

We are writing this email in the strangest of times. Currently under 'lockdown' Island Rivers partners are unable to get out to the countryside to survey our water-courses, meet with landowners, check on invasive plants and carry out restoration projects. On the positive, it has been an opportunity to catch up on paperwork after a busy year. This newsletter is a catch-up on our top projects of the last year, and our plans for the forthcoming year. In addition, opportunities to get involved.



This stunning photo was taken by Mike Collins and kindly donated to the Island Rivers Partnership. It shows Hampshire and IW Wildlife Trust's Morton Marsh and Sandown Meadows Nature Reserves looking east from Morton Common. Taken in the wet weather of early March it shows the floodplain doing what it should do. Flooding at Morton is nothing new as the 1909 photograph opposite shows.



EASTERN YAR

Our charge on the Eastern Yar has been led by **Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust**. In 2014 the Isle of Wight Council commissioned a report to highlight restoration opportunities on the Island's largest river catchment. With the help of funding from the National Lottery Community fund through Down to the Coast they were able to acquire 10 acres of wetland alongside the River Yar at Adgestone and manage it as the Morton Marsh Nature Reserve.

This year much work has focussed on Morton Marsh where new scrapes were completed just before the rains arrived and were subsequently quickly flooded demonstrating that they hold water. The bund built with the spoil from the scrapes was seeded with a mix of wildflower and grass seed in preparation for the installation of Sand martin nesting tubes. A new viewing platform has been built to provide visitors with views across the new scrapes and Sand martin nesting bank.



The safe transit of fish along the Eastern Yar has long been a primary aim of the Island Rivers partnership and two fish easements have been built within the river at Langbridge and Horryngford. The weir at Alverstone is still a major obstacle which we would like to tackle, but it is far from simple to achieve. The picture by Claire Hamilton is of a brown trout.

The big news is that the Wildlife Trust successfully raised £245,000 to purchase more land on the Eastern Yar. Parsonage Farm and Hill Heath form a rich tapestry of habitats, from ancient woodland and river to grazed pasture and marshland. The sites are perfectly placed on the outskirts of Martin's Wood, an existing Wildlife Trust nature reserve so this is an excellent opportunity to give the Island's nationally important wildlife the space it needs to thrive. They form part of a wider network of sites which are managed by the Trust and other conservation bodies. This land purchase will become the largest Wildlife Trust reserve on the Island totalling 124 acres.

The photograph shows part of the land in the recent March floods. Thanks to Mike Collins for this.



ADVICE TO FARMERS

The Island's **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) team** lead on advice to farmers.

Mark Simmons is the Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) Advisor. CSF means making sure that all water leaving the farm from rainfall, springs, rivers, streams and ditches is uncontaminated. No polluting substances must be allowed to flow from fields and farmyards. All agricultural operations should therefore ensure pesticides, fertilisers and other substances, including soil, do not cause environmental damage. The definition of CSF extends to keeping soils healthy and that air pollution by substances such as ammonia is minimised.

Mark provides advice and guidance to farmers and landowners on all aspects of farming operations to protect the Island's catchments. He will also provide assistance with applications for grant funding to protect water resources, address diffuse and point source pollution and enhance wetland habitats.



But that's not all that's being done. The AONB team also support the **East Yar Farm Cluster Group** who received a Down to the Coast award towards the cost of removing alder and willow trees along the River Yar between Budbridge and Horingford. This has had the effect of reducing shade and increasing open water habitats for the benefit of wildlife including the nationally endangered water vole. The group also hold talks including one last autumn on '**Soil Health and Regeneration**'. The event included practical demonstrations on how soil, protected by a green cover, can resist erosion whereas bare soil under wet conditions allows silt-laden run-off. Losing top soil and silt can clog drains, spill onto roads and damage the wildlife in rivers. The talk was held at **Marvel Farm**, where farmers were shown how cultivated fields, including those under maize, are protected by a diverse green cover. After late-season harvesting, damage by winter rains is minimised, the soil gains carbon and any loss of Nitrogen is reduced. Read more at <http://www.iwcsf.org.uk/>



Additionally, in partnership with the **Environment Agency** the AONB have been delivering an exercise using '**Farmscoper**'. This is a decision support tool that can be used to assess diffuse agricultural pollutant loads on a farm and quantify the impacts of farm mitigation methods on these pollutants. Results are aggregated to catchment level, and after trying this on the Eastern Yar last year, the focus in 2019 was on Newtown, with Medina to follow.

ACCESS TO RIVERS

Creating better access to the Island's water-courses is something that is important to all of us, and in 2019 we were really busy with a number of projects.

