



WILD TROUT TRUST

# AUTUMN 2023 NEWSLETTER



## WTT CHRISTMAS RAFFLE 7 DECEMBER

Fabulous prizes: see back cover. Please buy a ticket or two!

Plus inside: News, views and updates from our Conservation Officers, trouty films, and befriending Bradford's Becks

# Conservation at our core

## WTT's Director Shaun Leonard reviews what we've been up to in the last year

Since the printed WTT newsletter is a thing that flowers but once a year, it's an opportunity to reflect on what we got up to in our 2022-23 financial year, which runs May to April. The core of what WTT does is to offer expert technical advice to improve river habitat for trout and all wildlife, do practical work to effect that advice, and spread environmental conservation messages to as wide an audience as possible; here's how we did tackling that core.

### Spreading the word

We gave 39 presentations to various groups (5 less than last year and the five-year mean of 44), from angling club meetings to international conferences like the pan-European Dam Removal Conference in Manchester in May '23, and disseminated our messages through media: national radio, local TV, and high profile printed publications such as *BBC Wildlife magazine* and the *Conservation Land Management* journal. The WTT website attracts over 23K website visitors every month, with our social

media channels extending that reach (e.g. our Facebook page has 6382 followers, up 14% on 2021-22).

Our communication focuses on trout ecology, factors impacting rivers (and their trout) and what might be done to help life in and around the river, including tackling impacts from agriculture, the water industry and climate change. We aim to provide much-needed balance to inform debates all too often polarised into 'for' and 'against' camps, for example those around beaver reintroduction, and sewage pollution.

### Science

Several of our staff, including our Research and Conservation Officer, Professor Jonny Grey, maintain close links to academia, through involvement with relevant research at the universities of Durham, Highlands and Islands, Hull, Lancaster and London. Our annual journal, *Salmo Trutta*, distributed to at least 4000 people, includes articles where academic research is translated into the practical realm; in 2023, with pieces on floods, droughts, weirs, fish migration,



Electrofishing field research in Upper Wensleydale in September 2023, led by Jonny Grey (centre). Conserving rivers is a big part of the National Park's Nature Recovery Plan - and how different this denuded landscape will look and function when the young trees planted in the fields behind the barn grow up!

pollution, sea trout ecology and invasive non-native plant species.

### Advice and practical river restoration

We completed 238 Advisory Visits in the year, across England and parts of Ireland and Scotland, 15 more than last year and 5% above the five-year mean of 227. Many were to individual river reaches, extending as far as the 129km walkover of the River Moy in County Mayo completed by our Conservation Officer Gareth Pedley, on foot and kayak.

We worked on 79 practical projects, 15 more than last year and 18% above the five-year mean of 67. These projects ranged from single days with groups of volunteers through to two very large weir removal projects. In Yorkshire, Jonny Grey oversaw what is believed to be the largest weir removal yet undertaken in the UK, demolishing a structure 75m wide and 4m high in an extraordinarily cost-effective

way. In Derbyshire, Tim Jacklin, working with the EA's Ryan Taylor, led a complex weir removal project, with early and gratifying results: a spawned-out hen salmon was found upstream of the previously impassable weir three months after its removal. Both these projects are detailed on the WTT website, including cracking videos created by Paul Gaskell.

Our 2023-24 year will not be one illuminated by big capital projects, but we will focus on our bread-and-butter work, with no sign of it slowing: still many Advisory Visits, across England and again encouragingly in Ireland, north and south, and lots of smaller-scale, impactful practical projects. As we enter that practical window after the fishing season but before our trout start spawning, we've got lots of work lined up, from Cumbria to Devon.

What's really, really important to WTT's *raison d'être* is the help we get from our supporters and partners – angling clubs and other community groups, river and wildlife trusts,

## STATE OF NATURE 2023

In September, a group of 60 conservation organisations produced its latest report on the UK's State of Nature. For those of us that interact daily with our natural world, this wasn't going to be a happy read and it isn't. 'The UK is now one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth'. On land and in freshwater, the report cites the biggest impacts to nature coming from the way we manage our land for agriculture, and the effects of climate change.

Additionally sobering is how under-represented fish are in the report and indeed the broader debate around nature and what's happening to our wildlife. For example, the Atlantic salmon is mentioned once, in connection with its plight in Wales, but the crisis that sees salmon stocks in ¾ of English rivers officially 'at risk' does not register in the State of Nature; such is their plight that Atlantic salmon may well be added this year to the IUCN Red List of the globe's most endangered species. In many places, sea trout are in an equally parlous position, unrecognised as such by most people.

Not only must we work harder physically to help our fishes, we obviously need do much, much more to get them in the public psyche.

government agencies, especially the EA - thank you all. We pledge always to use wisely the funds that we're given and that's what we do. For example, we've put a couple of recent donations into a ring-fenced practical kit fund which is buying

our Conservation Officers waterproofs for the winter and Nick Lawrence our first electric chainsaw!

Final plea: never shy from telling me what you think of WTT, good or bad, on [director@wildtrout.org](mailto:director@wildtrout.org) or 07974 861908.

## WTT AS INFLUENCER

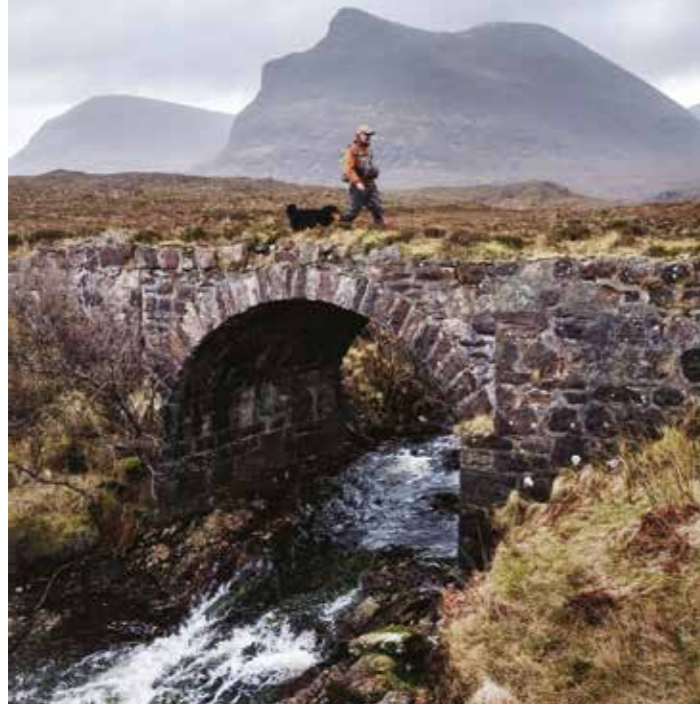
WTT's day job is physical habitat work but we play a largely unseen role in supporting those who work on other issues, and we try to influence debates on those issues. For example, in Yorkshire, we've been working to ensure that the Dales rivers become front-and-centre of the developing Nature Recovery Plan for the National Park. Jonny Grey's input is highlighting the need to renaturalise the Dales rivers, to fence out livestock, plant trees, return gravel and wood; how right Jonny is when he says "Becks and rivers should be the capillaries and arteries flowing through our Dales landscape". More on the National Park blog <https://www.yorkshiredales.org.uk/writing-a-nature-recovery-plan/>

# News snippets

## Wild Trout Trust Spring Auction

15–24 March 2024

[auction.wildtrout.org](http://auction.wildtrout.org)



## WTT Spring Auction 15 to 24 March 2024

Thank you to our 2023 auction lot donors and bidders: we were utterly overwhelmed and humbled by your support, and by our new record final total of nearly £93K.

We are now gathering donations for 2024, and repeat lots are very welcome. If you haven't donated before but would like to, please do! It would be very much appreciated. Guided fishing lots are always popular but don't feel that it's essential to include guiding (or refreshments, or anything else). Many winning bidders are happy to explore by themselves having been given some advice beforehand and this will be reflected in the lot description.

Christina would be delighted to hear from anyone keen to donate a lot, preferably before Christmas or in early January at latest, via [office@wildtrout.org](mailto:office@wildtrout.org) or 023 9257 0985 so that the catalogue can be assembled and posted to members in February, together with our Spring news update. By running our own auction website, 100% of the money, apart from any credit card fees, will be put to good use for wild trout and our rivers and lakes. Thank you so much.

[www.auction.wildtrout.org](http://www.auction.wildtrout.org)

## WTT 3-Fly fundraiser nets over £5,000 for chalk stream improvements

Organised once again by star WTT volunteer Neil Mundy, our latest 3-Fly competition took place on Saturday 17 June at Meon Springs Trout Fishery in Hampshire.

The whole event, and the vital funds which it helps us



Worthy winner Roy Gosling accepts his prizes from Neil Mundy

raise, are dedicated to the memory of Pasco James, who died tragically and far too young in 2010.

This year, our friendly competition was won by long-time supporter Roy Gosling, and we raised over £5,000. Pasco was an enthusiastic fisher at Meon Springs, but also a very keen river man who much loved the chalk streams and we'll be putting these proceeds into a special restricted fund for work on the southern chalk streams, and use it for practical river improvement projects in the area.

Our huge thanks go to:

- Neil Mundy for organising the whole day for us
- Greg Adlam and his colleagues at Meon Springs
- Roy and Bridget Gosling for donating the cut glass decanter and tankard trophy (which Roy then won, and gave to Greg at the fishery!)
- Mark Roberts for tying and donating all the flies for each competitor
- Everyone who joined so generously in our competition, raffle and auction!

Neil has already put 15 June 2024 in the diary for our next 3-Fly event - you'd be very welcome to join us.

Keep an eye on WTT channels for news, or register your interest now with Neil via [ncmundy@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:ncmundy@hotmail.co.uk)



Sea trout: in need of help

PAUL SHARMAN

## Cardiff Sea Trout Symposium 2023

Over the years, Cardiff has hosted a series of conferences on the biology, ecology, conservation and management of sea trout. The latest, in September 2023, co-organised by the Institute of Fisheries Management, WTT, WildFish, the Atlantic Salmon Trust and Dr Nigel Milner brought together the great and good from the sea trout world, though sadly with one behemoth absent: Dr Graeme Harris – see his obit on page 30. The event was dedicated to Graeme's memory and his legacy as a champion for sea trout.

