

# What's Beane Happening?

The newsletter of The River Beane Restoration Association  
Issue No 38 Spring 2023



## Welcome

I think it's safe to say that the rainfall over the past twelve months has been pretty erratic fluctuating between months that are completely dry and months that are extremely wet. Last summer we had quite a significant drought, and the erratic weather looks set to continue. We have our own weather watcher in Aston (Steve Shaw) who has measured rainfall for many years. To judge the likely flow over the summer we combine that with bore hole readings showing the depth of water in the aquifer (*coordinated by Dave Ashby*). In the last issue we warned that we needed a really wet winter or the river would be in trouble this summer. Well, February had no measurable rainfall at all, but then we had one of the wettest Marches on record with 300% of the long term average, the Environment Agency (EA) even briefly issued a flood warning! The pictures, above left, were taken by Peter White on April 1<sup>st</sup>

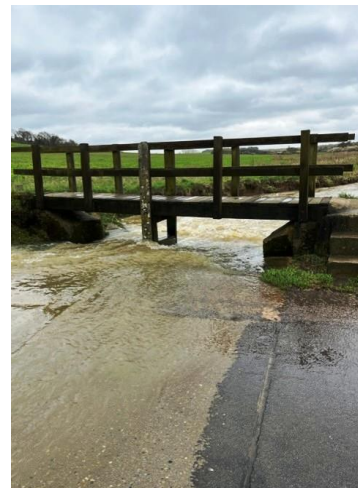
at Waterford Marsh. He suggested it might be called 'All Fulls Day'! The pictures show the river overtopping its banks and the flood plain doing its job. More on Waterford Marsh later in the issue. The picture on the right was taken in March and is of the ford at Aston.

**Monday 3 July 2023, 6.45 pm**  
Waterford Village Hall

## Open Meeting

*and RBRA Annual General Meeting*  
How volunteer citizen scientists can play an important part in river restoration work.

**Keynote by Dr Kate Heppell**  
currently running a research project on the River Chess.  
*We also hope to tour the recent work done at Waterford Marsh.*



## Changes on the RBRA Committee

A big thank you to Dave Standing who has acted as both Chairman and Secretary for the past three years. During this time he has done an excellent job guiding the change from the RBRA being a campaigning organization to one far more involved in practical conservation. The projects that he has overseen are too numerous to mention, but of particular note is the lifting and thinning out of the tree canopy along the river in Walkern. He maintained previous activities and initiated nitrate and phosphate testing. The committee system, which started under Dave Stimpson, took a step forward under Dave Standing (there are a lot of Daves on the RBRA and it can be confusing!) and he kept it all going through Covid as he was just about the only person who understood how to set up zoom meetings!

Dave has now decided to step back from such an intense involvement although I am pleased to say that he will still be on the committee and will help out with some secretarial duties like maintaining the mailing list for What's Beane Happening, etc. There will be an AGM on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July when a new chairman and secretary will be elected. In the meantime Peter White will take on the responsibilities of chairman and Bob Thornton will act as secretary. Peter is the HMWT Living Rivers Champion for both Stevenage Brook and The Beane, and Bob has a long history of leading many practical conservation projects for the RBRA including the reintroduction of water voles.



## Work Completed at Waterford Marsh from Peter White



*Ponds being dug on the marsh to enhance the habitat.*

debris has been deliberately put back in. A large 'mat' of woody debris has been pinned to the gravel bank in the area where the mill stream and main river channel meet at the north end of the site. Over time this will gather silt which in turn will become vegetated, narrowing the very wide section here to improve water velocity at times of low flow.

Opposite Waterford village hall, the near vertical bank offered little in terms of habitat and was being eroded by dogs climbing out of the river. A large 'brash build out' has been formed to link two existing areas of reed growth to help these to knit together. This may help dissuade dogs from entering the river here too (which is better for the river, although maybe less fun for the dogs).

Opposite the Tree Heritage site, part of a large tree has



been keyed into the bank and secured in the channel. If you watch the way the water flows past this you'll see it has the combined effect of deflecting flow away from the bank by the path where it was being eroded, and speeding the flow further out, where it's scouring the bed to reveal clear gravels – vital habitat for invertebrates and future fish spawning.



