

# What's Beane Happening?

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



## Welcome



The picture on the left is from the Wychdell flood management reservoir on Stevenage Brook, a major tributary of the River Beane, and over recent years the only consistent all year round source for the lower river. It was taken by our new chairman, Peter White as a symbol of 'Light at the end of the tunnel!' You will see why in some of the articles that follow. I asked Peter to write a short piece to introduce himself ...

## From the Chairman

This is a novelty: I've written for magazines in the past, including What's Beane Happening, but I've never been asked to write a 'From the Chairman' piece before. What am I expected to say, what does 'Chairman-like' sound like. What do you want to read?

I've lived in Stevenage since 1987 and shortly after moving here (from my parent's home in Welwyn Garden City) became involved with local countryside and

conservation activities with the county council's Countryside Management Service (CMS). Many of those early tasks were in and around the River Oughton in Hitchin and that introduced me to chalk streams and how fragile they can be.

I volunteered to be made redundant from work in 2019, which (although not originally my intention) has effectively become early retirement. This has let me give more of my time to supporting or leading sessions with the CMS and Stevenage Council's Green Space team. I have been a Riverfly monitor on St Albans' River Ver and the Beane since 2015, and in 2019 was invited to become a volunteer Living Rivers Champion with the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT). That led to me sitting in on committee meetings of the RBRA.

Earlier this year, I threw my hat into the ring as a nomination for Chair, and I'm very grateful to those who supported this and voted for me at the recent AGM. I have a hard act to follow. As I outlined at the start of our recent Open Meeting, what has been achieved by the RBRA since its inception in 1991 has been truly impressive. During their times at the helm Dave Stimpson and Dave Standing have influenced water company decisions to save our chalk stream through practically stopping abstraction at the Whitehall pumping station, strengthened our partnership relationships with HMWT, Affinity Water and many others, encouraged a wider audience to support our activities, seen our river become a focus for attention and action at a national level, and very much put the River Beane in the spotlight. I want to say a huge thank you to Dave and Dave. I fear I may be at a slight disadvantage going forwards, being called Pete, not Dave, but let's see!

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Our new chairman, Peter White, participating in a river fly monitoring session. Below – the dastardly Himalayan Balsam.



## What does the journey to good ecological status look like?

I have a simple goal for the RBRA: to see the River Beane reach the status of 'Good' under the Water Quality Framework Directive criteria. Many of you will have heard Feargal Sharkey, one-time band frontman and now one-man campaigning machine, powerfully point out that only 14 percent of Britain's rivers currently reach 'Good' ecological status. We can be one of those. The fact that we now have a healthy population of water voles is A Really Good Thing. We have sought-after indicator plant species – notably Water Crowfoot – growing in many parts of the river. There are fish, although, not yet, the Trout we'd love to see. But we still have several of the so-called 'reasons for not achieving good' (RNAG) that reduce our score: abstraction is still too high compared to the amount of rain that falls, sediment and chemicals from road and field run-off still impact our water quality, obstacles like weirs are still across the river and we are blighted by the presence of non-native invasive species such as Signal Crayfish, Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam.

Ticking off that RNAG list will take time. We can do it though and are starting with an easy gain. We've held Balsam Bashing tasks before, but this summer has seen RBRA volunteers (joined on a couple of occasions by staff from Affinity Water too) make a huge dent, clearing this year's plants from at least half a kilometre of river! A massive 'thank you' to those who have helped out at these sessions. We'll need to run several more next year and I'd love to get to meet you at some of these, helping us on our journey towards 'Good'.

Thank you

Pete

## The Government has been persuaded to provide more protection for Chalk Streams!



Following a long campaign of lobbying by campaigners headed by Angling Trust Ambassador Charles Rangely-Wilson, the government has agreed to undertake to provide protection for chalk streams in The Levelling Up Bill. (Photo from the Angling Trust).

*"If our chalk streams were buildings, they would be UNESCO heritage sites. Let us protect them as though they were."*

- Baroness Taylor of Stevenage

## Open meeting and AGM from Bob Thornton

We held our open meeting and AGM on Monday 3rd July. We had a very interesting line-up of speakers who all spoke about the importance and the opportunities for volunteer citizen scientists to become engaged in shaping a better future for our river. It was great to see Waterford Village Hall bursting at the seams and we are grateful for all those who showed an interest in volunteering for our riverfly monitoring scheme.

