

From Beck To Beach



News in brief

West Cumbria Rivers Trust welcomes its new chairman...

After seven years of running West Cumbria Rivers Trust, founding Chairman John Wilson has stepped down. We at the Trust and the rest of the community who are concerned about our freshwater environments owe

John Wilson a tremendous debt of gratitude for his vision, drive and enthusiasm in starting up and leading the Trust through its formative years of life. David Calvert, the longest standing trustee of the board and a passionate fisherman and conservationist has been elected as our new Chair.



Our First Patrons

As well as a new chairman we also have our first Patrons of the charity – Lord and Lady Egremont! We are delighted to welcome them as patrons of WCRT as they are showing their committed support to the Trust, adding prestige and lending credibility to our cause. His Lordship has been a dedicated supporter of the Trust through financial donations and also opening up his home at Cockermouth Castle for fundraising events.



We are expanding!

Not only have we moved into a new office space in Keswick on Lake Road, we have hired several new members of staff. Keep an eye out for the next newsletter where we will introduce them all.



catchments in the north of Cumbria in early 2015. This October heralded the completion of our first project on the River Waver at Waverbridge, near Wigton. A bank stabilisation and riparian fencing project was highlighted as a priority during catchment walkovers undertaken in 2015 and the project has restored a 520m of a section of the River Waver helping prevent excess sediment entering the river, restrict cattle access and improve the watercourse and riparian habitat for fish and other species. The farmer is pleased with the project, in particular the advice and assistance regarding the erosion issue, which was causing loss of land in a prime silage field.



Promising signs for Loweswater

Salmon have returned to Loweswater for the first time in years! This is a good sign that the Loweswater Care Programme we undertook to reduce the amount of phosphorus entering the lake and its tributaries, thus improving the quality of water and reducing the amount of algae is working!

Electrofishing

The season has come to an end and we successfully managed to survey 136 sites in the Derwent Catchment, which is an expansion on the numbers of sites we surveyed last year. We worked in collaboration with the Environment Agency and couldn't have done it without the help of our dedicated volunteers. The full report of the results will be available in the New Year.

Working with Flooded Communities

We have been successful in securing £5000 from the Woodland Trust to work with communities in Dovenby and Bassenthwaite, which were both flooded during Storm Desmond last winter. The communities are keen to look at options to reduce the impacts of flooding in the villages through upstream measures and we will be working with them to undertake catchment walkovers to identify possible actions that could be taken upstream such as tree planting, and reconnecting rivers with their floodplains.



Our first project on the River Waver
West Cumbria Rivers Trust's 'patch' expanded to include the Waver and Wampool

Out and about with the Trust

We have been busy over the summer attending shows and putting on fun activities for children and members of the public.

Hayton Castle recently became over run with Beaver Scouts as they came together from Derwent and Solway to take part in 'Our Natural World' day. Beaver Scouts (boys and girls aged 6-8) navigated from one nature based activity to another and created a flower meadow, built a bug mansion, participated in scavenger hunts; and arts and crafts. Our very own Rosie Law and Karin Crofts were there teaching the Beaver Scouts what creepy crawlies and insects they can find in the river. A great day was had by all, despite the rain!



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We have been busy out and about promoting the work we do at the local agricultural shows this summer. Wasdale, Cockermouth, Loweswater and Ennerdale Shows, were just some of the ones we attended and luckily the weather was on our side this year and there was no getting stuck in mud! At Ennerdale Show we even

had the pleasure of watching Ben Fogle attempt some Cumbrian wrestling.



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To celebrate World Rivers Day on September 25th a group of enthusiastic would-be otter spotters joined by the wonderful wildlife surveyor John Martin went otter tracking on the Glenderamackin. A HUGE thanks to everyone who joined us and especially John for inspiring us with his fantastic insight and knowledge of the otter world; what we should look for and where, smelling and dissecting poo and examining bits of bones. It was a wildlife CSI on the riverbank!