What came out startlingly is that sea trout stocks around the UK and Ireland are in a parlous state, impacted by problems for all our rivers (water quality, water quantity, poor habitat) and a myriad of issues at sea. The number of sea trout taken in targeted fisheries or as by-catch is largely unknown and unpoliced; along the west coasts of Scotland and Ireland, sea lice infestation from salmon aquaculture is rife.

The SAMARCH project in the English Channel has revealed some interesting details on how far and how deep individual sea trout swim, and suggests that the nomadic habit of the species might mean that actions to recover populations should be on a river-by-river basis and regionally too.

There was a strong and unanimous call to action, starting with raising awareness of sea trout, their importance in ecosystems and the need to protect and conserve them. A focused, technical workshop in London in November will produce an Action Plan to go forward to the governments of the UK and Ireland.

## New To You: Fishy Stuff

Have you seen this new(ish) department in our website shop?

New To You: Fishy Stuff is where we hope you'll find something you've been longing for – pre-loved tackle, flies, books, maybe art – gifted by WTT's generous supporters to help raise funds for wild trout conservation: [www.wildtrout.org/shop/new-to-you-fishy-stuff](http://www.wildtrout.org/shop/new-to-you-fishy-stuff)

If you'd like to donate to us in this way, we'd be delighted to accept good quality items that need a new home. Please contact Christina in the WTT office on [office@wildtrout.org](mailto:office@wildtrout.org)

Thank you to everyone who donates their beloved stuff and to you for giving it a new life. Every pound we get is one that trout conservation didn't have before.



Back on the Tarn

## Fishing returns to Malham Tarn

The National Trust re-opened fishing at Malham Tarn again this year, after three seasons in abeyance, with WTT's 'Prof in Practice' Jonny Grey as part of the fishery management team, the Friends of Malham Tarn ([www.friendsofmalhamtarn.org](http://www.friendsofmalhamtarn.org)).

The new arrangements were put in place after the National Trust became concerned about the possibility of anglers introducing invasive non-native species to this Site of Special Scientific Interest, and Jonny has helped steer the biosecurity discussions. The Friends of Malham Tarn - a group of very experienced and environmentally-minded wild trout fishermen – were appointed after a public consultation and application process.

Under the terms of the lease, members of the public can pre-book fly-fishing on the Tarn, but only two boats are available at any time, and one of these must be occupied by one of the Friends' ten-strong management team (called Wardens). There is a minimum of two and a maximum of three anglers per boat, and no bank fishing is allowed. Fishing runs from 9am to 5pm each day; for biosecurity, anglers must arrive with all their kit completely clean and dry, and be checked in and out by the Wardens.

Malham Tarn is Britain's highest upland alkaline lake, and the record Malham Tarn trout weighed in at 13lbs. The water also holds a prolific population of perch, and invertebrates including the Malham sedge, a rare flightless species of caddis fly which is found only here and in Estonia.

Jonny has been consulting with Natural England's fisheries specialists to determine spawning habitat within the tarn and inflowing / outflowing streams.

## SUNRISE wins the 2023 UK River Prize

The River Restoration Centre's 2023 UK River Prize (catchment scale) was won in April this year by a large scale project across the River Trent catchment, led by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust with WTT as a key partner.

River restoration sites at Staffordshire University Campus and the old Victoria (football) Ground have been significant components of the Trout in the Town project over the years, and our Trout in the Town Manager Paul Gaskell has



New habitat on the Trent

been closely involved: in fact one of his first Advisory Visit reports, soon after joining WTT in 2008, featured these exact locations. Together with Tim Jacklin, Paul was also involved in project opportunity scoping

works in 2014, and WTT's designs and aspirations were brought to life through long-term participation in the SUNRISE project.

Paul says: "To be part of the project that pushed through such radical changes in previously-degraded urban sections of the Trent - and to be recognised in the RRC's Award - has been extremely rewarding".

To find out more about the SUNRISE project, watch Paul's film (page 9 of this newsletter) or visit this report on our website:

[www.wildtrout.org/wttblog/river-trent-stoke-on-trent-sunrise](http://www.wildtrout.org/wttblog/river-trent-stoke-on-trent-sunrise)

## Action on chalk streams

Many of our members and supporters are passionate about the plight of the nation's chalk streams. In 2020 the Government announced that there would be a multi-sector chalk stream restoration group set up to establish a new Strategy for chalk stream recovery.

Even more importantly, this group would make sure there would be a follow-up action plan targeted at addressing the issues identified in the Strategy - and particularly those impacting on water quality, water resources and habitat quality and availability.

WTT's founder and former president Charles Rangeley-Wilson has skilfully chaired the group and put in a huge amount of work to pull together the Strategy and the draft Implementation Plan, which was launched by Minister Pow at Watermen's Hall in London on 15 June this year. Our own Andy Thomas is a member of the group, and his role has been to ensure that the need for high quality chalk stream trout and salmon habitat was included within the actions identified.

At the heart of the Strategy is the 'one big wish' which asks for 'overarching statutory protection and priority status for chalk streams



The urban River Dour in Dover

and their catchments to give them a distinct identity and to drive investment in water-resources infrastructure, water treatment, stronger planning controls and catchment-scale restoration. The key challenge remains on how to replicate the investment and focus that designation brings to a handful of chalk streams, across the remainder.

At the launch of the Implementation Plan, the Minister announced that the Government would set out its response via a Recovery Pack to describe exactly how DEFRA, OFWAT and the water companies would resource and deliver the recommendations made by the group. Given the current status of many of our rivers,

the group is desperately keen to encourage the Government to grasp the raft of recommendations put forward in our joint Implementation Plan. Currently we are waiting for the details of the Recovery Pack to be announced.

We have jointly reminded the Minister that we are in a freshwater emergency. Climate breakdown, over-abstraction, pollution and habitat degradation threaten our rivers, placing water security, human health and iconic species such as salmon and trout at risk. Nowhere is this more acute than in our highly pressured but globally iconic chalk streams.

We will be working to ensure that the Government rises to this challenge.



A thriving wild trout fishery: Haddon on the Derbyshire Wye

## Thank you

We are always very grateful to our kind supporters whose generous donations enable us to keep on delivering our practical advice and projects. Very many WTT members and supporters donate to our Spring Auction fundraising event (see page 4). We also receive regular cash donations, for which we're hugely thankful.

Some of our supporters choose to support us with fundraising through marathons and other events. This year, **Paul Mackreth** raised funds for WTT on JustGiving by running the Rob Burrow Leeds Marathon in May - an incredible and very generous effort!

Trade membership is another way of supporting us, from just £65 a year. In this issue of the Newsletter, we're launching a new series of short articles profiling some of our most committed Trade Members: turn to page 29 to read more about **Famous Fishing** (our oldest trade member, with us right from the start in 1998) and **Fortitude Rod Co** (one of our very newest). Please do support them, and all the other WTT Trade Members listed on our website, if you can.

We receive donations of book royalties from authors **Adrian Latimer**, **Theo Pike** and WTT Vice President **Pat O'Reilly**. Pat also donates his publishing profits.

For many years, **Butts Brewery** near Hungerford have been donating 5p for each bottle of Barbus barbus beer that they sell: [www.buttsbrewery.com](http://www.buttsbrewery.com)

Richard Wright gives casting lessons and asks his clients to donate £50 to WTT. He also donates the fees for his articles in *Fly Fishing & Fly Tying*.

WTT has a long relationship with the **Haddon Estate** on the River Wye in Derbyshire, from the early days of Tim's advice and Gareth starting his career there as a river keeper, through their annual contributions to our auction and raffle, and the many years of hosting WTT trout and

grayling fishing weekends on this beautiful water.

What makes the Haddon Estate's **Peacock Fly Fishing Club** particularly special is that back in 2003 the bold decision was made to move from more traditional fishery management, with regular fish stocking, to a conservation-based approach.

The result is now a thriving, wild, catch and release fishery for wild brown trout, wild rainbows and grayling. Habitat is restored and managed in a sympathetic manner to ensure that the rivers are right for the fish and other wildlife, first and foremost, with anglers then able to enjoy the significant benefits - without the inherent detriments of over-manicured banks or introductions of hatchery-reared fish.

This seemingly obvious and simple approach pays dividends in the abundance of fish and fly life, and the high quality fishing available. We thank Haddon Estate and The Peacock at Rowsley for their kind support for WTT, and their important contribution to progressive fishery management.

**Thank you to everyone who supports WTT so generously!**



**YOU CAN HELP US TO HELP WILD TROUT IN ONE EASY CAST...**

**SIGN UP A FRIEND!**

**More people love wild trout and rivers than there are members of the Wild Trout Trust.**

**So be a trouty champion... tell a fishing pal about the great work we do and the benefits of being a member (events, journal, camaraderie) and sign him or her up as a member.**

**It really does make a difference: the more members we have, the more work we can do and the more our voice matters.**

Challenge yourself to signing up a new member via our shop at [www.wildtrout.org](http://www.wildtrout.org) or by asking Christina to email or post a membership form ([office@wildtrout.org](mailto:office@wildtrout.org) / 023 9257 0985)

**THANK YOU**

## New books to read

Another year of varied and interesting books written by WTT members and friends of wild trout!

Our Vice-President **Pat O'Reilly** has just released the third title in his *Winding River Mystery* trilogy, crime novels with a fly-fishing couple at the centre of the action.

