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Images by John Dominick

## Celebrating our volunteers

There have been so many highlights of the second half of 2015 – but let's start by celebrating the lifeblood of the ARC project – our volunteers!

In December we held an event at the Arundel Wetland Centre to thank them. An incredible 838 people have given up their time to help the ARC project achieve great things to date.

This event, hosted by WWT, began with a welcome talk from Dave Fairlamb the centre manager and a quick run through of our collective achievements by Kate our volunteer coordinator.

Then it was straight outside to enjoy the glorious winter sunshine, with guided walks and boat trips around the reserve.

Participants were then treated to a delicious buffet lunch provided by WWT catering staff.

It was such an enjoyable day and a great opportunity to chat and hear more about what everyone has been involved with.

"The day really enforced my pride in volunteering for such a great project" said Natalie Breden, our voluntary assistant volunteer coordinator.

# Invasive non-native species update

## A bonanza of balsam bashing!

A huge thank you to all the volunteers who helped with some mammoth Himalayan balsam bashing during the summer.

With their help, we managed to clear an area the size of a football pitch at Monkmead Wood near Pulborough/Storrington.

We have estimated that 500,000 plants were removed and up to 400 million seeds were prevented from entering the catchment at that one site alone!

We will be out again throughout the balsam season (June to early August) at Monkmead Woods and other sites in the project area, so if you'd like to join us for some highly addictive balsam bashing fun, lots of cake, good company and fresh air, then please get in touch and keep an eye on the website for further details.

## Tackling "the most dangerous plant in Britain"

The ARC project's work on controlling invasive non-native species was catapulted into the spotlight over the summer as a result of news reports of people suffering nasty burns from coming into contact with the toxic sap of giant hogweed in other parts of the country.

A live interview on BBC Radio Sussex with ARC Conservation Officer Sarah McIntyre led to a very fun day out with Chris Vallance, a reporter from Radio 4, for a piece on the PM programme and a short film on the Radio 4 website.

ARC has controlled giant

hogweed along 5km of the upper Arun in 2015, and we are engaging with numerous landowners to extend this work during 2016. If you have giant hogweed on your land or would like advice please get in touch with Sarah McIntyre: [sarah.mcintyre@rspb.org.uk](mailto:sarah.mcintyre@rspb.org.uk)



Radio Four's Chris Vallance interviewing giant hogweed!

## Skunk cabbage invasion

Leading on from two very well attended workshops at Imbhams Farm near Haslemere, some very hardy volunteers tried to halt the skunk cabbage invasion armed with spades, wellies and a love of mud! Two work parties have removed this stinky offender from four sites within the project area.

## Floating pennywort

Until recently we were only aware of the presence of this pernicious invader at two sites in our project area (at Petworth Park and where the outflow from their lake reaches a pond at Frog Farm on the Leconfield Estate), however we have been informed of another site in Bury close to the river Arun which will be tackled in the Spring.

With help from both the Leconfield Estate and the Environment Agency we have removed several tons of floating pennywort from Frog Farm pond (see below).



Before



After

# Documenting the Arun Valley for future generations

On a wet and windy day in November, the project's second annual oral history and photography exhibition was held at the [Look and Sea Centre](#) in Littlehampton.

This year's oral history project saw seven volunteers trained in oral history techniques. They then interviewed local people, to record their memories and stories about living and working in the Arun Valley.

We are keen to hear from anyone who'd like to take part in the final year of the project, particularly residents who are new to the area or from minority groups.

The sorts of things we'd like to ask about include: your experiences living and working in the area; your knowledge of local rivers and wildlife; flooding and pollution; community life and events; changes to the landscape and much more. Please get in touch ASAP if you know a local person



who fits the bill or you would like to volunteer yourself. We'll also be looking for people to carry out the interviews. Full training is provided. Contact Debbie for more information:  
[debbie.coggles@rspb.org.uk](mailto:debbie.coggles@rspb.org.uk)

The exhibition also featured the best of the images taken at our wildlife photography workshops. 20 young people aged between 7 - 16 joined us in the summer at [Pulborough Brooks](#) nature reserve, which was alive with

colourful insects and butterflies.

We'll be running the last few sessions next spring and summer so if you know a young person who would like to develop their photographic skills, get in touch to find out more.

Led by professional landscape photographer and volunteer, [John Dominick](#), all equipment is provided along with lunch and entry to the reserve. We may be able to fund local minibus pickup where needed.

## Mega volunteer day at Graffham Common

Another highlight of the volunteer season was a 'mega volunteer day' at Graffham Common in October with the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

35 work-hungry volunteers turned up on a Saturday to help pull birch and pine seedlings from the ground.

