



# Ver Valley Newsletter



*Published quarterly for members of the Ver Valley Society*

President: Peter Fox, MBE, 23 Fish Street, Redbourn, AL3 7LP

[www.riverver.co.uk](http://www.riverver.co.uk)

Number 116

January 2013

## **Chairman**

Andy Webb, 37 Alsop Close,  
London Colney, AL2 1BW  
Tel: (01727) 824043  
Email: [Not yet available]

## **Treasurer, Membership & Newsletter**

John Cadisch, 14 Prae Close,  
St Albans, AL3 4SF  
Tel: (01727) 862843  
Email: [john.cadisch@ntlworld.com](mailto:john.cadisch@ntlworld.com)

## **Deputy Chairman & Bailiff Co-ordinator**

Mrs Jane Gardiner, 18 Claudian Place,  
St Albans, AL3 4JE  
Tel: (01727) 866331  
Email: [janegardiner@madasafish.com](mailto:janegardiner@madasafish.com)

## **Secretary & Webmaster**

John Fisher, 92 High Street,  
Redbourn, AL3 7BD  
Tel: (01582) 792843  
Email: [john.fisher@btclick.com](mailto:john.fisher@btclick.com)

## **Ver Valley Action Group**

Sue Frearson  
Tel: (01727) 761878  
Email: [sue.frearson@which.net](mailto:sue.frearson@which.net)

## **Joint Webmaster**

Rachel Young  
Email: [silver@thejostlingcherubs.co.uk](mailto:silver@thejostlingcherubs.co.uk)

## **PR**

Helen McCrorie  
Tel: (01727) 760351  
Email: [pr@riverver.co.uk](mailto:pr@riverver.co.uk)

## **Committee member**

Ernie Leahy  
Tel: (01582) 793144  
Email: [ernest.leahy@ntlworld.com](mailto:ernest.leahy@ntlworld.com)

## **Newsletter Layout**

John Trew (Verulam Angling Club)

## **HOTLINES**

Water Leaks (Affinity): 0800 376 5325  
"Greener St Albans": 0845 125 8000  
EA "Incident Hotline": 0800 807060  
EA "Floodline": 0845 988 1188  
[floodline@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:floodline@environment-agency.gov.uk)

## **JANUARY OPEN MEETING**

Members and friends are warmly invited to our January meeting:

### **MONDAY 28<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2013**

at Redbourn Village Hall, east side of High Street, Redbourn, near "The Bull", timed for 7.30 pm (Some parking in front of the hall, otherwise in the High Street). This is a new venue necessary because the room at St Mary's church had become overcrowded.

Andy Webb and other officers will give their reports and answer questions. After refreshments, our guest speaker will be Jonathan Forgham, talking about "The Natural History of a Hertfordshire Village".

Jonathan has spent five years studying the whole natural history of Little Hadham, a small village in East Herts. He spends several hours each day covering the parish, some 18 sq. miles and containing 60 miles of footpaths. Within this time he is closing in on 100 bird species, 275 moth species as well as recording in excess of 100 plants.

[See also [littlehadhambirding.blogspot.com](http://littlehadhambirding.blogspot.com)]

## **VVS Subscriptions**

**John Cadisch**

This is the time of year when those whose membership subscriptions have expired come to my attention. I will be sending out customary reminders later this month.

Our subscription policy is coming under review, but in the meantime the rates are unchanged, i.e. £20 Five-year or £5 Annual.

Our membership brochure has been revised and reprinted - and will be at the January meeting. If anyone has new ideas as to where these can be placed, please let me (or any committee member) know - alternatively, I will rush a bundle of 25 to your door!

## **The importance of e-addresses**

**John Cadisch**

About a quarter of the membership have notified their e-address but we would like more. Although the newsletter comes out quarterly, sometimes important events such as meetings, talks or walks are notified between-times.

Please let me ([john.cadisch@ntlworld.com](mailto:john.cadisch@ntlworld.com)) have your e-address, it will then be added to our master file (maintained by Rachel Young) and used exclusively for sending out VVS information.

*River Ver Archive: St Albans Central Library (Local History Reference Section)  
Over 1,000 pages of information*

## Chairman's Notes

Andy Webb

As you know our new Walk leaflets were printed and published 18 months ago, along with completion of the necessary way-marking and infrastructure in the ground. As far as we can tell they have been well received.

