

Water for Wildlife Annual Report

January 2020 to January 2021

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough



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Water for Wildlife Officer (Cambs)



Bedfordshire
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Northamptonshire



This is a summary of Water for Wildlife activities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough between January 2020 and January 2021. Funding covers 2.5 days per week of officer time.

Many planned activities were disrupted by Covid19 restrictions and the Water for Wildlife Officer was on furlough from 30th March until 5th July and then part-furlough (1 day per week) from 6th July until 2nd August.

Bourn Brook

Planned work 2020

- Control Himalayan balsam along the entire length of the brook using volunteer work parties;
- Control giant hogweed by identifying and mapping plants and using a contractor to treat with herbicide.

Himalayan balsam

Thanks in particular to the enthusiasm of the Cambridge Conservation Volunteers (who took huge care arranging safe ways of working), balsam was pulled along the whole brook by a combination of pairs / lone working with buddy / distanced work parties. Ideally there should be at least two visits to each section but some sections were only visited once. Landowners were willing to allow access and the Bourn golf club allowed access to their fenced building compound, which includes a section of brook. The Cam Valley Forum took responsibility for the lower part of the brook from the end of Countryside Restoration Trust land to Byron's Pool. The 2019 survey helped target volunteer effort.

In total over 500 hours of volunteer work took place, with a focus of effort on a lower section of brook which had not been cleared so regularly and took up a lot of time. This year CCV calculated a metres/hour measure, which varied from 408 (an upstream section with only 1 plant in over 1km) to 6.5 (the dense downstream section), showing the impacts of a few years focussing on the upstream end of the brook.

Giant hogweed

The EA operative who has sprayed giant hogweed along the brook since 2012 has now retired, but EA provided funds for us to engage a contractor. It was a difficult year for a new contractor to start, although maps and information on plant locations were provided. Despite some miscommunications and the WfW officer on furlough, the contractor found and treated 7 plants. A further 2 seed heads were removed by the Wildlife Trust before seeds were mature.

Planned work 2021

- Continue control of Himalayan balsam with volunteer work parties, aiming to cover the whole brook;
- Seek funding to continue giant hogweed control, possibly with a different contractor;
- Plan invasive plant and water vole surveys for 2022.

Water vole surveys

Planned work 2020

- Contact landowners and carry out repeat survey of Curf Fen and Ransonmoor;
- Carry out some baseline surveys on the River Granta.

All water vole work in 2020 was cancelled due to coronavirus restrictions. Currently working with the Middle Level Commissioners and the Cambridgeshire Mammal Group to plan these surveys for 2021, but we do not yet know whether they will go ahead. The Middle Level surveys are the first priority, but need the whole survey season. Mink control is due to begin on the Granta this year, so while it will not be possible to survey the whole river, the aim is to get some baseline stretches surveyed which can be revisited in future to help monitor the success of the project.

Planned work 2021

- Contact landowners and carry out repeat survey of Curf Fen and Ransonmoor;
- Carry out some baseline surveys on the River Granta.

Greater Cambridge Chalk Streams Project

This project was not in the 2020 plan but became possible through funding by Cambridge Water and Cambridge City Council. The first step was production of a report by the Wildlife Trust and Wild Trout Trust summarising what is known about 20 river reaches in the Cam catchment, including project ideas. Funding is in place through the project and Pebble Fund to deliver 4 of these projects in 2021.

Consents have either been received or are waiting for approval.

The report is intended as a starting point for discussions with stakeholders and will be available on the city council website along with a questionnaire for feedback.

Planned work 2021 (with Wild Trout Trust and local volunteers)

- Deliver improvement work on the lower River Mel, including tree work and gravel placement;
- Add gravel to the Cherry Hinton Brook downstream of the Hall grounds to improve instream habitats;
- Improve habitat in Vicar's Brook by adding large woody material plus "dig and dump", with extra gravel at the confluence with the Cam;
- Reshape lower end of Coldham's Brook at Stourbridge Common, adding gravel and potentially some fencing (to make it more cattle-proof);
- Participate in local consultation and work on projects with stakeholders;
- Add details to more of the project ideas and look for opportunities to deliver them.

