Riverfly Surveys
River Exe System
2023 Annual Report

RETA
RIVER EXE & TRIBUTARIES ASSOCIATION

Version D 2 Nov 2023

Riverfly Surveys 2023
River Exe System

Introduction

2023 has been a mixed year in many ways. Whilst the English weather has always been variable, we have again experienced extremes that are increasingly linked to the effects of climate change. We have seen dry periods and wet periods, with flows high enough in September to prevent surveys. The high temperatures and low flows in June undoubtedly stressed the life in our rivers.
The year has also seen water quality issues in the headlines: from the performance of water companies discharging sewage into our rivers and the sea, to the Government's changing position on addressing climate change and environmental standards.

Weather

2023	jan	feb	mar	apr	may	jun	jul	aug	sep
Temperature diff. C	0.3	0.8	0.4	0.0	1.1	2.6	-0.4	0.0	2.4
Rainfall %	124%	20%	221%	115%	60%	44%	191%	108%	128%
River Level m.	1.92	1.16	1.63	1.57	1.19	0.94	1.03	1.21	1.25

The data for the first two rows is taken from the Met. Office Regional Data Series for South West England and South Wales.

- The first row shows the difference in mean temperature deg C. from the 30-year average 1993 to 2022. It can be seen that all months were at or above average except July, with June and September significantly so.
- The second row shows the monthly rainfall as a % of the 30-yr. average. March and July were the wettest months, with February and June the driest.
- The third row shows the average monthly river level on the River Exe at Stoodleigh. These were higher than in 2022 for every month except February. The average river level only fell below 1.0m in June whereas, in 2022 it was below that level for five months, from May to September.

The highest flow at Stoodleigh occurred in January and then dropped significantly in February due to the low rainfall. Levels rose again in early March and then stayed relatively high until May. Periods of high flow then occurred around the start of August and again in late September. This last period included a particularly extreme passage of thundery weather which crossed the Exe catchment from south to north on Sunday 17th September. The effects of this were most severe on the smaller tributaries and the Culm had its highest flow of the year (to October) as a result.

Some Riverfly surveys were affected. Those in spring had to wait until levels fell whereas summer surveys were best undertaken early as levels were rising by mid-July. If the autumn survey had not been done before 17th September then it was too late and surveys were either not done or were carried out in early October. (We suggest dates for surveys so that we can compare results across sites but it is better to survey early or late than not at all… the same applies to other considerations such as holidays to fit around.)

Coverage

The number of sites within the overall Exe catchment network remains at 53, although some of these are vacant and ten sites had no survey at all.

The number of surveys reduced from 76% of sites in spring to 66% in summer and 68% in the autumn; the low autumn number was largely due to high river levels at that time. A total of 111 surveys were undertaken, and 81% of the sites were visited at least once (110 and 87% in 2022).

Good coverage is important. If a poor result is returned then the first course of action (after reporting it if serious) is to look at other results. If a neighbouring or subsequent survey is missing then it is difficult to know if the issue is local or is temporary.

Summary Scores

With eight groups of invertebrates being counted, the 108 surveys comprise 864 separate scores. The Riverfly method and scoring system were explained in the 2021 Annual Report. Summary scores are the totals from the eight groups for each site. Hence for all the groups to be present there needs to be a score of at least 8. However, this score, or higher, can also be achieved if some groups are missing but there are high counts in other groups.

Summary Results 2023 (2022)	**Spring**	**Summer**	**Autumn**
% of scores at or above their seasonal site average	33% (50%)	37% (41%)	25% (27%)
% of scores below their seasonal site average	67% (50%)	63% (59%)	75% (73%)
% of scores above the EA trigger threshold	87% (98%)	74% (81%)	58% (60%)
% of scores at the EA trigger threshold	8% (0%)	9% (8%)	14% (20%)
% of sites below the EA trigger threshold	5% (2%)	17% (11%)	28% (20%)

Notes:

1. The average record length is now over eight years (maximum 12) and excludes the 2023 results. The averages are calculated for each site, for each season. The highest average is 17.4, for the Culm above Hemyock (it was the Haddeo but this has fallen recently) and the lowest is 4.3, for the Culm at Rewe.
2. Comparison of the percentage, rather than the number, of sites is considered a better measure when the total number of sites surveyed varies year-by-year.
3. Trigger scores are set by the EA and represent the level at which the Environment Agency (EA) asks to be alerted. They are in the range 5 to 7.

The results for 2023 are the worst recorded. Two thirds of the spring results were below average and that increased to three quarters by the autumn.

The percentage of sites failing to exceed their EA trigger levels, or only just meeting them, increased significantly. In the spring, 13% of sites were at or below their trigger level (2% in 2022) and by the autumn 42% of the sites met the criteria for alerting the Environment Agency. These data will be considered in more detail later.

The full results are included at the end of the report.

Trigger Level Failures

Trigger level scores are the thresholds below which the scores should not fall. They are intended to be pragmatic and so take into account known issues. Consequently, a survey below the site trigger level is always a cause for concern.

Some sites are known to the EA as having chronic issues – i.e. ongoing problems that cause Riverfly scores to regularly fall close to or below the trigger. A site that is usually well above it trigger level but falls below is a particular cause for concern since this is more likely to be caused by an acute issue such as a pollution incident. These should always be reported to the EA as soon as possible.

