



# Ver Valley Society

## NEWSLETTER

*Published quarterly for members of the Ver Valley Society*

Number 123 - October 2014

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

President: Peter Fox, MBE



*Mill leat volunteers - men at work  
repairing Redbournbury mill leat.  
(See article on page 10)*

*[Justin James]*

## Annual General Meeting

### NOTICE OF 38<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**This will be held on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2014,  
St Michael's Parish Centre, St Albans, 7.30 pm  
Parking in Museum car park.**

Nominations for the Chairman and Committee are invited.  
These should reach the Secretary, John Fisher, by the Friday before the meeting:  
proposers and seconders will be required.

All the present Committee are willing to stand for a further year  
including Paul Foster who was co-opted last May.

After refreshments Mark Carter, former CMS Project Manager,  
will be talking on a subject close to home:  
*"Light and Shade: Restoring Habitats at Riverside Way and Sopwell Nunnery"*

The AGM Agenda, last year's minutes and the year-end examined accounts are included as  
pull-out pages in the centre of this Newsletter

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

## Chairman's Report

Jane Gardiner

Of course the most encouraging news over the year for VVS has been that Affinity Water's 10-year business plan has been accepted by OFWAT. This means that abstraction from the Ver aquifer will be significantly reduced over the next few years starting in 2016 with Bow Bridge pumping station being effectively closed down.

Coming up for our Annual General meeting I have plenty of activities and changes to report. Our previous Chairman Andy Webb decided he no longer wished to remain on the Committee at all, so we sent him a gift with our sincere thanks for all his hard work and devotion over many years. He will of course maintain his interest in the Ver and its valley as he has already shown by renewing and treating all the benches on the eight Ver Valley Walks.

Another long-serving member of the Committee, John Cadisch, has relinquished two of his roles in which he has worked tirelessly for over 30 years; these are Treasurer and Membership Secretary and we are very lucky to have Rachel Young taking over from him. John will be continuing as Newsletter Editor for the time being. We have produced an updated Membership Leaflet with an insert detailing the new Membership arrangements – these will be available at the AGM.

The Action Group lead by Sue Frearson, has undertaken a considerable amount of work on the river up and down the valley. In particular the works in conjunction with CMS at Riverside Way and in Sopwell Nunnery meadows will be explained by our speaker, Mark Carter, after the AGM. [See Sue's report and photos elsewhere in this Newsletter]

In the summer we took part in the River Ver Days in Verulamium Park with our display boards, information leaflets and colouring activities for children. Many visitors showed interest in our Society and we gained several new members as a result. We may get a place for a day on the Charities Stall at St Albans Christmas Market.

Ernie Leahy and John Bell attended the Chilterns Chalk Streams Conference on behalf of VVS and several of us recently attended a very informative 'Science of Chalk Streams' evening organised by Charlie Bell of HMWT, hosted by Affinity Water.

You may have noticed the new signage panels in Verulamium Park with which we have been peripherally involved. Our own Ernie Leahy has produced some wonderful wildlife interpretation panels which are due to be installed by November, so do look out for them.

**A PLEA FOR HELP!** The Committee, in particular John Fisher, would really appreciate someone to act as Minute Taker at four Full-Committees meeting a year and at the AGM. As Secretary John has many other calls on his time and so far has taken and circulated over 90 sets of minutes! If you might consider helping out in this way please do phone or email John or me to find out more what would be entailed.

## Verulamium Park

John Cadisch

Now installed as promised at every entrance to the Park are attractive information boards featuring detailed maps of the Park, very helpful for new visitors. Committee member Ernie Leahy's interpretation panels have still to arrive. Completely new finger posts have been put up at key points.

The Society is pressing hard for the overgrown woodland between the "Fighting Cocks" and the former "Duke of Marlborough" pub to be tidied up so allowing proper access to the river along that stretch.

