



In this Issue

[ARC Explorer](#)

[Non-native invasive species update](#)

[Join the pond network!](#)

[Rotary ditcher](#)

[New legislation to help tackle invasive non-native species](#)

[Outdoor learning for primary schools](#)

[£1000 community grants](#)

[Oral history project](#)

[Delivering on the ground in the Arun and Western Streams](#)

[Rescuing Ratty](#)

[Rummaging for newts](#)

[Botany Bay bryophytes](#)

[Toads](#)

[Upper Arun river restoration project](#)

[Rain garden update](#)

[Staff changes](#)



Chris Packham launches the ARC Explorer app at Pulborough Brooks

ARC Explorer

The [ARC Explorer](#) app and website offer a fun and engaging way for people of all ages to experience and explore the Arun and Rother rivers and their surrounding countryside while also learning more about the wildlife it contains.

The app showcases a number of walking trails people can follow in the project area (including information about places of interest, cafes and toilets on the route). It also invites users to submit sightings of wildlife and invasive species; data that are passed on to the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre via [iRecord](#) – thereby assisting those working in conservation in the region.

BBC Springwatch presenter Chris Packham helped launch the app with a walk at [Pulborough Brooks](#) nature reserve in February. You can watch his inspiring speech about the app and the role of technology in conservation on the website homepage – well worth 5 minutes of your time!

So far over 570 people have downloaded and are using the app.

It's FREE and available via the homepage: <http://arcexplorer.org.uk/> Every species you record gets you a badge. At the end of the project there will be a prize for the person who's gained the most badges.

Do you have what it takes to become the 'Guardian of ARC' by being the first person to record *all* the species (currently 255)?!

Non-native invasive species update

The first Himalayan 'Balsam bashing' session of the season, carried out by the ever energetic South Downs National Park volunteers in the second week of May, removed a swathe of emerging seedlings on the Rother walk near Midhurst.

The primary focus of the ARC invasives programme this season will be on clearing the Rivers Stor and Chilt near Pulborough/ Storrington and the upper tributaries of the Rother, although we would encourage any communities in the catchment who would like to champion Himalayan Balsam clearance on their stretch of river to contact us for advice and support.

We will be organising Balsam bashing work parties throughout the summer (June – mid August).

If you would like to get some exercise in wonderful scenery and meet new people whilst making a contribution to conservation, then please get in touch.

Surveying the upper tributaries of the River Arun near Haslemere, in partnership with Surrey Wildlife Trust, has revealed a forest of Skunk Cabbage plants in wet woodland. A training day/workshop at Imbhams Farm near Haslemere for landowners and other interested parties is being held on the 22nd June, and volunteers will be needed to help us dig up this highly invasive plant in early July.

Giant Hogweed continues to be a problem along the Upper Arun and we will be attempting to 'hold the line' by surveying the extent of current infestation and working with landowners along the main river north of the A272 to halt its advance. It is vital to identify any isolated infestations before they spread so please report any sightings of this plant to us by getting in touch with Sarah by email/phone or by using the ARC Explorer app / website. Visit <http://arcexplorer.org.uk/>.

Work is also continuing to advise landowners, train volunteers, map invasives, control water fern and *crassula* infestations, and set up a mink control initiative across the entire catchment.

There is a fact sheet detailing the key invasive species we are targeting on the website: www.arunwesternstreams.org.uk/invasives



SDNPA Volunteers tackling Himalayan Balsam seedlings on the River Rother.



The ARC Conservation Officer surveying the epic scale of Skunk Cabbage infestation near Haslemere.

Join the pond network!

We have one more training session coming up at Pulborough Brooks Nature Reserve which is free, and open to anyone who would like to make a contribution to pond conservation.

In return we ask that you 'adopt' a local pond or two, and tell us what you find there for as long as you can.

Pond plants and invasive species:
Saturday 20th June, 10 am - 4 pm.

