



Action for the River Kennet

Action for the River Kennet
Annual Report
2014

A partnership of people
who care about the River Kennet

ARK's Year 2013-14



November

Work begins on the second phase of ARK's Marlborough fish pass project.



December

The Environment Agency announces its response to pollution from Marlborough Sewage Works.



January

We call for better sewerage provision as winter floods cause raw sewage to flow into the river.



February

'Nettle' the Belted Galloway calf joins our grazing stock at Stonebridge Meadow.



March

ARK's 'Muddy Walk' training teaches people how to identify and report pollution hotspots.



April

Schools release hundreds of baby trout into the river after another successful 'Trout in Schools' project.



May

The Water Act receives Royal Assent following active lobbying by ARK.



May

ARK helps Esso identify monitoring sites following a leak of fuel from a pipeline on the Marlborough Downs.



June

The Environment Agency announces its intention to reduce abstraction after 20 years' of campaigning by ARK.



July

Five local schools release baby eels as part of ARK's project to reintroduce the species to the Kennet.



August

Imperial College scientists complete the first year of their ecological survey of the river following 2013's pollution incident.



September

Marlborough residents use 3 million fewer litres of water as a result of our 'Save Water September' campaign.



October

ARK's Yellow Fish campaign alerts people of the dangers of pollution through street drains.



Another great year for ARK – on so many fronts

As everyone knows, the weather has been hitting extremes again. We had one of the wettest springs on record, followed by a warm summer and then nationally the driest September. The river coped not too badly, starting the year with a full aquifer set it in good stead, though lack of *Ranunculus* in many places is still a problem. The stretches affected by last year's pollution have partly recovered, though the *Gammarus* shrimp population is still well below what it used to be. Flooding in winter/spring led to sewage flooding many parts of the valley, with Aldbourne particularly hard hit. Riverfly monitoring and redd monitoring were impossible in many places for much of the winter.

But the weather has never stopped ARK's work to preserve and enhance our much-loved Kennet. We have had our busiest season ever on Stonebridge Meadow, jointly owned and managed in partnership with Marlborough Town Council, with a record programme of

Creating a better future for the Kennet through:

- 1 **Proactive Conservation**
Read more on page 6-7
- 2 **Citizen Science**
Read more on page 8-9
- 3 **ARK in the Classroom**
Read more on page 10-11
- 4 **Robust Campaigning**
Read more on page 12-13
- 5 **Helpful Farm Advice**
Read more on page 14-15
- 6 **Access for Everyone**
Read more on page 16-17

events. Attendance at these events and the results of the Consultation undertaken with the Town Council have shown the extent to which the Meadow is now valued as a nature reserve.

Two pollution incidents have concerned us. A bus on fire in Marlborough High Street lead to quantities of diesel being washed down drains to the river – despite firemen's best effort. A larger escape of fuel into the aquifer was caused by criminals tapping into an underground pipeline. ARK was consulted and continues to work with Esso to monitor the situation via a number of bore holes sunk by them. A well-attended meeting with Savernake Flyfishers and teams from Thames Water and the Environment Agency reviewed last year's disastrous chlorpyrifos pollution incident, and both sides agreed that their handling of the incident could have been better; lessons had been learned and everyone has agreed to work together on a joint protocol for future events of this kind.



ALLISON BURDEN
WINNER OF THE ADULT CATEGORY
2014 STONEBRIDGE WILDLIFE RESERVE
PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

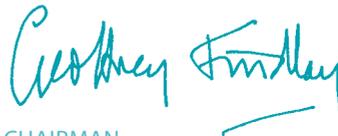
At the political level, the Water Act 2014 was passed in May. While this is a step in the right direction in addressing 'resilience' of water supply, it does not go as far or as fast as we and other environmental bodies would have wished. But we welcome its start on the route towards abstraction reform and are participating in the technical discussions.

There is good news on the abstraction front. On 26 June, the Environment Agency announced its intention to reduce abstraction at Axford, and to cancel it completely at Ogbourne from 1 April 2017. This is not the end of our campaign, but it is an important milestone. Equally important is the progress Thames Water is making in planning the major North-South Swindon pipeline that will make it possible to reduce their abstraction from Axford by enabling south Swindon to use water from the Farmoor reservoir. Three key members of the Thames Water team and a representative of the Environment Agency have shown us the outline of the route and explained how far they have got in gaining permissions from landowners and negotiating key issues such as crossing the main trainline and the M4. Once the necessary consultations are complete they have agreed to let us have the draft route – which we will put on our website. All being well, work could start in April 2015, and with no unforeseen problems the pipeline could be commissioned by December that year. This is really good news, though none of us will hold our breath until the water flows. We will also continue to urge Thames Water to exploit the flexibility

