Summer 2006

ARK

Action for the River Kennet

Newsletter Number 15

Spring river walk

Well over one hundred people, and a few dogs, enjoyed this year's Spring River Walk in the early June sunshine and showers. The route began from the east side of Marlborough at Elcot Lane and meandered along the banks of the Kennet through Stitchcombe until Axford. It was an opportunity to explore a privately owned and beautifully managed reach of the chalk stream. Thank you to the village of Ramsbury for lending us their 'Ramsbury Flyer' minibus, and to Robert Osmond for driving it, and to the riparian owners who opened up their gardens and river banks for ARK.

Marlborough Community Area Fair

Torrential rain will be the abiding memory of the first Marlborough Area Community Fair, held at Marlborough College in July. River Keeper, John Hounslow and Head of Biology, Sean Dempster collected a variety of fish and river creatures to give visitors a view of what lives beneath the surface of the River. Special thanks to local fly-fishing instructor Malcolm Hanson and his team who gave up their afternoon to offer people a chance to fish on the college's lakes. For those who braved the rain it was an excellent afternoon. Welcome to all the new members who joined ARK and thanks to all our existing members who came to say hello!

Ed.

ARK greetings cards

Our greetings cards have proved so popular we have had another batch printed. Packs of 4 designs, specially commissioned for ARK by local artists Simon Orton and Eric Kilner, cost £8 including envelopes. All profits to ARK. Simply call 01672 513672 or post a cheque for £8 to ARK, PO Box 2919, Manton, Marlborough, SN8 4WE.
Picture (left) *'Werg Hatches'* by Simon Orton.

Inside this issue:

Progress at Manton

The main work on the river restoration project at Manton recreation ground is now complete thanks to the efforts of volunteers lead by the BTCV.

The banks and marginal areas have been planted up with native species supplied by Flower Farms at Shalbourne and are taking root well. Marlborough Town Council, who maintain the field, have adopted a 'water vole friendly' mowing regime, leaving the grass long to the water's edge. This allows the meadow plants to thrive, helps reduce bank erosion and provides shelter for water voles. Local children seem to be enjoying the more natural environment. Trout have ventured into the faster flowing water and we looking forward to evidence of water vole soon.

With the Marlborough River Restoration Scheme, ARK have applied to a number of trusts and funding agencies to fund similar restoration projects along the Kennet. ARK are also happy to be working alongside the EA with the Thames Rivers Restoration Trust as they identify potential river restoration sites. *Ed.*

Abstraction at Axford

Thames Water's licence to abstract water at Axford expires at the end of 2007. ARK have always argued that there should be no consumptive abstraction from Axford. However, Thames Water could simply and legally move their abstraction points to other pumping stations with indefinite licenses (Marlborough, Clatford, Ogbourne and Ramsbury) so the environmental damage would just be moved and the problem would not be solved.

The Environment Agency has made it clear that the agency will not side with ARK against Thames Water to defend the environmental status of the river. Instead they plan to act as arbitrator between Thames Water and ARK to find a balance between the health of the river and the need to supply water to customers.

ARK has responded robustly to the WS Atkins study into the impacts of abstraction. ARK supports the report's recommendation that consumptive abstraction should be dramatically reduced. We understand that Thames Water is currently creating the 'Upper Thames Major Resource Development' plan, due to be published in September/October 2006. This may give some clue as to how they hope to meet their obligations to supply water to Swindon and Marlborough. In the meantime ARK will continue to lobby for a sustainable alternative to abstraction to be found.

Ed.

Drought beating

In the UK we use an average of 155 litres of water a day—almost 20 litres more per person than 20 years ago. One of the greatest threats to the health of the River Kennet is water abstraction for domestic and industrial consumption. By managing our water demand, each of us can make a difference to the health of the river and, as Edmund Burke said, 'Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little'. Here are some ideas from the Environment Agency and Thames Water to help reduce consumption.

Water saving at home and in the garden

A third of household water is used flushing the toilet. Put a 'hippo' or a 'save-a-flush' in your cistern and you'll save water. Thames Water will send you one free. Call 0845 9200 800 or order online from http://waterwise.fortune-cookie.com/free-stuff/

Take a shower instead of a bath for a week and you could save enough water for 1,680 cups of tea.

Wash vegetables and fruit in a bowl, not under a running tap—the left over water can be used for plants.

