
Issue 20 | Spring/Summer 2016

Newsletter

Restoring Ratty
project voles on!

Robson Green
officially opens
Hexham Fish Pass

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Welcome

Well what a start to 2016! It's has been an incredible six months for us with the official launch of Hexham Fish Pass opened by Northumberland fishing legend, Robson Green. Not to mention the appointment of our volunteer coordinator, Simone Price, which has seen our volunteering activities go from strength to strength.

Unfortunately, we also witnessed first-hand the combined impact of human use of the landscape with heavy rainfall as December saw the Tyne experience its greatest flood since 1771 with homes and businesses throughout the catchment badly affected. In many places rivers have been affected by aggravated erosion and overland runoff depositing a damaging silt burden in our rivers. For us it highlights the importance of looking after our rivers.

Restoring Ratty project voles on

Kielder Castle is hosting our exhibition on the local history of the water vole as part of our joint project with Northumberland Wildlife Trust and the Forestry Commission. The project is part of a longer term vision to see water voles thriving once again along the whole of the River Tyne and its catchment.

Graham Holyoak, River Projects Manager at the Trust has led phase one of the project which set up volunteer teams to monitor and create a suitable habitat, free from mink, which is the water vole's main predator.

To understand the history of this iconic creature, which has been absent from the Tyne for many years, many people from the local community have shared their childhood memories. These recorded memories have been used to create the oral exhibition now on display at Kielder Castle.



Volunteers being trained in mink surveying

Graham Holyoak says: "The critical monitoring phase has been really successful. It was all about paving the way for successful re-introduction of the water vole. Volunteers gathered over 1000 records with no sighting of Mink, so we are confident that the habitat is now ready for the Restoring Ratty project to begin."

Phase two of the Heritage Lottery funded project hopes to start in June, after the bid for funding was submitted in March. Phase 2 will see water voles re-introduced into Kielder and the project will be led by Northumberland Wildlife Trust with support from ourselves and the Forestry Commission.

Robson Green Officially Opens Hexham Fish Pass

Robson Green officially opened Hexham Fish Pass on Tuesday 22 March 2016 using his expert fishing skills to cast a line to mark the occasion.

The fish pass was completed last year but officially opened in March to coincide with the time of year when spring salmon begin to 'run' the river using the fish pass to make their way upstream.

The fish pass is designed to make it easier for salmon and sea trout to migrate upstream to breed. Tyne Rivers Trust has been the driving force behind the project which has taken many years of hard work to come to fruition.

Susan Mackirdy, Director of Tyne Rivers Trust says: "This opening marks many years of hard work and is testament to what can be achieved by several organisations working together.



Hexham Fish pass

There is a challenging leap for migrating salmon and sea trout at Hexham Bridge, too challenging for many fish especially in low water. A lot of leaps are



Robson Green, Hugo Remnant, Susan Mackirdy

unsuccessful and the fish can injure themselves by landing on the concrete. They also waste their energy in failed leaps, and are prone to disease while they wait for better flows, so they have less energy for spawning when they do eventually get upstream."

The new fish pass gives migrating fish an alternative route by-passing the bridge footings to swim up two low-gradient channels to continue on their journey up the Tyne.

Robson Green said: "It's an honour to mark the opening of something which will help salmon and sea trout on their annual migration and ultimately improve what is the greatest salmon river in the country.

He adds: "Since childhood the draw of the Tyne always gives me a sense of belonging and goes some way into defining who I am. Salmon tend not to reside in ugly places so the fact that good numbers are still journeying up the Tyne is testament to its clarity and health."

The fish pass has been shortlisted for the Institute of Civil Engineer's Robert Stephenson Awards.

Our thanks go to our partners who helped deliver the project: Northumberland County Council, the Environment Agency, Tyne Riparian Owners & Occupiers Association and the former Tyne & Wear Integrated Transport Authority.

Our Volunteers!



Tree planting at Whitfield Northumberland

We've been working to improve the River Tyne and its catchment since 2004. In that time we've reduced the number of barriers to fish migrating upstream, improved huge amounts of river habitat and improved the quality of water so that aquatic life can thrive.

Our volunteers are an essential part of this, they help us to tackle the practical tasks that keep the river in good health. From removing invasive species to restoring riverbanks and planting trees to reduce the risk of flooding

- volunteers tell us it's the perfect excuse to spend time outdoors and learn a new skill.

So far in 2016, our volunteers have planted over 4,000 trees to stop riverbanks from eroding, keep rivers cool and help reduce the risk of flooding, and we've got lots of more volunteering days coming up in the next few months.

2016 Volunteering dates for your diary

17 June: Riverfly monitoring – learn how to carry out this recognised river health indicator to keep an eye on water quality for us. Equipment will be provided.

June – August: Balsam bashing and invasive species control – spend a day getting to grips with non-native species such as Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed which can cause riverbank erosion and flooding.

Sep – October: Hexham Fish Pass monitoring – help the Environment Agency to set up and run acoustic monitoring at the pass or take part in a visual count recording the numbers of fish swimming up the pass

October: Tree planting - experience fantastic scenery and a true sense of achievement working as part of a team to plant up to 500 trees in a day to help keep rivers cool and prevent river bank erosion.

Simone Price joined us this year in the Heritage Lottery funded role of volunteer coordinator. She joins us from Durham Wildlife Trust where she worked with volunteers on the Low Barns nature reserve.

