

riverGuardian

The newsletter of the River Colne Project

The River Colne Project has been busy! New staff, creating a tree nursery, planting an orchard, carrying out habitat and wildlife protection work, and running free family events. Soon we shall be busy *Naming the Valley* and installing the Blue Plaques.

Naming the Valley

Based on a banner designed and embroidered by local diarist, pacifist and suffragette *Florence Lockwood*, the plaques welcome visitors to the Colne Valley at the main road, canal and rail entrance points.

We have developed this project to build on the success of the Naming the River Project which installed four decorative River Colne name plaques on the main road crossings of the river. We have also seen the condition of the existing Colne Valley welcome sign on the A62 and realised that a new sign was urgently needed.

“The old sign is in a terrible condition, it’s bent, fading and going rusty. It gives a poor impression when you first enter the Valley”, Project Officer Mick Smith said.

The plaques will be set on stone pillars built by local craftsmen celebrating the use and beauty of dry stone walls in the area.

Funding has been secured from the Colne Valley Area Committee and the plaque has been designed by Yorkshire artist Michael Ives.



New 'Welcome to the Colne Valley' decorative plaque

Linthwaite Hall

Part of the Manor of Linthwaite held by John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster in the 14th Century.

Built before 1550 by Edward Kaye. Rebuilt in the early 1600s with extensive orchards and gardens.

Grade II* Listed

Blue PlaquesComing Soon!

The popular Blue Plaque project is in its final stages. Local residents were asked to suggest sites for commemoration, and then vote for their favourites.

Marsden - Hey Green Generator (providing the first domestic electric lights in the valley); the Tenterposts and Marsden Park.

Slaithwaite - The Free School, Manor House, and the Gaol.

Linthwaite - Linthwaite Hall (pictured), and Black Rock House (former home of valley suffragette and diarist Florence Lockwood).

Milnsbridge - Home of former Prime Minister Harold Wilson and Roods Hall School.

Permissions are being finalised and we are aiming for installation and unveiling of the first plaques on the 29th of July when we will be leading a 'Blue Plaque Walk' to take in the locations selected. We are grateful to the Colne Valley Area Committee who have supplied funding for this project.



The River Colne Tree Nursery

A free educational resource for local schools



The Nursery is taking shape.

The Tree Nursery at Lees Mill Lane, Linthwaite is a project that started last year, and is now really taking shape. It is based on land owned by Thornton & Ross Chemicals Limited, adjacent to the River Colne.

The Nursery is being created thanks to a Big Lottery grant, through the Breathing Places programme. We have run school workshops, getting children to identify trees, gather seeds and berries and then prepare them for sowing. In the autumn we hope to invite the children back to see how their seeds are doing.

We have planted a small orchard of local fruit varieties. These include the 'Ribston Pippin' apple (an ancestor of the 'Cox's Pippin'), as well as other apple, pear, plum and gage varieties. It may be a few years yet, but visitors can look forward to enjoying these fruits in times to come.

An Education Pack has been produced which will be given to local schools and will contain everything needed for them to use the Nursery on their own, including lesson plans and resource guides. There is an outdoor classroom, workspace and resource shed to make it as useful a facility as possible.

We have planted a mini arboretum of 'standard' trees with support from Kirklees Council Environment Grant Scheme. They will grow to maturity as examples of some of our best loved and perhaps less common species. It is hoped that by allowing them to grow in an open park setting, it will demonstrate how trees can be identified by their shape. Species such as the Wych Elm (devastated by Dutch Elm Disease in the last century), Hornbeam and Small Leaved Lime, are planted in company with the better known Common Oak, Birch, Alder and Ash trees.

Crunch Time for Crayfish!

White Clawed Crayfish are the only native British crayfish. Found only in Europe, a significant proportion of the remaining world population is now concentrated in the UK and Ireland.

Introduction of non-native species, particularly the aggressive American Signal Crayfish has had a huge effect on our native species. The signal crayfish is larger than the native white claw, and also carries diseases which, whilst not harmful to them, can decimate populations of white-claws in a very short space of time. It is estimated that following the introduction of one signal crayfish, a population of white-claws could be wiped out by disease in a matter of weeks.

Although generally more at home in limestone areas such as the Yorkshire Dales, a survey in 2007 by the Environment Agency found white clawed crayfish in the River Colne in Slaithwaite and in 2001 a population in the Huddersfield Narrow Canal was discovered. Unfortunately, evidence suggests that unless steps are taken, the aggressive signal crayfish, already found in the Peak Forest Canal (Stalybridge) and in the River Calder and Fenay Beck will spread up and down the River Colne and canal and eliminate any remaining white claw populations within 20 years.

The only way to save this declining species is to isolate or relocate existing populations into protected ARK sites - waterbodies that are cut off from all other watercourses and so protected from the arrival of non-native species. Following a meeting with crayfish experts, we decided to apply for funding to search for the first ARK Site in West Yorkshire. We have secured this funding and work to protect this rare species will begin in autumn 2008.

Warning - Despite suggestions to the contrary on TV, to catch, move, or in any way disturb crayfish is illegal and requires a licence, it is illegal to either remove or introduce crayfish to any watercourse without a licence, and fines can be large!



The White Clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) is our only native species.



