



# Alun & Chwiler e-newsletter June 2016

## The Afon Chwiler: an environment worth preserving

The Afon Chwiler and its surrounding environment is a very special place for me. I discovered it in the mid 1950s when in my early teens I used cycle from Holywell to fish in the river. It was the first place I saw an otter, the first place I saw a buzzard and the first place I saw a kingfisher.



*A section of the Afon Chwiler. A nice river but a section devoid of practically any bankside vegetation and the 'missing link' that would create a continuous wildlife-friendly corridor along the entire length of the river.*

Even though I now live in the valley, I don't fish the river so often but I still explore it, especially the section where the fishing belongs to the Vale of Clwyd Angling Club of which I am a member, and I also explore the surrounding countryside.

It's an environment created by nature and developed over the years with little or no intervention by man, but some things have changed since I became a visitor to the valley. There's now a mink problem that's all but wiped out the water vole population and Himalayan balsam that strangles

the indigenous bankside wild plants.

There's also an increased risk of pollution as more houses are built in the valley and from traffic-related run-off from the A541 road that's much busier than when I was a young man.

Now though, the river and the surrounding countryside does need man's intervention to care for it to safeguard every creature and plant that depends on what is still mainly an unspoiled environment and to ensure that it remains that way.

**Medwyn Roberts**

### Living Landscapes

Living Landscapes is an ambitious vision for wildlife and people, and a new way of thinking about our natural environment. Our Living Landscape Schemes involve the creation of a network of wildlife habitats across large areas, resulting in a resilient 'Living Landscape' that people and wildlife can benefit from. The Wildlife Trust's vision is a landscape within which wildlife thrives and people prosper together in clean, healthy and sustainable environments.

### Volunteers Wanted!

Do you have an interest in creating a better environment for wildlife? Do you enjoy spending time outside with like-minded people? Then get in touch and volunteer with North Wales Wildlife Trust!

### SNAPSHOT



*This pond was home to much wildlife but the liner failed. The living landscape project has reinstated this fantastic home for wildlife and we are looking forward to finding out what will live here.*

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## Birds of the Alun and Chwiler wetlands

The wetland areas of the Alun and Chwiler valleys are quite different in character and this is reflected in the water birds that live in them.

The Alun between Llandegla and Rhydymwyn grows into a substantial fast-flowing river, well before it finally reaches the Dee near Wrexham, whereas the Chwiler is little more than a stream flowing in the opposite direction towards the river Clwyd near Denbigh.



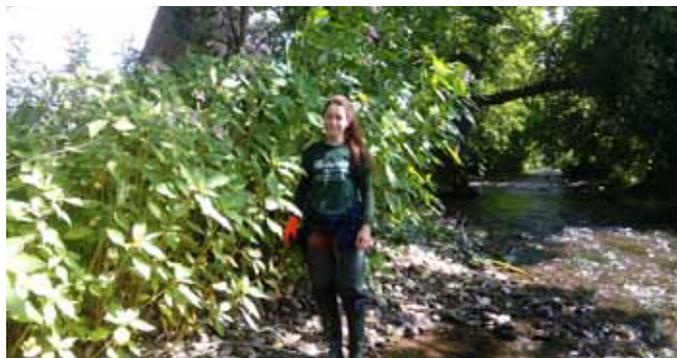
*A Dipper, found on both river catchments*

These pools support nesting by geese (Canada and Greylags), ducks (mallard, tufted duck) and other birds (little grebe, moorhen, coot and sand martins) and frequent visits, especially in winter, by heron, kingfisher, black-headed and common gulls, as well as by more unusual ducks, like Shoveler, Teal and Goosander. Much rarer visits by scarce species like Black-necked Grebe and Little Ringed Plover have also been recorded in winter and on passage.

Glenn Morris

Nesting along the Alun itself are typical birds of upland rivers, like the Dipper, Grey Wagtail and Kingfisher. The Chwiler is adorned with pools on its side-streams, whether produced by damming, as at Ysceifiog and Nannerch, or by current and historical industrial activity, as at Hendre and Maes Mynan.

## The Battle of Wheeler Banks *a volunteers perspective*



*Himalayan balsam can grow very tall and in dense stands, blocking out sunlight to smaller plants below.*

On a balmy summers morning in July the troops arrived. A motley bunch of volunteers, college placements and the odd warden or two. Armed with our trusty bracken flails and hands we faced the enemy. A vast 6ft high wall of Himalayan balsam covering the banks for as far as the eye could see. This non native invader smothers most native plant life blocking the light from the sun.

Battle commenced and all day long we slashed and tore and squashed till nought was left and sunlight returned to the banks. We rested content while one of the placement students celebrated by performing backward somersaults and handstands. We sustained few casualties save for a warden suffering from superficial injuries and embarrassment after being caught out by a barbed wire fence. The battle was over but we knew that the war was not won. More volunteers will be needed to control seedlings that establish this next year from seeds in the soil. So get volunteering, its great exercise and good fun!

John Chadwick



*Lovely views from one of the locations in the Living landscape area.*