

## CLOSE SEASON NEWSLETTER 2017

The start of the new season in April seemed a very distant prospect when the “Beast from the East” was doing its worst last week. There are still a few lingering patches of snow, but the sun is shining and temperatures are now climbing. Spring is in the air. The enclosed 2017 Rivers Report should rekindle some memories of last year. This newsletter will set out some of the things we have planned for the coming year. You will also find enclosed papers for the AGM which is being held on 16 March at Kimbridge – you will have received notification of the AGM a couple of weeks ago by email.

### **Membership Events in 2018**

Two dates for your diary. We are planning a **Members Summer Event at Leckford on the Test on Friday 8 June**. This will involve an opportunity to fish on the river and lakes at Leckford, casting demonstrations and competitions, fly-tying and invertebrate monitoring demonstrations, some speakers, a hog-roast lunch and one or two other things to keep you informed, amused and entertained. Primarily, it will be an opportunity for you to meet some of your fellow members. The Board will be having one of their four annual meetings at Leckford immediately before the event so there will be an opportunity to meet many of them as well. The Test valley should be looking its best at that time of the year. More details to follow nearer the time.

In the autumn, we will be holding a more traditional **Members Day on Friday 26 October at Sparsholt College**. There will be a number of speakers in the morning followed by lunch. In the afternoon, we are hoping to return to Bossington on the Test for a river visit. Many of you saw the ambitious river restoration work underway at Bossington when we visited in November. The return visit will be an opportunity to see how the river has recovered and – hopefully - the benefits the restoration work will have delivered. Again, more details nearer the time.

### **Meanwhile...**

It has been a busy few weeks, and the next month sees no let up. The Public Inquiry into changes proposed by the Environment Agency to Southern Water’s main abstraction licences gets underway in Winchester on 13 March. It is due to finish on 25 March, with a decision by the Secretary of State some months later. The key protagonists are the Environment Agency and Southern Water, but a number of other organisations, including the Association, have stated their case and will be speaking at the Inquiry. The outcome is not a foregone conclusion but there are some grounds for optimism. If the Environment Agency gets its way, the Test and Itchen will have significantly better protection from future over-abstraction and Southern Water will be required to develop alternative sources of water supply.

A petition in support of the Environment Agency’s position has recently been launched, following on from an earlier petition on the discharge of effluent into the Arle, an Itchen headwater. These petitions will probably not have much influence on the decision-making process, but they do attract publicity and inform the wider public on the threats to the environmental well-being of the chalkstreams. Environmental protection often comes at a

price that the public ends up paying in one way or another. So increasing awareness is a good thing.

### **Water quality**

Two of the issues that most concern you are water quantity and water quality. The Public Inquiry is all about ensuring the Test and Itchen continue to flow strongly – water quantity. There are some reasons for thinking that a corner is being turned on water quality. Environment Agency monitoring suggests that all the cress farms on the Itchen are now complying with their new, tighter discharge permits. Monitoring also suggests that average phosphate levels in the Itchen are declining, although there remain worrying spikes. That said, invertebrate monitoring does not point to the sort of general improvement in river-fly life we are all keen to see.



*Invertebrate monitoring training at Kimbridge*

The Association invested heavily in invertebrate monitoring last year. We will do so again this year. The ambition is to make high-quality monitoring sustainable and to use it to identify pollution sources. This requires close cooperation with other organisations active in this field. Salmon and Trout Conservation UK have been the standard bearers for a number of years and the Association will continue to work closely with them and fund some of their work. You will be receiving later this year the results of the monitoring work we did on the Meon last year with Wessex Chalkstreams and Rivers Trust (WCSRT), another key ally. We will also be working with WCSRT on their projects to limit the amount of sediment getting into the rivers – excessive phosphate and sediment are the two principal causes of declining river flies.

There is not the space here to offer an exhaustive list of everything the Association has planned for the year ahead. But I would like to highlight another couple of things. First, we established a Bursary for riverkeepers last year. Two were awarded and you can read short articles on how the recipients used them in the Rivers Report. We will shortly be seeking applications for the 2018 Bursary Award. And second, planning is now underway for the implementation phase of the successful Test and Itchen Catchment Partnership Watercress and Winterbournes

bid for Heritage Lottery Funding. This is an exciting opportunity to enhance the Test and Itchen headwaters environment. The Association will be involved and we will provide an opportunity for our members to meet the project implementation team at one of our Members Events this year.

That is all for now. If you would like any more information about any of the issues raised in the Rivers Report or in this Newsletter, please get in touch. I look forward to seeing many of you at an Association Event or on the riverbank later in the year.

*Jeremy Legge*, Executive Director

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