

The Wandle's first wild trout

It's now common knowledge that the Wandle Trust's annual Trout in the Classroom educational programme, which teaches more than 9,000 local kids every year about the value of the river on their doorstep, has also been responsible for reintroducing a thriving population of brown trout to the Wandle.

For the past few years, we've been watching these trout grow to impressive sizes before starting to spawn. But we've never known for sure that they were actually producing eggs and fry which would be capable of surviving the triple threat of urban runoff, siltation and



photo: Duncan Soar

predation to become the river's first modern generation of truly wild trout.

As part of the ongoing Living Wandle project, sponsored by Thames Water, the Wandle Piscators' Anglers' Riverfly Monitoring Initiative has already won the prestigious John S

Hills Memorial Award (see *Wandle News*, Winter 2009/10).

Now, on 14 March this year, one of our monitoring teams found proof of new trouty life in the Wandle: a single tiny brown trout fry amongst the usual freshwater shrimp, caddis and other riverflies on the Hackbridge stretch of the river.

Because this baby trout was found just days before our schools' Trout in the Classroom releases were due to begin, it could only have hatched from spawning redds a few yards upstream.

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Springing into action

Many years ago, the Wandle was fed by lots of springs, where cool clear water rose from the ground where the chalk geology of the North Downs ended. Today, these springs are less obvious or have disappeared, having dried up or been culverted underground. However, if you know where to look signs of the springs can still be seen bubbling up through ponds, gushing through the far corners of Carshalton Ponds and flowing through the chalk in Beddington Park.

Believe it or not, springs can actually be inhabited by tiny animals, scientifically known as *Hypogean Crustacea*, which live in the water and spaces between underground rock and sediment. They are perhaps best described as looking like tiny shrimps and woodlice but are highly adapted to their dark underground environment, having no eyes, generally lacking pigment so that they are white in colour and having large antennae to feel their way and large legs to cling on to substrate.

These animals are rarely surveyed and there are only a few people in the country who are able to survey and identify them, so we were very fortunate when Lee Knight, who runs the Hypogean Crustacea Recording Scheme, offered to come and have a look at our springs on the Wandle. On a crisp day in March, Lee and I visited three springs between Carshalton and Beddington Park. After hammering a stake and hand pump into the ground, Lee pumped water and sediment out from the spring, drawing in fresh water from the surrounding underground area. All the water was pumped through a small net which trapped any of the Hypogean Crustacea for later identification.

Despite a lot of pumping, the Wandle's springs seemed to be quite clogged and only a few individuals were found. However, two species of shrimp-like Amphipods were discovered and these were exciting results because they had rarely been recorded in this area. One of them (*Niphargus fontanus*) had been recorded only at one other location in the vice county of Surrey (a biological recording area) and the other (*Crangonyx subteraneus*) had never been recorded here before! Further details on Lee's Hypogean Crustacea Recording Scheme as well as pictures and information about the species we found can be seen at www.freshwaterlife.org/hcrs.

Bella Davies



Lee Knight investigates invertebrate life in the Wandle's springs

Grapples from 'greenagers'

Erica Evans explains how girls from a local secondary school have helped the Wandle Trust – and raised awareness of green issues in Wandsworth

Burntwood School in Wandsworth has been working with the Wandle Trust since June of last year. They entered a national competition sponsored by npower for 'greenagers' highlighting a local environmental project as their Green SOS. Their 'Towards a Cleaner Wandle' competition entry was shortlisted to the final ten from hundreds of entries nationwide. At this point, the ten finalists were awarded a cheque for £1,000 by Konnie Huq, the former Blue Peter presenter. The girls have kindly spent most of this money on more cleanup equipment for the Wandle Trust. Having consulted our volunteers, our shopping list consisted of waders, grapples, bolt cutters, a hacksaw, and a wrench.



Not only did the girls want to give the river practical help, they decided to put up a display in Earlsfield library to raise awareness of the river to local people.

