



WILD TROUT TRUST

Trout in the Town

Urban Rivers Restoration Guidelines



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1.0 Introduction



Acknowledgements

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1.1 Introduction to the guidelines

A great many of our urban rivers in the British Isles are carrying the cleanest water that they have seen in the last 100 years. The steady decline in heavy industry on the banks of many of our “post industrial” rivers has been matched by a gradual, but insistent, improvement in water quality. This improvement is also critically dependent upon continued investment in bettering Sewage Treatment Works across the British Isles.

However, due to their vital role in receiving surface water drainage, urban rivers constantly live in the shadow of episodic pollution via accidental spillage or incorrect disposal of toxic substances. Moreover, habitats in and alongside our towns’ and cities’ waterways are continually under pressure from encroaching urban development that has historically left many of them encased in concrete banks or – worse – underground pipes.

It is wonderful to know that, in the face of such challenges, many urban rivers either currently support – or are capable of supporting – excellent wild fish populations such as salmon, trout, grayling and chub, unthinkable in our recent industrial past. Given this favourable set of conditions, a successful bid by the **Wild Trout Trust** to the **Esmée Fairbairn Foundation** enabled the **Trout in the Town** project (TinTT) to help foster custodianship for our urban rivers.

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The information available in this manual is not intended to be comprehensive or definitive; in particular, details or topics relevant to particular circumstances may well not be included. Readers are advised to seek full professional advice before considering acting on any of the recommendations in this manual, and the WTT does not accept any liability for its content.

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1.2 How to use the guidelines

This pdf document is, as with our existing published guidelines, intended for practitioners. The major focus is guidance for groups of committed individuals that enables them to take on the care, protection and promotion of their local urban watercourses. However, a huge amount of this advice will be equally relevant to groups or clubs who are looking to improve their own rural sections of river (an obvious example would be guidance on successful working parties – [section 2.2.3](#)). Furthermore, this document also builds on and cross-references existing habitat restoration techniques detailed in our [Wild Trout Survival Guide](#), [Chalkstream Habitat Manual](#) and [Upland Rivers Habitat Manual](#) publications. The guiding principles of identifying core issues and tackling them at cause are promoted. Interestingly, these urban guidelines extend this approach to the human society around the river as well as the ecology of the river corridor itself.

Each section of the guidelines is titled and numbered for ease of cross reference and, additionally, can be navigated to by clicking on the section title in the contents page. In addition to the guidelines themselves, the context for their development is provided by a report on the projects from which these guidelines were derived ([Appendix, Concluding Report on initial 2-year funded project “Trout in the Town”](#) (TinTT)). Have fun using the guidelines and, as always, the WTT can be contacted for advice on your own specific circumstances as well as guidance on putting the theory into practice

URBAN RIVER FISH KILLED BY POLLUTION (LEFT) AND AN EXAMPLE OF UNDERGROUND STREAM CULVERTING (RIGHT)



1.3 Habitat guidelines sections

Section 2 – Community guidance

Advice on how to get to know your river and local community ([section 2.1](#)) by monitoring ([section 2.1.1](#)) and education ([section 2.1.2](#)) as well as how to campaign for your river ([section 2.2](#)) by using public records ([section 2.2.1](#)), publicity and communication ([section 2.2.2](#)), working parties ([section 2.2.3](#)) and successfully securing funding ([section 2.2.4](#)).

Section 3 – Habitat projects on your river

Takes you through typical urban river issues ([section 3.1](#)) of invasive species ([section 3.1.1](#)),

fly-tipping and trash ([section 3.1.2](#)), damaging modification of the river channel ([section 3.1.3](#)), fragmentation of habitat ([section 3.1.4](#)) and riparian ownership ([section 3.1.5](#)) before suggesting what can be done through habitat works ([section 3.2](#)) from general principles ([section 3.2.1](#)) to the land drainage consent process ([section 3.2.2](#)) and adapting techniques to the urban environment ([section 3.2.3](#))



1.4 The key challenges, objectives and scope of these guidelines

Obstacles to communities adopting their local urban rivers include:

- A lack of interest from angling clubs or aquatic wildlife enthusiasts, especially where waterside access is restricted.
- Often very fragmented or uncertain riparian ownership.
- Perception of poor quality and pollution due to fly tipping.
- Episodic pollution events that create negative headlines.

Given these barriers and a lack of perceived value, even for rivers in very good heart, protection and restoration of our urban rivers is as much about informing and supporting local communities to become custodians as it is about physical restoration. For this reason, much of this guidance will concentrate on community engagement, education and organisational advice.

In the U.S.A., organisations such as the Coalition to Restore Urban Waters (CRUW) have provided numerous valuable case-studies (e.g.¹) and, also in America, there is published practical guidance that takes into account U.S. Federal legislation and



other socio-economic and governmental protocols (e.g.²). In the UK however, we do not currently have comparable advice. This manual is designed to fill the gap in UK guidance and has grown out of the experience gained through working with 8 local TinTT chapters between 2008 and 2010. The TinTT approach is reach-scale custodianship with the capacity to campaign for and influence processes acting on the whole catchment. A guide to how a typical TinTT chapter can be organised is outlined in the WTT's TinTT project prioritisation strategy (http://www.wildtrout.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=316&Itemid=312). Adopting this suggested (or any functionally equivalent) “local chapter” structure provides a basis upon which to carry out the subsequent advice given in these guidelines.

All types of river are found in urban settings – chalkstreams and other spring fed watercourses as well as spate-rivers with their variable flows. This means that techniques appropriate to each fundamental river type can very often be successfully adopted (perhaps with minimal modifications) from existing practical restoration manuals. This document, therefore, aims to provide guidelines that complement and cross reference the WTT's “**Chalkstream Habitat Manual**”, “**Upland Rivers Habitat Manual**” and “**Wild Trout Survival Guide**” (all available via the Wild Trout Trust website: www.wildtrout.org).

1. “*Rivertown, Rethinking Urban Rivers*”, MIT press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Ed. Paul Stanton Kibel (2007)

2. “*Restoring Streams in Cities, A Guide for Planners, Policymakers and Citizens*”, Island Press, Washington D.C. by Ann L. Riley (1998)

FLY TIPPING LEADS TO PUBLIC PERCEPTION THAT THE RIVER IS POLLUTED EVEN WHEN WATER QUALITY IS GOOD

