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KEEPING OUR ACT TOGETHER

The importance of Europe in maintaining environmental standards

Raymond Smith

FROM AN ENVIRONMENTALIST'S PERSPECTIVE the referendum on the future of Britain within the EU should focus the mind on the advantages of international cooperation and oversight. It can enable different countries to ensure that their neighbours do not pollute the "global commons". It provides an overarching body within which problems can be resolved where one state does generate difficulties for others, most obviously with pollution. The central body is not in itself responsible for managing problems, but with the combined strength of the other members can ensure failings by any members are addressed. Past areas for problems have included the Rhine and the North Sea. The EU can also set benchmarks for member states to come up to – for example with the Water Framework Directive, which in this area is focusing new attention on the quality of the river Wey. The spread of regulations across many countries also reduces the scope for producers to undercut their rivals by having less stringent standards.

The North Sea and coastal pollution in general provide a telling example of the value of a European level body in greatly improving environmental standards. By the early decades of the twentieth century significant limitation on sewage pollution in rivers had been achieved (although a long way short of modern standards), based on over half a century of experiment and experience. From the creation of the sewerage system in the 19th century, however, the sea was viewed as the cheap option for sewage disposal. Along our coasts this was through short sea outfalls from towns such as coastal resorts, or for the dumping at sea of the sludge that was taken from sewage of cities like London or Glasgow to protect the rivers.

The 1930s saw the new fashion for sun-bathing as a health pursuit, and the introduction of compulsory paid holidays for all workers. After the Second World War a newly confident working class flocked to the seaside


James Sellen

It's been one of our most challenging projects. How have the Woking peregrines fared? ***See page 6***

in unprecedented numbers, both exacerbating the problems of coastal sewage pollution and increasing the awareness of it.

The resulting anti pollution campaigns led to a Medical Research Council (MRC) investigation of the health implications of sewage contamination of coastal bathing waters being launched in 1953. This provided a handy excuse for delaying new works in many towns. In 1957 the Coastal Anti-Pollution League was formed, and focused on the possible connection between polio infections and sea-bathing, pursuing an idea first floated in the 1920's. The MRC report eventually arrived in 1959 and famously concluded that there was no threat of disease "unless the water is so fouled as to be aesthetically revolting". This assumption underpinned government policy for over two decades.

The Water Authorities were created in 1973, partly on the basis that as water suppliers they would have a vested interest in controlling pollution. Unfortunately, this did not apply downstream of their water intakes.

The focus of the debate was shifted on to the international stage, however, with Britain's entry into the EEC. The French have been credited with the EEC's 1975 Bathing Water Directive. The water industry had reservations about the Directive, but considered that the installation of long sea outfalls with diffusers on the end would cope with the demands. The head count of beach users necessary for the designation of beaches needing to meet the European standards was carried out in the cold summer of 1979. The result, as the House of Commons Environment explained in 1990, was that "Britain designated only 27 beaches, excluding popular beaches such as Blackpool and Brighton". As the Environment Committee continued "Application to 350 other beaches was conceded only in 1987, two years after the target date for compliance." A variety of campaigners within Britain were, however, able to use the EEC legislation to put pressure on the government. Eventually in 1990 also under pressure from European governments worried about pollution of the North Sea, the British government agreed to end sludge dumping at sea and to treat all coastal discharges by 1998, partly from "concern about the potential long-term build-up of pollutants in the sea." Curiously, the role of the EC can be seen as comparable to that of the county councils in controlling river pollution a century before, when they provided a 'higher authority' than individual towns which was capable of stimulating action.

Britain may now be known in Europe for its potential display of petulance, but it was once known as the "dirty man of Europe". It is safe to assume that in the event of Britain turning its back on Europe environmental standards are more likely to decline than to improve.

This article is based on research for my article "Dangerous Waters", BBC History Magazine, Vol. 3, No. 8, August 2002, pp 22-24, and other texts.

KEEPING OUR ACT TOGETHER

on the environment and transport

by Forum member H.Trevor Jones

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www.ibtimes.com

MOST PEOPLE ACCEPT that rail is generally one of the more environmentally friendly modes of transport, so I won't try to argue that case, although some may argue about the merits of super high speed rail. But most cross-border connections around Europe are classic rail as generally built in the 19th century even if they connect with high speed lines on one or both sides of the border. So I hope you agree that, as environmentalists, this is something we should support for moving people and freight around Europe.

