

From Beck To Beach

News in brief

Official Office Opening

Our Patrons, Lord and Lady Egremont, officially opened our new office and information centre on the 8th March. This information centre is a partnership project with United Utilities West Cumbria Supply Project and will be open to the public weekdays 10-4. So pop in and find out a bit more about us and what we do.

Catchment Animation

We have released a new animation about catchments, river restoration and making space for water. The animation highlights how a whole catchment approach needs to be taken to manage flood risk and how making rivers more natural can help reduce flood risk and has other impacts downstream. Take a look at it on our website: <http://westcumbriariverstrust.org/news/making-space-for-water>

Hayton Castle



The Greggs Foundation have kindly funded us to work with Hayton Castle Fields and the local community to clean up the woodland and river at Hayton Castle to create a haven for people and wildlife. It will also allow some young disadvantaged people in the area to learn about woodland ecosystems, woodworking and construction skills. We'll be tree-thinning, creating leaky dams and removing years of fly-tipping to reduce flooding and pollution in the beck. For updates and how to get involved see our website.



Vendace in Bassenthwaite



As the first in a series of talks hosted by us, Ian Winfield from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology recently came to The Kirkgate Centre in Cockermouth to give an informative talk all about the fall and rise of vendace in Bassenthwaite Lake. The talk gave an interesting insight into the populations in Bassenthwaite and Derwent Water which are the only locations this rare species of fish is found in England, and until recently, the Bassenthwaite population was thought to be extinct. We will be running a series of walks over the summer and our talks will be returning in autumn - keep an eye out on our website and social media for more details.



River Irt project news



Photo credit: Ceri Gibson, FBA

As part of the River Irt project we are working with the Freshwater Biological

Association to reintroduce juvenile mussels into the river. These juveniles have been reared in captivity in a very sheltered environment, therefore before they will be reintroduced, the FBA have placed them into a flume which is designed to resemble river conditions. This will help the juvenile mussels adjust to burying into the gravel and tolerate conditions such as flooding and droughts that they will encounter in the wild.



Adopt a Beck news

Sealy Beds of Aspatria have taken on Threapland Gill as our fifth beck adopted through the Adopt a Beck scheme. Sealy are keen to work with us to improve the beck and get the community and staff involved in an environmental project. We are currently working up some multi-benefit schemes that improve the environment as well as flood and erosion risk.

Other becks that have been adopted include Dash Beck by Bassenthwaite Rotary Club, Dovenby Beck by the local community and NuGen have adopted Kirk Beck and Black Beck in the River Ehen catchment.



Caring for the Crookhurst and introducing our first PhD student - Josh Gittins



We have been working with farmers to reduce diffuse pollution in the Crookhurst Beck for a while now and have just received great news that we can continue this successful work. Funded by United Utilities, the three-year project 'EllenWise Phase 2', will work from the source of the river right through the catchment and build on the original one year trial "EllenWise" project.

In order to provide a better understanding of ways to improve water quality, we have welcomed Josh to the team. Josh is a PhD student at Lancaster University working with us and United Utilities, to investigate the benefits of investing in catchment interventions compared to costly end-of-pipe solutions.

In order to cope with pollution in other areas, United Utilities has previously always invested in upgrading wastewater treatment works. However, this tends to be expensive and carbon intensive, and, in the Crookhurst, unlikely to provide the most effective solution. With over 1300 dairy cows, lots of beef cattle and sheep, and approximately 500 people in the two surrounding villages, the beck is struggling to cope with considerable amounts

of diffuse pollution. So, by addressing pollution issues at source, we are hoping that this project will make significant differences to costs and to the environment, as well as highlighting a new way of working with local communities to find the most effective solution for everyone.

Josh is really looking forward to working with us on this research project, and commented "Water is vital to life and I always find it shocking that so many rivers are failing to meet water quality standards. Projects like this are important as we need to demonstrate the best use of resources and make the right choices for our economy and our environment."

We have also set up the 'Crookhurst Catchment Farmers Group' to complement the EllenWise Phase 2 project. The group meets once a month to discuss farm improvements and provides a variety of training to improve farm efficiency as well as working together to reduce pollution and flooding in the area.



Tree planting

As the tree planting season comes to a close we thought we should have a look at some of the areas we have planted-up this year.

On a soggy Saturday in January, 16 volunteers from the University of Cumbria came and planted 200 trees with us on Croasdale Beck. Despite the weather, spirits were high and this enthusiastic bunch of volunteers planted the trees in no time at all. They even had time to help us "beat-up" some older trees which had been planted in the area a few years ago. "Beating-up" is a term coined by our River Ehen Project Officer Diane O'Leary, and refers to tree maintenance that involves lifting the guard, weeding the area around the base of the tree and then then replacing the guard. Newly planted trees that are not looked after in this way can be choked by weeds that compete for light, nutrients and water.

Volunteers taking part in Wasdale Wednesdays, our regular monthly event on the River Irt, have also been out planting trees, some even

on 45 degree slopes! Around 1000 trees have been planted along the banks of the River Irt this winter, with the aim of stabilising the banks, thus reducing soil erosion and sediment inputs to the river, and also providing habitat for fish and other animals. Planting trees on a river bank has the added benefit of slowing the flow of water in the catchment and can therefore reduce the risk of flooding downstream. The tree canopy breaks up the rainfall, meaning it takes longer to reach the ground, the roots absorb some water reducing the amount reaching the river, and once the water does reach the river, the trees increase

the roughness of the river bank, providing a frictional type force, slowing the water in the channel. So a win win for people and for wildlife!

