

# Wild Oxfordshire NEWS

## People and Nature – Making Connections



Photo: Wytham Woods, Nigel Fisher

While plastic waste grabbed the headlines on launch day, a big chunk of the plan focusses on nature with a whole chapter titled: Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes. There is strong backing for the approach recommended by Professor Sir John Lawton in 'Making Space for Nature', and a commitment to publishing a strategy for developing a Nature Recovery Network. There is also a target of creating or restoring 500,000 ha of additional wildlife-rich habitats outside the protected site network. New woodland creation looks particularly favoured, with plans for 12% woodland cover by 2060 (180,000 ha of new plantings by 2042). Creating and sustaining more wetlands to

**'Wild Oxfordshire is already helping lead the way'**

reduce flood risk and offer valuable wetland habitat is also mentioned - Wild Oxfordshire is already helping lead the way through our River Evenlode initiatives.

Key commitments include embedding an 'environmental net gain' principle for development and designing and delivering a new environmental land management system. An immediate priority is to mainstream the use of existing biodiversity net gain approaches within the planning system, then extend the approach to wider natural capital benefits. The plan recognises that economic benefits flow from the natural world and this is now taking greater prominence in policy-making, thanks in part to the ground-breaking work of the Natural Capital Committee (NCC).

The inspiring Knepp Estate in Sussex, where rewilding of 3,300 acres is well underway, is highlighted as an example of landscape scale nature recovery. Farmer cluster groups are flagged as a great example of collective working to deliver greater benefits. Both are relevant to Oxfordshire. We don't yet

## Defra's 25 Year Environment Plan: good news for Oxfordshire?

*Mike Pollard*

*Area Reserves Manager RSPB, Wild Oxfordshire Trustee*

**A** year ago we launched 'State of Nature in Oxfordshire 2017' with a call to action, highlighting the need for greater collective ambition for a more nature-rich future. Defra's newly launched '25 Year Environment Plan' aims to arrest the decline in native species and improve biodiversity, so how might the plan help us turn around nature's fortunes here in Oxfordshire?

The 25 year plan received a generally positive reception - a "good start" (WWF), "there's much to welcome" (CPRE), "reasons to be cheerful" (Rewilding Britain) and is seen as offering a strong vision for a greener future with clean air and water and thriving plants and animals. But reaction to the plan also calls for a new Environment Act, much needed cash and an effective watchdog to back it up.

# Wild Oxfordshire's work in

## The Evenlode Catchment Partnership – Four years on

Anne Miller, Evenlode Catchment Co-ordinator

As the fourth year of the Partnership draws to a close we thought we'd take the opportunity to look back at what has been achieved by today's vibrant and productive group of 30 partner organisations.

Our partnership aims to improve water quality, enhance biodiversity, flood management and resilience to climate change, and build greater community engagement with the local rivers and their environment. We are doing this by employing a mixture of:

### Practical works and demonstration sites

Five major river restoration projects have been completed: Woodstock Water Meadows, Honeydale Natural Flood Management scheme, River Glyme floodplain reconnection at Stratford Bridge, River Evenlode at Pudlicote, and the first phase of the Natural Flood Management scheme on the Littlestock Brook.



Photo: Hilary Phillips



Photo: Sharon Williams



Photo: Jo Old

### Education and sharing

- **Sharing of best practice** – 60 people attended the initial Water Conference held at Oxford to build capacity and partnerships, 30+ land owners and managers attended the Water and Farming Seminar held with the Wychwood project in 2015 and a further 40+ attended the Glyme Restoration event at Stratford Bridge in 2017.

The development of the website with extensive information and links to the Freshwater Watch site, which hosts all the Evenlode data, means that as many people as possible can now easily access detailed information about their local river.

The 2016 River Hackathon held in partnership with CEH, Oxford University and Earthwatch attracted more than 30 participants developing prototype tools to support better measurement and monitoring of the river and its surrounding land in a variety of ways.



