RIBBLE CATCHMENT CONSERVATION TRUST

Welcome to our 7th Newsletter

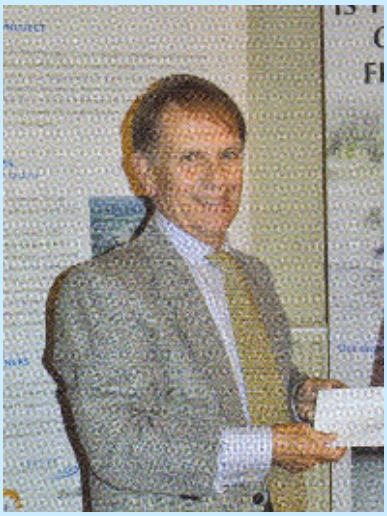
2010, our busiest year so far!

2010 has been the busiest year to date and this is reflected in an eight-page newsletter rather than our usual four pages! Writing this newsletter has really given us the chance to reflect on the work we've done; fish easements on seven weirs, four new habitat schemes, two fish passes constructed, two diffuse pollution farm visits, 263 electro fishing surveys, 35 invertebrate sites being monitored, seven schools in the Trout in the Classroom scheme and even an award! Details of many of the schemes can be found on our website as well as a wealth of information about our catchment and the wildlife you might get a chance to see.

2011 doesn't show any signs of easing up, however we relish the chances that we are being given to make significant improvements to the rivers and streams of the Ribble Catchment. A big thank you to all of our volunteers and supporters, and we hope to see you at our first Trust open day.

In this newsletter...

Chairman's Report *by Philip Lord*



This year has been hectic. We have spent over £400,000 on improving the rivers Ribble, Calder and Hodder. Padiham weir has gone; a project that was carried out in conjunction with the Environment Agency with the Trust providing £130,000 towards the cost.

Following on from this, your Trust removed Montford weir, constructed easements to Barrowford 1 and 2 weirs and has successfully installed a fish pass on Barrowford 3 weir. When Pendle Water was high in the first week of October, trout/ sea trout up to 5lbs were observed trying to jump the weir, let us hope that they will use the new fish pass. Removing the bottom two weirs on the Calder has exposed some wonderful gravel, as weirs not only stop fish migration but they also restrict gravel movement downstream.

The weir on Mearley Brook goes under the A59 in a culvert and was impassable to fish. It now has a series of small weirs and trout will have access to more spawning areas. West Bradford and Eel Beck weirs have been removed. Bashall Brook at Talbot Bridge now has a fish pass on it. Habitat improvement work has been carried out on the upper part of Easington Beck and we have also installed a solar powered drinking trough for cattle. This will be followed by tree planting in the near future. Tree planting has also been done on Boyces Brook. Stock Beck has been improved and 160 tonnes of gravel have been added. We now have evidence of salmon and sea trout spawning in the upper reaches of Stock Beck.

Barrow Brook has received habitat improvements which included Himalayan Balsam spraying to control this invasive species. We have also carried out a habitat improvement scheme at Quaker Bridge on the Calder which involved major bank repairs, and the planting of 4000 trees is to commence in the near future.

In addition to all this, Trout in the Classroom continued to expand, over 260 sites have been electro fished to survey juvenile fish populations and monthly invertebrate surveys have been carried out on 50 sites by volunteers. The Angling Passport scheme was launched and has made a good start. The Hodder, Ribble and Calder catchments have been surveyed for obstructions which resulted in over 100 being listed that stop fish migration to 51% of the whole of these 3 catchments. Not all of them can be made passable, but many can.

Funding for all of this work came from the Association of Rivers Trusts' DEFRA fund, the Environment Agency, Lancashire County Council, Forest of Bowland AONB, Lancashire Environmental Fund, Ribble Valley Borough Council, the National Lottery Awards for All, United Utilities and Hanson Cement.

Another great success of the year was achieved after 11 years' work by the Brennand and Whitendale focus group who have campaigned tirelessly to alter the water abstraction regime on the Dunsop catchment. Three trustees, Mike Horner, Philip Lord and Brian Wells have worked together consistently throughout this time, backed by other representatives from the Hodder catchment. The new minister has now signed his agreement to the scheme and work will start in 2011.

