

LODDON FISHERIES AND CONSERVATION CONSULTATIVE

Minutes

DATE 22nd September 2022
VENUE Swallowfield Village Hall
TIME 7.20 pm arrive for 7.30 pm start, 9.30 pm finish.

Apologies received from: Trevor Ashton, Ade Bicknell, Lou Sykes, Alan Muller

Item:

1. Welcome MM 10 mins

MM welcomed all. Expressed hope King Charles III will be lobbying for the environment. Noted death of Jo Clarke UoR and her role in the Loddon. Noted involvement in NERC NFM program. Also founded Loddon Observatory. LFCC supported student projects. Jo has left a big legacy. IW – looking for new contacts in UoR. MM we have been out doing DNA work. Also fed into various consultations. No floating pennywort at Mill Lane or Wisteria, some still at Wyndhams. Assisted Ade with a small fish rescue near Swallowfield. Rescued about 400 fish. Small fish but big range of species. Three days later, pools dried up. There is interest in the Angling Trust water quality monitoring, program. Got 3 clubs onboard at the moment hope to get more. Led to article in the Guardian article – see website. Barkham Brook low flows meant flow heavily dependent on treated sewage effluent, P was very high on d/s side.

2. EA news (given by IW) 15 mins

Sewage Pollution Tributary of Petty's Brook

Pollution and Fisheries officers attended an incident on a tributary of the Petty's Brook at Chineham near Basingstoke. With low flows this summer and very little dilution this small stream was badly affected from a cracked sewage pipe. Although the source of pollution was stopped relatively quickly the damage had been done with 600m meters of stream with dead fish present. Dead fish species found during my fish kill assessment were stickleback, bullhead, stone loach and minnow. Information collected has been included in my witness statement and I will keep the LFCC up to date with any progress regarding this incident.

Low Water levels Basingstoke Canal

The Basingstoke Canal has been very low this summer particularly the section between Ash Lock and Deepcut. The marginal shelves of the canal have been exposed with just one or two feet of water remaining. This was particularly worrying earlier in the summer for fish populations with such high temperatures. Although there has been no fish mortality that we are aware of this has definitely been a worry for the Canal Authority. Water levels are still very low however hopefully with lower temperatures, shorter days and lower night time temperatures we can avoid a serious incident.

Stillwaters This Summer

This summer has seen many incidents called into the Environment Agency re privately owned and council managed still waters. Many ponds are either suffering from low water levels or with algae or temperature related fish mortalities. Advice on pumps and aeration equipment is readily available however fish rescues should be carried out as a last resort as often more harm than good can be caused by attempting to move fish during hot weather.

Argulus Pipes

There has been a fish mortality on a still water fishery this summer. We expect that the tench dominated mortality has been caused by the parasite or gill maggot *Ergasilus sieboldi* which has been known previously to have been the cause of fish mortalities in large tench. However following the mortality many of the carp present within the fishery are smothered with the fish louse *Argulus* which are irritating to the fish and in extreme large numbers could be the cause of fish mortalities. *Argulus* is known to cause problems on trout fisheries during hot weather when the fish louse can thrive. Research has shown that argulus like to lay their eggs on smooth shiny substrate. To try and reduce argulus numbers in the fishery the angling club has installed some *Argulus* pipes. These are black shiny drain pipes which are sunk and staked in place around the margins of the lake. By regularly taking the pipes from the lake and cleaning them the hope is that this will help to break up the life cycle of the *Argulus*. I am not aware that this has been tried on a coarse fishery before but for a cheap cost of stakes and pipes it will be interesting to see if we think this is working.

River Blackwater Habitat Improvements

We have been working with a river engineer to advise and design two new gravel riffles on the River Blackwater. These gravels will benefit fish, wildlife and invertebrates. The new riffles will be situated at Frimley Business Park where the river already supports a reasonable population of mixed coarse fish. The riffles which will be installed soon are the part of a successful enforcement undertaking by the EA.

Other

Marked barbel to be stocked into the Loddon Catchment, where to stock and mark? *IW note – clubs must have site permits in place before stocking can*

take place, Contact Ade for details.

Tices Meadow Project coming up for Rivers Week.

Ideas for FIP funding always welcome.

3. Emm Brook project Lou Sykes SERT

The South East Rivers Trust (SERT) has been working in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council and the Environment Agency since 2018 to develop and finalise the designs and permissions for the completion of the Emm Brook Restoration project in Woosehill Meadows, Wokingham.

The project comprises a series of river and environmental enhancements and community engagement programmes, as we reconnect the river with its former meandering 320m course through the park. The benefits include significant habitat enhancements which will promote species abundance and diversity, enhancing the visual amenity and landscape character of the public greenspace and helping improve water quality. The installation of two bridges along with associated engagement activities and habitat creation in the Thames Water Catch Pit in the southern section of the park are also included in the plans.

Significant work in a public space requires permissions from the relevant authorities, and SERT has been working tirelessly over the past 2 years to complete designs and apply for the permissions, and this work continues at present. SERT has no reason at this point to think that Planning Permission will not be given, but the technical details required by the regulators are taking longer than expected to produce and confirm, hence the elongated permissions process.

