



AUNE CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

'Conserving the Devonshire Avon from source to sea'

NEWSLETTER – September 2009

Dear ACA member

I'd like to let you know about a couple of news items and two events that we have organised for the autumn. We'd be very pleased to see you and your friends at either or both events; please mark your diary.

Events:

- 1) On 20th September at 2.00pm we shall be organising another of our regular 3-monthly 'Adoptabeach' beach cleans on Cockleridge, this time as part of the Marine Conservation Society's Beachwatch BigWeekend scheme.

This annual MCS event takes place on the 3rd weekend of September every year and the data collected are used for the annual MCS Beachwatch report on the state of our nation's beaches. Did you know, for example, that

- average figures for the UK are now at 2195 litter items/km of beaches surveyed, compared to 1045 items/km in 1994?
- some of the commonest items found on Cockleridge are cotton bud sticks (these are also the commonest type of debris trapped in the pre-screening filters at Aveton Gifford sewage works – if you must use them, please don't flush them!).

You and your family or visitors could be sunbathing and swimming amongst that lot! If you'd like to help us protect one of our local beaches, please come and join us.

- 2) Every year we organise one or two lectures for our members and the general public on topics affecting our river. In our second lecture this year, Andy Cummins will be talking about the work of Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) in a talk entitled 'Not just Surfers, Not just Sewage!' at 7.30pm in Thurlestone Parish Hall on Tuesday 20th October. You'll be surprised at how SAS has developed over the years from what started out as a small but dedicated special interest group. There will be a charge of £2 to cover the cost of refreshments, hall hire, etc.

Other news:

Boat crime has shown a recent increase on the Avon with several outboard motor thefts. Such thefts spoil enjoyment of the river for many people other than just the immediate victims. If you see any suspicious activity on or around the river please call the police on 08452 777444 quoting 'Project Kraken'.

SWW have recently updated us on the improvements to AG sewage works with a guided tour of the site. Many of the old problems with overflows and bypasses into the river should have been solved by the very expensive repairs to important drainage pipes under the A379. The pipes are thought to have been damaged at the time the road was constructed. Our thanks and congratulations go to AG Parish Council who have kept up the pressure (so to speak!), with our active support, for a resolution of this old problem. SWW also deserve congratulation for the way in which they have consulted and involved both the AG community and the ACA on this issue.

On another topical sewage issue, raw human sewage was recently spotted leaking on to a footpath at Bantham, not far from the river. We know that many of the private sewage systems in properties bordering the Avon are quite ancient and may not be operated or maintained as they should be to prevent pollution. It is the Environment Agency's job to put a stop to this sort of neglect by property owners so if you notice any incident of pollution, damage or danger to the natural environment, please do not hesitate to phone the EA's Incident Hotline on 0800 807060 which is open 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week. Please also let one of the ACA committee know the details. We have been accused of hounding local farmers about river pollution by cattle in the past and I feel that we owe it to them to do all we can to help clean up our own human mess!

On the topic of local farming, I have just been told by James Grischeff (Regional Coordinator, Natural England) that in the second phase of the Catchment Sensitive Farming Project, there will be *'funding activity on the Avon to a much greater extent than in the past'*, contrary to earlier indications for the Avon. He has asked us help contact local farmers who might be interested in taking advantage of this scheme. There will be money for farm visits offering soil and manure management advice, for help with small capital projects such as building 'buffer strips' to reduce the loss of top soil, fertiliser and manure into the river by erosion, and to erect fencing to stop cattle breaking down river banks and roaming into the water. James writes *'These visits are fairly expensive so this intense attention will be provided to the farmers who have a fair size herd of cattle and are fairly close to the estuary (i.e within 5 km or so), although we can be flexible on this if an individual farm outside of this area presents a serious risk and is enthusiastic to receive our advice'*. I can provide further contact details for any interested farmer.

Our Siltation Research Project has served to arouse an ongoing interest in aspects of Avon siltation by the academics at Plymouth University. Over the summer they have been looking further into sand movement in the estuary at Aunemouth Sands and in a separate project they are about to start a year-long examination of silt movement downstream from above Loddiswell and from a feeder stream above Duke's Mill Creek. As part of this study they will be looking at the relationship between dissolved phosphorus and that bound up with suspended solids in the water. Both nitrate and phosphorus concentrations in river water are under close scrutiny here and elsewhere because concentrations are generally on the increase along with the associated risks of eutrophication (see e.g. www.wri.org/publication/eutrophication-sources-and-drivers). Particulate phosphorus in the Avon is not routinely monitored by the Environment Agency but dissolved phosphorus concentrations are frequently high enough (at Hatch) to stimulate abnormal plant growth even if the concentrations, when averaged over a year, are acceptable.

We have no news yet about the possible Environment Agency nature reserve/ flood minimisation project on South Efford marsh – the modelling process is obviously problematic; either that or the money has run out!

There is no news, either, from the Duchy of Cornwall's agent about the 'Gillaroo' which continues to decay at an increasingly rapid rate at Aveton Gifford. We have supported AG Parish Council in telling the Duchy that we would like to see the vessel gone as soon as possible for environmental reasons, preferably having been lifted out of its current berth by crane.

Lastly, if you still have any appetite for food after the foregoing, we are hoping to arrange an evening get-together at Avon Mill Garden Centre some time in November. Watch out for further details or send me an e-mail if you might be interested.

Regards

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