

## CLOSE SEASON NEWSLETTER

April and the beginning of the season seem a long way off on a foggy and frost-encrusted mid-January morning at Kimbridge. But I hope you find something here to rekindle memories of warmer days last summer, and to whet your appetite for the year ahead. Included with this newsletter and the Rivers Report you will find a Membership Survey, a document with the Association's Key Dates for 2017, a Keepers Bursary application form and information from Angling Trust on an insurance package for riparian owners. More on all these enclosures below.



*Kimbridge. Mid-winter*

### **Rivers Report**

Many of our members have told me that they particularly enjoy dipping into the annual Rivers Report. I hope you all enjoy reading the enclosed 2016 edition. In addition to the reports from fisheries up and down the Test, Itchen and Meon valleys, we have included this year articles from many of the organisations with which the Association works closely, as well as pieces of more general interest. I am grateful to all those who have taken the time and trouble to pen a contribution. You might not agree with the views of all our correspondents, but you will hopefully find what they have to say thought-provoking and stimulating.

What a difference a year makes. Twelve months ago we were in the middle of a very wet winter. The rivers were full. As I write, the rivers are notably low and there has been a lack of winter rain to recharge the aquifer. One positive result is that many of you have found it easier to get on with significant river restoration work, with the banks drier than they might have been. But let's hope the rainclouds arrive soon.

## Invertebrate Monitoring

One consistent theme of the Rivers Report, and of conversations I have had with many of you on the riverbank, has been the lack of fly life. This was the focus of our Members Day at Kimbridge in November. The picture varies from place to place and year to year, but most are agreed that invertebrates in terms of both abundance and species richness are generally lower in numbers than previously. There are consequently fewer rising fish and the fish seem thinner than one might expect. You will find some articles on the subject in the Rivers Report.



*Members Day visit to the Oakley Beat, Mottisfont, on the Test*

The Board agreed at their meeting in December that the Association should invest heavily in invertebrate monitoring in 2017. Plans are already well-advanced. We will be funding the continuation this year of the RiverFly Census work done at 11 sites on the Test and Itchen in 2015 and 2016 by Salmon and Trout Conservation UK (read about it in the Rivers Report). Three years of data collected and analysed to the very high standards used by Aquascience will provide us with the base line evidence we need to assess objectively the state of our rivers: identification to species level enables us to draw conclusions about the specific impacts of sediment, phosphates and the other key stressors. We will circulate the collected data to all our members and make it available on our website.

We have also agreed with Salmon and Trout Conservation UK and the Wessex Chalk Streams and Rivers Trust that the Association will fund the extension of the RiverFly Census to the Meon, using the same methodology and standards deployed on the Test and Itchen. We will

also be funding additional monitoring and analysis on the Meon and will aim to circulate the Meon results to our members later this year as a Catchment Invertebrate Fingerprinting Study (CIF), similar to the Test and Itchen CIF we circulated last summer.

We want to build on the effort and investment put into the RiverFly Census by making that quality of monitoring sustainable. The Association trained 30 Anglers River Fly Monitoring Initiative(ARMI) monitors in 2009. We are providing training at Kimbridge for new ARMI monitors on 27 March and refresher training for existing monitors on 27 April. We will fund the training of Association ARMI monitors to the more advanced River Fly Invertebrate Identification and Monitoring (RIIM) standards at courses being held at Leckford (places currently available for Association members on 12, 13 and 20 May). Read Cyril Bennett's article in the Rivers Report to find out more about what this involves. We will send out more details nearer the time but please contact the office now if you would like to reserve a place on one of the courses. Our aspiration is for Association monitors to be carrying out River Fly Census standard monitoring on at least five sites on each of the Test, Itchen and Meon from 2018.

Benchmarks and base lines as established by the RiverFly Census are necessary, but we all want to identify and rectify the problems that are causing the invertebrate decline in the first place. As we heard at the Members Day in November, this is often harder to achieve. We think we know some of the culprits, but accumulating solid evidence of site and source specific pollutants and stressors is technically difficult, time-consuming and expensive. We have earmarked some additional funding for site specific water quality monitoring in 2017 and will work with partner organisations to ensure our efforts are well-targeted, complementary and mutually reinforcing. In the meantime, there are things we can do to limit some of the more obvious problems. As I write, I am waiting for the clouds to open so, together with WCSRT and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIOWWT), we can do a wet weather walkover survey of the Upper Itchen to identify where sediment is entering the river. This will enable the design of preventative measures. Controlling sediment pathways is not high-tech or glamorous, but it works.

## **Swan damage**

Another feature of the Rivers Report is the widespread concern about the damage done by swans to weed growth, particularly ranunculus, up and down the rivers. For the mathematically minded, word processing technology tells me that there are 25 references to swans in the 2016 Rivers Report: by way of comparison, there were 12 references in the 2015 Report. Another feathered friend that has been causing angst, the cormorant, features 11 times in the 2016 Report. So, swans are clearly uppermost in your minds.

