

24th October 2016

Dear Members

End of season newsletter 2016

Welcome to the end of season newsletter. I don't believe the Association has circulated such a document before, but there is a lot to tell you about and a number of other documents we wanted to circulate in hard copy at the same time.

Fishing

The end of the trout fishing season can be a somewhat depressing period. This year I diligently completed a fishing diary for the first time, inspired by leafing through the beautiful record kept by one of our members, so I am better able to rekindle during the dark days of winter the memories of many happy hours on the riverbank this summer. I hope many of you, like me, have enjoyed some good days fishing on the river this summer, or have found the time simply to enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of the riverbank environment.

Water flows have been healthy, although they dropped quite noticeably in the last few weeks of the season; and water clarity has been good, better than in a number of previous years. Blanket weed and various kinds of algae have made an appearance, but thankfully not generally in the same quantities as has sometimes been the case in recent years. If I have had a consistent concern – and one that I know is shared by many of you - it has been a lack of river flies and a consequent lack of rising fish.

2016 Rivers Report

This will no doubt be a theme of the 2016 Rivers Report when we publish it, hopefully in February 2017. We will shortly be commissioning articles from our usual correspondents. We will be approaching a number of others for the first time to see if they are prepared to pen some words on a particular stretch of river, or perhaps on a subject of more general interest to our members. We need in particular more Meon correspondents, so if you are in a position to help we would like to hear from you. If you have not received a request to write an article for the 2016 Report by the end of the October, and would expect or like to do so, please get in touch with the office.

Autumn Members' Day

Given the amount of interest in and concern about the decline in river flies expressed by our members, we have made it the theme of our autumn members' day on Sunday 20 November, to be held at Kimbridge and Mottisfont on the Test. In the morning, we are fortunate to have three speakers lined up who are experts in this

field. Matt Owen-Farmer has been a keeper and water manager for many years on the Meon and Itchen. He will be providing training next year for members who wish to become Anglers River Fly Monitoring Initiative (ARMI) monitors and refresher training for existing monitors. Matt will speak about ARMI and will help interpret the ARMI data collected by our members which is now available for all to see on the River Fly partnership website. Dr Cyril Bennett MBE is hugely knowledgeable about Hampshire chalk stream river flies. He first became involved with river fly monitoring in the 1980s on the Hampshire Wey. His expertise in aquatic entomology is now globally recognised. Cyril will talk about the picture that emerges from the data that has been collected on the decline in river flies on the Hampshire chalk streams, current efforts to understand better the problem and opportunities for our members to contribute to future monitoring. The third speaker will be Rupert Kelton, Test and Itchen Catchment Officer at the Wessex Chalk Streams and Rivers Trust. Rupert was the author of the Test and Itchen Catchment Invertebrate Fingerprinting Study we circulated to our members earlier this year. Rupert will talk about the methodology used in the study, the results of the study and what can be done to mitigate the damage done to river flies by the two key stressors identified in the study, sediment and phosphate.

The talks will be followed by a short open forum and a lunch at Annie's restaurant at Kimbridge for those who wish to stay. In the afternoon, the National Trust have kindly agreed to host a river visit to the recently restored Oakley beat of the River Test at Mottisfont, just upstream from Kimbridge. The river looks magnificent after its restoration. Neil Swift, the National Trust keeper, will be there to tell us what was involved and how the river has recovered. The Oakley beat is also home to the famous Halford Fishing Hut so there is an element of pilgrimage too! We hope many of you will be able to join us for what should be an excellent day. Further details and a request for an indication if you are able to attend for all or part of the day are in the attached flier.

2017 Weed Cut Dates

In past years, the Association's meeting in November has been an Extraordinary General Meeting and has traditionally focussed on weed cut dates for the following year. In response to feedback from our members, who wanted the weed cut dates agreed as early as possible, the Board looked at proposed dates at their meeting in September. We then consulted owners, managers and keepers. The dates have now been formally agreed with the Environment Agency. The finalised dates (not changed from the draft dates previously circulated) are in the attached "Greens" for the Test and Itchen. We are also circulating an updated Weed Cutting Code of Practice. The guidance is mainly common sense and has not changed much from previous versions. But it is worth looking at, particularly if you are new to the weed cutting business.

