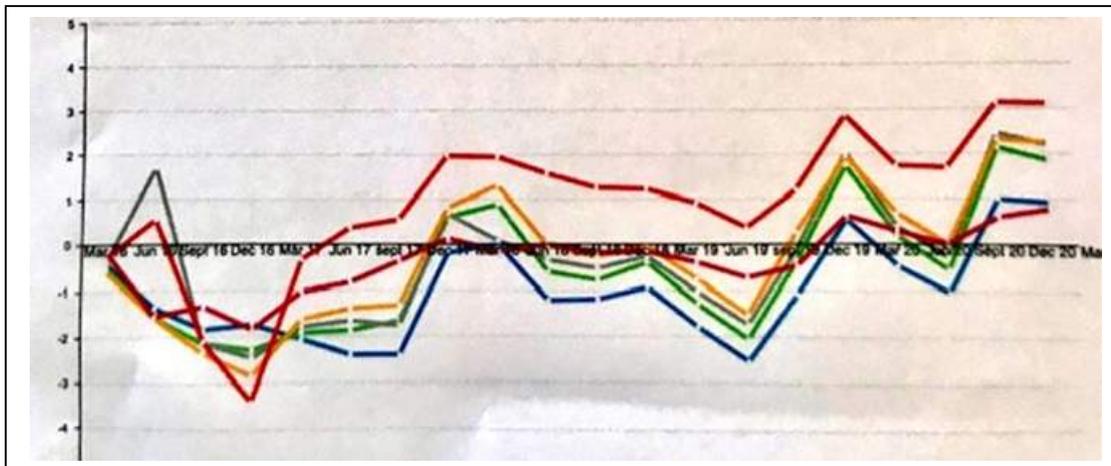
This photo was taken at Whitehall where the river had been straightened. The old water course now seems to have water in it!



Woodhall Estate results Nov. 2018 – Dec. 2020



Stapleford results Jul. 2017 – Dec. 2020



The change in the water table

The chart to the left shows the change in the water table between Walkern and Watton from March 2016 up to December 2020. This is the area covered by the 'cone of depletion' mentioned in a previous article. The

blue line is Walkern, green – Aston End, grey – Aston Ford, yellow – Holdbrook, red – Whitehall and purple is Watton. From this you can clearly see the benefit gained from the reduction in abstraction and the recent wet winters. The river is flowing well along its length despite the dry spring. For example, the depth of the river at Aston Ford, measured during river fly sampling, is currently the deepest since sampling started. The target species are starting to come back to this previously dry stretch with a score of 2 recorded in February and 5 in March.

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