



**Bedfordshire  
Cambridgeshire  
Northamptonshire**



# Water for Wildlife in Bedfordshire

## Progress Report for 2020



This report covers the Water for Wildlife work that has been carried out in Bedfordshire in 2020. It explains how projects have progressed and been developed during the last year, as well as how it is hoped that the work will be taken forward. Current funding for Water for Wildlife in Bedfordshire covers a post for two days per week.

The Water for Wildlife work carried out by Lewis Dickinson (Water for Wildlife Officer), Elizabeth Dobbie (Conservation Officer) and Gwen Hitchcock (Research and Monitoring Officer). Supported by Laura Downton (Living Landscapes Manager) and Matt Jackson (Conservation Manager Beds & Northants).

**Lewis Dickinson**

**The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire  
Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire**

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## River Wardens Scheme

### *Review of Planned Actions for 2020*

- Seeking opportunities for funding the river warden programme.
- Allocation and utilisation of funding secured for events, workshops and training.

Covid-19 put everything on hold in 2020 due to the social nature of workshops, training and the celebration event. In its absence we tried to maintain engaging interactions with the river wardens, signposting them to the range of online workshops and training opportunities that may be relevant to their volunteering positions.

A newsletter is being developed and will be distributed once we have made decisions on what we want to do regarding the workshop programme.

Development of catchment partnership's development of a strategic catchment plan was paused for a period through a mix of furlough and other absences. The training that was going to be held for the river wardens to undertake the necessary surveys was postponed. We are looking at options to deliver the training in 2021.

The funding the catchment partners had secured in 2019 for 2020 was allowed to be rolled over to start 2021.

2019 saw a new addition to the river wardens programme in Towcester. South Northamptonshire District Council facilitated the generation of 6 new river wardens to cover the river Tove in Towcester. We held a couple of combined introduction and training sessions for the new wardens to help them get to grips with the programme and what being a river warden is all about!

### *Planned Actions for 2021*

Despite all with Covid-19, partners will continue to seek opportunities for funding the river warden programme from their respective organisations. The funding that has already been secured, and was allowed to be delayed in spending, will be spent in 2021 physical distancing restrictions permitting. We aim to deliver a few workshops and training opportunities, with a get-together event earmarked for 2022.



# River Wardens



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## **Contributions to the UBOCP**

### *Review of Planned Actions for 2020*

- The catchment partnership as a whole wants to develop in participation, engaging with some others who work within the catchment but don't sit on the partnership to have a representative, particularly farmers and landowners.
- Creation of a strategic catchment restoration plan in conjunction with the RRC.

The Covid-19 pandemic also affected Catchment Partnership operations, a number of members were placed on furlough for varying periods of time throughout the summer.

Prior to the pandemic and since late summer, partners continued to work with the RRC in developing a strategic catchment restoration plan, now named catchment river restoration plan. Work has developed in identifying a handful of watercourses that have some priority. These are now being worked to divide into reaches. The aim is to then train a cohort of river wardens in the new survey method to go and survey these rivers.

The agri sub-group was unable to recreate the 2019 workshops to engage local farmers in 2020 due to physical distancing rules. These events may be organised for 2021 depending on when restrictions allow.

The catchment partnership have also applied to the Anglian Water Invasive Species Fund to boost our operations tackling Himalayan Balsam in the Flit Valley.

### **Catchment Partnership Meetings**

Full partnership meetings were held on 24<sup>th</sup> September and 14<sup>th</sup> December. The meetings covered updates from Agricultural Business Subgroup, Climate Change actions, and budget updates on the River Wardens project and strategic catchment restoration plan updates.

### *Planned Actions for 2021*

Further development of the strategic catchment restoration plan with the training and delivery of the river warden ground truth survey element. Continued identification of funding streams to carry out catchment partnership objectives. Further the Catchment position on engagement with the climate change agenda.



