



**Caring for the rivers of the Yorkshire Dales**

A full-page photograph of a river in the Yorkshire Dales. The river flows from the background towards the foreground, reflecting the surrounding green trees and the blue sky. The banks are lined with lush green trees and grass. In the foreground, there are large, dark rocks along the riverbank. The sky is a clear, pale blue with a few wispy clouds.

# Annual Report 2020



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# Chair's introduction

*Chris Ryder looks back on a year when the Trust was once again at the forefront of fighting for our rivers.*

**THE TRUST CAN CERTAINLY LOOK BACK ON 2019** as another year of significant progress and change for our rivers.

Our team of passionate, hard-working staff has continued to achieve results that many other larger, better resourced conservation bodies would be proud of. Whether visiting over 1500 schoolchildren with our new mobile classroom, planting up our riverbanks or helping to tackle historic mining pollution, the Trust has spread the message of river conservation far and wide.

On behalf of the Trustees I thank Dan Turner (the Trust's in-house energy source, leaving after 9 years to take up an opportunity at the Rivers Trust) and Charles Forman (our Director for 3 years who successfully built the team and the partnership working that now characterise the Trust) for their contributions and wish them all success in their new jobs. We bid a warm welcome to Conor Scholey and thank Marie Taylor for bravely stepping into the breach to provide leadership and maintain team morale as Operations Director.

The ongoing global debate over the impacts of climate change has been crystallised in our catchments by the behaviour of our rivers: a series of devastating flood events, with all the disruption and heartache they bring, has brought management of our aquatic environment to the forefront of public consciousness like never before. Our natural flood management work has seen us link with everyone from upland farmers to policy makers and become a leader in promoting natural solutions rather than costly concrete and steel.

In 2020 coronavirus has imposed many challenges and disruptions on our lives. Conservation has been no less affected than other sectors - projects put on hold, staff furloughed and new funds for a while very hard to come by. However we are back in progress and in motion now, active again on the rivers and building a portfolio of projects once again.

We warmly thank all the funders and partners who help us deliver clean rivers for all.

# Staff updates

## New staff



**Conor Scholey**

Conor joined YDRT in August as an Assistant Project Officer, having previously worked in hydrographic surveying for the Canal and Rivers Trust. He is a BSc Geography graduate from Lancaster University, where he further developed his interest in rivers and natural processes. During his undergraduate dissertation he worked on the monitoring of a river restoration project on the River Roddlesworth with the Ribble Rivers Trust as part of his dissertation. As an Assistant Project Officer, Conor is involved with projects across the entire catchment and works with the Project Officers to help deliver projects and develop project management skills. Conor grew up in Leeds and is a keen sportsman playing Cricket for Shadwell in the Airedale and Wharfedale Senior Cricket League amongst other sports

the Rapid Life Biosecurity Project and also the metal mine pollution element of the HLF Tees Swale project. The Dales to Vale River Network secured CAF funding as part of their catchment partnership resilience project to further develop, already being one of the most successful catchment partnerships in the country.

I am proud that during my tenure the team has grown from just one member of staff to a team of nine. I have been constantly impressed by the dedication, passion and drive of our staff which has allowed them to deliver in often challenging situations. I am very grateful for the support and encouragement I have received from the staff and trustees and particularly from neighbouring rivers trust CEOs – Tees, Eden and Ribble.

flood management. Things started to take shape, we became a little more organised and began to build respect and trust. Soon we had suddenly grown to 9 members of staff, with a Director in place, leading the way. We began to deliver bigger projects, develop stronger partnerships and become more recognised. It really felt like we were starting to make an impact to our rivers and catchments. And that's very much how it is today.

While we are a much bigger organisation than 9 years ago, what has always kept consistent is the passion and purpose to ensure our rivers, catchments are looked after. Ultimately making it a better place for people and wildlife to live.

I really think the future is bright and some exciting times lie ahead for the YDRT. Nevertheless, like all small charities there will be challenges, not least the recent pandemic. It's going to force us all to think differently and challenge the normal. Therefore, it's a hard time to leave, but it always was going to be. I have grown an identity here; it's given me a purpose and for that I am really thankful. I am however really pleased to be staying in the movement and working for the Rivers Trust. I hope I can bring my experiences of working for a local rivers trust to help shape a better future for all.