Half-load programmes on dishwasher and washing machines use more than half the water and energy of a full load, so wait until you have a full load before switching the machine on.

A running tap uses 5 litres of water a minute. If you are washing hands, shaving or brushing teeth don't leave the water running.

A mulch of bark or woodchips helps prevent water evaporation as well as suppressing weed growth.

Lawns can survive long periods of dry weather if the grass isn't cut too short. Even if the grass turns brown it will recover after a few days of rain.

Collect rainwater in a water-butt.

How much water do we use?

Bath	80 litres	16 buckets+
5 minute shower (not power shower)	35 litres	7 buckets
Brushing teeth with tap running	6 litres/min	1.2 buckets
Brushing teeth with tap off	1 litre	0.2 buckets
Dripping tap	140 litres/week	28 buckets
Washing machine	65 litres	13 buckets
Dishwasher	20 litres	4 buckets
Washing car with bucket	10 litres	2 buckets

Tips and facts from Thames Water and the Environment Agency

State of the river — Summer 2006

The whole Thames catchment has had the driest recorded 20 month period in the past 100 years. Although May had exceptionally high rainfall, June signalled a return to dry conditions with only 31% of the long term average. In April, Thames Water implemented a hosepipe ban across its entire region. They have since made an application to Defra (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs) for a Drought Order to restrict non-essential uses of water in London. As part of the Environment Agency and Thames Water Drought Management Plan, flow in the Kennet below Newbury will be supplemented by groundwater from the boreholes in the Pang and Lambourne catchments to take water downstream to the Thames and thereby supplement the water supplies in London. This scheme won't remove additional water from the Kennet catchment.

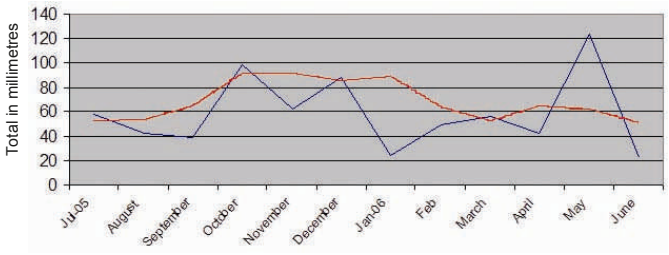
Groundwater levels have remained well below average all year, with very little winter recharge.

River flow is depressed, and the extreme low winter flows did not kick-start *Ranunculus* growth, as a result the river weed in dominated by Starwort.

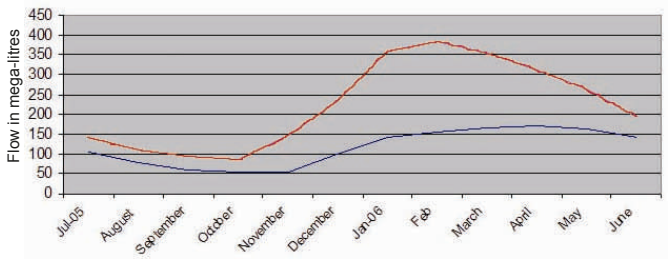
Water vole. The water vole population seems to be thriving. Recent sightings on the west side of Manton were confirmed by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. Water vole are now well established downstream at Marlborough College, but become absent through the town, where brown rats thrive on the bread left for ducks.

Mink, having been almost absent last year, have been spotted around Marlborough, and traps have been set, although to date none caught. None have been reported upstream.

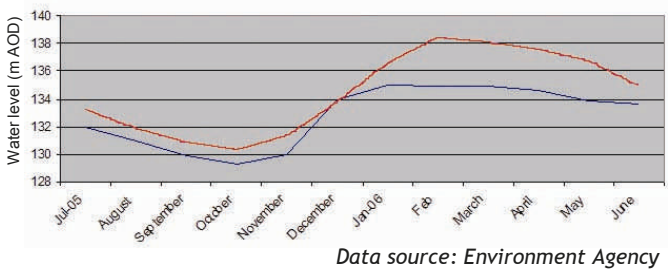
Rainfall at Marlborough Sewage Treatment Works
June 2005 —June 2006
Blue = recorded *Red = monthly average 1990—2005*



River Flow at Knighton
June 2005 — June 2006
Blue = recorded *Red = monthly average 1990—2005*