## Official Opening of the Riverside Way Project

Sue Frearson

The Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service hosted this event in September where Richard Millagan and I were asked to unveil the new information board in recognition of Lafarge and VVS sponsorship of this completed project. (photo of the unveiling of the new sign). The deflectors we helped to build are working well, restricting the width and speeding up the flow, enabling the river to scour the river bed and expose the gravel, providing more varied habitats for the fish. We saw Brown Trout, Chubb and Pike.

Much more light is now reaching the river after the removal of the self-seeded Ash trees, enabling more vegetation to grow in the river, some covering the deflectors. Martin and I were asked to demonstrate Riverfly Monitoring (photo Martin and Sue Riverfly monitoring) and we were delighted to show the visitors a very diverse sample of invertebrates as well as several Bullheads and Minnows, and inevitably Signal Crayfish. The path has been resurfaced with pH neutral crushed granite, which consolidates on contact with rain. This inert material is recommended by English Nature for use in Nature Reserves.

## Bailiff Notes

Jane Gardiner

Following the last very wet winter we seem to have had a warm and mostly dry summer. Despite this flows in the Ver have been holding up well, although the amount of vegetation growth has made it very difficult for Bailiffs to make flow measurements. As is only to be expected the aquifer level has been falling back but is still 2½ meters above the average for September, perhaps assisted by the rather wet August, although much of September has been very dry. The head of the river is between Redbourn and Markyate and the River Red in Redbourn is flowing although the other tributary, Hanstead Brook, has dried up.

Month 2014	Groundwater level at Ballingdon Farm in metres [Long-term average] (figures from EA)	Rainfall in millimetres [± average] (figures from Chris Hall at Rothamsted)
June	137.49 [133.32]	30.5 [-22.77]
July	136.29 [133.23]	36.9 [-13.0]
August	134.83 [132.56]	113.3 [+49.59]
September	133.32 [130.87]	14.8 [-42.81]

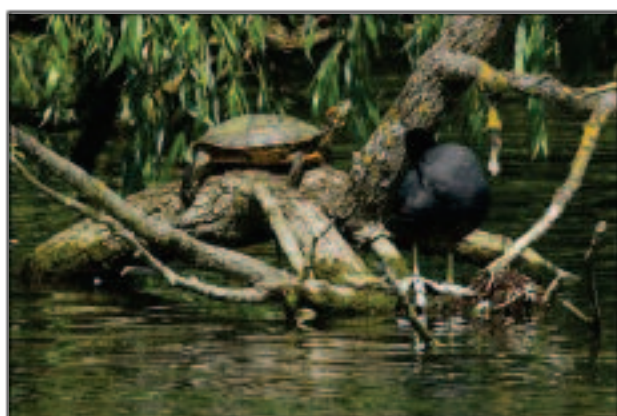
As well as the channel being quite blocked by cress, reeds and grass, some pathways have been very obstructed by nettles, burdock etc. Our devoted Bailiffs have been doing their best to clear problems where they can; John Pritchard is continuing to clear the pipes channelling the river below the Irish Weir just north of Shafford; Bruce Banfield-Taylor clears where he can in the meadows behind Sopwell House Hotel; Dick Downs is trying to get improvements to the path from Frogmore Pits to Moor Mill. Of course the Action Group is also involved in these and many other efforts.

As well as the less desirable vegetation there are still some nicer plants flowering near the river such as purple loosestrife, forget-me-nots and water mint. Blackberries have been very plentiful this year and banks are brightened with many other berries such as spindle, hips, sloes and haws. At this time of year there are many fungi about and some, such as chicken of the woods, are good to eat.

The Bailiffs have reported some interesting sightings this summer. An osprey was seen flying over and two hobbies at least have been seen. Kingfishers seem to have done well and there are goldfinch flocks feeding on thistles to be seen now. There are even a few late swallows and martins around but the swifts are long departed, [see John Fisher's Bird notes for more on birds]. Some butterflies, damsel and dragonflies are still to be seen on warm afternoons. Those Bailiffs doing river-fly monitoring are mostly getting good results.



