



AVON

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AUTUMN 2010

THE **LIVING RIVER** NEWSLETTER



Supported by  
**The National Lottery**<sup>®</sup>  
through the Heritage Lottery Fund





Welcome to the newsletter for autumn 2010 – our final edition.

The Living River project is in its last few months but our mission continues to increase awareness and appreciation of the River Avon and its tributaries with a focus on how the special wildlife of the river has developed alongside the history of the area. The project has worked with local communities from the river's headwaters in the Wiltshire Downs to the sea at Christchurch and has involved people who live and work in the catchment. From 2006–2010 Living River has:

- Restored river habitats at sites the public can access and enjoy
- Enhanced existing access to, and information about the river
- Held public events, training and volunteer activities to help people understand their relationship with the river system and take responsibility for it.

Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and:

- Natural England
- Salisbury City Council
- Wiltshire Council
- Salisbury International Arts Festival
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
- Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
- Hampshire County Council
- Wessex Water
- Environment Agency.

# THANK YOU!

Our final newsletter offers us the chance to say a huge thank you to all the people that have supported Living River in a myriad of ways. Without their help the project would never have been possible. From putting waders on and building bank revetments, to pulling Himalayan balsam, sawing planks for boardwalks, piling up branches for otter holts, developing walking routes, taking pictures at events, drawing images

for interpretation boards, designing watery artwork, or just spending some time with us to generate ideas... The tasks were endless but rewarding – for both sides we hope – and the big winners are hopefully the river and the communities it supports.

This final newsletter tells the story of some of the people that have given their time to the project but represent so many, many more...

## THE WRIGHT STUFF

Karen Wright (pictured) volunteered with Living River helping with our education programme. From this experience Karen now works as an education officer at Moors Valley Country Park, near Ringwood.

### LR: What attracted you to education work?

*Karen: I have always been good with children and working with Living River encouraged me to inspire young people whilst carrying out environmental education or practical conservation.*

### How did you get involved with Living River?

*I was looking for an opportunity to carry out some voluntary work in the environmental*

*sector, because I was struggling to get a job after finishing university. Martin [Martin Gilchrist, Living River project officer] had worked with some people my dad knew; we had an informal chat and were both happy for me to volunteer for the project.*

### What in your opinion is the best way to inspire young people?

*I think the best way to inspire young people is to treat them like adults. Teach them to use the skills that they have and combine them with what they enjoy. This enables them to develop a whole range of new skills and ideas.*

### How has Living River helped you?

*Living River has helped me a lot. The experience I gained from volunteering helped me to get the job I now have. It gave me a good range of experience and confidence to do things.*

### And your funniest experience?

*I have had a few funny moments, but the best one I can think of is a child not watching what she was doing and walking straight into the pond.*



# PHIL & PAT

Phil Stevens is the initiator of the Pewsey Avon Trail (PAT), a long distance walking route supported and developed in cooperation with Living River.

**LR: Where did the idea for PAT come from?**

*Phil: It was a long-standing dream of the community as well as myself.*

**What was the greatest success associated with the launch of the Pewsey Avon Trail?**

*Pulling all the many groups together to get the project up and running.*

**Has the PAT helped you/the community to get more in touch with the river?**

*I hope so, there has certainly been a lot of interest in the book.*

**Why is the River Avon important to you?**

*It is our connection to the sea.*



## VIEWS OF VENICE

As a member of Stapleford Parish Council, Venice Correa was involved in the Living River Project right from the very beginning. "I was initially very sceptical" she admits, "How could signs and benches add anything to the river?"

Stapleford lies just off the main A36 and was identified by Living River as one of 32 sites within the Avon catchment where work could be undertaken together with the community to help people better understand and enjoy their local river. Improvements at Stapleford included the installation of a sculptural bench, interpretation board and dipping platform (above).

After time the work began to blend in, and Venice could see the benefits the new structures could bring. "It became clearer that the improvements would not detract from the beauty of the river and would actually help stimulate interest and improve understanding."