Trust work for 2011 and beyond will include easements in Chipping Brook, weir removal and fish pass work to the Calder, Brun and Thursden in the Burnley area, habitat work to Cam and Gayle Becks and further habitat to Stock Beck. Survey work including electro fishing and invertebrate surveys will continue as will Trout in the Classroom. The River Darwen will also be surveyed.

Within our project funding there is a certain amount of money to meet the Trust's costs, but the Trust still needs in the order of £50,000 per annum from other sources such as individual members, angling clubs, riparian owners, local companies and individual donations.

My thanks to our director Jack Spees, Stephen Hatton and our latest recruit Catherine Birtwistle for their efforts and determination to achieve so much this year. We could not have achieved all of this without the support of our members, volunteers and the staff of the Environment Agency working closely with us.

Philip Lord
Chairman

Electro Fishing Report

Electro fishing is a means by which to monitor fish populations over the entire catchment from year to year. The fish are caught, measured, counted and recorded before being returned to the stream. Often an intense and arduous task, the surveys are vital as fish populations are an indication of the health of our rivers. They also aid in measuring the improvements that our projects have made, highlighting the areas that still require work. New equipment was purchased using grant money from the National Lottery through the Big Lottery Fund as part of the Discovering Urban Rivers Scheme. The equipment was used for undertaking fish surveys with volunteers in urban areas.

Jack and volunteer Danny Barlow survey Brants Gill

This year, director Jack Spees and a team of willing volunteers surveyed a total number of 263 sites around the Ribble catchment which was 20 more than last year, an outstanding achievement given the conditions through the summer. A minimum of 200 sites are necessary to provide an overview of the catchment as a whole and so this year's efforts should have produced some reliable and informative results. Aside from the salmon and trout that are routinely counted, a variety of other species were caught and noted. These included eel, chub, dace, brook lamprey, gudgeon, stoneloach, minnow, bullhead, stickleback and even a juvenile pike.

Overall, salmon populations have shown a slight increase across the catchment whereas a notable decrease in trout numbers has been observed. This may be attributable to the delayed start to the spring in 2010 resulting in a reduced abundance of food and/or the drought that followed the winter causing increased losses of fry.

- On the Calder the trout populations have shown only a slight reduction. This was observed in locations where floods that were recorded in November 2009 may have damaged redds.
- On the Ribble the salmon population has shown a slight increase and despite the reduced numbers of trout since the previous year, the trout population as a whole remains positive.
- The Hodder salmon and trout populations have fallen slightly, mirroring trends that have been observed on the Calder and Ribble.

Measuring a trout

Pike

Hard Efforts Rewarded

Chairman Philip Lord and director Jack Spees attended the Association of Rivers Trusts' seminar on the 12th October. At the awards dinner Jack deservedly received the 2010 award for his 'Contribution to Fisheries and the Environment', sponsored by the Salmon and Trout Association. He received a specially commissioned Lindean Mill vase and a cheque for £1000 made out to RCCT. This is a well deserved reward for Jack's work since he joined the Trust.

Jack receives his award

Environment Agency Hotline

0800 807060

If you see any pollution problems please report them to the Environment Agency

The Calder Story

Introduction

The River Calder presents a major problem to migrating fish. A series of weirs prevent them from gaining access to the headwaters of the catchment and their preferred spawning ground. Too high for fish to jump, the weirs were historically constructed for industrial purposes and are now largely redundant. The Trust's ongoing mission is to allow fish to migrate from the sea, all the way to the top of the highest tributaries and back again. Below are the improvements that have been undertaken this year.

Padiham Weir

This was the first obstruction to contend with. The Environment Agency played a huge part in making it passable, taking on all of the physical works. The height of the weir was reduced by half and a huge amount of rock was placed into the river below the weir to create a 'rock ramp' style fish easement. This lifted the level of the water, allowing fish of all species and ages to pass the weir in all flow conditions.

Padiham Weir before

Padiham Weir after

Montford Weir

Upstream from Padiham, Montford weir was the second obstruction. From here on the Trust undertook all of the work. The weir was reduced in height by removing some of its stone blocks so that it was sufficiently low for fish to swim past. Its removal also exposed some fantastic gravel habitat.

