

Leading the way in urban river restoration

Inspired by our work on the Wandle, restoration efforts are gathering pace on urban rivers everywhere. Theo Pike reports on a hugely successful knowledge-sharing conference in Sheffield

From our perspective here on the River Wandle, it's great to see more and more urban river restoration projects springing up all over the UK – as people start taking pride in their local rivers, and wanting to protect them for the future as sustainable habitat for birds, fish, animals and insects.

A great deal of this impetus comes from the Wild Trout Trust, which has recently launched its Trout in the Town programme, encouraging projects like ours to share their experiences, learn from each other, and feel that they're not alone in overcoming challenges.

The Wandle Trust is recognised as one of the flagship projects of Trout in the Town. So we were delighted to be asked to speak at the first Trout in the Town conference, which took place in Sheffield

photo: the Wild Trout Trust



Gideon fishes the urban River Don

on the weekend of 1 - 2 August this year.

After an introduction from each of the river restoration groups – including delegations from Sheffield, Nottinghamshire and Glasgow as well as the Wandle and the Cray – Gideon Reeve gave a presentation on our Trout in the Classroom programme, and how it has become a successful annual project reaching more than 9,000 kids each year along the Wandle Valley.

Other speeches included the latest news

on fundraising, tackling invasive species, and applying to the Environment Agency for permission to carry out works – before I wrapped up proceedings with a talk on volunteer-led river restoration projects, and the way we've grown our monthly community cleanups on the Wandle from fewer than five people to more than 60 at almost every event.

Next morning we were invited to sample the fishing on Sheffield's urban River Don, the home of the SPRITE project, where the wild trout and grayling left everyone inspired to replicate the same successes with these indicator species on their own urban streams.

Back in South London, we're proud that the Wandle is helping to lead the way in the national urban river restoration movement, and we look forward to sharing our experiences whenever we can in the future!

For more reports about the Trout in the Town Conference, and links to our river restoration partners nationwide, visit www.wandletrust.org.

Our Rivers: campaign for the Wandle!

The 'Our Rivers' campaign was set up to help local groups and individuals to respond to the Environment Agency's River Basin Planning consultation as part of the Water Framework Directive. This process should produce plans identifying key issues on each river and what needs to be done to improve a river's biological, chemical and physical quality.

However, the draft plans have been criticised for their lack of ambition, their failure to address key issues and their lack of commitment to develop detailed implementation plans to drive targeted actions at the local scale. Our Rivers is working to change this and you can help to make a difference to the Wandle.

You can visit their website (www.ourrivers.org.uk) and let them know about particular issues and concerns on the Wandle. You can also write to your MP in order to influence the Secretary of State, Hilary Benn's decision this month whether to approve the draft plans or not. So if you feel passionate about the Wandle (or any other river), why not download a draft letter to your MP and help ensure that the Thames River Basin Plan sets out a clear vision for the future of the Wandle.

Bella Davies

From grassroots to government

The Wandle Trust is a model for community involvement – and political parties should take notice, argues Brendan Pastor

In academia, the fashionable new theory in social policy is communitarianism. This is the idea that communities are the most important feature of contemporary Western society. In some ways this is a radical departure from the current mainstream approach to government policy, which aggrandises the significance of the individual. New Labour's approach to its environmental programs often idealises communities, but in reality it is crafted around individualism. The Tories are hardly any different. But this is fundamentally flawed, and it is partially why the government's plan for local environmental sustainability has lagged in recent years.

The Wandle Trust is the archetype of a local charity that maintains strong social connections with the community, and has a clear and effective mechanism for promoting awareness of environmental

responsibilities. It has built on its reputation as a fun, effective, grassroots campaign with the goal of restoring the Wandle to ecological integrity. At every monthly cleanup, similar faces can be seen, but perhaps more significant are the new faces from all parts of London.

This is the essence of community. It is the lifeblood of London, and more importantly the backbone of democracy. To that extent, the Wandle Trust volunteers are the soldiers on the front lines in the battle to ensure environmental sustainability for Greater London's residents. Their services should be acknowledged with policy by local and national government that supports their work. For instance, proposals for a new Green Development Bank to offer funding and services to non-profit community groups is a fantastic way to raise money and resources. And travel exemption costs from TFL should be offered to volunteers who commute to events from distant areas.

But what is most important is that it is communities, not self-interested

individuals, which are making London a greener, safer, and more enjoyable place to live. By recognising this, government will be empowering social organisations to continue their enormously successful activities, and will be offering them the legitimacy to develop further towards meeting their goals.

The next government will have to marry ideology with effective environmental policy. The reliance on the idea of individual self-interest to improve the environment is incompatible with reality. By examining groups like the Wandle Trust and exploiting its successes, government leaders can create policy that empowers communities to face, and hopefully reverse, the challenges of environmental degradation.

Brendan Pastor is a senior at Richmond, the American International University in London, studying international relations with an emphasis on political economy of the environment. He is president of the Green Project, a student-run organisation at the university promoting green issues.

