



## Notice of 42nd Annual General Meeting

**Tuesday 23 October 2018, 7.30pm**

**St Michael's Parish Centre, St Albans AL3 4SL**

Free parking in the Museum car park after 6.30pm.

Nominations for Chairman and Committee are invited.

These should reach the Secretary, John Fisher,  
by Friday 19th October.

Proposers and seconders will be required.

All the present committee are willing to stand for a further year.

After refreshments the speakers will be  
**Rob Rees and Liam Dennis of the  
Environment Agency**

### Revitalising the Ver

The main focus will be on the Ver restoration proposals centred on Verulamium and upstream/downstream of the Park. This will include reference to the context within which this work is planned – the Water Framework Directive and River Basin Management Plans.



### SAVE THE DATES

#### Next Open Meetings:

**Tuesday 26th February 2019**  
Redbourn Village Hall, AL3 7LW.  
John Tyler – Wetland Wildlife

**Tuesday 4th June 2019**  
St Stephen Parish Centre,  
Bricket Wood. Speaker tbc

**Tuesday 22nd October 2019**  
St Michaels Parish Centre, St Albans.  
AGM – speaker tbc

*Please note: All meetings are free entrance to members and non-members. Please check our website or social media a few days prior to the meeting in case of any late changes. Although our meetings are free entry to members and non-members, we welcome donations towards the cost of refreshments, hall hire etc. Suggested £2 per person.*

### LATEST NEWS

by **SUE FREARSON**

## Opening of The Alban Way

The Alban Way, a traffic free smooth 6.5 mile link between Cottonmill Lane St Albans and Wrestlers Bridge in Hatfield was opened on the 6th September 2018. It is part of the Sustrans National Cycle Network, running along the former St Albans branch line of the Great Northern

Railway, with several information signs describing points of interest such as the river Ver, the Watercress beds and Smallford Station. Leaflets will be available, containing excellent maps, at the VVS AGM 23rd October.

# New Brooms

You may notice our Newsletter has a new look. John Trew who has helped us set it up for many years has stepped down and we are very grateful for all his help. He has been given a small gift in appreciation of all his help. The layout of this Newsletter has been designed by John Pritchard's colleague Annie Rushton; we hope you like it. Our new website is under construction and I hope to have further news of that at the AGM.

## Stepping down

After five years I am stepping down as Chairman at the AGM in October, having agreed to 'hold the fort' for one year when Andy Webb stepped down in 2013. It has been a very interesting and largely enjoyable 5 years and I have been so grateful for all the help and support I've received from our very hard-working, knowledgeable and devoted Committee. I am delighted to be able to nominate one of the existing Committee to take over as my successor but we would be happy to receive nominations from any other VVS members.

## New faces

The Living Rivers Officer at HMWT, David Johnson, has been replaced by Sarah Perry with whom Sue Frearson and I had a very useful meeting in August and we look forward to working with her. Our good friend Isabel Crozier of CMS, who was instrumental in setting up our very popular series of walks, has moved to pastures new with our good wishes but remains interested in the Society. She is replaced by Miriam Linforth who has already been helping us in various ways along the river. Tom White of Groundwork who is our new contact with ColneCAN

came out with several committee members to see parts of our river in July and he is hoping to help us with some possible projects and aid access to suitable funding.

The very dry and hot summer has been challenging for our little chalk stream although some rain in April and May did help it to in the keep flowing to some extent in the lower reaches (facts and figures in my Bailiffs report). Sadly in Verulamium Park the heat and lack of water in the lakes saw the return of suspected avian botulism and many dead water fowl. However there are radical plans in place to improve the river through St Albans and in the Park, which I have every hope may actually happen before too long.

## More water, less abstraction

Sarah Hendry, Director of Floods & Water at DEFRA and her team came to visit in June and also in August, Rachel Fletcher, Chief Executive of OFWAT and her colleagues came to inspect the condition of our local chalk streams in August. Hopefully these important people were persuaded of the importance of using all their influence, working with the water companies to reduce abstraction and water use wherever possible. It does seem that the suggestion of a reservoir being built at Abingdon will be taken forward which would be good news for the future.