In recognition of its potential, Venice volunteered her time to plan and arrange an official unveiling party for the dipping platform. A firm advocate of inspiring and educating children, she recalls fondly the success of the unveiling. "Around 60 people attended the event and the children, especially, were captivated throughout. It was such a pleasure," Venice remembers,

"The idea I had in mind I'd actually made happen."

The highlight of the day was the river dipping from the new dipping platform. Children of all ages, guided by Living River staff, were astonished to see creatures such as the camouflaged caddis fly larvae or the tiny and rare bullhead. And then of course the rubber duck race: "The children dropped their ducks off the bridge and ran along the bank to see which duck won" Venice recalls. "All children were winners each getting Easter eggs as well as the rubber duck they raced!"

Months on from the unveiling, the dipping platform is still actively used by the community – Venice notes "grandparents take their grandchildren river dipping while other people use the dipping platform as an unorthodox barometer to comment on the height of the river."

The village of Figheldean also received improvements similar to Stapleford. Having previously lived in that village, Venice thought she knew a lot about it. Not so: "I learnt more about the river from reading the Living River interpretation board in a few minutes than I did from living in the village for ten years." Quite an endorsement if ever there was one!

# RIVER RESTORATION



Lisa Bailey is a senior youth and conservation officer at the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers

(BTCV). Together with Living River she has led teams of volunteers to restore large stretches of river in Salisbury.

## LR: How did you get involved with Living River?

*Lisa: When I heard that Living River was planning to carry out some river restoration work at the Maltings, at a time when BTCV had just created a grant application for similar work slightly further upstream. It seemed silly not to join forces, double the benefits, and share the costs.*

## Why in your opinion is river restoration work so important?

*It was fantastic to work on the river for two major reasons: the first being that in Salisbury the flood relief channels were very boring and concrete, not being of any use to wildlife. The projects that we have been involved with have created new and improved habitats for wildlife, which of course is fantastic! From another point of view, river work is very beneficial for our volunteers. It encourages them to work outside their comfort zone, improves their coordination as they manoeuvre themselves through the water, and encourages them to work as a team. The water itself creates excitement and a relaxed atmosphere.*

## Is restoration beneficial to wildlife?

*Yes, it is. One of the aims of this work was to try and increase the flow of the river by slightly narrowing the channel and improve the quality of the gravel bed for spawning fish. When we pinned logs onto the river bed one week, the change in flow rate became evident straight away: at the start the river was moving quite slowly but by the end of the day we felt the current very strongly against our legs.*

## From photos, river restoration work looks quite tiring. Is it quite physical work?

*It is extremely tiring work! Leg and glute muscles have to work hard to support the body in flowing water, especially when you are wearing big floppy waders. Moving the materials is the most tiring bit – they are heavy and you have to be really aware of how you are travelling in the water to prevent yourself from falling over and getting wet.*

## Do you get much interest from the public when you are working?

*We got most interest from the public when we were working next to the playground in Salisbury. People were very interested in what we were doing; one man told us we were wrecking the river. But with Living River's experts on hand, we explained how the work will benefit the river and wildlife and he walked away very happy, which was great.*

*A fantastic way of raising awareness of local wildlife was when we saw a water vole basking on our coir rolls! It was incredible, as our volunteers had never seen one before. When they found out it is a protected species they were amazed and excitedly told the public as they walked past.*

## Can anyone have a go?

*As long as you are happy to work in a team anyone can get involved with river restoration. Our oldest volunteer is in his eighties and our youngest was thirteen! Being in the water and being active is particularly good for people with mental or physical health problems. At BTCV these are the people we particularly want to encourage and support. We make sure that we always adjust the work to people's abilities – and of course we have lots of tea breaks and biscuits.*

## How can people find out more information on volunteering?

*The best place to go is the Do-It website: [www.do-it.org](http://www.do-it.org). Every volunteering opportunity is listed, not just nature conservation but anything from fashion to mechanics.*



## AVON ART

Joe Searle was an apprentice at QinetiQ who worked with Living River and the Salisbury International Arts Festival on the creation of the Avon sculpture at Solstice Park in Amesbury.