Last year, only one spring summary score was below its trigger-level. This year there were two:

- **Culm d/s Ellerhayes Bridge**
- **Spratford Stream at Cullompton**

with a further three sites at the threshold:

- **Exe below Tiverton STW**
- **Lowman tributary at Uplowman**
- **Dart at Riverside**

Six summer survey Riverfly scores were below trigger level in 2023 (four in 2022):

- **Lowman tributary at Uplowman**
- **Culm at Rewe**
- **Culm d/s Ellerhayes Bridge**
- **Culm u/s Uffculme**
- **Culm at Whitehall**
- **Spratford Stream at Cullompton**

A further three summer surveys were at trigger level:

- **Exe at Hatswell**
- **Exe at Morrisons**
- **Dart at Riverside**

A record ten autumn survey summary scores were below their trigger levels in 2023 (six in 2022):

- **Exe at Hatswell**
- **Exe at Morrisons**
- **Haddeo at Bury Bridge**
- **Batherm u/s Bampton**
- **Lowman tributary at Uplowman**
- **Calverleigh Stream at Palmers Mill**
- **Culm u/s Uffculme**
- **Culm at Whitehall**
- **Spratford Stream at Cullompton**
- **Yeo at Salmonhutch**

A further five scores were at trigger level:

- **Lower Haddeo**
- **Lowman at Chieflowman Bridge**
- **Lowman at Collipriest**
- **Dart at Templeton Bridge**
- **Dart at Riverside**

These results can be grouped together:

Longstanding Chronic Issues

Problems on the **Culm below Cullompton** and on the **Dart** (which joins the Exe at Bickleigh) are known to the EA and are raised every year. Ten of the eighteen scores below their trigger levels are at these sites. Very little aquatic insect life is now recorded on the Spratford Stream or the River Culm between Cullompton and its confluence with the Exe at Stoke Canon. Riverfly scores would be even lower if it was not for the very high count of *gammarus*, often measuring into thousands.

The site on the **middle Exe** at Morrisons, Tiverton is sometimes considered unrepresentative but in 2023 sites above (Hatswell) and below (Tiverton STW) also fell to their trigger levels.

Developing Chronic Issues?

The **Lowman** has previously been marginal but its Riverfly scores consistently slipped to or below trigger levels in 2023. By the autumn surveys, all three sites were at or below their trigger levels.

The **Culm above Cullompton** also deteriorated in 2023. Uffculme and Whitehall both failed their trigger levels in the summer and autumn. This issue has been raised with the EA. The average and 2023 scores are shown below:

River	Site	Trigger	Spr	Sum	Aut	Ave. Spr	Ave. Sum	Ave. Aut
Lowman Tributary	Uplowman	**7**	7	6	6	10.6	8.3	6.9
Lowman	Chieflowman Br.	**7**	10	9	7	11.1	9.6	7.7
Lowman	Collipriest	**7**	11		7	13.6	10.6	9.5
Culm	us Uffculme	**7**	8	5	5	11.0	10.1	9.0
Culm	Whitehall	**7**	9	5	5	11.0	9.9	8.1

It should be noted that the best Riverfly results in the Exe catchment are recorded at sites above Hemyock, barely 2km above Whitehall, on the Culm and on the Madford River.

The **Haddeo** has historically produced some of the best results in the Exe catchment. Its main source is the outfall from Wimbleball reservoir, which should be high quality water, and the **Pulham River** which scored 11 or above in this year's surveys. However, since about 2020, the Riverfly results have fallen significantly. The average score on the Lower Haddeo from 2011-2019 was 16.5 but from 2021-2023 it has only been 9.1 and it only reached a trigger level score of 7 in September 2023. A recent new site at Bury Bridge has scored no better and achieved only 6 in September.

Acute Issues?

Two sites produced unusually low results in their September results, which can indicate an acute issue:

The **Calverleigh Stream** joins the Exe just above Tiverton. The results from this site can be variable, but generally average over 9. The summer Riverfly score was 12 but this fell to 6 in September 2023. The EA contacted Fred Leach and me on 11 September as they were aware of an issue. Our Riverfly survey was undertaken on 9 September and we were able to provide the results from this and the preceding surveys by 13 September.

[Note to volunteers: Fred and I liaise with the EA and forward trigger events but this invariably takes some time. If you record an unusually poor score, which is the same when repeated, please contact the EA direct on its 'hotline' number 0800 80 70 60.]

The **Yeo** at Salmonhutch (below Crediton) recorded an unusually low score of 5 in September which volunteers promptly reported and whose concerns were forwarded to the EA for investigation on 28th September. By 4th October the EA was able to confirm that it was aware of a private sewerage outfall that was the probable cause and that action was being taken to remedy the problem.

Notes and Other Activity

Water Company Illegal Spills

The performance of water companies with respect to sewage discharges into rivers and to the sea has continued to make the news this year. There is no doubt that some wastewater treatment works and their associated outfalls in the Exe catchment have been (and continue to) discharge untreated sewage on many occasions outside the terms of their permits. It is also clear that much of the infrastructure is operating at full capacity, with little or no means to deal with increased load, breakdowns or even moderate rainfall. One water treatment works in the Culm catchment spilled 85 times in 2022, for a total of 1233 hours, that's an average of every four days and almost 24 hours every week (source The Rivers Trust).

