



e-newsletter 19 . August 2011

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OBE AWARD

Please forward this E-Newsletter to any friends or colleagues whom you feel may be interested or click on "subscribe to" at the foot of the newsletter, adding their details .

The Rivers Trust Autumn Conference and Awards - 14 & 15 September

- - Book online [here now](#) to ensure your place

Where there's water there's *Life+*

The Rivers Trust (RT)* Autumn Conference, hosted by the Wye & Usk Foundation (WUF), will take place at Caer Beris Manor, Builth Wells, on Wednesday 14th and Thursday 15th September 2011, focusing on Catchment Management issues in Wales and showcasing the WUF Irfon Special Area of Conservation (ISAC) EU Life+ Project.

The project features a huge variety of restoration methods from work in the acidified tributaries, through stream habitat improvements and protection and restoration of Special Area of Conservation (SAC) species.

The two day event comprises the conference and papers followed by The Rivers Trust Awards Dinner on Day One, with a Guided Field Trip on Day Two.

*The new name for the Association of Rivers Trusts

For more information and to reserve your place (no later than Wednesday 7th September please)

follow [this link](#) to the DRAFT Conference Programme and Booking Form.

The Awards Nomination Form, which lists all the award categories, can also be found at the foot of the web page or via [this link](#). All nominations are extremely welcome, it's an opportunity to reward individuals for 'excellence and achievement' over the last year. Please complete the form and return it no later than Wednesday 31st August 2011 to: events@therivertrust.org

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Irfon Special Area of Conservation (ISAC) Project

Project Partners

In 2008 the Wye and Usk Foundation submitted a bid to the **EU Life+ fund** and, after a rigorous justification phase, they were fortunate to be one of just four successful UK candidates. The Irfon was chosen as it had all the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) species present - though only just in the case of some! The partnership delivering the project include:

Wye and Usk Foundation

The Foundation is a registered charity concerned with restoring the habitat, water quality and fisheries of the Wye and Usk. It is more than just a lobbying organisation, and it is raising significant sums of money to remedy problems such as habitat degradation, poor water quality and diffuse pollution, barriers to fish migration and over-exploitation. The foundation is the lead beneficiary and responsible for project delivery through its own workforce.

Environment Agency Wales (EAW)

The EAW is a Welsh Government Sponsored Body responsible to the Ministers for Environment and Sustainable Development whose principal aims are to protect and improve the environment, and to promote sustainable development. It plays a central role in delivering the environmental priorities of the Welsh Government through its functions and roles. EAW is an Associated Beneficiary and has responsibility for fisheries monitoring and delivery of actions relating to Freshwater Pearl Mussel and White clawed crayfish.

The Rivers Trusts (RT) *The new name for the Association of Rivers Trusts*

RT is an umbrella organisation established to represent the rivers trust movement in England and Wales. Launched in 2001, it works to support its members and emerging community groups and encourages partnerships with Government bodies and others to promote practical and sustainable solutions to environmental issues. The Rivers Trust is an associated beneficiary with responsibility for disseminating the findings and results of ISAC using their links with other EU projects and rivers' trusts.

The Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) are a Co-financier

CCW is the Government's statutory advisor on sustaining natural beauty, wildlife and the opportunity for outdoor enjoyment in Wales and its inshore waters. It champions the environment and landscapes of Wales and its coastal waters as sources of natural and cultural riches, as a foundation for economic and social activity, and as a place for leisure and learning opportunities. It aims to make the environment a valued part of everyone's life in Wales.

The National Museum of Wales*

National Museum Wales, formerly the National Museums and Galleries of Wales, comprises eight museums in Wales. They are at the forefront of using diatoms to assess water quality.

**Following a modulation request in September 2010, the National Museum of Wales was added to the*

project as an associated beneficiary to deliver the monitoring of the acid waters work.