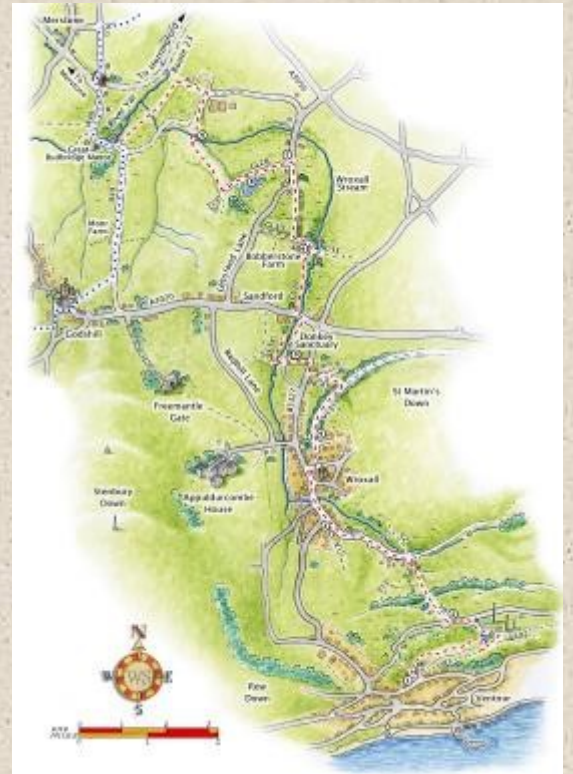
YAR RIVER TRAIL, WROXALL TRAIL & SCOTCHELLS BROOK TRAIL

Natural Enterprise and Isle of Wight Ramblers have concluded a project to revamp the Yar River Trail and create two new trails that link to the Yar Trail from Shanklin and Ventnor. The trails were due to be launched at this year's IW Walking Festival.

The trails follow existing Rights of Way and are waymarked.

Leaflets have been produced and will be distributed around the Island in due course, but all three can be downloaded from the Island Rivers website at <http://www.islandrivers.org.uk>

www.islandrivers.org.uk/explore/walks/yar-trail/



ALL ALONG THE RIVERBANK

Our friends at New Carnival Company have been fantastic at getting people out to the Eastern Yar with their annual festival. Most of the Island Rivers partners have been involved in this including leading walks, running activities and giving demonstrations. Sadly the 2020 event has been cancelled.



PATH IMPROVEMENTS

Riverside paths are often muddy and slippery. This year we have made path improvements at Benstead Marsh, Moreton Marsh and the Donkey Sanctuary.

All projects on this page had funding from Down to the Coast. This project ends in 2020 and has been invaluable in making things happen in the East Wight.



WROXALL STREAM

Natural Enterprise have led our efforts on Wroxall Stream this year. Although a pretty little stream, it is classed by the Environment Agency as 'poor' due to macrophytes (plants) and phosphates, and the Eastern Yar has a failure due to nitrogen levels in Bembridge Harbour. Invasive Species are thought to contribute to Wroxall Stream's failing.

Natural Enterprise already had a close working relationship with many of the landowners due to their control work of Himalayan balsam, so were keen to take this further with a number of projects to tackle phosphates and nitrates along the waterbody.

Some projects were really small such as resurfacing gateways and drinking troughs which were being poached due to the impervious soil type. Their location close to ditches and drains that fed into the Wroxall Stream posed a risk of diffuse pollution from sediments and nitrogen.



Other projects were larger. Past investigations on one site found elevated levels of nitrate in water issuing from an old water drain that discharged into an existing ditch and flowed into the Wroxall stream. Here it was decided to intercept flow pathways to the stream by creating a new floodplain wetland with reed beds, wide ditches, ponds and wet grassland to absorb and help uptake excess nutrients from both surface and sub-surface drains. This looks drastic now but will be fantastic in a month or so.

Most of the work was carried out by two local contractors, but Natural Enterprise's **River Club** volunteers provided sterling assistance in very challenging conditions. **Viv** and **Nina** are smiling!

With help from drone footage from **Mike Collins** further opportunities have been identified and these are currently being recorded in a strategic report. Funding for all this came from the **Environment Agency's Water Environment Improvement Fund**.



AND MOVING AROUND EAST WIGHT...

WETLAND RESTORATION WANDERINGS...

As well as working on the Eastern Yar river, **Emma Hunt** and her team at the **Wildlife Trust** have also been busy at Bohemia Bog and Wroxall Stream at the Donkey Sanctuary.

At the **Donkey Sanctuary** they were able to provide fencing to enable the meadows there to be grazed by cattle to try to improve botanical diversity in the grassland around the river too. They are providing ongoing advice on how to manage the “riverside walk” area to promote a herb rich grassland to benefit invertebrates and birds in addition to the water vole and ongoing management to control scrub regrowth in the cleared areas.