Indeed, by the Autumn virtually all supplies of the 9 leaflets had gone. A further 1600 or each have been printed, paid for from within the original budget.

Two new River Ver Trail interpretation panels will be installed in the new year on SADC land, opposite the Duke of Marlborough PH, and on Sopwell Mill Open Space.

Footbridge River Ver identity signs were installed in December some of which have the name of the stretch of river being crossed. In the long term it is hoped that other 'River Ver' signs can be installed where main roads are crossed.

Isabel Crozier, coordinator of the project, has written a Final Report, for the Heritage Lottery Fund and any outstanding monies we currently hold will be taken at the beginning of the next financial year in April.

I must also commend to you another CMS volunteer, Alison Evans, who has coordinated any reports from Footpath Friends or problems since the walks launch in 2011. She has also personally amended or added additional way-marking when necessary, taking some of the burden from Isabel.

Thank you Alison for all you have done.

## 2013 Open Meetings

John Fisher

### **Monday 22 April at 7.30 pm**

St Stephens Parish Centre:

Speakers Christine Aitken "Childwickbury" and Sandy Norman "Sopwell" – Both have recently published books on these very different areas of the Ver Valley.

### **Thursday 25 July at 7.30 pm**

Markyate Village hall:

Speaker Charlie Bell – Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust - "Living Rivers". Charlie will have been in post for just over one year and will be telling us about her work with the rivers of Hertfordshire.

### **Tuesday 22 October at 7.30 pm**

St Michaels Parish Centre:

AGM followed by Rob Sage of Affinity Water – Rob Sage will be explaining the future policies of our local water supplier and how it will affect the River Ver.

### **Very Important**

All meetings are free entrance to members and non members - If you are coming to one of our meetings please check our newsletter or the web page a few days prior to the meeting in case of any late changes. If you require directions to any of the venues please contact a committee member. (see contacts page).

**LATE NEWS:** With the heavy rain just before Christmas we now have continuous flow through Redbourn Golf Club and Porridge Pot Meadow. Run-off from the M1 has filled the channel north of Verlam End and with the aquifer rising there should be real flow in a week or two.

## New Committee Member

We are pleased to welcome Helen McCrorie who moved into St Michael's early in 2012 and promptly joined the society. She has already started to bring her PR expertise to bear so as to raise the Society's profile - aiming to make people (and other environmental groups) much more aware of the VVS and what it does. Amongst other ideas, Helen is working to give the VVS a regular spot in the "Herts Advertiser". (Contact details, page 1.)

At this time of year the aquifer level is normally falling and after the warm, dry August and September this happened over the autumn. Although there was a slight rise of half a metre from September to October it was then below the long-term average and the level continued to fall in November. However with the over-average rainfall in the last two months, the December figure shows an increase of well over one metre in groundwater since November, so the aquifer figure is almost one metre above average (see table below). (There is usually a time lag of a couple of months before rainfall affect the aquifer as the water seeps through into the chalk aquifer.)



The Bailiffs are now measuring much improved flows; indeed briefly towards the end of November, Alison Evans, one of CMS Volunteers checking Walk 1 found flow at the 'source' below Kensworth Lynch (left) and in the culvert past Corner Farm (right). The head of the river in early



December is in north Redbourn and there is flow in both the River Red and in Hanstead Brook, the small tributary in Bricket Wood.

Month 2012	Groundwater level at Ballingdon Farm in metres [Long-term average] (figures from EA)	Rainfall in millimetres [± average] (figures from Chris Hall at Rothamstead)
September	131.04 [130.87]	40.4 [-17.27]
October	130.55 [130.93]	115.8 [+34.13]
November	130.18 [130.91]	100.4 [+23.79]
December	131.52 [130.56]	[Not yet available]

You will probably all remember how colourful the trees have been this autumn has been with hedges full of bright berries and lots of fungi appearing, possibly all due to the unusual weather this year.



Above: hips and sloes.