The Wye & Usk Foundation
ACTION FOR FISHERIES



ASiantaeth yr
AMGYLCHEDD CYMRU
ENVIRONMENT
AGENCY WALES



Cyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru
Countryside Council for Wales



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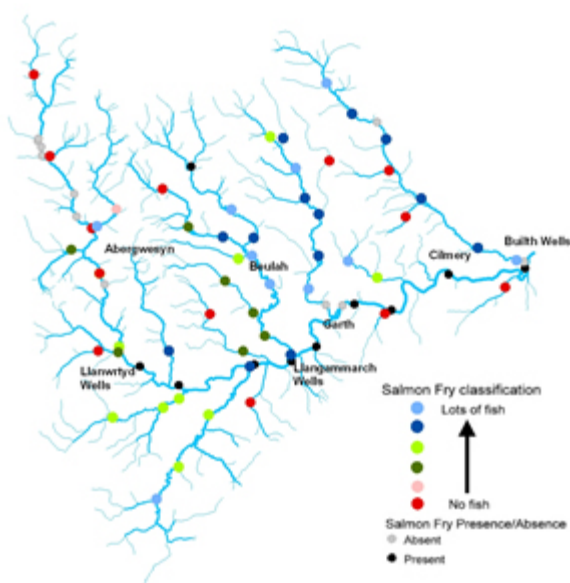
Introduction and preparatory work

The plan includes both specific actions for the listed SAC species and two main areas of work to correct the acid water and flow problems arising from forestry operations, and to recover 30km of degraded river habitat.

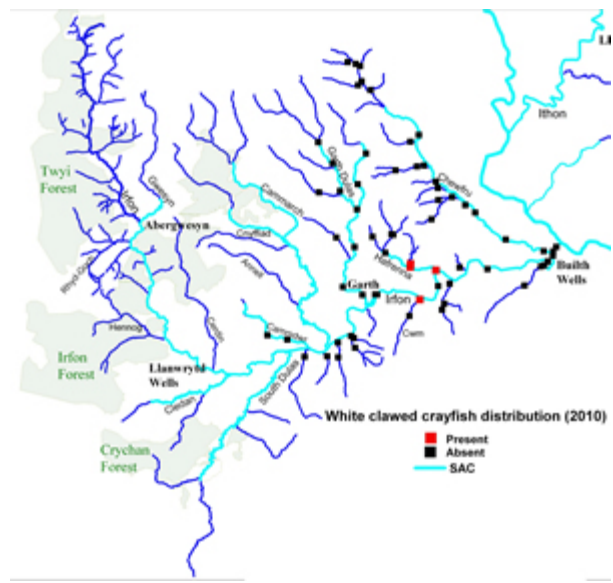
Amongst the species that will benefit, Atlantic salmon will be the most obvious as both the acid waters work and habitat restoration will increase the survival rates of the freshwater life stages. The works will also benefit other SAC species, including White clawed crayfish, Freshwater pearl mussel (FWPM), the Lampreys, Shad, Bullhead, Otter and Rannunculus.

Whilst ISAC is match funded by LIFE+ Nature and as such is primarily a 'doing' project, some monitoring is required to guide actions and quantify results. Initial surveys have determined that crayfish have been lost from most of their historic range and were only found in 2 small tributaries and that the FWPM population is superannuated. The quality of the riparian habitat suffers from all the problems and issues that are commonly found today. Fish populations are being studied with an electro-fishing survey with the baseline established by the Agency's work in 2010. Acid waters monitoring comprises a network of 22 sites recording pH, diatoms compositions, water chemistry and invertebrate analysis. The numbers and distribution of other SAC species will all be assessed again at the end of the project.

This project gives us a real chance of protecting what we have, restoring what we might lose and enhancing some of the most important species and habitats in the UK. We look forward to reporting progress of this £1.2m project, which will continue to the end of 2013. Further details can be found at: www.wyeuskfoundation.org/projects/isac



River Irfon Salmon Fry Distribution



White Clawed Crayfish Distribution Map

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Correction of Acidity & Flows

In the upper 15km of the Irfon (above Llanwrtyd Wells) all of the river and its tributaries drain uplands that are heavily afforested. WUF's pHish project (www.wyeuskfoundation.org/projects/phish.php) set about correcting the resultant low pH – and hence restoring invertebrate and fish life - of both the Irfon and upper Wye catchment. Success was achieved in the upper Wye and tributaries, although only partial success was achieved on the Irfon.

This was for two reasons. Firstly, a smaller proportion of the upper Wye catchment had been afforested than the Irfon. Secondly, the Wye had many more hydrological sources where powdered limestone could be introduced. On the Irfon, however, these were largely obliterated by extensive forestry drains, which also compounded the pH problem with a faster run off.

