

Wandle hits the headlines

The month of August both began and ended with great news for our river – first, a massive lottery bid success, then the Wandle was named as one of the UK’s top ten most improved rivers.

On August 1, we heard that the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) had named the Wandle Valley as one of 11 first-round passes in its £18.3m Landscape Partnership (LP) programme – and the first one ever in an urban area.

This Landscape Partnership Scheme award enables organisations to come together to deliver landscape improvements and change. The ‘Living Wandle’ bid was submitted by a number of different organisations and groups working in the Wandle Valley to engage the local community and help people connect with and improve the Wandle landscape.

In this successful round of funding, the HLF awarded the Wandle partnership £78,000 towards the development of projects which will have a total value of over £2 million and be implemented throughout the Wandle Valley.

Less than a month later, on August 30, the river hit the headlines again with the Environment Agency’s announcement of the Wandle as one of its top ten most improved rivers.

The EA said: “Historically the river has suffered extreme pollution and was officially declared a sewer in the 1960s. But over the last 20 years it has become a vibrant rich habitat due to better environmental regulation, a fish stocking programme and huge local enthusiasm for the river which has resulted in a vast improvement of water quality.

“The Wandle is now well known as



photo: Jane Porter

Above: Wandle Trust Director Bella Davies is interviewed in the river at Trewint Street, Earlsfield by reporter Andrew Bomford for Radio 4’s lunch-time news show, The World at One, about the Environment Agency’s announcement

one of the best urban coarse fisheries in the country and supports a huge variety of species including chub, barbel and eel. It has also become a very popular location for walkers.”

Media coverage of both news events saw the Wandle hit the headlines in the national press, as well as radio and TV news.

Inside:

Find out more about the Wandle Trust’s river restoration works, how we are helping eel populations, Trout in The Classroom’s 10th anniversary and a chance to become a Wandle Trust supporter.

In June the Chair of the Environment Agency, Lord Chris Smith, visited the Wandle to sign an historic Habitat Enhancement Protocol with the Wandle Trust.

This joint agreement will help the Environment Agency and the Wandle Trust to work together even more closely to improve the river’s habitat for many iconic and endangered urban species including trout, mayflies, kingfishers and eventually water voles.

Lord Smith said: “The improvements on the Wandle clearly demonstrate the importance of partnership working and community participation. This protocol will help us to share knowledge and expertise even more actively, and provides the opportunity for more people to make a positive contribution to the Wandle”.



photo: Dave Phillips/Wandle Trust

Breaking down barriers

Great works are under way to renaturalise the Carshalton arm of the Wandle. Bella Davies reports on a programme of pegging, planting . . . and a bit of gentle demolition.

This year has seen a flurry of activity to improve and renaturalise the Carshalton arm of the Wandle – an important part of the river because trout and other fish try to migrate here to spawn.

The Wandle's long industrial history has meant not just that the river was polluted but that its physical course and shape were changed, creating long-term problems for the ecosystem. For instance, weirs were built to impound water and drive the mill wheels, but these now present barriers to fish and other organisms trying to get upstream. Another problem is the frequent widening of the river channel which means that the water is often very shallowly spread over a larger area.

Over the past year a series of activities have started to improve this arm of the river and make the headwaters accessible to aquatic organisms for the first time in centuries (there has been a mill at

Butter Hill Mill since at least 1620 and probably as far back as 1300).

In partnership with the Wild Trout Trust, the Environment Agency and 50 enthusiastic volunteers, we reduced the height of three weirs, added cover for fish to hide under, and improved localised flow and habitat by installing 'woody debris'. Riverside trees naturally shed branches and trunks into the river, providing a food source and cover for animals as well as complexity to flow patterns in the river. In urban areas such wood is removed due to the possible flood risk it presents if it gets stuck under a bridge. So we carefully plan where to reintroduce specific lengths of wood and peg them in place with two metre long metal stakes so they won't move downstream.

Below Butter Hill, we've also removed part of a weir which prevented fish passage; scraped back silt trapped behind the weir



all photos: Bella Davies

Above: volunteers begin narrowing the river.

Below left: introducing gravel

and replaced it with over 50 tonnes of gravel to create a more natural bed; narrowed the river and created a new natural bank stabilised with over 1000 native plants; and built "dragons' teeth" structures from wood and twigs to provide even more habitat, cover and flow diversity.