I would like to thank Nick Buck and all the early trustees, who really supported me and were flexible enough to allow me to pursue my other life ambitions outside of work. And for that matter, all the trustees who have dedicated some much time and energy to the trust. All the people from other organisations I have worked with. And finally, all the staff I have had the pleasure to work with, I have certainly made some life-long friends and you guys really make it a fun place to work.



**Dan Turner**

**Dan came to the Trust in 2011 and was its dynamic heart for the next 9 years.**

“ I arrived fresh out of university, with little direction but a whole lot of enthusiasm. I was lucky enough to secure a job here at the YDRT as a project officer. As a tiny grassroots charity, that only employed one other member of staff, it felt a little hectic at times. However, what it lacked in organisational structure was made up by some extraordinarily passionate individuals who dedicated their time, largely on a voluntary basis. The pure sense of purpose and determination was infectious.

The first few years were a journey of discovery, lots of mistakes made, lessons learnt and at times I questioned what on earth had I signed myself up for. But, while I might have not realised at the time, these were incredibly valuable life lessons. No corporate grad scheme would have ever provided that.

Two years in, and I was the only employee. Then we began to grow - 2, then 3 members of staff. We were lucky enough to employ some amazing people, who really helped shape the future. We began to diversify our activity: education, recreation and natural

## Departing staff



**Charles Forman**

**Charles was the Trust's first ever Director, serving in the post from 2017 to 2020.**

“ I started at the Trust having never managed a team or worked in the charity sector, let alone run a charity. The Trust was at a pivotal position, having taken on several new ambitious projects but not yet having staff to deliver them.

As a team, we have greatly expanded the range of projects and funding sources. Of particular note are the Rivers 2U education project, the expansion of multi-benefit natural flood management projects and working with our European neighbours on the WaterCOG project. We have also started to take on work as consultants, including writing natural flood management guidance, managing



# Building a resilient river partnership

*Charlotte Simons explains how a new project is helping to secure the long-term future of this important partnership.*

**ENCOURAGING STAKEHOLDERS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC** to work together to protect our rivers is a key goal of the Dales to Vale Rivers Network, which YDRT coordinates.

The Dales to Vale Rivers Network (DVRN) is a catchment partnership which brings together local people, communities, organisations and businesses to make decisions on managing the rivers, becks and lakes in the Swale, Ure, Nidd, Ouse and Wharfe catchments. But what would happen if government funding for catchment partnerships dried up - would they survive?

This is the critical question that we started looking at, with the support of the Charity Aid Foundation (CAF). Over the past year Dawa from CAF has been working with the DVRN to check where we are as a network and to identify what we need to develop to make us resilient. The project has enabled us to have a clearer idea for what the DVRN does and how to make funders understand and value the services we offer.

## **What are the results of this?**

We now have a clear vision for our catchments: "Healthy Rivers, abundant wildlife, valued by Communities". We've also defined the impact that the DVRN can have: "That the river environments of the Swale, Nidd, Ouse and Wharfe are thriving, and supporting the needs and wellbeing of their biodiversity and communities, now and in the future"

**A really important outcome of the work has been a shift in how each partner understands and appreciates the works of the DVRN, so that they support and promote our work in their own internal organisations but also in external meetings. This has been quite a sea change and really welcome to us.**

## **So where are we now?**

As a network, our work is supported and amplified through our partners. We have identified tasks that the network should be doing and isn't due to lack of resources, along with tasks that we are doing to the best we can but could do so much better if we had the time. We have also costed up all this and can show funders what exactly they would be supporting - from work tasks up to the impact DVRN and the vision we have for our catchments.

## **So what are we going to do with all this?**

So far we have raised our profile within the Environment Agency and provided them with costings that show how much it would really cost us to run the network and made and built on our contacts into CAF - networking is all about making contacts and bringing people together.