Now the winter visitors have arrived, sightings by our Bailiffs include flocks of fieldfares and some redwings, some of lapwings, skylarks and yellowhammers, huge flocks of golden plovers, a few egrets, siskins, bullfinches, grey wagtails, redpolls, the occasional green sandpiper and even two waxwings. Tufted duck, gadwall, teal and the more usual waterfowl have been reported.

Moles are obviously active with lots of molehills appearing,

squirrels and rabbits are still being seen regularly. Finally one of our very long-serving Bailiffs has decided that, for health reasons, he really has to step down. The Ver Valley Society thanks him sincerely for his efforts over the years and wish him well for the future. Luckily Vivienne Gates had offered to be a reserve



Right: Fly agaric



Autumn colours.

Bailiff and she is willing step in but if anyone else is prepared to take her place as a reserve please contact me. There have been quite a few changes to our bailiffing team this year so in the next Newsletter I hope to give the list of names and the stretches they cover. In the meantime many thanks to them all for the work they do for VVS.

Last winter very few waxwings were seen in the UK but this year they began to arrive for mainland Europe in October. In late November they arrived in Hertfordshire, with small groups being seen in Hemel Hempstead, Watford and over 50 feeding on berries in the middle of the Campus roundabout at Welwyn Garden City. One was seen at Shafford Cottages catching flies from a lofty perch.

Along the valley redwings and fieldfares have arrived and we saw over 100 of each in the field near Shafford one afternoon. I saw about 80 golden plover and 30 lapwings flying over the A5183 in early December but they did settle in their usual field opposite the Punch Bowl (KinK). I had a report of an amazing 2,000 golden plovers near Friars Wash one day in late November and I am sure we will get big numbers later this winter.

With the three late broods we ended up ringing 21 owlets this year from five breeding pairs - easily our best ever year. We have just put up another two nest boxes and we now have 12 Ver Valley Society boxes as well as four provided by others.

I would like to record our thanks to all the farmers and land owners for their enthusiastic cooperation which has enabled this project to be such a success. We would also like to thank Peter Wilkinson, who has advised us throughout the



*Waxwing - [Bob Harris]*



project and now ringed 56 Ver Valley owls,

A couple of notable sightings recently were a migrating osprey seen from a Redbourn garden and a marsh harrier over Shafford. Needless to say I missed both.

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).

## **VVS response to Affinity's public consultations**

**Sue Frearson**

Affinity is in the process of producing a Water Management Plan for 2013, which would be a statutory plan to enable Affinity to meet water demand within the Colne Catchment Area over the next 25 years. They have produced a number of consultative documents including [www.affinitywater.co.uk/haveyoursay](http://www.affinitywater.co.uk/haveyoursay) and held drop-in sessions, including one in St Albans on 12<sup>th</sup> December, attended by a number of our committee.

Our response to Affinity's consultation can be seen in full on our website [www.riverver.co.uk](http://www.riverver.co.uk) and has been sent to our local MP's, receiving support from Anne Main who agrees that Friar's Wash pumping station should not be turned back on. Further publicity came from an article in the Herts Advertiser.

In brief, the Consultation documents do not address the environmental concerns of the fundamental problem of insufficient water and over abstraction from the chalk aquifer, 18 % water loss per day through leakage and the potential irreversible damage to aquatic and non-aquatic ecosystems. Neither the Environmental Agency's target of 15% reduction in water abstraction nor the EU Environmental Directive for improving water quality by 2020 will be met by Affinity's proposals, made worse by a projected 15% increase in population by 2040.

In conclusion, Affinity will publish a formal Consultation document in the Spring, in which we hope they will have addressed our concerns.

Well done to the 13 volunteers who helped clear the millstream at New Barnes Mill, filling a skip provided by Bob Stephens with debris. We have had many complimentary comments about this work, which has opened up part of the Millstream. However, our bailiff Bruce Banfield-Taylor is keen for us to continue this good work later this season.

There was a very good turnout, including five of our water bailiffs, to clear the river behind the Chequers in Redbourn in December. The river is now flowing well, leaving Ernie Leahy the local bailiff with the hope that we will see kingfishers again on this stretch.

Our next task in January will be to complete the clearance of scrub started by the Countryside Management Service volunteers, on the steep chalk banks of Redbourn Lane (Harpenden Hill), Redbourn. This will allow light to reach the chalk land vegetation of this delicate habitat, returning it to its former glory.