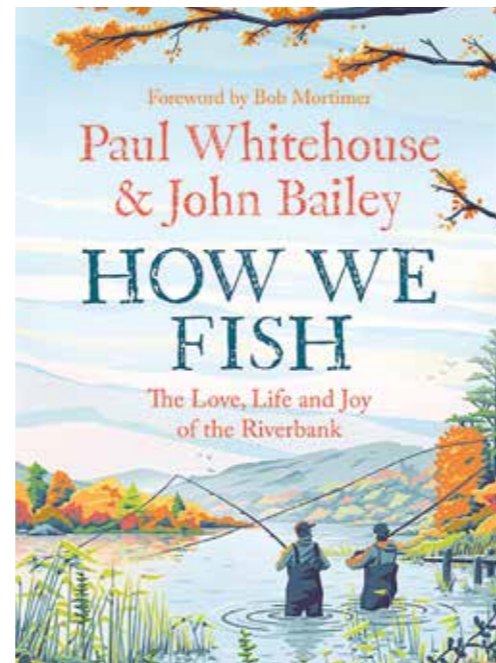
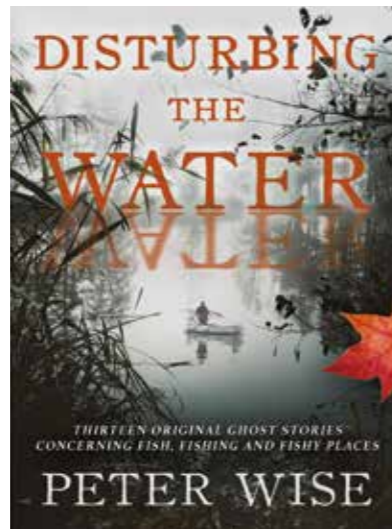
*Dead Drift* is set in Ireland with a fast moving, complex plot that makes an absorbing read.

Pat is well known to WTT members as the author of *Matching the Hatch*, and he's very generously donating his author royalties to WTT. Available from Amazon.

As mentioned in *Salmo Trutta* 2023, **Peter Hayes** and **Don Stazicker** published *The Flies That Trout Prefer* as an e-book via the Amazon Kindle app. It's an iconoclastic exploration, questioning 22 fly-fishing assumptions with 350 pages of insights, including 340 photos and 36 videos filmed by the authors and linked straight from the e-book. Not to be missed: available as a download from Amazon.

Suitably and spookily released on Halloween this year, *Disturbing the Water* is a collection of original ghost stories written by WTT member **Peter Wise**. Four of his 13 stories involve fly-fishing, trout, salmon and grayling: subtle, chilling, with shades of M.R. James. Published by Cranthorpe Millner.

We know how many WTT members have enjoyed the *Gone Fishing* TV series, and now **Paul Whitehouse** has



linked up with fishing consultant **John Bailey** to write *How We Fish*, celebrating the richness of lives spent fishing. With a foreword by **Bob Mortimer** (and kind

words about WTT's effectiveness on the ground 'rather than just talk in meetings' - thank you Paul and John!) A lovely add-on to all the TV series so far. Published by HarperCollins.

Last but not least, if you're looking for stocking fillers this Christmas, our own 'little book of riverside moments', *Not Really Fishing*, was previously reviewed by John Bailey as 'a miniature masterpiece' and is still selling well from our web shop. Find all the details on page 31 of this newsletter.

## Still busy with beavers

We've taken a very considered decision to work with many of the parties involved in beaver reintroduction to England, and to some extent Scotland. Our view is that beavers are here, they're spreading in the wild, they will have detrimental impacts on some fish in some (maybe many) places in our highly modified landscape and we must be in the mix, making the case for fish and practical management that allows for the diversity that beavers can bring, without unintended consequences for other wildlife.

Various groups of WTT staff have visited beaver sites (mostly enclosed sites) in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Derbyshire, Cumbria and Tayside,



learning more about the animal's amazing ecology. We're part of local beaver management groups in the south and the germinal National Beaver Management Forum.

Most practically, we ran a training course in July, together with the

**WTT Conservation Officer Ed Eley stands beside a Somerset beaver dam. On this particular day in May 2023, trout (and most other fish species) would not have been able to pass this dam in either direction**

Beaver Trust, for those wildlife trusts at the vanguard of beaver reintroduction, addressing the fundamentals of fish ecology and how beaver damming and habitat modification might impact fish at various stages in their lives. And currently, we're also working with a group of partners drafting a practical beaver dam assessment tool to inform intervention at beaver dams that might cause issues for native fish communities.

# WTT's favourite films

WTT's YouTube channel is where we showcase the small but growing library of footage which we've made over the past few years. Here are some of our recent highlights, as well as recommendations of films from WTT friends, project partners, and other videos which we and our Conservation Officers have been involved in.

To watch, simply type the specially shortened links below into your browser window, or use the individual QR codes with your mobile phone.

You can also find our whole YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/@WildTroutTrust](https://www.youtube.com/@WildTroutTrust) - don't forget to 'subscribe' so you'll be notified when new films appear. Or just keep coming back regularly to check!

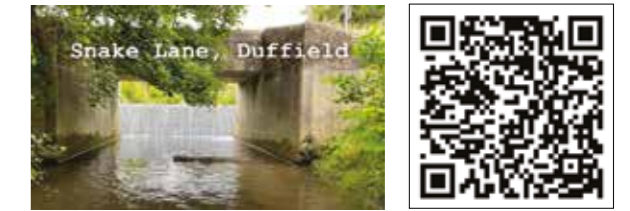
### SUNRISE ON THE TRENT



Paul Gaskell isn't just WTT's Trout in the Town Manager for the north of England - he's a film-maker as well. This video shows our involvement in the award-winning SUNRISE project on the River Trent.

Watch here: <https://tinyurl.com/WTT-SUNRISE>

### REMOVING SNAKE LANE WEIR



Another epic film from Paul Gaskell: how WTT's Tim Jacklin removed a huge weir on the River Ecclesbourne and replaced it with a rock ramp so that salmon can migrate back from Greenland to the heart of England.

Watch here: <https://tinyurl.com/WTT-SnakeLane>

### FRIENDS OF BRADFORD'S BECKS



Professor Barney Lerner MBE, chair of WTT's Trout in the Town chapter Friends of Bradford's Becks, explains how they're improving these urban streams: find out more on page 26 of this newsletter too.

Watch here: <https://tinyurl.com/WTT-FoBB>

### WILD TROUT IN THE NIDD



WTT's Jonny Grey has been working with Nidderdale Angling Club to rebuild wild trout populations and move away from stocked fish. This film from the Angling Trust shows the positive results!

Watch here: <https://tinyurl.com/WTT-Nidd>

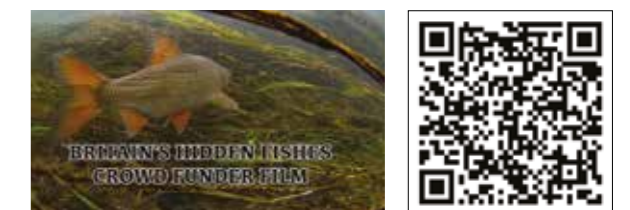
### JON BEER: SO MANY TROUT...



Our President Jon Beer gave this talk at Christmas last year (also featuring James Prosek's amazing artwork!) Put this year's WTT Christmas raffle with Ken Whelan's Zoom talk in your diary now: see page 32 for all the details.

Watch here: <https://tinyurl.com/WTT-JonBeer2022>

### BRITAIN'S HIDDEN FISHES



Jack Perks's film *Britain's Hidden Fishes* premiered in summer 2023, and is well worth catching if you can. Here's the trailer to whet your appetite, complete with voice over from another good friend, Jeremy Wade. Watch here: <https://tinyurl.com/WTT-BritainsHiddenFishes>

# Sea-run stockies

By Andy Thomas,  
Conservation Officer  
for the South

We've known for years that the odd stocked trout will drop down a river to the salt, only to return as a reconditioned fish, albeit one with little to offer the next generation of wild brown or sea trout.

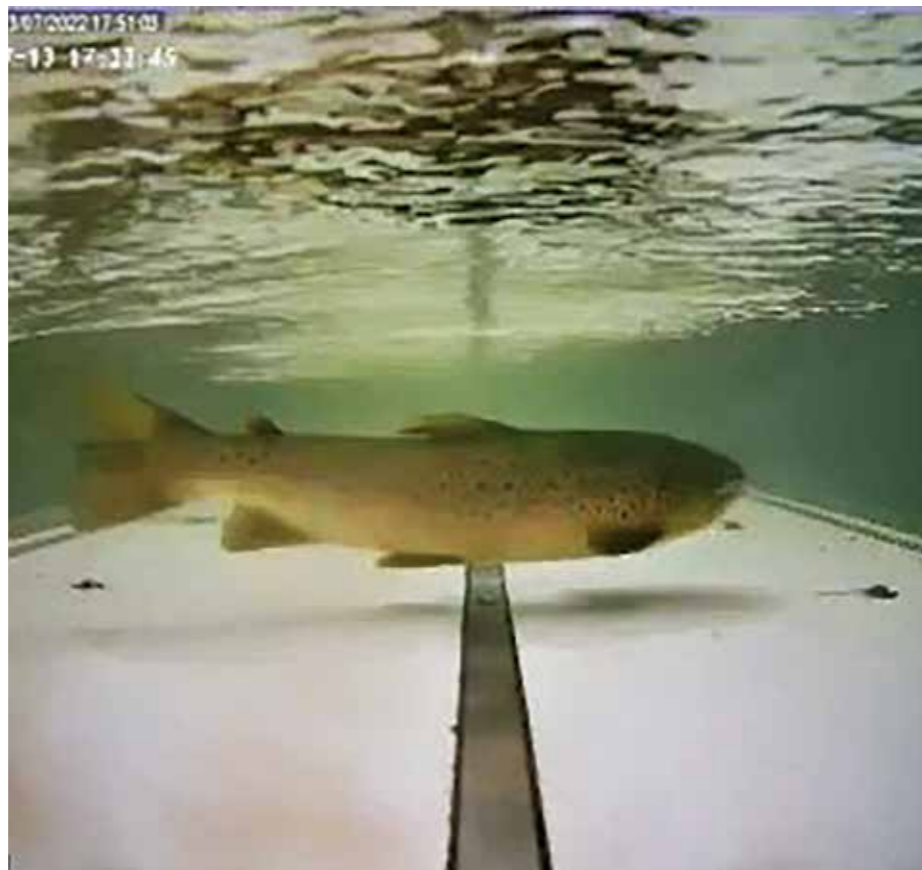
Now, we also appear to be seeing the number of 'sea-run' stocked trout steadily increase, following the Environment Agency's ban on stocking with fertile farm-reared trout, and a move to using all-female triploids instead. Without the energy deficit inflicted during the process of spawning, triploid trout often retain sufficient energy reserves to survive the winter. As with all trout, these sterile stockies still hold the genetic code that offers up a choice between winter starvation, or a move to potentially more productive feeding areas and a chance to survive. So it's not a shock to discover that some stocked triploids seem to be doing just that.