WATER for the Wandle

The Westcountry Rivers Trust has recently been awarded an EU project called WATER, which stands for Wetted Land: the Assessment, Techniques and Economics of Restoration. This 3.8 million euro project is funded under the Interreg IVA programme which aims to promote collaboration between French and English parties surrounding the Channel.

The WATER project acknowledges that what happens upstream can affect the quality of water downstream and that this can have a variety of costs. These vary from the expenses incurred by water companies who have to clean up water before it can be used, to the loss of tourists visiting an area if its wetlands become polluted and the loss of income from anglers if the quality of a river declines so that there are fewer fish. The WATER project looks at the various services which wetlands provide and will assign them an economic value: a model known as Payment for Ecosystem Services. This can be hard – how do you value the presence of a kingfisher, for example, or several species of bat?

Partners on both sides of the Channel (two in England and four in France) will help to investigate how Payments for Ecosystem Services can increase the number of wetland areas and improve their quality. The Wandle Trust will be involved with this project through the Association of Rivers Trusts which is one of the English partners. Further details, including the logo which you may see on future Wandle Trust material, can be found at www.projectwater.eu.

Bella Davies

Riverfly award

At a special ceremony at this year's Association of Rivers Trust's conference, Wandle Riverfly Co-ordinator Will Tall was honoured with the Thames River Restoration Trust's new John S Mills Memorial Award.

Will received the award for his outstanding work in co-ordinating a team of volunteers from the Wandle Trust's sister angling club the Wandle Piscators, who give up their spare time every month to test the quality of the water at 12 sites on the Wandle, so that any pollution can be quickly picked up and dealt with.

The team forms part of the national voluntary Riverfly Partnership's Anglers' Monitoring Initiative. Their regular work on the Wandle, which is sponsored by Thames Water as part of the five year Living Wandle project, has also been hailed as a national model of best practice.

To find out more about Riverfly monitoring and the Wandle Piscators, visit www.wandlepiscators.net.

Theo Pike

A slippery survey

An Environment Agency investigation has shown the Wandle to be a stronghold for critically endangered eels, reports Bella Davies

During the summer you may have noticed a group of people towing a boat down the Wandle, looking like they were on a treasure hunt with giant metal detectors. In fact, they were members of the Environment Agency doing an eel survey.

The European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) has a fascinating life history. It is thought that they spawn in the Sargasso Sea and spend up to three years travelling 4000 miles to reach our waters, during which they change from a leaf like appearance to a juvenile eel (elver). After spending 10 years or more in our rivers (up to 30 years), the adults develop larger eyes and a silvery colour which helps to conceal them from predators as they return to saltwater and 'run' back to the Sargasso Sea to spawn.

Sadly eel populations have declined dramatically with up to a 98 per cent drop since the 1970s, and they have now been given a 'Critically Endangered' conservation status. Reasons may include



overfishing, man-made obstructions to their migration and dispersal such as weirs and sluices, climate change, pollution, habitat loss and the introduction of a parasite. However, cleanup regulars might dispute this rare status given that we frequently find eels disappearing into a mattress or happily hanging out in a tyre. And you'd be right; the Wandle is thought to be one of the remaining strongholds for eels in London (as well as the Lee and Roding).

Results of the survey showed that eels are present on the Wandle with most being found in the lower river. The upper river contains fewer, not surprising given the number of weirs. The resulting



photos: Duncan Soar

information will be used to inform strategies for the management of eels across the Thames basin, as well as for the Wandle itself as part of the Wandle Trust's Community Catchment Plan.

The survey also showed that brown trout appear to be successfully spawning in the Upper Wandle in Carshalton. Several trout around 18 months old were found at a location which our Trout in the Classroom fish could not have reached (due to weirs), indicating that they must have been the result of successful spawning. Let's hope that we can facilitate a similar success for the eel.

“As good as it gets”

Why do people give up their time for free? Trout in the Classroom director Gideon Reeve explains the many benefits of the new volunteering programme

The Trout in the Classroom Project grew, like the Wandle Trust itself, from the enthusiasm of a handful of volunteers. Like the river, the project started from small springs and has become a strong, constant flow – and a nationally recognised endeavour.

This year for the first time we placed an advertisement for volunteers on various environmental websites, as well as on our site and at local volunteer bureaux. There were a vast number of enquiries, and we have now enlisted 16 dedicated volunteers. Their ages range across the board, and they have a multitude of skills and experience, including Masters Graduates and retired teachers.

So what will our volunteers get out of donating their time? They will be trained in all aspects of the programme, from setting up and maintaining a tank to giving presentations to groups of children. Benefits listed by the Institute of Volunteering Research include better employment prospects, the potential of promotion at work, a sense of achievement, more confidence

and improved mental and physical health. One study found that 25 per cent of jobseekers claimed that volunteering had helped them secure a job, while the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) state that 45 per cent of their volunteers found work in the environmental sector, 16 per cent of those directly with the BTCV. Society also benefits: our neighbourhoods are improved by the devotion of these altruists who donate their time and effort.