Her job is to recruit volunteers and coordinate and plan volunteer activities. Simone has already made her mark, doubling the number of regular volunteers and organising 10 tree planting days in three months. She also spent two days working with 15 volunteers to remove debris left from the December floods and restore the footpath at Watersmeet, Hexham. Simone says: Our volunteers tackle practical tasks from removing invasive species to restoring riverbanks – it's the perfect excuse to spend time outdoors and learn a new skill. As a Trust we couldn't function without them."

To find out more about volunteering contact Simone on: 01434 636902 / s.price@tyneriverstrust.org



heritage
lottery fund
LOTTERY FUNDED



Here's some of the activities our volunteers have been up to so far this year

Left: Planting 250 trees at Tasset Castle

Right: A team of 15 volunteers cleared debris from the December floods at Watersmeet, Hexham



Forest project runs its course



Forest streams digger

Our successful Forest Streams project is celebrating its fifth anniversary as it prepares to come to a close. Funded by the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission it has focused on working with foresters to improve water quality in the burns running through Kielder Forest.

There were low numbers of fish in these burns due to silt and low PH balance in the water, potentially influenced by forestry. The Forest Streams project joined forces with

foresters to improve water quality. On a practical level this involved introducing a range of 'slow the flow' measures:

- Disconnecting drainage – this meant that dirty water no longer flows directly into the burn, it first flows into a silt trap, pond or rough ground to filter it
- Improving forest road drains to reduce the silt going into burns
- Planting more than 400 broadleaf trees where conifers were previously planted in order

to stabilise banks, keep the water cool and increase food sources for fish

- Blocking 24 hectares of forest drains to slow the flow of water and make the ground wetter on unproductive land.

The project has achieved many successes along the way and we hope to see water quality continue to improve as foresters and engineers continue to implement the good practices the project has put in place.

Revitalising news for Redesdale



Bellshiel in Redesdale

Immortalised in the Border Ballads, home to the famed Border Reivers and a key military site since Roman times, Redesdale is set to be revitalised over the next five years.

We're pleased to have been an integral part of the team which has successfully bid for £1.8 million Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) investment to reinvigorate the economy, culture and heritage of this magnificent and undervalued landscape.

The project, led by Natural England has been given the green light for an 18 month development phase which will be led by newly appointed Project Development

Officer, Lydia Speakman. The development phase will include creating a river improvement plan to protect the Freshwater Pearl-mussel as part of a wider suite of plans for the area, which will then be submitted to HLF as a bid for funding to deliver the work.

If the Delivery bid is successful, nearly 1,600ha of land will be restored; plans will be put in place with farmers to reduce silt build up, pollution and riverbank erosion in the River Rede and 50 volunteers will help to monitor and tackle non-native invasive species. Built heritage will also benefit thanks to repairs and management plans for Scheduled Ancient Monuments and listed buildings.

Whilst the valley is still a crossing point for thousands of visitors, a declining resident population and associated economic problems threaten Redesdale's heritage.

The project aims to reconnect people with the landscape's heritage. Those who currently just pass through will be encouraged to become visitors with an awareness and engagement programme to tell the frontier story. Residents and land managers will receive training and new business and training opportunities will be developed.



Fishing off the beaten track



Aidan Pollard and James Stockoe

 **Winner of BBC's Earth Wildest Waters, James Stockoe has joined forces with Tyne Rivers Trust to encourage those looking for a more wild fishing experience to try the Tyne Angling Passport.**

Our charity fishing scheme offers a day's fishing on a range of 'wild' beats across the Tyne catchment for only £8 per day. All proceeds go back into improving the river.

James says: "Brown trout fishing on the Tyne can be overlooked because of the amazing runs and catches of salmon, but there are great numbers and some phenomenally sized trout to be had. This is a great opportunity to fish for this amazing native species and its low cost means more people can take advantage of it."

The beats available range from Kielder in the North to Alston in the south west of the catchment, down to Cow Green Reservoir in County Durham and Rowlands Gill in Gateshead. The beats primarily offer brown trout fishing but anglers can enjoy good fishing for grayling on the river Derwent and for the occasional salmon and sea trout on the

Devil's Water and the river Rede.

Aidan Pollard, Fisheries Consultant for Tyne Rivers Trust says: "We're extremely grateful for the goodwill of the beat owners who by donating use of the beats keep fishing accessible and affordable. In buying a day ticket through the Tyne Angling Passport you not only get a good day's fishing, but you also support Tyne Rivers Trust in conserving rivers across our magnificent catchment.

"These are great places to go to learn the finer skills of wild trout fishing. It's the ideal day out for those who seek the peace and tranquillity of fishing off the beaten track."

For a full list of beats, maps, availability and to book visit: www.tyneriverstrust.org/tap

Charity Calendar 2017

We're launching our very own charity calendar for 2017 and we need your best photos of the Tyne catchment to fill it! The theme is Tyne River Life so it can cover anything from people enjoying the river to wildlife, as long as it's taken within the Tyne river catchment. A judging panel will pick the best 13 photos and the winners will receive a free copy of the glossy calendar displaying their winning photo. To enter, email up to two photos, 3mb in size to: info@tyneriverstrust.org. Photos should be labelled with your full name and where they were taken.

A special thanks

The fabulous front cover image from the autumn/winter issue of the newsletter was provided by photographer Shona Branigan.

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