

What's Beane Happening?

The newsletter of The River Beane Restoration Association
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Welcome

The picture to the left (from Bob Andrews) shows how one of the water voles we reintroduced is enjoying his/herself in their new home. Well done Bob, because getting photos of these shy creatures is not easy. We are all looking forward to the next survey later this month and are pretty confident that our little furry friends will have spread even further both up and down the river,

From the chairman

In the last issue I mentioned that the Beane was good and full after

September and October's rain. Since the rain's not stopped since then, it's even fuller now! In general the Beane has continued to flow well along its entire length from Sandon (out towards Royston) all the way to Hertford, and with groundwater levels at their highest for many years, this all bodes well for the summer ahead. Not so good has been the tendency for the storm tanks at Weston's sewage works to overflow at times of peak rain, and, according to the Thames Water website that reports these storm discharges (thameswater.co.uk/edm-map), Cottered's works have been overflowing nearly constantly since October too. Given that Thames spent £2 million upgrading the works there in early 2023, this is disappointing. I shall be contacting them soon to ask what's going on. There is a hint that the overflow sensors are not operating correctly since the upgrade – let's hope that is the case. As we move into Spring and then the Summer, we will be restarting our continued campaign to remove invasive non-native species (INNS), especially Himalayan Balsam, from the Beane catchment: watch our Facebook page (facebook.com/riverbeane) or website (riverbeane.org.uk) for details of upcoming work parties if you fancy lending a hand. We have also been successful again this year with our application to Affinity Water's INNS-out grant scheme to help with this year's efforts – more on that in the next edition.

A Brief History of Rain in the Beane Valley From Steve Shaw

Monthly recording began in 2007 at the request of my elder brother who lives in Tasmania. He was seeking a possible similarity between two locations at opposite ends of the globe. None was found, but a record of rainfall has been kept every month ever since. The sophistication of the recording apparatus is best explained as an open-ended transparent container calibrated to read millimetres of water present - simple but effective.

So, these recordings have accumulated over the years and have been poured over by many interested parties. There are seasonal trends, but they are not by any means consistent. 2016 was the driest year with 400mms and the wettest was 2012 with 778.5 mms. *(Editor's note: I'm surprised it wasn't 2023. The 23/24 winter has certainly been one of the wettest on record nationally)* On a narrower timescale the winter months are wettest. October, November, December and January are reliably wet, which is essential for aquifer recharge. Spring brings drier weather for March, April and May, June can be quite wet with July and August being a bit wetter. September has been a notably dry month, recommended for barbecues.

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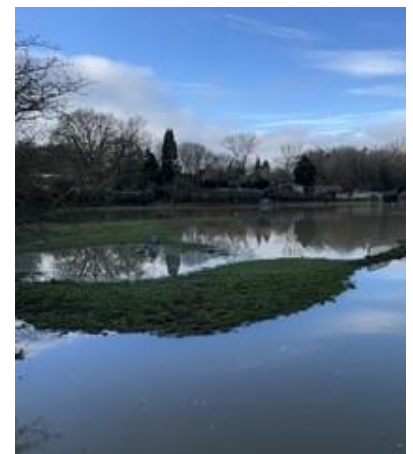
How to access publicly
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It's been a wet winter

The photos above and below, Whitehall ford and the flooded Festival Field at Whitehall Farm, were taken during the winter by Steve Shaw. See his article on Aston rainfall below left.



A brief history of rain in the Beane Valley continued

There is no indication yet that there has been a profound change in the volume of rain but there is no doubt that rainfall is more intense. Fields are wetter and hold water for longer and consequently run off into the river and onto our rural roads occurs more frequently.

I hope you have found this short piece interesting. If you have any questions drop a note to our website and I will try to offer an explanation – if possible.

New Fencing to Help Protect the Beane at Waterford Marsh

From Marcella Randall

New fencing was put in place on the Marsh last year to protect the river Beane from 'poaching' damage by grazing animals, although all areas of this common land are still fully accessible. The main footpath along the river, part of the Hertfordshire Way, is now separate from the fenced area to the East. The footpath through to Molewood, part of Waterford Heath, can still be reached, as before, and there are new stiles at each end of the Marsh, as shown in the photos.

The project was coordinated by Hertfordshire County Council's Countryside and Rights of Way team (CROW) in collaboration with the Environment Agency and was approved by central government after a consultation period. Stapleford Parish Council continue to manage the Marsh and this summer there will be some cattle grazing once again, with drinking water points for the animals due to be installed shortly.



The above photos from Marcella show the stile at the south end, the main gate entrance at the north end and the gate through to Molewood.