Montford weir before

Montford weir after

Barrowford Weirs 1 and 2

Modifications to the lowermost weir (weir 1) involved simple chipping away of the concrete in the centre of the weir to reduce it in height and make it passable to fish. The next weir upstream (weir 2) required a bit more work. A stone barrage was installed downstream followed by a low concrete weir further up. These two secondary weirs created a series of low steps up to the existing weir that could be easily passed by fish.

Barrowford 2 before

Barrowford 2 after

Barrowford Weir 3

The last piece of the puzzle and the Trust's first technical fish pass installation. A hole was cut into the weir on the left bank and a pre-fabricated fish pass was inserted and built into place. The fish pass was finished off in stone cladding for aesthetic purposes and a viewing platform is proposed for the near future.

Barrowford 3 with fish pass

This work will not only increase fish populations, but also the wildlife that feeds on them such as dippers, kingfishers and otters. Despite this, there is still more to be done in the coming years to really lift the ecological status of the Calder system.

Stock Beck Habitat Scheme

The source of Stock Beck is located close to the town of Barnoldswick and flows directly into the River Ribble near Gisburn. In the past the beck has been subjected to dredging which has left behind an unnatural channel with a distinct lack of substrate.

Back in 2007, the Trust undertook some work to improve the flow of water by constructing stone headlands within the channel. Following an informative visit from the Wild Trout Trust, work has now been completed to improve the spawning grounds for salmon and trout by creating a series of pools and riffles.

Gravel bed to encourage fish spawning

The work involved the installation of natural woody debris at intervals along the channel, followed by the addition of 160 tonnes of gravel sourced from Waddington Fell Quarry to the stream bed.

This creation of gravel beds over a 1200m stretch of Stock Beck will greatly improve the numbers of fish cutting their redds in the stream and lead to an increase in fish populations in the Ribble.

Fencing to prevent stock access

Easington Habitat Scheme

Easington Beck before

Sometimes just simple fencing of a bank can make a vast improvement to the ecological status of a stream. With a grant from the Lancashire Environmental Fund, 1500m of fencing was erected at Easington Beck near Newton in order to prevent sheep and cattle from gaining access to the stream.

Farm animals can seriously damage the health of a stream because not only can they trample fish eggs, they also destabilise the banks and cause an excess of sediment to enter the water. This can be extremely detrimental to aquatic life. With the banks fenced off it allows the stream habitat to exist undisturbed.

Of course we had to make sure that the stock would still have access to drinking water and so we installed a solar powered drinking trough. As this newsletter goes to print we will most likely be out there planting some of the 3000 native trees that will create fantastic habitat for river dwelling wildlife and a lot more!

Easington Beck after

Invertebrate Sampling

Invertebrate sampling is an important tool that the Trust uses to monitor the health of the catchment's tributaries. Each volunteer is trained to identify eight different families of invertebrates that are found in the rivers, as well as being taught how to carry out monthly kick-samples in order to count their numbers within a particular site. A rise or fall in invertebrate populations from month to month highlights whether the health of a volunteer's designated site is improving or deteriorating. These vital surveys help to identify potential sources of pollution so that any issues can be quickly dealt with.

Volunteers learn to conduct kick samples on the Ribble

True Mayfly (Ephemeridae)

This year, two highly enjoyable and extremely popular invertebrate workshops were held during the month of June which were partly funded by the National Lottery through the Big Lottery Fund and partly by the Environment Agency as part of the Ribble Trust's Discovering Urban Rivers Scheme. Each workshop was hosted by an expert tutor from the Riverfly Partnership. Some fantastic weather made for two superb days by the river and 23 new volunteers were trained to carry out these important surveys, bringing our current total to 64 catchment monitors.

Cased Caddisfly (Trichoptera)

Invertebrate Samplers' Social Evening

To show our appreciation to our volunteers and to give them some feedback on what their results have shown so far, a social event was held at Gazegill Organic Farm in Rimington one evening in November. Following a buffet dinner, the volunteers enjoyed a presentation delivered by Jack Spees and trustee Mike Horner.