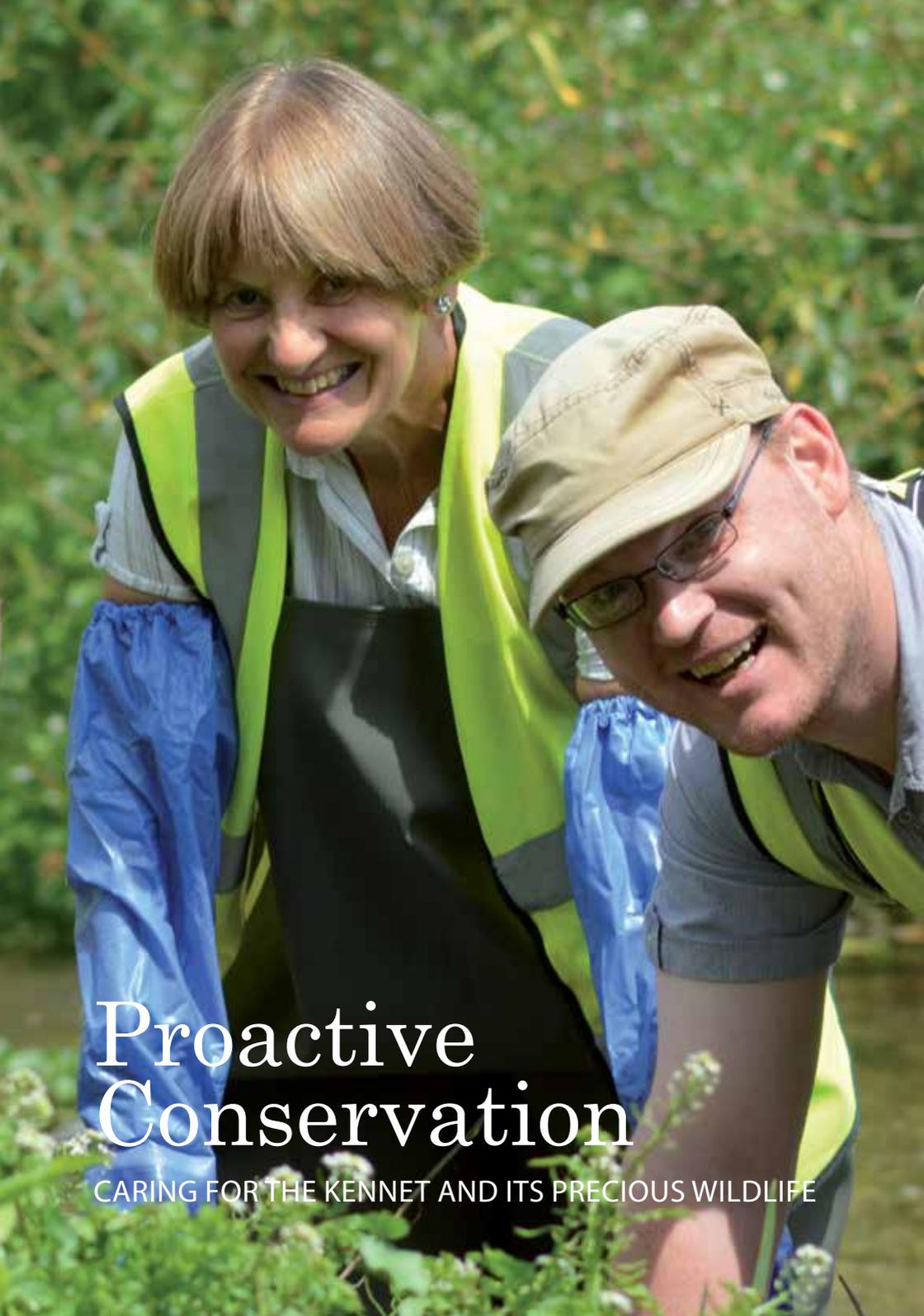
of the new system to reduce abstraction still further.

We have had useful discussions with Richard Benyon MP (former Rivers Minister); Alok Sharma MP (Reading West) and Martin Salter (former MP for Reading West and now Campaigns Manager for the Angling Trust) about working with partners downstream. With their support we are starting to consider projects in and near Reading. We also had a successful stand at the Royal Berkshire Show for the first time.

Meanwhile, as you will read, ARK continues to expand our programme of practical projects, riverfly and other monitoring, voluntary work – now with more than 110 volunteers, education in schools and on farms ... all made possible by Charlotte and her team, our partners, the committee and you our members. We are also very grateful to Philip Perkins for creating 'The Beautiful Kennet 2014' calendar – not only is it a wonderful advertisement for the river but he has also generously donated all of its profits to our work. To all of you – as ever – we are greatly indebted.



CHAIRMAN



Proactive Conservation

CARING FOR THE KENNET AND ITS PRECIOUS WILDLIFE



Our volunteers have been working hard in the river and on the land beside it

The following are just some of the practical projects carried out under guidance by our dedicated group of more than 100 conservation volunteers.