This is an important heathland site, so removing encroaching saplings and rhododendron encourages the heather to re-establish itself and benefits many scarcer species.



The volunteers worked their socks off and collectively gave 170 hours of help. What a result – thank you all!

# Giving rivers a bit of welly!

One of the key aims of the ARC project is to encourage people to take an active interest in their local river.

There is nothing quite like getting your wellies wet to make you feel like you've properly got to know your local stream!

So this summer we invited expert Andy Thomas from the Wild Trout Trust to give us some lessons in making our rivers better for people, fish and wildlife.

Volunteers came from all over West Sussex to join us at two locations: Warnham Local Nature Reserve and Storrington Meadows chalk stream.

Around 25 volunteers helped by installing natural bankside willow protection to help stop the stream eroding the banks of a local school playground. They also installed woody debris (which provides refuge for fish), creating pools, riffles and meanders, and narrowing the channel to help the river run through quicker and 'self cleanse' itself of silt.

It is muddy, wet and physical work but thoroughly satisfying to watch as the river springs back to life before your very eyes. Let's hope the fish enjoy it as much as we did.



## Launch of the Rother Riverfly Scheme

The Rother Riverfly Scheme was set up in June 2015 to provide training to volunteers to help monitor the health of the rivers in this catchment.

This project is being delivered by a partnership of organisations, led by the Arun & Rother Rivers Trust and is part of a national scheme launched by the Riverfly Partnership in 2007.

The work involves pairs of volunteers collecting samples from the riverbed each month, using a technique called 'kick sampling' to record the presence and abundance of eight riverfly groups.

Full training is provided and expenses covered.

The first training event for volunteers was delivered in September and following on from

this, eight volunteers are now actively monitoring sections of the Rother.

A second training workshop is scheduled for March 2016 and is already fully booked!

If you'd like to hear more about this scheme or find out about future activities please contact Kate on 01273 763 377 or [kate.whitton@rspb.org.uk](mailto:kate.whitton@rspb.org.uk).

# Putting the splash back into the floodplain



In August we deployed the RSPB's rotary ditcher at four sites within the project area.

The only one of its kind nationally, this piece of machinery is a low impact and wildlife friendly way of creating wetland habitats, which will benefit wetland wildlife including snipe, lapwing and dragonflies.

The rotary ditcher works by removing top soil from one area and spraying it finely across another area, leaving behind a shallow depression which fills with water when it rains. These mini lakes or 'scrapes' as they are known, not only help wildlife, but also help to store rain and flood water in floodplains away from homes and infrastructure.

We were delighted to discover that the scrapes had all filled up with water within a week and ten days later snipe were recorded visiting one of the sites!



We are looking forward to seeing how these new wetland and flood storage features fare over the winter season.

## Tiny treasures of Botany Bay

Fran Southgate, ecological advisor to the ARC project, took a chalk stream expert from the World Wide Fund for Nature on a tour of some of the rarest and most unique chalk streams in Sussex.

Botany Bay has featured in previous newsletters. Tucked away in a miniature valley, it is a special place, all tumbling ferns, mosses and liverworts. The water which flows through this valley is crystal clear, bubbling straight from hidden aquifers underground.

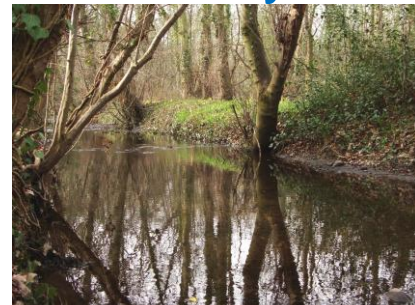
In the picture Fran has just picked up an inconspicuous looking little rock, and snapped it in half to reveal a semi fossilised twig inside – a priceless reaction from a seasoned ecologist!



These 'tufa deposits' are the result of a unique chemical reaction which occurs when the chalk in the water is exposed to oxygen and microbes. The carbonate in the water solidifies, encrusting both living and dead materials.

The owners of this chalk stream are committed to preserving these wonderful features for present and future generations. Work is going on behind the scenes to get this site ready for outdoor education activities from next year.

## Free trees available – for three months more only!



Colin Wilkinson (rspb-images.com)

The combination of geology that underlies the Arun river valley creates generally heavy soils that become wet and water-logged during the winter.

Like much of the Low Weald, these soils were difficult to cultivate and remained heavily wooded so that by the time of the Domesday Book (1086), about two thirds of the area was still wooded.

Trees play an important role in flood management – water sinks into the soil under the trees at [67 times the rate](#) at which it sinks into the soil under grass.

The ARC project has funding available for tree planting. We can cover the cost of the trees, the cost of fencing to protect the trees and can help provide volunteers to assist with planting.