*Chicken-of-the-woods.*  
[Paul Foster]



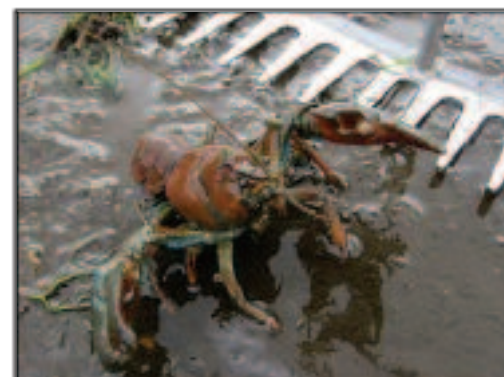
*Red-necked slider terrapin.* [Paul Foster]

Moles are becoming more obviously active now and several Bailiffs report seeing muntjac. There are badgers and hares active in the valley along with the usual rabbits and squirrels. At least two red-necked slider terrapins are in Verulamium Park lakes having been dumped in by owners. These are a troublesome invasive species and may explain a reduced number of ducklings there this year.

Another invasive species, the American signal crayfish, is only too abundant over most of the Ver.

Much nicer to report is an abundance of bull heads as well as plenty of brown trout, minnows, chubb and even the occasional stone loach and pike, all indicating the health of the river.

Finally, on 20<sup>th</sup> Dec after their efforts behind the Chequers pub, Redbourn, the Action Group will be having a pre-Christmas drink at the pub with the Committee and we'd welcome Bailiffs to join us as well from 12 noon.



*Signal crayfish.* [John Pritchard]



## Bird Notes

John Fisher

Our barn owls bred really early this year with three pairs raising a total of eleven youngsters and it was possible that we would get second broods. I carried out a check in early September and although adults were day roosting in a couple of the boxes there were no eggs or young. We did get some late breeding in 2012 and because they fledged so late in the year they had a much harder struggle to survive, so I was not really that disappointed not to find second broods.



*Female yellow wagtail – [John Fisher]*

Yellow wagtails were seen around Redbournbury on several days in September and often up to twenty could be seen just downstream from the Mill. One day Ernie Leahy and I saw over 40 on the river margins where the cattle were feeding on hay.

These were mainly first year birds gathering and feeding up before their long migration to Africa. Although you can see pied and grey wagtails throughout the year the yellow wagtail is a summer visitor to the UK.

A pair of grey wagtails bred near the Mill and usually you can see one of the pair or a juvenile feeding on insects on the water crowfoot upstream from the ford.

Earlier this year Ernie and I, along with local botanist, Sandra Langstone arranged a local

wildlife display at Redbourn Museum. We are going to bring along some of the display boards to the AGM and put them up in the downstairs room at St Michaels so members can see them at the coffee break.

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).

*Male Grey Wagtail – [Luke Massey]*



## Water Footprint Study

Paul Foster

The Environment Agency and the Water Footprint Network have completed a Water Footprint Assessment for Hertfordshire and North London, the first such study to be completed in the UK.

The basis of the Water Footprint is analogous to the Carbon Footprint that is concerned with Energy issues, but can be used to assess the water requirements of people, manufacturing and food production, as well as for river basins and whole countries. For instance, it has been calculated that it requires 120 litres of water to produce 1 glass of wine, and 2400 litres of water to produce one beef burger.

This particular study has considered the river basins in Herts and North London, including the Ver. The WFA links water consumption (including industry and agriculture as well as for human consumption) to water availability, considers lost return flows as happens in the Ver Valley, and identifies environmental hotspots, and thus shows where to protect vulnerable freshwater resources.

The results of this study will be used to better communicate the issues of water scarcity and water pollution levels to water providers, water users and the public, and help to increase the sustainability of our precious chalk streams.

**VER VALLEY SOCIETY**  
**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Tuesday 28 October 2014 at 7.30 pm.**

**AGENDA**

Nominations for the Chairman and Committee are invited.  
These should reach the Secretary, John Fisher, by Friday 24 October.

All the present committee are willing to stand for a further year  
including Paul Foster who was co-opted in May 2014.