A little test! Try to find the common names for our standard trees:

1. *Quercus robur*.....
2. *Fraxinus excelsior*.....
3. *Carpinus betula*.....
4. *Betula pendula*.....
5. *Alnus glutinosa*.....
6. *Prunus avium*.....
7. *Ulmus glabra*.....
8. *Tilia cordata*.....
9. *Sorbus aucuparia*.....

1 English Oak, 2 Ash, 3 Hornbeam, 4 Silver Birch, 5 Alder, 6 Willow, 7 Wych Elm, 8 Small Leaved Lime, 9 Rowan (or Mountain Ash)

Surveys of this kind are not easy to undertake but the results made the effort worthwhile. Our surveys showed large numbers of the Common Pipistrelle, as well as good numbers of the Natterers, Whiskered, and Brown Long Eared bats. The most exciting 'sightings' were of the relatively rare Daubentons and Leisler's bats, the latter being located in good numbers in two pockets in the Colne Valley. Also noted, although in relatively low numbers, was the Noctule. The Soprano Pipistrelle was recorded much less than we would have expected, which is worrying. Of the 8 species found in West Yorkshire all 8 of them were found in the Colne Valley which is a brilliant achievement.

To build on the results of the bat survey, we have secured funding to undertake extensive habitat improvements in the Colne Valley. The works will include, hedge planting, pond and ditch creation, installing large bat boxes, including one with a web camera, and woodland management. A main feature of the project will be the building of a Bat Tower. A permanent roost building, the design of which has been inspired by the shape of mill chimneys. It will be a unique and ground-breaking structure that will benefit the low numbers of Soprano Pipistrelles in the Colne Valley.

River Colne Project Work Programme

Picnic Sites

Further works are planned at the picnic sites, where ongoing patrols and litter picks are a regular part of our work.

New bird boxes have been put up at Appleyards, Rotcher and Tunnel End. Amazingly on the day we put up bird boxes at Rotcher with Slaithwaite Explorer Scouts, Blue Tits were already checking them out by the time we left the site!

At Tunnel End picnic site, we will be revamping the 'wildlife area' behind the new feature wall. Plans for a wildflower meadow, berry garden and orchard have been agreed by Kirklees Countryside Unit and work will start this summer. The addition of fruit blossom and wildflowers,

will encourage a greater range of insects and birds into the area making it an attractive place for both people and wildlife.

Titanic Mill Path

The riverside footpath at Titanic Mill is getting a makeover! Funding has been secured from the Colne Valley Area Committee and Kirklees Council Buildings are for People Scheme to upgrade the path to allow better access for pushchairs, prams and wheelchairs. Although improved in 2005, some areas need further work and will be upgraded, and one of the current benches will be replaced with a wheelchair accessible picnic bench.

Slaithwaite Spa Park

Further work is planned to keep the rhododendrons under control, and a section of riverside wall that continues to suffer the unwanted attentions of vandals will be rebuilt.

Bats of the Colne Valley

An update on this successful project

With help from the West Yorkshire Bat Group and dedicated volunteers we carried out a survey of bats in the Colne Valley in 2007.

There are 16 species of bat resident in Great Britain, 8 of which are found in West Yorkshire.



Leisler's Bat (*Nyctalus leisleri*, Rare in the UK and found in the Colne Valley.

Events Programme 2008

As usual, a busy schedule of events is underway and everyone is welcome to attend. See the back page for further details.

If you have an idea for a future event, let us know and we may include it next year!

Get Involved

If you would like to become involved with the River Project and help us with any of the projects

please don't hesitate to contact us.



New Assistant River Project Officer... Jim Bunting

The new Assistant RCP Officer, when not working with the River Project, can be found on stage misusing an acoustic guitar under the pseudonym *Jim Sputnig*. As the Assistant Officer, he is involved in all projects, building on his experience as a self-employed hedge-layer and forester.

Jim started with us in March 2008 and so far he has improved access at Appleyards picnic site, been active in the creation of the Tree Nursery, led popular events and been enthusiastic to help save the native crayfish. He is fully intending to be on the second annual Colne Valley Brewery Walk (*see below*).

Events Programme 2008

JULY

Bat Bonanza, Thursday 24th July 8pm

A short talk and introduction to the work the RCP and the West Yorkshire Bat Group are doing for these creatures, followed by a short walk around Milnsbridge to see what bats are can be seen.

Blue Plaque Walk, Tuesday 29th July 1pm

Take in a summer walk looking at locations celebrated by the RCP's Blue Plaque Project.

AUGUST

Colne Valley Brewery Walk, Saturday 16th August, 2pm

Building on the success of last years winter walk, we decided to have one in the summer! An afternoon walk taking in the micro breweries of the Valley and a tour of the Golcar Brewery.
COST: £10 to include pie and peas (or veg equivalent) and a few pints at the Golcar Brewery

SEPTEMBER

Marsden Mushroom Foray, Sunday 21st September 2pm

An afternoon walk to see and identify this year's fungal bounty

OCTOBER

River Colne Conker Championship, Sunday 19th October

Take on the staff of the River Project to try to take this year's crown!

All events are free unless otherwise stated. Look out for posters and check out our website for further details

BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL FOR ALL EVENTS

For further information about any aspect of the Project please feel free to contact

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