Now we are going to put together our "sellable document" - it is an odd phrase but basically this is what we can use to approach funders to cover the benefits of being involved in the DVRN and especially of funding us. We are also going to set up a fundraising sub-group to start focusing on bringing money in - firstly to support the running of the network and then to support the projects that will give us.

## **"Healthy Rivers, Abundant wildlife, Valued by Communities"**

What we've learnt through this process is that the DVRN is so much more than just a meeting that the board members attend on a quarterly basis. We are the backbone of conserving our rivers, helping to create consensus and build effective partnerships that influence how we care for the environment, from source to sea. We are the DVRN team and the sum of our parts is so much greater than the whole.



**Water sampling training day for the iWharfe project, working in partnership with Addingham Environment Group, Ilkley Clean River Group, Environment Agency and other local volunteers along the Wharfe**

# Beaver away in Bavaria

*In October 2019 YDRT's **Jack Hirst** embarked on a trip to discover how beavers are giving conservation a helping hand in Germany. Here is his account of the journey.*

**AS THE PLANE'S WINGS** pierced the clouds, a vast patchwork of green and brown loomed into view. My home in the Yorkshire Dales felt a long way away, as Bavaria rapidly came into view. I was on my way to meet Eurasian Beaver experts, Derek Gow, Gerhard Schwab and Roisin Campbell-Palmer to see how people live with and manage Eurasian Beavers in the heart of Europe. I was joined by representatives from a range of organisations such as the Environment Agency, the National Trust and Natural England as well as from Natural Scotland and the Scottish Wild Beaver group.

Beavers, previously eaten and worn out of existence in the UK, are starting to paddle their way back into our waterways. There are now small isolated populations of beavers living across Britain. They exist in several guises, either in trial sites or as escapees, as

wild living populations or as illegal releases. It is estimated that there are more than 400 animals now living in the UK. At the time of writing we have just received the initial results of the River Otter Beaver Trial, a 5-year study into a free-living population of beavers on the River Otter in Devon. The trial was designed to study the ecological and social effects of free-living beavers, which in turn can inform decisions taken by Defra and Natural England around the licencing of more free-living beaver populations. As landowners and conservation organisations become more interested in releasing beavers, it becomes increasingly important that within the Yorkshire Dales catchments we understand how to manage these animals.

***Jack's trip to Bavaria was funded by the Wharfedale Naturalists Society, to whom we express our sincere thanks.***

## WHAT'S A BEAVER?

Beavers are large, native rodents which are fully adapted for life in the water, feeding exclusively on vegetation that they find in or around areas of freshwater. Beavers build dams from wood, mud and stones to create pools of standing water; this makes them "Ecosystem engineers", because they create, modify and/or maintain habitats, and through this activity they create and enhance the ecosystem services of the area.



**Eurasian beaver**

## Why Bavaria?

Bavaria reintroduced beavers in the 1960's. Since then they have spread from a few small areas to occupying nearly every river, beck and drainage ditch with a population of 23,000. Bavaria is therefore a fascinating place to visit, providing an interesting comparison with UK beaver populations, which are similar to that of Bavaria around 50 years ago. We can benefit from the lessons learned there as support increases for beaver reintroduction in Britain.

Bavaria is a highly developed region. It is important to note that their agriculture consists mainly of arable crops and zero grazing livestock production, and not to be imagining Bavaria as a land of ancient forests and steaming swamps. As my friend and fellow wildlife enthusiast Peter Cooper describes it, "It's Norfolk with Germans".

This trip took us from the mountains of the Bavarian National Forest Park to the lowlands of the Danube valley, looking for beavers every step of the way. But we saw much more. A range of wildlife was presented to us thanks to the expertise of the course leaders. We also met with people representing organisations who are involved with the beavers or the people affected by them.

## What did we see?

Whilst in Bavaria we visited the town of Winzer, a town that had suffered from flooding as well as inundations of sediment coming from upstream maize fields. We met the Mayor of Winzer, on the banks of the Unterholzer Mühlback river, upstream of the town in an area where logs and branches poked out from the dark water's surface. He explained that the town council had been on the verge of installing a €450,000 sediment and flood control scheme, when a family of beavers had moved into this stretch of the watercourse. Since that day the beaver dams had slowed the flow and captured sediment to the point that the proposed flood and sediment control scheme was no longer needed.