Riverfly surveys

Planned work 2020

- Continue to support Riverfly surveyors and look for opportunities for new sites and surveyors;
- Arrange a surveyors' meeting autumn 2020.

Very few surveys were carried out in 2020 due to coronavirus restrictions, although some surveyors managed to get out a few times. Reports of very low invertebrate diversity on the Granta were investigated – it was agreed this was most likely due to persistent low flows rather than a pollution incident. It seems likely that several surveyors have lost motivation and confidence, and it may be difficult to continue at some sites.

Planned work 2021

- Encourage volunteers to restart surveys when it seems sensible to do so, and visit at least once each to help with ID.
- Arrange a volunteer event in autumn 2021, to include a summary of work and data so far;
- Consider whether there is a way to tie in Riverfly work with other monitoring and research work, so that surveyors feel part of a larger community;
- Continue invertebrate monitoring at Trumpington Meadows.

Natural Flood Management

This was also not planned for 2020. An opportunity arose to work with the Environment Agency delivering some of the work in the Alconbury Brook catchment. Work for the 2020/21 financial year (around 10 leaky dams) is waiting for Ordinary Watercourse consent. There may be further funding for work in 2021.

Planned work 2021

- Deliver leaky dam construction by end of March;
- Work with FWAG East on further NFM projects in the area;
- Look for ways to use lessons learnt in other areas (e.g. West Cambridgeshire Hundreds).

Cambridge projects

This is a new opportunity to work with Cambridge City Council on water-related projects in the city. There are 2 potential projects: one is habitat creation (grassland, wetland and scrapes) at a new extension to Logan's Meadow LNR. The other involves daylighting a section of ditch across Midsummer Common, which has been culverted for many years. Both need preparatory surveys completed this financial year.

Planned work 2021

- Negotiate involvement with project design and commissioning surveys and complete the work as agreed.

Grantchester Meadows

Planned work 2020

- Deliver a trial section of bank works at Grantchester Meadows. Landowner, tenant and grazier agree that something needs to be done here. The banks need to withstand the regular action of dogs, cattle and people, so a trial on the worst-affected section will test how well any interventions survive.

This work was not completed in 2020, in part due to coronavirus restrictions. It is proving difficult to get the agreement of all parties. Following discussions with FWAG East we hope to move this project forward in 2021.



Planned work 2021

- Meet on site with stakeholders and a contractor to agree on initial trial measures and costs;
- Obtain consents and funding, and carry out the work;
- Monitor and see which features work best.

Chalk streams

Cambridgeshire's chalk streams are suffering from long-term low flows, which impacts their resilience, their ability to recover from any short-term problems, and their ability to manage silt and keep gravels clean.

Planned work 2021

- Continue to work with organisations such as Water Resources East, water companies, Cam Valley Forum and local government to collect and share relevant evidence for the importance and state of chalk streams and seek solutions.

Other activities

- County Wildlife Sites – further wetland sites were surveyed this year, including 4 North Level IDB drains (Highland Drain, Cat's Water Drain, Hundreds Farm Drain and Middle Drain) and 2 brick pits: Crown Pit #1 and Fletton Lake;
- Advisory visit for North Level IDB on ditch bank management to benefit autumn ladies tresses;
- Worked with Waterlife Recovery East / Countryside Restoration Trust to determine locations for mink traps on the River Granta;
- Attended catchment partnership meetings in the Cam catchment and at CamEO level.

Planned work 2021

- Work with St John's College on potential small wetland creation adjacent to Bin Brook;
- Support Waterlife Recovery East with their mink control work in Cambridgeshire;
- Attend catchment partnership meetings in the Cam catchment and at CamEO level and continue to work with Water Resources East;
- Work with the Cam Catchment Partnership and Cam Valley Forum on catchment plan for the River Granta;
- Look for ways to work with the Cambridge Water Education Officer in the Granta catchment;
- Look for contacts and funding to address barrier removal on the River Granta and to deliver dig 'n' dump project at Granta Park;
- Continue to comment on Environment Agency and other's consultations.