The Test “Green” also provides contacting details for the three weed cut wardens for 2017. In response to feedback, we recruited a third volunteer warden (Keith Fisher) who will focus his efforts on the period immediately following each clearing down, when problems often arise. Again in response to feedback, we have included a map showing the Sector boundaries on the Test: the description of the Sector boundaries on the Green is the definitive guidance on Sector boundaries, but the map should help you identify at a glance which stretch of river is in which sector.

We do our best to ensure that everybody who might need to cut weed is aware of the dates. We do some leafleting in towns and villages where a number of gardens run down to the river, and are looking to engage with parish councils where this would be appropriate. Ideally, however, every owner of a garden backing onto one of our rivers would be a member of the Association. If you are aware of any such “garden owners” who might be interested in joining the Association, please let us know in the office and we will approach them.

Communication

The Board discussed a number of other issues at its meeting in September. One of them was how to enhance communication – in the widest sense of the word – with our members. As a result, we will be providing more information, more often, in written form to our members: this end of season newsletter is part of that initiative. Over the winter, Jacqui and I will be updating and adding more content to the Association’s website (www.testanditchen.co.uk). And we are planning to hold a series of meetings for our Owner members in the Spring of 2017, organised on a river by river basis. These meetings will be an opportunity for us to tell river owners what we are up to on your behalf, and for you to provide feedback. They should also be an opportunity to meet fellow river owners and discuss issues of mutual interest. Details to follow separately before the end of the year. And as an additional part of an effort to make sure the Association has understood what you want the Association to be doing on your behalf, I will be working with one of our Directors, Andrew Hoad, on developing a survey which will help us establish more objectively what it is that you would like us to focus our efforts on. We plan to circulate this survey early in the new year.

Abstraction

The September Board also considered how the Association should engage with the Environment Agency (EA) and Southern Water on abstraction of water from Hampshire’s rivers and the groundwater aquifer. As indicated in the mid-season newsletter, the next few weeks and months will see a number of key periods of consultation on Southern Water’s existing and future abstraction plans.

To recap, Southern Water are currently planning or implementing three initiatives designed to ensure continuity of supply for its customers in times of drought:

- A new bulk supply of up to 15 million litres of treated water a day from Portsmouth Water's Gater's Mill Water Supply Works on the River Itchen.
- A new 18km pipeline to transfer water from the River Test at Testwood to the Otterbourne Water Supply Works where it will be treated and sent into supply.
- The use of a Candover groundwater abstraction licence to support the flow of the River Itchen and abstraction at Otterbourne with water abstracted from the chalk aquifer.

Construction of the new pipeline from Gater's Mill began in July 2016 and will take approximately one year to complete.

For the proposed Testwood pipeline, Southern Water have begun the first stages of their planning application process. They expect to submit the full planning application by the end of the year. Ahead of this they have submitted to the EA amendments to their existing Testwood abstraction licence. This proposed licence amendment was advertised by the EA recently, providing a 28 day consultation period, ending on 10 November, although these dates might change as a result of an ongoing exchange between Southern Water and the EA on the status of the application. The Association will be contributing to the consultation process. We had hoped to include our contribution with this newsletter, but the uncertainty around the status of the amendment application means we have not yet been able to do so. We will circulate our contribution by email in due course, encouraging our members to submit their own comments, as we have been advised that the quantity of comments submitted weighs heavily in the EA's consideration of the issues. Sharpen your quills! For those who would like to find out more about the Testwood pipeline plan, Southern Water have organised two exhibitions where members of their team will be available to answer questions: the first is at Otterbourne Village Hall on Saturday 12 November from 1100 to 1500; and the second is at Romsey Town Hall on Monday 21 November from 1600 to 2000.

On the Candover scheme, the EA informed Southern Water in August of its decision to renew the Candover abstraction licence at a reduced rate of five million litres a day. Southern Water were planning on a 27 million litres per day limit. In the light of this development, Southern Water say they have suspended any further design work and access discussions until the licence renewal process is finalised. The formal consultation period is due to start soon. Again, the Association intends to submit its views during this consultation period.

Looking further ahead, Southern Water are starting work on their next phase of longer term water resource planning. The Association will be engaged in this process. In all these consultations and discussions, the Association will be arguing for Southern Water to develop water resource solutions that are not wholly dependent on extracting water from rivers and the aquifer. Alternatives do exist.