The beaver's ability to reduce flood peak and capture sediment has also been noted in Great Britain, at the West Devon Beaver Trail. Here, it was found that flood peak decreased by 30% over



a 183m length of watercourse occupied by beavers. They slow the flow of water by creating a rougher catchment, by adding woody material to watercourses either as dams or as felled trees. They create a network of waterways that divert the main course of water, which increases the length and complexity of the watercourse. These activities also improve water quality by capturing sediment, acting as pollution sinks and have even been shown to neutralise acidic run-off, as was seen at the Scottish Beaver Trial.

We also visited a valley, near the town of Wettelsheim. Where once the valley floor had been a blanket of agriculture, it is now a mosaic of ponds, marshes and grassland full of bird song, migratory fish and even rare black storks. The surrounding trees consisted of familiar species but all looked very different, growing shorter with multiple stems; almost all had been coppiced by the beavers. The benefits to wildlife are evident in Great Britain at the River Otter Beaver Trial, which found that beavers have fantastic benefits for wildfowl, water voles and amphibians as well as 37% increases in fish abundance within beaver ponds. This includes notable increases in Lamprey within the dammed ponds and juvenile trout abundant in the woody riffles formed by collapsed beaver dams.

Although beavers can have a range of positive impacts, it is easy to see how they can also cause conflicts, primarily with agriculture. In Bavaria, due to the arable or zero grazing nature of the agriculture, the biggest concern is the beaver burrows causing holes in fields, damaging crops or machinery, and beavers grazing on the crops that grow near to waterways. However, these issues can be mitigated or prevented. In Bavaria there is legislation that reduces the risk of an issue arising. Firstly, farmers are prohibited by law from farming within at least 5m of a watercourse. There is also a scheme where developers are required to provide biodiversity “net gain” as compensation for impacts made by developments such as new housing estates, via an obligation to buy agricultural land and return it to a more natural state. On top of this there is also around 1,000 voluntary beaver consultants in Bavaria trained to work with landowners to minimise conflict, advise on mitigating issues and calculate compensation payments for damages done by beavers (which also covers foresters and fisheries). These are actions that could be possible in the UK.

As our guide and beaver expert Gerhard Schwab said, “Give the river 20m of breathing space, you will solve 95% of beaver problems”.



**Jack Hirst**

**“ The trip was full to the brim with thought-provoking information, relating to the Bavarian people’s co-existence with beavers. It made me realise that with better support and understanding of beaver management, it wouldn’t take much for there to be successful reintroductions of beavers into the wild in England.**

**The Yorkshire Dales could be a great place to give beavers a helping hand, and colleagues in the Eden Rivers Trust are already making moves to bring in their own beavers. There is a real opportunity to improve the waterscape of the Dales, we just need to be bold and help lead the way as we look to take the first steps in our own beaver adventure.”**



**Members of the trip viewing a beaver created wetland**



# Projects update:

## Improving rivers in Elmet

*For the last three years Marie Taylor has been leading on the Rivers in Elmet (RIE) project, helping to raise awareness and improve water quality in the lower Wharfe and lower Ouse catchments.*

### THIS PROJECT HAS ENABLED

the Trust to engage with around 50 farmers to deliver a range of practical conservation measures that has helped to tackle sediment, nutrient loading and habitat modifications in five adjoining waterbodies. Fencing has been a key output of the project, with a total of 7km of riverbank fenced off, creating approximately three and a half hectares of buffer strip. More than three thousand trees have been planted including half a kilometre of hedges. This work has helped to exclude livestock from the rivers and has improved 15 drinking points. We have also installed five pasture pumps to provide alternative watering solutions and ensure livestock have access to water. These physical improvements have helped to reduce erosion and pollution, whilst enhancing the quality of bankside habitat.