1. Signing in.
2. Chairman's welcome
3. Apologies for absence.
4. Minutes of the AGM October 2013 as circulated with the newsletter.
5. Matters arising
6. Chairman's Report
7. Treasurer's Report and accounts
8. Bailiff Coordinator's report.
9. Ver Action Group Coordinator's report
10. Election of Chairman
11. Election of Committee    Nominees must be willing to stand with a proposer and seconder. Officers will be appointed at the first committee meeting in November 2014.
12. Future Open Meetings  
  
Wednesday 28 January 2015    Redbourn Village Hall    "Ver Valley Society Barn Owl  
Project 2004-2014
13. Any Other Business

**BREAK**

Presentation by Mark Carter    Former CMS Project Manager.

## VER VALLEY SOCIETY

# MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**St Michaels    Tuesday 22 October 2013 at 7.30 pm.**

1. **Signing in:** - 39 members signed in.  
The recent death of long term members Stan Pierpoint was announced
2. **Chairman's Welcome** The chairman welcomed all members plus Miles Morgan of the EA and our two guest speakers from Veolia Water.
3. **Apologies:** -. 12 had sent apologies    list available from the secretary.
4. **Minutes of the previous meeting:** - These had been circulated with the October Newsletter. John Bell proposed and Dave Paynter seconded acceptance and they were unanimously agreed as a true record.
5. **Matters Arising:** - all on the agenda.
6. **Chairman's Report:-**  
6.1 Members were told about the redevelopment of Hicks Road in Markyate where the Ver had been de- culverted.
7. **Treasurer's Report: -**  
7.1 The balance was £31,101.23, which included £5,255.87 of Friends of Ver Park monies ring fenced until 2015.  
7.2 During the year £10K had been contributed towards the £100K Walk Project and £3K had been contributed towards the Riverside Way Project.  
7.3. David Jinks had audited the accounts.  
7.4 Acceptance of the accounts was proposed by John Bell, seconded by Jane Gardiner and accepted unanimously.
8. **Bailiff Coordinator's Report: -**  
8.1 Generally as the October 2013 newsletter.  
8.2 Head of the river was now just north of Redbourn.  
8.3 Year to date rainfall was 15% below average.  
8.4 Groundwater was 0.5 metres above average for October.  
8.5 Janet Southwood was standing down as a bailiff as she now lives some distance away.  
8.6 Recent reports include sightings of parakeets, kingfishers, goldfinches and bullfinches.
9. **VVS Action Group:-**  
9.1 A good year of useful work including the removal of Himalayan Balsam from near Moor Mill and the installation of flow deflectors at Riverside Way.  
9.2. The next VAG work party would be at Sopwell Nunnery on Saturday 16 November.  
9.3. Sue Frearson had attended a CPRE Hertfordshire Living Awards Evening at County Hall on 16 October. The Society had won the The Rural Living Champion in recognition of the Ver Valley Walk Project. The framed certificate was presented to retiring chairman, Andy Webb, and the wooden plaque would be displayed at future Open Meetings.
10. **Election of President:** - Peter Fox was proposed by Martin Frearson, seconded by Ernie Leahy and duly elected unanimously.
11. **Election of Chairman:** - .Jane Gardiner was proposed by John Fisher, seconded by Ernie Leahy and duly elected unanimously.
12. **Election of Committee:** - All existing committee members, including the retiring chairman, Andy Webb, and new members John Bell and Martin Frearson were proposed by Janet Southwood, seconded by Roy Titchmarsh and duly elected unanimously. The other officers apart from the chairman would be allocated at the first committee meeting in November 2013.
13. **Future Open Meetings:-**
  - Wednesday 29 January 2014    Redbourn Village Hall    Bill Barr and Howard Roberts.- "Farming the Ver Valley
  - The 2014 AGM would be Tuesday 28 October    subject to confirmation
  - After refreshments members, were given a Presentation by Rob Sage and Matthew Ascott    Affinity Water.