Nobody objects to a few swans. Ideally, there would be a breeding pair every mile or so along the river. The devastating weed damage is caused by immature swans in large groups, sometimes numbering more than 30. What can be done about them?





It is possible to acquire swan control licences which provide for the reduction of the number of eggs on nests. There is clear evidence that such licences reduce the number of non-breeding immature swans over time.

So such licences are definitely worth considering. Quite rightly, Natural England require compelling evidence before they would consider issuing such a licence. They need to be persuaded that in the places covered by the licence: there is a serious problem (damage to ranunculus); there are no

realistic alternatives to resolving it; and the licensed solution (egg removal) would have the desired impact. We will shortly be asking riparian owners and keepers for information on swan numbers and the damage swans have caused. Armed with this information, we will then decide how best to take forward the dialogue with Natural England. Considerable patience might be required: experience elsewhere suggests the licence application process is a lengthy one.

## **Membership Survey**

Invertebrate numbers and swans are two of the things that clearly concern many of you. What else does? We have put together a Membership Survey to give us a more objective basis for understanding what you would like the Association to focus its efforts on, and how you think we are doing. Please do find 10 minutes to complete it, either the enclosed hard copy version, or the soft copy you will have received by email if you use the internet. We will let you know the results in the summer. In the meantime, we will use the results better to focus our efforts on what matters most to you and more generally to improve your membership experience.

## **Key Dates for 2017**

You will also find enclosed a 2017 Key Dates document. You will see that we are planning to run – subject to demand - a series of meetings for riparian owners in March and April. We will send out invitations about four weeks in advance of each planned event. These meetings will be an opportunity for riparian owners to meet members of the Board, to hear about what we are doing on your behalf and for you to advise us on where we should be focussing our

efforts - as well as being a chance to meet some of your fellow riparian owners. We are planning separate meetings for Test, Itchen and Meon owners, as well as a meeting at the Flyfishers Club for those owners who would find a venue in London more convenient.

The Members Day format of morning talks, a lunch and a river visit in the afternoon received enthusiastic feedback from those who attended the meeting at Kimbridge in November last year. We will use the same format for the Annual General Meeting in April and an Autumn Members Day in November this year. In response to feedback, we will trial holding both these meetings on a weekday which might make it easier for more of you to attend.

## **Website**

The Association has a website ([www.testanditchen.co.uk](http://www.testanditchen.co.uk)). Jacqui and I will be working over the next three months to refresh and expand the content. One part of the site, accessible only to our members, provides late availability fishing at reduced rates, offered by our members for our members during the fishing season. Other parts of the site accessible only to the membership provide detailed information on Association events, as well as environmental data of interest including invertebrate monitoring results, and rainfall and river flow statistics. You require a password to access these member only areas of the site. The password changes annually. For 2017 it is "browntrout".

Maintaining a website is quite a resource intensive undertaking for a small organisation. We need to be reassured that our members use it and find it valuable, or if they don't, why they don't. Please use the membership survey to tell us what you think.

## **River Keepers Bursary**

The Test and Itchen Association will award a Bursary of up to £1,000 to a Hampshire river keeper in 2017. The aim of the Bursary is to help a river keeper improve their river management skills. The Bursary is also in recognition of the work done by Hampshire river keepers to look after our chalkstreams. If the Bursary is a success in its first year, the Association will aim to award Bursaries in subsequent years. Further details and an application form are enclosed with this Newsletter.

## **Insurance and legal advice**

We periodically receive requests from riparian owners for information or advice on insurance. The Association's advice is that all fisheries, whether owned or leased, should carry both public and employer's liability insurance for at least £10 million cover. Note that for insurance purposes 'employees' cover a much wider range of people than just those on a payroll. It includes for example people who are in receipt of benefits such as free fishing or reduced subscriptions in return for carrying out work on behalf of the fishery which can include secretarial and management work. This type of cover can be expensive if obtained as a single client from a broker.

Members might wish to be aware that the Angling Trust has just launched a revised class of membership for riparian owners, clubs and commercial fisheries, which includes employer's and public liability insurance with cover of up to £10m as well as access to Fish Legal for legal advice and, if necessary, legal representation. Further information is available on the Angling Trust website. We have enclosed, for riparian owners, a document with more information.

On legal matters, the Association has in the past taken legal action. It might do so in the future when the Board considers that the collective interests of the membership are at stake and it is in the best interests of the Association. I would emphasise the membership's collective interests. By and large, we would not want directly to involve ourselves, for obvious reasons, in issues that might arise between riparian neighbours. But we are happy to point members in the direction of legal representation with the required subject matter knowledge.

### **And finally**

In the few days since writing the above there have been three developments of note. The rainclouds have arrived. The Secretary of State at DEFRA has "called in" the Candover and Twyford/Otterbourne abstraction licence changes (see Tim Sykes' enclosed article) which will lead to a formal Hearing or Inquiry: the Board will consider whether and how the Association should be represented once the procedure, costs and timings have been confirmed. And the start of the fishing season (well, mine anyway) is now only 59 days away!

*Jeremy Legge*  
*Executive Director*