When the railways were built, as long as the track gauge was constant (which it is except in the former USSR, Ireland, and the Iberian Peninsula) a steam engine (not so environmentally friendly!) could pull a train anywhere it would fit under the bridges etc, simply by someone pulling a lever to raise or lower a signal arm. But the modern railway has very many and various sophisticated signalling and control systems and electric supply systems (much more environmentally friendly!) and it can greatly increase costs (a discouragement to being environmentally friendly!) to build trains and locomotives to cope with different systems.

So it does make sense to have a pan-European organisation to try to ensure compatible systems either side of a border, which has to be a better way of doing things than separate bi-lateral agreements across each border. Whilst I suppose it doesn't have to be the EU, it seems sensible to me that it should be, although obviously adding in Switzerland and Norway and the non-EU Balkan states (who will probably be forced to do whatever the EU decides if they want efficient cross-border connections).

This is just one example of nations working cooperatively together, and so one of many reasons why I'll be voting to remain in the EU.

No vaccine

The entire badger vaccination programme for bovine tuberculosis in England and Wales is suspended for 2016 due to a global shortage of the required BCG vaccine.
(Source: BBC Wildlife, Apr '16)

FACTS & FIGURES

Trees

There are 3 trillion trees on the planet today – that's 422 for every person on Earth.
(Source: Nature, Sept '15)

Maize menace

Maize is grown in the UK for animal feed and for biogas, attracting subsidies. Yet maize crops leave soil exposed during much of the growing season, then are harvested late when soils are wet, causing run-off containing pesticides and nutrients. Some farmers can grow maize well but not enough to mitigate the damage.

Between 1990 and 2000, total maize acreage in England trebled and has continued to increase.
(Source: Living Earth, Summer '15)

Life in Death Valley

The barren basin of California's Death Valley has burst into bloom, in a once-in-a-decade flowering. This has followed 0.7 inches of rain brought by a large storm in October, which washed to protective coatings off seeds and allowed them to sprout.
(Source: i, 25 Feb '16)

ROADS, WHEELS AND FEET IN THE HEART OF GUILDFORD

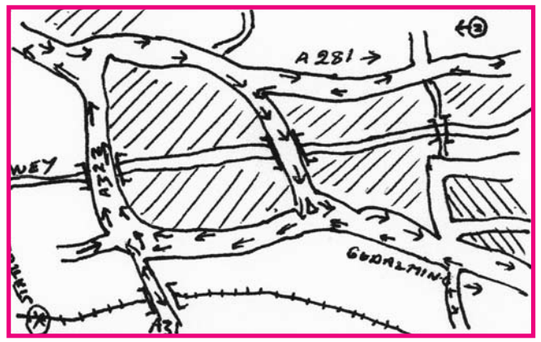
by Forum member Michael Tanner

SORRY THAT I AM NOT writing about apple blossom, traffic islands brimming with daffodils, and woodland bluebells, but the word 'ENVIRONMENT' means just what it says on the lid, that is, what lies around you.

For a great many who live and and/or work in Guildford their commuter environment, morning and eve, is the system of roads, pavements, bridges and pedestrian crossings that lie within the four corners comprising rail station, bus station the bottom of the High Street and the beginning of the Old Portsmouth Road. Unlike the idyllic environments I initially referred to, the latter is an area where the driver, cyclist, and pedestrian have to have their wits about them if they are to survive. It is a tragic fact that not all do survive their passage through this area: some are slightly injured, some maimed for life, some fatally injured. Those who survive may never forget the trauma suffered. Relatives and friends of the fatally injured bear the loss for the rest of their lives.

Most are fully aware that every day in the not so distant metropolis, people are killed or maimed in traffic accidents and that thousands have their respiratory systems chronically damaged by traffic emissions. Mile for square mile, I cannot supply a comparison with little Guildford, but when I am in central Guildford at peak traffic periods I find the sense of imminent danger (or the frustration of non-movement) are the kind one experiences in some of the more congested areas of London at peak traffic times.

The grid start circus



Many of us sense that there is a brighter future as regards traffic pollution, but we are much vaguer about the congestion factor. Is there a safer future for the central part of Guildford's traffic system? When I look at the current situation regarding the areas in the accompanying diagrams and photos I am not at all optimistic: the road traffic authorities have recorded dozens of 'slight' road-related injuries in the lower A31 and rail bridge area during the past few years, and three fatal injuries in the past 10 months.

Only a year ago I wrote in the June issue of the Forum's newsletter an article about 'The Pedestrian in Guildford'. Since that article, there have been at least three pedestrian fatalities in the central area I am concerned with here. I have seen few or no improvements which are likely to prevent further death and injury: traffic seems to have become even more congested; freight lorries seem to be getting bigger; more and more cyclists are being obliged to come onto pavements; the 'grid starts' from traffic lights at pedestrian

crossings on the main circuit using the two river bridges and the one railway bridge are more and more alarming; the understandable confusion about which lane should be chosen (out of the 2,3 or 4 available) is more and more an ingredient in this devil's brew.