Volunteers receive feedback on their efforts

Mike discussed some of the intriguing trends and seasonal patterns that some of the sites were showing and it was interesting to see how well the data that was collected in 2010 highlighted both the positive and negative sites around the catchment. Afterwards the farm opened its shop briefly to allow volunteers to peruse the selection of organic meats. On the evening it was also suggested that a website should eventually be created where volunteers can log their data on a monthly basis and see their results and those of others in a clear and simple way. More workshops will be held next year, get in touch if you would like to volunteer.

Trout in the Classroom

The Trout in the Classroom scheme was a huge success this year with a total of seven primary schools around the Ribble catchment rearing fish eggs in their school tanks. Once the eggs had hatched and the fry were large enough, the children were taken to a nearby stream to see their carefully reared trout released into the wild. Hands-on learning still remains the best way to educate children about their local river habitats.

Watched eagerly by children from Whalley Primary, Stephen Hatton releases the fry

Pinpoint Farm Plans

Pinpoint is a new initiative set up by the Association of Rivers Trusts and Catchment Sensitive Farming. The aim of Pinpoint is for Rivers Trusts to meet farmers and undertake farm visits to pick out opportunities for farmers to save or even make money whilst improving the environment by reducing diffuse pollution.

Earlier this year Jack undertook a training course in Cornwall and subsequently made two farm visits in Whalley and Hurst Green. Both visits resulted in opportunities that would save the farmers money and protect the environment.

Jack hands his plan to the farmer at Brookhouse Farm

An 'easy fix' that can really improve the health of a stream

Examples include fixing broken gutters so that rain water is kept separate from slurry pits and thus reducing the amount of slurry spreading the farmer has to do. This means that the farmer has to apply less slurry less regularly reducing any risk of excess nutrients leaching into rivers. Another example was the capture of rain water to provide wash down facilities for the farmer, saving on his water bill.

The Trust doesn't just find opportunities, it works out the cost and saving accurately and then searches for potential funding sources to help, where appropriate. It is a simple straight forward scheme that we hope more farmers will show an interest in, resulting in cleaner rivers and a better environment.

Angling Passport Scheme

The Angling Passport Scheme is a national project involving Rivers Trusts from all over the country. Certain rivers and tributaries that have undergone habitat work have been specifically chosen to bring affordable fishing to everybody. Tokens can be purchased from as little as £2.50 from the Ribble Trust and come complete with an information booklet which details the sites' locations, as well as offering tips and advice.

Angling Passport site on Stock Beck

straight back into continuing improvements on tributaries such as these. Set in stunning scenery, Lancashire's rivers offer the chance to catch trout, grayling, chub and dace amongst others, and next year we hope to add more sites to the list. The next season starts on 1st May 2011 and you can buy tickets either online or by sending a cheque to the Trust's address.

Trout caught at one of the sites

The tokens can also be used on other Rivers Trusts' catchments making the scheme excellent value for money. Not only this, the project helps to educate farmers and landowners about just how valuable an asset a healthy stream can be. Any profits are split between the Trust and the landowners, which is money that goes

Tokens available from RCCT

PROJECTS FOR 2011

Following the tremendous success of all of our projects this year we look forward to an auspicious start to 2011. In addition to more proposed habitat work and weir removal around the catchment, the Trust plan to target the Calder even further with enhancement works in the urban area of Burnley as well as tackling the upland drainage issues at Gayle and Cam Beck. This is in addition to the increasingly popular Trout in the Classroom scheme, another round of electro fishing surveys, more Pinpoint farm plans and the training of a new group of willing invertebrate samplers.

Major works will be required at the River Brun and Calder confluence in Burnley

The culverted concrete channels through Burnley provide little or no habitat for fish and other wildlife

SUPPORTING THE TRUST

The Trust would like to thank all of its volunteers, members and contributors for their enthusiasm and continued involvement in helping the Trust achieve its objectives.

Volunteers at an invertebrate sampling workshop

Planting trees at Easington Brook

If you would like to help the Trust please contact us at:
Ribble Catchment Conservation Trust, c/o Hanson Cement, Ribblesdale Works, Clitheroe, Lancashire, BB7 4QF
Tel 01200 444452, email admin@ribbletrust.com

For more information on our work, how to volunteer or become a member of the Trust please visit our website: www.ribbletrust.org.uk