### ***Programme Winter 2013***

- **Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> January:** 10.00-12.00  
**Redbourn Lane, (Harpenden Hill), Redbourn**
- **Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> March:** 10.00-12.00  
**New Barnes Mill, Cottonmill Lane, Sopwell:** Clearing the mill stream of overhanging scrub and silt.
- **Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> April :** 10.00-12.00  
**Chequers Inn, Redbourn:** Clearing overhead vegetation and litter

In the Spring and Summer we hope to work with the CMS and EA on the removal of Himalayan Balsam along the river, particularly near the Frogmore Pits and Riverside Way.

Please contact me (01727 761878 or [sue.frearson@which.net](mailto:sue.frearson@which.net)) if you would like to help so I can borrow from the CMS the correct number of tools.

### **Redbournbury fords**

**John Fisher**

Over the last year or so more and more vehicles seem to have been using the two fords and a number of members had reported this to us. "Land Rover Experience", which has close links with the Land Rover PLC and who operate out of Luton Hoo, were using the fords as part of their tours. I contacted them and explained about the damage being caused to the gravel bed of our chalk stream and to the bank side vegetation. There is also a safety issue as the fords have been a favourite spot for generations for family picnics, tiddler fishing and paddling.

I was pleasantly surprised when Andrew McRobb, the joint owner of Land Rover Experience, agreed to stop using the fords at weekends straightaway as they were keen not to go against local opinion. On some weekdays they run training courses for emergency service personnel and they do need to incorporate a ford element, but he assured me they will look for an alternative.

Redbournbury Fishery are asking their customers to use the access from Beesonend Lane rather than Redbournbury Lane and the Hudgells who farm Redbournbury seldom use the fords as they have a separate surfaced ford for access to the cattle barns. This just leaves the individual "Jeremy Clarkson Wannabe's". From my enquiries it seems that Redbournbury Lane and Beesonend Lane are maintained highways and whilst the track between the fords is not, it is open to use by motor vehicles and this use has led to it being in such a poor state with huge pot holes and puddles. It would be ideal to get this track reclassified as just a footpath. I will contact our County Councillor, Maxine Crawley about this to see if anything can be done.

In the meantime I would be grateful if you could let me know of any incidents, particularly if there are safety issues.

### **"The River Ver - A Meander Through Time"**

This attractive book continues to be available. The author, Jacqui Banfield-Taylor, offers free delivery and a bookmark, contact her on [riverver@btinternet.com](mailto:riverver@btinternet.com) or phone 07792 588892, the price is £24.99.

### **Additional "Late News" item**

Members will know that only days before Christmas the major freight interchange on the Radlett airfield site was effectively approved by the Secretary of State, against the advice of St Albans MP Anne Main. This is very worrying, it will impinge on the river and interrupt a number of footpaths, with light and noise pollution affecting the whole area. We will do all we can to reduce the impact of the Secretary of State's disappointing decision.

## VVS submission to Affinity Water, flow in the Upper Ver John Fisher

Following a long campaign by the VVS, Friars Wash Pumping Station was put on "Standby Only" in May 1993. Since 1956 Friars Wash had abstracted up to 15MI / day but on standby this was reduced to just 1 MI / day. The VVS maintain that this action has improved the flow in the Upper Ver, although it still dries up from time to time. In the twenty years before 1993 the Ver was always practically dry north of Redbourn. Within a month or two of the shut down water flowed in parts of the Ver which had been continuously dry for years.

The flow measuring just south of Redbourn was only commissioned in 1994 so there is no flow data with Friars Wash in full operation. It was necessary to fall back on anecdotal evidence from local people. Elizabeth Stovin and Ted and Christine Aitken, who have lived by the Upper Ver for over 50 years, were able to provide us with eye witness accounts describing how the flow had improved since 1993.

This water colour that Ver Valley committee member Ernie Leahy painted in 2009 (below) shows the diversity of bird life we can get every time the Upper Ver flows. Little ringed plovers, lapwings and yellow wagtails are rare breeding birds in Hertfordshire and they all bred in this area just south of Friars Wash in 2001 and 2009. The ruddy shelduck was almost certainly an escaped bird but none the less it was only there because of the wet conditions.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you will see that we sent a submission to Affinity Water regarding their public consultations. A separate submission was sent regarding this area and the critical need to keep Friars Wash Pumping Station on "Standby Only" as it has been for the last 20 years. The full text of both these submissions can be downloaded from our website.