Working with parishioners at St George's Church, Preshute, ARK volunteers prevented further bank erosion by restoring a section of riverbank, while Marlborough College students continued to carry out practical river habitat work on an adjacent stretch of the Kennet passing through the college.

Sites where in previous years we worked hard to remove Himalayan balsam have shown significantly less re-growth this year. As a result, we have extended our campaign to new sites, which we will be revisiting in 2015 to make sure we are winning our battle against this highly invasive and destructive plant.

In addition to a second fish pass in Cooper's Meadow, baffles have been installed on the weir beside the Pewsey Road Bridge in Marlborough as a further means of allowing fish to swim upstream.

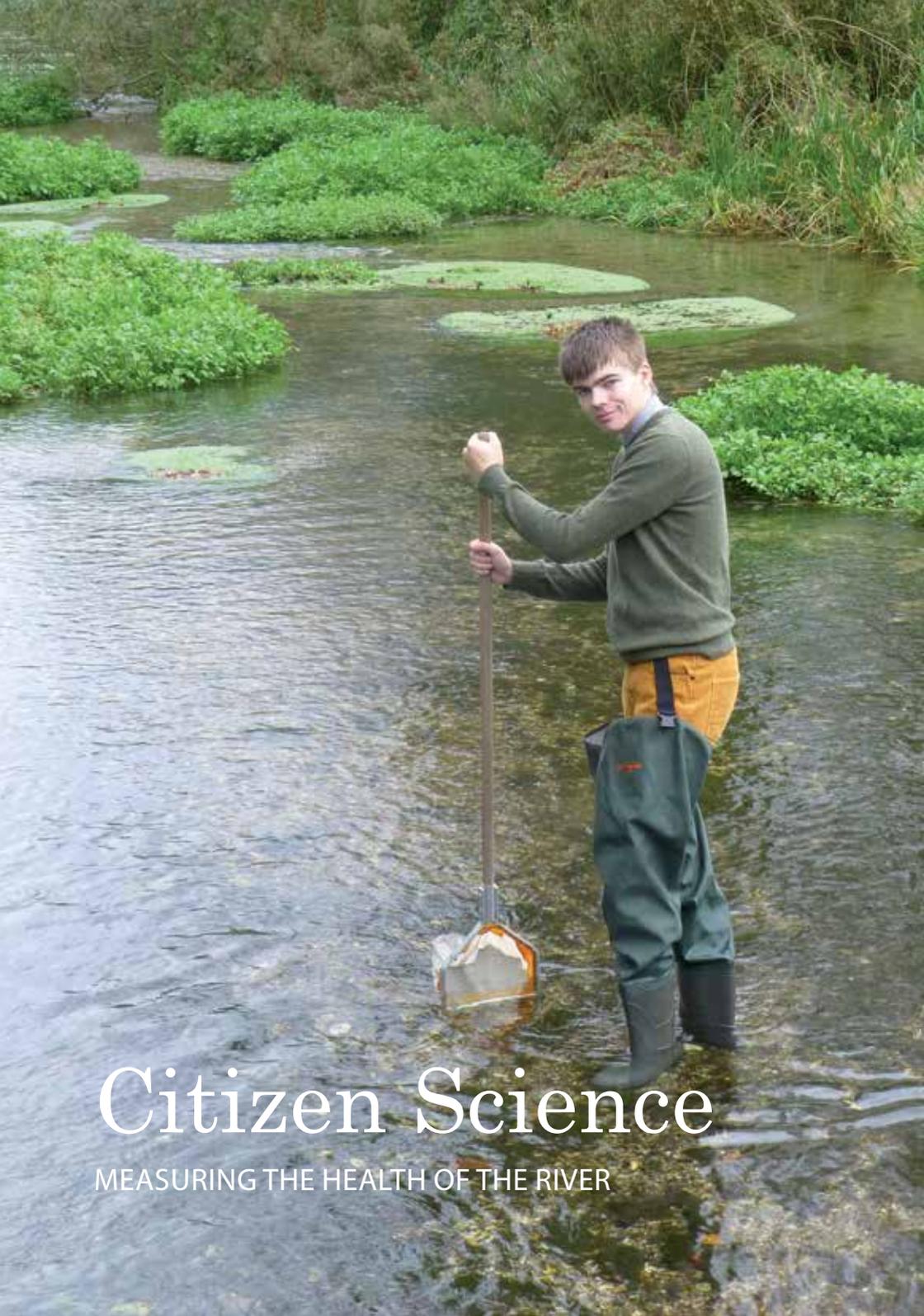
Bird and bat boxes, kindly made and donated by Ray Lippiatt of Ramsbury, have been erected by volunteers at Stonebridge Meadow and Cooper's Meadow in Marlborough and at the Kennet Triangle in Ramsbury.