The project has successfully engaged with communities across the catchments, hosting volunteer days and working within schools. Events included a litter picking day (in partnership with the Environment Agency, Leeds City Council and the Yorkshire housing association) and a riverfly monitoring training

workshop, where we were able to train six local volunteers to monitor invertebrate populations. Volunteers have been actively involved planting trees and installing in-stream channel deflectors to improve fish spawning and aquatic habitat. The volunteer hours alone have generated an incredible £27,000 worth of in-kind support, while demonstrating the importance of proactive community engagement for project delivery and success.

Connecting with schools has been an important part of the project - Catherine (our education and engagement officer) has visited seven different schools across the catchments and engaged with 425 children, educating them about river processes, pollution and river invertebrates.

The Rivers in Elmet project has been funded by the Environment Agency. Although the project has come to the end of its three-year funding period, we are hoping to secure another year of funding to deliver work upstream of Thorner village.

We would like to say a big thank you to all of the partners, farmers, landowners and volunteers that have been involved in this project.

Flow deflector installed by YDRT volunteers



▲ Before (above) and after (below). Fencing work carried out on Cock Beck



# Projects update:

## Could floods have a silver lining for farmers?

*A three year project saw YDRT help farmers in Upper Wharfedale to look at ways in which they could improve the natural environment on their farms, with a special focus on flood management.*

*As the project comes to an end, **Jack Hirst** explains what has been achieved.*

**THE PROJECT HAS WORKED CLOSELY** with a group of 16 farmers who run upland sheep and beef farms in Upper Wharfedale. The key environmental focus of the group was on natural flood management (NFM) which has helped to link it to related YDRT projects such as WaterCog, Naturally Resilient and the River Wharfe SSSI Restoration project.

We drew together a number of experts from different organisations so that the group's members could learn about best practice for farming for wildlife. Helen Keep on the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) gave an insightful talk on the 'payment by results' trial occurring in Wensleydale, providing a glimpse of how farmers are likely to be rewarded for providing 'public goods' such as protecting landscape, biodiversity and helping to reduce flooding.

A workshop run by group member Chris Clark of Nethergill Farm discussed the resilience of farm businesses in the current climate and took a detailed look into the impacts of livestock stocking densities on farm profits. The group discussion following this was around balancing the delivery of public

benefits against profit margins and whether this must be a balance at all. We also deliberated over the issues of transitioning from sheep farming to cattle farming, seemingly a trend in farms looking to deliver greater public goods.

A flurry of reports in the media identifying agriculture as a source of high carbon emissions came at an opportune time, provoking the group's interest in looking at the carbon footprint of hill farms. JBA Consulting was commissioned to run a carbon audit on two of the farms in the area, both a mix of cattle and sheep farming. The reports came back showing that in terms of carbon each farm emitted more carbon than they sequestered. They also identified opportunities to both increase carbon sequestration and the flood management benefits that each farm could provide.

Funding for the Upper Wharfedale Countryside Stewardship Flood Facilitation Fund came to an end in April 2020. YDRT is planning to build on the network of relationships with farmers in the area to develop new initiatives, with a focus on natural flood management.





# Projects update:

## Taking rivers on the road

*The Trust's flagship education project Rivers2U has seen **Catherine Mason** taking our river conservation message to schoolchildren across the region.*



### What the schools say

**The feedback from the project has been overwhelmingly positive:**

**“Thank you for an outstanding outdoor learning experience for our students.”**  
- Upper Wharfedale School

**“The children were really engaged and learned a vast amount in a short space of time. It was great how the leader had a vast amount of knowledge about wildlife and could talk about it really well to the children.”**  
- Clifton School, York

**“Sessions were so useful and enjoyable for the children that they didn't want to stop!”**  
- Kirby Hill

**A REALLY EXCITING MILESTONE** of the project was converting a van into a mobile classroom. As soon as it was ready in April 2018 we hit the road and during the following 18 months we worked with 55 classes, from 34 different schools, engaging with over 1500 children!

Rivers2U has also reached wider audiences through attending agricultural shows and community events across the region, hosting pop-ups and guided walks at nature reserves and working with other organisations such as the National Trust and Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority to deliver partnership events and activities. In November we were proud to receive a Gold Award from the Green Apple Organisation, in the category Education/Conservation and Wildlife.