Thankfully, Government appears to have recognised the public outrage at this situation having been allowed to develop. However, its commitment has to be questioned as targets for improvement are decades away and it has recently attempted to relax developer requirements intended to ensure no further detriment to water quality.

Agricultural and other Rural Pollution

The EA and water companies hold the view that approximately two thirds of water pollution is of agricultural/land-use origin. There are many causes, including livestock waste, fertilizer run-off and soil erosion. Few cannot have noticed our Devon rivers running red during October as heavy autumn rain has fallen on fields where maize has recently been harvested. Surveys suggest that there is poor compliance with statutory guidance, and very little enforcement action.

Until there are actual measures to tackle these issues (and not just distant targets), including a change of culture with effective regulation and enforcement, it is difficult to see matters improving.

Citizen Science Investigations (CSI)

This initiative has been mentioned previously as it complements Riverfly surveys. Its focus is water quality and CSI surveys involve measurement of water temperature, turbidity, total dissolved solids and phosphates. Anyone who is interested in undertaking these surveys (I undertake them alongside Riverfly) is encouraged to contact the West Country Rivers Trust.

The Riverfly Partnership

The Riverfly Partnership is hosted by the Freshwater Biological Association, based in the Lake District. It has recently been through more changes, including a new team, and has been introducing new initiatives such as an extended riverfly survey method (for those interested with aquatic invertebrates at species level) and a revised database. There are more details at https://www.riverflies.org

The Riverfly Partnership regularly issues newsletters and the latest copy (October 2023) is appended.

Recruitment and Training

We are aware of a few gaps opening up in the network; ten sites were not visited at all in 2023. So, we are always keen to hear from anyone interested in joining. There may be a vacant site nearby or perhaps a new site could be added?

New volunteers need to be trained and should, ideally accompany an experienced volunteer, at least to start with. However, even experienced Riverfly surveyors sometimes welcome refresher training. If you feel that you would benefit from this, and perhaps the opportunity to exchange ideas with fellow Riverfly volunteers, then please let Fred or me know. We cannot promise a location or date to suit everyone but will try to arrange this if there is a demand.

Acknowledgements

This Report is only possible because of the volunteers, who are The River Exe Riverfly Network. We also rely upon support from the River Exe and Tributaries Association (RETA) which has provided funding to cover the essential costs such as kit and training. No-one is paid.

Particular thanks are due to everyone for sending in their data. This is the earliest that it has possible to put the annual report together, which gives more time to address the issues whilst they are still recent.

Richard Horrocks
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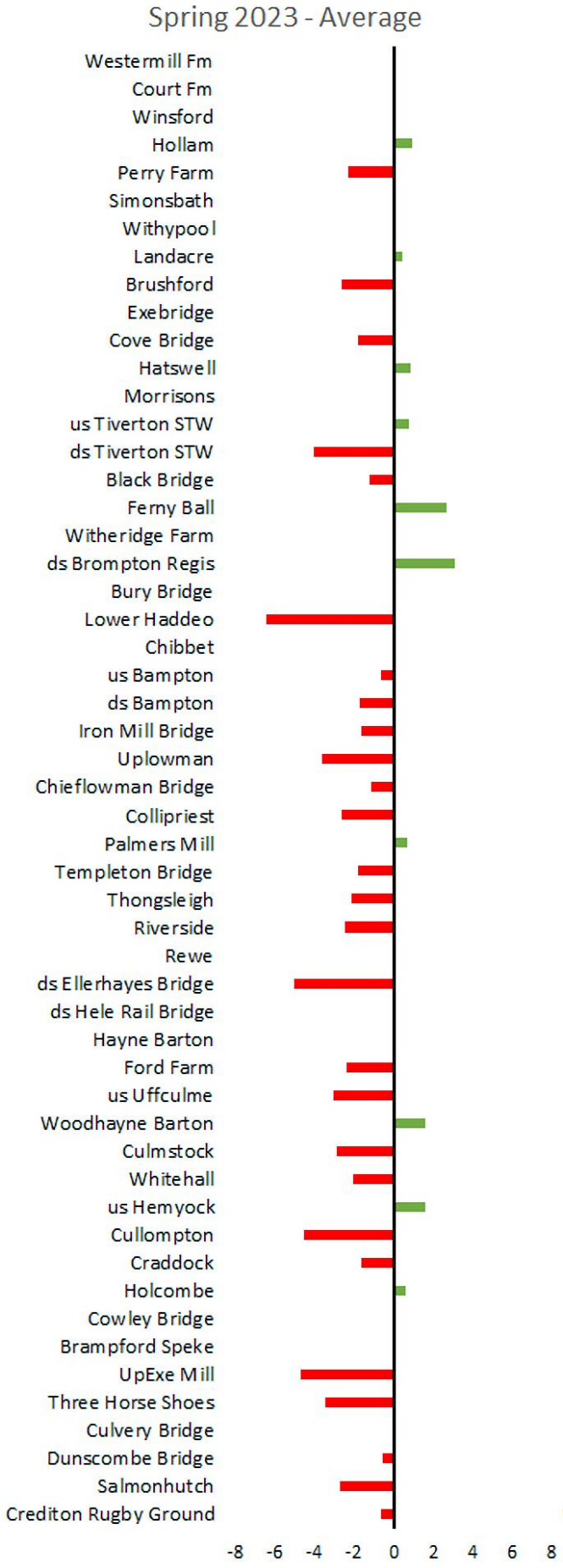
Fred Leach
Overall Coordinator
Barle, Upper Exe and Middle Exe Coordinator
fredleach@bampton.eclipse.co.uk