See www.arunwesternstreams.org.uk/events for more information. If you are interested in attending the training or would like to find out more please contact: kate.whitton@rspb.org.uk.

If you find any invasive species in a pond, please contact: sarah.mcintyre@rspb.org.uk.

Rotary ditcher



The ARC project aims to increase the area of habitat available for a range of wetland species. In particular we want to improve areas for breeding wading birds, wetland plants and for water voles.

Over the course of time, our floodplains and seasonal wetland pools have been flattened out or filled in, which leaves very little 'niche' habitats for certain wildlife.

This autumn we will be putting some of the 'lumps and bumps' or "micro-topography" back in our floodplains at key sites across the Arun & Rother valleys using this fantastic machine.

The [rotary ditcher](#) is different to most machines used for earth moving. Rather than digging and bulldozing the soil, this machine lifts up soil and sprays it out in the desired direction.

It's a very low-impact and wildlife friendly way of creating wetland habitats, and the machine can be fine tuned to create very small nuances in the land that may not be noticeable to us, but which make a huge difference to whether wetland birds will breed and be able to rear their young or not. So far we have four sites lined up for these improvements.

If you have a wetland grassland site and feel that you could do more for birds and other wildlife then contact Fran Southgate about the possibility of bringing the rotary ditcher onto your land:

fransouthgate@sussexwt.org.uk

New legislation to help tackle invasive non-native species

People who fail to control the spread of invasive non-native plants such as Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed on their land could be fined up to £2,500 (or £20,000 for companies/organisations) or receive anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs), under new legislation.

The Infrastructure Act 2015 became law on 12 February 2015 and while this primarily relates to infrastructure and development, it also introduces much needed powers to control non-native invasive species in England and Wales. The measures provide government agencies with powers to enter into control agreements and, if necessary, issue landowners with control orders to ensure action can be taken against harmful species on their land. These will only be issued as a last resort if landowners consistently fail to control invasive species, and if this is having a serious detrimental impact on the local community.

A further piece of European legislation designed to limit the spread of invasive species, the EU Commission's *Invasive Alien Species* legislation, became law on 1 January 2015. The EU estimates there are currently over 12,000 species present in Europe which are alien to the natural environment. About 15% of these are invasive (causing a detrimental impact on the environment), they are rapidly growing in number, and the cost of their control is in excess of €12 billion per year. The new Regulation will lead to the adoption of a list of invasive species of "union concern" which 'must not be introduced, transported, placed on the market, kept, bred, grown or released into the environment'. It also covers those of regional concern.

Both pieces of legislation are important steps in the fight against invasive species in the UK, both in tackling the species already having serious negative impacts on our native species, health or economy, and in preventing the colonisation of new species.

Further details on the legislation can be found here:

www.nonnativespecies.org/home/index.cfm.

Outdoor learning for primary schools



Northolmes Junior School pond dipping at Chesworth Farm

The ARC project aims to connect young people with their local rivers and wetlands. We have a number of **FREE** activities for local primary schools. Please get in touch to find out how your school can benefit.

River field trips

The ARC education programme is designed to teach primary school children about the fantastic cultural and natural heritage of their local rivers the Arun and Rother. This summer more than 180 children from four schools will join us for a fun and informative day outside the classroom, learning about their local rivers and wildlife.

Feedback from two of this year's fieldtrips:

"The children and adults absolutely loved the trip. The pond dipping was great, well organised and completely safe. The children loved finding all the different creatures and identifying them... The children enjoyed finding out the flow rate of the river and we have used this to do graph work back at school. The field sketches were great and they learnt lots of information about the river corridor. A fantastic visit and one that we would definitely repeat when we undertake this topic again and we would definitely recommend it to others" Teacher, Northolmes Junior School.

"I learnt the most extraordinary things like which creatures live in a pond and that a manmade waterfall is called a weir. My favourite thing that we did was the field sketch (I had never done one before)." Sophie, Northolmes Junior School pupil.