There are also free black poplar trees available as part of the Sussex Black Poplar Conservation project. We have just three months left of the tree planting season, so please do get in touch to discuss tree planting possibilities in your local community.

Planting must be within our project area – see here for a map – [www.arunwesternstreams.org.uk/projects/arc](http://www.arunwesternstreams.org.uk/projects/arc).

Contact [fransouthgate@sussexwt.org.uk](mailto:fransouthgate@sussexwt.org.uk) for more details.

# Free Activities and Training for Primary Schools

## FREE Otter and Water Vole Discovery Day

Local primary schools are invited to come and discover the magical world of riverside mammals at Chesworth Farm, Horsham, this spring and summer.

The children will take part in a number of fun educational activities. They'll hear all about the life of river mammals. The children will also learn how to identify tracks and signs and make pretend mammal poo using natural materials like clay.

We can accommodate one class for a full day or two for a half day. Please get in touch if your school would like to find out more or book a free place.

## FULLY FUNDED Forest School Training

"Forest School is an exciting way

forward in environmental education which brings children into regular and repeated contact with their local outdoor environment" *Sussex Wildlife Trust*.

Through our funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund we are able to send local teachers, teaching assistants or parent helpers on a Forest School training course with the Sussex Wildlife Trust (cost for all three levels usually around £1500).

The courses are led by experienced staff and fully risk assessed. We also have a fund to support with travel costs (please ask).

**All levels available (introduction, assistant and leader) only seven spaces left!**

Click the following link for further information about Forest Schools:

<https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/what-we-do/environmental-education/forest-school/forest-school-training>

## Other free activities

- Arun & Rother resource pack launching in Spring
- River field trips to the Arun or Rother
- Loan of our wildlife camera

Visit the resource page on the catchment website for a full programme:

<http://arunwesternstreams.org.uk/resources>



Josef a student at Seaford College recorded the above badger image using our wildlife camera.

Get in touch if you'd like to find out more:

[debbie.coggles@rspb.org.uk](mailto:debbie.coggles@rspb.org.uk)

# Helping schools to save water

Primary schools across the South East are being offered a great opportunity to save water, energy and money.

Southern Water is about to launch its water-saving mission and is working in partnership with the ARC project to extend this FREE offer to primary schools in its water supply area.

Engineers carry out school visits to audit water use and then fit the latest water-saving devices to taps, toilets and showers.

Southern Water will help teachers engage pupils in saving water by becoming Water Heroes. They will provide education packs and lesson plans filled with challenges



designed to help children work out how small changes can make big savings. As a result, your school should make significant savings on water and energy bills.

If your school would like to find out more and/or take part, please contact:

[debbie.coggles@rspb.org.uk](mailto:debbie.coggles@rspb.org.uk)

# Desmoulin's whorl snail - a wetland rarity living in West Sussex

*Vertigo moulinsiana* is a tiny wetland snail that gained fame, some would say notoriety, during the Newbury Bypass confrontations and debates of the mid 1990s. For many people this is the 'Newbury Bypass snail'.

Measuring just 2.2 – 2.7mm in length it has a light brown 'chrysalis shaped' shell with tooth folds in the shell's aperture or mouth.

The snail is mainly found in unshaded calcareous fens and marshes typically bordering rivers and lakes. Even light overhead shading by trees will suppress numbers and deep shade is avoided by the snail.

It lives on both living and dead stems and leaves of a variety of plants including sedges, grasses

and sometimes reeds. The species shows a preference for taller vegetation so it can climb; it is rarely found in ground litter.

Ground water conditions are also of critical importance for the snail. It can survive short periods of flooding or drought, but if these continue for an extended period the snail declines and disappears.

Locally distributed across southern and eastern England from Dorset to North Norfolk with a few isolated populations elsewhere such as West Cornwall, North Wales and East Kent the snail is of European importance being listed on the EU Habitats and Species Directive (Annex II).

In 2014, its presence was confirmed at four sites in West Sussex by Martin Willing, mollusc specialist and county recorder: the Arundel Wildfowl & Wetlands Centre, Swanbourne Lake, Arundel Park, Burton Mill Pond and neighbouring Chingford Pond.

The snail has been lost from at least two West Sussex sites in recent years due to habitat changes - Fishbourne Fen (within the last few years) and Harting Pond near Petersfield (lost in early 1970s). It is not known to be present in East Sussex.

For further information on this snail or other molluscs in Sussex contact Martin:  
[martinjwilling@gmail.com](mailto:martinjwilling@gmail.com).



## River safety training

Working safely in and near water is hugely important so the ARC project sent a group of staff, volunteers, representatives of community groups and partner organisations on a river safety training day in Midhurst, to help build skills and confidence.