As a behavioural driver, the instinct for survival seems to be every bit as strong as the need to reproduce. We can understand why a stocked trout, struggling to sustain itself during the winter, might passively drop downstream with the flow. But it begs the question of why it then bothers to run back up into a river if the feeding is rich in the estuary, and the urge and ability to spawn are an irrelevance! That's a question which is yet to be answered.

An additional question mark hangs over the potential impact that these fish might be having on wild smolt numbers, both trout and



Two examples of hatchery-origin trout which have recently been detected running through the EA's salmon counters on the Test and Itchen



salmon. Despite some efforts by the EA to evaluate what these triploid trout might be eating, there is a risk that part of their diet may consist of migrating trout and salmon smolts.

Recently I accepted an invitation

to fish for sea trout on the Test (which is still apparently the most heavily stocked river in England) and perhaps I shouldn't have been surprised that on an early May trip the fishing was difficult. I did catch

Origin and destination unknown:  
this ocean-going stockie was  
caught at sea, west of the Needles



two 'sea trout' - but the difference between the two was startling. One was a complete bar of silver and hard as a rock, bristling with sand-eel fuelled vigour. The other, well, not so much - but nonetheless still a silvery

fish, fresh in from the estuary, albeit a feeble example with deformed fins compared to my first capture.

Anecdotes from other chalk stream anglers suggest that larger runs of bigger 'sea trout' are now

more noticeable than for at least 50 years, and my interest in these fish was further sparked when I recently received a copy of the EA's Test and Itchen salmon counter data for January to April 2023 (which is reported and linked on our website at [www.wildtrout.org/news/test-and-itchen-salmon-counter-update-january-april-2023](http://www.wildtrout.org/news/test-and-itchen-salmon-counter-update-january-april-2023)). Interestingly, numbers of salmon entering both rivers are well below average, whilst sea trout numbers appear to be on the rise. Dominic Longley, who collects the data and compiles the excellent reports, included some photographs from the counters which show that some of these trout are clearly of hatchery origin.

So, we now know that numbers of stocked triploid trout are actively running our rivers and reconditioning at sea. We don't know exactly where, but we can presume that this happens in the estuaries, in a similar fashion to wild slob trout. Whether these stockies have the physiological attributes to fully prepare for the salt and high-sea migration, as with wild smolts, again, we really don't know. But is it something we should be concerned about?

For clubs and landowners who still stock their fisheries with triploid trout, the possibility that these stockies might be having an adverse impact on wild populations of salmon and sea trout may never have been suggested. But competition and predation will almost certainly be present at every life stage - and may now be on the increase from wandering stocked triploids, if the EA's salmon counter data are any guide.

Some anglers may see the arrival of sea-run stockies as an unexpected bonus to exploit and enjoy. For me, however, the situation just reinforces my view that a fully wild fishery management model carries the least risk and offers the highest rewards.

# Walkovers, workshops and the wild west of Ireland

By Gareth Pedley, Conservation Officer for Northern England, Ireland and Scotland

In the course of the past year, I've delivered several WTT fisheries habitat improvement workshops across County Durham and Northumberland. While these rod licence funded events were primarily aimed at anglers – with training in habitat assessment as well as opportunities for attendees to observe and undertake simple habitat improvement techniques – they were also open to anyone else with an interest in rivers. The project has already delivered two days of habitat assessment walkovers in the River Aln catchment, along with theoretical and practical habitat workshops on the Tyne (Rivers Derwent and Team) and Tees (River Leven) catchments. Further workshops are being planned for later in the year on Tees, Wear and Aln catchments.

On upland rivers, habitat work usually focuses around facilitating natural processes, often simply replacing the kind of features lost through over management, like in-channel woody material and bankside cover. A light touch approach is often best, starting a process and then allowing the river to do the work.

One of our workshop events involved installing lodged woody material in a large pool on the River Leven which lacked in-channel structure and flow diversity. A medium sized tree was felled (well back from the river, to avoid reducing bankside cover) and then securely lodged between bankside trees without the requirement for artificial fixings. As with many such workshops, it was necessary to accommodate the wishes of anglers using this stretch of river,

so the structure wasn't installed exactly where it might have been otherwise, but the result was still greatly increased cover and refuge from predators for the pool's fish population. Willow hinging was also demonstrated on small and large willow limbs, with an opportunity for several attendees to try this technique for themselves.

## The Border - and beyond!

Traditionally, most of WTT's activities have been focused in England, but demand for our advice is still increasing further afield. Earlier this year, I undertook some more walkover work on the Border Esk catchment, at the request of the local angling club and Galloway Fisheries Trust (GFT). The walkover highlighted many of the usual habitat issues, and it's now being used by GFT to support future plans for the river. Over towards the other side of Galloway, it was a similar story on a small tributary of the River Luce, where a reservoir upstream further complicated matters, but I was able to highlight several options for habitat improvement on the burn. A lack of bankside trees and associated structure (to provide shade and keep water cool) is a common issue, and one that's becoming more significant as we see increasing periods of warmer, dryer and brighter conditions – even if they're not occurring when everyone expects them.

Following my previous visits to the Glazert Water in the Clyde catchment, and the creation of a plan for potential



habitat improvements in 2021, one landowner finally agreed that we could start some habitat improvement work. During this practical workshop, I demonstrated techniques for hinging willows as well as pinning and lodging woody material. On the Fife Tyne, I ran a more theoretical workshop, in the form of a river walk and a discussion with local anglers, which highlighted the value of large woody material and low tree branches, as well as the importance of removing artificial obstructions in rivers.

Seeing river restoration techniques successfully implemented is hugely satisfying. All the way back in 2015, WTT organised a workshop

to demonstrate bank protection and stabilisation works, and this year I visited an area where Argyll Fisheries Trust and their partners have used these techniques to greatly reduce erosion and stabilise long stretches of unnaturally destabilised earth banks.

promotion of catch and release for trout, to mention just a few. It will be fascinating to see whether these recommendations can be delivered.

## Way out west

In addition to the increase in requests for work in Scotland, the

lower river reaches (unlike many areas of the UK). The buffer strips are often very small, with fences too close to the river, but that is far better than none.

My workshop was a follow up to a previous AV, undertaken last year on the Rivers Ray and Tullaghobegly

Even further north, I went to see a salmon fishery in the Deveron catchment where riparian habitat improvements are planned – in a shift away from the more traditional management practices that still degrade many Scottish salmon beats. This offered a great opportunity for truly aspirational recommendations, suggesting measures that would really benefit all of the river's wildlife, including salmon and trout. These suggestions included bankside tree planting as well as additional planting away from the river, setting tracks back from the bank top (which will also reduce disturbance and increase angling prospects), reduced strimming of the banks, and

Irish work also keeps coming in. At the time of writing, I've already delivered one Irish Advisory Visit and riparian habitat bank stabilisation workshop, and I'm hoping to have completed another Irish trip on WTT's behalf by the time you read this.

The first visit, to the River Easkey in Sligo, highlighted particular issues at catchment scale with land management (turf cutting/bog drainage) and a lack of trees and riparian vegetation in the headwaters being particular problems. However, it was also very refreshing to see long sections of buffer fencing and improved riparian habitat in the middle and

**Installing lodged woody material on the River Leven: what a simple, effective way of adding habitat structure!**

in North Donegal, to provide discussion around the importance of the habitat improvements which I'd previously suggested, and to demonstrate some of the techniques. Technical difficulties dictated an adaptable approach to the workshops, but it was possible to demonstrate willow peg planting to increase bank stability, and willow hinging to reinstate low cover, along with discussion around the benefits of protecting riparian areas from intensive maintenance.



to wander back across the meadow, thereby allowing the beck to reinitiate the natural processes of erosion (and subsequent deposition) under its own volition. The stone walling was returned to the bed from whence it came as a dispersed matrix to counter the over-incision, similar to the bed-raising that my colleagues on the chalk streams can do with flint topped with gravel.

On Flasby Beck at Hetton, I was astonished to learn from satellite imagery that the channel had been straightened as recently as this century - at some point between 2002 and 2009, prior to the current landowner acquiring the field. I had a brief of 'making the beck right' so that is what I have tried to do. Lidar

**Below: Walling stone from the bank to the lower left of image returned to the beck as a dispersed matrix to help reconnect the floodplain and provide fabulous parr habitat**

data and even casual observation on the ground could pick out a plethora of paleochannels in the sheep mown grass, so there were plenty of blueprints to work from. One of these was selected for full reinstatement, ie dug down to a depth to accommodate water at low summer flow and hence divide that flow across the new 'old' meandering channel and the extant 'new' straightened channel, if you get my drift! Then, banks were lowered in key places to allow water under higher flows to spread out onto low berms and even higher flows to seep into reconnected paleochannels elsewhere on the floodplain. For good measure, eight large tree trunks and 15 large boulders were placed into the straightened reaches to encourage more sinuous flow.

Lothersdale Beck is a more feisty, upland stream with sufficient power to have been historically harnessed for the largest indoor waterwheel in Europe. These days, the straightening,

culverting, weiring and embanking serve only to accelerate flow below the village, leading to large erosion scars in the sheep pastures downstream wherever there are slight curves. I'm in the process of removing the livestock pressures to allow reinstatement of a more natural riparian flora, but have also reconnected a former (deliberately) blocked paleochannel to reduce pressure on the worst of the erosion scars. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to scalp a large bar of boulder and cobble dredged from the river, and to use that in the creation of a dispersed rock ramp fish passage solution downstream (but that's another story). Now, a relatively mild spate flow can access an extra 300m<sup>2</sup> of temporary storage.