"We had a great day thank you! The children really enjoyed it and the weather was brilliant. They loved the habitat hunting, particularly the pond dipping... Please say another big thank you to Sue and Sarita, we had a wonderful day". St Mary's C of E Primary School, Horsham.

Get in touch if you'd like to find out more about next year's field trips. All trips are fully funded, risk assessed and led by experienced field teachers.

Forest School Training

We still have a number of **FREE** places on our forest school training sessions (Level 1, 2 or 3). Limited to one place per school. There are a number of sessions throughout the year. Please get in touch if you'd like to apply for a place.

"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

Otter and water vole activity days

We are looking for two schools to come and join us for this year's *otter and water vole* activity days. These are engaging, tailor-made days by the river, which pupils will remember for years to come. We can accommodate one class per school at Chesworth Farm in Horsham. All trips are fully funded, risk assessed and led by experienced field teachers and we can contribute £150 towards minibus hire (if required).

Wildlife Camera

Get in touch if you'd like to book our wildlife camera (**FREE** of charge). The camera can be set up on school grounds and will capture images of any wildlife that sets off its sensors. It's not very big and can easily be attached to a fence or tree. The ARC project assistant will come and set up the camera and leave it on your school grounds for a couple weeks before returning to take it down. You will receive copies of all images taken by the camera to share with students.

ARC education resource pack

We've developed an educational resource pack about the Arun and Rother rivers. With an emphasis on outdoor learning and rivers, it is linked to the new national curriculum for primary schools. The resource pack is about to go into the layout and design phase and we're aiming to launch it in the Autumn term 2015. It will also be made freely available to download via the catchment website www.arunwesternstreams.org.uk/

For further details about the ARC education programme contact:
deborah.coggles@rspb.org.uk /
01273 763 378

Community grants - up to £1000 available - schools, community groups and parish councils encouraged to apply

We have funding to restore, create and reconnect habitats for local wildlife and improve access to the countryside in your community. Get in touch if you'd like to discuss an idea or apply for up to £1000 of funding.

The ARC project has already committed £11,600 to habitat, wildlife and access improvements. We've received applications from local volunteer groups, schools and parish councils for a variety of enhancements including installing owl boxes, creating a boardwalk and restoring ponds, hedgerows and chalk streams. There's just over £20,000 of funding left, so do consider applying or share this article with your friends, colleagues, local schools or community groups who might like to apply.

The sorts of things we can fund include:

- Site management plans or surveys for local wildlife sites
- Barn owl boxes
- Equipment to carry out conservation works
- Training
- Access improvements
- Interpretation (leaflets / boards etc)
- School grounds enhancements
- Work to enhance and re-connect species / habitats
- Hedge & shaw planting
- Pond & scrape creation
- Fencing

Please click the following link to download the application form:

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

To discuss a project idea, contact Fran Southgate on 01273 497 555 or email: fransouthgate@sussexwt.org.uk

Completed application forms should be sent to: deborah.coggles@rspb.org.uk



Story to share?

We are looking for local people with interesting stories, knowledge and/or memories to share about the heritage of the Arun Valley and surrounding areas for our oral history project. Perhaps you're working on an archaeological dig, are a local artist inspired by the rivers and local countryside or are involved with a local history group. Whatever your area of interest we'd love to hear from you! We'd only need an hour or two of your time in June, July or August and can come to you. For more information please contact deborah.coggles@rspb.org.uk.

Delivering on the ground in the Arun and Western Streams

In 2015 the focus for the Arun and Western Streams Partnership is on delivery of projects on the ground. The Partnership is pleased to announce that it has secured £40,000 from the Catchment Partnership Action Fund to deliver a suite of fish passage improvements on the River Ems. This will compliment the work being undertaken by Portsmouth Water in partnership with the Arun and Rother Rivers Trust and the Wild Trout Trust to restore a section of the river in the Upper Ems. For further information on the Arun and Western Streams Catchment Partnership and the projects being undertaken visit the website at:

www.arunwesternstreams.org.uk

Rescuing Ratty

Fifteen years ago, it was predicted that the water vole could be extinct in Sussex by 2010. Thanks to some considerable effort this hasn't happened, but this charming riverside character from Wind in the Willows is still very much threatened.