As for the arterial road (the A31), which most know as the Farnham Road, what I wrote in the 2015 article still applies – if anything, the situation has worsened: at the very top of the hill where there is a slip road down to the A3, accidents are virtually built into the lane arrangement at the very spot where impatient drivers, happy to escape from Guildford congestion, accelerate just at a blind spot for drivers emerging onto the A31 from the slip road itself (see diagram).

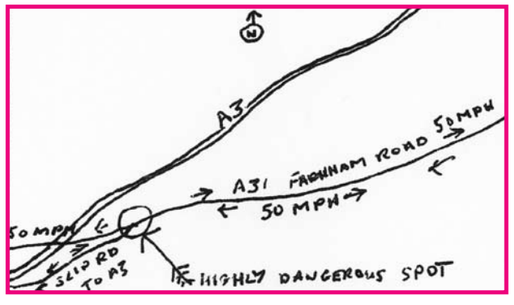
Back down the A31, only a few hundred yards before the rail bridge, right opposite the County Secondary School there now stands a new building development of 10 apartments and 4 town houses – their new residents will have access to the junction of Agraria Road with the Farnham Road itself. What kind of planning is that? Pedestrians on the upper part of the A31 (only one pavement, on the north side) still have to contend with a pavement partly narrowed by debris, weeds and jutting-out twigs, which have increased over the years and could be removed in half a day.

As I wrote in the earlier article, surely it would save lives to reduce all the speed limits currently operating on the A31, from its crossing of the rail bridge to that point where it siphons down to the town after crossing the Hog's Back: 50mph to 40mph; 40mph to 30mph; and in the final stretch past the school and the now rejuvenated hospital, 30mph to 20mph. A number of the minor roads, at their junction with the A31 section from top to bottom of its hill, are recorded as sites of traffic accidents over the past 10 years or so: no surprise!

Our late distinguished citizen, Colin Kirkland, of Channel Tunnel engineering fame, once declared that his ideal venture would have been to build a tunnel under Guildford. Until we get that kind of money, why can we not improve the efficacy of our traffic signs and notices in Guildford, reduce the speeds at crucial places, and improve the situation for pedestrians crossing roads or using pavements too narrow for a surging thrust of people? In particular, the circuit round the central block of buildings containing the YMCA, the Music Academy, the Electric Theatre and a section of the river, seems specifically designed to induce drivers to race away from one set of traffic lights to another, giving no heed to drivers who find themselves in the 'wrong' lane or to pedestrians so near the kerb of a narrow pavement that a little stumble could be fatal. It cannot be beyond the wit of those responsible to alleviate the total situation in this area before another winter sets in.

I trust the photos and diagrams will help to make my point.

A perilous junction for all



It's knotweed, look you

Swansea has been dubbed the knotweed capital of the world due to a massive infestation during urban regeneration 50 years ago. The city has the world's only full-time Japanese Knotweed Officer, and is the only place in the UK to require developers to certify that building plots are free of the weed before applying for permission to build.
(Source: BBC Wildlife, Jun '15)

Three-in-one cultivation

A traditional native American growing technique is to grow sweetcorn, beans and squash together. The tall sweetcorn plant supports the beans (no need for poles); the beans fix nitrogen in the soil for the sweetcorn; and the squash blocks sunlight, reducing weeds, while prickly hairs on its vine deters pests.
(Source: Waitrose Weekend, 22 Oct '15)

FACTS & FIGURES

Where's a pretty boy then?

The grey parrot has been almost completely wiped out in the wild due to habitat loss and collection for the pet trade. Between 90% and 99% of the poulation in Ghana has disappeared since 1992, a pattern likely to hold across West Africa.
(Source: BBC Wildlife, Apr '16)

Palm oil

Swathes of tropical rainforest are being bulldozed to make way for lucrative palm oil plantations. As well as being used as a fuel, palm oil is found in cosmetics and about half of all household products. To learn what to avoid buying, see the Rainforest Foundation's guide to products containing palm oil – http://bit.ly/1WcgEH5

FACTS & FIGURES

The bovine effect

The biggest culprit among ruminants for contributing to climate change is the cow, which is thought to produce between 250 and 500 litres of methane a day.
(Source: i, 18 Dec'14)

What's in a name?