Further downstream at Kintbury, volunteers continue their monthly tasks to improve a carrier stream. The bank work held up to last winter's flooding and the marginal planting is now firmly established.

Wild flower seeds scattered in Stonebridge Meadow last year have come up – an encouraging start for this long-term project.

Water crowfoot is once again growing in the River Kennet at Stonebridge, thanks to the perseverance of our volunteers. This complements the regular land-based conservation tasks carried out at Stonebridge throughout the year.

Anna Forbes
Stonebridge Project Officer



Citizen Science

MEASURING THE HEALTH OF THE RIVER



Our volunteers provide the evidence needed for practical action and effective campaigning

Perhaps most strikingly, riverfly monitors have been capturing data on the recovery of the Marlborough – Hungerford stretch of the Kennet since the devastating pollution incident in 2013. It turns out that invertebrates have re-colonised in numbers larger than many expected. Sites near Marlborough are back up to pre-pollution levels, although others in the Ramsbury area have been slower to repopulate due to their distance from unaffected populations.

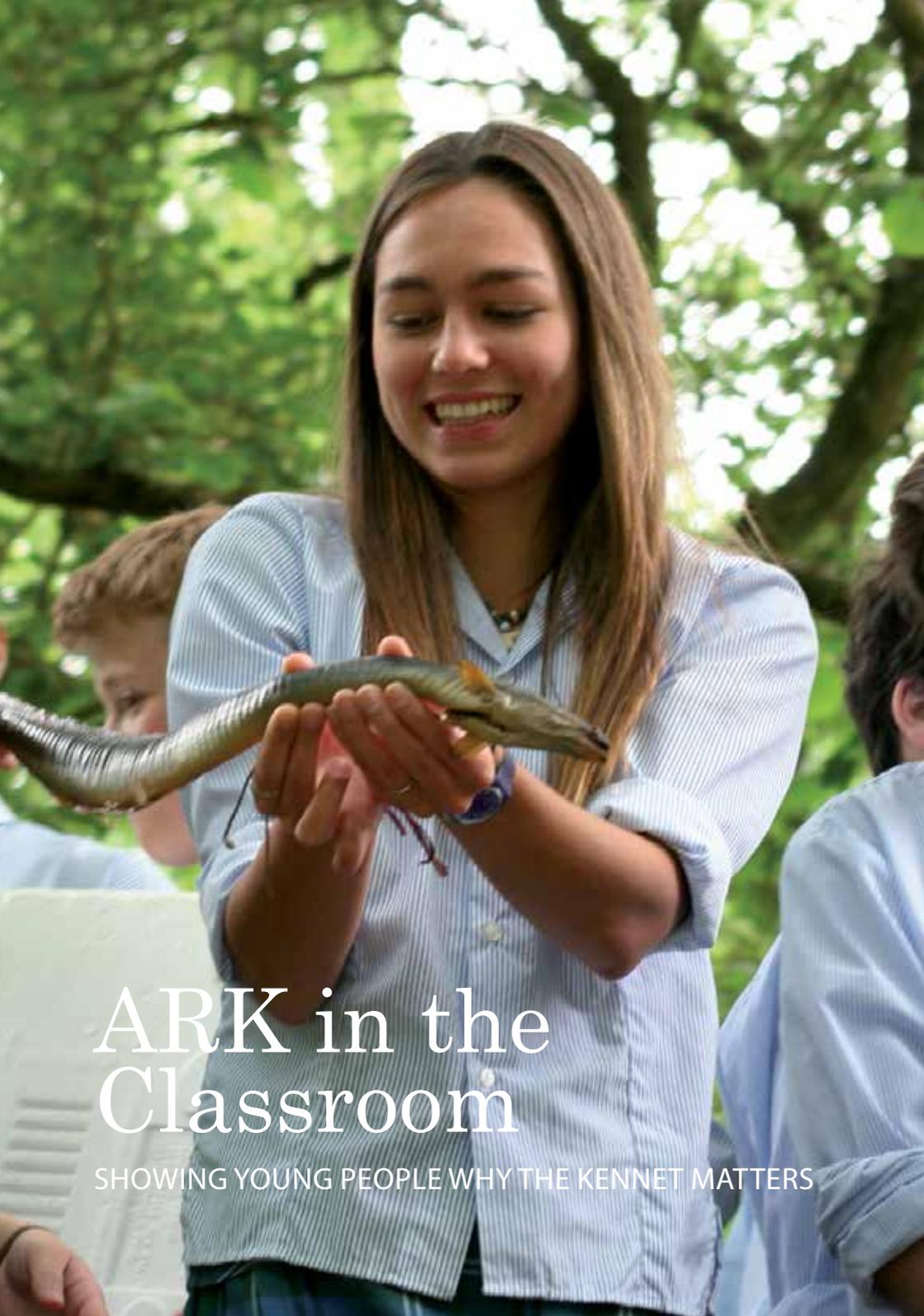
Alongside the work of our own volunteers, a team of scientists from Imperial College and University College, London has been assessing the extent of recovery and the more subtle effects that the pollution may have had on the ecology of the river.

