

## **FORCE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2013 REPORT ON RIVER CRANE POLLUTION EVENTS**

This, unfortunately, has become a regular slot on the AGM Agenda. The first major event that we were fully aware of, and which affected the whole of the Crane, was the Thames Water pollution of October 2011. This year we have suffered significant pollution events in March and again in October; and today we have produced a report showing that over the last 27 years there have been at least 17 major pollution events in the lower Crane that resulted in significant fish kills.

This latter report has been compiled from the records of a local fisherman over the 27 year period from 1986, and shows that significant pollution incidents have been a long term feature of the lower Crane and Duke of Northumberland's River. We shall put this report on our web-site and circulate it to all interested parties with a request for action – more on this later.

The event of October 2011 devastated the aquatic life on the Crane for 20 kilometres downstream of the outfall, on the A4 crossing, to the Thames. FORCE and ZSL have been monitoring the river's recovery on a quarterly basis ever since and this has provided a fascinating record of how an urban river can recover. It has also allowed us to monitor much more closely the impact of other pollution incidents; and we consequently had a clear record of the impact of pollution from Heathrow following the cold weather in the first part of this year. We now know that this is a regular occurrence following cold weather and is due to the use of de-iceants on the planes and runways. We are in correspondence with Heathrow Airport Limited about this and we hope to have more news in the near future.

The most recent event occurred in early October this year, when work at a site in Cranford resulted in the fracturing of a pipe transporting sewage sludge between two Thames Water sewage works. The exact causes and responsibilities for this remain shrouded in considerable mystery. Initially we feared that this was another completely devastating event. It certainly caused a significant fish kill throughout the downstream length of the river but, remarkably, the invertebrate life of the river was not so badly affected. The recent heavy rainfalls have also helped to flush the remaining sludge from the river bed. Presently we are reasonably hopeful that the river will recover more quickly this time.

We remain concerned about the vulnerability of the river to further pollution events. We are working alongside our partners to reduce the vulnerability of the eco-system by introducing marginal habitat and backwaters into the river corridor. We are also determined to ensure that the risks of pollution are managed and reduced. We have submitted detailed evidence to the Environment Agency regarding the October 2011 event and aftermath, and we propose to attend the hearing. However, over two years after the pollution event, a date for this is still to be announced.

We also propose to hold a public meeting next year, to be called; "River Crane, Environmental Asset or Urban Drain", when we shall invite the Environment Agency, Thames Water and Heathrow Airport Limited to debate with the public about the current status of the river and how this might be improved. More details will follow in the New Year.

Rob Gray  
Chair of FORCE  
November 2013