

# Water for Wildlife Annual Report

## March 2015 to January 2016

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough



*Ditch with water vole at Ransonmoor*

**Ruth Hawksley**

This is a summary of Water for Wildlife work in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough between March 2015 and January 2016.

## Bourn Brook

Work continued on the Bourn Brook in 2015. Although there were no water vole surveys, records from local people and from balsam pulling events showed that water voles are still present on the brook. More local people now know about the project and there was a continued commitment to tackle Himalayan balsam.

Mink control is still in place on the brook, and occasional mink are still caught at the downstream end. Reports from the upper reaches of the brook indicate that an otter had 2 surviving cubs, which have now started to move downstream.

## Giant hogweed

Treatment of giant hogweed was again generously provided by the Environment Agency though unfortunately was late this year for a number of reasons. Treatments took place in June and September. Timing and limited resources meant that at least 2 plants flowered and set seed, although one flowering plant was spotted and treated. The aim is to focus more time on giant hogweed treatment and spotting this year.

## Himalayan balsam

A total of 23 balsam-pulling events were held, comprising 353 volunteer hour and 60 hours of staff time. Despite the fact that this is significantly more than last year (17 events, 177 volunteer hours, 26 staff hours), more was needed and a focus on upstream sections meant that some downstream areas were not visited.



Volunteers pulling balsam at the Bourn golf course, August 2015

Some of the extra time required is due to the fact that more side ditches and adjacent areas were covered, and new populations of balsam are discovered each

year. Anglian Water allowed access to their pumping station in Bourn again this year, and a significant effort went into pulling balsam around the horse fields in Toft. More is needed here next year but several local people volunteered and made a big difference.

In 2016 there will be a greater focus of effort on the Bourn golf course, which has a significant population of Himalayan balsam, with the aim of visiting the upper sections at least twice. Fixed point photography will be used to document any changes in the amount of balsam present.

### **Landowner meeting:**

No landowner meeting was held this year, but many of the landowners are part of the West Cambridgeshire Hundreds Group. This group will hold a discussion regarding the Bourn Brook on the 16<sup>th</sup> March, to which all the Bourn landowners will be invited. The aim is to discuss the issues facing the brook, and to consider potential solutions and actions.

### **Volunteers**

More local people volunteered than in previous years, particularly pulling balsam, but also reporting potential sightings of mink and generally keeping an eye on the brook.

## **Hoffer Brook**

Phase 2 of the Hoffer Brook restoration project is nearing completion. Sections of the brook have been cleared by tree surgeons and by volunteer work parties. The brook was then desilted carefully by machine. The machine was also able to place gravel and to reshape some of the banks.



Gravel reinforcement of eroded bank, with rebuilt bank opposite.



Over 170 volunteer hours have been put in, clearing bankside scrub to provide access for the desilting machine, installing 6 flow deflectors and 2 brushwood ledges, and tidying up following machine work. The area of the springs has been cleared, allowing water to bubble up from underground.

A fish survey was carried out to provide baseline data, and found trout present where brushwood ledges and flow deflectors had already been installed.

A further tidying task is planned, and a late spring task to undertake some marginal planting of native species in an area with public access.

Support for this project has come from the Catchment Partnership Fund via the local catchment partnership, CamEO. Additional funding came from Cambridgeshire County Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council. £18,000 of funding was secured, while landowners, the Wild Trout Trust and local volunteers have provided help in kind worth another £7,500.

## **Middle Level Water Vole Survey**

Two drainage districts in the Middle Level were surveyed in spring 2015, repeating surveys undertaken in 2005 and 2010. Over 80km of ditch was surveyed in 25 days, either on foot or by boat, covering all the maintained ditches and most of the private ditches in Curf Fen and Ransonmoor drainage districts.

Results are still being analysed but seem to show that the water vole population has been relatively stable over the last 10 years, and not significantly affected by construction of wind turbines at Ransonmoor, or adversely affected by mink.

## **Wilhorn Meadow**

Water for Wildlife is working with Huntingdonshire District Council to look at the hydrology of the meadow and make suggestions for restoration. A dipwell was installed in November 2015. The aim is to take monthly readings. Botanical surveys are planned for summer 2016.



## County Wildlife Sites

Several wetland sites were surveyed this year, including a River Corridor Survey of the Wilbraham River. Thorpe Meadows, alongside the River Nene in Peterborough, was recommended as a new County Wildlife Site. Three drainage ditch County Wildlife Sites were surveyed by sampling 20m stretches.

## Mink control

The Eastern Region Mink Control Group continues to bring together regional mink control efforts. As part of the group, money has been awarded to Water for Wildlife and the Countryside Restoration Trust to trap mink on the lower Little Ouse (trapping work on the Little Ouse has been underway for years on the Suffolk side of the border) and at a test site in the fens near Ely. These limited efforts will at least provide evidence of the size of the problem, and there may be scope for some trapping in the Ouse Valley as well, to link to work on RSPB sites.

## Other activities

- Talk for Cam Valley Forum event, Barrington;
- Talk for Wildlife Trust warden's conference;
- Led water vole survey training for Middle Level survey volunteers;
- Led water vole workshop as part of Wildlife Trusts Training Workshops series;
- Invertebrate monitoring on the River Cam at Trumpington Meadows and also on the Hoffer Brook;
- Chair of MLC Drainage Board Conservation Committee meeting;
- Arranged talk by EA to WT Cambs conservation staff on biosecurity;
- Commented on Environment Agency River Basin Management Plan and local works;
- Attended Anglian Water's biodiversity action planning event;
- Assisted with plans for river restoration, Mill River/North Ditch in Wendy;
- Assisted with organising Water for Wildlife's 2020 workshop;
- Continued working with local catchment partnerships;
- Pesticides certificate PA(1) and PA(6AW).