Our annual survey of redds (trout nests) had to be cancelled because of last winter's exceptionally high flow of water, but a very successful training day attended by 15 volunteers means we have a larger than ever group of surveyors ready for the coming winter.

At Stonebridge Wild River Reserve, detailed biological surveying has continued unabated. As well as a host of previously unrecorded flies, beetles and other invertebrates, 86 new species of moth were recorded. Reptile and amphibian surveying has continued fortnightly, while a new mammal was added to our list as a result of the exciting sighting of an otter in May. Another welcome surprise was a stoat recorded by one of our camera traps.

Meanwhile, muddy walkers remain vigilant for any pollution or nutrient sources running into the river and our water-vole surveyors have been busy identifying stretches of the river suitable for habitat restoration. Their work shows just how lucky we are on the Kennet to have such a large population of the UK's fastest-declining mammal.

Harry Forbes
Riverfly Co-ordinator



ARK in the Classroom

SHOWING YOUNG PEOPLE WHY THE KENNET MATTERS



2014 has been another busy year for ARK in our local schools

January saw the return of our ever-popular 'Trout in Schools' project. We were extremely lucky to be supported by Michael Stephenson of Berkshire Trout Farm, particularly as the farm had been battling with major flooding issues. The trout were successfully hatched and released during April and we achieved some excellent media coverage for ARK, including a BBC Radio Wiltshire feature that gave the children of St Michael's School in Aldbourne a lovely opportunity to demonstrate all that they had learned about the Kennet through raising the baby trout.

The summer term brought a new project to the ARK portfolio: Eels in School. Eels have not been resident in the Kennet for over 50 years, but prior to this they were an extremely important part of our river ecology. With the approval of the Environment Agency, ARK and Severn & Wye Smokery delivered tanks of elvers (baby eels) to six Kennet schools. The

aim was to help children learn about the species and their relationship with the river before returning the eels back to the Kennet eight weeks later. The eels were a huge hit with children, teachers and visitors alike. Each release was extremely hands (and wellies!) on, and the children even got to try some smoked eel.

Feedback from all the schools has been extremely positive and we are looking forward to extending these projects further downstream in 2015. We have also acquired an exciting new resource called Em-River, a hands-on tool for demonstrating 'fluvial geomorphology' – or more colloquially the way rivers form and change over time. We enjoyed a wonderful weekend demonstrating it at the Royal Berkshire Show and are looking forward to bringing it to Kennet classrooms in 2015.

Helen Kelly
Care for the Kennet Co-ordinator

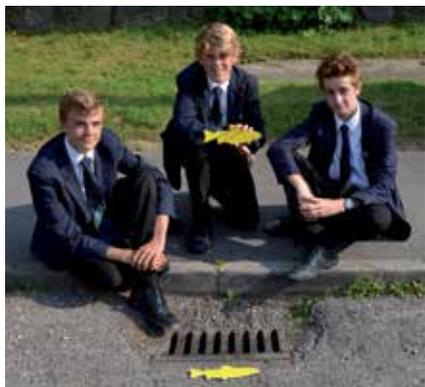



Protect
our trout


Use
water wisely

Winning Support

CAMPAIGNING FOR A HEALTHIER RIVER



ARK's role as the voice of the Kennet continues, as we move the Kennet Catchment Partnership forward and downstream

After more than 20 years of campaigning by ARK, planning work has begun on the new north-south Swindon pipeline that will enable reduced abstraction at Axford, and no abstraction at all at Ogbourne. This means that more water will remain in the Kennet Valley, particularly in dry years, when exported water will be limited to three million litres a day.

