



# Ver Valley Society

## NEWSLETTER

*Published quarterly for members of the Ver Valley Society*

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

President: Peter Fox, MBE

### VER VALLEY SOCIETY

Present a talk by

## **MIKE HEYLIN OBE**

of the

Colne Valley Fisheries Consultative

on

**COLNE AREA NETWORK CATCHMENT**

(ColneCAN)



**TUESDAY 19th JULY 7:30 pm**

**MARKYATE PARISH HALL**

Cavendish Road, Markyate, AL3 8PS

Non Members Welcome

Free Entry - Donations Appreciated

Adequate parking

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

## Chairman's Report

Jane Gardiner

The benefits of Affinity Water ceasing to pump from the Bow Bridge borehole in April have not yet been very apparent because the aquifer remains low after poor winter recharge [see data in my Bailiffs' report]. However the Ver is generally in a good state, unlike the lakes in Verulamium Park; it is the responsibility of SADC to deal with the issues there. For some considerable time, the council representatives have been consulting widely, (EA, Affinity Water, CMS, RSPB etc) to find the best long-term solution to the problems with the lakes. They are due to publicise their conclusions and proposed actions before the autumn. We anticipate the long-awaited improvement to the designated path beside the river from Holywell Hill will be part of this programme of improvements.

The remedial works to the access to the Redbournbury fords, which Julian Thornton the HCC Footpaths Officer undertook to put in place, are still awaited. While flows are low this is not a particular problem but hopefully these repairs will be done by the winter. However I would like to commend the efforts of the Action Group in improving and opening up access to two of Ver Valley footpaths, in the Sopwell Mill area and from Frogmore Pits towards Moor Mill. Our Ver Valley Walks can be spoiled by litter beside the paths, especially by plastic bags of dog-foul hung on trees or left by the walkway. It is best if these can be disposed of properly but if not the un-bagged mess will rot if just flicked to one side into a hedge. At the last Open meeting I mentioned that John Bell has had to resign from the Committee due to the pressure of his many other responsibilities, although he continues as a Bailiff and member of the Action Group. I'm pleased to be able to tell you that another of our Bailiffs, John Pritchard, is considering joining the Committee. We can be grateful to both these Johns for their interest and commitment to the Ver.

Finally I'd like to refer you to our Membership Secretary's note about renewals that will be due from 1<sup>st</sup> September. It would ease her workload considerably if you would consider setting up a standing order or possibly taking out a five-year membership, both of which methods of joining also save you a little money!

## Open Meetings

Ernie Leahy

### Tuesday 25th October at 7.30 pm

St Michaels Parish Centre – AGM followed by speaker Jennifer Gilbert of Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. As this is our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary there will be wine to celebrate (and cheese).

### Thursday 26th January 2017 at 7.30 pm

Redbourn Village Hall Centenary Suite – speaker Ian Pigott Ver Valley Farmer who initiated the Open Farms Days which is now a nationwide event.

### Tuesday 25th April 2017 at 7.30 pm

St Stephens Parish Centre – speaker Rob Pearson of the EA on Fish Surveying on the 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). Although our meetings are free entry to members and non members we welcome donations towards the cost of refreshments, hall hire etc. Suggested £2pp

## Membership

Rachel Young

This quarter we'd like to welcome new members Sue Cooper and Roger Hall to the VVS.

In the next few weeks the reminders for subscriptions that are due in September 2016 will be going out by letter or email. The idea behind the earlier timing is to give renewing members enough time to set up an annual Standing Order with their bank before September 1st, SO payers get a discounted rate. It's also still possible to pay by cheque for annual or 5 year membership. Options and details will be provided.

If you'd like to pre-empt the reminder, you can set up a SO and inform me by email at [members@riverver.co.uk](mailto:members@riverver.co.uk), you can find our SO details on the form on our membership page.

Our membership form, for new joiners and renewals, is available on request via a committee member, or downloadable from <http://www.riverver.co.uk/pages/membership.html>, or email [members@riverver.co.uk](mailto:members@riverver.co.uk).

The rainfall in March and April was above average and this is probably the reason for the slight improvement in the aquifer level in June although it is still well below the average. May rainfall was 30% below the mean, but June so far has had plenty of rain which should help flows for a while despite some warm weather. There has been much growth of vegetation and the abundant plants in the river channel has made it difficult for some bailiffs to get flow measurements but those that have been recorded, despite being low, are holding up fairly well for this time of year.