In addition, they are taking part in a community engagement programme which they are rolling out to a number of primary schools in Wandsworth. Their 'Think Before You Throw' campaign highlights the journey of an empty plastic drinks bottle that might be carelessly thrown into the Wandle. The bottle finds its way via the Thames estuary to the North Sea, ending up in the North Pacific gyre, an enormous mass of floating plastic the size of Texas!

And as if that wasn't enough, the girls won Best Green Secondary School in the Wandsworth Green Guardian Awards this year, a Diana Excellence Award, and the group category of the Wandsworth Young Person of the Year Award.

Many congratulations and also many thanks to the school – the new tools and waders will be very useful for our future cleanups.

Above right: girls from Burntwood get stuck into a special cleanup at Trewint Street in Earlsfield.

Right: Burntwood girls came along to the May cleanup to present the new tools to Trustee Erica Evans (left) and Development Officer Bella Davies (right)



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And while discovering one tiny trout might not sound like a major event, here on the Wandle it's the first record of successful spawning in more than 80 years.

So it's a truly historic moment – which gives all our volunteers a big boost as we begin our calendar of

river restoration plans for summer 2010. These include our regular monthly community river cleanups and clearance of invasive non-native species (focusing on Himalayan balsam during the Wandle Valley Festival).

Later in the year, we'll also be working with our volunteers to maximise habitat for all stages of

the wild trout life cycle in the upper river, using plans drawn up with the Wild Trout Trust and our local Environment Agency team.

So keep an eye on www.wandletrust.org for updates on our plans, and for more opportunities for you to get involved.

Theo Pike, Chairman of Trustees

Big splash for baby trout

Banners, fancy hats, a Deputy Mayor in waders . . . sounds like another Wandle Trust trout release! Gideon Reeve reports on the culmination of this year's Trout in the Classroom

On Thursday 18 March, a fine spring day, we gathered at a new venue for us: in front of the giant Sainsburys on Merton High Street. It was great to create such a stir with the local people. In the afternoon it was off to Hackbridge in Sutton.

The following Thursday, 25 March, we had a full day at Morden Hall Park. In the morning it was predominantly Wandsworth schools releasing their fish. We were delighted to have the Deputy Mayor of Wandsworth as our guest of honour. Councillor Jane Cooper was a terrific sport, getting into the river wearing her mayoral chain for photos.

Honeywell School as usual made the occasion into a celebration to remember, with fancy dress and decorated banners. What must the residents of Morden Town have thought as the pupils and teachers paraded from the tube station in their hats, sporting banners and carrying their precious bucket of trout fry?

Reducing our carbon footprint

This year in addition to the usual class work the project included a Carbon Balancing competition. Participants were invited to put into practice ways in which Trout in the Classroom could reduce its carbon footprint. The winner was Linden Lodge, which ran a water saving week highlighting the importance of saving water at home and at school. The prize of £250 was generously donated by Wandle Trust supporter Roger Stevens.

Encouraging diversity

Working with up to 9000 school children each year enables the Wandle Trust to engage with parts of the community which perhaps traditionally have not been involved with the River Wandle. This has been the case more than ever this year: for the first time we were delighted to work with Al – Khair Primary in Croydon and SS Peter and Paul in Mitcham. Al – Khair is a Muslim school and SS Peter and Paul, Catholic; so on the subject of faith Muslim, Catholic, Church of England and secular schools were all represented.



Another newcomer to us was Francis Barber Pupil Referral Unit in Tooting. This fantastic school works with secondary age children who have been permanently excluded from school or who are not able to attend school for other reasons. It also works with students experiencing emotional, behavioural or social difficulties.

All seem to agree that no matter what the students' background is, taking part in this inspiring project has significant benefits - both for the students and the river. Definitely something to celebrate!

Gideon Reeve is Trout in the Classroom Project Manager.



Top left: Deputy Mayor of Wandsworth, Councillor Jane Cooper, takes to the water with pupils from Francis Barber. Centre and above: Honeywell Primary School really went to town with their costumes and decorations

photos: Roger Stevens, Theo Pike

A view from the classroom

"On Thursday 18 March, some of the Eco reps and the winners of the trout competition went down to the River Wandle. When we got there the year 6 Eco reps had to put on waterproof waders and a life jacket. We finally got to go into the river with the trout.



