Darent River Preservation Society

The voice of the River Darent

DRiPS

No 38 Autumn 2022

Has it rained enough?

Rained enough for whom, you might ask? Not for farmers, not for the soil, or the ecosystems on which the natural world relies, and that includes ourselves.

Reservoir levels all over England reached a 25 year low and the Thames dried up at its source in Gloucestershire.

The vast aquifers which lie underneath the Thames Basin take months of rain to recharge and that process won't be able to start until the ground itself is well saturated.



If you are interested in the science of soils and aquifers, geology, botany and river life, and want to help DRiPS help improve the public understanding of how all these things are joined up in nature, please get in touch by email or Facebook.We must not let anyone take these things for granted.

SUMMERS WE WON'T FORGET



Darent dry riverbed at Eynsford in 1977 (Ian Wilkes)

Some who remember the summer of 1976 say that they've seen hot summers before and it will be OK. By this September, our river was very low but still flowing.
So what's the problem?

Anyone who lived near the Darent in Lullingstone, Eynsford, Farningham, Horton Kirby and Dartford in the 80s and 90s has different recollections, After watching the river dry up for several consecutive years, with dead fish and standpipes, the Shoreham Society organised the inaugural meeting of DRiPS in 1985.

For the next 20 years DRiPS worked with the EA and the water companies to create a Darent Action Plan. The EA was very proud of how they were able to rescue the river. But funding for the second tranche of works never materialised and these days target levels of flow are no longer achievable.

Our water companies have promised never to let this happen again and will invest in alternativce sources of water. The Darent is still one of the most over-abstracted rivers in England and being in an area with the highest growth of population and the least rainfall it doesn't look like the story will end happily.

DRiPS Meeting

Thurs 17th November

Eynsford

Listen to our speakers tell us about how we can help to look after the Darent Valley.

See back page

The Darent Landscape Recovery Project



Picture courtesy of Thomas Alexander

William Alexander of Castle Farm is delighted to announcethat the Darent Valley Farming Cluster, in partnership with Kent Wildlife Trust, has won an award by DEFRA to be one of 22 national schemes to demonstrate how they can implement radical large-scale approaches to improve biodiversity and wildlife habitat and benefit food production along the river valley.
Others pilots include schemes in Norfolk, Dartmoor, the Cotswolds, Lake District and the Pennines.

This summer the Darent group began surveys on a field-by-field basis, mapping existing habitats and their species of birds, insects and plants across the cluster landscape and identifying opportunities to improve biodiversity and to increase carbon capture.

William writes “We have begun to recruit and train local volunteers and the cluster group is keen to engage with all the appropriate stakeholders who share our ambitions and are able to contribute knowledge, advice and both practical and financial assistance.”

Read more about the government scheme HERE (www.gov.uk/government/news/projects-of-landscape-recovery-scheme-announced)

Learn more from our speakers at our November meeting.



We must all learn to look after Nature,
or Nature won't be able to look after us.

Life is easier when you understand how things work.
Don't rely on others to solve all the problems on the planet.

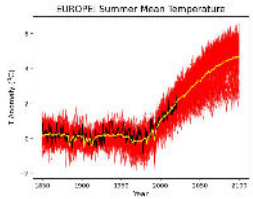
Even as gardeners, we need to give thought to how to improve the soil structure, drainage and water retention, to create little ponds, and try to use greywater

The worldwide water crisis and the future of chalk streams

From Australia to Africa and from California to Chile and throughout Europe, 2022 has demonstrated that the world's food production is under threat if we are unable to manage our water supply.

Closer to home, the Thames dried up at source and river traffic on the Rhine and Danube couldn't carry normal freight without running aground.

Metoffice data shows the record-breaking heatwave experienced across Europe will be considered an 'average' summer by 2035. Chalk streams are the surface expression of the great chalk aquifers from which our water companies take our water and they represent one of the UK's most important contributions to global biodiversity.
This summer, over half of our chalk streams have run dry. You might like to follow CaBA, the



Catchment Based Approach group that works in partnership with government, local authorities, water companies and businesses, to maximise the natural value of our environment. It's chaired by Charles Rangeley-Wilson.

Our River Darent was under severe stress and we discussed with the EA the use of augmentation pumps but it seems they



are no longer deemed effective as they lower the water table elsewhere. Low rivers mean that any pollution is more concentrated - there were sightings of dead fish. but not on a scale where the EA felt the need to organise fish rescue parties.

We need to reduce our dependence on chalk aquifers. In spite of our National Intrastructure Commission (NIC), there have been no new reservoirs built in the UK since 1991 and some exisiting reservoirs have even been sold off to land developers.

You might like to follow the national conversation with DRiPS on Twitter. We are called "*Darent River Preservation*" and we follow over 100 key players and now have 50 people following us, including Feargal Sharkey.

Your committee's been at work

This summer we've been in dialogue with Thames Water and South East Water; with Natural England, who are advocating a policy of Water Neutraility for new developments; with Sevenoaks District Council in respect of the Sevenoaks Quarry Development; with our MP Laura Trott; and with RAPID, which was created in 2019 by OfWAT to help facilitate the development and funding of new large scale strategic water supply options by the water companies.

We sit on the Darent and Cray Catchment Improvement Group chaired by the South East Rivers Trust and will continue to do our best to be *the Voice of The Darent.*

Some questions to ponder..

• What proportion of water from the Darent is used by local towns and villages and what proportion gets “sent up to London”?

• If there is no spare land in our catchment to build reservoirs, it must be piped from elsewhere. Where is the existing "water grid"?

• Analysis of Water UK data by the Angling Trust found that on average, water companies replace 0.05% of their water and wastewater pipe networks a year. This implies they will last for 2000 years.

• Why don't water companies recruit more teams to fix the leaks?

• If the average consumption dropped from 150 to 100 litres/day, how much more water would there be in the river?

• If more surface water drained into the ground instead of the sewer system, that will both recharge the aquifers and reduce the load on the sewer tteatment works which are prone to overflow after heavy rain. And it would reduce flood risk.

• Road runoff carries pollutants and microplastics into the river. Should we care about this and is there anything we can do?

• We need more trees to absorb carbon. If they grow too close to the river they can shade it too much and need cutting back. Who should pay for this?

• But a moderate amount of woody debris helps to form "pool-riffles sequences" that scour the gravels and create breeding grounds for fish.

• Are you an amateur (or retired) hydrologist? Please get in touch.

DRiPS Autumn Meeting

Castle Hotel Eynsford



Thurs 17th Nov 7.00pm

Doors open 6.30pm

Short AGM followed by

speakers from

Kent Wildlife Trust
South East Water
South East Rivers Trust

Non-members welcome
Enquiries 01959 563296



Why are NWKCP and DRiPS promoting the PPP Project ?
PPP? That's Preventing Plastic Pollution.
The least we can do is to pick the stuff up before it washes downstream and breaks into micoplastic particles. Join Mark Gallant and Stuart Merrylees in Westerham Darent Car Park on Wednesday 16th November (between 10am and 2 pm) or look out on Facebook for another date to help elsewhere on the Darent, Cray or Shuttle.