Finally, at Airton, I've been let loose on the mainstem Aire, again with bank lowering, opening up blocked paleochannels, and returning those blocking stones to the river. A few dead ash trees have been tethered in

# Let the water do the work

By Jonathan Grey, Research and Conservation Officer for the North

Another year, and another direction of sorts. It seems that 2023 was a year for me to think and act laterally. After much longitudinal connectivity work in previous seasons, primarily removing weirs, I've recently had several great opportunities to work with landowners to create better lateral connectivity with the floodplain. Of course, there has been ongoing TRoUT project work and monitoring, but I'll save that for a blog...

Almost all of my local blue lines have been straightened over time, and pinned out of place within their floodplains - quite often using stone robbed from the river bed to help set them in aspic. As a consequence, each artificial channel was already deeper and hence it was less likely

for flow to spill over the bank tops under spate conditions. More flow energy was constrained between the banks, and with a straighter channel being steeper as well, erosive power led to inexorably deeper channels dominated by larger substrate as the smaller fractions (gravel, critical for spawning) were stripped out. Cue circle of negative feedback degrading habitat... and disconnection from the floodplain where all that spate energy could be dissipated.

To do this well, one needs to have space, and hence a landowner who is comfortable with the change. Thankfully, I have found four in the space of one year, each with their own reasons, but all fundamentally understanding that rivers or becks are dynamic entities and shackling them

**Above: Malham Beck set in aspic by walling - yes, that curve is entirely artificial, and the water would prefer to flow out onto the meadow to the left**

up isn't such a great idea. All four sites are within the Aire catchment and range in size from smaller headwater tributaries like Malham and Hetton Becks, to larger tributaries like Lothersdale Beck, and even the mainstem Aire itself.

At Malham, I've been working with two local farmers: from their 'terrestrial perspective', they both wanted a return to more natural wet meadow systems. With Malham Beck being walled against a land boundary, it was relatively simple to remove the constraint at key points like the outside of bends where it would want







**Left: Bank lowering and lateral connection on Flasby Beck at Hetton. Right: The artificially straightened channel of Flasby Beck to the left and a full paleochannel reconnection to the right, to divide the flow energy and allow to develop naturally over time**

judicious positions to facilitate some more sinuous flows, and the whole of the riparian floodplain been fenced to control low density, conservation-type grazing with a few Belted Galloways.

In the media-fuelled parlance of our times, these projects might

be considered ‘rewiggling’, a term I admit I am not keen upon. Rather than look to a specific moment in the past via a paleochannel (which is not ‘its original course’ as I am also at pains to point out whenever I hear that term bandied around) and divert the water into that whilst blocking up

the artificially straightened course, all I have attempted to do is unshackle each channel and reintroduce the essential element of dynamism – let the water do the work for me. It’s still early days for these sites, but I’m excited to see what unfolds over the course of a few winters...



**Removal of the artificial embankment of the mainstem Aire at Airton and partial reconnection with a paleochannel**

# TWIST and trees

By Theo Pike, Trout in the Town Officer for the South

Readers of WTT’s annual journal may remember Sue Everett’s feature about Somerset’s River Frome, and all the catchment-scale pressures that make it such an interesting case study in microcosm for many other British rivers (*Notes from a small lowland river: Salmo Trutta* 2023).

In her article, Sue described how a typically large-scale 1970s flood defence project resulted in much of the river through the town of Frome being straightened, deepened, and enclosed in a hard-engineered trapezoidal channel which, so far, has defied all attempts at renaturalisation (but watch this space for future ambitions).

Yet one stretch of the river mysteriously escaped the dredgers...

Rodden Meadow is an area of former farmland, with ancient meadow characteristics, which was historically used for grazing sheep and growing teasels for Frome’s successful textile trade, and is now a well-loved blue/green space and wildlife area with a trout population very close to the heart of the town. The southern boundary of the meadow is still delineated by the meandering River Frome: alder and willow trees along the banks were once managed by rotational coppicing, which has lapsed in recent years, so this stretch of the river has

become too shaded, and even hidden from view by large and closely-spaced alder coppices.

During 2021-22, part of our funding for the TWIST (Transforming Waterways In Somerset Towns) project included addressing the long-term local aspiration of developing a tree management plan for Rodden Meadow, in close consultation with Friends of the River Frome (FORF – already one of WTT’s Trout in the Town chapters), Frome Town Council (FTC) and Frome Tree Group.

The tree plan was duly published and adopted by all the project partners, and Ed Eley and I started putting the first stages into practice in October last year. This included successfully re-pollarding a pair of top-heavy veteran willows, to save them from splitting and collapsing,

**Left: Putting the finishing touches to the dead hedge in Rodden Meadow. Right: Before and after building the dead hedge, showing the heavy banktop erosion (and thus siltation) that it’s designed to protect against**





**Above: Two of the tree kickers which we've installed in the River Frome in Rodden Meadow**

**Below: Each tree kicker is secured back to its stump with a short length of steel cable**



before using the trimmings to repair a deteriorating habitat structure in the river.

Then, in April 2023, we helped one of the landowners on the opposite bank to remove several very large non-native laurels and reduce heavy shading over a potential trout spawning riffle. We also recycled some more of the old willow and sycamore brush as a dead hedge along a stretch of bank top which was being heavily eroded by dogs. (When we came back a few months later, we found that almost the whole dead hedge had apparently been deconstructed by dog walkers breaking off sticks to throw into the river for their pets - another unexpected peril of working in urban environments. And yes, we did rebuild it again!)

Most recently, as I'm writing this at the end of September, Ed and I

have been back in Rodden Meadow again, assisted by FORF volunteers as well as FTC's whole Ranger Team, starting some of the larger-scale work that we've planned to let more light into the river corridor, and increase the amount of wood in the channel itself.

From the Environment Agency, Frome Town Council and Somerset Council, we've received permission to fell up to 15 carefully-selected trees into the river, and securely anchor them back to their stumps using very short lengths of 12mm steel cable with a breaking strain of about 10 tonnes, so that each tree can still move fairly freely as the water rises and falls. 'Tree kickers' like these are an innovative way of getting lots of large woody material (LWM) into a river, with all the benefits that this brings (see opposite) combined with reasonable

**Above: Local volunteers helping to remove heavily-shading, non-native laurel trees from the river bank**

confidence that they won't lift off in a spate and potentially block bridges or other man-made structures downstream.

Even after felling these trees (not to mention the earlier laurels) long stretches of the river channel through Rodden Meadow are still seriously shaded by overgrown alder coppices, so we may need to return in future years to operate on a few more. In the meantime, we're forming similar plans to improve habitat in other Somerset rivers including the Brue and Sheppey. Watch this space, we hope, for much more good news of TWIST, trout and trees...

*The TWIST project is funded through the EA's Water Environment Improvement Fund (WEIF).*

## WHY PUT TREES IN RIVERS?



It's a little-known fact that most of the UK's rivers are functionally starved of the wood which they'd naturally contain. Together with historic channel simplification for agriculture, industry and urbanisation, this severely inhibits their ability to create (or recreate) complex, dynamic physical structure and associated high quality in-channel habitats for trout and other species.

'Tree kickers' are a low-cost, commonly-used river restoration technique for carefully adding and retaining large quantities of wood in river channels, so as to mimic biological processes including natural

tree fall, as well as wood which might be introduced by keystone species like beavers. They're especially useful for improving habitat in high-energy rivers like the Frome - generating complex currents around their trunks and branches, adding woody diversity to the channel, and producing localised areas of bed scour and sediment deposition.

Kick-starting these physical processes is beneficial because they make microhabitats for a wide range of insects, fish, birds, animals and plants: for example, scouring out pools for trout to shelter from very low or very high flows (increasingly important for climate

change resilience) while simultaneously providing shade, refuge from predators, feeding, spawning and nursery habitats. LWM also provides a diversity of complex surfaces for algae and invertebrates to colonise, boosting the lower levels of the aquatic food web.

Eventually, many tree kickers end up being pushed parallel to the bank, accumulating permanent deposits of silt, and becoming entrained and vegetated as a new low-level bank line. At this point, we can come back and remove the steel cables - and perhaps re-use them for new tree kickers somewhere else!

## INNS MAPPER: A GREAT NEW APP FOR CITIZEN SCIENTISTS

Most experienced river menders know that managing invasive non-native species (INNS) effectively means having accurate information about where they are in the first place, before co-ordinating projects to tackle them - and that's where citizen science can play an important role.

INNS Mapper is a free app and website which allows everyone to report sightings, surveys and management of INNS across England, Wales and Scotland. It's hoped that this co-ordinated approach will increase the



effectiveness of management projects, as well as showing and sharing where different techniques have proved useful

for tackling INNS.

Citizen scientists can now use INNS Mapper to report sightings and management of 62 different species of INNS, including freshwater plants and invertebrates, terrestrial plants and mammals.

The new app has been developed by Natural Apptitude, with citizen science data helpfully pre-populated from their previous PlantTracker app.

Visit [www.innsmapper.org](http://www.innsmapper.org) or download the app via Google Play or the Apple Store.

# Restoring the Bourne Rivulet

By Nick Lawrence, Conservation Officer for the South



Because the production of this newsletter needs to start in early September, it often just misses my most significant project delivery period, which normally starts just after the end of fishing season here in Wessex. So, after glancing back at last year's article, when I wrote about our ambitious restoration project on the upper Test (now bedding in well, and being enjoyed by members of the public as much as the fish!) and also mentioned my then-upcoming work on the Bourne Rivulet, I thought I'd take the opportunity to let you know how this project went too.

Some of you may already know the Bourne Rivulet by reputation: it's famous in fly-fishing history as a result of a book called *Where The Bright Waters Meet*, written by Harry

Plunket Greene, which portrays the author's profound connection with a captivating stream and its remarkably sizable brown trout. On their way to fish the water, many guests make a pause at Plunket Greene's resting place, beside the river at Hurstbourne Priors church, to honour his memory. Some may even discreetly place an Iron Blue Dun (Plunket Greene's most cherished fly) amidst the lichen on the cross which serves as his memorial. The stone is always adorned with an assortment of flies and fly boxes, left there by those who came before on their pilgrimage to this hallowed angler's ground.

