



ISSUE 2 · JAN 2024

ALT CROSSENS NEWS



Official Newsletter of the Mersey Rivers Trust

Happy New Year! As we start a new year we take a look back at all the great work that has been delivered in the Alt Crossens catchment over the past 12 months and the exciting new projects we will be delivering in 2024.

We wish all our partners, stakeholders and volunteers a very happy and healthy 2024.

MERSEY RIVERS TRUST TURNED 25!



On 6th October 1998, the Healthy Waterways Trust was formed. The Trust was created as the charitable arm of the Mersey Basin Campaign to help improve the health of the River Mersey and its tributaries. In 2013, the Trust joined the national Rivers Trust movement. Shortly after, the charity changed its name to the Healthy Rivers Trust and later, the Mersey Rivers Trust.

We would like to take this opportunity to say a BIG thank you to everyone who has worked for and supported the Trust throughout the past 25 years. We have had some great success and hope to continue our work to improve the Mersey rivers for the benefit of people and wildlife. Here's to another successful 25 years!

Welcome Andy!

Andy has recently joined The Mersey Rivers Trust as a Senior Project Manager, overseeing projects in the Merseyside area, and hosting the Alt Crossens and Lower Mersey Catchment Partnerships.

Andy has over 20 years of experience of green space management and community engagement, most recently working as a Senior Project Manager for Groundwork CLM managing their outdoor education programme and Grozone Community Garden in Northwich, and before that as a Countryside Warden for the Mersey Valley Warden Service in South Manchester.



Welcome Justine!

Our newest member of staff is Justine Lord, a Project Manager who will be delivering all things farming in the Alt Crossens catchment.

Justine began her conservation career at Dunham Massey NT, where she learned a lot about the local wildlife and gained valuable practical skills. Since then, she has worked at various places, including Shugborough NT, Tatton Park and Reaseheath College, where she gained valuable skills and experience in countryside management. She also holds a foundation degree in countryside management.

Farewells!

In September 2023, Caroline Riley retired after working for the Trust for over 10 years! For the last 7 years, Caroline hosted the Alt Crossens Catchment Partnership, helping to bring together stakeholders to work in partnership. We wish Caroline a very happy and relaxing retirement!



After 18 months with the Trust, we bid farewell to Abbey Andersen Hides as she moved on to pastures new. We thank Abbey for all her hard work during her short but successful time with us and wish her every success in her new job!

OUR BIGGEST BID YET!

MRT partnered with other members of the Alt Crossens Catchment Partnership to submit a bid for £2.1 million to the Environment Agency NFM Grant Programme.



The project aims to deliver 39 Natural Flood Management (NFM) measures across 23 sites throughout the whole of the Alt catchment. This includes leaky dams and wetland creation in the upper reaches, through to dune management at the Sefton coast.

We will hear whether our bid has been successful in early 2024 so keep your fingers crossed!



HEADBOLT LANE BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

Network Rail commissioned Mersey Rivers Trust to scope interventions to reclaim the biodiversity credits associated with the construction of a new train station at Headbolt Lane, Kirkby.

In 2023, we were busy delivering the biodiversity improvement works across 6 public parks in Kirkby...and there's still more to do!



Wildflower meadow creation



Wetland creation



Pond enhancement



Hedge planting



Balsam Bashing



Wet woodland enhancement



RIVER ALT FISH SURVEY

As part of the Alt Weir project, we undertook eDNA sampling along the whole of the River Alt, from Croxteth Park to the Formby Bypass. We sampled 8 locations, 4 upstream and 4 downstream of the weir to assess the impact of the barrier to fish movement.

This chart lists the species found in each sample.

River Alt Weir Removal Feasibility Study

Mersey Rivers Trust has been awarded a grant from the European Open Rivers Programme to carry out planning and design work to remove the disused Alt Weir, upstream of Bull Bridge in Aintree, Merseyside.

The Mersey Rivers Trust has an ambitious 30-year fish improvement strategy for all the Mersey rivers, including the River Alt, which flows from Huyton in Knowsley into Liverpool Bay at Hightown in Sefton. We have worked in partnership with the weir owners United Utilities and the Environment Agency, to develop this project, and are all very pleased it has succeeded in attracting funding.

Alt Weir is one of many hundreds of disused weirs across the Mersey catchment that have been left behind from previous industrial activities, which prevent the free movement of fish. The weir is too high for fish and the critically endangered Freshwater Eel to be able to swim over it and move upstream in the River Alt catchment to important spawning and nursery habitats.

Working with stakeholders and landowners, together we can now start to improve fish and Eel passage throughout the River Alt catchment.

The funding has been used to design the safe removal of the weir, obtain environmental permissions and confirm the cost of the removal work. Further funding will now be sought to carry out the weir removal itself.



A bubble means a species was detected in that sample. The size of the bubbles represents the proportion of DNA sequences within a sample. A larger bubble size can indicate a stronger eDNA signal. This signal may be linked to abundance of species in the environment but should be interpreted only as a coarse measure.



SPECIES SURVIVAL FUND

We have applied to the National Lottery Heritage Species Survival Fund for the creation and enhancement of wetland habitats along the River Alt at Mab Lane, Woolfall Heath and Lunt Meadows. We will hear whether we have been successful in February 2024 ready to start works in the spring.



