



AUNE CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

'Conserving the Devonshire Avon'

NEWSLETTER - MARCH 2006

At an Extraordinary Committee Meeting in February there were some changes made to our organisation. John Crawford handed over the Chairmanship to me following his long and productive stint during which the ACA has been increasingly active on social, environmental, scientific and community-related fronts. John will continue to serve as both Treasurer of the ACA and Convenor of the Steering Committee of the Siltation Research Project (SRP), the latter of which tasks is a major undertaking in its own right; we are very lucky in continuing to have such a deeply committed and knowledgeable person working with us. Mike Garten-Springer (from Bigbury) joined the Committee and has since agreed to take over the Social/Entertainments sub-Committee – please give him all the help and support you can! Otherwise the Committee remains unchanged with a healthy representation from villages on both sides of the river, namely Yvonne Bennett (Secretary), Wendy Bennetto, Peter Marsh (Water Quality), John Peters (Ecology), Maya Plass and Neill Schroeter (Safe Navigation).

I shall do my best to follow John's excellent example in making the ACA an influential force in the affairs of the Avon valley. By way of introduction, my wife, Sally, and I have lived in Duke's Mill (Bigbury) for almost 4 years, having been lured to the area by its rural and aquatic delights. Most of my working life was spent as a research biologist in the pharmaceutical industry and as an associate lecturer in the Open University Business School's MBA programme.

Communication

One of our main challenges on the Committee is effective communication with our members. We have constructed a database of members but I suspect there are errors which need correcting. Bear with us and, if we are not reaching you as you would like, please let me know. Where possible, I shall use e-mail for communication, as this has many advantages, so do keep us up to date with any changes in your details. Our website (www.aca.aveton-gifford.co.uk) has now been operational for almost one year, thanks to the generosity of Larry Alen who hosts the site on his server. Larry tells me that between April and December 2005, we had over 2900 visits to the site and in recent months the number of 'hits' has levelled off at about 280/month. Not all of these 'hits' can be mine, so we must be generating some interest elsewhere! I do know that we've had enquiries via the website from an ex-AG resident, now living in New Zealand and from several academic groups interested in bringing students to study this very special river valley and estuary for various purposes. Currently, we are considering what improvements we might make to the website, such as the addition of sections for 'Recent Wildlife Sightings', 'Photographs', 'Aune Valley Wisdoms and Anecdotes' and an improved 'News & Activities' section. Again, if you have any ideas on that score, let me know please.

Funding/Membership

The ACA is becoming increasingly involved in worthy initiatives, aligned to our central purpose. Unfortunately, the more active we become, the higher the associated costs. Whilst this expansion of our activities has benefitted tremendously from the generosity of several local families and organisations - in particular regarding the SRP - there are other developments worthy of support such as helping to fund the patrol boat and other security arrangements on the river (theft from parked boats and cars is a perennial problem) and helping to change local

farming practices. Our social events are not geared to fund-raising, generally, and at our March Committee meeting we reviewed arrangements for our membership subscriptions which have become rather confused. Henceforth, Life Membership will cost £15 for an individual and £20 for a couple – a modest increase of £5 in both cases. Please note, this is a once and for all payment not an annual subscription! Existing members will automatically become Life Members, whatever their former status. In order to help pay our administration costs and meet other expenses, the Committee has decided to hold an Annual Draw (with an entry fee of £5), the details of which will be clarified at the AGM (please bring your wallets and purses). We are anxious not to disturb the existing ‘culture’ of the ACA and hope members will be generous in their donations because Life Membership fees are unlikely even to pay mailing costs, given the longevity of many folk in the South Hams!

Allied to the finance issue is the question of whether the ACA should apply for charitable status. John has raised this matter in the past and I think it is time to examine the advantages anew.

Social

In February, the ACA returned to the Oyster Shack for a successful re-union and we plan on extending our valley-wide dining experiences to include other local establishments, circumstances permitting. Keep an eye open for further details of guided walks, estuary clean-ups, BBQs, a riparian quiz night and additional ‘re-union’ dining opportunities.

Conservation

I’m pleased to report that we have teamed up with the Devon Farmers and Wildlife Advisory Group to apply to the S Devon AONB for a grant to fund a programme to encourage local farmers and landowners to think more carefully about the consequences of their farming practices on the wider local environment. This initiative is not a pre-judgement on the outcomes of the SRP but over the past couple of years we have been particularly concerned at the extent of the very obvious agricultural run-off into the river during periods of heavy rainfall and hope that this long-term initiative will help alleviate problems of top soil and associated fertilisers or manure changing the estuarine habitat for all species, including *Homo sapiens*. If our application is successful, our portion of the funding will amount to £1200 over the first year and if the funded programme is well received and is effective, it is likely that we shall wish to extend this work in the future. As a Committee, we believe that this programme goes right to the heart of what we should be doing as a conservation group.

Siltation Research Project

The second phase of the SRP (commissioned from Plymouth University and the Plymouth Marine Lab., in conjunction with the South Hams Society) is running to schedule and has expanded considerably - thanks to the generosity of the Clothier and Clark families and to financial support from the South Devon AONB Unit, the Environment Agency, the Seale Hayne Trust and the Duchy of Cornwall. I’m delighted to report that, this month, we have been awarded an additional grant of £1300 from the Duchy of Cornwall. John has provided a timetable for the Project which is included with this mailing. He has also compiled a checklist of ‘Ancient Wisdoms and Anecdotes’ for your perusal and comment. As all the data are analysed, interpreted and converted into intelligence, we shall be issuing more detailed reports in the form of presentations, website updates and newsletters.

With good wishes,

Stuart Watts