



AUNE CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

'Conserving the Devonshire Avon from source to sea'

NEWSLETTER – June 2009

Dear ACA member

Our AGM was well attended and I'm very pleased to announce that Eric White has joined our committee. Eric, you may recall, has recently taken over the moorings at Aveton Gifford for the Duchy. In collaboration with AG Parish Council and with our occasional input he is trying to improve that part of the estuary.

Immediately following the AGM, Robert Waterhouse presented a talk on the archaeology of the Avon Valley from moor to sea and it was fascinating to hear, amongst other things, his account of the very extensive seasonal migration (transhumance) of humans and their livestock that used to occur between the moors and lowland areas. His interpretation was based largely on clues provided by ancient droveways in the local landscape.

The ACA has just paid its £250 contribution towards the patrol boat operated by Marsh Dawes, Bantham Harbourmaster, for the summer. The purpose of the patrol is to try and maintain the peace and tranquility of the Avon for humans and wildlife by deterring anybody from breaking the byelaws, especially those pertaining to water-skiing. On my occasional outings on the river during May, I saw two unregistered boats being used for skiing; one of them without an observer. If you see anything similar, please report the details to Marsh (01548 562056).

1. BEACH CLEANS

Our programme of beach cleans in association with the Marine Conservation Society will continue over the summer as follows (contact Maya on 01548 562449 or info@learntosea.co.uk for details):-

Sunday 28th June, 3.00pm, 'Beachwatch' clean up on Cockleridge.

Sunday 20th September, 2.00pm, 'Beachwatch' clean up on Cockleridge.

Please wear suitable clothing/ footwear and bring along any spare collection bags. At the last clean up somebody suggested holding a beach BBQ at the same time; watch out for further details, probably for September.

2. FOLLY HILL RAM ROAST

We hope you, your family and any guests will be able to come along to an ACA BBQ that Jane & John Tucker have kindly agreed to host at Folly Hill Farm, overlooking the Avon Estuary at Bigbury on Sea on Thursday 30th July 2009 at 6.00pm. When we held a similar event a couple of years ago it was a great success, on a brilliant sunny evening. The views from the farm across the estuary are quite stunning and, alone, are well worth the cost! John is making a marquee available for our use so it shouldn't matter if the weather turns against us.

This will be an excellent opportunity to socialise with other ACA members and some of our past and present collaborators, who I hope will be able to join us. Please BYOB and glasses as we are not planning to obtain a

licence to sell alcohol. Plates and cutlery will be provided. Parking will be available in a field directly opposite the farm entrance.

The cost, including food, will be £8 per adult, £5 per child (under 12). Please help us to cater adequately by booking, and preferably paying, by Thursday 16th July either by cash or by cheque (payable to the Aune Conservation Association) c/o Ros Brousson at Waterfoot, Tidal Road, Aveton Gifford, TQ7 4JN (01548 550792; brousson@btinternet.com), or c/o Stuart Watts at Dulce Domun, Duke's Mill, Bigbury, TQ7 4AN (01548 810373; sdmw2@btopenworld.com). Please be aware that if you choose to turn up and pay as you enter, the cost will rise to £10/adult and £6/child.

If you are able to help with organising this event e.g. by preparing some salad or dessert, please let either Ros or myself know as soon as possible.

3. DOES THE AVON NEED A TROUT FARM AT LODDISWELL?

Arguably, one of the most enjoyable and picturesque stretches of the Avon runs from Hatch Bridge upstream to beyond the old Loddiswell Station and Silveridge Weir. However, the pleasures of visiting this area have been scarred in recent years by developments at the old trout farm downstream of Avon Mill. Whilst it is difficult to know exactly what is going on (there will be a public enquiry into planning matters affecting the site on Wednesday 8th July in Loddiswell), apart from ugly earthworks, tree-felling and planning disputes, a much-publicised justification of the development was the resurrection of the old trout farm whose derelict ponds provided evidence of this earlier purpose.

Aquaculture is one instrument for promotion of economic growth in rural areas because it creates jobs and income. Nevertheless, it is worth briefly reviewing the main environmental arguments against the re-development of a trout farm at this site in order to be able to evaluate their relative importance against the possible economic benefits (a fuller review will appear in the bulletin of the South Hams Society).