All of this work has been undertaken with the support of our fantastic volunteers, with over 90 volunteers giving up their weekends on 8 days. Thank you to every single one of you who have supported us, whether it be wielding a sledgehammer, passing on the message of what we're trying to do and encouraging others to love the Wandle, or just giving us a wave while we're working in the river. Thanks also to our funders, the Rivers Trust (formerly the Association of Rivers Trusts), Thames Water and the EU Interreg IVA WATER project.

If you like the sound of this, watch out for more of our restoration events coming up soon - check for details on www.wandletrust.org





Clockwise from above: fixing faggot bundles in place; planting marginals in the freshly laid gravel; sparks fly as the weir is 'notched', sculpting the river bed; securing the new banks with native plants, breaking down a weir with a pneumatic drill



photos: Bella Davies



All about eels

Tim Longstaff looks at how the Wandle Trust is helping monitor and revive a flagging, endangered eel population

The Wandle Trust along with three keen volunteers (Steve, Claire and Norman) has been working with the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) to monitor eels in the River Wandle at Merton Abbey Mills. Eel migrations in the River Thames and its tributaries have been monitored by ZSL since 2005 as part of the Tidal Thames Conservation Project.

The number of elvers (young eels) arriving from the ocean has been dropping over the last 30 years – some

researchers say by as much as 90-98 per cent. Because of this, eels are now recognised as critically endangered. The monitoring data from Merton Abbey Mills will be used to estimate the returning elver populations and to identify potential restrictions to the population. Using the gathered data, we will then implement a management plan to try and improve eel recruitment.

Improving eel passage
Weirs are a barrier to fish and eel



photo: Norman Fairey



photo: Tim Longstaff

migrations, and the weir at Merton Abbey Mills is a significant obstacle to eels and elvers moving upstream during the freshwater phase of their life cycle.

With our monitoring volunteers, we have recently installed a permanent eel pass at the site to allow migrating eels and elvers to travel upstream. This pass comprises steel trunking with brushes inside and water flowing through it. This allows eels to wriggle their way up and over the obstructing weir and continue their migration upstream. Excitingly, our first eel has been monitored using the pass via an integral trap. Maybe this is the start of a better future for eels in the Wandle!

Left: the eel pass; top: our first eel; above, (l-r) Joe from ZSL, volunteers Norman, Steve and Claire

An elegant, efficient solution

Elizabeth Taeed explains why the Wandle Trust is trying out Paid Ecosystem Services

Payment for ecosystem services (PES) is an idea that has grown in popularity and appeal over the last decade, as it provides elegant, efficient solutions to environmental issues. Ecosystem services, such as clean water, fresh air, and healthy plants and animals, are rarely valued or paid for, often resulting in misuse and destruction of the environment and increased costs of traditional services. PES addresses this problem by connecting beneficiaries of an ecosystem service with the providers.

The Wandle Trust is launching a series of

PES projects over the next few months to ensure that those who use and enjoy the Wandle's services can participate in its restoration to a healthy, beautiful chalk-stream. This involves working with all groups who benefit from the river, ranging from anglers to estate agents, visitors to beekeepers. It is the beginning of a new era, one where caring for the environment through efficient business practices is normal, where everyone benefits.

Involvement in the Wandle Trust's PES programme will deliver a range of benefits depending on which industry is involved and the service provided. Generally, benefits can include:

■ Direct financial benefits from improved

ecosystem services: these might include reduced water rates and higher home values

- Increased revenues
- Heightened brand recognition by customers
- Publicity value of participation in a flagship programme
- Demonstration of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and community engagement
- Reduced costs of doing business

For more information on how you or your business can be involved with the Wandle Trust's flagship PES programme, please contact Elizabeth on +44 (0) 7887 837010 or email her at Elizabeth.Taeed@WandleTrust.org.

Ten years of Trout in the Classroom

Gideon Reeve reflects on a decade of inspiring children to care about the environment through our award-winning educational project

At 10.30am on Wednesday 30 March, pupils from six of our participating Trout in the Classroom schools gathered at Hackbridge to release their diligently nurtured trout fry into the River Wandle.

All those present were also there to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the inception of this project in 2001 – a decade of learning about the importance of a healthy river and the life-cycle of the wild brown trout.

At the beginning of the morning the children gathered on the green and peered into each others' buckets to compare their baby trout and swap fish rearing tips.