Open Meeting

We held a very well attended meeting (approx. fifty people, photo by Nicola Thompson) at Stapleford Village Hall on the 20th February.

RBRA Chair, Peter White, kicked the meeting off with a skim though what the RBRA has been up to since our last meeting in July. We heard from:

- Andrew Wood, Hertfordshire Butterfly Recorder from Butterfly Conservation - Herts & Middlesex who told us all about the butterflies of the Beane Valley, including the

Grizzled Skipper and Dark Green Fritillary, both of which are rare, but are found by our river.

- Affinity Water outlined their initial ideas for a further round of 'rewiggling' and reconnection of the Beane with its floodplain on the Woodhall Estate - vital to improve the river itself, local wildlife habitat, and to reduce downstream flood risk.

- And we caught up with progress on the CaSTCo project from Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust - enabling trained, local volunteers to gather the vital, missing data that will help in identifying the sources and causes of siltation, run-off and misconnected sewer flows into the river to allow the EA to take action.

Thank you too to Stapleford Parish Council for making us welcome in the village hall. (which I learnt at the end of the meeting, was originally built and sited in Norfolk. It (and others) were moved to the local area by the Woodhall Estate after WW1)

A summary of Bore hole data for March from Dave Ashby

Apart from Halls Green & Watton, boreholes have shown a marginal reduction in Ground Water levels despite the healthy, if not greater than monthly average, rainfall.

I would suggest that we are now at a dynamic equilibrium point, where 'soil moisture deficit' levels are steady at 0% and the boreholes are similarly at their highest maintainable levels. Relatively small rainfall events will give a temporary marginal increase in GW level with a corresponding increase in dirty flow due to surface run-off. These minor perturbations do not greatly affect the underlying 'chalk' flow levels in the long term, until the soil moisture deficit becomes generally positive again.

Armchair philosophising can keep us busy for ages; the river is at a relatively healthy and stable level.

Data, Data everywhere, but None that's Easy to Read – Or is it?

If you follow us on Facebook, you might have seen our recent posts showing the Thames Water sewage spill data which they publish on their website. But, what other data about the Beane is there to see online? It turns out that there's quite a lot, and much of it in very digestible forms.

Let's start with something simple, but very useful: how much water is in the River Beane? Along the Beane itself are three depth monitoring stations, the output from which can be seen online in real time. These are in Walkern, at Watton at Stone, and on Hartham Common in Hertford. The .gov website shows a live graph of depth from these and covers the past five days. In the case of Hartham, it also predicts the next 36 hours.

Here's the link to that Watton data:

<https://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk/station/7339>

or you can see this by scanning this QR tag with your smartphone. If you follow the link to 'Nearby levels' from that page you can see the data from Walkern and Hertford, as well as for the Stevenage Brook. And if you choose the 'Map' option, you can see rainfall data as well.



Woolenwick School Year 5's Welcome the River Beane to their Class room from Viv Jones

Whilst walking round the Walkern Fayre last summer, Emma Farrier, a year 5 teacher at Woolenwick School, Stevenage, stopped to chat with Dave Standing who was manning our roadshow stall. She was fascinated by the RBRA display and wondered if we could help enrich the rivers topic in their curriculum. Sadly, taking two classes out to the river would be too difficult. However, taking the river into the classroom would be a lot easier.

This led to Bob, Robin and myself delivering a lesson to 2 classes of year 5 (aged about 10) pupils in mid February.

Bob spent the first half of the lesson looking at rivers, examining their role in the water cycle and their importance for humans. The focus was from the global to the local with of course a lot about the unique nature of our wonderful Chalk Streams and how invertebrates can be used to test river health. We were amazed at the knowledge of the children who knew lots of facts about Rivers such as The Nile, The Amazon and The Thames. However, they were less aware of the rivers nearby such as the Stevenage Brook and the River Beane. We were impressed how engaged the children were, they really wanted to answer our questions and were so keen to share their knowledge of rivers and geography and they listened very intently and quietly to Bob.

After the talk the children looked at a Riverfly sample that Bob and Robin had collected that morning from The Beane in Watton. In small groups, and amidst a lot of squealing and excitement, they started to separate the different mayflies, leeches and freshwater shrimp into the sorting trays. This really proved a great success with the students; they took the task seriously and enjoyed catching and looking at some of the specimens through a microscope.

Although we were exhausted and had new respect for the patience and skills of primary teachers, it was an enjoyable experience for all and one we'd like to repeat by offering a similar lesson to other schools in the Beane catchment.



Studying the mini beasts from the Beane. Photos from Woolenwick School.



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