

Press release: Letting the Dove Flow - Restoring the natural condition of the River Dove

National Trust in the White Peak – Home Farm, Ilam, DE6 2AZ

Work to improve the natural habitat of the River Dove in Dovedale is continuing in 2018 through a partnership consisting of the National Trust, the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Wild Trout Trust, the Peak District National Park and local fishing clubs.

The next stage of work to restore the natural habitat of the river will begin in August, and will see three weirs near the famous Stepping Stones breached in partnership with Leek and District Fly Fishing Association to allow the river water to flow quickly and freely again. The Beresford Fishery will also be involved in Wolfscotdale. The work will see the weirs restored to the natural cascades present before the 1920s, and depicted in paintings by artists who visited the valley as early as the eighteenth century.

More than a hundred weirs were built across the River Dove in the early part of the twentieth century to create a series of pools of deep, still water which could be stocked with farmed trout and fished by local clubs.

However, over the years they have collected silt, blanketing the gravel on the riverbed which invertebrates like river-flies need and where wild trout lay their eggs.

The 'Letting the Dove Flow' partnership has breached six weirs over the last two years; these areas of the river have now returned to a natural state and provide better habitat for wild trout as well as charismatic birds like dipper and kingfishers.

The river forms an integral part of Dovedale's beauty as it meanders through the iconic valley's steep woods and wildflower-rich grassland.

The partnership will continue to work together to slowly breach more of the weirs, restoring the natural, fast flow of the river across the rocks, allowing gravel beds to become exposed and providing places for fish to spawn and invertebrates to live.

Tim Brooks, Environment Agency officer said, 'Fresh water like rivers makes up around 1% of the available water on the planet but supports around 10% of species, making them incredibly important and valuable habitats. We need to ensure they are able to function as they should to deliver benefits to both people and wildlife.'

Chris Wood, National Trust ecologist for the Peak District described the dammed areas of the river as ‘wet deserts’ and said: ‘The areas behind the weirs provide less food and variety for wildlife. The work to remove the manmade weirs will restore the river to its natural condition.’

‘We are delighted that local fishing clubs are in agreement with this work – it is a great step for conservation in Dovedale, and will greatly improve the condition of the River Dove.’

Tim Jacklin of the Wild Trout Trust said: ‘Catching a domesticated animal that’s been released into a modified artificial environment is nothing compared to the satisfaction of deceiving a cunning wild fish.’

Across the length of the valley the difference will be very gradual as the Dove slowly starts to flow faster and look more natural, returning to the rugged landscape admired by pre-Victorian painters and writers such as Izaak Walton. Visitors later this summer might come across work parties from the fishing clubs moving giant boulders by hand as they strive to improve the river they love.

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Editor’s Notes

- 1) High resolution photos available on request.
- 2) The River Dove in Dovedale and Wolfscote Dale is one of the most renowned rivers in Britain, and supports a diverse range of wildlife. In recognition of its ecological value, the river is designated as part of the Dove Valley and Biggin Dale nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) conserve and protect the best of our wildlife, geological and physiographical heritage for the benefit of present and future generations. There are over 4,000 SSSIs in England, covering around 8% of the country. SSSIs give legal protection to the best sites for wildlife and geology in England under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
- 3) The River Dove is also designated as part of the [Peak District Dales Special Area of Conservation](#) (SAC). Special Areas of Conservation are internationally important for their wildlife and home to the rarest and most vulnerable habitats and species in Europe. These sites form part of the European network of protected areas known as Natura 2000.
- 4) Dovedale is a National Nature Reserve. National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are areas of national natural interest and are generally all SSSIs, which also provide a resource for scientific research and recreation. The reserve, which includes Wolfscote Dale and Biggin Dale (south of Hartington), is in the northernmost reaches of the valley of the River Dove in the Derbyshire Dales District of the Peak District National Park. The National Trust owns and cares for the majority of the land and manages the NNR.

- 5) River restoration is needed to improve the physical habitat and associated ecology of the river sections of Dovedale and Biggin Dale Site of Special Scientific Interest. Natural England and the Environment Agency have funded the project to improve the SSSI condition and to contribute to the England Biodiversity Strategy 2020. The long-term aim of restoration is to move the river towards a more naturally functioning state that supports a diverse ecology and wildlife, whilst recognising other interests and river users' needs.
- 6) In 2011 a fluvial audit of the river system assessed the function and form of the river and made recommendations for potential restoration action. The project partners have used this existing data, new information and discussions with local landowners and river managers to produce a restoration strategy for the river, available here: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6259971227385856>.
- 7) The National Trust is a conservation charity founded in 1895. Entirely independent of Government, the National Trust looks after more than 250,000 hectares of countryside, 775 miles of coastline and hundreds of special places across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. More than 20 million people visit every year, and together with 4.5 million members and over 62,000 volunteers, they help to support the charity in its work to care for special places for ever, for everyone.
- 8) Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide. Natural England is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#).
- 9) The Environment Agency works to create better places for people and wildlife, and support sustainable development. EA is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#).
- 10) The Wild Trout Trust is a conservation charity that focuses on practical work to improve habitat for trout and all wildlife across the UK and Ireland.
- 11) The Peak District National Park Authority is responsible for looking after a designated area of land, the Peak District National Park, which is 555 square miles (1,438 square kilometres) in size, and covers parts of the counties of Derbyshire, Yorkshire, Staffordshire, and Cheshire. Our purpose is to:
 - conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Peak District.
 - promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the Peak District's special qualities.

We must also foster the economic and social well-being of the local communities.

- 12) Leek & District Fly Fishing Association was founded in 1972. It's the strong relationships we maintain with our land owners, the National Trust and the Environment Agency that are essential to the ongoing success of our association. In 2012, LADFFA proudly celebrated its 40th anniversary. Our values remain unchanged – to provide affordable and quality fly fishing to our members. In return we ask our members to respect the waters we fish, the people who visit them and above all the environment of our quarry.
- 13) The Beresford Fishery is also closely involved with the project.

