

## Keeper's Report Pre Season 2011

The weather this winter has made working in the river or on its banks extremely difficult, with measured temperatures at Miller's dale down to – 21 degrees. A lot of jobs were impossible during the really cold spell, with the ground like concrete, and getting into the water needed an extra intake of breath! Even when cutting down and pollarding trees, which you would think would be a nice warming job, we found that bark encrusted with ice which soon blunted the chain saw. Saying this, I think Chris and I have done very well to get through my list of jobs for this close season, with the only job not done at present was to pollard more trees back on Signposts.

The main project this winter was to improve the in-river habitat between the Iron Bridge and the Water Wheel pool and to make a pathway with casting room on the true right bank. The in-river work was done by narrowing the stream with willow brush deflectors and tree trunks, which were sourced from the path clearing and casting area. Anyone looking at the pathway now will not realise the number of sycamores and willows that were removed because we cut them down below ground level, as we have also done on the path going down onto the point at Water cum Jolly. We also shored up the track below Iron Bridge as this was starting to erode away. We have also put in some woody debris as well as some small deflectors to create a safe area for emerging trout fry and this I mean to continue in the future. Other jobs done were the coppicing of willows to let more light in and make more casting room on Keeper's. Chris has also done a great job of putting in a new set of steps in at Upperdale.

As many of you will know Duffer's hut had to be moved for repairs to the road supporting wall behind it. I am glad to say there was no damage done and everything is back to normal. We have also removed several diseased alders and taken out or pinned back to the bank quite a few trees that had collapsed due to the weight of snow.

At present Chris and I are finishing off the smaller jobs and clearing rubbish from the river. On this point I would like to thank the volunteer group from Derbyshire Wildlife Trust and the five Club Members who helped us clear rubbish out of Cheedale on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March. Some 50 odd bags of rubbish were removed along with a few larger items, but thankfully far fewer tyres and wheels than usual. Well done. Chris and I also went up on the 6<sup>th</sup> March and helped Buxton FFC on their annual clear up, where we picked up large amounts of plastic, polystyrene and many more larger items, including shopping trolleys, bikes, chairs, clothing and tyres. The residents of Miller's Dale and Litton Mill are also helping us clear litter between the villages on the 13<sup>th</sup> March.

On the poaching front, we don't usually have many problems in the close season but last week we had 2 incidents where people were seen about to tackle up. They were spoken to and they saw the error of their ways. As I write this the Police are looking for 2 men with a bow & arrows who are shooting at molehills in Monsal Dale !!

As I mentioned in my end of season report there are moves to try and control Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed on the upper Derwent and its tributaries and in the upper Dove catchment. If any members or people they know would like to volunteer to help in this important long term project, please contact me.

There are still a few places available on the Bugs & Bats evening on 25<sup>th</sup> June, and five places free on the Rivercraft day on 7<sup>th</sup> May. Please contact me if you are interested.

Could members please remember to put their ID cards in their vehicles especially when parking at Blackwell Cottages (top boundary) as the track has been upgraded and members of the public are now going down the private track and parking by the cottages. We are allowed two spaces in the parking area provided the card is displayed.

We have replaced some of the old combination locks with a different design. To open, enter the normal number and push the lock against the gate/door frame and it will spring open. To lock, close and then scramble the numbers.

#### Nature Notes

There have been a few Large Dark Olives and February Reds hatching off on some of the warmer days recently. Our male Otter has returned to the Litton Mill area, having been absent all winter. The severe weather in early December brought two very unusual birds to our area, a Bittern at Lock Bridge and a Jack Snipe in my garden. Also present were larger numbers of Teal, Snipe and big numbers of Mandarin ducks on the ponds. As some of you will know, I study birds by the means of ringing and one of the main species I monitor is the Barn Owl which has been hit badly by the harsh weather. Between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> December six birds were found dead due to starvation. Hopefully the few remaining birds I know of will have a good breeding season and bounce back.

The first signs of spring are upon us with a few frogs stirring and the odd Chiffchaff, Wheatear and Sand Martin spreading north.

Tight lines,

Stephen