VER VALLEY SOCIETY  
INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT  
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2014

2013 £	Expenditure	2014 £	2013 £	Income	2014 £
228.50	Room Hire	143.10		Subscriptions	
510.73	Admin/Sec/Travel etc	197.69	600.00	5Year	900.00
196.76	Insurance	196.76	130.00	Annual	120.00
	Donations		125.00	Donations	85.30
40.00	H & M Wild Life Trust	40.00	891.20	Interest	99.52
34.00	C P R E	36.00	81.60	Sales	-
527.00	Printing	278.40			
87.07	Computer	26.50			
295.00	Lecture Fees	140.00			
140.03	Bank Charges	114.65			
	River Fly Monitoring Kits	84.48			
2,941.90	Riverside Way Scheme	-			
480.00	Tree Maintenance	-			
245.36	Sundries	349.38			
5,726.35		1,606.96	1,827.80		1,204.82
			3,898.55	Excess of Expenditure over Income	402.14
5,726.35		1,606.96	5,726.35		1,606.96

VER VALLEY SOCIETYBALANCE SHEETAS AT 31 AUGUST 2014

<u>Liabilities</u>		<u>Assets</u>	
<u>£</u>		<u>£</u>	<u>£</u>
<u>31 Aug 13</u>		<u>31 Aug 13</u>	<u>31 Aug 14</u>
<u>Accumulated Fund</u>		<u>Balance at Bank</u>	
4,530.55	Balance	632.00	14,496.51 Current Ac 16,996.36
(3,898.55)	Excess Expenditure over Income	(402.14)	1,604.72 Business Acc 9,608.24
632.00		229.86	15,000.00 Lloyds Bond -
25,213.36	Hammon Legacy less Walk Folders	25,213.36	
		3,036.00	
		22,177.36	
18,993.67	Lottery Grant less contribution to Herts CC	-	
18,993.67			
-			
5,776.87	Friends of Ver Park	5,255.87	
521.00	less expenses	1,058.49	
5,255.87		4,197.38	
<u>31,101.23</u>		<u>26,604.60</u>	<u>31,101.23</u> <u>26,604.60</u>

I have examined the financial statements above and in my opinion they represent a true and fair view of the financial affairs as at 31 August 2014

D Jinks

Independent Examiner 10 Sept 2014



## Ver Valley Action Group

Sue Frearson

Himalayan Balsam was our target in July at Moor Mill, and with the help of ten volunteers we managed to clear about two thirds of the site. CMS volunteers had previously cleared Riverside Way down to the confluence, so we should find the task less onerous in the future. It is hoped that we will be able to work to clear the Frogmore Lakes, with the support of Lafarge next year, which will help reduce the chance of seeds washing downstream.

Our Bailiff, Bruce Banfield-Taylor, in the Sopwell Manor meadows, has had major problems with a fallen oak and other vegetation blocking the flow of the river and having an adverse effect on the invertebrates, as shown by his Riverfly samples.



A small group of VVS volunteers worked one evening in August to remove some of the blockage and Bruce has subsequently removed more of the fallen trees.

With the river flow down in September, we were able to complete a deflector, and remove more of the overgrown willows to reveal the willow arch in Sopwell Nunnery Green.

More willows were removed the following week by the CMS volunteers, and to improve the views of the Nunnery from the relocated VVS bench.

*Action Group volunteers getting down to it.*

### **The VVS Action Group Programme Autumn / Winter**

The following is a provisional programme for the **third Saturday of the month**. It would be very helpful to me if you would like to join the group if you would contact me by email so that I can obtain sufficient tools and send out the reminder and risk assessment. ( [sue.frearson@which.net](mailto:sue.frearson@which.net) ).

- **18<sup>th</sup> October 10.00 -12.00 River Red.** Meet on Red-bourn Common near the Cricket Pitch to clear some of the weed. Leader **John Fisher**
- **15<sup>th</sup> November 10.00-12.00 Sopwell Manor Meadows.** Meet at the car park by New Mills, Cottonmill Lane, St Albans, to walk about 500m downstream to the clearance area to remove fallen trees across the river and weed.
- **20<sup>th</sup> December 10.00-12.00 The Chequers, Redbourn.** Meet in the car park to remove vegetation and litter.