P.S. we are always happy to receive comments, corrections or suggestions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Court Fm
Winsford
Hollam
Perry Farm
Simonsbath
Withypool
Landacre
Brushford
Exebridge
Cove Bridge
Hatswell
Morrisons
us Tiverton STW
ds Tiverton STW
Black Bridge
Ferny Ball
Witheridge Farm
ds Brompton Regis
Bury Bridge
Lower Haddeo
Chibbet
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ds Bampton
Iron Mill Bridge
Uplowman
Chieflowman Bridge
Collipriest
Palmers Mill
Templeton Bridge
Thongsleigh
Riverside
Rewe
ds Ellerhayes Bridge
ds Hele Rail Bridge
Hayne Barton
Ford Farm
us Uffculme
Woodhayne Barton
Culmstock
Whitehall
us Hemyock
Cullompton
Craddock
Holcombe
Cowley Bridge
Brampford Speke
UpExe Mill
Three Horse Shoes
Culvery Bridge
Dunscombe Bridge
Salmonhutch
Crediton Rugby Ground
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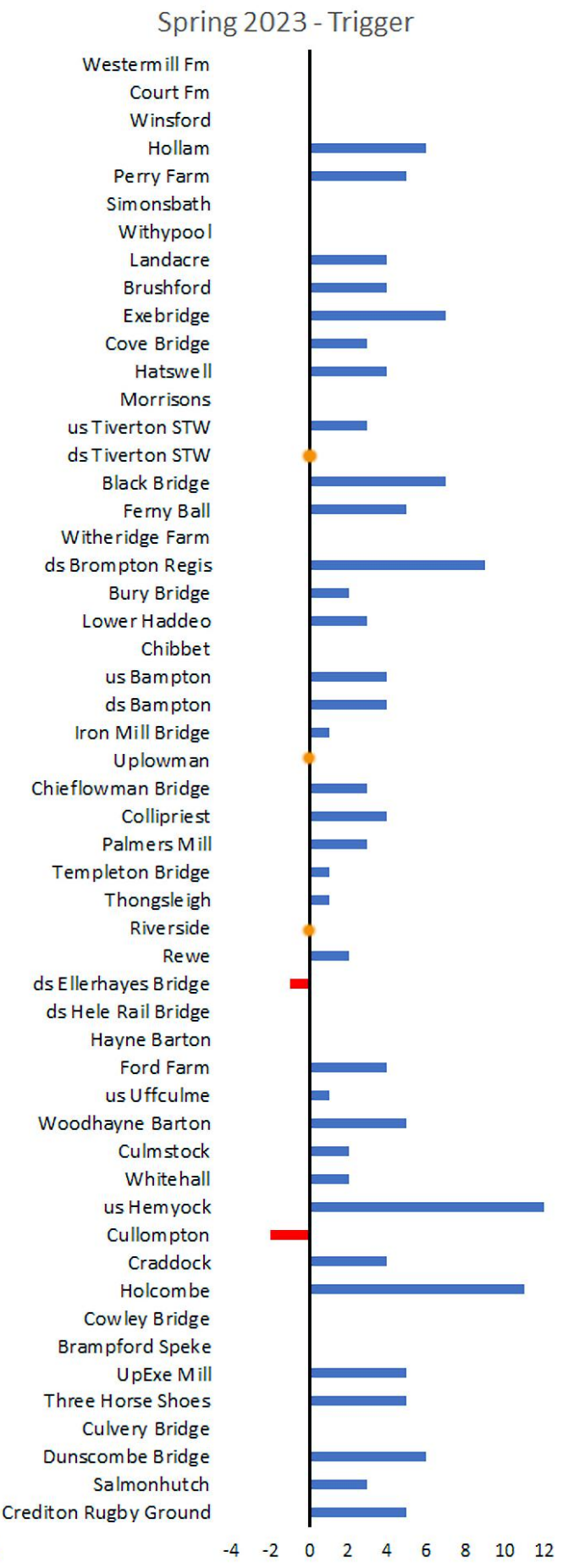