The wheatear has a bright white rump – its name is a corruption of 'white arse'.
(Source: BBC Wildlife, Mar '15)

Organic cotton

Organic cotton causes almost half the emissions of global-warming gases compared to non-organic cotton, as well as consuming over 90% less fresh water, and over 60% less energy. In 2014 the organic cotton harvest equated to a potential saving of 94,655 Olympic swimming pools of fresh water, enough energy to keep a 60-watt bulb going for 57,122 years, and as much CO_2 as driving around the world 14,114 times.
(Source: Living Earth, Winter '15)

Many hands make light work – in the long run

John Bannister

A PROJECT at the Rosamund Community Garden, that has taken over two years to deliver, reached its final climax on a gorgeous morning on Saturday 7th May.

A large polytunnel, measuring 14 feet by 42 feet, was delivered to the garden in March 2014, in kit form I might add. This came thanks to a hugely generous grant from the Community Foundation for Surrey. It was supplied by Northern Polytunnels who offered to erect it for us for a mere £1,000, but we decided we were tough enough to do it on our own.

Then, on Easter Monday that year I suffered a stroke and was rushed to hospital, my life saved thanks to alert grandchildren and a TV ad. So I didn't even get going on the polytunnel until July 2014, when we began digging 16 holes (by hand) for foundations. My strength was beginning to return by then. We then got terribly bogged down over planning permission – did we or didn't we need it? It wasn't until we got sight in August 2015 of the Land Registry title for the transfer of the 19 acres of land on which Rosamund Garden sits that we realised we didn't.

So from August 2015 to May 2016, bit by bit, item by item, working only a few hours a week, the polytunnel took shape. Sometimes I got some help but mostly it was a sole venture. No power tools were used. My father's brace and bits were used for all the drilling and a lever-operated ratchet screwdriver served very well for the long screws holding the door frames together.

When it came to large pieces of plastic for the sides a second pair of hands was definitely needed, and Roberto of apple pressing fame gave up some of his Saturday mornings to help. For the main plastic covering we had to pick a warm still day and get at least six people along. And the day chosen turned out perfect: Saturday May 7th this year was about 20°C, sunny and not a breath of wind. Kate and Mark, Clare and Chris, Russ and Karen, and I completed the job in two hours. Two grandmothers and two small children happily played in the background and produced wonderful cake and cups of rosemary tea.

What a way to finish and just in time for the growing season, although a year or two later than hoped.

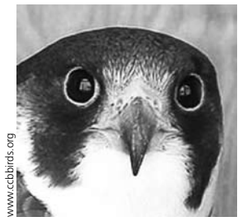

John Bannister


Kate Millington


Kate Millington


Kate Millington

A good home for peregrines . . . and a bonus for Woking



www.ccbbirds.org

John Bannister

"What hope is there for a youngster these days to get onto the property ladder?

With the steady rise in our population since the organochloride pesticide scourge of the 1950s and 60s, coastal haunts are now over-subscribed. You can't get a rocky ledge with a sea view anywhere for love nor money.

So we've moved inland to urban locations and onto man-made cliffs. After all it will still only take us less than an hour to get to the beach and food is more plentiful in suburbia."

Life is just as tough for young peregrines as it is for their human equivalents. So we in Guildford Environmental Forum (GEF) decided to lend a helping hand.

It has been known by peregrine watchers for a long time, over many years in fact, that a pair of peregrines has fancied a tall office block in Woking near the station. Sixteen storeys high with fine views in every direction and plentiful food supplies all year round. Woking shopping centre is immediately below. The office block in question is Export House, which used to be called the BAT building, but British American Tobacco moved out. When approached, BAT had said no to a nest box for peregrine falcons as they might pose a risk to their employees – a total lack of understanding of risk on BAT's part. (They were quite happy one presumes if their employees smoked.) But the birds kept on trying despite BAT's obduracy and their eggs kept being flooded or human disturbance meant they were abandoned. Export House roof is covered in air conditioning units, telecommunications masts and cabling, which need maintenance from time to time.

Peregrines are Schedule 1 birds and you need a licence to approach them or their nests and any disturbance is illegal. Therefore GEF decided last June to step in and make a new representation, this time to Woking Shopping, owned by Woking Borough Council who also own Export House, all under the collective management of an enlightened man, Martin Pooley, Head of Operations. Martin's response was instantaneous and totally positive. He would welcome a nest box for peregrines and his view was fully backed by the council.