The Bourne Rivulet is a major tributary of the River Test, and over the years, like most of our chalk streams, it has been subject

**Above: A whole ash tree and root plate replicating natural processes: cover, flow diversity and additional wetland features where the tree's roots once stood in the ground**

to manipulation for watermeadows and mills. One sawmill still remains, just downstream of St Mary Bourne.

At Lower Wyke Farm, the river corridor within our restoration project site was dominated by cricket bat willows – a crop for harvest, but one which depletes the natural ecology of the river by reducing the abundance and diversity of other tree species, and their contributions of woody material to the aquatic habitat. Our project took two years to develop, in partnership with Wessex Rivers Trust, as well as the landowner and local



**Above: 'A flow deflector on steroids' - with kingfisher perches for no additional cost**



**Above left: Hinged willows: the artist with the chainsaw was WTT's Ed Eley. Above right: Precision work with the digger**



fishing syndicate, who fully supported the improvements even if they made the fishing seem a bit harder!

WTT assembled a small team of eager river restorers to assist with delivery, including Davey the digger driver who had just been helping us on the upper Test. Most of this project involved installing large woody material (LWM) as well as bank regrading to address the steeply-incised banks which limited favourable marginal habitats, and disconnected the floodplain from the river.

The LWM works were ambitious

to say the least - without doubt, some of the largest bits of wood I've ever put into a small river. These included logs spanning the full width of the river, and two enormous root plates which Davey expertly placed into the channel with deceptive ease. Each of the resulting root plates is as natural a structure as you'd see in nature - strong winds often displace whole trees, root plates and all - providing kingfisher roosts and nesting sites as well as bonus wetland areas in the holes where the tree roots previously stood.



**Above: Another whole ash stem, providing valuable in-stream cover and potential for winter bed scour**



**Left: Still looking raw: the bank just after regrading last year. Above: One year later, all our improvements are bedding in beautifully**

When the in-river works were complete, we undertook some tree planting with volunteers from the fishing syndicate, to address the lack of species diversity within the riparian zone. This will also help to replace some of the trees dying from ash dieback, the disease which is reducing tree cover along many river corridors across the country.

Hopefully this project will help some of the trout reach the legendary size of the fish that Plunket Greene recalled in *Where The Bright Waters Meet*.

# How to make a Lark wiggle

By Rob Mungovan, Conservation Officer for the East of England

The River Lark has suffered a lot in its history. The 17th century saw it turned into a canal, controlling the river's flow and disconnecting it from its floodplain. A complex network of side ditches, sluices and mills still maintain parts of that former existence.

However, plans are underway to restore lengths of the river (as a Flagship under the National Chalk Stream Restoration Strategy), and that's where the Wild Trout Trust has continued its close working relationship with the Bury Trout Club at West Stow.

The river here has seen various phases of work since the late Nigel Holmes pioneered some of his 'dig and dump' approach, using gravel won from within the channel to re-shape the riverbed so that it undulates more naturally again.

There was one reach that didn't have enough gravel beneath to allow it to be re-shaped, but fortunately the river was over-wide at that point (not something that's often written!) which meant that it might be possible to re-initiate lateral processes and push the river from bank to bank.

Rivers never flow straight, and will always work against being forced into an unnatural shape. In this case, the Lark was working against its constraints by depositing large volumes of sand and silt. These soft deposits were an ideal rooting substrate for branched bur reed, which choked the channel, further reducing water velocity.

In 2021-22 a scheme was devised for the placement of several riparian willows and alders in the overwide channel, as the basis for five large woody berms. These



Above: The previously over-wide River Lark at West Stow in Suffolk with no flow diversity to transport fine sediment. Below: The Lark following the creation of log berms backfilled with gravel in September 2022



berms would then be backfilled with mixed-grade gravel to ensure that they were resilient to scour, whilst maximising their potential to push flow from bank to bank.

The scheme was successfully delivered in September 2022, when the low flows made it much easier to manoeuvre the trees within the river, and position them specifically to look as if they'd fallen and been washed into position. The gravel was then added to appear as if it had

been washed amongst the wood. To everyone's relief, flow picked up in the autumn, and the whole reach started to come to life once again, with the gravel being cleansed of fine sediment and the trailing woody limbs starting to act as flow deflectors in the elevated water.

Instead of being designed to create spawning habitat for trout, the objective of this work, in addition to managing fine sediment, was to increase the river's capacity to



Above left: A wild trout caught from the lark at West Stow: no need to stock the river when it can produce its own. Above: right: Trout redds in the Lark at West Stow



Above left: Pulling branched bur reed by hand: laborious but effective work Above right: The Lark wiggling from side to side in a formerly overwide channel

hold adult trout - with an emphasis on shaggy margins and woody bolt-holes. Spawning habitat is present only a short distance downstream, and this was demonstrated by redds appearing just before Christmas 2022.

The high flows extended through to spring 2023, and all our placed wood and gravel remained firmly in place. As spring advanced, the woody structures provided anchor points for plants such as water cress

and brooklime, while the small backwaters provided shelter for juvenile fish away from the river's increasing flows.

The Environment Agency undertook an electrofishing survey in this area in early May 2023, and as expected, a wild trout was caught. And where there's one wildie there will often be more: members of the Bury Trout Club picked up several more as the season progressed (and even the author has managed one).

It is now hoped the club will think hard about whether it's necessary to continue to stock farm-reared trout, and whether this represents value for money for the club since very few stocked fish are caught from the river. Money saved from ceasing stocking could go to river management instead, to ensure that past improvement works continue to perform as originally intended.

As spring turned to summer this year, bur reed downstream of the improved reach impounded the flow. WTT advised members of BTC on clearing the reeds, and water levels have been partially lowered.

This illustrates how important it is to ensure that good work on low-gradient river systems isn't undone by small but notable stands of bur reeds. But it's also important to remember that it's not the river's fault: we're working to improve a river that is suffering the effects of physical modification (dredging, straightening), low flow due to abstraction (which reduces the river's ability to scour away sediment) and water quality problems from nutrient enrichment (resulting in excessive plant growth).

By improving physical habitat in the Lark, we're ensuring that the river's wild brown trout can hold on until bigger, and more sustainable and positive, improvements are brought forward.

For now, the Lark needs a helping hand to ensure it can wiggle enough to flush through the high sediment load that it still retains. Larger, more joined-up, schemes are needed to restore the Lark to a better functioning river once again.

*This project was funded by the EA's Fisheries Improvement Programme, with further contributions from the Lottery Commission via The Brecks Fen Edge and Rivers Landscape Partnership, and many thanks to West Suffolk District Council, Bury Trout Club and the River Lark Catchment Partnership.*



Snake Lane: before the fish passage project

RYAN TAYLOR



# Snake Lane: the sequels

By Tim Jacklin, Conservation Officer for the Midlands

In last year's Autumn newsletter, I reported the completion of our major fish passage improvement on the River Ecclesbourne at Snake Lane in Duffield, Derbyshire. Since then, the project has been 'stress tested' by both high and low flows, requiring some additional bank reinforcing works and tweaks in the level of the rock ramp to maintain flows into the adjacent channel. These issues illustrate the importance of being prepared to undertake 'snagging' and emphasise the importance of having an adequate contingency budget (we did!)

During the January following completion of these works, the carcass of an adult female salmon was found about 500m upstream of the former weir, and as I write this in August 2023, recent electric

fishing surveys have found juveniles in the same area, showing that spawning has been successful. Young-of-the-year salmon were also found downstream of the former weir (where they were also present prior to the project) showing that the construction works have not unduly impacted spawning habitat there. Another highlight was seeing a dipper feeding amongst the boulders of the constructed rock rapids, where previously there had been a sluggish, canal-like impoundment.

We were delighted to receive recognition for this project, being nominated and short-listed for the Dam Removal Europe (DRE) 2022 Award. The DRE conference in Manchester in May was a great opportunity to share project experiences and celebrate successes.

The Snake Lane project has opened up around 10km of habitat above the former weir, up to another former mill weir (sans mill) near the village of Turnditch. Back in 2019, WTT scoped a project to enable the river to bypass this structure, in parallel with the Snake Lane project, but the latter took precedence for development and delivery.

Since then, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust (DWT) have picked up the baton as lead partner, and WTT have been working with DWT, Chatsworth Estate (landowners) and Nestle Waters UK (co-funders) to move things forward. After a multitude of surveys, ground investigations, flood models, and applications for Felling Licence, Ordinary Watercourse Consent and Planning Permission, we're hopeful that groundworks can



JON WALL

Above: Snake Lane: after the fish passage project. Left: Juvenile salmon caught during electric fishing surveys in August 2023

begin in mid-September (ie by the time you read this!)

Elsewhere in Derbyshire, we eased a substantial obstacle to fish movement on the Bentley Brook, a tributary of the River Dove, by notching a large weir; we await some higher flows to see how the river reacts in terms of sediment re-distribution, and plan to return to complete installation of large woody material.

Over the county border in Staffordshire, an extensive fencing project has been completed along the Gayton Brook, a tributary of

the upper Trent near Stafford. This work was suggested in a WTT Advisory Visit report and developed to fruition by Sandon Estate (landowners) with funding provided to WTT by the Environment Agency. Large areas of riparian land have been given over to tree planting, which will begin this coming winter with support from Forests of Mercia CIC. The project has removed grazing livestock from the river banks and will lead to great improvements for in-stream habitat.

Meanwhile, in Lincolnshire, various projects are in the pipeline

- from installation of woody material and gravel in the upper Witham, through to major river restoration works on the Nocton Beck. We continue to work in fruitful partnership with East Mercia Rivers Trust, whose volunteers did an excellent job introducing willow to the Dunston Beck restoration site earlier this year. We're also very excited to be involved in the Boothby Wildland project near Grantham, helping to shape the restoration of a section of the upper River Glen. And finally, in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, we are working to remove obstacles to fish passage at four sites including Kingston Brook and the Rivers Leen, Erewash and Derwent.

Watch our film about the Snake Lane project: see page 9 of this newsletter.

# Befriending Bradford's Becks

Andrew Griffiths, our Northern urban river correspondent, introduces WTT's newest Trout in the Town chapter...

