

2018 End of Season Newsletter

The end of season is not quite upon us, but I wanted to include this newsletter with the Weed Cut Dates for 2019 (“The Greens”) and an invitation to the Association’s Autumn Members Day on Friday 26 October, both of which we need to distribute now. You should already have received versions of both these documents by email.

The fishing

We will shortly be asking owners and keepers for their reports on the 2018 season for inclusion in the Association’s Annual Rivers Report for 2018, which we hope to publish and distribute early in 2019. My sense, based on anecdotal evidence, is of a mixed year. Starting with a spasmodic May Fly hatch which never really seemed to get going, for a number of fisheries the season was marked by sporadic and limited fly-life leading to only occasionally rising fish, but the picture varied widely from river to river and fishery to fishery. Some fisheries enjoyed good seasons. I have had some excellent days but have also had some days which have underlined I still have a lot to learn – on a September afternoon on the Bourne it seemed I only had to think of casting to lovely wild fish 20 yards upstream of me in shallow, crystal clear water for them to dart off under some marginal vegetation. I hope I might have a chance to return next year, a wiser and more cunning man.

I hope you have some memories of good days on the riverbank to sustain you through the winter months. One day I will not forget in a hurry was on the Lower Itchen when I had a novice as my guest. I was determined that he would not return home empty-handed. He succeeded in hooking a good fish but his line and leader got wrapped around a great big clump of weed in deep water mid-stream, with the trout still attached. In the end there was nothing for it but to strip off and go swimming with my landing net. I successfully netted the fish and returned to the bank with everything but my dignity still intact. My guest seemed grateful if somewhat bemused, no doubt thinking what strange people these fly-fishers are.

River flows

The sizzling mid-summer weather led many to think we might have some real problems with declining river flows and rising water temperatures later in year. But the chalk aquifer underneath the Hampshire Downs kept feeding cool water into the rivers throughout the summer, and as I write river flows and groundwater levels are around where they typically would be at this time of year. It is the autumn and winter rain that recharges the aquifer so fingers crossed that the heavens will open, as they did this last weekend, on a regular basis for the next few months.

You might recall from previous newsletters that reducing to more sustainable levels the amount of water that can be abstracted from the aquifer and rivers by the public

water supply companies has been a preoccupation for the last couple of years. The Public Inquiry in March led to the Inspector recommending to the Secretary of State that the amount of water than can be abstracted from the Test and Itchen was significantly reduced and the river flows below which water cannot be abstracted were significantly raised, thus affording much needed additional protection to the rivers. The Secretary of State has not yet formally accepted the Inspector's recommendations but there is no reason to think that he will not do so. In the meantime, the Association and other organisations have been engaged with Southern Water and the Environment Agency in working through the procedures that will ensure public water supply can be guaranteed in the period before the new sources of water come on tap. These new sources (including desalination, a new reservoir and more water re-use) and the timeframe for implementing them will be spelt out in Southern Water's Water Resource Management Plan which is due to be published in November. Southern Water have promised a clear commitment to developing these new sources and the timeframe within which they will do so. We shall see.

Water Quality

So, some progress on water quantity. What about water quality? The dearth of river flies, at least in some parts of the rivers, continues to suggest all is not well. The Board at their meeting in September looked at some proposals which would contribute to a better understanding of the issues and the identification of problems at specific sites. These proposals emerged from a meeting hosted by the Association earlier in September where all those organisations involved in water quality monitoring exchanged information about their monitoring programmes. The aim was to avoid duplication and encourage joint working.

The Board subsequently approved three projects: monitoring, in conjunction with Salmon and Trout Conservation UK (STCUK), what is believed to be the main source of phosphate entering the Upper Test with a view to persuading the company concerned to make the investment required to reduce phosphate discharges; using volunteer invertebrate monitors already trained by the Association to continue the River Fly Census project at a number of sites on the Test and Itchen, thereby providing a high quality and continuous set of invertebrate data against which to judge the success or otherwise of water quality improvement initiatives; and scoping the requirement for further work on monitoring the amount of sediment entering the Lower Itchen from the Bow Lake Stream – a planned massive new development in the area risks turning what is already a serious problem into a catastrophe.

Looking ahead

You can hear more about all these subjects at the Association's Members day at Sparsholt on Friday 26 October – invitation and further details enclosed.