Getting started

Over the following months we put together a team of six experts and went to work. The six were Nick Dixon (urban peregrine specialist), James Sellen (wildlife photographer working at the nearby WWF HQ), Denis Corley (friend and long-time peregrine enthusiast), Richard Denyer (Woking bird ringer), Jason Fathers (Wildlife Windows Ltd and nest box builder) and myself (a peregrine fanatic) acting in a co-ordinating role. Many meetings and site visits led to a decision to install a nest box in the side of Export House at the highest level, facing north-west, accessible from the utility floor just below roof level. The utility floor houses equipment such as lift controls, air filters, pumps and other electrical units. Nick weighed up all the evidence on the birds' use of the building and gave us a report suggesting, after much deliberation, a small locked room on the utility floor giving access to the ventilation panels that circle Export House. The box would be installed through one of the ventilation panels, giving direct access to the outside ledge which we knew the birds used. He sketched out the design and recommended Jason to build the box. They made a fantastic team. Because a pair of very broody peregrines was right there literally on top of the chosen spot, a camera would go in with the box and be fitted out for WiFi. Our aim was to have the box in place in time for the March 2016 nesting time.

An expensive business

The cost of working safely at high levels on buildings is not cheap. One of the existing panels had to be removed and replaced with another metal panel cut out to take the nest box. Power had to be laid on for the camera, an expensive item in itself, and WiFi. If I told you that the installed cost was in excess of £8,000, those of you who have worked in industry won't be surprised. In fact Woking thinks it's getting a good deal, because if all goes well it will be the only place in Surrey with a webcam broadcasting from a peregrine falcon nest box with young. The business potential is enormous as people visiting Woking will celebrate the peregrines, all adding to Woking's impressive environmental record – namely the town centre energy plant that provides heating, cooling and electricity to many buildings in the town and huge arrays of solar PV (which they embraced from the beginning, unlike Guildford). It's a nice feature that you can see solar panels on the website looking through the nest box. Woking will join the likes of Chichester, Norwich and Derby Cathedrals, and an increasing number of churches, structures and quarries. Woking Shopping hopes that the shopping footfall will also be increased.

GEF, its members, the Community Foundation for Surrey, the Surrey Bird Club, Woking Shopping and Woking Borough Council have all contributed to the cost of the box and the live streaming. We are very grateful in particular to Nick Dixon and Jason Fathers, who have given the project the benefit of all their experience.

Joyful results

Four eggs were laid on successively 23rd, 24th, 26th and 28th March. Both the falcon (female) and the male (tiercel) shared incubation, which started on 26th March. Three eggs hatched on 1st and 2nd May but one failed to hatch. Unfortunately the last chick was noticeably weaker and survived only a few days: if a chick doesn't thrust up a gaping beak the adults can't feed it. The two healthy chicks (called eyesses) are now growing steadily, requiring ever more hunting trips by the adults to satisfy them. The eyesses' covering of white down will be gradually replaced with flight feathers.

Pigeons are the favourite food, which are caught in the air using the element of surprise by stooping at high speed and coming from behind and underneath, but over 100 bird prey species have been recorded. Prey is plucked and the flesh pulled off using the powerful hooked beak while standing on the prey. Tiny pieces are delicately placed in the beaks of the young.

All this has been followed on the webcam by thousands of enthusiasts. The young will learn how to feed themselves and be tempted to fly by the adults calling and leaving prey away from the nest. Once airborne they will be shown how to hunt by the adults dropping live prey. GEF, the RSPB and Surrey Bird Club members have been on hand since early May with telescopes and notepads/smartphones speaking to visitors in Woking, showing them what's happening in the air and at the same time the activity going on inside the box via WiFi. The live website has been active since mid April at www.wokingperegrines.com

A follow-up talk

Nick Dixon gave a fascinating and entertaining talk on 'Urban Peregrines' to a packed audience on 4th May. He showed superb photographs of many types of man-made structures with nesting peregrines, including a floating lifting crane which moved around Southampton Water and made a trip across to the Isle of Wight with the nesting peregrines on board! The first record of UK peregrines nesting on man-made structures was in 1981 and since then the use of man-made structures, including quarries, has risen as a proportion of the total number of UK nesting pairs, which stood at 1,505 in 2014. The peregrine population continues to rise and England has now overtaken Scotland and Wales for breeding pairs, with the latter countries actually showing a decrease in recent years.

Young peregrines don't have an easy time growing to maturity. Some studies show 60% will die in the first year from colliding with overhead wires or other man-made structures, from starvation and still from persecution. Even a small accident will mean unsuccessful hunting and starvation.

The eyesses at Woking will be fitted with a BTO (British Trust for Ornithology) ring plus a coloured ring easy to read with a telescope. This will help the BTO to follow their progress. The tiercel at Woking has a BTO ring, but it cannot be read with a telescope.

The young will stay around until July and beyond, so there's a great deal more viewing still to come.