## LR: What part of the project did you enjoy most and why?

*Joe: The construction and installation of the sculpture as this provided different challenges to the ones which I usually encounter at work.*

## What have you learnt about the River Avon as a result of being involved in the project?

*The different local landmarks placed along the River Avon.*

## What are your thoughts when you drive past and see the Avon sculpture?

*I am proud of the team's achievement in completing the project.*

## When does the Avon sculpture look best and why?

*Dusk, when the lighting comes on so that all the details can be seen.*





# NOURISHED BY NATURE

Having volunteered for Living River from the start, Sue Fitzpatrick (above with fellow volunteers) utilised her wildlife and countryside management knowledge from her professional role as lecturer at Sparsholt College.

“I have been volunteering since I moved to Salisbury seven years ago. The first task I remember doing was a river restoration project at the Avon Valley Local Nature Reserve, filmed by the BBC all day and subsequently appearing for a 30-second slot! This work has stood the test of time (with a few ongoing repairs) and is now well vegetated. Last year, I was delighted to see a kingfisher, on the lookout for fish, perching on one of the posts exposed by low river levels. This, to me, is one of the motivations for volunteering – enhancing our regrettably degraded countryside and increasing the habitats and opportunities for wildlife to recover. The river restoration projects I’ve been involved in have constructed new riparian habitats where there was little potential for wildlife; it is

great to see how quickly they have made a difference – a dragonfly perched on our newly-installed planted coir rolls in Churchill Gardens while we were still working on them! A few weeks ago, at the start of a volunteering task, we watched a water vole munching away in a previously restored part of the Avon in Salisbury; it was oblivious to its delighted audience.

“My spare-time volunteering was in many ways a ‘busman’s holiday’, as I was professionally involved in wildlife and countryside management at Sparsholt College, taking groups of students out at least once a week to participate in tasks, and learn as many practical conservation skills as possible. River restoration work was good in this educational context, as the students not only had to understand the ecological and conservation issues but also had to undertake physical tasks which were new to most, develop teamwork, and an appreciation of health & safety – all in delightful surroundings!”



## LOOKING BACK

The Living River team on their greatest moments of the project:

**Eva Stuetzenberger**  
project manager

*“Receiving a call from a man from Upavon, telling me about his adventures on the Pewsey Avon Trail – from the sighting of a kingfisher to the tasting of the best ever pint. He ended the conversation by saying ‘Thank you, for making this possible.’”*

**Martin Gilchrist**  
former project officer

*“When I heard that the Heritage Lottery Fund had awarded the grant. Several years of work by many people and groups to get the funds to make a difference to the River. Relief and elation.”*

**John O’Reilly**  
project officer

*“Working with the communities up and down the valley involved with the project – the genuine enthusiasm and passion for their river is something to be really proud of!”*

**Chris Patrick**  
finance officer

*“Realising that there were so many excited children around the interactive table at the Salisbury Play Day that I couldn’t reach the stock of quiz sheets in the centre.”*

## GET IN TOUCH

To find out more:

Living River, Natural England,  
Prince Maurice Court,  
Hambleton Avenue,  
Devizes SN10 2RT

T 0300 060 4008

[www.livingriver.org.uk](http://www.livingriver.org.uk)

# 2010 SO FAR...

With Living River coming to an end later this year, we and our volunteers have been particularly busy getting as much work done as possible. Here is a flavour of what we have done throughout the year!



## SALISBURY INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL DEBATE

A 'Pecha Kucha' evening of creative environmental debate where everything had to be said using 20 images with only 20 seconds for each.



## DOWN ON THE FARM

It was an early start for Living River leading river dipping on the new dipping platform at River Bourne Community Farm, as part of Open Farm Sunday.



## THE BIG PLAY

All things chalky was the theme on the Living River/Natural England stand at this year's Salisbury playday which attracted over 3,000 visitors.