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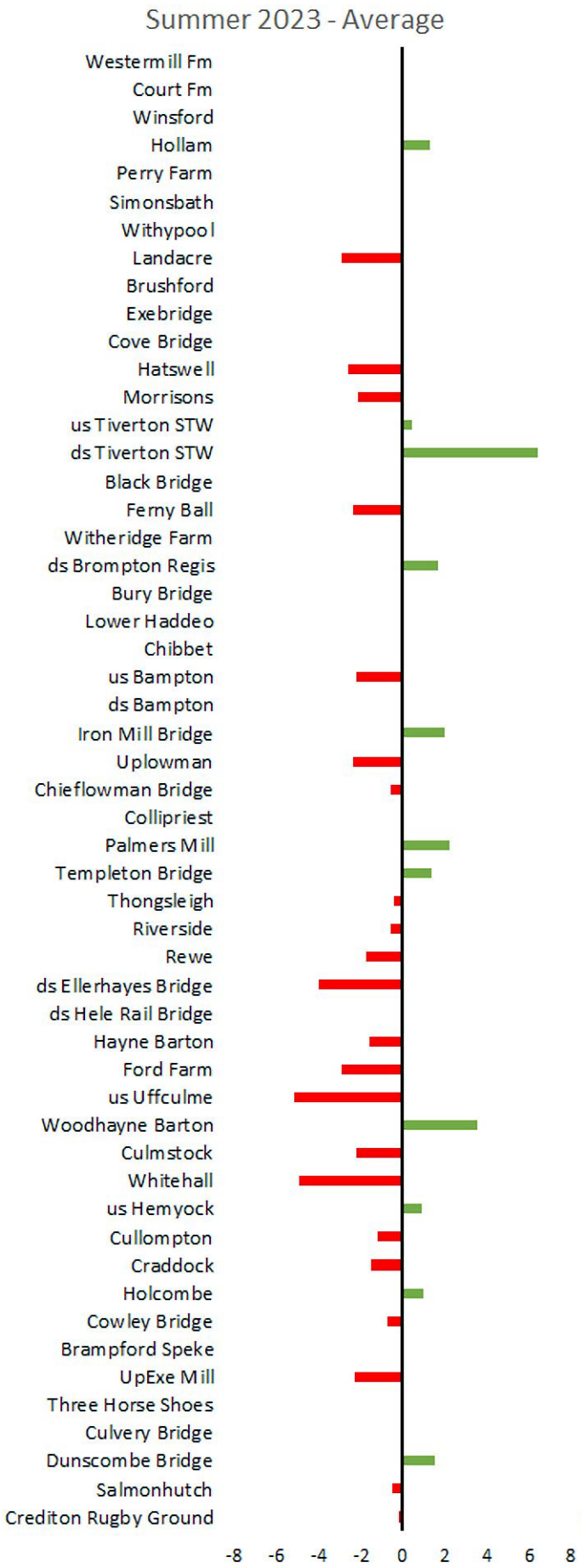
Summer 2023 - Average
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Woodhayne Barton
Culmstock
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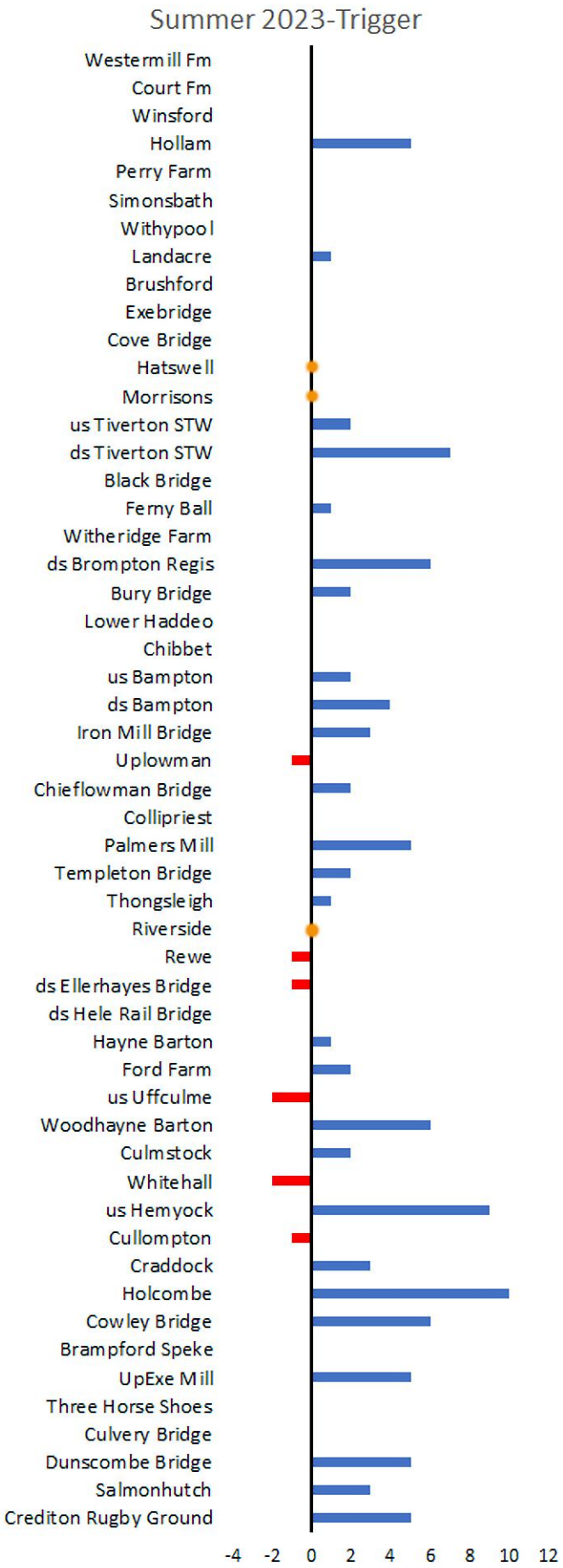
Summer 2023-Trigger
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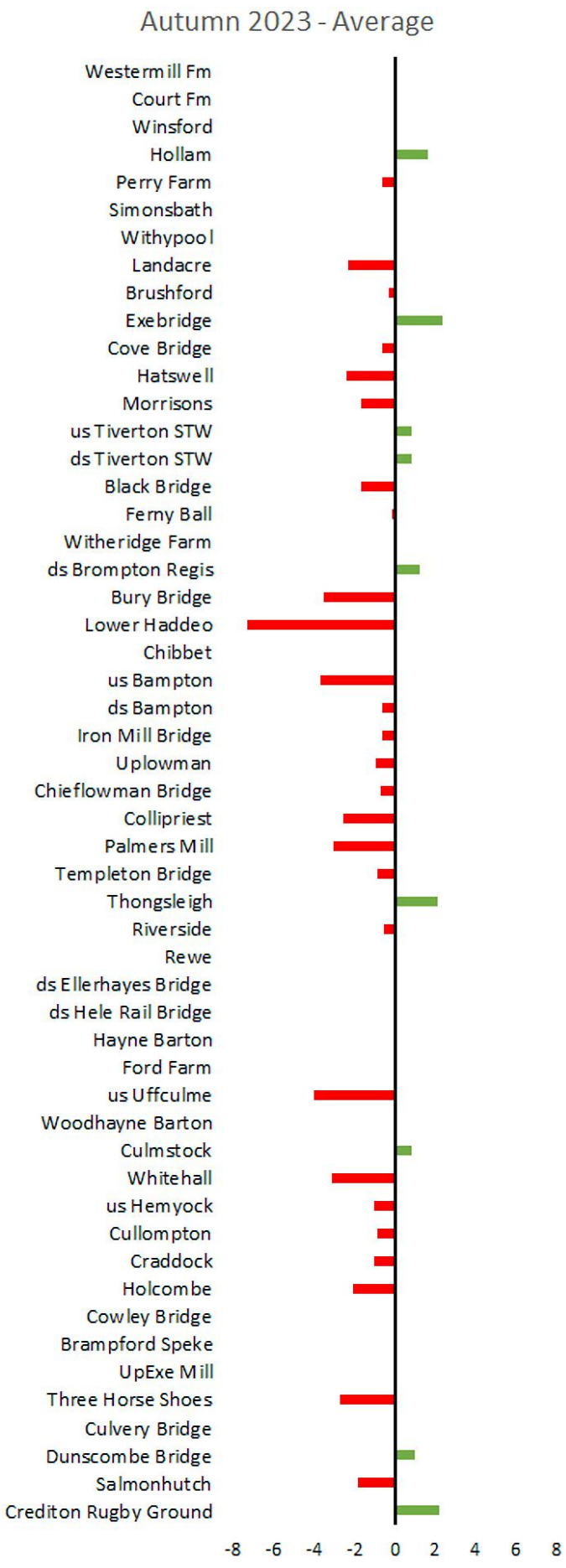
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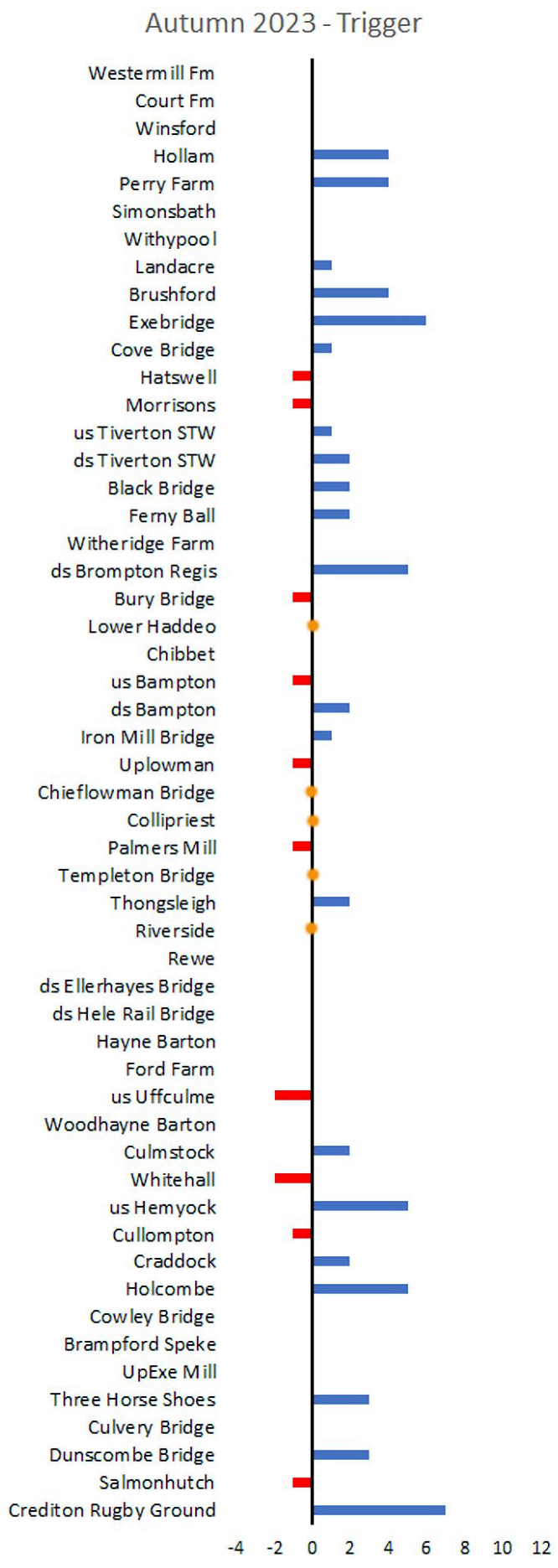