Sixteen days old and ravenous

OUR NATIONAL COAST PATHS

Adrian Thompson

The England Coast Path

A new National Trail, to be called the England Coast Path, is to be created around the whole of England's coast. It is opening in sections and is scheduled to be completed in 2020. When complete it will be one of the longest coastal walking routes in the world.

The England Coast Path is happening because of a completely new right of access that gives everyone the legal right to explore our coast for the very first time. It is much more than just a path: it gives access to beaches, cliff-tops, and most of the wonderful habitats around our coast. Currently, the longest section already in very regular use is the 630 mile South West Coast Path from Minehead, Somerset to beyond Swanage, Dorset via Lands End. The impact of this Coast Path on the local economy is significant, creating nearly 10,000 jobs.

England's coastline is spectacularly beautiful, rich in wildlife and hugely popular. No one in England lives more than 75 miles from our coast and as a nation we make over 70 million trips a year to enjoy it. We love walking along it but at the moment we don't have a right to explore much of our nation's coastline. Once complete the England Coast Path will provide clear, well-managed access to the whole coast – whether you want a short stroll or a more challenging hike.

The website www.nationaltrail.co.uk/england-coast-path states that *"the really exciting thing about coastal access is that it is much more than just a path, although at 2,795 miles (4,500 kilometres) long we think that is pretty exciting! The new right of Coastal Access brings in 'roll back' meaning that if a section of coast erodes or slips the path isn't lost, it simply moves back with the new coastline. And of course one of the great joys of the coast is exploring the beaches, cliff-tops and headlands. For the very first time, under coastal access, this will be a legal right.*

Not everywhere will be accessible though. You won't have any rights to enter private houses and gardens or Ministry of Defence land. Sensitive habitats will also be protected. Some parts of the path may be closed to allow for repair or other works, the coastal margin may also be subject to restrictions."

The Wales Coast Path

The Wales Coast Path isn't a National Trail but it already exists – see website www.walescoastpath.gov.uk. It has been developed by the Welsh Government in partnership with Natural Resources Wales (incorporating the former Countryside Council for Wales), sixteen local authorities and two National Parks.

From 2007 to 2014, approximately £14.6 million has been spent on establishing the Wales Coast Path route – this has been made up of contributions from the Welsh Government and the coastal local authorities. As part of this funding, the European Regional Development Fund also allocated nearly £4 million over four years in support of the project.

From 2014 onwards, further funds are being made available for quality maintenance and improvements to the Path. Where possible, the route will follow the Welsh coastline as closely as is safe and practical. Over time, the Wales Coast Path is expected to lead to the creation of circular coastal routes as links to the inland towns and villages are improved.

The idea was developed out of a desire to build on the economic success of the "Pembrokeshire Coast Path National Trail" and the "Isle of Anglesey Coastal Path" both of which are major contributors to the visitor economy of Wales. Currently, the Wales Coast Path is about 870 miles long.

In planning these coast paths, serious consideration has to be given to the expected rise in sea levels of up to a metre in this century. The National Trust, which owns some 10% of the English coastline, states in its Autumn 2015 magazine that it is very conscious of the impact that erosion and flooding may have on its 80 coastal properties.

The National Trust also states that it will work with Natural England to help with the government plans to make the England coastlines accessible by 2020. We wish them well in this significant enterprise.

GOOD NEWS / BAD NEWS

compiled by Clare Windsor

Unesco forest logging

Poland's environment minister has approved a plan to allow extensive logging in Europe's last pristine forest, arguing that it's the way to save it from woodworm. Greenpeace calls the logging a "black scenario" for the Bialowieza Forest, which is on Unesco's World Heritage list.

Countryside Stewardship

The success of the Countryside Stewardship 'agri-environment' schemes is typified by what's been happening at the RSPB's Hope Farm in Cambridgeshire. Since the early 2000s it has been farmed conventionally but at the same time developing techniques and features that provide food and habitat for birds and insects. Crop yields have been maintained while wildlife populations have increased. The number of skylark territories on the farm has soared from 10 to 40, and there are six or seven pairs of grey partridges. Overall, bird numbers have increased 920% in 15 years.

Support from MPs

Iconic and threatened English species are being 'adopted' by MPs across England, who are acting as 'Species Champions' to help improve the species' future. From the skylark to the shrill carder bee, 20 English species currently facing significant threats have been identified and put up for adoption, and 18 have already been adopted.

The initiative was launched in April by a coalition of seven nature NGOs: RSPB, Butterfly Conservation, Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Buglife, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Plantlife and Bat Conservation Trust. This follows a successful model in Scotland, and a trial in the south-west of England in 2014.