## SCHOOL OF FISH

Shop windows and school classrooms became temporary trout hatcheries and provided an insight into the lifecycle of the brown trout.



## PEWSEY AVON TRAIL

Launched by local MP Claire Perry, the Pewsey Avon Trail has made the length of the Avon accessible to all.



## WILTON DIPPING PLATFORM

A new dipping platform was installed for the community at the sports/recreation ground in Wilton.



## SITTING ROOM

A beautifully crafted bench has recently been installed at Tisbury for young and old to while away the time.



## INTERPRETATION BOARDS

Many new interpretation boards went up – this one at Tiffont carefully illustrated by artist, Richard Hawkins.

# LIVING RIVER'S LEGACY

Very sadly this is the last Living River newsletter. The project that started in 2006 will be completed by the end of this year. We had major achievements in restoring parts of the River Avon system from its headwaters in the Vale of Pewsey to the sea at Christchurch, improving access and interpretation, and providing education and training. We got in touch and communicated our messages to over 30,000 people and we actively involved over 1,500 volunteers in our work. I am sure each of these volunteers will have their own personal highlights, eureka moments and stories to tell. We have heard some of these stories over the last few pages of this newsletter. What they have shown is that all the Living River achievements were only possible through the incredible enthusiasm of these volunteers, their can-do-attitude and hard work. A huge **thank you** to all for making it happen and for making the project such a great success.

## ▶ THE FUTURE

Living River is putting various tools in place to ensure that what we have started will keep on bearing fruit in the future:

### Resource pack

We are developing a resource pack for parish councils within the Avon catchment which answers the most relevant river related questions..

### Demonstration report

We are compiling a report of case studies of our work, so other projects can use and learn from our experience.

### Leaflet

A new leaflet will keep communicating our messages and provide advice and ideas for residents and visitors alike.

### Website

The Living River website will stay live and will keep providing you with river related information – so please keep on visiting to find out more.

### Project partners

Our project partners, Natural England, Salisbury City Council, Wiltshire Council, Salisbury International Arts Festival, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Hampshire County Council, Wessex Water and the Environment Agency will keep the river's interests at their heart and in their policies.

## ▶ A CELEBRATION

### Monday 4 October

Please come and join us in celebrating the Living River's achievements at the Michael Herbert Hall in Wilton, 3.00–6.30pm (refreshments and presentations at 4.30pm). Many of those who have worked with us over the past four years will be there. It's a perfect opportunity to gain and share ideas on how to carry the spirit of the Living River forward.

Please keep our three key messages about the River Avon in mind:

### ▶ IT'S CHALKY...

and full of life. The Avon is what it is thanks to chalk. The plants and animals thrive in the water that is filtered and purified through the chalk; so much so that the Avon is recognised as one of the best chalk rivers in the world. Appreciate and care for its special wildlife – and watch out that you don't stumble across one of the many curious water voles that inhabit the newly improved riverbank in Salisbury.

### ▶ IT'S WET

If you live in the Avon catchment, the water you use and take for granted every day is taken from your river. Remember the river from your home; when brushing your teeth, washing your car, or watering the garden... Save water for the river and its wildlife.