Photo: Jeanette Wooster



Photo: Hilary Phillips

Top: Children investigate a flood model.

Above: River monitoring.

- **Education** – Two River Fly training sessions have been delivered to date. We also ran three courses for trainee geography teachers to learn field survey techniques for monitoring rivers, woods and meadow habitats, and one group of secondary school students have participated in monitoring projects on the Glyme.

- **Public engagement** – We've had regular stands at the Wychwood Fair, Oxfordshire Goes Wild, Woodstock Family Day and Forest Schools, plus a family fun day at Combe Mill and an evening session on Secret Creatures of the Evenlode. Two 'bats by canoe' surveys were carried out on the Charlbury to Chadlington stretch of the Evenlode in 2016 and 2017.

Left, top: Ian Wilkinson checking Summer green manure.

Far left: Tree planting at Pudlicote.

Left: Water Blitz – 'Citizen Scientists'.

Right: River fly monitoring.

## Science

- **Monitoring** – Accompanying the Natural Flood Management pilots we have installed monitoring networks and currently have one PhD and two MSc students working on monitoring and modelling the hydrology and effectiveness of the different interventions. Two more PhD students will shortly begin their research using these sites and the catchment as a living laboratory.

- **Citizen science** – In five Waterblitzes we have had around 100 volunteers collecting over 1,000 data sets and with the help of our partners at Earthwatch this data can now all be viewed and downloaded at the Evenlode catchment's bespoke data portal. The data includes Nitrate and Phosphate levels as well as river fly monitoring results. Visit <https://freshwaterwatch.thewaterhub.org>

## Biodiversity

- **Restoring rivers** – All of the five restoration projects completed so far are (or will soon) deliver enhanced biodiversity, both in the river and across the surrounding land, with 13 hectares of new wet woodlands, enhanced flood meadows and four hectares of wetland scrapes attracting many different insects and birds such as snipe and woodcock. In future monitoring of these new sites will yield valuable evidence of the success of the measures, which we anticipate will encourage other land owners to follow suit, as well as informing and refining our knowledge and designs for future schemes.

Finally, we want to acknowledge the unstinting enthusiasm, energy and generosity of so many of our trusted partners. It's both a pleasure and a privilege to work with so many fantastic people who all want to make a difference!

Photo: Hilary Phillips



## Natural Flood Management

Despite wind, rain and snow, the first phase of the exciting new Natural Flood Management (NFM) scheme on the Evenlode was completed in an astonishing 2 months, finishing 5th February 2018.



Photo: Richard Bennett

*Installing woody dam.*

Richard Bennett, Wild Oxfordshire's civil engineer and Natural Flood Management Project Officer, has been working closely with the contractor to deliver a number of measures on the Bruern Estate near Milton-Under-Wychwood, designed to intercept, attenuate and control runoff in the Littlestock Brook Catchment. These have included the creation of field corner bunds, ponds, swales, woody dams and new woodlands to reduce the risk of flooding to the communities downstream in Milton-Under-Wychwood, at the same time as improving water quality and biodiversity.

The works are part of a five year innovative pilot project in the Evenlode Catchment, delivering Natural Flood Management (NFM) measures throughout upper tributaries of the River Evenlode to demonstrate multiple benefits including improving water quality, habitats and flood risk. The work in the first phase has been delivered in conjunction with the landowner, who secured additional funding through a Woodland Creation Grant which will create approximately 13 hectares of new woodland.

As it is part of a pilot programme we are planning to model and monitor throughout the catchment so that we can learn how effective specific interventions really are. We are working extensively with the Centre of Ecology & Hydrology (CEH),



Photo: Richard Bennett

Atkins and other Environment Agency (EA) teams to establish a network of water-level and turbidity monitoring and will continue to install further monitoring and provide academic links to monitor the effectiveness of the measures installed in Phase 1. A student project with HR Wallingford consultancy was very helpful in modelling the effectiveness of the NFM measures in Phase 1 and further

funding has been secured to continue model development within the Littlestock Brook catchment. We have also engaged the local community with several Citizen Science Labs having been established, including one on the Littlestock Brook.