The Arun valley hosts one of only 3 remaining viable populations in Sussex likely to survive long term. As part of our bid to enhance the Arun landscape for all, we've been trying to improve things for Ratty (aka the water vole). We've been doing this through practical conservation like mink control as well as through training local people "the vole patrol" to monitor population changes.

On a blustery but sunny weekend in May, the [Arundel Wildfowl and Wetland Trust](#) welcomed 18 enthusiastic volunteers for a training day on how to look for water voles. It's fairly unglamorous and boils down to droppings, feeding signs and burrows, but we were richly rewarded with numerous sightings of these lovely small mammals, and with the chance to spend time in a fantastic wetland environment.

Our volunteers will now be busy seeking water voles for the rest of the year. Last year over 40km of river were surveyed, and this year we expect to beat that figure. All of the work the volunteers do goes towards helping us save this species from extinction across the Arun & Western Streams catchment. Sincere thanks to all our volunteers. We're sure the water voles appreciate it!

Rummaging for newts

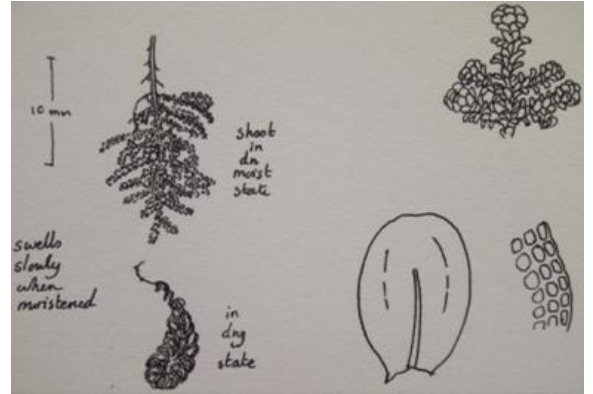
It's not often that you find yourself huddled round a pond at dusk on a chilly spring evening. Peering into the murky depths with nothing but a high powered torch to light our way, we were amazed at the teeming life we found, even this early in the year.

This was one of 9 training sessions being delivered in partnership with the [Freshwater Habitats Trust](#) who are helping us set up a network of trained volunteers to survey ponds. The focus of this session was the Great Crested Newt. Many thanks to all the volunteers who've offered to give up their time. The work they do will form an important part of our aim to establish a healthy network of ponds, supporting a range of wildlife across the project area.



Night time newt surveying at Pulborough Brooks

Botany Bay bryophytes



Prince of Wales feather moss drawing by Sue Rubinstein.

Tom Ottley, Bryophyte Recorder for Sussex and volunteers Jaqui Hutson and Sue Rubenstein, recently surveyed the bryophytes in Botany Bay, home to a fast flowing rocky chalk stream with some rare and unusual mosses.

These include the very rare Teesdale feather moss (*Rhynchostegiella teneriffae*) and the Fountain feather moss (*Hygroamblystegium tenax*). One of the interesting and very beautiful mosses found on the trees is the Prince of Wales feather Moss (*Leptodon smithii*).

Toads

In February the [Sussex Amphibian & Reptile Group](#) hosted a 'Toads on Roads' workshop in Midhurst. We were fortunate to be joined by Jim Foster, Director of Conservation at the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust who gave a talk on the issues facing toads in the UK and worldwide. The event was attended by 35 interested members of the public who were encouraged to keep an eye out for where toads were crossing roads and to submit this information.

Over the following weeks information on 12 new toad crossing sites (10 in the Arun Valley) was received – a valuable addition to the three previously known sites. This information is being fed back to the [Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust](#) and to [Froglife](#) who co-ordinate the national toads on roads project. We would like to thank all those who attended the event to learn more about our native amphibians and a special thanks to those who have been and continue to send in records of their sightings.