There have been quite a few challenges for the Ver during my time as Chairman, partly due to climate change, house building programmes and continued abstraction from the aquifer but we have seen Bow Bridge pumping station turned off and some more abstraction reductions are in the pipe-line (sic)! I wish my successor as Chairman all the very best for the next few years and am willing to continue on the Committee, possibly as Bailiffs' coordinator for another year or so if required.

## HAVE YOUR SAY

BY MARTIN FREARSON

# Draft Local Plan 2020-2036

As we went to print St Albans City & District published its local plan draft for public consultation, which is open until Wednesday 17 October. You can go to [www.stalbans.gov.uk/localplan2018](http://www.stalbans.gov.uk/localplan2018) to comment online or email [LP2018@stalbands.gov.uk](mailto:LP2018@stalbands.gov.uk). The postal address is Civic Centre St Albans AL1 3JE. This is a very different shorter document from its predecessor – it had to be – with detailed planning policies for housing locations, design and layouts but worryingly little about environmental protection and minimising the use of water by new dwellings. The target for housing has doubled from 460 to 900 per annum, but the Lawes Trust proposal for some 900 homes in the Ver valley near Redbourn is not included. To see the draft go to [www.stalbans.gov.uk](http://www.stalbans.gov.uk), then 'Have Your Say'. From past experience comments received after the deadline will be considered, so do please take a look. You may well find policies affecting your local neighbourhood of concern!





# Pond invertebrates increase

Despite this summer's heat wave and the low flows in the river, the Riverfly Surveys are showing a healthy river. An interesting observation made by several of our monitors is that with the slower flow, drop in depth and increase in vegetation along the river margins, more pond invertebrates, such as water beetles, water boatmen and damselfly nymphs have been sampled, as well as an increase in numbers of American Crayfish, Bullheads and Minnows. There have also been two sightings of Brown Trout.

We welcome four new volunteers to our Riverfly team. Robert May, who has taken over from Ernie Leahy at Shafford, is also reporting on the state of the river at Luton Lane and the Chequers (no flow!) on a monthly basis. Edward Haworth (an angler) is monitoring at the bottom of Bluehouse Hill, from Prae Close and has already sent in three sets of data. Josh Kalms (many of you will know him as an active volunteer with the Action Group) has taken over from Tom Kent at Moor Mill. Josh also works for the HMWT. John Lepley, who discovered and reported Giant Hogweed growing opposite his garden will monitor along the Mill leat in Park Street. Training will be offered in



October or November, and we are waiting for confirmation of the dates.

A big thank you to our eleven monitors, sending in results from eighteen stations every month, which I then check to make sure that they are not dropping below their trigger point, when the EA would investigate for poor water quality or contamination.

If you would be interested in joining the team, please contact me so that I can arrange training – [sdfrearson@virginmedia.com](mailto:sdfrearson@virginmedia.com)

Photo: Damselfly & dragonfly nymphs (Paul Foster)

SOCIAL MEDIA

by JOHN PRITCHARD

# Support on the up

The number of our regular followers across Facebook and twitter continues to climb beyond 550. Regular posts on the state of the Ver, nature notes and walking in the Ver Valley have been well-received over the summer.

Two of the most popular posts reached well over 10,000 people in total. The dry Kingsbury Mill stream irked the citizens of St Albans and the state of the top 11kms of the river from Kensworth to Redbourn incensed chalk stream lovers around the country.

You don't have to have a Facebook or twitter account to look in and see what the VVS is posting. Search for **@VerValleySoc** and stay right up to date.



MEMBERSHIP

by JOHN PRITCHARD

A warm welcome to our latest group of new members including Andy Wells, Edmund Jankowski, Stewart Loftus and Ed Haworth. We look forward to seeing you over the coming year at our events, working on the Action Group sessions or walking by the Ver.

## Now's the time to renew

September is the beginning of the Society's new year, so many thanks to all those who have renewed their subscription. Gentle reminders have been sent via email or letter to those who may just have forgotten!

# From the bailiffs' reports

Sadly one or two pollution incidents and fly-tipping incidents as well as the recurrence of problems at Redbournbury east ford have had to be reported to the relevant authorities to deal with and we have chased them up if necessary.