<b>Month 2016</b>	<b>Groundwater level at Ballingdon Farm in metres</b> <i>[Long-term average]</i> (figures from EA)	<b>Rainfall in millimetres</b> <i>[± average]</i> (figures from Chris Hall at Rothamsted)
March	128.82 [132.79]	84.3 [+33.52]
April	130.8 [133.6]	62.0 [+6.96]
May	131.12 [134.1]	39.4 [-15.3]
June	131.6 [133.6]	<i>Not yet available</i>

I'm sure everyone has appreciated the displays of cow-parsley, ox-eye daisies and hawthorn blossom along the roadsides as well as the prolific buttercups in the meadows, which have also had good displays of ragged robin and lady's smock. Beside the river yellow flags have made bright splashes of colour and in the channel water crowfoot has done very well this year. Less pleasing southwards from Park Street is the strong growth of the invasive species of Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam which the Action group will be attacking in August and September (see Sue Frearson's note for details).



*Lady's smock [Jane Gardiner]*

swallows have even been seen being chased by a hobby! I have had only one report of a cuckoo being heard which probably reflects their sad decline nationally. (See John Fisher's Bird Notes for more about birds).

Among the usual animals muntjac are seen quite often and recently a road-kill otter was reported on the Redbourn Road; while this is sad it is very encouraging

to know otters are using the Ver valley corridor. Fish records include brown trout, minnows, chub, bullheads and a barbel.



*Yellow flag. [Jane Gardiner]*



*Water crowfoot. [Jane Gardiner]*

Plenty of butterflies are being seen on sunny days such as whites, speckled woods, small tortoiseshells, peacocks, holly blues, orange tips, and brimstones. A few damsel flies are now about and a broad-bodied chaser dragonfly has been recorded recently. The river-fly monitors are finding a good variety of invertebrates in reasonable numbers.

From my early monitoring it looks promising for a good breeding year for the Ver Valley barn owls. We have one nest with a couple of young, probably about 2 weeks old, one with two just a few days old and another with three eggs. There are still about 5 boxes that I have not yet checked and although they will be late fledging this year it could be a very good year for our barn owls.

One barn owl box has been used by a pair of kestrels and they have five young which we will be ringing at the end of June. Another has been used by stock doves and we were able to ring their two young. They have used the boxes in previous years but we never got the timing right to ring them. They are very ugly chicks but suppose their mothers love them!



*Little Egret with Colour Rings – [Barry Trevis]*

right leg. If you see one of these birds let me know even you can't read the number and I will pass the sightings on to Barry. Last year two of the young were seen in the autumn in the Gade Valley and one at a nature reserve in Sutton Coldfield.

Little Egrets first bred in the UK in the mid nineties but they are now established breeders at five sites in Hertfordshire. A natural and successful colonisation of a very attractive addition to our fauna and not something I expected when I saw my first Ver Valley little egret in the winter of 2003.

Barry found it difficult to ring the herons at Verulamium Lake this year as the nests were hard to climb to but he thinks there were about ten nests. Not the best year but still a good number. The herons are very early breeders



*Verulamium little egret brood – [Barry Trevis]*

and have usually left the island by the time the little egrets are nesting. When herons nest the willows are still bare but by the time the egrets nest they are in full leaf making it difficult to see them. The pictures are taken by the guy that climbs the trees.

A new bird for the Ver Valley this year was oystercatcher. A pair was seen near Shafford Mill in May, probably the pair that is regular at Tyttenhanger.

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).

*STOP PRESS 24 June 2019 – Five VVS barn owl boxes have young or eggs and one has four young kestrels. Late and all small broods but looks good. Just hoping for some warm dry days now.*



*Kestrel brood of five – [John Fisher]*

## Riverfly Sampling

Sue Frearson

The sampling of the Ver from Dolittle Mill (Redbourn) to the confluence with the Colne in Bricket Wood for river invertebrates has shown that the river is healthy, with all samples above their target level. However the river remains dry north of Redbourn. Water shrimp (*Gammarus*), Blue-winged olive mayflies and Olive mayflies are found throughout the river but Mayflies only at Riverside and the confluence. The concentration of Cased and Caseless caddisfly varies with area, vegetation and season. Samples are taken on a monthly basis and reported to the Environment Agency. Declines in water quality would be reflected in declines in the abundance and numbers of the different invertebrates and investigation for pollution would follow if the sample dropped below the target level for that site.