ISAC is working with both the private and public forestry interests to recover these crucial wetland areas and to correct the effects of the severe drainage system. Coniferous (see www.blanketbogswales.org) trees are being removed and the drains blocked to restore natural hydrology. Long term management agreements have been drawn up to keep these restored wetland sections.... wet! Work elsewhere in Wales has shown impressive results with drain blocking resulting in flows up to 400% higher 15 days after rainfall. The intention is to replicate this.

The future of 41ha of previously forested hydrological source areas has been secured so far and discussions are progressing well to secure another 50ha.

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Habitat Restoration

The other essential part of the project is restoration of the main tributaries of the Irfon. Work started on the South Dulas, Garth Dulas and Chwefru last year and completed 11.7km of stream. It continues this autumn on the Cammarch, Cledan, Cnyffiad, Cammdwr and parts of the Irfon itself.

Stock exclusion, erosion repair, coppicing and introducing instream features and water gates will comprise the bulk of the work. In all, 30km of SAC stream will be restored.



River Chwefru before restoration



...and after

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Recovering Native Crayfish

Another important SAC annex 2 species and indicator of environmental problems is our native White clawed crayfish, which is besieged on all fronts. Those White claws that survive toxic sheep dips are threatened with elimination from Signal crayfish plague and habitat degradation. They were once common throughout the entire Wye system but now only small pockets of survivors are found in certain tributaries. The principle for the rejuvenation of salmon, pearl mussel and White claws remains the same: the adverse conditions need to be removed, particularly water pollutants, and good habitats restored. Much of what is good for one species is good for all. Captive breeding methodologies have been developed and new populations will be established in improved streams this autumn.



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Captive Freshwater Pearl Mussel Breeding

The Agency's snorkel survey of Irfon Pearl mussels last spring discovered a better stock than expected. Amazingly, these animals live for the best part of a century. Initially it seemed that the Irfon population contained only older specimens. However, in a couple of sites, some comparatively young mussels were found and the Irfon has one of the largest populations in Wales.

Pearl mussels are one of the casualties of increased siltation as a result of land use changes and this project offers real hope for this beleaguered species. Their survival depends on water quality and the unique relationship that exists between mussels and salmonids. Mussels "move upstream" by releasing spats (larval stage) into the water which are then transported upriver in the gills of

migrating salmonids. It is therefore of crucial importance to them that sufficient numbers of salmon and trout are present in the Irfon and proceed well upstream. Pearl mussels are a rare and important species and they remain one of the "canaries" of the river. The success in saving them is indicative of everyone's commitment to saving the rivers.



Young pearl mussel - picture courtesy Oli Brown

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OBE

The Wye and Usk Foundation is proud to announce that its Director, Stephen Marsh-Smith, has been awarded the OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to the "Environment and to Conservation on the Rivers Wye and Usk." An avid fisherman for over half century, the award recognises the extraordinary efforts he has put into restoring and protecting the two rivers over the past 15 years.

Following the dramatic decline of the Wye's Atlantic salmon runs in the late 1980s and 1990s, Dr Marsh-Smith, along with a group of other Wye owners, began to address the issues affecting their plight. In 1996 he established the Wye Foundation and began work to reverse the seemingly inexorable decline of Wye salmon and to try to restore both the river and the salmon numbers to levels at which they once again could be an important asset to the region's economy. The organisation became the Wye & Usk Foundation (WUF) in 2002 and is now Britain's largest Rivers' Trust.



In addition to securing funding and running environmental projects, the Foundation, under his leadership, has been instrumental in measures to reduce the exploitation of salmon runs at a time when the species is in grave danger. These included the buy off of the commercial netting and putcher

trapping of salmon in the Severn estuary in 2000, the cessation of the Irish Drift net fishery in 2007 and the introduction of catch and release initiatives for Wye salmon anglers. WUF has successfully pioneered the partnership approach to river management and enjoys a close working relationship with the Environment Agencies and other statutory bodies.

Away from the Wye and Usk, Stephen has also played an important role in the political side of angling. As chair of the Anglers' Conservation Association he helped to unite the various representative bodies into the Angling Trust and became its first Chairman in 2009. He also played a part in the creation of the Association of Rivers' Trusts by arranging a formative meeting of all established trusts in 1999.

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The Rivers Trust is actively engaged in the following projects



The Rivers Trust is supported by the following organisations



The Fishmongers' Company



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