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 historic 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
- Expand, create and enhance habitats within the floodplain to benefit specific species.

We've opted to use low-cost, low-tech and low impact methods to help deliver these aims. For example, by using fallen or felled timber, we can build naturalised dams in suitable areas. We can narrow or widen channels to manage the flow of water. Regrading some banks will improve habitats for different wildlife. Beyond the watercourses, we can block drains associated with polluted run-off into watercourses, manage vegetation, plant new woodland areas and create pools. Using a coordinated variety of such methods will bring direct improvements.

Historically, the river would have flowed naturally within a wooded landscape. Falling trees and woody debris would have created a dynamism that is lacking today. Heavy downpours would have been buffered by woodland resulting in far greater retention of water on the floodplain.

The development and expansion of Horsham exacerbated the discharge of rainfall to the river channel while Horsham sewage works contributes a significant nutrient rich flow to the river. Both the weir at Wanford (site of a former water mill) and the gauging weir at Alfoldean slow down currents and have reduced the natural character of the river.

The project team has been working with landowners and experts to develop solutions and come up with effective ways of monitoring and evaluating the project's impact. Fish and invertebrate surveys have been undertaken and will also take place at intervals after the project has been completed. Before and after photography will document the changes.



The next stage of the project is to put out an Invitation to Tender for the works. This contract opportunity will be advertised in early July. If you know of any suitable contractors that might be interested then please put them in touch. Works will commence in August. If you have any questions please get in touch with Rachel Carless, the project manager for this project.

Rain garden update

A [rain garden](#) is a shallow depression, with absorbent yet free draining soil, planted with vegetation that can withstand occasional temporary flooding. Rain gardens were first developed in the United States in the 1990s, where they have become increasingly popular. In the UK, the mimicking of natural drainage in urban areas is officially encouraged and known as Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).

The ARC project has been working with local communities to identify suitable sites to build four rain gardens to showcase the value of Sustainable Drainage Systems. Designs are now being developed working in partnership with communities local to each site. Further updates will be provided as these projects develop.



Staff update

ARC team welcomes Kate Whitton who has joined as the project volunteer coordinator. Kate will be helping us meet our target of delivering 2,840 days of volunteering activities over the course of the project.

She will also be helping to build a strong legacy by working with partner organisations to develop a strategy to deliver a more joined up approach to volunteering across the catchment. She will also be developing the vision for establishing a water monitoring programme, which would, with the help of a volunteer workforce, track the health of our local water bodies beyond the life of the project.

“This is an exciting time to be joining the ARC project team and I’m looking forward to what we can achieve together this year. We’re now over half way through the project and are making a big push to promote our exciting volunteering opportunities and get more people involved. This is where you can make a big difference by contacting me to volunteer your support.”

Visit www.arunwesternstreams.org.uk/volunteering to download the full list of volunteering opportunities available. We have activities for everyone, from helping toads cross our roads, river clean-ups, pond surveying and helping to remove non-native invasive species, or conducting oral history interviews. Alternatively if you have a particular skill you’d like to offer then do get in touch to discuss your ideas. We’d love to hear from you.

Volunteer coordinator Kate Whitton removing non native invasive species Himalayan Balsam



Image by [John Dominick](#)

Please contact Kate for an informal chat:
01273 763 379 / kate.whitton@rspb.org.uk.

Contact the project team:

ARC Project Manager – Rachel Carless:

rachel.carless@rspb.org.uk / 01273 763 374

ARC Project Assistant – Debbie Coggles:

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ARC Project Conservation Officer – Sarah McIntyre:

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Project Development Officer (ARRT) – Vee Moore:

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ARC Ecological Advisor – Fran Southgate:

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ARC Volunteer Coordinator – Kate Whitton:

kate.whitton@rspb.org.uk / 01273 763 377