Autumn 2023 - Trigger
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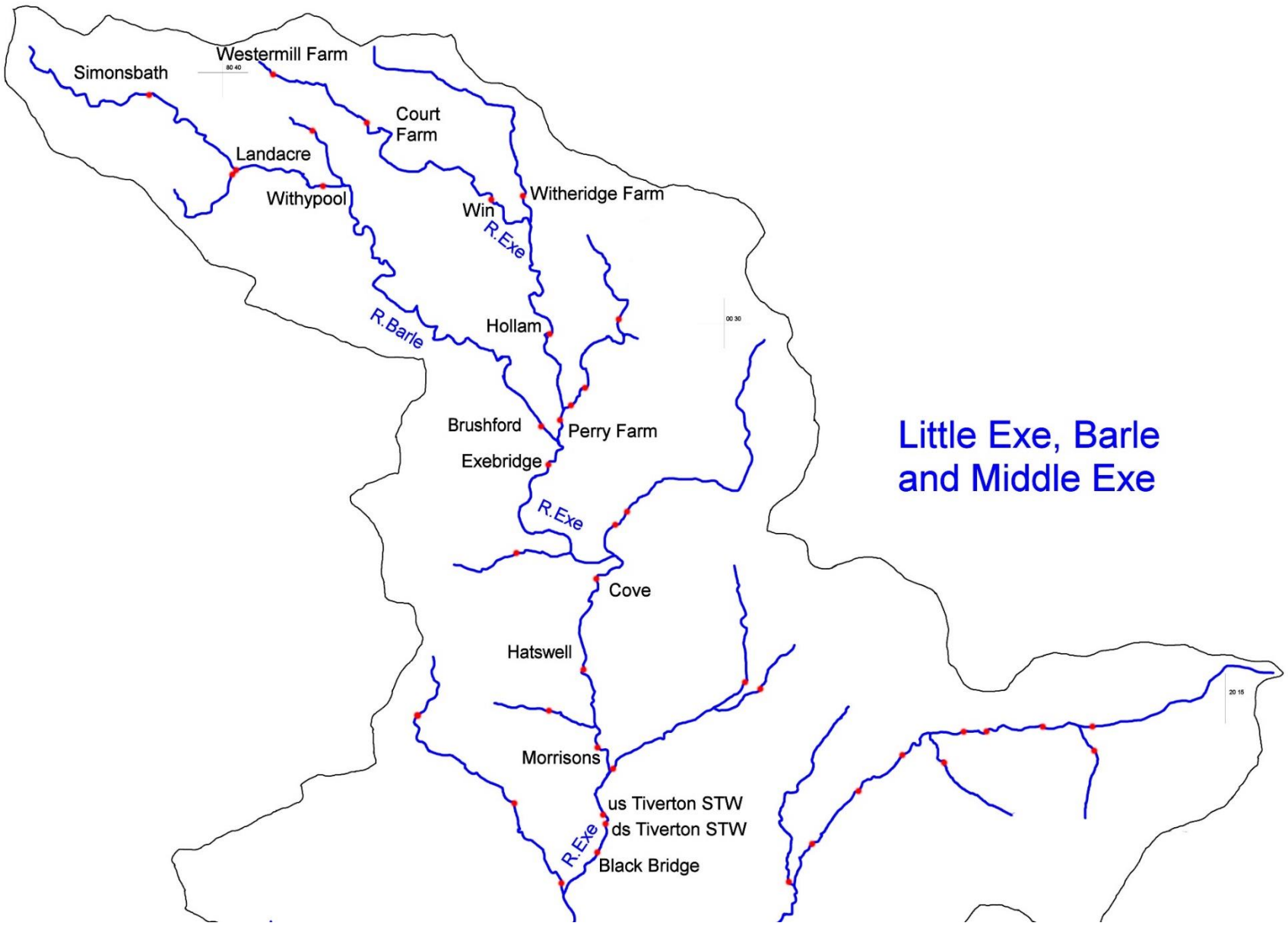
Simonsbath
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Court Farm
Landacre
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R.Exe
R.Barle
Hollam
Brushford
Perry Farm
Exebridge
R.Exe
Cove
Hatswell
Morrisons
us Tiverton STW
ds Tiverton STW
R.Exe
Black Bridge
Little Exe, Barle and Middle Exe