Vegetation growth has been prolific; some in the river channel has made flow measurements almost impossible even if there was a trickle of water. Some other unwelcome plants have been noted; nettles, Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed being the worst but there are lots of nice ones too, like purple loosestrife, hemp agrimony, water forget-me-not, scabious, self-heal, marsh, hairy and greater willow herb, pignut, and woody nightshade. Many trees coped with heat by dropping leaves and many berries like blackberries, sloes and elderberries have been early and prolific.

## Wildlife

Butterflies and dragonflies have been having a good year this summer. Some nice sightings have included purple hairstreaks, a small coppers, gate keepers, commas, ringlets, lots of speckled woods as well as the more

usual peacocks, orange tips, and red admirals. Dragon and damsel flies that have been seen include the lovely banded demoiselles, blue damsels, broad bodied chasers and darters both common and red-veined.

Less common bird sightings have included a hobby, nuthatch, spotted flycatcher, tree creepers, a group of yellow wagtails as well as the more usual grey wagtails, kingfishers, blackcaps, chiffchaffs, jackdaws, lapwings, flocks of goldfinches and yellowhammers, ring-necked parakeets, buzzards and red kites. Large flocks of swallows and house martins have been gathering ready for migration but swifts seem to have been few in number and have already gone.

Animals reported have been muntjac, fox, pipistrelle bats, and signs of badgers as well as the usual squirrels and rabbits. Fish seen have been sticklebacks, perch, roach, minnows and brown trout. Bullheads are often picked up by the river-fly monitors.

## Invitation:

As usual the Committee invites all Bailiffs to join the Action Group for pre-Christmas drinks after the working party at the Chequers, Redbourn on 15th December at noon.

Photos: Banded Demoiselle, Elderberry, Purple Loosestrife (Jane Gardiner)



## LIST OF BAILIFFS

I have been asked who are on our Bailiff team and where are their stretches, so that members can look out for them or perhaps alert them to any issues they notice. This is the list of their names and river beats. Please contact me as Bailiff Co-Ordinator if no contact details are given.

|  |                               |                              |
|--|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. R Colne to Moor Mill  | Sue and Martin Frearson*      | sue.frearson@virginmedia.com |
| 2. Moor Mill to Burydell Lane  | Dick Downs*                   | d.downs2@toilets.org.uk      |
| 3. Burydell Lane to New Barnes Mill                                      | Bruce Banfield-Taylor*        |                              |
| 4. New Barnes Mill to Sopwell Mill                                       | Giles Harrison                | gpharrison13@gmail.com       |
| 5. Sopwell Mill to Holywell Hill   | Catherine and Derrick Davies* |                              |
| 6. Holywell Hill to Bluehouse Hill                                       | Vivien Gates                  |                              |
| 7. Bluehouse Hill to Bow Bridge  | Roger Hall                    |                              |
| 8. Bow Bridge to Redbournbury  | John Pritchard                | members@riverver.co.uk       |
| 9. Redbournbury to Dolittle  | Jane Gardiner                 | janegardiner@madasafish.com  |
| 10. Dolittle to Redbourn Bypass  | Ernie Leahy                   |                              |
| 11. Chequers to Porridge Pot<br>(and Redbourn golf course to Luton Lane) | John Fisher                   | secretary@riverver.co.uk     |
| 12. Flamstead to Markyate<br>(and Kensworth Lynch occasionally)          | VACANCY                       |                              |

\* indicates those who are also river-fly monitors.



# The long, hot summer

Despite reasonable rain in April and May which did help the aquifer, the very hot and dry weather in June, July and early August were very challenging for the river (some of the driest on record). There has been no flow in Redbourn for more than 2 years and even where flows could be measured they have been exceptionally low. The figures in the table below and in the graphs paint the dismal picture.