Welcome to Catherine Mackenzie Davies, who has joined our team of monitors and is sampling in Sopwell Nunnery Green, under the Alban Bridge, where it is hoped that the deshading of the river, and the transfer of water starwort and water crowfoot, by a local resident, will increase the diversity in invertebrates and provide a better habitat for fish.

Thanks to our team of eight monitors we are helping to keep the Ver a healthy chalk stream. However it would be even better to have more monitors, so if you would like to help with this project, we can arrange training and purchase of the equipment for kick sampling. Please contact me [sue.frearson@which.net](mailto:sue.frearson@which.net) if you are interested in training to carry out Riverfly sampling.

## Orchid Walk

John Fisher

In June for the third annual orchid walk there were 26 walkers and at the end of a wet week we left Redbourn Common at 10.00 in bright sunny and warm conditions. Roger and I had both looked at the usual spots and it all seemed promising with a week to go especially at the spot along the Nickey Line which usually has at least 20 bee orchids. However with just three days to go a man with a digger turned up and dug a huge hole, absolutely devastating the site. So no orchids there for a few years at least.



*Pyramidal orchid. [John Fisher]*

Thankfully the Harpenden Hill Embankment had three fragrant orchids and at least 20 pyramidal orchids so all the walkers were able to clamber up the slope and see these wonderful plants. We did manage to see a few bee orchids along the way but only single plants or small groups of two or three.

Knott Wood, a mainly beech wood, is just east of the Nickey Line and is part of the Rothamsted Estate (it just about qualifies as the of The Ver Valley eastern side!).

Every April it is swathed in blue as the bluebells come through just before the beeches come into leaf. This year I was told that some early purple orchids were flowering and that was about 100.

When I visited in early May I eventually found two groups amongst all the 1000's of bluebells. They have probably been flowering there for years but although I walk there regularly it was first time I had noticed them. Must look down more!



*Bluebells and early purple orchid in Knott Wood  
– [John Fisher]*

*Early purple orchid. [John Fisher]*

## Recent Projects:

Frogmore Pits has been the focus for our attention this spring, starting in April. Despite high water levels two teams of volunteers were able to remove debris, and fallen trees from the river downstream from the Hyde Lane foot bridge. Some of the timber was used to form natural deflectors, by pinning it back against the bank. This, we hope will speed up the flow, scouring the river bottom to reveal more of the gravel, giving more areas for the fish to breed.



*Bruce and Dick building a deflector. [Sue Frearson]*

In May and June, working with Sandy Belloni, South Groundwork Trust, one group started the removal of the young Himalayan Balsam. This is a major problem and a source of seed for the lower Ver and Colne. Although a very pretty flower, it shades out our native species along the river. It would be very helpful if when you see it you could pull it up and deposit it away from the water.

We have no reports of Himalayan Balsam north of Park Street, but please let me know if you spot it and contact me to give the location using [sue.frearson@which.net](mailto:sue.frearson@which.net).



*Removal of dead trees along the Ver at Frogmore pits. [Sue Frearson]*

## Summer Programme 2016

### Saturday July 16th:

No Action Group, to allow members to attend the Herts Geological Society Conference, 9.30 Verulamium Museum, on the 'Water Table' (see the poster).

### Saturday 20th August:

10.00-12.00 (meet at Moor Mill car park).  
Bruce Banfield Taylor has kindly agreed to lead the group removing Himalayan Balsam in the grounds of Moor Mill.

### Saturday 17th September:

10.00-12.00. Frogmore Pits (parking at Hyde Lane / Moor Mill)  
To work on Himalayan Balsam, fallen trees downstream from the Hyde Lane Bridge, and clear back the permissive footpath.

### Saturday 15th October:

10.00-12.00. Frogmore Pits (parking at Hyde Lane / Moor Mill)  
To clear back the permissive footpaths.