As part of the Pearls in Peril project and the Biffa Award River Irt Pearl Mussel Project, over 600 West Cumbrian school children have been involved in a free educational programme called 'Pearls in the Classroom'. Education Officer Philippa Chadwick went into schools to teach them why the freshwater pearl mussels are an important part of the local ecosystem, their unusual life cycle, a little about their history (they have been around since the time of the dinosaurs!), what factors are threatening the survival of the mussel and what we are doing to help improve the mussels chances of survival. The kids then got an opportunity to go to the River Ehen and look for mussels in their natural habitat.



During half term we also held a river workshop at 'The Gather' for local kids to come and learn about the mussels and insects that live in the river and they had a great time making their own bathyscope.

For upcoming events, walks and talks please visit our website.

Adopt a Beck – Karin Crofts

We have launched our new "Adopt a Beck" scheme and we're happy to welcome Nugen as our very first 'guardians'!

Our first Adopt a Beck scheme is a three year project which focuses on Kirk Beck & Black Beck, two important fish spawning tributaries of the River Ehen. The project will be working to improve the wildlife habitat in and around the becks and work delivered will include fencing, tree planting, wooded debris, willow spiling, tackling invasive species and much much more. The project will benefit both wildlife and landowners by helping to: manage livestock; stabilise riverbanks; reduce erosion and provide good habitat for spawning fish. We will also be holding events and activities over the three years to encourage local communities to get involved in their rivers.

Habitat surveys are well under way and we have also completed electrofishing at a number of sites to help measure the success of the project. In addition to Nugen, our other key partners are the Environment Agency and

Egremont Anglers, who are contributing not only their knowledge and expertise of the area, but also some match funding to really make the money go further and deliver some fantastic work on the ground.

And it doesn't stop there! To complement the habitat work we are also delivering Catchment Sensitive Farming advice to the farming community, funded by Natural England.

So, if you live, work or farm in the area and you're interested in getting involved in the project then Karin would love to hear from you! Contact karin@westcumbriarivertrust.org

If you or your organisation would like more information about joining the "Adopt a Beck" scheme, then please get in touch.



River Restoration Projects and their Benefits to Flood Reduction – Ian Creighton

Last December, Storm Desmond brought our rivers and their terrible floods back to the forefront of all our minds. Understandably, the most frequently asked question is 'How do we prevent it all happening again?' Unfortunately, the simple truth is that there is no one single solution that will prevent flooding for everyone. It will take considerable expense, commitment, partnerships and years of multiple actions to minimise the threat.

The aims of many of these actions will be to flatten the flood peak like River 2 in the diagram below so the floodwaters don't enter our homes and businesses. Typically, it is the flood peak of River 1 in the diagram that causes the damage to our properties.



The Trust's Ian Creighton has been working on one of these potential actions that will help reduce the flood peak within the River Derwent catchment through 'River Restoration'. Historically many of our rivers have

been straightened, embanked and often raised up off the valley floors. These measures have had the effect of reducing floodwater storage

capacity, speeding up the flood flows and increasing the height of the flood peaks.

In partnership with individuals, groups of farmers and landowners, various projects have been undertaken to re-connect rivers to their flood plains such as; removing flood embankments and re-meander the river channel so that rivers can spill out into their natural flood plain. All these projects will increase the floodwater storage capacity, slow down the flood flows, help reduce the flood peaks and increase the storage of gravels which often contribute to the flood risk in our towns such as Keswick, Cockermouth and Workington.

Going forward, for River Restoration to make a significant contribution in reducing flood peaks, we will need to undertake lots of these projects. This will require consistent funding streams and a means for those temporarily storing the floodwater on their land to be adequately compensated.

It is also beneficial to note that what is good for flood reduction is typically very good for our fish and wildlife. Early signs from this year's electric fishing monitoring programme show that it is those stretches of channel which are connected to their floodplains where the deposited eggs survived Storm Desmond and so the next generation of fish have been secured.

River Irt Project Update – Chris West

It is over a year since the project began and much has been achieved since the last newsletter update. The aim of the project is to improve the habitat of the River Irt for the small remaining population of freshwater mussels. In addition the improvements will benefit fish, particularly salmon, which are essential to the lifecycle of the Irt mussels. Habitat improvements completed to date have taken the form of fencing, tree coppicing, bank stabilisation and boulder placement.