Bohemia Bog is one of the most important botanical sites of the Island. It is a transition mire of little over 0.1ha and is believed to be the only site on the Island where Pale Butterwort is found and the carnivorous Sundew is also present. In recent years this unique habitat has been disappearing under bramble and gorse. However, now thanks to their intervention the scrub is being removed to enable the sympathetic management of the site for its wildlife value.

AND THE ANNUAL BALSAM BASH!

Natural Enterprise have continued their efforts to control this pesky plant and also Japanese Knotweed. Japanese knotweed is found sporadically upstream of, and around the village of Wroxall. It is an issue because it causes structural damage. This is worrying as it is occurring close to bridges.



Himalayan Balsam is an issue because it is an annual that forms dense stands on Wroxall Stream and the Eastern Yar. It shades out native plants and is also allelopathic (poisonous to other plants and fungi). Therefore when it dies in autumn the river banks are left bare with no roots to bind and prevent soil erosion, transport of silt and flooding. Additionally dense stands of Himalayan Balsam are found to be detrimental to water-voles.

Nicola Wheeler and her trusty team of **River Club** volunteers spent 2101 hours pulling and scything Himalayan Balsam in 2019 with an additional approximately 1000 hours coming from contractors.

Wroxall Stream, south of Bathingbourne Lane, is pretty much under control and a further 6.5 ha of sites downstream have been added to the programme. However it is not completely clear. The Eastern Yar is more problematic.

These projects were also kindly funded by:



LUKELY BROOK

Current activities are being led by **Southern Water**. Plaish and Lukely Brook are incredibly important to the Island's water supply.

The **Lukely Brook** is a spring fed typical chalk stream rising from the chalk aquifer at the foot of the Bowcombe Valley and flowing north east through the suburbs of Carisbrooke and Newport to confluence with the River Medina.



The water meadows at **Plaish** have been designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) by the Isle of Wight Council. The citation refers to the meadows being 'a particularly good example of species rich marshy grassland'.

Southern Water are monitoring hydrology and species at Plaish to gain a thorough understanding of how they work. Isle of Wight Council are assisting in this work because of the area's archaeological importance.



To compensate for the low flow of Lukely Brook and its impact on fish, Southern Water have been planning four interventions to be built in 2020. These include rock ramps and weirs at Wellington Road bridge, a small rock weir upstream of this, and fish and eel passes at Carisbrooke Mill and Waterworks Ponds.

Our wonderful photographs are supplied by **Carole Walker** (top) and **Alan Rowe** (left). We are lucky to have several very talented local people who supply us with photographs.

RODGE BROOK

Thanks to **Carole and Jon Jewett**, we now have a page for one of the Island's lesser known water-courses. Jon has provided a series of photographs and Carole, a local historian has written a history to the area and stream that can be downloaded from this page;

<http://www.islanddrivers.org.uk/rodge-brook/>

If you want to write about or photograph your local watercourse we would love to hear from you



GET INVOLVED!

CHALLENGES & CHOICES The Environment Agency are seeking your views on the challenges our waters face and the choices and changes we all need to make to help tackle those challenges. By responding to this consultation you will be helping to shape the management of the water environment. The information gathered through this consultation will help us update the current river basin management plans, starting with the publication of draft plans in 2020.

<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/environment-and-business/challenges-and-choices/consultation/>

ISLAND RIVERS CATCHMENT PLAN This guides the work of Island Rivers and is reviewed annually. It features most of our main water-courses. Please feed comments to Natural Enterprise.

<http://www.islandrivers.org.uk/island-rivers/island-rivers-catchment-plan/>

VOLUNTEER FOR PRACTICAL WORK Details of opportunities can be found here:

<http://www.islandrivers.org.uk/love-your-river/get-involved/>

ISLE OF WIGHT INVASIVE NON-NATIVE SPECIES PLAN Details threats to the Island:

<http://www.islandrivers.org.uk/isle-of-wight-ias-action-plan-feb2020/>

VISIT OUR WEBSITE It's a massive source of information on the island Rivers, activities, issues etc

<http://www.islandrivers.org.uk>

FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK We post here regularly, and love to receive photographs to repost!

<https://www.facebook.com/islandrivers>



ISLAND RIVERS
PARTNERSHIP

is hosted by



natural enterprise
an economic and environmental partnership

The organisations helping to steer this project are the Environment Agency, Natural Enterprise, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Isle of Wight AONB, Isle of Wight Council, Southern Water, Natural England, CLA, NFU, Isle of Wight Estuaries Project and Arc Consulting.

FOR FURTHER DETAILS ON ANY ITEMS IN THIS NEWSLETTER

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And finally thank you to Sheila Colenutt for our super entry for the Brighstone Christmas Tree festival, we believe we had the only tree with water-voles!

