



Streams and Ponds

With a varied landscape and temperate climate, Dorset has a good network of rivers, streams and ditches, all set within a wider floodplain landscape. Ponds, lakes, fens and marsh give us even more variety of water habitats. These wetland habitats are vital to wildlife and they need sensitive management.

A few facts

A vital resource

Water in the landscape was once very important to communities, serving the drinking, hygiene and energy needs of people and their livestock locally. Water is still essential to us all but we are less involved in its management. Nowadays many local ponds & streams have become neglected as they are no longer useful to our day to day needs. Inappropriate management and increasing pressure on public water supplies have also resulted in significant impacts on rivers and wetlands, amounting to a serious loss of habitat.

Changing environment

Wise use of water is vital, especially as our climate is changing and potentially altering rainfall patterns.

Rivers, streams and ditches are sometimes the only remnant of the natural landscape left when an area has been developed. They are vital refuge for wildlife by providing a home for many plants and animals as well as a safe corridor.

Globally rare

The chalk landscape in Dorset accommodates a unique and fascinating feature – chalk streams fed from the underground chalk aquifers, which are globally rare. These streams are almost entirely spring-fed and their headwaters (or winterbournes) are often seasonal, flowing only when groundwater levels are high from winter rainfall. Often the spring water feeding these streams fell as rain hundreds of years ago! Because of this and their unique water chemistry, they support many species that are rarely found elsewhere.

Flood plains

River floodplains can act not only as havens for important wildlife, through restoration of water meadows, but also as a means of holding back water which might otherwise cause flood damage elsewhere.

Watery wildlife

Species such as the otter and water vole are well known, even characterised in popular books such as the *Wind in the Willows* ('Ratty' was in fact a water vole!) Such species are useful as they can give us a quick measure of the health of a river system and quality of the water.

Invasive species such as Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and mink are becoming a serious threat to wetland wildlife as they dominate the native species which have not evolved to cope with them, reducing the variety of plants and animals.

Water power

It is possible to generate electricity from watercourses, especially at the sites of old water mills where water flows over a weir.

What you can do

- Investigate old wetland features

Using old maps and local knowledge, finding out where your local ponds, streams and meadow systems used to be can be a fascinating insight into how people lived and worked in the past. This could also be a good starting point in deciding if you want to improve your local wetland features.

Who can help: Dorset County Council
- Historic Environment Team



Things to be aware of: Always get permission from the landowner before you do any survey work.

- Bringing streams to life

Help increase the wildlife value of your local stream and develop opportunities for people to enjoy them more. The Living Streams information pack gives detailed information on how to survey your stream and undertake practical improvement projects.

Who can help: Dorset Wildlife Trust – Rivers & Wetland team
Funding: Dorset Biodiversity Partnership.

Things to be aware of: Work along rivers and streams, and also work that affects ponds near rivers or streams may need consent from the Environment Agency. If you are planning any works in these areas, you should contact the Agency in the first instance.



- Wildlife watch

Contributing to established surveys (such as otters, water voles, water shrews, toads, frogs and great crested newts) can give wildlife organisations vital information on where these species are and what help they need, if any. There are simple to use methods of surveying and submitting your sightings.

Who can help: Dorset Wildlife Trust – Rivers & Wetland team, The Herpetological Conservation Trust, Dorset Otter Group, Pond Conservation Trust, Froglife
Things to be aware of: Always get permission from the landowner before you do any survey work. Avoid disturbing or handling any wild animals – often this requires a special licence

- Ponds for wildlife

There may be some simple practical ways that your local pond can be improved for wildlife – or a new one created – but it is important to get professional advice and a plan of action before you start.

Who can help: Dorset Wildlife Trust – Rivers & Wetland team
Funding: Dorset Biodiversity Partnership

- Keep invasive species under control

If Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed or mink are dominating your waterways you may be able to help in a practical way and by working with neighbouring landowners.

Who can help: Dorset Wildlife Trust – Rivers & Wetland team

- Dorset Winterbourne

Dorset AONB have set up a project to help conserve and celebrate Winterbournes in Dorset. If you have a chalk stream in your local area, there may be a project up and running which you could help with, or start up your own with help.



Things to be aware of: Work along rivers and streams, and also work that affects ponds near rivers or streams may need consent from the Environment Agency. If you are planning any works in these areas, you should contact the Agency in the first instance. A risk assessment & public liability / personal accident insurance needed.

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Courtesy of Mark Simons, DCC

Things to be aware of: Respect privately owned land. Do get professional advice and draw up a plan of action.

nes project

Who can help: Dorset AONB
Funding: Dorset AONB Sustainable Development Fund



• Pond dipping! Stream spotting!

These are great ways to raise awareness of water issues, particularly with children and schools.

Who can help: Dorset Wildlife Trust – People & Wildlife team, Wessex Water
Funding: Dorset Biodiversity Partnership, Wessex Watermark Award

Things to be aware of: Get permission from landowners first. Get advice on health & safety precautions.



• Harnessing water energy

Water mills were once an important source of energy and there have been some interesting projects recently where mill owners have used their mills to develop micro-scale hydropower to generate energy for their local area. The nearest is a group of mill owners in South Somerset where they have achieved power for 150 homes but also created a good reserve of learning & innovation for others to benefit from.