Ready for the river

"The water pressure squeezed our legs when we got in. It felt really strange, like the water was actually going into the waders. Before we put the trout into the river we had a picture taken of us holding the trout. Finally we got to lower the box into the water. The trout were free! Once we had got out and taken the equipment off we went back to school. It was great knowing that we had helped the River Wandle's wild brown trout."

Angus Macdonald, Dan Williams and Ben Muir, Year 6, Avenue Primary School

Why there's always a coconut!

How and why do so many coconuts end up in the Wandle, and with such regularity? Curiosity got the better of Erica Evans, who decided to investigate . . .

It only takes a few Google searches to link coconuts and rivers with religious practices in general and with Hindu ones in particular. According to our website's June 2008's cleanup report 'some unusual objects were found including a Hindu figurine' and, again in June 2009, 'Chris uncovered a cache of ritualistic river offerings'. Studying the photographs closely, these figurines appear to be depictions of various Hindu gods and goddesses. Our coconut mystery, however, refers to one particular Hindu god, Lord Ganesh or Ganesha. This one (below) was recovered from the Wandle in early March, near Mill Lane in Carshalton.



photo: Erica Evans

Remover of Obstacles

Son of Lord Shiva and the goddess Parvati, Ganesha is worshipped as the supreme god of wisdom, prosperity and good fortune. He is also known as the Remover of Obstacles and is prayed to particularly when Hindu people are beginning a new enterprise or starting a new business. Ganesha is also known as the patron god of travelling.

The festival of Ganesha usually falls between 20 August and 15 September each year and lasts for 10 days. Tradition dictates that every Hindu household has a Ganesha figurine

in it. After 10 days of worship the god returns to his heavenly abode, and, to symbolize his merging with the universe, his image is submerged in the river. First though, a candle is lit, prayers are uttered, sweets are eaten and then a coconut is cracked and the contents poured on him.

Breaking a coconut is considered highly auspicious in Hinduism as it is considered the purest thing a human being can offer a deity. The coconut is not polluted, as the water and the white kernel remain covered by the hard outer shell until it is offered to the god. Not only are coconuts one of the favourite foods of Ganesha, but the breaking of the coconut symbolizes the breaking of the ego.

At the river, Ganesha gets submerged three times, and on the third time he is released in order to sink to the bottom. Mud is then taken from the bottom of the river, and is kept until the next year when Ganesha comes again.

Surrogate Ganges?

Believing that all rivers in the world are linked, perhaps those releasing the statuettes hope that Ganesha will find his way back to the source waters of that most sacred of rivers, the Ganges. But it is more likely that the Wandle has become a surrogate Ganges, and it, and other waterways, a part of the spiritual life of the capital's Hindu communities.

But what is the environmental impact of this practice? Is the ritualistic placing of Ganesha figurines into the Wandle and other waterways polluting and harming the environment? Originally, Ganesha figurines were made of clay and therefore dissolved on contact with the water. Now, however, they can be made of different materials, brass, plastic and plaster of paris – a man-made substance which takes longer to biodegrade – and can be adorned with chemical paints which themselves can contain mercury and cadmium.

In the days following mass immersion of Ganesha idols in rivers and lakes in



photo: Jane Porter

India, for example, shoals of dead fish can be seen floating on the surface of the water.

Many Hindu organisations in London are keen to stress their awareness and commitment to a clean environment, and members of the Hindu community work with our partner organisation Thames 21 as riverkeepers, keeping an eye on the Thames and London's canals for dumped rubbish and graffiti.

Finally, given the enthusiasm with which the festival of Ganesha is celebrated in India, and, even though the number of people attending our cleanups is increasing year on year, our volunteers can breathe a collective sigh of relief that the figurines of Ganesha found in the Wandle are not this size!



photo: Vijay Bandari