Amongst them are water storage (reservoirs), water re-use (putting more treated waste water back in the rivers), desalination (now more affordable, with Thames Water having opened the UK's first desalination plant), and securing water from areas of water surplus outside the Test and Itchen catchment. All of these options have environmental pros and cons, but Southern Water badly needs a more diversified water resource strategy.

The three existing initiatives, outlined above, are all fundamentally unsatisfactory as they amount to extracting more water from an already highly stressed environment at a time of drought. We will be arguing for measures that mitigate the damage the initiatives would cause if brought into use, while recognising that Southern Water are under an obligation to have plans in place for continuity of water supply. Part of our argument will be that the abstraction licences these initiatives are dependent on should be time limited and Southern Water put on notice that they must develop more sustainable solutions in the period before the licences expire. Pressure to develop more sustainable and less potentially damaging solutions should have been applied more effectively on Southern Water in recent years, but it hasn't been. The health of our chalk streams are strongly dependent on river flows which are obviously directly impacted by levels of abstraction. So this stuff matters.

Southern Water

I spent an afternoon recently at Southern Water's Testwood and Chickenhall sites. I was keen to see for myself what they do and hear from them how they go about planning their future water procurement requirements. It was a fascinating and informative few hours. Southern Water offered to organise visits to the Chickenhall Waste Water Treatment Site – which puts thousands of litres of treated waste water back in to the Itchen each day – for local fishing groups. If you are interested, let me know and I will put you in touch with the right part of the company. Don't worry, I am not about to become a Southern Water cheerleader. But I think the Association will be better placed to influence what they do if we understand their perspective and know some of the key individuals devising their future strategy. Clay, our Chairman, is also engaging with Southern Water on their future plans.

Swan damage

The September Board also had a short discussion on what the Association might do to prevent the serious damage done by large groups of swans to weed growth, particularly the ranunculus community, in many parts of our rivers. In places the damage this summer has been devastating. The Board asked me to establish whether it might be possible to secure a licence to control swan numbers, aiming for a position where there is a healthy population of breeding pairs but fewer of the large groups, sometimes numbering more than 20, which cause the most serious damage. Such licences do exist and are in operation in at least one neighbouring river catchment, where the numbers of non-breeding swans have as a result been reduced

significantly over a period of time. This is a sensitive and potentially contentious area so I will consult widely and proceed cautiously. More anon.

December Board Meeting

The next of the Board's quarterly meetings will take place on 8 December. We will be agreeing the key dates for 2017 and looking at the budget for the year ahead, amongst other things. The Board will have before them a number of proposals to fund and support efforts to understand better the reasons behind the decline in river flies which is clearly an area of real concern to many of you. The presentations and discussion at the members' day on 20 November should provide some ideas to inform the Board's consideration of these proposals. They will also involve close cooperation with a number of other organisations active in this area, including Salmon and Trout Conservation UK, the Wild Trout Trust and the Wessex Chalk Streams and Rivers Trust. Developing the Association's relationship with those organisations so we can achieve the best degree of cooperation possible will be a priority for me over the coming months. Nobody has any appetite or the time for combative or competitive relationships.

2016 Parliamentary Review

Our Owner members will find enclosed with this newsletter a copy of the Agriculture Edition of the 2016 Parliamentary Review, a glossy publication aimed at informing an influential constituency, including parliamentarians and other opinion formers, about the work of market leading organisations and companies. The Review includes an article about the Association. Clay attended the launch of the Review at the Houses of Parliament. For those not receiving a hard copy (we have a limited number) you can view the document online at www.theparliamentaryreview.co.uk and then clicking on the Agriculture link. If you would like your own hard copy and have not received one, please contact Jacqui in the office who will put one in the post for you. This was one initiative to publicise who we are and what we do. We have much to be proud of. We will be aiming to put more about what we do in the local media next year.

Photos

The Parliamentary Review benefited from some good quality photos which we secured from an outside source. Photos would help bring these newsletters to life, but we do not have an Association photo library. If any of our members has such a photo library and would be prepared to share it with us, please let us know and we can discuss how best to access the material.

That's enough for now. I hope you have found something here of interest to you. If you would like to hear more about other issues in future newsletters, please let me know. I am planning to circulate the next one, together with the 2016 Rivers Report, in February 2017. Feedback, as always, welcome. The many supportive comments I

have received since I started in June have been much appreciated. Thank you. As valuable for me have been the comments I have received about how the Association can raise its game. Keep them coming.

Jeremy

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