The first of these environmental arguments concerns the abstraction of even more water from the Avon. The Environment Agency's (EA) Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy for the Avon (2007) recognises that 'current actual abstraction is such that no water is available at low flows. If existing licences were used to their full allocation, they could cause unacceptable environmental damage at low flows.'

The second concerns the siting of a fish farm on a river's natural flood plain where there is a very high risk of seasonal flooding at high flows, such as at Loddiswell. Such flooding would obviously render quality control of farm water inputs and outputs completely impossible. There is a consequent high risk of river pollution by viruses, fungi and other parasites which might infect wild fish; by nutrients which can stimulate excessive plant growth (nitrogen and phosphorus); by sludge from settlement ponds which adds to river siltation; by chemicals and anti-parasitic therapeutics; by dead fish and processing wastes; and by fish escapes.

In its National Trout and Grayling Fisheries Strategy (2003), the EA has stated its aim is to conserve and improve wild stocks of trout (Brown Trout), Sea Trout, Charr and Grayling and that it will take steps to conserve this biodiversity for its aesthetic, scientific and potential economic value, and also to maintain the evolutionary potential of the species at a time when environmental change is increasingly evident. The highly competitive, cannibalistic and predatory nature of escapee Rainbow Trout, deprived of their customary high protein fish diet, would threaten stocks of wild species and would be unlikely to help in achieving these strategic aims.

4. SOUTH EFFORD MARSH

The future of the EA's suggestion that South Efford Marsh might be managed to create a wildlife reserve and to control flood risk around Bridge End, at AG, is still uncertain as their contracted engineers are trying

to improve their hydrological model of the river at that point. Whether the funds to carry out the project would be available in the current climate is a moot point.

5. RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT PLAN AND WATER QUALITY

The South West River Basin Management plan (DEFRA) has a 6-month consultation period ending in June. The ACA has made some suggestions to raise the profile of the Avon which has received scant attention in the consultation document. Of particular concern are the issues of water abstraction and water quality, especially levels of phosphates. Parts of the east bank of the Avon estuary are already designated a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone, which imposes certain restrictions on farming activities but we are concerned that the concentrations of phosphorus in its various forms are high enough, routinely, to cause abnormal plant growth (EA data from samples taken at Hatch). Interestingly, a PhD student of one of our previous collaborators from Plymouth University will soon be undertaking a detailed study of phosphorus stored in river sediment although the ACA has no formal involvement in the work. The main sources of phosphates in river water are run-off from agricultural land and the routine discharges from sewage works. Everybody can help in reducing the phosphate content of domestic waste water by the use of phosphate-free detergents, of course.

6. SHORELINE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The South Devon and Dorset Coastal Authorities Group (SDADCAG) are responsible for producing a Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) which includes the Avon's estuary and the associated stretches of coast. The Plan has a 100-year 'time horizon' and is meant to anticipate changes in the environment over that period. A significant rise in sea level is a fundamental assumption of the Plan. The upper estuary has been re-classified in SMP2 for 'managed realignment' instead of the previous 'no active intervention' of SMP1; hence the South Efford Marsh proposal to ameliorate flood risk. However, the most recent classification of the outer part of the Avon estuary remains as an area for 'no active intervention' – based on the perceived minor risks and consequences of flood damage. The results of our Siltation Research Project actually demonstrate that the estuary is gradually filling up. The ACA feels there is a strong economic argument (based on the importance of tourism and recreation to the Bigbury on Sea/ Bantham area) for active intervention to slow down the in-filling process, in an environmentally acceptable way. We have even investigated the possibility of restoring the groynes on Cockleridge to slow down the movement of sand into the estuary but there seems little enthusiasm or funding to support or manage such a project. Perhaps we shall have to wait for Bantham to become completely inaccessible from the sea for people to wake up. The public consultation process continues and you can contribute your views about SMP2 via the SDADCAG website (www.sdadcag.org); the policy statements of interest are in Part 5.

Finally, if you know of ACA members who do not have access to e-mail, could you share the contents of this Newsletter with them, please?

Have a good summer and enjoy the river!

Stuart Watts (Chairman)

PS you are welcome to contact me via our website at www.aca.aveton-gifford.co.uk, by e-mail at sdmw2@btopenworld.com or by phone on 01548 810373.