

Update from Newport River

Group: November 2024

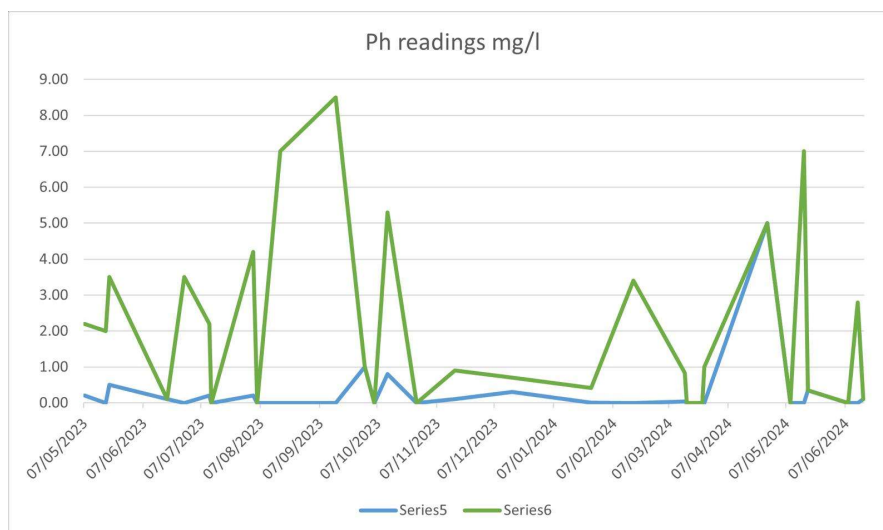
Communication

We'll be producing a newsletter quarterly, but remember we are all volunteers and it's more fun to get wet, cold and muddy than to sit and write a newsletter, so don't be hard on us. Our first newsletter is quite detailed but future editions will be more concise.

Testing

Bill and team have done a brilliant job of the testing programme for 2 years now, and it is the foundation of all we do. Engagement with polluters, regulatory bodies, funding, commercial operations is all based on the facts derived from the chemical and invertebrate testing. It gets their attention.

A team of around 12 people help Bill, 8 of whom are fully trained in Riverfly Monitoring by the EA so that we may provide official reports of aquatic wildlife diversity in our stretch of the river. We incorporate this as part of our monthly test program. These results are uploaded to a website run by the EA, and any significant fall in the score prompts an immediate action by the EA and water company, who deal with the source of pollution and against the polluters.



Phosphate readings. Green is downstream of the sewage works, blue is upstream

They are testing 3 sites each month, taking a couple of hours on each test. A great success story. There is a possibility of a site within the grounds of JFAN and managed by an EA and Wildlife Trust qualified tester who is a student at the school – a great step to engage with the local schools.

Thank you to the home owners who allow us access to the river to do the testing.

Wildlife sightings

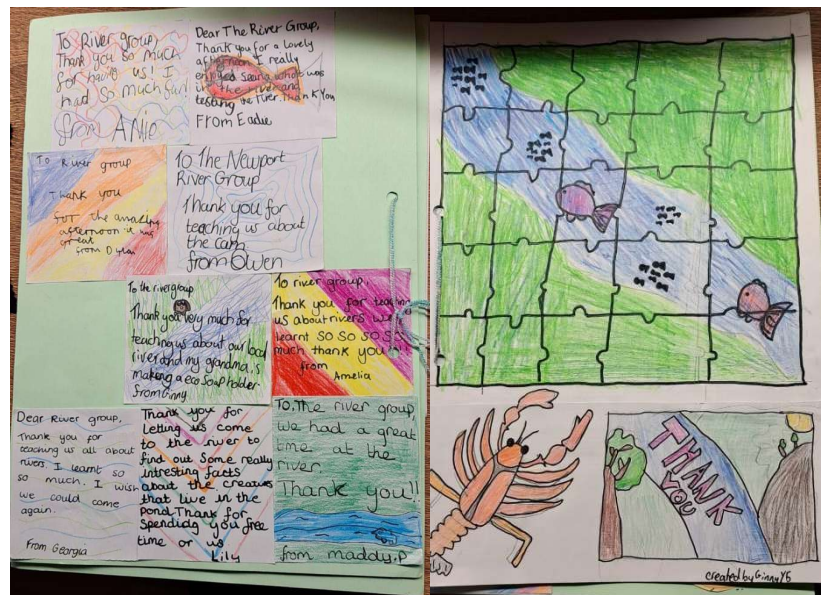
We regularly post images on Newport Newline, showing local wildlife that Andy has captured on our trail cameras within the parish. These sightings are really important because they prove there are protected species in the parish. That means we can legally challenge builders to make sure any development in the area is done in an environmentally sustainable way. We now report on an app called iReport, which means the evidence cannot be ignored. Well done to Andy who is doing a fantastic job with the photography and uploading to iReport.



