

AINA CASE STUDY

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

River Thames: habitat improvements



Volunteers and the Environment Agency examine the clean river gravels by Penton Hook lock island

Volunteers work to enhance fish and wildlife at Penton Hook

Volunteers from the Thames Anglers' Conservancy worked under the guidance of the Environment Agency Fisheries Team to carry out improvements at Penton Hook lock island on the River Thames. Members of all ages have now undertaken a series of work parties to enhance habitats for breeding fish and other wildlife on the island.

Their work has supported an on-going Environment Agency scheme which created a fish 'by-pass' channel on the island. The channel provides valuable gravels for spawning and also enables fish to migrate upstream past Penton Lock Hook where they are able to complete their lifecycle.

During the autumn and winter months the entrance to the spawning channel becomes blocked with debris carried down from the main river. The prolific growth of vegetation can also restrict flows in the channel, preventing fish from entering or accessing breeding grounds. Volunteer work parties have carefully removed any obstructions at the entrance of the channel and trimmed foliage along its length. In order to prevent any detriment to wildlife, the work has been carried out before the fish spawning period and prior to the bird nesting season.

Since undertaking the work the flow in the channel has significantly improved. More clean gravels can now be seen and chub and other fish and even kingfishers have been spotted moving up past Penton Lock. This bodes well for the future health of the stream and the wildlife on the island. The volunteers have also helped clean areas for anglers to fish from and the larger logs found during the clean-ups have been piled to create valuable stacks for invertebrates and small animals.

Work to import more gravels into the channel takes place in the later parts of the year, when it can be certain that wildlife will not be affected and flora is naturally dying back after the summer season.

George Gerring, Environment Agency Area Fisheries Officer, explains: "The work the Thames Anglers' Conservancy have been doing has greatly improved the bypass channel and will enable fish to successfully breed - preserving Thames fish stocks for future generations."

Further information about the work of the Thames Anglers' Conservancy can be found at: www.rivertac.org