We are delighted that our Rivers2U project is continuing in 2020, thanks to the generous funding from the Postcode Local Trust, financed by players of the People's Postcode Lottery. This is allowing us to work with a wider range of schools across our catchments, as well as reaching new audiences through our community work and outreach at shows through the coming year. Additionally, we will be using the Rivers2U mobile classroom to support our work with other projects within YDRT, as well as looking in to new opportunities to expand the education outreach across our area. If you would like the van to come to a school or an event near you, please get in touch with us at [education@ydrt.co.uk](mailto:education@ydrt.co.uk).





# Projects update:

## Tackling heavy metal pollution in the North Pennines

*The Tees-Swale is a landscape-scale project which aims to enhance habitats in ways that will benefit wildlife, farmers and wider society.*

*Here **Dave Higgins** explains YDRT's role in the early stages of the project.*

**WHILST A KEY AIM OF THE PROJECT** is to restore and connect habitats whilst providing support and training to upland hill farmers, YDRT's role is to identify methods to reduce the impact of diffuse pollution from heritage metal mine sites in Teesdale and Swaledale, and to create rare calaminarian grassland and improve habitats for fish.

During the first stage YDRT have worked with landowners, farmers and gamekeepers and surveyed important heritage metal mine sites responsible for diffuse pollution from lead, zinc and cadmium with a view to developing new control measures.

Phase I is now complete and has been submitted to the National Lottery for consideration. The funding decision should be made public in July.

The project, which is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, is a partnership between the North Pennines AONB and the Yorkshire Dales National

Park along with other partners including the Tees Rivers Trust and the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust.



**The metal mine sites looked at include the Old Gang Mill complex in Swaledale**

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## Autumn Rivers Trust Conference – 2019

*In October 2019 YDRT had the privilege and responsibility of hosting the annual Rivers Trust Autumn conference.*

**THE TWO DAY CONFERENCE**, held in York, offered the more than 100 delegates from across the rivers trust movement the opportunity to share their experiences and thoughts on the title theme of 'Cross-sector collaboration and governance – building resilience and delivering impacts'.

Day one of the conference saw delegates arrive at the DeGrey Rooms in York for a day of talks and discussion. A variety of speakers from local rivers trusts, water companies, community groups and European partners gave their take on the conference theme throughout the day.

Day two of the conference was an opportunity for YDRT to show some of the work we have done at our demonstration sites in Oughtershaw and Collingham. The day started with a long coach journey for the delegates,

with some precarious moments as they managed the farm tracks and narrow gate openings to reach our demonstration site at Swarthghyll Farm. The delegates were met with typical Dales weather of heavy downpours mixed with brief moments of sun as they got the chance to see the site.

After a site tour we headed down the farm track to Nethergill Farm where farmer Chris Clark gave a talk on how he is working with the landscape to improve his profitability in this upland setting.

The afternoon was an opportunity to showcase our lowland demonstration site that forms a part of the Collingham Natural Flood Management (NFM) project. Roger Fawcus gave a presentation on how he runs his dairy farm and how NFM measures have been incorporated into the way he manages his land. The second day concluded with a tour around the demonstration site and the chance for the delegates to see our Rivers2U mobile classroom.

The conference was a great opportunity to see so many new and familiar faces from

across the rivers trust movement and we were happy to see that our hard work to host the conference and our work at the demonstration sites was well received.

All the presentations from the conference can be found on the national Rivers Trust website here:

**[www.riverstrust.org/events/the-rivers-trust-autumn-conference](http://www.riverstrust.org/events/the-rivers-trust-autumn-conference)**



**YDRT Chair Chris Ryder addressing the conference**



With special thanks to our main partners and sponsors



**Caring for the rivers of the Yorkshire Dales**

For more information on the Trust and its activities and the Dales to Vale Rivers Network please see our website at:

**[www.yorkshiredalesriverstrust.com](http://www.yorkshiredalesriverstrust.com)**

or contact us at:

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