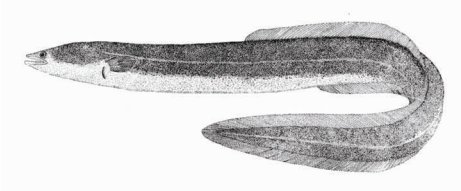
Groundwater Levels Rockley Observation Borehole
June 2005 —June 2006
Blue = recorded
Red = monthly average 1980—2005



Data source: Environment Agency

Eels

There is an eel trap by the bridge in Hungerford and another one by the bridge at West Overton, which suggests that in the not-so-distant past there were eels in the Kennet worth catching – but I've yet to meet anyone who has seen an eel this far up the Thames River Basin in recent years. Whilst there are still eels (*Anguila. anguilla)* in the lower reaches of Britain's river systems (including the Thames and the Avon) eel fishermen have reported a crash in eel stocks over the last 20 years. Their observations are backed up by research suggesting that eel populations in the UK have declined by 75% since the late 1970s.



The story is the same across Europe and explanations for the eels' decline include global scale influences such as oscillations in the North Atlantic Drift and local influences, including water abstraction and river regulation which render habitats unsuitable or inaccessible for eels.

An eel begins its life hatching out from an egg in the Sargasso sea. It takes up to 3 years to drift all the way to UK shores. Fewer than 1% survive the journey. The young eels entering European river systems are known as 'glass eels' because they are almost transparent. They become darker in colour and start to migrate up streams in large numbers; they are known as "elvers" at this time and measure around 50 mm in length. The eels, now called 'brown' or 'yellow eels' grow in freshwater, with males and females spending 6-12 and 9-20 years in freshwater, respectively. Towards the end of this time, they become sexually mature; they turn a silvery colour and migrate back towards the sea on dark, moonless and stormy nights; during this time they are known as 'silver eels'.

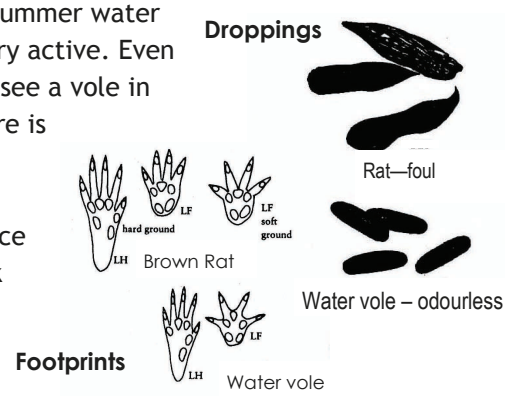
The adult Common or European Eel has a long, narrow body with a continuous dorsal, anal and tail fin. The skin is slimy, the lower jaw is longer than the upper jaw, and the scales are tiny or absent. They can live as long as 85 years.

There are several European and UK projects working to restore the eel to our rivers. If you spot one of these mysterious creatures in the Kennet, please let ARK know and we can pass the information on.

Ed.

Looking out for water voles

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's Beth Nightingale, explains that in the summer water voles are very active. Even if you don't see a vole in the flesh here is some other evidence of their presence you can look for:



The Water Framework Directive

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) is the most substantial piece of EU water legislation to date. It requires all inland and coastal waters to reach "good status" by 2015. It sets demanding environmental objectives, including ecological targets for surface waters. The UK Government, via Defra signed up to the legislation and it is being put in place by the Environment Agency.

One of the aims of the WFD is to balance environmental, economic and social considerations. The Water Framework Directive should safeguard and improve water quality. But unlike previous Directives, this Directive looks at the condition of all the key things living in the water in order to decide if it is good quality or "good status".

The Directive will be implemented via a set of 'River Basin Management Plans'. The River Kennet is part of the Thames River basin. A river basin management plan is being drawn up by the Environment Agency in consultation with stakeholder groups who include representatives from environmental groups, the water industry, farming, boating and local government.

Critically for the Kennet the links between **surface** and **groundwater** and **water quantity** and **water quality** must be taken into account in meeting objectives. The directive is equally about moving towards joining up the management of water with other policy sectors that have an impact on the water environment. It is difficult to see how the current unsustainable water abstraction from the Kennet will meet the WFD criteria so ARK are hopeful that this legislation will be good news for the Kennet.

Ed.