Photos: Chequers Lane at Redbournbury, Trout at Holywell Hill (John Pritchard)



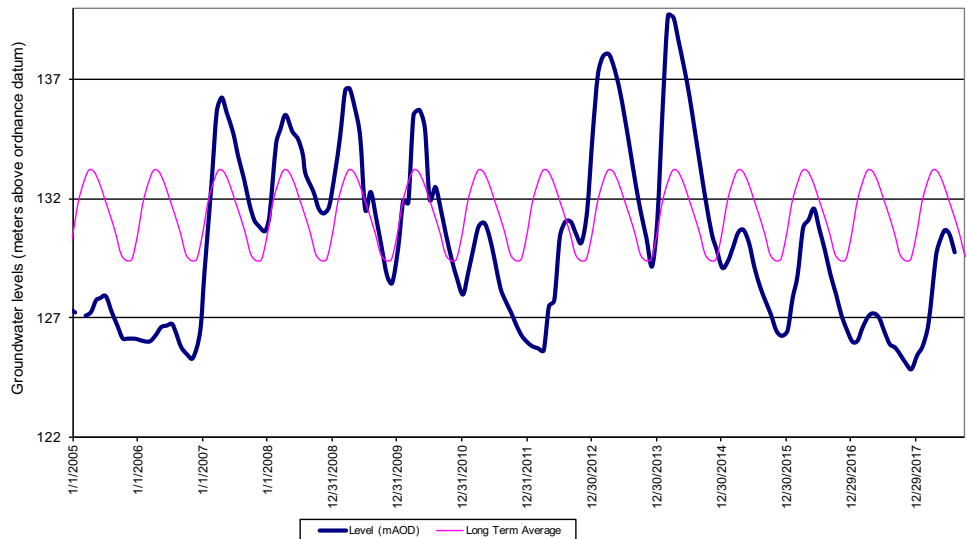
**Groundwater level at Ballingdon Farm in metres**  
[Long-term average]  
(figures from EA)

**Rainfall in millimetres**  
[± average]  
(figures from Rothamstead)

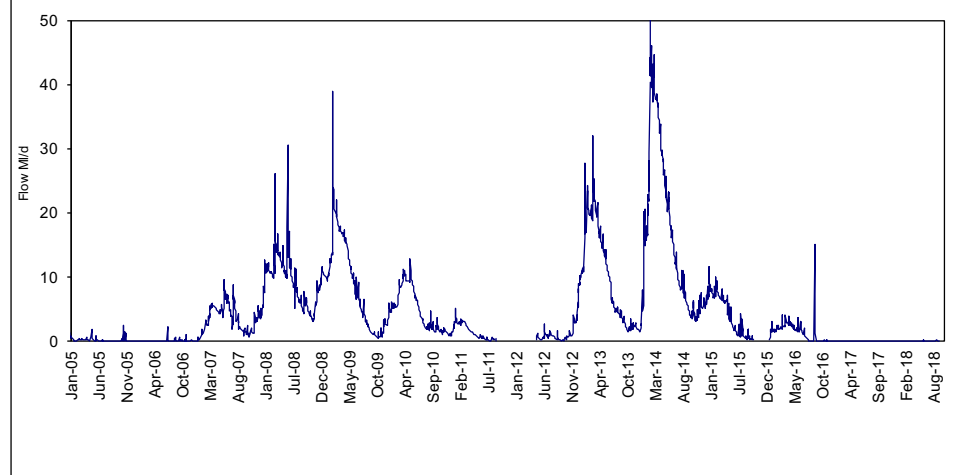
**Months 2018**

|                  |                  |                   |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <b>April</b>     | 128.63 [133.6]   | 74.8 [+19.77]     |
| <b>May</b>       | 130.05 [134.1]   | 61.9 [+7.24]      |
| <b>June</b>      | 130.69 [133.32]  | 3.7 [-49.61]      |
| <b>July</b>      | 130.52 [133 .23] | 15.1 [-34.82]     |
| <b>August</b>    | 129.77 [132.56]  | 64.0 [+0.27]      |
| <b>September</b> | 128.66 [130.87]  | Not yet available |

