

# What's Beane Happening?

The newsletter of The River Beane Restoration Association  
Issue No 33 Autumn 2021



## Welcome

This picture, entitled 'Swanning About on the River' was taken by Malcolm Hadley on October 29<sup>th</sup>. Malcolm and his wife, Sonia, stumbled across them when they visited the plant nursery at Watton at Stone. We know

swans are nesting at the Beane Marshes reserve (see the Spring 2021 issue) and now it seems they have spread further up the river, which is great. Could it be the same family? In this issue you will see some requests for more volunteers to engage in practical conservation projects. This is in line with the new direction of the RBRA. Each opportunity only involves a small time commitment, so if you feel one might be for you why not make contact to find out more information. The RBRA is also interested in preserving and enhancing the wider ecology of the Beane Valley, for this reason many members supported the campaign to raise funds for the purchase of Astonbury Woods, an ancient woodland which is an important 'stepping stone' for nature in the River Beane Catchment. There is good news on this as can be seen from the HMWT statement printed below.

## Astonbury Woods a statement from HMWT

Thanks to the generosity of donors, Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust has raised the funds needed to secure a wilder future for Astonbury Wood. The Trust is working to progress the purchase of the long-term lease for the site from Hertfordshire County Council. Site visitors are welcome to complete a Visitor Survey – you can do this online here: [https://hertswildlifetrust.formstack.com/forms/astonbury\\_woods\\_visitor\\_survey](https://hertswildlifetrust.formstack.com/forms/astonbury_woods_visitor_survey) The survey closes on the 15<sup>th</sup> December.

## Earth Watch Fresh Water Watch report by Dave Standing

The RBRA has participated in the Earth Watch Freshwater Watch project this year. The project uses citizen science to measure the Nitrate and Phosphate in any body of fresh water. People were asked to register for kit(s) and take a sample(s) of the water and then measure the amount of Nitrate and Phosphate present in parts per million (ppm). Results were uploaded to the Earth Watch website and are available to view at: <https://eip.ceh.ac.uk/hydrology/freshwaterwatch/?thames>. The results were:-

Walkern Ford- Nitrate 5-10ppm, Phosphate 0.05-0.1ppm

Aston Ford – Nitrate 5-10ppm, Phosphate 0.1-0.2ppm

Rivershill Watton- Nitrate 5-10ppm, Phosphate 0.1-0.2ppm

Stevenage Brook- Nitrate 2-5ppm, Phosphate 0.1-0.2ppm

Hertford- Nitrate 2-2ppm. Phosphate <0.02ppm

## In this Issue

Astonbury Woods  
Fresh water watch  
Catchment Partnership Site  
Meeting  
American Mink  
Walkern Mill



**Astonbury Woods**, an important 'stepping stone' for nature in the Beane Valley. Shortly to become an HMWT reserve thanks to many generous donors and a campaign supported by RBRA.



Photograph of **the nitrate testing kit** taken by Neil Rickards. It is hoped that the RBRA will continue this monitoring and we will be **looking for volunteers** to take samples along the whole of the River Beane next year.

## River Beane Catchment Partnership Site Visit report by Sarah Perry



The River Beane Catchment Partnership group got together on the banks of the Beane in mid-September, to share updates on activities happening across the valley. This was the first time in 18 months the group have been able to meet in-person, since the onset of covid. It was a great opportunity to reconnect and hear from the Environment Agency, Herts County Council (CMS), Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, Affinity Water and others, what's been taking place over that time. The group walked from Waterford Marsh to Hertford North (and back again!) and along the way heard about plans for river

restoration activities at the marsh, discussed the latest news on addressing the breached horseshoe weir, learned about Affinity's work with farms in the area and spotted some unique wildlife, like the Wasp Spider (photo) at Beane Marsh Nature Reserve. The next meeting will be held in spring 2022, all welcome, RBRA members will be notified of the date in advance.

### Beane Marshes

Plans to begin restoration work at the new nature reserve are taking shape. Beane Marshes, near Hertford North Station, is one of few remaining areas of priority floodplain grassland in the valley. This is a very rare habitat – we have lost 95% across the UK over the past 50 years. The marsh was once home to a range of interesting plants and rare insects, but over recent years due to lack of grazing, the site has become less rich in wildlife. The Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust are aiming to reverse this decline by bringing back conservation grazing using cattle in 2022. They are also undertaking a range of plant and animal surveys to monitor improvements. The first step for restoration will be to put up new fencing around the reserve soon.

### American Mink



If you spot the little feller to the left it's not good news! Sarah Perry explains why.

An American mink has potentially been spotted along the River Beane recently and efforts have been upped to monitor the numerous mink rafts around the catchment. Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust were notified by a local resident September and are in the process of installing more monitoring rafts in the area it was reported to be. Mink are a non-native species of concern; they predate on water voles, the UK's fastest

declining mammal, which are known to be present along the river Lea and other chalk tributaries in the area. Without monitoring and control in place, mink pose a real risk to water vole survival. The Trust host a volunteer survey programme, where rafts with clay mats are checked for footprints on a regular basis to detect where mink are being found in the catchment. **If you'd like more info on helping with the surveys or hosting a raft, please contact [Josh.Kalms@hmwt.org](mailto:Josh.Kalms@hmwt.org) or [Josh.Kalms@hmwt.org](mailto:Josh.Kalms@hmwt.org)**

Bob Thornton from the RBRA has set up a trail cam near where the possible sighting took place. So far there have been no further sightings, so let's hope that is a good thing.

**Further volunteering opportunities:**  
**River fly monitoring, bore hole dipping, invasive species control.**  
**Contact: [rba.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:rba.secretary@gmail.com)**

**Secretary: David Standing ([rba.secretary@gmail.com](mailto:rba.secretary@gmail.com))**  
**Treasurer: Andrew Bott**  
**River Fly Monitoring: Bob Thornton**  
**Bore Hole Monitoring: Dave Ashby**  
**WBH Editor: Philip Hewett**  
**Social Media: Neil Youngman**



**A Wasp Spider** spotted during the site meeting. Photo by Tim Hill.



*The above photograph is from a postcard of **Walkern Flour Mill** in about 1910. It was brought to our attention by Terry Hewitt. You can see how healthy the river appears before abstraction started in the middle of the century. Still, the river has been flowing for most of its length over the summer even though it became very shallow at Aston Ford and puddled at White Hall. Fingers crossed it will do even better next summer as we now go into the period of winter recharge.*

**River Beane Restoration Association Annual  
General Meeting  
Thursday 18th November 7:00pm  
The Methodist Hall, Watton at Stone SG14 3SX  
Everyone welcome**

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