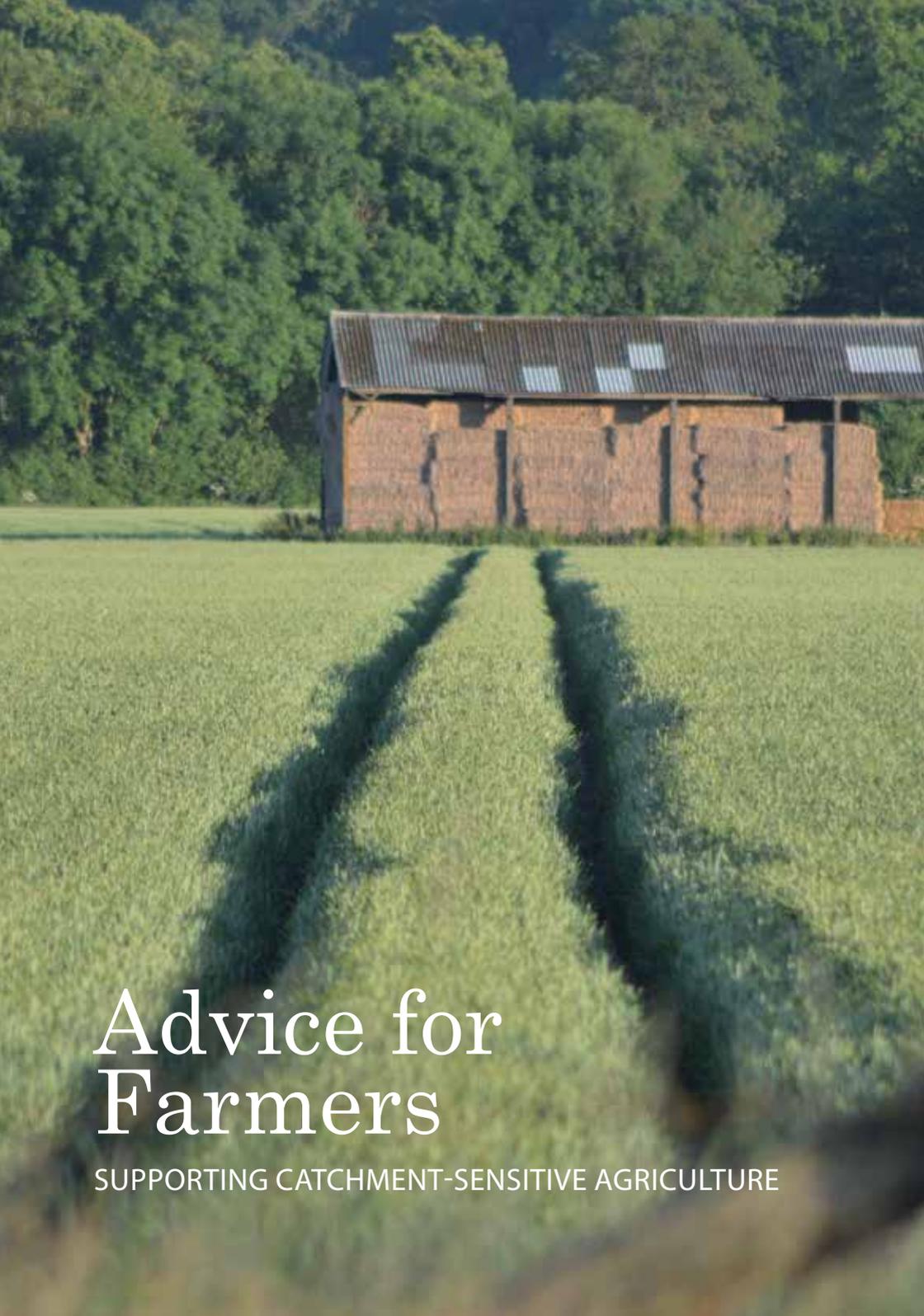
Our Catchment Management Plan for the Kennet has been used to inform the draft River Basin Management Plan for the Thames River Basin. The plan was adopted by the Kennet Catchment Partnership, and the group continues to grow and become more active. The Partnership's aim is to create a river that meets 'Good Ecological Status' and to join up the groups and organisations whose activities affect the river.

Residents in the Kennet Valley still consume more water than the national average, so we have made a concerted effort to reduce consumption, particularly

in Marlborough. By fitting water-saving gadgets into people's homes our 'Save Water September' campaign with Climate Energy and Thames Water reduced annual water consumption by 3 million litres in just a month – a million better than our target.

As important as plentiful water is clean water. For the first time this year we co-ordinated a 'Yellow Fish' campaign, run by Duke of Edinburgh Award students from St John's School and funded by the North Wessex Downs AONB. The students have been marking drains which lead to the river with Yellow Fish and then distributing cards which explain what the yellow fish mean. In the wake of last year's chlorpyrifos pollution incident our message 'Only rain down the drain' is a reminder to people to think about what they tip down drains and sinks.

Charlotte Hitchmough
Director



Advice for Farmers

SUPPORTING CATCHMENT-SENSITIVE AGRICULTURE



ARK and Catchment Sensitive Farming are working together to run the collaborative Southern Streams project

The Southern Streams project provides advice to farmers in the Kennet catchment on reducing diffuse pollution from their farms that would otherwise adversely affect the quality of the water in the rivers and the aquifers that feed them.