## Riverbank repairs at Redbournbury Mill

Justin James

The watermill at Redbournbury is driven by an overshot waterwheel. This means that the water flows over the top of the wheel and fills buckets around its circumference. It is the weight of water in the buckets that turns the wheel. The wheel can have up to 10,000 litres of water flowing over it every minute. Simpler mills have an undershot wheel which relies on fast flowing water hitting the wheel's paddles.

The problem with an overshot wheel is that it requires a head of water above the wheel. At Redbournbury we need an 11' difference in height between where the water is delivered to the wheel (the mill race) and where it leaves the mill (the tail race). To achieve this difference in water levels, the millwrights had to divert the river Ver along the side of the valley in an artificial channel called a leat. The leat at Redbournbury stretches upstream for about 200 yards and raises the water 11' above the valley floor. This incredible feat of engineering required the construction of an enormous earth bank which was then lined with puddled clay and chalk to make it waterproof. Over a thousand tonnes of soil, clay and chalk were required to build this, all transported by man, horse and cart. The chalk for the lining came from the pit at Redbournbury where the Veolia treatment plant is now located.

Over the course of the last sixty years, since the mill was last used commercially, the bank has been neglected. Animals have burrowed through it and trees have grown both on the bank and in the leat itself. The roots of the trees penetrate the chalk lining and cause it to leak.

Over the course of the summer, a team of volunteers spent several days removing all the trees from the bank and leat and repaired damaged sections with over 200 sandbags. The trees in the leat had firmly rooted in the heavy silt and required winching-out. Even with a 5 tonne capacity winch, some were too heavy to remove in one piece and had to be split whilst still in the river.

The bank is looking much more cared-for now and the leakage has been reduced to a mere trickle. The increased flow in the leat will help to keep the waterwheel turning.

A big thank you to everyone who was able to help with the repairs. It was difficult, heavy and dirty work but made much easier by the support of so many. Volunteers from the mill, the Ver Valley society, Veolia, Chiltern Society Conservation Volunteers and even Ashridge Forest all turned-out across several days. It was great to have our friends from Veolia water helping once again; their team in chest high waders were invaluable!

The intention is now to regularly check the leat for tree growth and leaks to prevent it from becoming such a big job again. Next summer we will organise another volunteer party to help clear the river downstream of the mill; weed growth and silt here hold water back against the waterwheel. Watch this space if you would like to join us!

## Organic Farm Walk, Redbourn

John Fisher

Meet 10.00 on Redbourn common Sat. 15<sup>th</sup> November for walk to Redbournbury and Hammondsend Farm where the farmer, Howard Roberts, will talk about organic farming. Bring binoculars for winter birds. Details from John Fisher.



Cattle at Redbournbury Meadows  
Redbournbury Mill

[John Fisher]



## Fisheries Management Course

Bruce Banfield-Taylor

I started the Institute of Fisheries Management Certificate Course last year to help further my interest and experience in all things fish and waterways related. I am a life-long angler and a VVS volunteer bailiff, working party member, help with river enhancement and take part in the National Fly Fish monitoring scheme which includes the River Ver.

The IFM course gives specialised training in fisheries management for those who wish to start, or further a career within fisheries management and/or related disciplines. Prospective employers would include the Environment Agency, water authorities, fisheries, fisheries consultancies or similar bodies.

The main emphasis of the course is on the management of freshwater and migratory fish populations and developing competence in fisheries management, apply and evaluate course contents and to demonstrate how that knowledge can be applied to the work of a fisheries manager or similar positions.

Course tutors are on hand to offer advice and guidance on how to develop the ability to structure answers and to express them accurately, concisely and convincingly, develop understanding of the course concepts and assess competence in the subjects. The year of formal work comprises learning lengthy pre prepared modules and a very large reading list of books and websites!