Organised by the national Rivers Trust, the training session was delivered by Andy Weeks from ARW Training Solutions. Following a classroom introductory session participants grabbed their waders and headed out into the field.

The practical part of the training gave people the chance to practice throwing lines and to carry out an exploratory safety walk on the river bed. A guiding



pole and good balance are essential as well as a good dose of common sense.

Andy was impressed by the recruits and everyone passed with flying colours!

# Upper Arun river restoration project

This flagship river restoration project covering a 13.5km stretch of the Upper Arun was developed in response to the degradation of the river through pollution from sewage outfalls, urban run-off, and through historical engineering and dredging of river channels. The key aims of the project are to: expand the physical diversity of the river channel, extend the period that

floodwaters are retained on the floodplain and enhance habitats within the floodplain.

Following a competitive tender process, contractors Five Rivers started on site in early September overseen by contract supervisors Aquascience. Favourable weather allowed works to progress well and this first phase of the project was completed in early November slightly ahead of schedule. Works to the river included river narrowing, blackthorn coppicing,

bank re-profiling, scrape excavation and the reconnection of a relic flood channel at Dedisham Manor. This final element provides somewhere for water to go in times of high flow and should result in increased protection against flooding for the nearby historic farmhouse.

We will be meeting with other landowners in early 2016 to discuss further works we hope to take forward for the final phase of this project.



## Leaving a legacy for our local wildlife sites

Local Wildlife Sites (sometime also referred to as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance or SNCIs) are some of the most valuable sites in the county for protecting local wildlife.

Often overlooked as the 'poor relatives' of nationally and legally protected sites, there is no real obligation to protect them which often means that there is little in the way of resources or support to manage them.

There are over 140 Local Wildlife Sites in the ARC project area, including some of the best loved and most visited nature reserves in Sussex.

In early November, the ARC project invited landowners of these sites to an event to meet each other, to learn how their sites fit into the wider landscape picture and to hear about funding management advice opportunities.

The feedback from the event has been really positive. We have

been following up with participants to provide support and advice where requested and some participants are now applying to the ARC community fund for up to £1000 to help manage and protect these sites for the future.

If you know of a Local Wildlife Site and you would like help with managing it or funding its management then please get in touch with Fran:

[fransouthgate@sussexwt.org.uk](mailto:fransouthgate@sussexwt.org.uk)

# Final months to apply to ARC community fund



Slindon School pond improvements funded through ARC

We have just over £9500 left in our grants fund for communities to use on a range of habitat, wildlife and access improvements. We can consider applications up to £1000.

Projects must be located within our project here, see map here - [www.arunwesternstreams.org.uk/projects/arc](http://www.arunwesternstreams.org.uk/projects/arc). To date, we have given out 31 grants totalling just over £23,000.

Slinfold School recently used a grant to help fund their school pond and bridge renovation

project (see photos above). Their school pond had become overgrown and the bridge was old and rotten, making access to the pond unsafe. Several volunteers helped restore the pond, creating a new bridge and the children enjoyed getting involved too.

We encourage you to get in touch ASAP as the funding will run out in July. Visit: [www.arunwesternstreams.org.uk/resources](http://www.arunwesternstreams.org.uk/resources)

to find out about the sorts of projects we can fund and to download the application form.

## Upcoming Events

Please visit the events page of the catchment website to find out what's going on in the local area and how you can get involved:

[arunwesternstreams.org.uk/events](http://arunwesternstreams.org.uk/events)

## Contact the project team:

**ARC Project Manager – Rachel Carless:**

[rachel.carless@rspb.org.uk](mailto:rachel.carless@rspb.org.uk) / 01273 763 374

**ARC Project Officer – Debbie Coggles:**

[deborah.coggles@rspb.org.uk](mailto:deborah.coggles@rspb.org.uk) / 01273 763 378

**ARC Project Conservation Officer – Sarah McIntyre:**

[sarah.mcintyre@rspb.org.uk](mailto:sarah.mcintyre@rspb.org.uk) / 01273 763 623

**Project Development Officer (ARRT) – Vee Moore:**

[projectdevelopmentofficer@arrt.org.uk](mailto:projectdevelopmentofficer@arrt.org.uk) / 07884 868 151

**ARC Ecological Advisor – Fran Southgate:**

[fransouthgate@sussexwt.org.uk](mailto:fransouthgate@sussexwt.org.uk) / 01273 497 555

**ARC Volunteer Coordinator – Kate Whitton:**

[kate.whitton@rspb.org.uk](mailto:kate.whitton@rspb.org.uk) / 01273 763 377