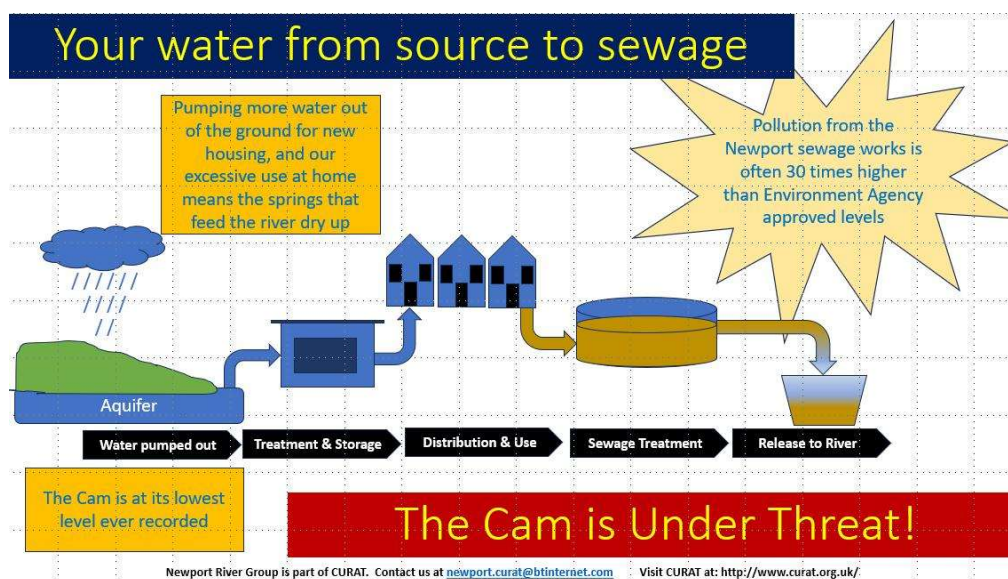
The other important part of the photography is an ongoing assessment of the impact we are having. The removal of mink had an incredible impact on the numbers and diversity of species, and we continue to see encouraging developments such as the return of Otters and various red-listed birds.

Education

We've had some great fun with a few groups this year. The primary school and a team of NRG volunteers and parents led by Julie had a river visit in June – the youngsters energy and enthusiasm was a real tonic. They had some fun with river bugs and the scary crayfish and went away with a proper understanding of the stressed state of the river and what they could do to help.



The other important message was 'source to sewage'. Where our water comes from, what happens to it when we have it, and where it goes to after we flush it or pull the plug out.



Joe, a NRG member, is a lecturer at Anglia Ruskin University agricultural college. He brought some of his students to experience a day managing the flow of the river, pest control and testing. These are all subjects taught in the classroom. Hopefully a day on the river will become a permanent part of their syllabus.



We're also delivering talks and presentations to the local community to raise awareness and build relationships with our residents, and to aid understanding of the water cycle from source to sewage. The last event was at Debden Grange in November.



We were very excited to host a forum for the parish councils organised by Uttlesford District Council to talk about our activities. The council were using Newport River Group as an exemplar of river conservation best practice which is a real feather in our cap.

A couple of parish councils have now started their own projects such as Wicken Bonhunt and Littlebury as they progress their own activities. Newport Parish Council has been extremely helpful and supportive with our projects and we continue to foster a close and collaborative relationship.

If you have any local clubs or organisations who you feel would appreciate knowing what's going on, please let us know by emailing newport.curat@btinternet.com.

Training

We had 4 training days on 'rewiggling' the chalk stream. Over decades the stream has been deepened and straightened which means it's either running fast and deep or not at all. It is also a significant cause of flooding. Natural flood defences depend on holding water in the landscape and regulating the flow by the sinuosity of the channel, and wetlands for storage of excess flow.



The four days had some elements in common. It was desperately cold, and without exception, we had a storm and were soaked from the river, rain, and on one occasion, hail. The team were unfailingly upbeat and our host, Trish, produced an amazing meal and hot coffee on every occasion. The outcome is that, apart from having 18 people trained on all or some part of 'rewiggling', we have also changed the flow of the river in this area to great effect. There is improved flow with riffles and pools that provide excellent habitat for wildlife especially trout. The work reduced flood risk downstream.

We are currently planning a large wetland restoration project at Belmont Wood that we hope to start within the next month. This will utilise all the skills we have learned, as well as the tools and materials supplied by our Parish Council. It may take 8 months to complete and require ongoing management by us. This should radically improve our chalk stream network.



The Environment Agency also trained 8 of us in Riverfly testing (bugs in the riverbed) which are a measure of pollution. This is a nationally recognised qualification giving validity to the results.. The skill and knowledge of the volunteers is growing steadily.



Fund raising

Chris and Adam have done a great job in creating a template for grant applications, which has been very successful. As a result, Newport River Group secured funding of £12,500 from Uttlesford District Council for a feasibility study for the Belmont Wood wetland restoration project – and we used the same format for an application for the build phase. The grant has been agreed but the contract hasn't been signed yet. Hope to announce very soon.

The re-wiggling training provided by the Wild Trout Trust cost £3,500 and was funded by Cambridge City Council. We continue to work with various organisations to support restoration of the Cam which flows across various boundaries.

We are considering applications to the **UDC carbon zero fund** to continue the restoration of the upper Cam chalk stream network.

Farm Cluster

We have also secured £10k funding to help to facilitate a 'North West Essex Farm Cluster'. Clusters have proven to be an extremely effective way of creating momentum in ecological projects within farms by collaborative effort, and most importantly, an administrator at the centre of the whole thing to help the farmers with all the administration to enable farming subsidy schemes. The scheme is wider than the rivers and streams but will have a big impact on quality and quantity of water feeding into our rivers and tributaries. We're hoping that the Parish Council will want to be involved in this initiative in view of our common goals.

Belmont Wood

We are planning to start 'in channel' rewiggling as soon as November. This will be phase 1 of the wetland restoration project. Phase 2 will be west of the Cam on completion of a topographical survey and Phase 3 will be east of the Cam and south of

Debden Water on completion of a EclA (Ecological Impact Assessment) due to it being part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Completion Summer 2025.

Final Thoughts

As you can see, there's a lot going on. We're involved in several exciting projects that ultimately should lead to improvements in the quality of the water and habitat around the Cam and its tributaries.

We can only succeed in our goals with the help of our dedicated volunteers. We really appreciate everything you do to support our efforts and we look forward to seeing you at future events.

