

LODDON FISHERIES AND CONSERVATION CONSULTATIVE

Agenda

DATE Thursday 28th September 2023
VENUE Swallowfield Village Hall
TIME 7pm for the water quality tests. Meeting has usual
7.30 pm start, 9.30 pm finish.

Apologies: John Sutton, Trevor Cotham, James Watson

1. Water quality test comparisons pre-meeting

A big thank you to Twyford & District FC, Gresham AS, Royal Aircraft Establishment AS & Swallowfield FC Angling Trust Water Quality volunteers for bringing their testing kits along to the meeting to check a sample from the River Blackwater. Reading variations across individual pieces of equipment was encouragingly small. We await the results from the lab tests on the same sample from Affinity Water who very kindly offered their services. The results will be published as soon as we have them.

2. Welcome MM 5 mins

MM welcomed members to the meeting. Water quality being tested to compare results between users and will also be analysed in a laboratory. Results will be posted for members. White Claw Crayfish eDNA on Barkham Brook with University of Reading. Several groups of students taken out. Also did some trapping but no WCC caught although a few signals. Still detecting DNA. Invasive Non-Native Species balsam bashing on St Pats, Dinton, Arborleigh, Swallowfield and Wellington Country Park. Basingstoke canal also. SERT thinking about balsam blitz next summer. Rivers week hit by a few problems so two events cancelled, Greywell (see later) and Dinton (high water level). Floating Pennywort Yateley ponds OK, Basingstoke canal still a problem. Two minor pollutions at Swallowfield dealt with by Thames Water. Also dumping of rubbish in river, hard to get anyone to take responsibility due to issues over ownership. 11 marked barbel for Swallowfield Angling Club markings at Swallowfield plus 4 new ones, including a small fish.

3. EGM to approve the updated Constitution

Carried unanimously.

4. Update from the Treasurer and a plea for a replacement.

Very little activity since last meeting. Not a lot of work involved as there have only been four transactions since the last meeting.

5. Steve Sheriden EA There's something about eels

Molesey weir eel pass. Very important for elver passage. Eels were very valuable, even used to pay rent. There were 30 eel traps on the Thames up to late wartime. Lots of eel pie and mash restaurants in London. Eels were very widespread over entire catchment. Now rarely found above Goring. Eels now critically endangered. Molesey is an obstruction despite a fish ladder from late 1800s. Now has an eel pass with an eel trap to monitor numbers etc. Also a Larinier fish pass. Elvers have been seen trying to pass recently. Put in spat rope to ease passage. Also put in cameras to monitor. Small eels and elvers turned up in May when there was good flow. Used spat rope for passage. Even more on wet nights. With low flow of water loads of eels went up. Mostly not very large 100-200mm long. Heron was waiting for them but installation of a ramp helped. Modified weir crest to make sure there was flow in low flow but not too much in high water. Got the footage examined by Zoological Society of London MSc student. 90 hours of footage from before modifications and same afterwards. Big improvement in ability of eels to get over 15% vs 1%. Did far better than the standard eel pass. Eel passage disturbed by mitten crabs. Also found an otter feeding. Even foxes got in on the act. Very hard to keep predators out. Boat wash washed eel back down. Still a lot of weirs are hard to pass and make easy prey for predators. Also had major intakes screened to prevent eels/elvers going in.

6. Break 20 mins

7. Lou Sykes SERT

Rivers week last week. Some events had to be cancelled. 75 volunteers 350 hours of time. 21 tonnes gravel at Bassetts Mead. Baffles at Arborfield. Cut back vegetation on Petty's Brook at Chineham. Will arrange site visit to Greywell Mill to discuss problem (see later) and what can be done. MM fish survey on Arborfield by-pass yielded 9 spp including 2 small barbel.

8. EA news Ade Bicknell 15 mins

Petty's Brook walk very uniform channel too much concrete so major project to fix habitat. Might have to put gravels on top of concrete. Could be improved. Gresham had problems with muddy run-off from a housing development this year. Blackwater valley big thunderstorm caused incidents. 6 fisheries had problems as a result. Upper Blackwater Rowhill Nature Reserve electrofishing to look for brown trout. Found stone loach and sticklebacks. Fish will be available from EA but need clubs to get site permits for Calverton fish. Wyndhams Pool, Wisteria, Mill Lane all very successful

with Wyndhams Pond only site where floating pennywort is still found but very scarce even there. MM, AB and IW joined floating pennywort picking on Basingstoke Canal. Concern it could get into Fleet Pond. Need to keep on top of this. Seems FP keeps being put in canal.

9. Jason Baylis Twyford AS improvement works at St Pats

St Pats feeds off Thames. Issues with erosion and weed growth. Poor numbers of chub and barbel in recent years. Caine Bioengineering advised on improvements. Gravel restoration, in-stream emergent weed removal, . Got FRAPs from EA to carry out works. Put in 50 tonnes of gravel this year for spawning habitat. Existing gravels had silted up or compacted. Had to remove big bed of club rush before could put in gravels. Telehandler and boats to deliver gravels made life much easier. Lots of small fish turned up on new gravels. 12 people working on the day. Larger fish moved in next day. Asked for EA permits to put in another 150 tonnes. Also used jetting to clean some existing gravels. Tried in a small area, successful so planning to do more later. Then put in faggots to stabilise banks and provide more flow in some areas. Used on-site materials. Then put leftover wood as infill behind faggots. Aim to get sinuosity back in St Pats. Working on controlling Himalayan balsam. Strimming and pulling – see which works best. Dug 3 new fry/juvenile flood refuges. Signal crays getting worse. Licenced trapper will trap for next 3 years to see what effect it has. 3 year stocking programme for barbel, some purchased, some from Calverton. Angling Trust Water Quality Monitoring Network showed no major issues. Getting good numbers of silvers in matches. General maintenance carried out.

10. Update from Gresham and Greywell

For Gresham a new lower Loddon fence has improved fishing. Clearing trees has improved weed growth. Still got some problems to be resolved. Getting local communities involved. Setting up mink controls. Trained up new bailiff team with Ade's help. Sparsholt students working on river every Friday afternoon.

Mike Wharmby (Greywell Fly Fishers) reported that at Greywell Mill major problem arose due to mill wall collapse leading to tonnes of sediment in river. Nightmare due to so many bodies being involved. Hart District Council, EA, Natural England, Historic England all involved and the mill is owned by a trust. Mill leat extends u/s about 300m. Flows below mill were very good with clean gravels and clear water but are some problems with agricultural pollution so not high rated under WFD. Had a good head of trout and spawning gravels. Silt now extends about three quarters of a mile d/s of mill.

11. AOB – follow up on projects and funding opportunities. Future Zoom talk from Buglife

Do this as a Zoom meeting, IW to arrange. Will request to have the talk recorded.

12. Date of next meeting

TBA. Could have a meeting at Sparsholt. Visit to Berkshire Trout Farms and visit to Kennet Hungerford town fishery. Microplastics a possible talk? Still working on getting a visit or talk in beavers.

END