This has turned out to be the best year ever for survival rates with all the schools having over fifty fish fry at the release stage and some considerably more. Many local councillors attended the event and the introductory speech was given by our guest of honour, Sean Brennan, Leader of Sutton Council.

Sutton Council has big plans for the regeneration of the whole of the Hackbridge area as part of the Hackbridge Masterplan, and the Wandle Trust has been working closely with Peter O'Connell and other Council officers to make sure river restoration is also part of this project.

After the speeches it was time for each school to release their trout. The students donned their waders and life jackets and were helped into the water by our volunteers. The whole crowd counted down and then cheered as the pupils tilted their buckets and the young fish finally swam free.

I was particularly aware of how excitedly the children spoke about how it felt to wade in the water. For most of them it was the first time they had ever experienced anything like this. Like my own memories of a school trip to a waterway, I'm sure many of them will remember this for a lifetime! In a rather untimely manner OFSTED chose to visit Benedict School on this very morning which meant the school couldn't take part in the first release event. Benedict were very happy though to have their own tailor-made release, including a nature walk along the Wandle, the following week.

The volunteers who helped were: Andrew, Jez, Jim, John, Peter, Sally, Sally-Anne, Susan and Theo. I would also like to extend my thanks to all the volunteers who have supported our schools over the last ten years. Without them this project wouldn't be possible.

Caring for the Wandle together: become a supporter

About us

The Wandle Trust is an environmental charity dedicated to the River Wandle in south west London.

Community

We hold community river cleanups on the second Sunday of every month, up and down this unique urban chalkstream – pulling out everything from shopping trolleys to shotguns.

Education

We're also helping to re-engage children with their home environment through our annual Trout in the Classroom project, in which local schools host a fish tank and children nurture trout as they grow from eggs into fish big enough to release into the river.

Restoration

In addition, we are engaged in a programme of river restoration, enhancing the environment for wildlife through planting wild species, controlling invasive plants, removing sections of concrete weirs and adding gravel to create a variety of habitat areas for fish to spawn, feed, rest and shelter.

Visit our website at www.wandletrust.org for all the latest news about our work.

Become a supporter

For just £30 a year, you can join our supporters' scheme as an individual. Just fill in the form, and return to:

Wandle Trust, PO Box 56545, London, SW18 9DY
tel: 0845 092 0110, registered charity no. 1091000

Yes! I'd like to support the Wandle Trust

Name.....

Address.....

Postcode.....

Email address.....

I enclose a cheque for £30 made out to Wandle Trust

I'd like to pay by credit/debit card

Card number:.....

Card type:.....

Expiry date:.....

Issue number (switch only):.....

Name on card:.....

Billing address if different from above:.....

I'd like the Wandle Trust to contact me about other methods of payment eg. direct debit

I'm interested in hearing more about the Corporate Supporters' scheme

Signed.....

Date.....

Wheelbarrows, weddings and wildlife

The Wandle Trust's monthly river clean ups continue to attract a great turnout of dedicated volunteers

With an average of 40-50 volunteers per event, our clean ups are as popular as ever and have enabled us to keep stretches of the river clean from Carshalton right up to King George's Park in Wandsworth.

We were especially delighted to welcome back in June newlyweds Hannah and Sean who had been given a wheelbarrow for Wandle clean ups as a wedding present by friends (and fellow volunteers) Debbie and Bart. The bridal ribbon stayed on the wheelbarrow pushed by our hardworking couple... although it maybe wasn't quite as pristine after dozens of trips piled with dripping rubbish.

In addition to removing rubbish, we have been tackling invasive species such as Himalayan balsam and floating pennywort - September saw a big effort at rolling up great carpets of the latter in Ravensbury Park and heaving them out of the water to compost in the woods.

Thanks as ever to all our volunteers, to our fantastic bakers Jo and Sally, and to all the local authorities for removing our rubbish mountains each month.



Left: the wedding wheelbarrow in its finery; above: a male banded demoiselle, seen at a King George's Park clean up

Right: volunteers working near King George's Park; below: tackling the highly invasive floating pennywort at Ravensbury Park



photo: Sally Ann Symis



Wandle News is published by the Wandle Trust, an environmental charity founded in 2000 and dedicated to restoring and maintaining the health of South London's River Wandle and its catchment.

Find out more about us and our work at www.wandletrust.org

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