*The 'brash build out'.*



*The same view as the picture above... but on April 1<sup>st</sup>!*

Finally, the concrete walls that constrained the river at the south end of the Marsh have been removed and the banks reprofiled to be more natural in shape, whilst not encroaching on the right of way that runs along the top of the bank. This has also connected more of the river corridor to its floodplain – as was demonstrated during the heavy rains at the end of March (See the photos at the beginning of the newsletter). Allowing water to occasionally spread out over the marsh here potentially reduces flooding further

downstream and keeps the marsh 'marshy'.

A final task for the diggers was to enlarge and add new seasonal ponds (see the photo at the head of this article) creating habitat for amphibians and dragonflies to enjoy. The contractors took care to minimise the amount of ground disturbance caused by machines weighing several tonnes each, and as they retreated from the site, they filled in, levelled and re-seeded their tracks.

Although the breach at the weir was outside the scope of these works, some of the broken concrete from the wall and spoil from the pools was used to shore up the bank by the breach where the footpath passes closest to the river.

The recent work by contractor Aquamaintain was a joint project between the Environment Agency and Hertfordshire County Council's Countryside and Rights of Way department.

'Woody debris' is vital to the health of a chalk stream. Historically, many have 'cleaned up the rivers' by pulling out fallen trees and removing overhanging branches, but more recent understanding has shown this has a detrimental effect. For this project,



### Brook Lampreys

*If you look carefully you can see 2 brook lamprey in the picture (see the video on our Facebook page). They were an exciting discovery during the recent water vole survey. You can see (bottom right corner) how they have been cleaning an area of gravel, and piling up stones, to lay their eggs.*

*'Reclusive, primitive and eel-like, the brook lamprey is an ancient and rarely seen fish found in the rivers and streams of several of our woods. It lives most of its life as a larva buried in the silty stream bed before turning into an adult and swimming upstream to spawn - its last act before it dies.'* from the Woodland Trust.



*Above the during and after view of the bank in January when the wall was taken out.*



## The Beane Inspires Poetry

The following poem and photo was submitted by Paul Gray via our website. We thought you might enjoy it. If anyone else would like to submit poems or photos please feel free. Sadly there's no money, but you will be credited.

### In Dappled Sunlight

I move slowly now, now that I'm nearing the end of my journey.  
Content. Feeling serene is how I would put it.  
I still have some troubles ahead. A weir I can view. But I can manage, for I have the knowledge to cope.  
Oh, how I remember the earlier times. My birth, bubbling up from the earth. Dancing, turning this way and that without a care, with abandonment, rushing headlong 'neath bridges and over metal lanes.  
Sometimes I would rest for a while, still, reflecting the blue blue sky under which I lay. Yet at other times I have felt the storm clouds, been battered by hail and rain, unable to take shelter for there was none.  
Winter snows and ice have slowed my progress.  
But now I go slowly, beneath overhanging branches in dappled sunlight.  
And when I have attained the end, still I will not have finished, for I will give all to the larger mass that which I have made.  
And it will always be.

*Paul Dominic Gray*

## Save the Date! a message from Viv Jones

Save Beane Marshes and RBRA together with HMWT and the London Freshwater Group are organizing an intensive survey of Waterford Marshes on the 8th of July - the aim is to provide a comprehensive species list for Waterford Marshes including all habitats – terrestrial and aquatic and to provide opportunities for people to meet 'the experts' to have conversations about biodiversity and the need to preserve our chalk streams and wet meadow environments.

Click on the link to find out more and sign up if you are interested.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/bioblitz-waterford-marshes-saturday-8th-july-2023-tickets-622398248917> or go to the RBRA website.



### How are the water voles doing?

On the 17<sup>th</sup> April we gathered to survey the water voles again which had been reintroduced along the river in the Woodhall Park Estate last year. I, personally, was quite concerned as the previous survey had not been as good as we had hoped and since then we have had a very severe winter. When surveying you don't often see water voles but look for signs that they have been feeding and marking their territory. Once again there were negative results for most of the release sites apart from the one at the southern most end of the area where there were good signs. A small number of surveyors continued down the river and found more evidence that the voles had moved further south.

While the survey was in progress Bob received a phone call to say that a resident in Stapleford was drinking coffee whilst watching a vole on the bank at the bottom of his garden! The team raced down to see it, but of course, it had gone, but it had left a distinctive latrine to mark its territory.

Fingers crossed, the summer should see them multiply and spread – perhaps back up river as new voles look for new territory.

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Treasurer: Andrew Bott  
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