

How can we increase care and understanding?

Chalk rivers and streams are important for wildlife and for people. They have been used by people over many centuries and provide an interesting insight into the natural and cultural history of an area.

WHY should people care?

One of the biggest threats that the River Avon faces is a lack of public understanding about its important functions for wildlife and humans alike – this is not helped by the fact that much of its length is in private ownership. Getting people interested and excited about ‘their’ river and encouraging them to find out more about its wildlife and history will increase appreciation of it. This is likely to lead to a greater level of care and a better understanding of the river.

WHAT can be done?

Enhancing access, providing information, giving talks or running river related events and activities can inspire people to get involved with the river and their local area in general.

► Information boards, leaflets and posters:

Can enhance existing access by helping people to find out about the river, its history, special features and points of access and interest. Take inspiration from examples that you like in other places.

► Information on websites:

Can raise awareness and understanding of the river and river related issues. Actively use your parish council’s website to provide information.

► Events and activities:

Can be simple and straightforward to organise and run; the key to success is good planning. Make sure you have help planning the event and advertise it well. You may want to encourage young people, in which case, speak to local schools or youth groups for their input.

Below are a few ideas for events and activities:

- River dipping sessions to explore life in the river. Some dipping nets, white trays, viewing pots and identification charts is all that is required. After the event you could give the kit to the local school for regular use within lessons.
- Guided walks led by members of the community increase understanding of the river and its surrounding area.
- Historical/archaeological exhibitions about the river and the local area.
- Fly-casting or fly-tying demonstrations by your local fishing club.
- Photo competitions, drawing competitions or river related arts and crafts.
- Treasure hunts, rubber duck races, Poohstick races, and so on.

There are many ways to help people learn about their local river



River dipping event at Stapleford



Interpretation board at the River Till



Parish website, Figheldean

WHO can do it?

Parish councils, landowners and individuals. You will need to get the support of the landowner and consult local people, but it is often individuals who drive things forward. You won't need much professional help, except perhaps in the design and production of information boards.

WHAT needs to be considered?

- ▶ Before planning any work find out who owns the area of river concerned and contact everyone who has an interest in the river: landowners, farmers, river users such as fishing clubs etc. A coordinated approach yields the best results.
- ▶ Cover insurance and health and safety issues. Risk assessments are crucial at the outset of any work in and around the river. The BTCV handbook 'Health and Safety Overview' provides useful advice for community groups (see right).
- ▶ Contact your local schools for support and input. This way you extend the reach of your activity to children and thereby also to their parents.
- ▶ Get the necessary consents and permissions for work in the river and along the river bank – early contact with the Environment Agency, Natural England and your local authority is vital.
- ▶ Consider the impact of providing more information or interpretation infrastructure. Will it encourage more people to use the area and is this something that this area can accommodate easily?
- ▶ Reduce the risk of vandalism. Involve the community in the development of interpretation facilities (this will make sure that it is looked after well), and choose sturdy and cleanable materials wherever possible.

WHO can help?

There is plenty of written and direct help available from the organisations listed, right. In particular contact the organisations where you have seen something you like. Most wildlife and conservation charities regularly produce information boards, leaflets and posters and are also experienced in running educational events.

WHERE can I get more information and ideas?

- ▶ **Living River:**
www.livingriver.org.uk
- ▶ **River Restoration Centre:**
www.therrc.co.uk/rrc_manual_pdf.php
- ▶ **British Trust for Conservation Volunteers:**
www2.btcv.org.uk
- ▶ **BTCV handbooks:**
'Environments for All', 'Local Action', 'Health and Safety Overview' and 'Waterways and Wetlands' (<http://handbooks.btcv.org.uk/handbooks/index>)
- ▶ **STREAM project:**
'Layman's report' (www.streamlife.org.uk/resources/publications)
- ▶ **Wild Trout Trust:**
'Chalkstream Habitat Manual' (www.wildtrout.org)
- ▶ **Environment Agency:**
www.environment-agency.gov.uk
- ▶ **Natural England:**
www.naturalengland.org.uk
- ▶ **Wildlife Trusts:**
Wiltshire (www.wiltshirewildlife.org);
Hampshire (www.hwt.org.uk);
Dorset (www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk)
- ▶ **Your local planning authority:**
www.planningportal.gov.uk
- ▶ **Local museums; archaeologists; natural history societies:**
Wiltshire Heritage Museum, Devizes (www.wiltshireheritage.org.uk); Salisbury Museum (www.salisburymuseum.org.uk);
Wiltshire Council Archaeology Service (www.wiltshire.gov.uk/leisureandculture/museumhistoryheritage.htm); Wessex Archaeology (www.wessexarch.co.uk)