Tree coppicing has been undertaken along 1300m of the river to not only reduce the likelihood of wind blow effects upon aging trees, which can damage river banks and encourage erosion, but to also create more 'dappled shade' over the river. This is beneficial as too much or too little shading both negatively impact upon the habitat within the river. After the coppicing was completed fencing then has been installed to keep livestock away and encourage natural regeneration.

Unfortunately almost throughout the length of the Irt, the larger stones from the river bed have been removed. This has created a river with a mobile bed which provides poor

habitat for mussels. This is because mussels need to anchor themselves into the river, therefore if the bed itself is mobile during high flows then the mussels will also be swept away. In order to create more stable habitat, boulders have been placed into one section of the river to act as locking stones. Monitoring of some existing stable habitat is underway to ascertain the conditions of the site. Of particular interest is the level of oxygen in the water which is flowing through the gravels, this needs to be high as juvenile mussels bury themselves within the gravel. If the oxygen levels are found to be favourable then there is the potential to release juvenile Irt mussels as part of the national project funded by Biffa Award which have been reared in the Freshwater Biological Association 'Ark' facility at Windermere.

Electrofishing and mussel surveys are also ongoing together with our battle with invasive species. Japanese Knotweed treated last year has responded well and its treatment has continued, however it will still take a number of years to eradicate fully. A fishing path has been unveiled from under thick rhododendron and the source of skunk cabbage has been identified and treatment completed.



To date over 141 volunteer days have been kindly donated to the project by our fantastic volunteers who have been helping with activities such as rhododendron clearance, riverfly monitoring, electrofishing and brush bundle making amongst others.

If you would like to get involved a regular volunteer event is held on the 2nd Wednesday of the month in partnership with the National Trust who also act as the hub for all events. Activities commence at 9.30am from Gaterigghow Sawmill, Gosforth, CA20 1ES.

Pearls in Peril EU Monitor Visit – Diane O’Leary

The nationwide EU funded Pearls in Peril Project has just received a glowing report having been examined by the Project’s EU Monitor. Nearing the end of its four-year term, the pressure was on to impress the Monitor, on this, his first and final visit to the Ennerdale Valley.

Pearls in Peril is a partnership project, between West Cumbria Rivers Trust, United Utilities, Lake District National Park and the Environment Agency and coordinated by Scottish Natural Heritage. Its aim is to safeguard the future of the freshwater mussel. Although Pearls in Peril is a nationwide project with 21 rivers involved; the River Ehen in Ennerdale is the only river in England to be part of the project as it is home to the last breeding population of freshwater mussels left in the country. So its importance both nationally and in a European context is of great significance.



The Pearls in Peril team has worked with landowners and volunteers in the valley to deliver a raft of conservation projects for the benefit of the land, the river, the mussels and all the animals and plants who

depend on the river for their health and wellbeing.

So, after an intense morning of presentations and questions in ‘The Gather’, Ennerdale’s wonderful new meeting room, the fog and rain lifted, providing an

opportunity to ‘show off’ some of the project’s conservation work. Landowners, volunteers and contractors joined the group and were asked their opinion on the value of the work and the project and we would like to thank them for their extremely positive feedback.

By the end of the day, the Monitor was very impressed and said the work of the project had been ‘excellent’. There were smiles all round, it was wonderful to receive such feedback after all the hard work and the amazing support of the local landowners and community.

Although the project is nearly over, the legacy of the work and the clear message of the importance of the Ennerdale Valley for mussels and a healthy river environment will continue, and so will Diane, through the United Utilities, compensatory measures project.



What is it...?



And no they are not baked beans!

They are chub eggs deposited across large areas (many tens of square metres) on the river bed in just a few inches of water at Isel – it caused quite a mystery at the time; but experts from the Environment Agency identified them. Fishermen had seen a school of the adults about a month before in one of the deeper pools which comprised (estimated) around 5000 individuals all milling about in what was probably a pre-spawning frenzy.