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## Himalayan Balsam and Other Non-Native Invasive Species on the River Flit

### Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*)

One of the few unscathed projects of 2020. An ongoing project which started in 2009 and, despite the pandemic, is proving to be still very successful in its 11<sup>th</sup> year. The success to date is in large part due to the project tackling this invasive species from the most upstream point it occurs which greatly reduces re-seeding of previously cleared areas. By working together with other local organisations and landowners the project has been able to cover 12.7km of the river Flit and tributaries plus 40.6ha of adjacent habitat comprising Flitwick Moor Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), three County Wildlife Sites (CWS), three non-designated areas of woodland, field edges and ditches.

*Himalayan Balsam River Flit – near Kingshoe Wood*

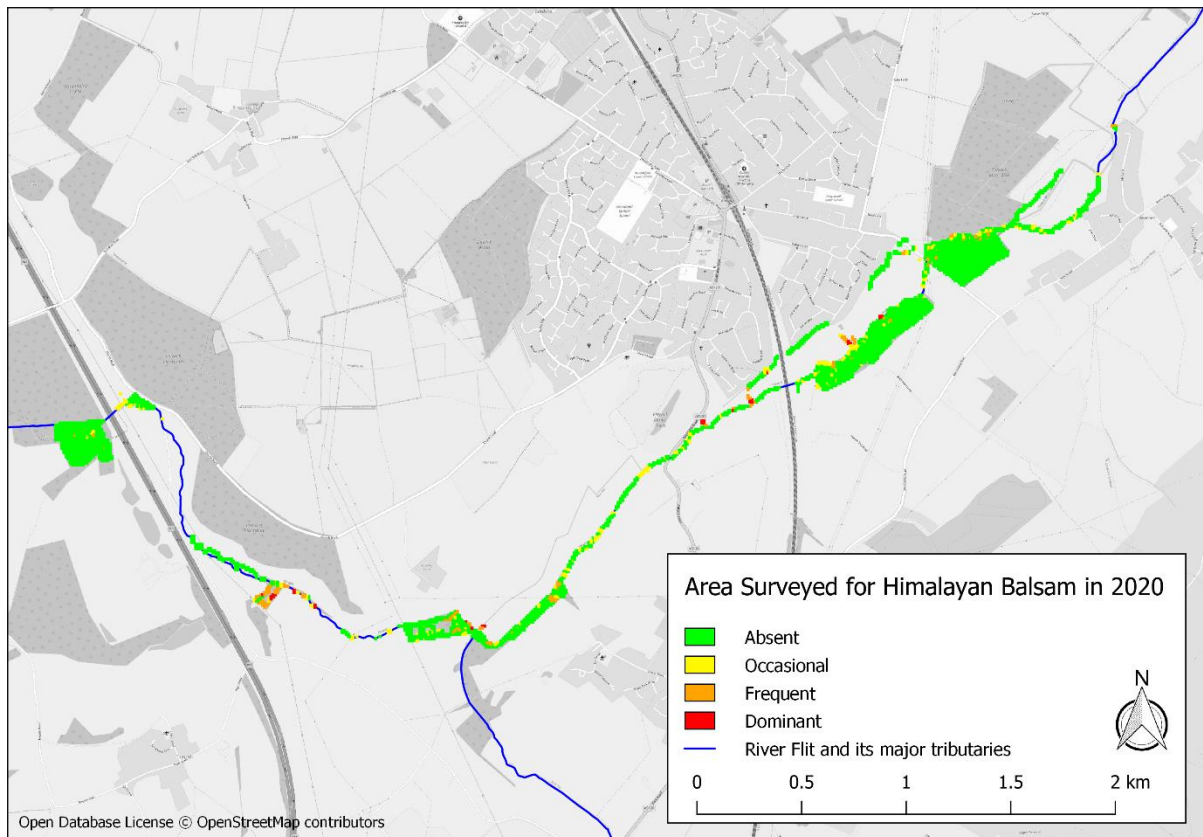


A milder start to the year saw Himalayan Balsam along the River Flit appearing earlier in the year, though in small amounts. We noticed in the last couple of years we had 2 flushes of Balsam growth so we adjusted our mapping to fit. We finished the initial mapping by July (map below), then followed up of specific problem areas in August. There is a slight increase on the amount of survey squares containing Himalayan balsam in 2020. This is due to the Himalayan Balsam seemingly having a good growth year, coupled with finding a couple of top of bank and set back reservoirs.