Friends of Bradford's Becks (FoBB) arrived in the Trout in the Town network fully formed, joining in November 2022 and already displaying a shiny new Silver accreditation badge on their website.

This local urban river group's portfolio of splendid community achievements meanders as widely as producing a guide for a series of walks around Bradford's becks, with bespoke poetry plaques marking the sections where the river flows beneath the town, to helping secure a landmark prosecution against their local water company – and even a 'world first' as a pilot site to develop new technology which could enable citizen scientists everywhere to monitor the water quality of their river at multiple locations in real time.

FoBB members include current chair, Professor Barney Lerner, who was recently awarded an MBE for services to rivers in the New Year's Honours list 2023, and Rob Hellawell, who many will know as the person behind the eponymous 'Urban Pollution Hunter' page on Facebook.

The trajectory of Bradford Beck is similar to that of many rivers flowing through these northern industrial towns: ravaged during the years of industry, followed by a remarkable recovery in a post-industrial age largely driven by European legislation, and now a worrying plateau and disappointing decline in a past decade or two of backsliding by Government, regulators and the water industry.

Rob Hellawell's story too has shadowed this recovery, forming an arc that's familiar to many of us who have become involved with rivers: a 'born again' angler about 20 years ago, which gave him a renewed love



Left: FoBB Chair Barney Lerner leads an urban river cleanup. Right: Trout underground: artwork traces the Becks beneath Bradford's streets

for the natural and cultural history of the river, and led to him becoming a passionate campaigner and advocate for its continued restoration - with little time left for the fishing.

"I used to be an angler as a kid, but there were no fish in the river then, absolutely nothing, completely dead," Rob tells me.

Rob remembers catching his first trout in the once grossly polluted River Aire. "I was absolutely stunned by it," he says. "I thought: 'I can't believe I've caught a trout'. It was astonishing to me to think about that, knowing what the rivers used to be like".

All this changed with a pollution incident that caused a fish kill in 2009, and another incident in 2011. It was then Rob began the transition from angler to activist, and his involvement with the Aire Rivers Trust, Friends of Bradford's Becks, and now the FBA's Riverfly Monitoring initiative.

If 'Bradford Beck' sounds familiar, it may be in connection with a £1.6m

fine imposed on Yorkshire Water in summer 2022. The fine related to a two year period when the water company failed to adequately maintain pumps at a 4000 m<sup>3</sup> sewage detention tank beneath Bradford city centre, which caused the tank to spill sewage into the beck intermittently. Such discharges can be difficult to trace, and initially the Environment Agency (EA) was reluctant to investigate - it was only the determination of FoBB that led to an eventual investigation by the EA - and prosecution of Yorkshire Water.

If ever there was a case that demonstrated the value of citizen science - if not its very necessity in today's 'regulation-lite' environment - then this is it. It was the careful and systematic riverfly monitoring by Rob and his team, and observations of life in the river, which contributed to bringing the action, as was acknowledged by the EA in their action against the water company.

At the hearing, which Rob



Setting up a WaterBox water quality monitoring sonde in Bradford: the very first to be installed outside Taiwan

and an intriguing one for a water company to support. As outlined in the Government's Storm Overflows Discharge Reduction Plan, all storm overflows must ultimately be monitored for their environmental impact, a condition made law by the Environment Act 2021. There are around 15,000 storm overflows in England, so this represents a considerable logistical challenge for the water companies.

WaterBox is a non-commercial technology that is being developed in Taiwan and is modelled on 'open' principles similar to their successful air quality sensor, the 'AirBox', which democratised and transformed air quality monitoring in Taiwan.

The open principle means that the device's design, software and data are publicly available and can be modified and freely used. So far there are over 12,000 AirBoxes in Taiwan.

Water, though, is proving to be a rather trickier proposition to monitor than particulate matter in air. So far there is one WaterBox being tested outside of the country of origin - by FoBB and Rob in Bradford Beck.

In the UK, the Upstream project is being handled by Dr Amy Jones, Senior Consultant at the Water Research Centre (WRC), a global consultancy to the water, waste and environment sectors. I spoke to Amy about the aims of the project with FoBB. One of its main benefits, she says, is to bring the business of water companies out into the open:

"Water companies have been quite hidden, their infrastructure is mostly underground," says Amy. "So helping them open up a conversation with the public and helping them to understand the challenges is really important."

I ask how the Bradford project is progressing.

"The first one was installed in

attended, Yorkshire Water CEO Nicola Shaw sought him out and told him that the company was keen to work with FoBB.

"Their attitude changed as soon as they knew the EA were on to something," says Rob.

Yorkshire Water and FoBB have now cooperated on the 'PollutionWatch' project, where volunteer 'watchers' enter details of the beck's condition and optional photographs onto a specially designed smartphone tool. They are working together on a campaign to reduce the number of misconnections - where waste that should enter the sewerage system is wrongly plumbed in and enters surface water drains and ultimately our rivers - which

Defra estimates to affect up to 2% of households.

Yorkshire Water has also introduced FoBB to 'Upstream', a project which brings together academics, companies and community groups.

Upstream is developing 'WaterBox': essentially a low cost, open source sonde for community groups and citizen scientists to use. A sonde is a small, electronic device which monitors key conditions in water such as temperature, pH, turbidity and electrical conductivity, all of which can provide vital indications of water quality. The sonde's data are then transmitted in near real time for analysis.

This is a powerful tool to put in the hands of community groups,



**Above and right: Cleaning up an urban river often starts with local people removing litter to improve both visual appearance and water quality**

Bradford in January this year," she says. "We've got a couple of issues but I think I know how to fix them. We've got it installed, we're getting live data from it, we are able to look at the data, we're working on a portal to see it, but it is going to take time before we have something we can easily roll out everywhere."

Amy explains that sondes used by water companies often use proprietary data systems which make open access and integration difficult.

"One of the things I am really interested in is opening access to data and I hope WaterBox can be a catalyst for that," says Amy.

"The Rivers Trust has done some really good work to improve accessibility of the data on CSOs for example," she adds. "If this project can open access to and help people understand water quality information, that would be a meaningful step towards transparency."

The Upstream project has been funded so far by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), though the initial funding period is just coming to an end.

"We've learnt a huge amount in a relatively short time about the technological, social, ethical, legal and economic challenges of rolling the WaterBox out more widely,"

says Amy, who hopes to continue the project with FoBB and the other project partners.

As a cost, it is difficult to give a figure at this stage, but in terms of materials the basic WaterBox should be in the low hundreds of pounds, with the sensors costing extra, depending on what is being measured. As a guide, with sensors, the Bradford WaterBox comes in at around £700 - excluding labour costs of assembly, installation and a solar panel to power the unit.

WTT's Paul Gaskell is delighted to welcome an established group such as FoBB to the Trout in the Town network, and highlights what the Wild Trout Trust can offer.

"Established urban groups can benefit from both the specific river-corridor biological and technical expertise of the Wild Trout Trust as well as utilising the Trout in the Town network," says Paul.

He describes FoBB's 'carrot and stick' approach to dealing with polluters as 'sophisticated', and of their WaterBox project he says:

"With the increasingly stretched capacity of our regulatory authorities to identify and characterise pollution of rural and urban rivers, the value of arming community groups with tools to gather and report high quality information on water quality

is hard to overstate. And being able to quantify impact - rather than just report generic 'pollution' - is critical to holding polluters to account."

A spokesperson for Yorkshire Water said: "We have a good working relationship with Friends of Bradford's Becks and work closely to tackle pollution issues in the watercourse from misconnections. We're pleased to have been able to play our part in bringing this innovative technology (WaterBox) to Bradford and we hope it will provide greater insight into the water quality in the city's becks."

If the future is one of community volunteers playing an increasingly significant role in monitoring our environment, then groups and knowledge exchange networks such as Trout in the Town will only grow in importance.

#### FIND OUT MORE

Friends of Bradford's Becks:  
[www.bradford-beck-org](http://www.bradford-beck-org)  
 Trout in the Town:  
[www.wildtrout.org/content/trout-town](http://www.wildtrout.org/content/trout-town)  
 Water Research Centre:  
[www.wrcgroup.com](http://www.wrcgroup.com)  
 WaterBox (Amy Jones):  
[amy.jones@wrcgroup.com](mailto:amy.jones@wrcgroup.com)  
 UpStream:  
[research.ncl.ac.uk/upstream](http://research.ncl.ac.uk/upstream)

## TRADE MEMBERSHIP

# Trading up to help us save wild trout

Here at WTT we're incredibly grateful to everyone who supports us in our aim of making a better world for wild trout.

We know times are tough, and that's what makes your generosity even more valuable.

If you have a business, becoming a Trade Member of WTT could be a very cost-effective way of promoting your products and services. But more than that, it's all about buying into the practical, wet-wellied river-mending ethos

that WTT represents.

In this new section of our newsletter, we're profiling two of our most committed Trade Members. Please do support them and others listed on our website whenever you can!

## Fortitude Rod Co

Founded by Jason Pereira, Fortitude Rod Co specialises in fly rod building kits and components for the beginner rod builder to the seasoned pro. The company offers a wide selection of products, including FRC's own range of carbon and fibreglass blanks, their custom-made reel seat inserts from exotic and native woods, and custom cork grips, with high-quality components from Strubel, Ray Lee, PacBay,



Fuji, REC, and Alps.

For those new to rod-building there are complete kits available, eliminating the guesswork of what is needed. These are supplied with grips and reel seats already tapered to fit the blank, plus detailed guide placement information.

Jason also offers a full custom rod-building service from his range of blanks and components, as well as options from Sage, Epic, and CTS amongst others.

[www.fortitude-rod.co.uk](http://www.fortitude-rod.co.uk)

## Famous Fishing

Famous Fishing has been a supporter and Trade Member of the WTT since 1997. Founded by former investment banker William Daniel 28 years ago, the company offers a broad portfolio of chalk stream fishing available by the day, including fabled wild trout beats on the Bourne Rivulet and Upper Itchen.

Famous Fishing also specialises in larger group fishing days, with top level hospitality and guiding, for both corporate and, increasingly,



private parties; these are a great way to entertain friends in glorious surroundings.