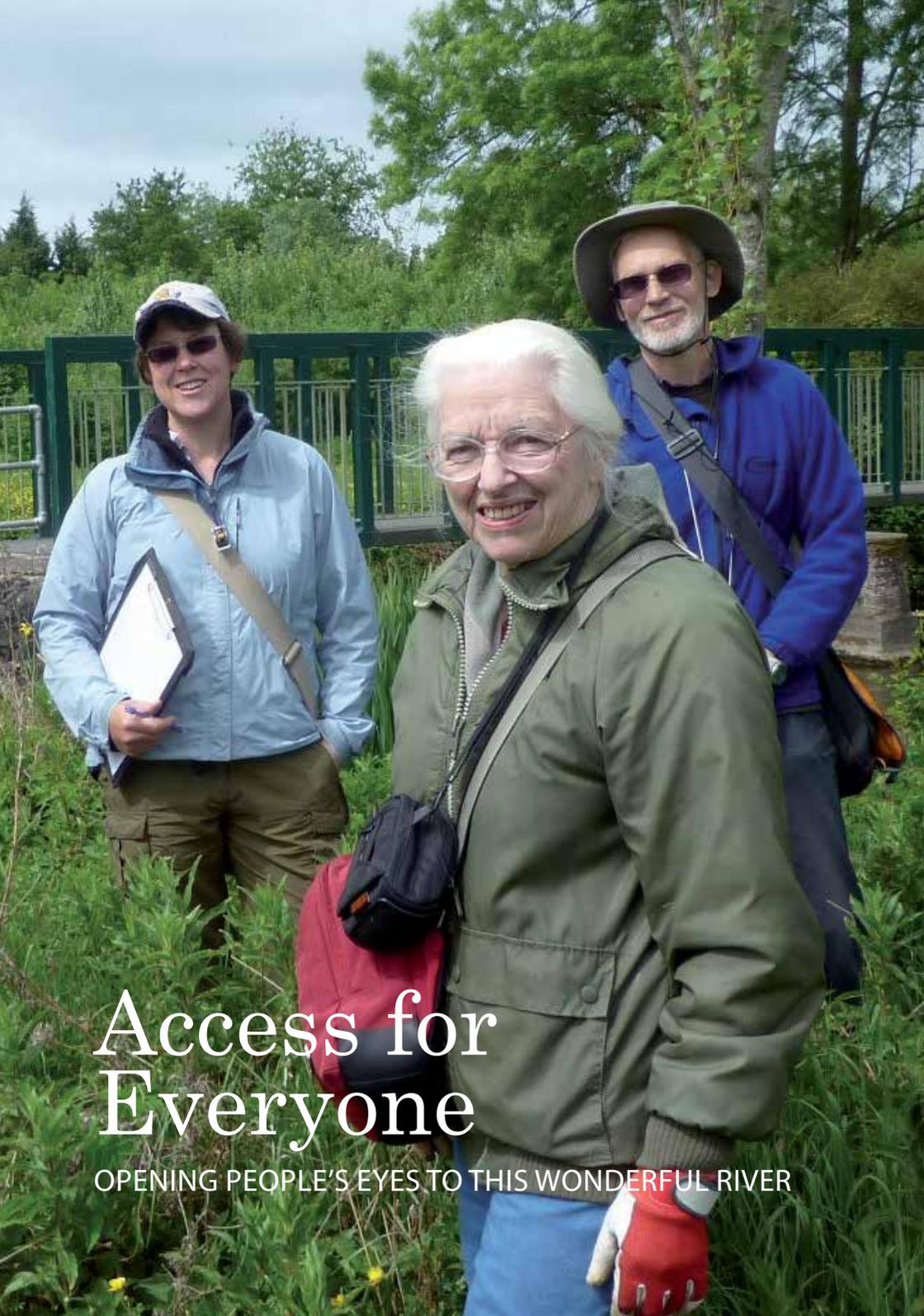
Nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus are widely used in agriculture as fertilisers and they are also present in animal manures. Accurate and precise application means that less of those nutrients are leached to surface and groundwaters. Helping farmers with better targeting of nutrients has been an important part of the advice provided by the project.

Sediment washed off fields can clog river gravels and ruin fish spawning areas. By reducing the compaction of their soils, farmers can increase the land's capacity to accept rainfall and thus reduce the amount that runs off into the river. Track management also has a large part to play in preventing sediment and nutrients reaching watercourses.

Pesticides are at risk of reaching water either when they are being applied in the field or when the sprayer is being filled or washed off in the yard. The project has therefore focused on providing Kennet farmers with advice about installing new, safer, banded sprayer filling areas as well as biofilters and biobeds that can treat contaminated pesticide washings in a safe and sustainable way.

Southern Streams, as well as providing one-to-one advice over the past year, also ran group sessions and attended the Agrii Focus event at Aldbourne, where we had a stand extolling the advantages and benefits of cover crops. If anyone wants to know more about these or any other farming matters, please give us a call on 07713 333196 or email me on timothyclarke55@gmail.com

Timothy Clarke
Farm Advisor



Access for Everyone

OPENING PEOPLE'S EYES TO THIS WONDERFUL RIVER



Understanding the River Kennet is the key to getting people to care about it

Over the summer our series of 'Discover Stonebridge' events introduced local people of all ages to the River Kennet and the rich wildlife habitats that surround it. A photographic competition and exhibition attracted 49 entries and our 'Make a Movie' and 'Creative Ecology' workshops encouraged young people to gain a better understanding and appreciation of their local patch.