FARMLAND SPECIES RECOVERY PROJECT

Mersey Rivers Trust have partnered with Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS) on a Liverpool City Region (LCR) Farmland Species Recovery Project. This demonstrator Project seeks to work collaboratively with farmers encouraging regenerative farming practice targeting marginal, underused and less productive land to deliver species recovery of target Priority Species through capital habitat works. We also aim to unlock biodiversity net gain opportunities alongside agri-environment schemes. Target species are: Brown hare, grey partridge, tree sparrow, lapwing, skylark, purple rampion fumitory, corn bunting, yellowhammer, water vole, and reed bunting. The commencement of the Project represents a huge step forward for conservation of iconic yet vulnerable farmland species across the LCR. This Project aims to kick start nature recovery of farmland which makes up 30% of the LCR land area. At the end of 2023, suitable farms have been identified and we are planning the programme of survey and capital works in 2024.

Croxteth Brook NFM



We have secured funding from the Environment Agency to create 20 leaky dams within Howard's Pits and Little Wood in Liverpool. 19 of the dams will be in Croxteth Brook and a tributary to help 'slow the flow' downstream into the River Alt. One leaky dam will be constructed on land to help reduce overland flow and protect a section of footpath which regularly floods. It is hoped that a series of small interventions within the upper reaches of the Alt catchment will have a cumulative benefit to flood risk downstream. If you're interested in helping to build the leaky dams, please email rebecca@merseyrivers.org.



WATER RESOURCES COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Thanks to the Water Resources Communication & Engagement Fund, plus some Environment Agency and United Utilities funding, we have been able to continue engaging with the farming community in the Alt Crossens.

In 2023, we have been working with farmers, growers, EA, Natural England, local authorities and United Utilities to explore sustainable abstraction policy options and water resource resilience in the catchment. In November, we held a workshop at Mere Brow Village Hall with presentations plus Q&A sessions from the NFU, Catchment Sensitive Farming, Environment Agency and Mersey Rivers Trust. Topics included:

- Latest updates on farm grants, including Sustainable Farming Incentive
- Relevant policy updates from Defra, Natural England, Environment Agency and other government agencies
- Water resources management and abstraction licensing in the Alt and Crossens catchment
- Water efficiency measures for farmers and growers

There was also the opportunity for farmers to meet Environment Agency advisors on a 1 to 1 basis to raise any questions or discuss any matters relating to abstraction licensing



We will be hosting another farmer engagement workshop at Mere Brow in early March 2024 and applying for more funding to ensure we can continue to support the Alt Crossens farming community in years to come.

LOWLAND PEAT & GROUNDWATER PROJECT

Our application to the Lowland Agricultural Peat Water Discovery Pilot Grant has been successful! This project will seek to develop a good baseline of evidence and knowledge on the current condition of the lowland peat soils within the Crossens catchment. We will look in detail at wetter unproductive areas of fields and work with the farmers & landowners to assess the feasibility of raising the water table to improve the resilience of farm businesses and the environment. The project will look to explore solutions with land managers on how to manage water and if/how wetter farming can be a viable option.



Mersey Rivers Week 2023



The annual Mersey Rivers Week was held in July and kicked off with a walk along Sankey Brook, from Carr Mill Dam to Warrington. Mersey Rivers Trust staff were joined by colleagues from Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS) to map invasive species, pollution, barriers to fish (e.g. weirs) and future project opportunities. It was a soggy start to the day but brightened up and was a very useful exercise to help understand the needs of the Sankey catchment.



On day 2 of Mersey Rivers Week we joined the Croxteth Park Volunteer Group to do various tasks including litter picking, cutting back willow and clearing weeds from the pond. Thanks to our friends at CPVG for their continued support.



Day 6 was our big event of the week, a BioBlitz at Croxteth Park. This family event encouraged people to get out and explore nature. We had scavenger hunts, crafts, pond dipping and walks/talks led by our experts. It was a wonderful day and we hope to run another BioBlitz in the region next year. Thanks very much to the Croxteth Park Volunteer Group and Merseyside Biobank for your help in delivering another great event.



KNOWSLEY FLOWER SHOW

More than 15,000 people visited Court Hey Park to attend the Knowsley Flower Show in its 25th year, despite the poor weather conditions. We held a stall where we showed some invertebrates that live in the wetland that we created at Court Hey several years ago. We also had information about what we do, scavenger hunts, word searches and stickers!



General



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Mersey Rivers Trust



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Farming

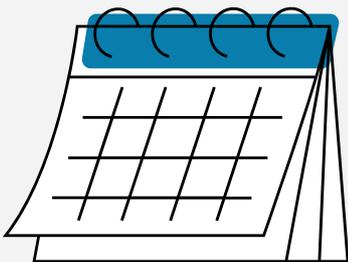


Farming Hub



farming@merseyrivers.org

Key dates for 2024



2nd February

14th March

22nd March

22nd April

25th May

5th June

8th June

1st - 7th July

28th July

22nd September

5th December

World Wetlands Day

International Day of Action for Rivers

World Water Day

Earth Day

World Fish Migration Day

World Environment Day

World Oceans Day

Mersey Rivers Week 2024

World Nature Conservation Day

World Rivers Day

International Volunteer Day