The project has secured grants totalling £280,000 through various EA funding streams, which not only allowed us to employ Richard as NFM Project Officer since summer 2017, but also to deliver this first phase of works, and further natural flood management measures in the Littlestock Brook Catchment. It could also catalyse funding for more schemes in the Evenlode Catchment, working in partnership with other organisations such as Natural England and Thames Water, who are at present carrying out pilot projects designed to reduce diffuse phosphate inputs to other tributaries.

We will be offering talks and site visits during summer and autumn 2018. To register your interest please email [richard@wildoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:richard@wildoxfordshire.org.uk)

have a Knepp, but we are starting to see how we can "re-nature" landscapes - the flourishing wildlife at RSPB Otmoor nature reserve, with the recent return of bitterns and marsh harriers - is a great example. BBOWT's plans for Duxford Old River, the latest Chimney Meadows nature reserve extension, to create a haven for water voles, otters and wading birds is also an exciting prospect. Farmer cluster groups are also up and running, with two in Oxfordshire, the first was established in the Upper Thames in 2015 and a new group is about to start near Deddington. The Upper Thames group has already grown from five to twelve farmers, covering over 2,000 hectares of precious habitats, including ancient hay meadows, and special wildlife including good numbers of breeding curlews.

Looking forward, one question comes to front of mind: what might a nature recovery network for Oxfordshire look like? We already have a focus on the 20% of the county within the 36 Conservation Target Areas co-ordinated by Wild Oxfordshire - surely we need to start our thinking there. We also need to consider if there are opportunities to re-introduce species that we have lost from our countryside (though recent evidence suggests that wild boar, at least, are making their own way here!). With much development planned for Oxfordshire in the coming decades, we are presented with both threats and opportunities - for example, how might

we work together to achieve a net gain for the environment? And with so much expertise based locally, could our county be the Litmus test for the success or failure of the 25 year plan?



### Data protection

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Photo: Roselle Chapman

## Pollinators

Wild Oxfordshire are hugely grateful to Clare Carvell and Judy Webb who presented excellent pollinator themed talks at the AGM. Given the positive feedback, we are aiming to promote the pollinator theme over the next 12 months.

It is a well-known fact that in the UK, this crop pollination service provided by insects is worth an estimated £430 million. Harder to quantify is the intrinsic value of pollinators to complex ecosystems: other wildlife depends on pollinators and the plants they pollinate for shelter and food. Their decline exacerbates plant declines, such as losses seen in wildflowers. Furthermore, they are of huge value to our culture: people, especially children love bees, butterflies, moths, beetles, hoverflies and other pollinators – they are the soundtrack to endless sunny summer childhood days and very often a child's first independent close-up encounter with wildlife.

Focusing on pollinators doesn't mean that other wildlife isn't important, it's more that by focusing on, and achieving conservation of pollinators, the status of many other species which share their habitat – or are vulnerable to the same threats - may also be improved. Long term pollinator conservation cannot be achieved just through captive breeding and release programmes, but through the long-term improvement of their habitat quality and quantity - food provision, nest site provision and reduction of pesticide use. These three actions are achievable by almost everyone, regardless of the size of the plot of land they are managing, not only that but you don't have to wait in silence for hours to see a pollinator reaping the benefits of your endeavours.

If you want to find out more, we will be hosting an event for community groups at Chadlington Memorial Hall on 21st July with the Director of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust giving a national perspective and local groups providing inspiring case studies. The day will be completed with spending time in the field looking at how pollinators use their environment. We are also running a 'Pollinator ID Day' that will feed into the national monitoring scheme.

For more information: [roselle@wildoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:roselle@wildoxfordshire.org.uk)



Photo: Roselle Chapman

### Stay in touch

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Photo: Clare Mowbray

### Thank you

We are grateful to our many member organisations and trustees who give hundreds of hours of their time for free, not forgetting our generous funders who make it all possible.