**Groundwater levels - Ballingdon Farm 2005 - To Date**  
Grid Ref: TL 0385 1404



**Flow in the River Ver at Redbourn**  
January 2005 to Date



# Barn owls

It has not been a good year for the Ver Valley barn owls, with just one pair raising two juveniles but I was able to see these after they had fledged and were wing flapping on the platform of the box. One of them actually flew somewhat clumsily from the box to take prey from an adult in a nearby tree and I am sure the second youngster would have flown within a few days. Another box had 5 eggs but when I visited in early September they had been abandoned. Most of the eggs had been trampled and smashed but the unbroken one I brought home and carefully broke its shell to reveal an embryo. The beak and feet were clearly formed and I should think it was only a week or so from hatching. (I do have a BTO license to inspect the boxes and remove old eggs) It seems that voles have been scarce this summer and there simply has not been enough food to raise broods. Next year will hopefully be better as usually a good year follows a bad one.



## Bird boxes

Most of the 100 or so small bird boxes along the valley are now 10 years old and I have been cleaning them out recently ready for next spring. By removing the old nesting material the parasites get ejected. Most of the boxes get used each year mainly by blue and great tits and I am really pleased that the boxes are still in good

condition. These boxes were made by my colleagues at Watford RSPB using marine ply and are far superior to the ones you get in a garden centre. If you would like one or two boxes like these for your garden please contact me. They are £10 and as they are made by RSPB volunteers most of the cash goes towards RSPB's conservation work.

## Brilliant yellow plumage

The yellow wagtails which visit us each summer were scarce this year until late summer, when a flock of over 30 birds got attached to Hudgels' cattle around Redbournbury Farm. They follow the cattle whose hooves stir up the insects in the grass. The wagtails feed up on these prior to their long migration to their winter quarters. Most of these were pale yellow juveniles from this year's broods but there were at least four adult males with their brilliant yellow plumage. Also in late summer spotted flycatchers were seen near Shafford. Hopefully they bred locally for the first time for a few years. Kingfishers were being seen regularly near Rebournbury and hobbies were spotted a few times.

My best experience locally this summer was to witness the huge flock of swallows which gathered at dusk to roost in the Ver Valley reed beds. Not quite as spectacular as a starling murmuration with 100's rather 1000's of birds. I reckon there were more than 500 flying high in the sky before they dropped into the reeds in small groups of 50 or so.

Although we have had this long hot and dry summer the hedges are full of berries – red on the hawthorn, blue sloes on the blackthorn, as well as the orange hips. All good food for birds like redwings and fieldfares this winter and maybe even waxwings if berries are short in mainland Europe.

If you have any interesting bird sightings I would be pleased to hear from you on 01582 792843 or email [john.fisher@btclick.com](mailto:john.fisher@btclick.com).

Photos: Barn Owls & Yellow Wagtail (John Fisher)





# Campaigning for our river

Over the summer we have been continuing our work to press for more water in the River Ver. It's a time when water is in the news and very much a hot topic in Westminster and Whitehall. We are at the point in the 5 year cycle where all the water companies submit their Water Resources Management Plans (WRMPs) in outline for the next 25 years and in detail for the next 5 years (2020-25). They present their Business Plans to the secretary of State for the Environment and recommend a consumer pricing structure too. The Government itself is working on the detail of its '25 Year Plan To Improve The Environment' where the promise is "...ours can become the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it...".

## No flow, low flow

We've been doing our best to demonstrate to those involved in the process that the Ver and its chalk stream neighbours are in a precarious state and need help to become more resilient. Official reports list the Ver's flow this year as simply 'below average' and the valley's water resources as 'near normal'. This seems somewhat at odds with the situation on the ground when the river starts south of Redbourn (Sept 2018), 11km from Kensworth Lynch the source of the Ver, and many stretches have insufficient flow or velocity to expose a clean gravel bed.

## Defra and Ofwat visit the Ver

Thanks to Feargal Sharkey, Chairman of Amwell Magna Fishery, who has been stepping up efforts to improve our South East rivers, in June we were able to demonstrate how badly the Ver was faring to Sarah Hendry, Director for Floods and Water, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and some of her Defra colleagues. In August, Rachel Fletcher, Chief Executive

of Ofwat and several of her team visited the Ver on a tour of Hertfordshire's chalk streams. Again we were able to explain the predicament of the Ver.