Andrew Challen is one of our very dedicated volunteers. Talking about how he first came to one of our events he said “I wanted to get involved locally, predominantly helping the community but I also liked the social aspect of volunteering for the Wandle Trust. I surprised myself really, as I had never done anything like this before.” He has just returned to us a few months after undergoing a major operation in hospital and has pitched in straight away, hauling rubbish out of the river and helping to mend waders. Last season he assisted on the trout project. When I asked what had motivated him to help out on this he said “Well this project is brilliant, excellent for the kids - it's about as good as it gets really!”

If you would like to get involved as a volunteer next year, contact Gideon at gideon.reeve@wandletrust.org

Where does it all go?

Ever wondered what happens to all the rubbish that our volunteers pull out of the river? Erica Evans asked Joanna Shearer and Michael Singham of Wandsworth's Waste Management Services Team

Once we have loaded up the lorry on the day of a Wandsworth cleanup, where does it go?

JS: Wandsworth has two waste disposal sites, Smugglers Way, just off the Wandsworth roundabout, and Cringle Dock, Nine Elms. Because we collect your rubbish on a Sunday afternoon at 3pm, the lorry goes to Cringle Dock which is open 24 hours a day.

What happens there?

MS: the lorry is weighed before and after waste disposal and the amount of tonnage is recorded. If the load included both mixed waste and recyclables, the lorry will do this twice to record the weights separately. All non-recyclable waste is transported by river to landfill in Mucking, Essex. However, within two years a new incinerator will be completed at Bexley and the rubbish will go there, also by river. The waste will then generate electricity which will go back into the National Grid. Mixed recyclable waste is currently taken by road to a sorting facility (or 'MRF') in Crayford, Kent. However, a new and purpose-built sorting facility is being built in Smugglers Way, Wandsworth and this is expected to start sorting the recyclables within a year.

We know we have to leave various items for you to collect separately such as tyres, gas cylinders, motorbikes and fridges. What happens to them?

JS: Tyres are not sent to landfill. The day after your cleanup, tyres are taken to an organisation in Bendon Valley which disposes of them. They can be re-used in three ways: for retreading and export; in granulation for sports surfaces, children's play areas and equestrian applications, for example, and in energy recovery for electricity and cement kilns.

MS: Obviously gas cylinders cannot be incinerated, so they are sent for scrap. Fridges have to be collected and stored separately as they can contain cfc's (chlorofluorocarbons). We have to adhere to a waste management requirement to extract these from both the coolant gases and insulation foam and also recover scrap metal from them. Wandsworth recycles over 100 tonnes of fridges per year. Recycling gas cylinders, fridges, motorbikes and the like costs less than landfill or other disposal, so doing this helps keep the Council Tax down.

Have you ever prosecuted anyone for fly tipping rubbish in the river?

MS: No. Our main priority is public highways and our resources are concentrated on monitoring and managing fly tipping in public areas around the borough. However, we are committed to community partnership by helping others to make Wandsworth a better place to live, so we support the Wandle Trust by disposing of the rubbish collected from the river.

If we pulled up Himalayan Balsam could you compost it for us rather than it being sent to landfill?

JS: Yes. We'd be very happy to work with you towards a programme of composting as it would contribute to our 'green waste' target. We could probably look at providing you with bio-degradable bin bags too.

Apart from The Big Tidy Up and the Capital Cleanup, what sort of local initiatives are you involved in?

MS: We run a Green Pledge Scheme to which nearly 1,000 residents have signed up, making over 4,000 pledges. This is saving an estimated 468 tonnes of CO2 emissions annually, equivalent to taking 110 cars off our roads. We also organise the Green Champions Competition which encourages residents and schools to be greener, and we have recently launched an Environmental Grant Scheme. This £5,000 fund is available to support project proposals which could help to reduce waste, cut the consumption of energy or resources, or improve the local environment. For a Green Pledge form, please email greenpledge@wandsworth.gov.uk. To enter the Green Champions Awards please see: www.wandsworth.gov.uk/greenchampions. For details of the Wandsworth Eco Fund, please see www.projectdirt.com/group/wandsworthecofund

A trolley good idea

Earlier this year, a hotline was launched to help members of the public report abandoned shopping trolleys in our rivers and canals. British Waterways, organisers of the scheme, estimates that 3,000 trolleys are dumped annually, and that fishing them out costs £150,000 each year. If, between cleanups, you see a trolley in the Wandle, call 01923 201120 or visit www.britishwaterways.co.uk/trolley.



photo: Jane Porter

Sally Pike and Jo Storry sign copies of their highly recommended Wandle Cookbook – produced as a result of volunteers regularly asking for recipes for all the delicious cakes our two talented cooks supply for cleanups. The book is available at cleanups for £3 and is packed with tempting treats, both sweet and savoury (including Sally's famous Wandle-berry jam, which can be seen in the picture above).