Famous Fishing also runs trips to Iceland each summer. Few anglers have ever caught a British wild brown trout over 5lb, yet such fish are relatively commonplace in Iceland and, along with the plentiful Arctic charr, provide terrific sport. If it's salmon you prefer, William's connections and knowledge are second to none; he is always happy to discuss fishing with you!

[www.famousfishing.co.uk](http://www.famousfishing.co.uk)

**WTT TRADE MEMBERS RECEIVE:** Membership card; car sticker; trade stickers for display in your premises; the use of our logo; our annual journal (*Salmo Trutta*) and newsletters; a link to your website from ours with a 50-word description of your business in our trade links section; a listing in the Supporters section of our annual journal; invitations to WTT events. To become a Trade Member, please visit: [www.wildtrout.org/shop/membership/annual-membership-trade](http://www.wildtrout.org/shop/membership/annual-membership-trade). Thank you!

## Memories of Oliver Edwards

In April this year we were deeply sorry to hear about the death of Oliver Edwards - one of the most skilled and influential fly-tyers of the modern era - at the age of 85.

Ollie became one of WTT's first Vice-Presidents in 2004, with a brief to raise our profile among fly-fishers, which he did with great enthusiasm and effectiveness. Many tributes were paid to him on social media: here's a small selection which show the respect and affection in which he was held: *Oliver was one of angling's greats, a superb fly-tyer, a true exponent of the North Country tradition, a great communicator and writer. He will be sadly missed. I am proud to have known and fished with him.*

**David Marriott**



ASGER STEINGRIMSSON

*Arguably, the most influential river fly-fisher of his generation. I'll always remember with affection his comment on my fly-tying skills on display after a well lubricated lunch in the 'Red House' on the Big Laxa, Iceland: "Just as well you became a pathologist and not a brain surgeon!"*

**John Smith**

*Everyone has an Ollie story: I have a few... but gosh! What a talented man. Wherever you go, Ollie, a great chunk*

*of our fly-fishing community goes with you. Thank you for all that you did for us.*

**Charles Jardine**

*A huge inspiration for me and so many in our community. Bumped into him at a BFFI when I was a lot (lot) younger and was completely star struck... I mumbled something and he gave me a fly. They say never meet your heroes, but Mr Edwards was a class act.*

**Gareth Lewis**

*RIP - a brilliant and innovative fly tyer, fisherman and educator - his DVDs are perennial classics.*

**Tane Mladenovic**

A full obituary for Oliver was published on our website, and will also appear in *Salmo Trutta* 2024. Our sincerest sympathies to his wife, Hazel, and all his family.

## Graeme Harris, RIP

An obituary penned by WTT Vice-President, Pat O'Reilly

Fisheries scientist, well-known angler and author Dr Graeme Harris died on 27 August 2023. Despite a long illness, he had continued contributing to fisheries science until a week before his death, including co-organising a Sea Trout Symposium in September in Cardiff and a follow-on technical workshop in November. Graeme was a passionate campaigner for sea trout conservation, desperate to see action and frustrated by all the inaction he saw around him.

Following a career in fisheries management in the water industry, where among other senior roles he was the director of Hamdden (the leisure division of Welsh Water), Graeme set up his own fisheries management consultancy, FishSkill. As well as carrying out extensive



research into sea trout behaviour, Graeme worked with rivers trusts, fishery owners, angling clubs and government agencies to restore and protect river habitats. For several years he also chaired the Environment Agency's advisory committee on Fisheries, Ecology, Recreation and Conservation in Wales.

Widely acknowledged as a leading authority of sea trout life strategies, Graeme took on the challenge of gathering and cataloguing scales taken

from many thousands of fish for microscopic analysis of growth ring patterns. The scales were contributed by anglers on rivers throughout the UK.

In 1989, with the late Moc Morgan, Graeme Harris wrote *Successful Sea Trout Angling*. This 320-page guide to fishing for migratory trout combined Graeme's extensive fisheries science expertise with both authors' decades of practical fishing experience in Wales and further afield. A second edition was published in 1996.

Graeme is survived by his wife Jane; we extend our sincere condolences to her and all the family. He will also be greatly missed by his many friends and colleagues in the fisheries science and game angling communities.



### GIFT MEMBERSHIP

Retired annual £23 or life £300, Individual annual £44 or life £400. Recipients will receive 2023 and 2024 publications plus a membership card and car sticker as usual. Life members also receive an enamel pin badge. Annual membership will be valid until 30 April 2025.

### ENAMEL MUGS £9.50 (plus £3.79 p&p, UK)

Big enough for a good cup of tea but small enough to take fishing, camping or just into the garden. Made of steel with an enamel coating in cream, a green rim, and etched with the WTT logo. Dishwasher-safe and oven-safe up to 530°F / 270°C.



### CAR STICKERS £1.95

(including p&p, UK) A car sticker displaying the WTT logo and website address.



### WTT CAPS £16 (plus £3.79 p&p, UK)

Ideal to keep the sun out of your eyes and muted enough not to scare the fish. Dark green, soft needle-cord 100% cotton corduroy with an adjustable strap and buckle, embroidered with the WTT logo.

### Not Really Fishing

*A little book of riverside moments*



*Edited by Denise Ashton and Theo Pike*

### NOT REALLY FISHING £5.99 (plus £2.70 p&p, UK)

WTT's little book of riverside moments, stories and fascinating facts about river wildlife and especially about trout.



### WTT CHILLY'S BOTTLES £21 (plus £3.79 p&p, UK)

Perfect on the riverbank whatever the weather. 500ml, matte green bottle etched with the WTT logo. Airtight screw-top lid, leak-proof, BPA-free, 24 hours cold, 12 hours hot. Vacuum-insulated to remain condensation-free.



### ENAMEL PIN BADGES

£3.95 (including p&p, UK) A hard enamel badge displaying the WTT logo, with a butterfly clutch pin fastening.

**ORDER** via our shop at [www.wildtrout.org/shop](http://www.wildtrout.org/shop); or by sending a cheque payable to Wild Trout Trust Ltd (allow 5 working days) to 'Freepost Wild Trout Trust' (this is a complete address and does not require a stamp); or by phoning the office on 023 9257 0985. Please place Christmas orders no later than 8 December but preferably as soon as possible to allow for stock requirements and Royal Mail which generally takes longer at this time of year. Thank you.



## WTT CHRISTMAS RAFFLE - THURSDAY 7 DECEMBER 2023

Our raffle will be a paperless affair again this year. Do please buy some numbers which cost £1 each, to be in with a chance of winning a great prize and supporting WTT at the same time. Numbers will go into a virtual 'hat', with the draw taking place on-screen using a random number generator. The draw will take place during our Zoom Christmas Get-Together on Thursday 7 December, which kicks off at 7pm with a talk by hugely travelled, much respected fishery scientist, angler and terrific story teller, Prof Ken Whelan: *Trout in Strange Places*. Why not bring a glass of wine and join us for a little Christmas cheer? To register for this on Zoom, please email [director@wildtrout.org](mailto:director@wildtrout.org) with 'Christmas Raffle' as the subject.

Order your raffle numbers via our website: [www.wildtrout.org/shop](http://www.wildtrout.org/shop) (till 4pm on 7 December 2023) and we will email your numbers to you. Or use the order form enclosed - please ensure we receive it by 4 December

2023 (allow at least 5 days). Order online if you can to avoid postal delays. We will email or post your numbers to you.

### 1<sup>ST</sup> PRIZE KINDLY DONATED BY GUIDE FLYFISHING, WORTH AROUND £1500

A Sage single-handed outfit - the winner may choose any single-handed rod and suitable reel from the Sage range current at the time of the draw, to which a matching RIO fly line will be added.

### 2<sup>ND</sup> PRIZE KINDLY DONATED BY THE PEACOCK AT ROWSLEY & HADDON ESTATE FISHERIES, WORTH £620

One night's accommodation in a large double/twin room for 2 people, with 3-course dinner and cooked breakfast, plus two tickets to fish the Derbyshire Wye, Lathkill or Derwent. To be taken outside Mayfly time, 2024 season.

### 3<sup>RD</sup> PRIZE KINDLY DONATED BY WESTON FARM FISHERY, WORTH £400

One day for 2 rods, trout fishing on 1½

miles of the upper reaches of the River Lambourn in West Berkshire with an experienced guide on Monday 20 May 2024 (or possibly another Monday in May / June by arrangement).

### 4<sup>TH</sup> PRIZE KINDLY DONATED BY ANDY THOMAS, WORTH £150

A guided day's winter grayling fishing on the Dorset Frome, either fly-fishing or centrepin trotting, with WTT Conservation Officer, Andy Thomas, who can supply bait and tackle for anyone wishing to try trotting.

### 5<sup>TH</sup> PRIZE KINDLY DONATED BY PETER SMITH OF RIVENDELL FLIES, WORTH £40

A stunningly beautiful stonefly nymph, tied by Peter, mounted in a black box frame, 112mm square x 33mm deep. Perfect on your wall or your desk.

The draw will take place at 8pm on Thursday 7 December. WTT will contact winners as soon as possible, and the results will appear in the News section of our website.

## EVENTS

### ZOOM MEETING: WTT CHRISTMAS RAFFLE AND TALK BY KEN WHELAN 7 December 2023 7pm

Ken is an eminent fisheries biologist and friend of WTT, and the title of his talk is *Trout in Strange Places*. To join us for this festive virtual event, please email [director@wildtrout.org](mailto:director@wildtrout.org)

with 'Christmas Raffle' as the subject. Shaun will send you a link to the Zoom meeting.

### BRITISH FLY FAIR INTERNATIONAL 10 & 11 February 2024

We'll be at the British Fly Fair at Stafford County Showground for this excellent event. More info at [www.bffi.co.uk](http://www.bffi.co.uk)

### WTT 3-FLY FUNDRAISER, MEON SPRINGS, HAMPSHIRE 15 June 2024

A great day out: friendly fishing for top prizes and valuable funds for WTT and our work around the chalk streams (see this year's report on page 4). More at [www.meonsprings.com/three-fly-challenge.html](http://www.meonsprings.com/three-fly-challenge.html)

## CONTACT US

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