Our final few tree planting events this season were with school children from the local primary schools, getting them out of the classroom and learning all about the benefits of trees with our new Education and Outreach Officer Rebecca Neal. If you are interested in volunteering with us, please contact us via info@westcumbriariverstrust.org or follow our social media and website for upcoming events.



New girl in the river



*There once was a girl with mad hair,
Who liked taking kids out in fresh air,
She liked food from a baker,
Was distracted by nature,
Ooh, look at that bird over there!*

OK, so it's not my best work, but not bad for a Monday morning!

Hello! My name is Becca and I am the newest member of the West Cumbria Rivers Trust team. I love creative writing and I like to think the poem I wrote especially for

my interview (which was far better than this one), got me the job! You can read this poem below.

My role within the trust is to work with schools and communities across West Cumbria, to get people excited by the work of the charity, and enthusiastic about all things riverine.

This is the first time there has been a dedicated position within the trust to do education and community work, and it's an amazing opportunity to get people outdoors and connected to their local river. The job is so varied; I could be teaching about freshwater beasts to a school one day, planting trees to reduce flood risk with a community group the next,

and then topping off the week at a local family event. I am so keen to get going.

The post is funded by Copeland Community Fund and United Utilities to work in particular with deprived communities in Copeland, and for those close-by UU's new pipeline in Copeland and Allerdale. We will be specifically targeting children aged 7-11 but also aim to reach people of all ages. Obviously, the topics we will focus on will be wet ones; rivers, flooding, freshwater wildlife, water pollution, but we are also keen to just get people appreciating our wonderful watery landscape.

Here is the kind of stuff we can offer:

- Curriculum-linked sessions indoors and outdoors
- Non-curriculum-linked practical and fun outdoor sessions
- School assemblies
- Practical volunteer sessions (for example tree planting or erecting fences)
- Community walks and talks
- Community events

We would love to hear from schools, youth groups and community groups that are interested in FREE activities, both indoors and outdoors. If you want to know more about what we can offer, please contact Rebecca Neal on 017687 75429 or rebecca@westcumbriariverstrust.org

What is a river?

by Rebecca Neal

A
sustainable

larder, a safe harbour,

a goods mover, a nutrient hoover,

a symbol of life, where pooh-sticks are

rife, a tourist attraction, for water abstraction,

a source of power, an alternative shower, a territory

for pike, a place for a hike, a wildlife corridor, a flood warrior,

irrigation for fields, fertility for yields, an ancient highway, where

kayakers play, a physical border, an ox-bow lake former, part of a cycle,

required for survival, a washing machine, a dip spot for teens, a waste disposer, a

natural composer, a fisherman's perch, a naturalist's church, a peaceful scene, the reason it's green.

New Role – River Ehen Project Officer

Diane O'Leary has been working in the River Ehen Catchment in West Cumbria as part of the EU Pearls in Peril Project for the past four years. The aim of the project was to secure the future of the highly protected iconic species, the freshwater mussel.

Although this project is now at an end, it is not the end of West Cumbria Rivers Trust's involvement with this special river! United Utilities has funded a new role within the Trust; the River Ehen Project Officer. Diane's experience in the catchment and her work with mussels put her in a good position to meet the challenging and competitive recruitment requirements to successfully secure the role. Diane said, "I'm delighted to be able to continue to work with the community and organisations to improve the conditions of the river for the benefit of all who depend on it, especially the fascinating freshwater mussel".

The River Ehen is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for freshwater mussels and Atlantic salmon. But, the river has

been assessed as 'unfavourable declining' due to the poor survival rate of juvenile mussels which means that the population is at critical risk of extinction.

The Pearls in Peril Project made a great start in making improvements to the river habitat and this new role provides a fantastic opportunity to continue to improve this unique river. The main aim of Diane's role will be to deliver conservation actions to restore the habitat to a state that juvenile mussels and salmon can survive to adulthood. These actions will be informed by the findings of a range of research measures to ensure the continued protection of England's largest population of freshwater mussels and their host fish, Atlantic salmon. The primary focus will be on the land that United Utilities own within the catchment but Diane will also be working closely with other landowners, partners and the local community as the work will benefit the river as a whole and all the plants, animals and people that depend on it.



What is it...?



This little fella was caught during the 2016 electrofishing season. His unique colours temporarily mystified us until we looked past his colour and at his shape, fins and features. He is an albino stone loach or as the locals would call him a 'liggy'. Stone loach (*Noemacheilus barbatulus*) are bottom dwellers, living on the bed of clear rivers and streams. Sometimes they are known to partially bury themselves in the sand and gravels. They feed on insects such as mayfly nymph and freshwater shrimp, they use the distinctive 'barbels' or feelers around their mouths to hunt their prey, especially at night. The barbels often make it look like they have a moustache, even the ladies! Albinism is the absence of any pigmentation leading to a white colouration instead of the natural colours or patterns. Unfortunately this reduces survival rates as albino creatures are more obvious, making them easier targets for predators, so we were pretty lucky to find him. Here he is next to a regular stone loach.