With a delay in our timeframes and the substantial increase in the cost of services and materials along with the timeframe for confirming a portion of the project funding has lapsing, we will have to secure new funding before we can deliver the project and associated environmental improvements to the river and surrounding habitat. This does mean the work on the ground on the Emm Brook in Riverside Park will not start until that replacement funding is confirmed, which may take some time. The Wokingham Borough Councils Greenways scheme has had to move forward, and as such they have continued their work in Riverside Park without the river and habitats working in parallel.

Thank you to everyone who has supported the project thus far. We are disappointed we won't be able to deliver this in our expected timeframes, and we truly believe this project will transform the Emm Brook for both wildlife and communities and are still fully committed to making this a reality in the future. SERT will be carrying on working with partners and fully expect to be delivering the benefits from this project still in the coming years.

4. Anna Forbes the work of ARK

ARK 1990 originally as lobbying group, led by angling demand. ARK is a

charity and is part of the Rivers Trust. Also work on Kennet tributaries. Also host of Pang. The Kennet is not in great condition, lots of brown algae this summer and with low flows. Need a wet winter to recover. Kennet did dry up about 10 years ago near Marlborough. Abstraction has reduced but still causes significant impacts. Would like it reduced further. Seeing more pollution these days. Volunteers helpful in spotting pollutions. EA and TW came out to investigate River Og. Cause has yet to be determined. Also had diesel pollution, had to follow it to the source to track it down. ARK now does many things, including advisory. Everything has to be funded, especially for schools outreach projects. Lots of interest from schools but must get funding. Very diverse sources of funds. Stonebridge Wild River Reserve old water meadow, got 50% funding, council gave the rest. Had to persuade council to leave wild areas. ARK can provide hands on outdoor training for schools on the river environment. Local river keepers are very helpful in providing access for school. Hundreds of volunteers give thousands of hours of work every year. Ripple effect from volunteers talking to their friends. Get big businesses involved which works well as corporate days. Water crowfoot planting can be very successful if you can plant enough to defeat the swans. Need lots of volunteers to control Himalayan balsam. Needs doing year after year. Have people looking out for muddy run-off. Have created 4 wetlands, more planned. Good for intercepting road run-off but needs regular maintenance. Effective at reducing N and P. Hedging provided by Woodlands Trust, planted by volunteers. Sparkling streams project funded by Lottery with several partners opened up a river to fish passage after about 100 years. Green Recovery Challenge funding from DEFRA. Also work on catchment sensitive farming. Farming in protected landscapes. Do a lot of citizen science to fill gaps by regulators, especially RiverFly. Redd spotting project. Don't want RiverFly monitors to ruin redds. Monitors count and GIS trout redds. Water vole surveys. [ObstacEELS](#) project to assess barriers to migration. Cannot always remove weirs so may have to install ladders, etc.

5. Break 20 mins

6. Anna Forbes ARK and RiverFly monitoring

1000's of Riverfly monitors. Have to be trained before starting. 64 sites in the Kennet catchment, took over 12 years to get all sites up and running. Needs ongoing support and training. Must be done monthly so if away need sub to fill in. Evidence from Riverfly can be used in pollution incidents. EA will respond to alerts from ARK in 24h. Testing kits about £100 from NHBS (*EA discount of Angling Trust members otherwise kits would cost more*). EA may only monitor every 3 years. Sampling sites can be near potential problem locations. Have to attend training workshop for sampling and ID. Anna talked through Riverfly methods and 8 groups to be counted, explained scoring system. Data entered into an online form. Once data entered, score is calculated automatically. If trigger level (*EA i.e. indicates pollution incident*), then call ARK and EA. ARK retains data after passing to Riverfly so can see position in Kennet catchment. Human impact can impact scores. Have found some significant pollution incidents. Can take a long time to recover after pollution.

7. White claw crayfish and signal crayfish DNA studies (IW and MM)

MM WCC eDNA sampling on Barkham Brook with UoR. Also sampled Itchen where we know WCC are present. Samples have been stored and await analysis. Still anticipated financial support from Wokingham District Council. IW, MM and RH have been sampling at Arborleigh to see if signal crayfish eat chub and barbel eggs. Did intensive sampling of water and crayfish over a week when chub could be seen spawning. Barbel spawning was not seen. Have dissected out over 100 crayfish guts which are frozen and await analysis. Gut contents are too mashed up to identify so DNA may be the only way to detect if they eat fish eggs and/or fry.

8. Rivers week

Rivers week next week see link posted on LFCC website. MM doing electrofishing on Emm Brook.

9. AOB – news from clubs etc

RW RAE approached BVCP for small grant to survey BW to see how upper and lower compare. Maybe more fish in upper? RAE seen progressive decline in match catches also decline from EA data. Want to use AT water quality tests plus extra tests. Maybe signals population too.

MM LFCC can offer small grants to clubs to buy AT sampling kits.

10. Date of next meeting

24 November the main speaker will be David Solomon. Fish and fisheries of the river Thames. He has also worked on Ewelme stream.

END