*New dog steps at Sopwell Nunnery Green put in by the CMS volunteers to prevent erosion of the riverbank and undercutting of the footpath. [Sue Frearson]*

Saturday, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016  
9.30 for a 10.00 am start



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9.30 for a 10.00am start

## THE WATER TABLE (A day of water related events)



- Morning:** Talks and round table discussion.  
Verulamium Museum, St. Albans  
Chair: Rob Sage (ex Affinity Water)  
Short talks by: Haydon Bailey (HGS)  
Ilias Karapanos (Affinity Water)  
David Johnson (H & MWT, Rivers Officer)
- Lunch:** Picnic in Verulam Park (hopefully not raining)
- Afternoon:** Walk the Ver Valley from Redbournbury  
Mill to St. Albans  
Guided by members of the Ver Valley Society



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**Newsletter Group**

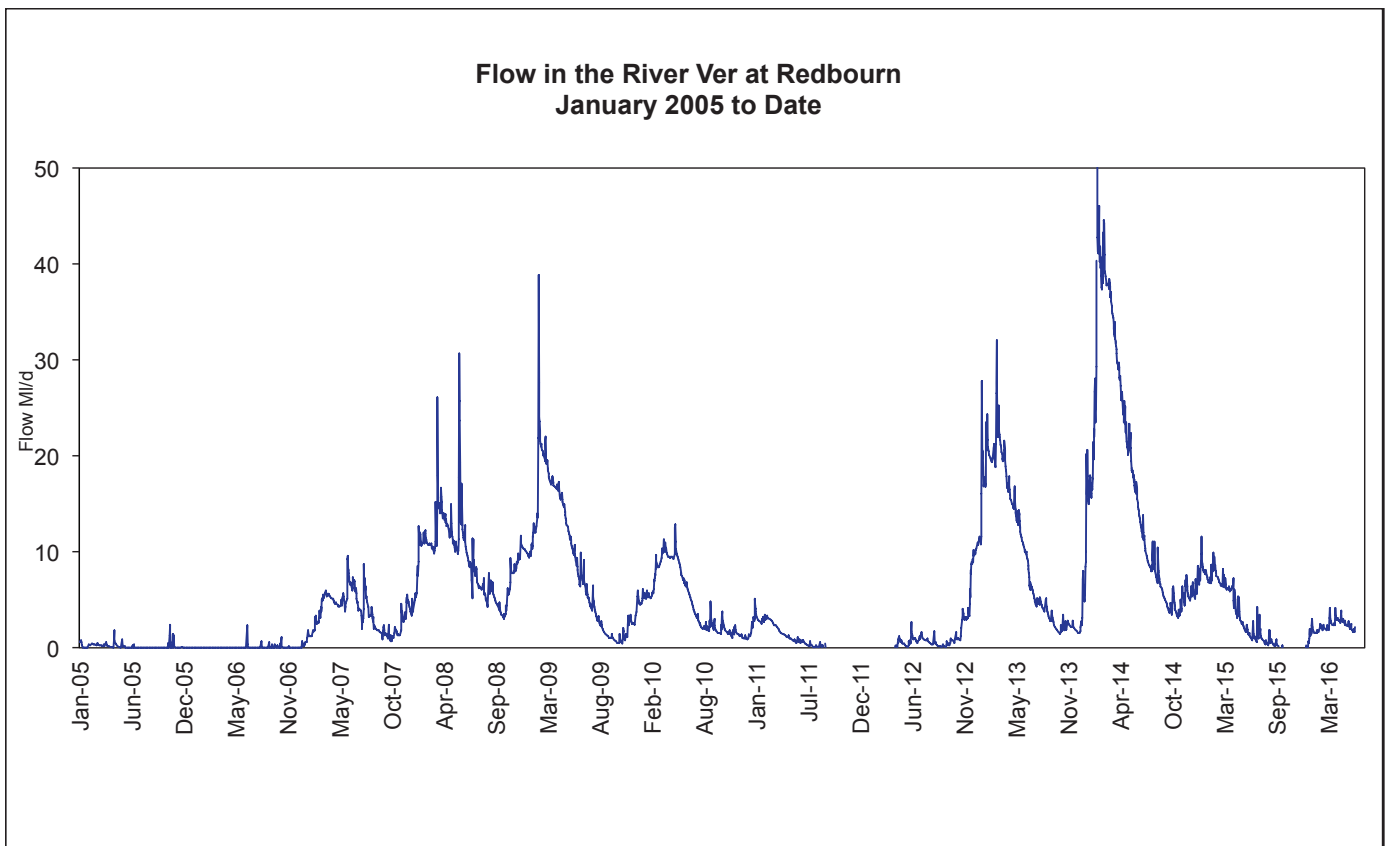
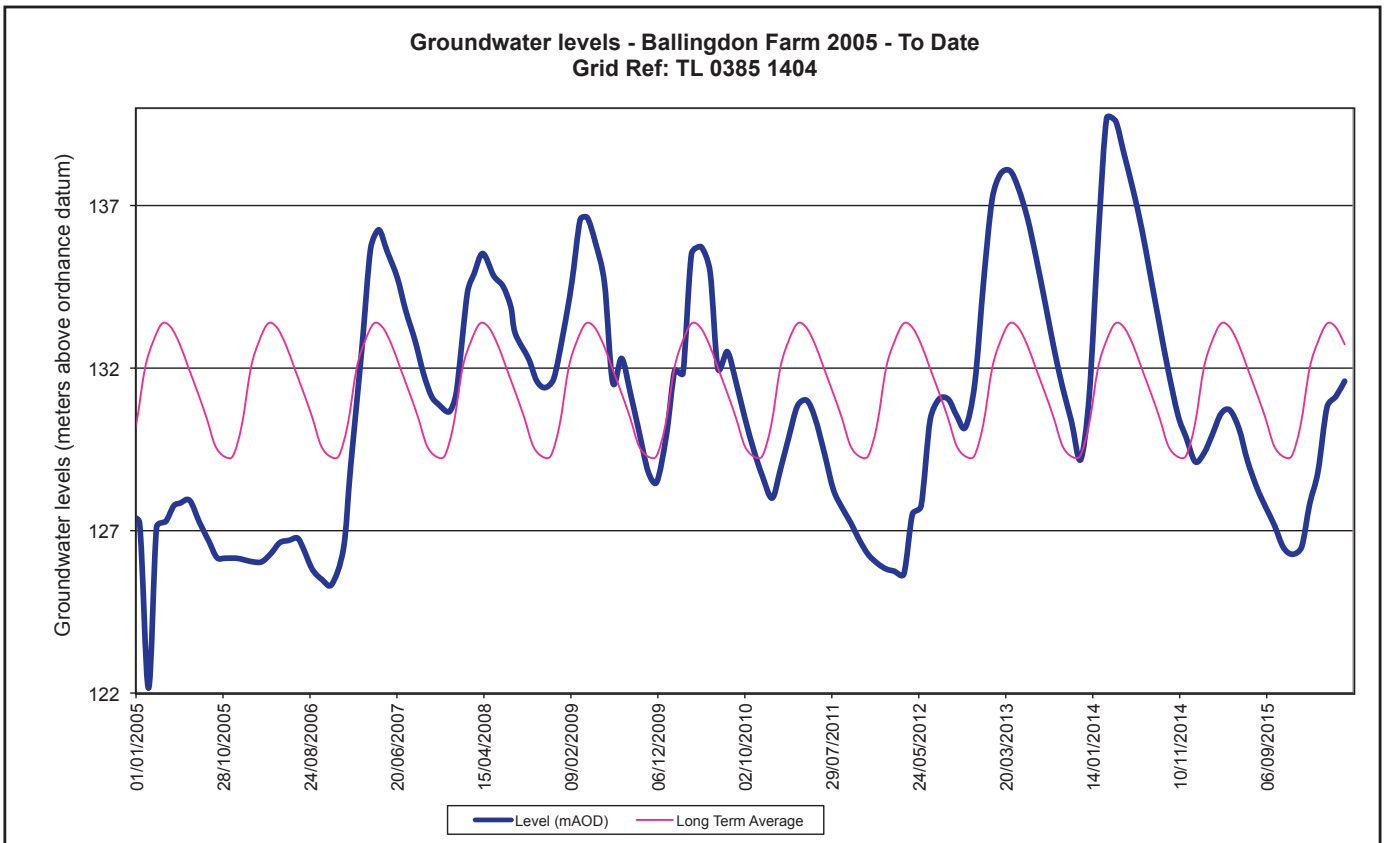
John Cadisch, John Fisher, Sue Frearson,  
Martin Frearson and Jane Gardiner

**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):  
01727 819598  
Water Leaks (Affinity):  
0800 376 5325



*We are grateful to Affinity Water for supplying periodic ground water and flow charts and to Veolia Environmental Services for printing and distributing these Newsletters.*