### ▶ GO SEE...

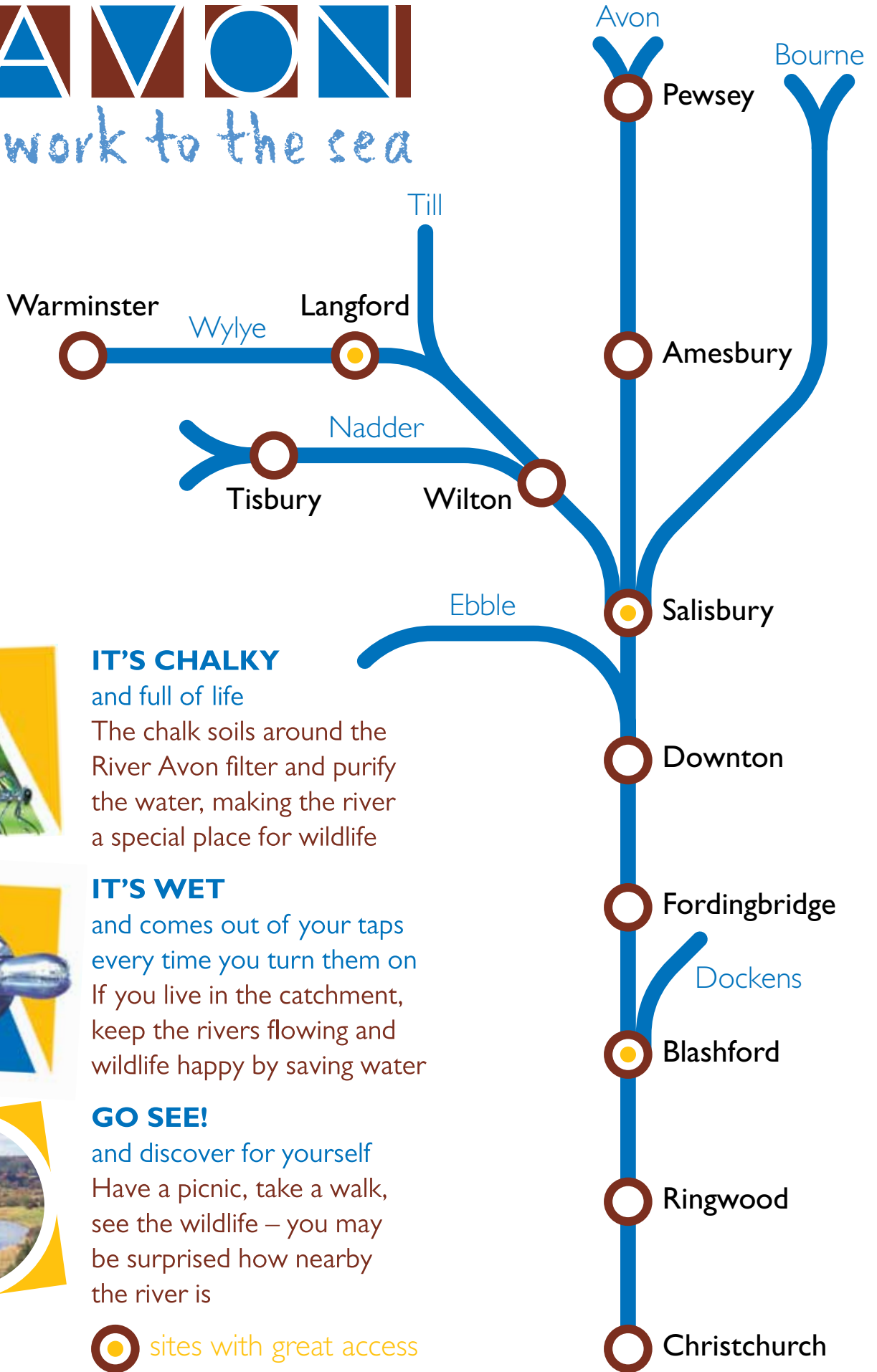
and enjoy the river. Whether you live in Pewsey near the source of the Avon where it is still a small little stream; in Salisbury where it joins forces with the Nadder, Wylye, Ebbles and Bourne; or at Christchurch where the grown up Avon is greeted by the sea. With your help we have improved and created places and possibilities everywhere to get close, to get inspired, and get wet.

*With very best wishes,  
goodbye from the Living River team*





a network to the sea



### IT'S CHALKY

and full of life

The chalk soils around the River Avon filter and purify the water, making the river a special place for wildlife



### IT'S WET

and comes out of your taps every time you turn them on

If you live in the catchment, keep the rivers flowing and wildlife happy by saving water



### GO SEE!

and discover for yourself

Have a picnic, take a walk, see the wildlife – you may be surprised how nearby the river is

 sites with great access