A partial victory

Conservationists have long been concerned that the tiny plastics called microbeads, used in facial scrubs, toothpastes and shaving foam, find their way into our marine environment where they are ingested by tiny sea creatures and accumulate dangerously in the food chain. The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) reported in 2015 that retailers such as Asda, Boots, Marks & Spencer, Tesco and Sainsbury's had pledged to remove microplastics from their own-brand products. However, the MCS had yet to reach agreements with Aldi, Lidl and Lloyds Pharmacy, and with producers such as Procter & Gamble and Unilever.

Potholes

The Government's £50 million fund to remove potholes has been described by the Local Government Association as "a step in the right direction", but they say that councils need more than 230 times that amount.

Natural selection

Humans are still evolving. Geneticists at Stanford University in California have developed a technique for analysing whole-genome sequences, narrowing the previous window of testing from 25,000 years to just 2,000 years. Applying the technique to the genomes of 3,195 British people has resulted in the findings that they have become taller, blonder, more blue-eyed, and more able to digest milk. Natural selection has also favoured women with larger hips and later first menstruation.

The researchers speculate that the results could be reflecting sexual selection in the ancestors of the British, and point towards the Viking and Nordic additions to the gene pool – part of a long evolution that has involved Romans, Angles and Saxons in the recent past.

Lead poisoning

Thousands of birds die each year through ingesting toxic lead gunshot, scattered in the environment after shooting. Most of the 2,000 tonnes of lead pellets used annually to shoot live quarry in the UK ends up in the ground, where birds mistake it for grit or seeds. The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust has petitioned the Government to phase out lead amminition by the end of 2017 and replace it with non-toxic alternatives.

- 1 in 4 recorded deaths of Bewick's swans are due to lead poisoning
- Between 50,000 and 100,000 wildfowl are estimated to die each year from lead poisoning
- 77% of ducks examined recently in England had been illegally shot with lead ammunition
- 1983 is the year the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution recommended phasing out lead shot

Green eggs

Waitrose Duchy Organic eggs are being sold in boxes made from rye grass and recycled paper. Rye grass grows quickly and its use makes the boxes 100% recyclable, while 60% less water and 10% less CO_2 are used in their production.

The rewilding of beavers in Britain

by Harry Cameron, Royal Grammar School student

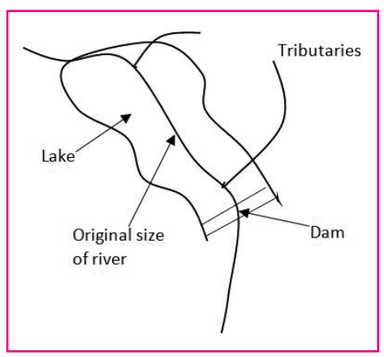
BEAVERS ARE semi-aquatic mammals that tend to live in woodland habitats close to rivers or lakes. They feed on vegetation growing in or beside the river, build dams to make a smallish lake and live in lodges made of sticks and mud. Beavers live together as a family in the lodge, having kits every year.

Beavers lived happily in Britain until they became extinct from England and Wales in the 12th century, but managed to carry on in Scotland before being hunted to extinction there as well by the late 16th century. Beaver pelts became extremely popular because of the quality of fur and the animals were also hunted for meat and scent glands.

Beavers have already been rewilded in two places in Britain – Knapdale in Argyll and the River Otter in Devon. Beavers have been living in those two places happily and healthily for a while now. There are lots of beavers in the Argyll forest in Knapdale, growing numbers in the River Otter and also many beavers breeding in the River Tay.

Environmental advantages

Beavers help the environment and all the ecosystems in their habitat. Firstly, they build dams out of tree trunks, twigs, logs, mud and even stones. These dams control the flow of water past that particular area but still let some water flow so as not to dry up the rest of the river. The dam creates a smallish lake along the river, in which the beaver builds its lodge and searches for plants to feed on. This simple diagram shows how the dam works.



Not only does damming the river provide a living area for the beaver, but it allows much more vegetation to grow in the water and attracts fish to the lake which won't be eaten by the beaver but help balance the ecosystem. The flourishing number of fish and plants in the lake allows other animals to live there as well. Beavers, by building their dam, cause new small channels to form allowing more places for animals to live.

As a beaver dam blocks water downstream it creates a small reservoir, which can also potentially reduce the risk of flooding in the more urban areas the river passes through. Rewilding beavers can help reduce flooding, build ecosystems in small lakes and rivers and bring back fish and other creatures to the rivers. These are all very good reasons as to why beavers should be rewilded in Britain.