Himalayan balsam continued to be absent along the Eversholt Brook (tributary of the Flit) upstream of the M1 for the fifth year running. As Himalayan Balsam seeds survive for around three years we are hoping we will no longer see the species in this area, we will monitor next year then spot check sporadically every 2/3 years to ensure no resurgence.

Funding was secured from the Environment Agency again in 2020 to assist with the removal of Himalayan balsam along the River Flit. This allowed for us to buy in the services of contractors for 11 days and extra volunteer groups. The contractors were principally used to cover the denser woodland areas of balsam along River Flit and tributary including Moors Plantation CWS and two sections of Flitwick Moor SSSI, alongside any large continuous patches that would have been inefficient for surveyors to pull at the time of the surveys.

Wildlife Trust volunteers, including specific Balsam wardens, focused their efforts around Flitwick Moor and the section of woodland next to Dawson WAM, Flitwick Manor Park CWS and Kingshoe Wood CWS. Other bought in volunteer groups worked on the River Flit, Running Waters tributary and ditches around Flitton Moor, covering approximately 5.7km and expanding the project area slightly downstream along the river through more farmland as far as Pennyfather's Moors.



**Himalayan Balsam found during 2020 surveys, some data not submitted at time of map creation**

### Other invasive non-native species

A significant amount of effort was spent by Wildlife Trust staff to remove patches of small balsam (*Impatiens parviflora*), at Flitwick Moor. This seems to be fairly on top of now.

A few American Skunk Cabbage plants have been found at Flitwick Moor and were treated early 2020 to prevent further spread. Ongoing monitoring of plant locations will take place in 2021, with any necessary further treatment taking place.

The EA's Floating Pennywort programme has been incredibly successful to date, though the floods from October onwards have proven problematic in carrying some Floating Pennywort into the Ouse Washes, though a small amount this has been tackled. The EA are now engaging and encouraging local groups, e.g. kayak, to volunteer to support pulling of small bits of Floating Pennywort they come across. The Catchment Partnership is supporting the liaison with volunteers.

### Planned Actions for 2021

A meeting of the Flit Vale Local Action Group (LAG) was held remotely on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020 to discuss the combined efforts of members in tackling Himalayan balsam and other invasive non-native species along the valley of the River Flit.

The EA representative once again expressed how the project had been a great success and an excellent value for money in tackling and managing the invasive species in the Flit Valley.

The Himalayan Balsam project shall continue in 2021, building on the progress of 2020 and tackling upstream hotspot areas. The meeting also discussed the upcoming "INNS Week" and whether there was scope to involve and promote invasive species in Bedfordshire to the wider public. The LAG and UBOCP have also discussed and submitted a bid to the AW INNS Fund to boost efforts and further eradication of Himalayan Balsam in the Flit Valley.

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## Water Vole Surveys, Habitat Management and Mink Control

### *Review of Planned Actions for 2020*

- Over the winter the key members of the partnership will meet once again to discuss the rafts which are out, check they are in the best positions and move them if necessary.
- Re-established contact on Colmworth Brook,
- Deployment of rafts at Wildlife Trust Wetland Sites.

Due to Covid, raft discussions and deployment were postponed until the situation had changed. We are planning a catch up Spring 2021 to update on the situation and plan for Mink Free East Anglia.

### *Actions in the Last Year*

Due to Covid-19 and a mix of restrictions and furlough, we were unable to re-deploy rafts at Wildlife Trust Wetland locations. We are looking forward to 2021 season to identify the opportunities available to survey on these sites.

Contact was made to landowners on Colmworth Brook and it was agreed that any plans for 2020 would be put on hold until the national situation is more suitable.

Like the rafts the cameras were deployed very limitedly in the summer, none of the camera locations at Flitton Moor yielded any images.