Moth Nights, Bat Walks and Wildlife Walks continue to draw the public to Stonebridge. As well as regular visitors we welcomed many residents of the town who had never been before, but who quickly come again after being amazed by what is on their doorstep.

Two hedge-planting afternoons in the spring gave the public an opportunity to get hands-on helping plant 420 native trees donated by the Woodland Trust. Not far away, our River Og conservation project is now complete – at the same time as improving the quality of river it allows much better access for people

to enjoy it. Meanwhile in Marlborough, volunteers assisted with re-establishing marginal plants for the popular Water Front in Kennet Place, Marlborough using a selection of native plants harvested from downstream.

Marlborough's Cooper's Meadow was again the summer home for a flock of conservation grazing sheep and Stonebridge for our four cows. As well as helping to control less desirable vegetation the livestock are a popular attraction, especially for children. The boardwalk, part of Stonebridge Wild River Reserve, continues to be used by many and provides a beautiful riverside walk, often accompanied by superb views of water vole and kingfisher.

Next year we hope to run even more public events at several locations along the river. Keep up to date at www.facebook.com/riverkennet

Anna Forbes
Stonebridge Project Officer

Accounts

Year Ended 31 March 2014

Income and Expenditure Account

	2014	2013
	£	£
INCOME		
Subscriptions	5,590	6,398
Donations	8,501	6,748
Legacies	1,000	-
Raffle income	-	765
Project income – unrestricted and spent	109,844	122,223
Fees and other – unrestricted and spent	-	25,000
Fees and other	1,238	4,001
Profit on sale of land	-	10,988
Interest received	13	105
Investment income	645	980
Total income	126,831	177,208
COSTS OF CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES		
Staff costs	34,560	24,789
Project costs	79,752	108,964
Project management and expenses	2,940	2,038
IT, stationery and postage	2,853	2,703
Newsletter and Annual Report	3,508	4,314
Website	1,350	375
Training	590	-
Insurance	643	666
Subscriptions	1,114	50
Depreciation	171	-
Other costs	652	661
Total of charitable activities	128,133	144,560
Governance and accountancy costs	3,743	2,524
Deficit/surplus of income over expenditure	-5,045	30,125
Restricted income carried forward	-12,500	25,000
Unrestricted surplus	7,455	5,125
Unrealised gains on investments	1,370	2,364
Charity funds brought forward at 1 April 2013	167,967	135,478
Charity funds carried forward at 31 March 2014	164,292	167,967

Assets And Liabilities as at 31 March 2014

ASSETS	2014	2013
	£	£
CASH FUNDS		
Current account	63,943	62,971
Deposits	10,651	9,993
Total cash	74,594	72,964
FIXED ASSETS		
Land	76,563	76,563
Office equipment	1,542	1,200
CURRENT ASSETS		
Investments	33,517	22,148
Trade Debtors	2,250	10,173
Total assets	188,466	183,048
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Creditors	-15,077	-3,209
Other creditors	-527	-414
Accruals	-8,570	-11,458
Total liabilities	-24,174	-15,081
Total funds	164,292	167,967
Unrestricted Funds	151,792	142,967
Restricted Funds	12,500	25,000

NOTE

The financial statements have been prepared under the historical cost convention, and on an accruals basis.

Executive Committee

President	Sir Nigel Thompson
Chairman	Geoffrey Findlay
Hon. Treasurer	Martin Gibson
Technical Adviser	John Lawson
Ecological Advisers	John Hounslow, Peter Marren
Committee	Richard Clarke, James Dallas, Sean Dempster, Don Harris, Rodney Owen Jones, Kevin Light
Director	Charlotte Hitchmough

The charity is constituted as a trust governed by a constitution. Trustees are elected annually by the members.

Benefactors and Supporters 2014

Abby George
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Environment Agency
Gibson Foundation
Greenbank Heating Ltd
Grove Farm Stitchcombe
Link2Nature
M J Sly Stonemasons
Marlborough Probus
Mole Productions
Mrs M Downey
Marlborough Rugby Club
Natural England
North Wessex Downs AONB

Penny Hill
Philip Perkins
Preshute C of E Primary School
Ray Lippiatt
Savernake Flyfishers
Sportfish, Reading
St George's Church, Preshute
St Peter's Church, Marlborough
St Peter's Coffee Shop
T H White Limited
Thames Water
The Blunt Trust
Wild Trout Trust
Woodland Trust



Action for the River Kennet

PO Box 2919, Manton, Marlborough, Wiltshire SN8 4WE
t: 01672 513672 | e: info@riverkennet.org | www.riverkennet.org
Registered charity number: 1120725

If you'd like to find out more about ARK, volunteering opportunities or membership please visit our website at www.riverkennet.org or contact Carolyn White: carolyn@riverkennet.org

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