## Olympic gold medalist and Environment Minister don their wellingtons

John Fisher

Early one morning in October I attended an event organised by Thames Water on the Chess at Latymer at which double Olympic gold medal-winning rower James Cracknell and Natural Environment Minister Richard Benyon urged the public to show their support for the 'Love Your River' campaign.

The Chess, Mimram, Beane and as well as the Ver were represented along with the Environmental Agency, The Chilterns Board, The Chilterns Society and the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

The "Love Your River" campaign encourages people to value their local river and shows the relationship between water in a river and the water used in the home. Richard Benyon and James Cracknell, the new "Love Your River" Campaign Adviser, both donned wellingtons before stepping into the River Chess, joined by local school children in kick sampling. This is what our bailiffs are now doing for the monthly river fly monitoring to check on the condition of the River Ver..



Allen Beechey - Chilterns Chalk Stream Officer makes his point to Richard Benyon and James Cracknell.

## Maple School at the River Ver

Ernie Leahy

Two classes of nine and ten year-olds from Maple School in St Albans were treated to a half day's visit to our chalk stream with Charlie Bell, the Living Rivers Officer from Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust. She had arranged for the pupils and their teachers to visit the riverside at Verulamium Park near the Westminster Lodge area. During the visit, she explained to the attentive children and their teachers about the environmental value and scarcity of chalk streams, and the impact of abstraction. The visit had been arranged because the children were studying Rivers as part of their national curriculum Geography syllabus.



In conjunction with Charlie's induction VER VALLEY SOCIETY members John Fisher and Ernie Leahy talked about some of the birdlife to be found along the river, and then took small groups of pupils into the river to explore the creatures to be found there.

The pupils, after conforming to Health & Safety requirements (i.e. wearing wellies and protective gloves!) entered the shallow stream with fishing nets to scoop up netfulls of debris, silt, and some living creatures. John and Ernie lent the pupils the large strong nets used in the Riverfly monitoring process to supplement the catch, which was then emptied into the shallow examination trays.

The enthusiastic pupils eagerly gathered around the trays with magnifying glasses and pipettes to examine their catch. As usual there were hundreds of water shrimps (Gammarus) and a few Olives, but as

far as the pupils were concerned the star catches were some Bullheads and Sticklebacks.

All the children were extremely enthusiastic, accurately answering questions about their experience. Later it was nice to receive many kind letters of appreciation from them. We were very impressed with the enthusiasm and knowledge with which the school had primed the pupils. It would be good if other local schools could have an appreciation of the very