### *Planned Actions for 2021*

Over the spring the key members of the partnership will meet once again to discuss the rafts which are out, check they are in the best positions and move them if necessary.  
Re-establish contact with landowner on Colmworth Brook to identify 2021 opportunities.  
Deploy rafts at other WT wetland sites to assess mink situation.

*Former Water Vole Site at Sandy*



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## Training & Events

### Local Action Group Workshop – Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNSS)

The two day conference was postponed in 2020. There are plans for a 2021 remote conference.

### River Restoration Centre Conference

The two-day conference was postponed and held remotely early 2021. Although being a remote conference it was a very interesting and educational experience with a range of talks and workshops from different organisations available.

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## Advice and Upcoming Projects

### River Wardens Scheme Expansion

The river warden scheme has interest from the Hertfordshire rivers of the catchment, such as the River Hit. We are working with the Countryside Management Service in Hertfordshire to facilitate the coordination of volunteers there. 2020 also saw the appearance of a river warden group around Buckingham, initially managed by The Conservation Volunteers and now coordinated by Buckingham Town Council. The existing volunteer coordinators advised and will support the set-up of these groups with their coordinators sitting on the volunteer river warden group.

### The 'New Cut' Channel Enhancements

The pandemic and other setbacks meant that the work could not be completed in 2020. The new timescale for completion is 2021.

The project is now at the point of permitting from Bedford Borough Council and the Internal Drainage Board, as the watercourse is not classified as main river.

#### *Project description*

The 'New Cut' located along the northern boundary of Priory Country Park (TL074495) in Bedford was dug as a flood relief channel for the town. Currently the bed of flood relief channel has a mix of stony gravel/pebble and silted areas, the whole stretch has been kept free of woody debris to this point.

There is a large amount of grown up vegetation along the banks of the channel, with areas of more mature trees creating large shaded sections of the channel, which has resulted in reduced in channel and bankside vegetation in these areas. The project to create of woody debris habitat along the channel by partially or fully felling a number of trees along the bank and securing them in place. Small bits of brash that are cut or taken can be used to form brash bundles or woody mattresses. These will be placed strategically along the channel on alternating banks a few metres apart.

Initial visits with Bedford Borough Council and the Environment Agency have been undertaken to provide a scope for the works.



## **A1 Biodiversity Connectivity Improvements**

The proposed project discussed was still on hold in 2020. There were a number of changes to the individuals responsible for managing the fund to the Highways England Asset in Bedfordshire. Contact with suitable personnel will be re-established in 2021.

### *Project description*

The Wildlife Trust BCN, in partnership with the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, have identified a suitable location for habitat connectivity improvements that meet the criteria of the Highways England Environmental Improvement Fund. The location is the A1 road bridge over the River Ivel at the south-west of Sandy, passing over The Riddy a Wildlife Trust Nature Reserve. This area would benefit from some habitat creation under the bridge to benefit the passing of small mammals and provide refuge habitat for fish and fry.

## **Harlington Village Pond CWS Restoration**

Following discussions and suggested course of action in 2019, nothing more had been heard about this site in 2020. We will seek to touch base again in 2021 to review the situation.

## **Flitwick Moor Riverbank Restoration**

This project is undergoing a small design review. The initial design proved unsuitable due to logistics in getting some of the materials to site, requiring heavy machinery unsuitable for site or too risky installation operation. The project aims to address the riverbank collapsing in close proximity to a public footpath and subsequent sediment pollution along a section at Flitwick Moor.

### *Project description*

The purpose of this project would be to prevent further erosion and collapsing of the riverbank that is currently in very close proximity to the footpath, a public right of way. The bank is a vertical cliff suffering from undercutting erosion, more so during flood and high flow events, and is only a couple of metres from the footpath. The proposal would be to restore that bank utilising a mix of resources to ensure bank stabilisation and future protection from erosion. Site visits with Central Beds Rights of Way Team and Bedford Group of IDBs were carried out to establish suitable restoration plans. There is also collaboration with Greensand Trust through their Flit Valley Walk project to ensure the footpath is suitably protected.





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