The AGM, a very short affair, resulted in the following appointments:

Chair: Peter White

Secretary: Bob Thornton

Treasurer: Andrew Bott

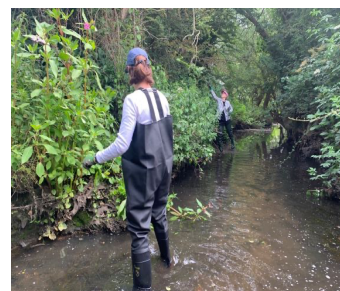
The other members of the committee: Marcella Randal, Phil Hewett, Steve Shaw, Neil Youngman and Sarah Perry (HMWT)

Once again, I would like to thank Dave Standing and Malcolm Hadley, who are standing down, for the many years of support they have given the committee.

As always, we would like to hear your thoughts and concerns about things to do with the river. So please feel free to contact us through the website: [riverbeane.org.uk](http://riverbeane.org.uk)



*Above and below, volunteers who recently made a huge dent in the 'forest' of Himalayan Balsam at the Wychdell Flood Reservoir and also at Frogmore Hall.*



*We were pleased that the recent Open Meeting/AGM was so well attended with approximately 60 people present. (see below).*





## What happened at the Bio Blitz?



Save Beane Marshes and the RBRA, together with HMWT and the London Freshwater Group organised an intensive biodiversity survey, or "BIOBLITZ", of the Waterford Marshes on the 8th of July. (Photo by Viv Jones) The aim was to provide a comprehensive species list for the Waterford Marshes including all habitats both terrestrial and aquatic. About 40 Naturalists and

enthusiastic members of the public spent the morning and early afternoon trying to collect and identify plants and animals. Spider expert David Carr found 19 spider species including *Salticus zebraneus* a nationally scarce Jumping Spider (Salticid) which was found on the trunk of a Poplar tree. Experts also listed 10 species of moss, 15 trees and shrubs, 14 grasses, 37 herbaceous plants, 4 aquatic plants, 8 species of butterflies, moths, 2 dragonflies and over 30 species of aquatic animals. A full species list is still being collated as some taxa need careful identification under the microscope. Carl Sayer found some remains of a crayfish possibly indicating an otter meal.

Using the village hall as a base there were some great conversations about biodiversity and the need to preserve our chalk streams and wet meadow environments. An orphaned Pipistrelle bat brought by Ronni Edmunds-Brown was also popular. This is just a start and more investigations are planned.



A nationally scarce Jumping Spider!  
Photo by David Carr

### Catchment Systems Thinking Cooperative from Alister Leggatt, Affinity Water

Affinity Water's water resources and environment team have been very active in the River Beane recently with our various environmental schemes. Here is an update on one of the schemes we have been working on, the Catchment Systems Thinking Cooperative, or CaSTCo for short.

This £7million national project is funded by Ofwat and is led by The Rivers Trust. UK partners including water companies, communities and local partnerships, technical experts, academics, government, non-government organisations, private sector, are coming together for the first time to co-design a consistent, open information and knowledge sharing platform. This will enable a national framework to standardise and share integrated data and build the much-needed evidence base for improved decision-making about our water environments. Sustainable financing solutions will be explored to scale-up the approach from 10+ demonstration areas to river catchments across the country.

Affinity Water nominated and funded the inclusion of the River Beane as one of the demonstration catchments, with the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) as the lead partner with support from us and the RBRA. Steady progress is being made with a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator starting in early August. Affinity have been mapping current and historic monitoring data across the Beane and will be working with the RBRA to identify and test new monitoring approaches including continuous monitoring sensors to build evidence for future schemes to support restoration of the River Beane catchment.

### More from Alister Leggatt at Affinity Water

**INNS Out:** Our INNS Out Scheme aims to prevent the introduction and spread of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS). We were delighted to be able to support the RBRA for a third year through the Scheme. Thanks to Pete and the team for arranging and facilitating the volunteer days that several of our teams attended this year. We have had great feedback from our staff who all had great days out and hopefully we have helped make a dent in the balsam!

**River improvement works:** The Walkern Road Bridge project was completed in April and in August we undertake some final enhancement and re-instatement works. This includes hydroseeding the new berms along the Lammas. Upon initial spraying, the berms will be bright green until the seeds germinate (1-2 weeks after application) and the grass establishes. We have installed some temporary signs to indicate this. For the next project we are looking to develop options for a river restoration project at Mill Lane Weir.

Chairman: Peter White  
Secretary: Bob Thornton (rbra.secretary@gmail.com)  
Treasurer: Andrew Bott  
Bore Hole Monitoring: Dave Ashby  
WBH Editor: Philip Hewett  
Social Media: Neil Youngman

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