



# 2012 Review

## A Cleaner River for All



One of our main objectives has been to end the discharge of raw sewage into the Chess from Chesham Sewage Treatment Works (CSTW). Whilst this practice by Thames Water is legal, we are very concerned about its impacts on water quality, biodiversity and potential health risks for river users.

The problem occurs when the capacity of the CSTW's storage tanks is exceeded after heavy rainfall, leading to a mix of storm water runoff and raw sewage being released directly into the river.

Our consistent lobbying culminated in Thames Water inviting us on a site visit to CSTW in 2011 to discuss the problem. We are delighted to report that Thames Water decided to double the storage capacity on site in Spring 2012 and have set up a system to notify us of any discharges. Thanks to Thames Water's investment there have been no sewage discharges this year, despite a lot of heavy rainfall.

We are continuing to work with Thames Water on other issues, including the used sanitary towels and nappies that are frequently found littering the river downstream of CSTW.

We are working hard to persuade the Environment Agency (EA) against changing the status of the Chess from "over-abstacted" to "over-licensed". They are considering the change after a contractor's report concluded that abstraction has little or no effect on flows in the river.

We dispute this conclusion and have made repeated requests for access to the report. We are still waiting to see the document in advance of a meeting with the EA in the New Year.

This potential move will threaten the Chess as it means that the water companies that abstract from the aquifer that also feeds the Chess will no longer need to try to reduce the amount of water they take. We believe this will result in lower flows for the Chess.



Our displays of live invertebrates and fish fresh from the River Chess attracted a huge amount of interest from members of the public at our stall at the More Than Gold community festival held in Chesham on the 28<sup>th</sup> July. We were heartened by the level of concern expressed by people about the drying out of the river in town.

## A Class from the Masters

In October we hosted a Wild Trout Trust (WTT) Masterclass to teach volunteers how to enhance river habitats for fish. The event took place on a stretch upstream of Scotsbridge Mill in Rickmansworth, which is owned by Three Rivers District Council. This stretch is open to the public and very popular with walkers, but less so with fish; our project aimed to encourage more fish activity.



We were shown by the WTT how to create pinch points to clean gravel and scour out pools, we installed half logs to provide cover and built a brash barrier to encourage bank-side plant growth. These techniques should encourage spawning and provide cover for fish of all sizes.



As well as being attended by the RCA and Chesham Environmental Group, who regularly work on the Chess, we also invited participants from other river groups. Representatives from the Colne, Bean and Mimram will be able to take their newly learnt skills back to their own rivers.

We are regularly returning to this stretch to monitor the impacts of the work, and hope to carry out more habitat enhancement in the future.

## Love Your River

In October we hosted a river visit by DEFRA Minister, Richard Benyon MP, and Olympic rower James Cracknell to promote the Love Your River campaign.

Richard and James heard the concerns of local river groups regarding over-abstraction and pollution, as well as participating in riverfly monitoring with students from Clement Danes School in Chorleywood.





On the 8<sup>th</sup> March the Australian Broadcasting Corporation interviewed our Press Officer, David, and the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project Officer, Allen Beechey. ABC were interested in the British drought and its impacts on the Chess. The dry river at Meades Water Gardens perfectly highlighted the severity of the drought on the chalk stream environment.

Due to the wet weather, our planned moth survey for Latimer Water Meadows was postponed until the 23<sup>rd</sup> August, when chilly weather made conditions less than ideal. Despite this, we spent an enjoyable night learning about the moths caught in traps set by Peter Hall and David Wilton from Butterfly Conservation.

A total of 45 species was found, including moths associated with aquatic habitats, such as the Water Veneer (*Acentria ephemerella*) and Bulrush Wainscot (*Nonagria typhae*).

Because of the promising nature of the site, Peter and David hope to carry out further surveys in May-July 2013.

## Riverflies Struggle During Drought

Our amazing volunteers have been carrying out monthly monitoring of the fly life in the Chess at seven sites, whatever the weather. The monitoring scheme was set up in 2010 to detect pollution incidents and, in the longer term, identify trends in the invertebrate populations.

The most noticeable result for 2012 is that two of our sites, the Queen's Head and Meades Water Gardens (both in Chesham), could not be monitored for the majority of the year, as the river was dry at these locations. Water was first seen back in the river in Chesham in August and since October low numbers of resilient species like freshwater shrimp have been found recolonising these sites. Our monthly recording should provide interesting data on the river's recovery from drought.

We had a number of trigger breaches along the length of the river at the beginning of 2012. This occurs when the results fall below a set level and we then contact the Environment Agency (EA) to investigate in case the poor results have been caused by pollution events. In these instances, the EA attributed the low levels of fly life to the impact of the drought conditions.



## Chalk Stream Summit

Our Chairman, Paul, attended a Chalk Stream Summit down in Hampshire in December. The event was organized by George Hollingbery MP and was intended to raise awareness amongst MPs and ministers of the special status of English chalk streams and the numerous threats they face. It became apparent from discussions that the Chilterns chalk streams are at the greatest risk, with over-abstraction being the major problem. There was a call for a 10-point plan for chalk rivers and we have offered to help with this process.



*The Test in Hampshire, scene of the summit*



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## Trout in the Classroom

Trout in the Classroom, run by the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project, is now in its 5th year. Since 2010, we have provided practical support for this project which teaches local schoolchildren about the brown trout lifecycle and the wildlife in their nearby river.

In January, Little Chalfont Primary and Rickmansworth Park schools were each provided with a specialised aquarium containing trout eggs. The pupils monitored the eggs as they hatched, and then as the young fish grew the children fed them and kept the tank clean, with the help of volunteers (that's where we come in).

Having successfully reared the trout, we hosted field trips to the river in March so that the pupils could release their fish into the wild. Rickmansworth Park School followed this up with a further visit in June, where the pupils tried their hand at monitoring flow speed and invertebrate sampling.

As a fantastic way of getting the next generation interested in caring for their river, we will be supporting the project again in 2013, when it will expand to four schools on the Chess.

**Thanks to all our supporters for their continued interest in the River Chess**