Another thing beavers do that help their semi-aquatic/woodland environment is coppicing trees. Coppicing is when a tree is cut down but not all the way, only to the stump, which stimulates growth and allows lots of little branches to grow from the stump. This allows more light to go below the leaf line so that small plants can grow instead of being cut off from the sun by leaves of bigger trees. So coppicing is a very useful and environmentally friendly way of encouraging more plants to grow.

Beavers chew down trees with their powerful teeth to use in their dams. They leave the stumps and the trees continue growing, in the same manner as coppicing.

Beavers affect the environment hugely, with their dams slowing water flow and building a lake for many other animals to live in, or coppicing trees to allow more growth from that tree and smaller plants nearby. Whatever the case, they are effective at maintaining the balance in their habitat.

Not everyone loves beavers

One of the reasons beavers haven't often been rewilded is because many farmers say that they eat crops and destroy farmland. They do eat crops but only when desperate and on a very small scale; fences could easily be installed to stop beavers accessing farms.

Apparently beavers damage the salmon industry. Many fishermen say this to stop them being rewilded and eating the freshwater salmon. However, this is definitely not true as beavers are 100% vegetarian. They don't eat salmon but their dams build lakes that salmon like to live in.

These are made-up ideas and cause people to not want beavers rewilded when it is such a good idea.

The benefits of reintroduction

Beavers should be rewilded for many different reasons. They build dams which cause a lake to form, and many animals and plants start to live and grow there. They coppice trees which allows for more growth of the tree and small plants around it. Their dams can potentially reduce flooding further down the river. They attract tourists which can make more money for the government to help the country.

Beavers can really help the environment in the long run but also have an impact quite soon after being reintroduced. Rewilding beavers can gain money and save it but also save the environment.

Have you ever seen a beaver? Would you like to see a beaver? I'm sure you would and so would most people. Beavers can attract tourists or just locals who enjoy watching them. There are special beaver watches where you can go out on a canoe in the evening and look for beavers, their lodges, their dams and lots of other cool things. This is another smaller but very relevant reason to rewild beavers in Britain.

[This is an excellent account. Harry is 12 years old.]

Scything – the class of 2015. The next course is in September.

Guildford Environmental Forum aims to improve the environment in and around Guildford for wildlife and for people and to build a sustainable future.

Join us in our work for the town and have this newsletter posted to your door four times a year. Forum membership costs only £10 per year or £15 for a couple, and new members are warmly welcomed.

Please contact Adrian Thompson on 01483 222687 or e-mail adrian@lampcottage.net

CALENDAR

All the Forum's Group meetings are open to the public

Saturday/Sunday 25/26 June

Surrey Wildlife Trust BIOBLITZ at Burpham Court Farm from 1000 to 1600.
Come and help discover and record all kinds of wildlife at this pristine site in Guildford – birds, flowers, insects, reptiles and amphibians. GEF will be there with a stall and also to help demonstrate scything.
To find out more and to book, please go to info@surreywt.org

Tuesday 28 June

Wey Valley Solar Schools Energy Co-operative has been one of the most successful Energy Co-operatives in the country. Under the chairmanship of Mike Smyth it has installed 1 GW of solar PV panels at local schools so they can now generate their own clean, non-polluting electricity. The PV installer for all these installations has been Joju Solar and **Dr Chris Jardine, the Technical Director of Joju,** will give a talk on **"Solar Power in the UK: a Bright Future under Cloudy Skies"**.
Chris is also a senior researcher at the Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford.
1900. Committee Room 3, GBC Millmead Offices.

Sunday 4 September

GEF will again be **apple pressing this year at NT Winkworth Arboretum's 'Live Local Love Winkworth'.** We are just one of many stalls, demonstrations and lively events taking place on this day which is free to all. Please come and support us and wander round all the other activities in a wonderful location.
1100 to 1600. If you would like to help GEF with the apple pressing, even if only for an hour, please call John Bannister on 01483 570468.

Thursday 8 September

We are in our sixth year running **scything courses at the Rosamund Community Garden with Mark Allery**, a champion scyther. This is a full course running from 1000 to 1600 where Mark will teach beginners and improvers to hone their skills with a scythe. He will cover the history, selecting a scythe and blade, setting it up for your body shape, the technique, sharpening and how to get good results safely. This is an excellent way to enjoy outside work without harming the environment. You can mow your lawn too.
More details from John Bannister on 01483 570468.

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Please send contributions for the next issue to Clare Windsor by Monday 8 August.
The views expressed in this newsletter are strictly those of its contributors and Guildford Environmental Forum.

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