The seven theory modules are:-Water Quality, Freshwater and Fish Biology, Fish Culture and Husbandry, Fisheries Maintenance, Monitoring and Improvements, Angling and Recreation, Fisheries Law and Fisheries Enforcement.

To obtain the IFM Certificate in Fisheries Management, all examination papers had to be submitted to schedule with required grades achieved in the examinations.

In some of the questions I used information and photos from VVS activities such as river enhancement to help highlight answers.

The two exams were around seven hours long each and although this seems a decent amount of time to complete it, it was in fact very tight. My lowest score was achieved in the question where I ran out of time, luckily as I achieved an A and Bs in the other questions I managed an average grade of B, which I am very pleased with. I received the certificate in August and aim to complete further IFM courses in 'The safe use and processes of electric fishing' and 'The principles and practices of fish tagging and telemetry'.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the VVS for part sponsoring me of my IFM certificate course.



*Bullhead or Miller's Thumb.*

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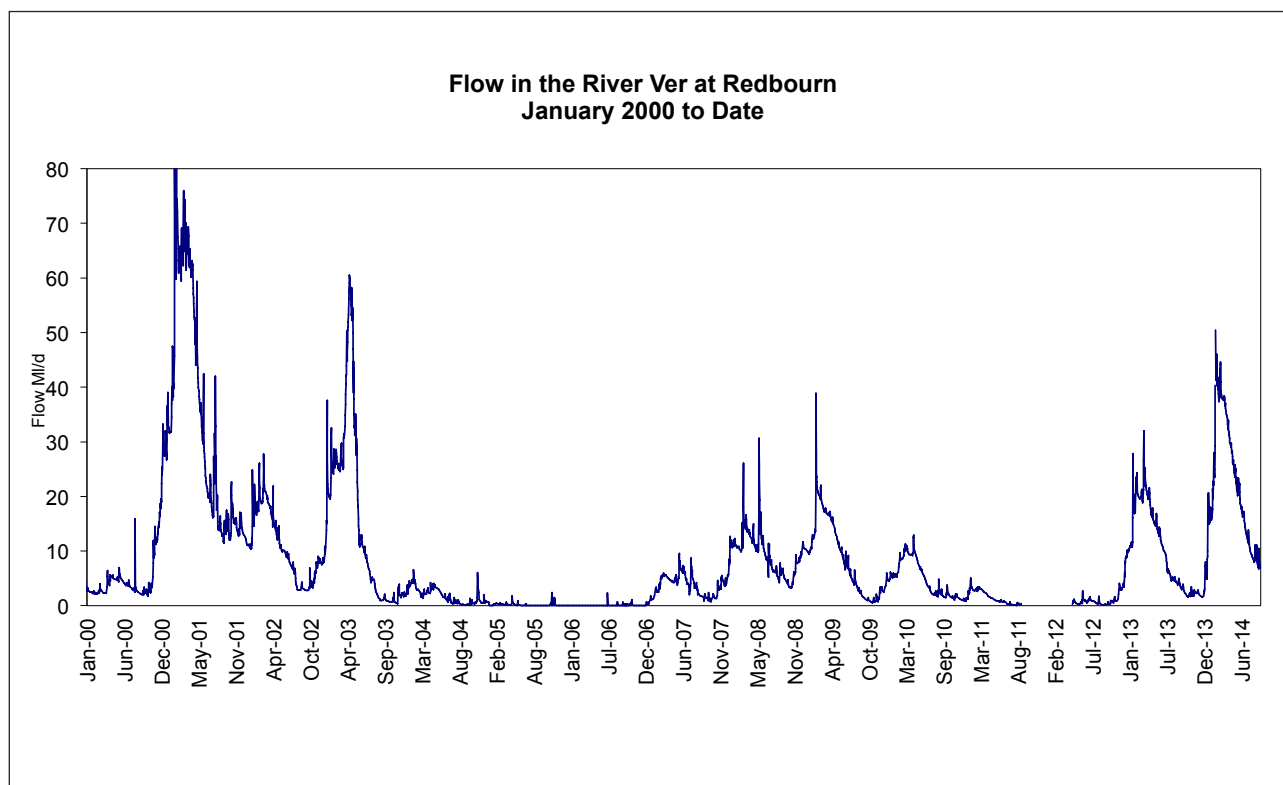
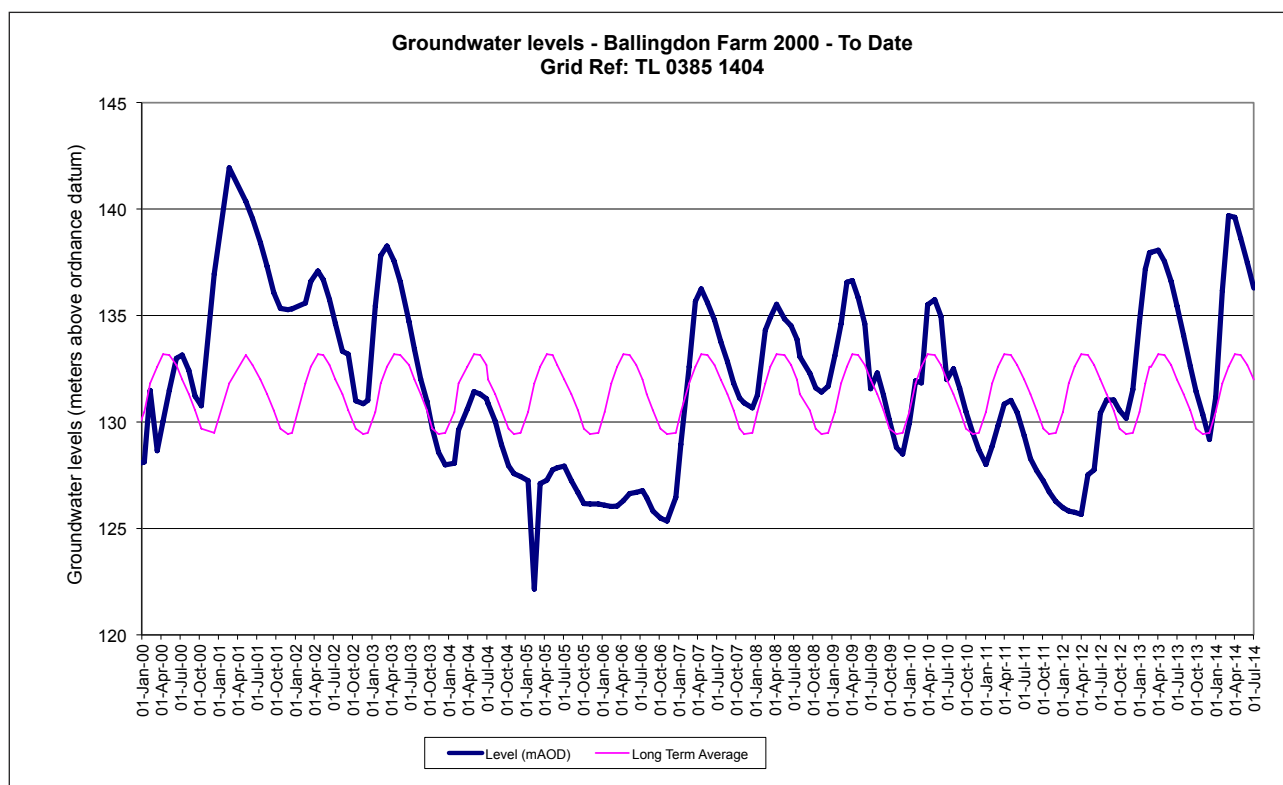
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**Newsletter Layout**  
John Trew  
(Verulam Angling Club)

**HOTLINES**  
EA Incident Hotline: 0800 807060  
("Report all environmental incidents")  
EA Floodline: 0845 988 1188  
"Cleaner District" (SADC):  
0845 125 8000  
Water Leaks (Affinity):  
0800 376 5325



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