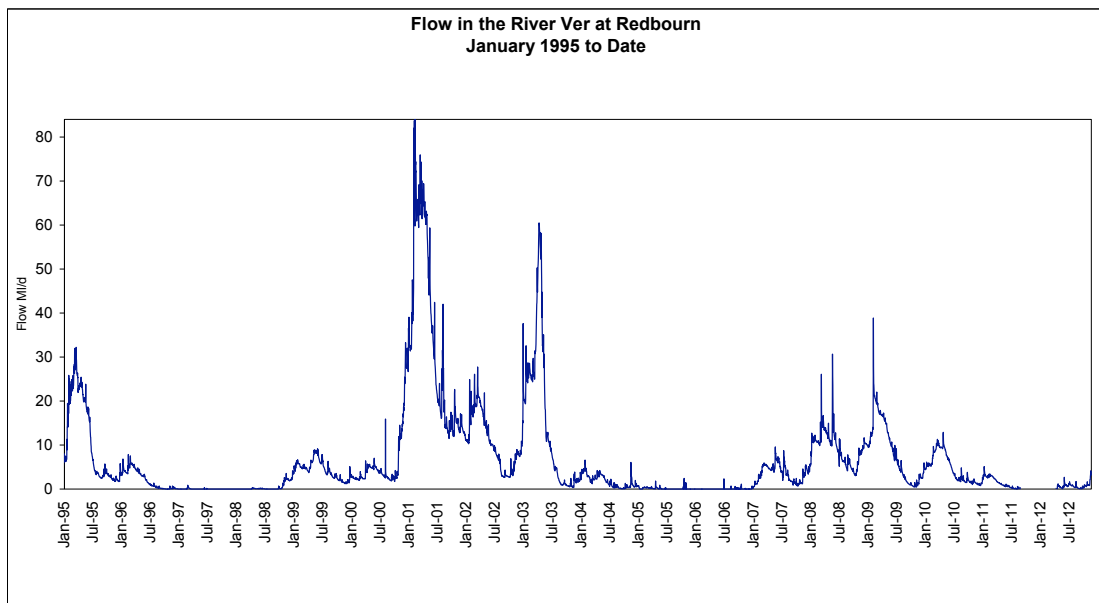
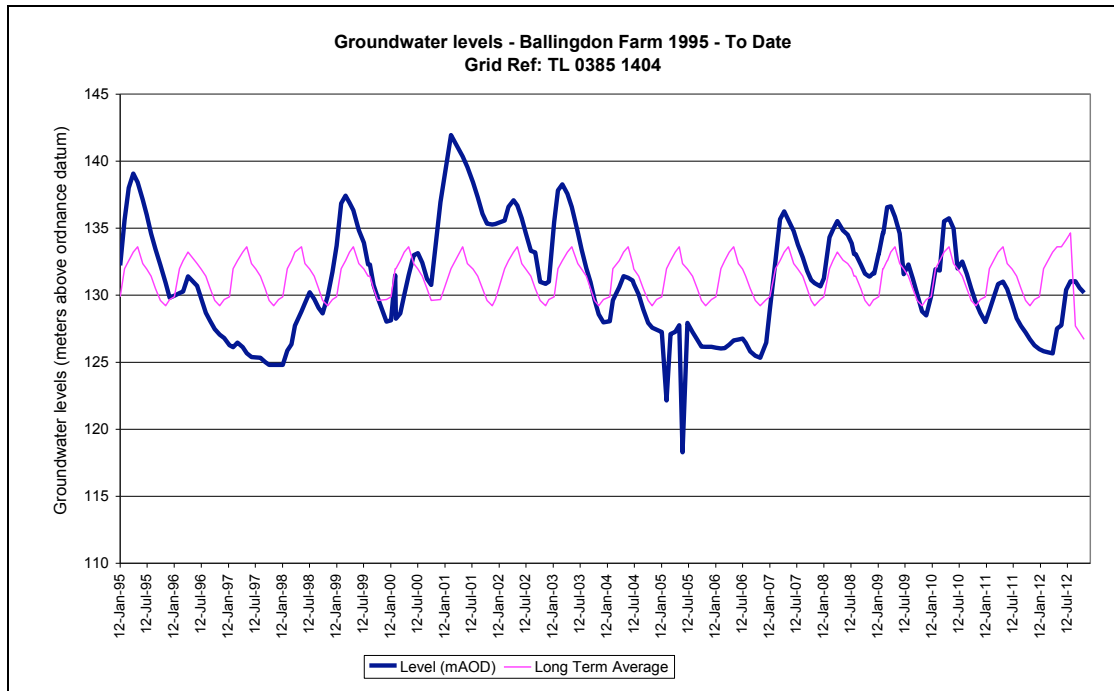


## Verulamium Park

John Cadisch

Not a great deal to report this time of year. The "Roman wall" path is now complete, equipped with low fencing on the "ditch" side where necessary and marker posts to show where bikers SHOULD be riding. There was a misunderstanding over the St Michael's to Westminster Lodge path, funding IS in place, we are assured, and work on its upgrading/widening must be imminent. A hedge has been planted the length of Bell Meadow (west side), this will screen the new fence.

The "Friends of Verulamium Park" bank account has now been wound up and as a result we have received the handsome sum of £5,776.87, which is ring-fenced for four years. There has been only one outgoing to date, former "FVP" committee members asked for three trees to be sponsored in memory of Barry Mort, Bill Morris and Juliet Bending, comprising two acers and one alder, and their maintenance, at a total cost of £521.



**We are grateful to Affinity Water for supplying the ground water  
and flow charts and to Veolia Environmental for printing and  
distributing our newsletters.**