These field visits underline the need for strategic planning and infrastructure investment which could take some of the pressure off groundwater supply. Affinity Water in particular is heavily tied to groundwater sources – hence our support for the construction of Abingdon Reservoir. What's more, the visits should help to get a better deal for our river when the balancing act between well-priced water for public consumption versus sufficient water for the thriving river environment is concluded in this planning round.

## Thank you to our members

We are grateful for the support of so many members who wrote to Michael Gove, Secretary of State for the Environment to express their views on Affinity's WRMP. The Plan was given a rough ride by The Environment Agency (EA) and Ofwat among others and continues to be revised.

We'll keep our members updated as the planning round concludes and continue to work on other projects including the EA led Working Together consultation, which begins the process to shape the next River Basin Management Plan 2021 – 2027.



Photos: Ver Gauging Station at Redbourn, River Beane, Chequer Lane Redbourn, (Paul Jennings, River Chess Association)



# Ver Valley Action Group Report

May 2018 – Frogmore Pits. We returned to the valley below the permissive footpath and continued the task of cutting back the willow and reducing the trees growing in the river. The weather was kind and we made significant progress but there is still more work to do.

**Balsam Bashing.** In June we met in Park Street and one party worked in the river clearing the river banks from Burydell Lane to the Railway Bridge including the Mill Leat. There was definitely less balsam present on this stretch of the river than last year but this may have been due to the late spring.

The second group worked on the bank down from Sycamore Drive into Frogmore Pits. The evidence of the extent of the balsam was clear for all the walkers to see

with piles of pulled balsam alongside the pathway. The CMS volunteers followed on and cleared the river to the ford on one of their Wednesday sessions.

In July we had a party working at Moor Mill where the river loops through the wood where there was a lot of balsam. We also had a group who worked the bottom of Riverside way towards the confluence. Whilst we cleared significant areas there was still some Balsam left when we ran out of time.

At the end of the morning we all met up at Moor Mill and enjoyed a drink together for a job well done.

August 2018. Back to Frogmore to re-open the Permissive Path which was overgrown and only passable by the most determined walkers. However, by end of the morning the team had cleared the pathway and it is passable by dog walkers.



What path?



Uncovering the path



There is a way!

## AUTUMN PROGRAMME 2018

**Saturday 15th September 2018,  
10.00-12.00**

Frogmore Lakes where we continued working along the valley clearing fallen and ingrowing trees.

**Saturday 20th October 2018,  
10.00-12.00**

Sopwell Nunnery Green where we will be opening up a viewpoint and improving the access along the riverside pathway.

**Saturday 10th November 2018,  
10.00-12.00 – to be confirmed**

New Barnes Mill – to control the willow growing in the river and on the island between the mill leat and the river.

## YOUR COMMITTEE

### Chairman, Bailiff Co-ordinator

Jane Gardiner  
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janegardiner@madasafish.com

### Riverfly Co-ordinator

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### Secretary

John Fisher  
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(01582) 792843  
secretary@riverver.co.uk

**President:** Peter Fox, MBE

### Treasurer

Rachel Young  
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(01727) 868919 (evenings/weekends only)  
treasurer@riverver.co.uk

### Planning, Publicity Officer

Martin Frearson  
4 Allandale, St Albans, AL3 4NG  
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martin.frearson@which.net

### Website

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0750 0664 477  
paul.foster@paulfosterassociates.com

### Committee Member

John Cadisch  
(01727) 862843  
john.cadisch@ntlworld.com

### Vice-chairman & Membership Secretary

John Pritchard  
01727 835957 members@riverver.co.uk

### Action Group Co-ordinator

Richard Wallis  
01582 794332  
richard\_wallis@btconnect.com

### Newsletter Group

John Cadisch, John Fisher, Sue Frearson,  
Martin Frearson and Jane Gardiner

### HOTLINES

EA Incident Hotline: 0800 80 70 60  
("Report all environmental incidents")

EA Floodline: 0345 988 1188

Flytipping reports/St Alban's Council:  
01727 809019

email:  
wastemanagementservices@stalban.gov.uk

Water Leaks (Affinity): 0800 376 5325