Further information: Energy Saving Trust website
Things to be aware of: Environment Agency should be involved from the outset. Safe passage of fish across water mills a big issue to address.



Courtesy of Chalk & Cheese

Who can help

Dorset Wildlife Trust

Rivers & Wetland team
01305 264620
www.dorsetwildlife.org.uk

Dorset AONB

Biodiversity Officer – Alison Turnock
01929 557337
alison.turnock@purbeck-dc.gov.uk
www.dorsetaonb.org.uk

Dorset County Council

Historic Environment Team
Senior Archaeologist – Claire Pinder
01305 224921, c.j.pinder@dorsetcc.gov.uk

Dorset Otter Group

C/o Dorset Wildlife Trust
(see above)

Environment Agency

General Enquiries: 08708 506 506
www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Froglife

01733 558844
info@froglife.org
www.froglife.org

Herpetological Conservation Trust

01202 391319
www.herpconstrust.org.uk

Ordnance Survey

For maps old & new 08456 050505
www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk

Ponds Conservation Trust

01865 483249
info@pondconservation.org.uk
www.pondstrust.org.uk

Wessex Water

Education officer & educational resources
01225 526000
education@wessexwater.co.uk

Funding

Dorset Biodiversity Partnership

Grants of £100 – £1000 for projects that contribute towards the Biodiversity Strategy such as creating, restoring & managing wildlife habitats, specific species projects or information & educational projects.
c/o Dorset Wildlife Trust
01305 217978
apollard@dorsetwildlife.co.uk

Dorset AONB Sustainable Development Fund

Katharine Wright 01305 756782
k.wright@dorsetcc.gov.uk
www.dorsetaonb.org.uk

Wessex Watermark Award

For environmental projects run by the Conservation Foundation
info@conservationfoundation.org
020 7591 3111
www.conservationfoundation.co.uk

Further information

Common Ground

Outcomes of their Confluence project offers inspiration and practical information on celebrating water. Rhynes, Rivers and Running Brooks pamphlet.
www.commonground.org.uk

Dorset Wildlife Trust

Have collections of leaflets on all aspects of wetland projects, and an informative website.
Rivers & Wetlands Team 01305 264620
www.dorsetwildlife.org.uk

Energy Saving Trust

www.est.org.uk

Environment Agency

Have publications on control of invasive species and an excellent website which can be used to pinpoint water data in your area via the 'What's in Your backyard' section.
www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Ponds Trust

Have information sheets on all aspects of ponds and their management
Environment Agency have publications on control of invasive species

Dorset Environmental Records Centre

01305 225081
www.derc.org.uk



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Ideas for Action

Investigate old wetland features

A fascinating insight into how people lived and worked in the past and a good starting point if you want to develop good places for wildlife locally.

Wildlife watch

Your sightings of otters, water voles, water shrews, toads, frogs and great crested newts will give wildlife organisations vital information to help their conservation. These will also help you build up a picture of the health of your local waterways.

Get your hands dirty

Breathe some life into ailing streams and ponds, making them better for wildlife, and people too! Many water features have suffered from neglect but with a bit of advice you can get them back into perfect condition.

A healthy balance

If Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed or mink are dominating your waterways, working with your neighbours to reduce their hold and can help restore a variety of native plants & animals to your waterways.

Pond dipping!

A great way to raise awareness of water issues, particularly with children and schools. Stream dipping can be fun too and easily tied into curriculum activities at school.

Winterbournes

If you are lucky enough to have a winterbourne stream in your area, then these globally rare streams are worth a closer look. Fed from underground water, these streams often 'disappear' during dry seasons. Their history and wildlife are fascinating and there's an opportunity to join in with a project to explore and celebrate these unique streams.

If you want to take up any of these ideas, there's a lot of help available. See over for how to get started.

Case study

The Three Rivers Partnership, Gillingham

The Three Rivers Partnership is the Community Partnership for Gillingham and was founded in 2003. The aim of the partnership is to define needs, establish projects and source funding for the benefit of the town and surrounding parishes.

The Open Spaces Group is one of four themed working parties, this one looking to improve the open spaces in the town for both people and biodiversity. Their vision is to bring wildlife into the heart of the town.

Gillingham is a core area for water voles in the country and is a nationally important area for them. Signs of otter can be found on all the rivers in the town and evidence can be found of otters using the rivers next to where some of the new housing estates are being built.

The Working Group wanted a 'big picture' view of the green space in their town. They set about surveying the whole town and worked with landowners and local people to develop greener community areas. The group looked to the Dorset Wildlife Trust for advice on managing land to the benefit of wildlife and people.

With the help of the Wildlife Trust, they have set up training for local anglers to carry out surveys of water vole, stoat, mink and otter so that they can monitor these populations. The Group is also looking at new building development to ensure that all is being done to safeguard the river wildlife as well as providing accessible green space for the people who live there.

If you are interested in taking up any of these ideas in your local area, we have more detailed information to help you.

For each topic in this pack, you can request our additional sheets which include more actions, a guide to who can help with advice and support, sources of funding available and things to be aware of before you start. These are all free and updated regularly.

For your free copy, contact the Dorset AONB Office:

01305 756782
dorsetaonb@dorsetcc.gov.uk
www.dorsetaonb.org.uk



Courtesy of Andy Fisher