Summary Little Exe, Barle and Middle Exe

	River	Location	#	2023			Average			2023 - Ave			2023-Trigger		
				Spr	Sum	Aut	Spr	Sum	Aut	Spr	Sum	Aut	Spr	Sum	Aut
Little Exe & Barle	L. Exe	Westermill Fm	6				9.8	6.8	9.5						
	L. Exe	Court Fm	6				12.5	10.0	9.6						
	L. Exe	Winsford	6				12.2	10.9	10.5						
	L. Exe	Hollam	7	13	12	11	12.1	10.7	9.4	0.9	1.3	1.6	6	5	4
	L. Exe	Perry Farm	6	11		10	13.3	11.5	10.6	-2.3		-0.6	5		4
	Barle	Simonsbath	5				10.6	9.3	9.6						
	Barle	Withypool	5				9.6	6.5	7.3						
	Barle	Landacre	5	9	6	6	8.6	8.9	8.3	0.4	-2.9	-2.3	4	1	1
	Barle	Brushford	6	10		10	12.6	11.5	10.3	-2.6		-0.3	4		4
Middle Exe	Exe	Exebridge	6	13		12	12.9	12.6	9.7	0.1		2.3	7		6
	Exe	Cove Bridge	6	9		7	10.8	9.6	7.6	-1.8		-0.6	3		1
	Exe	Hatswell	6	10	6	5	9.2	8.6	7.4	0.8	-2.6	-2.4	4	0	-1
	Exe	Tiverton Morrisons	6		6	5	8.1	8.1	6.7		-2.1	-1.7		0	-1
	Exe	us Tiverton STW	6	9	8	7	8.3	7.6	6.2	0.8	0.4	0.8	3	2	1
	Exe	ds Tiverton STW	6	6	13	8	10.0	6.6	7.2	-4.0	6.4	0.8	0	7	2
	Exe	Black Bridge	6	13		8	14.2	11.9	9.6	-1.2		-1.6	7		2

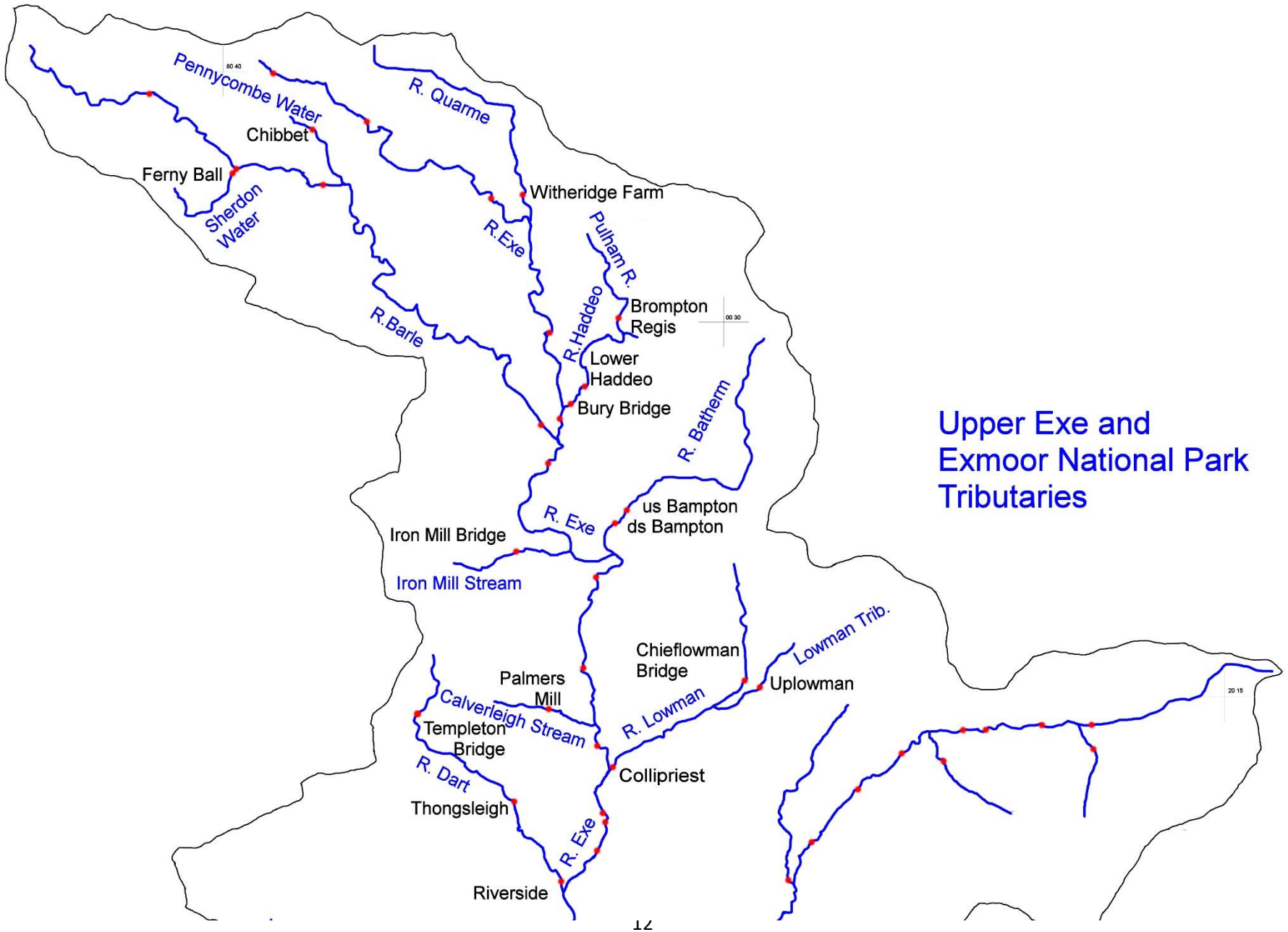
Trigger threshold score

The first column ‘2023’, shows the summary scores for each survey

The second column ‘Average’ shows the average of previous seasons

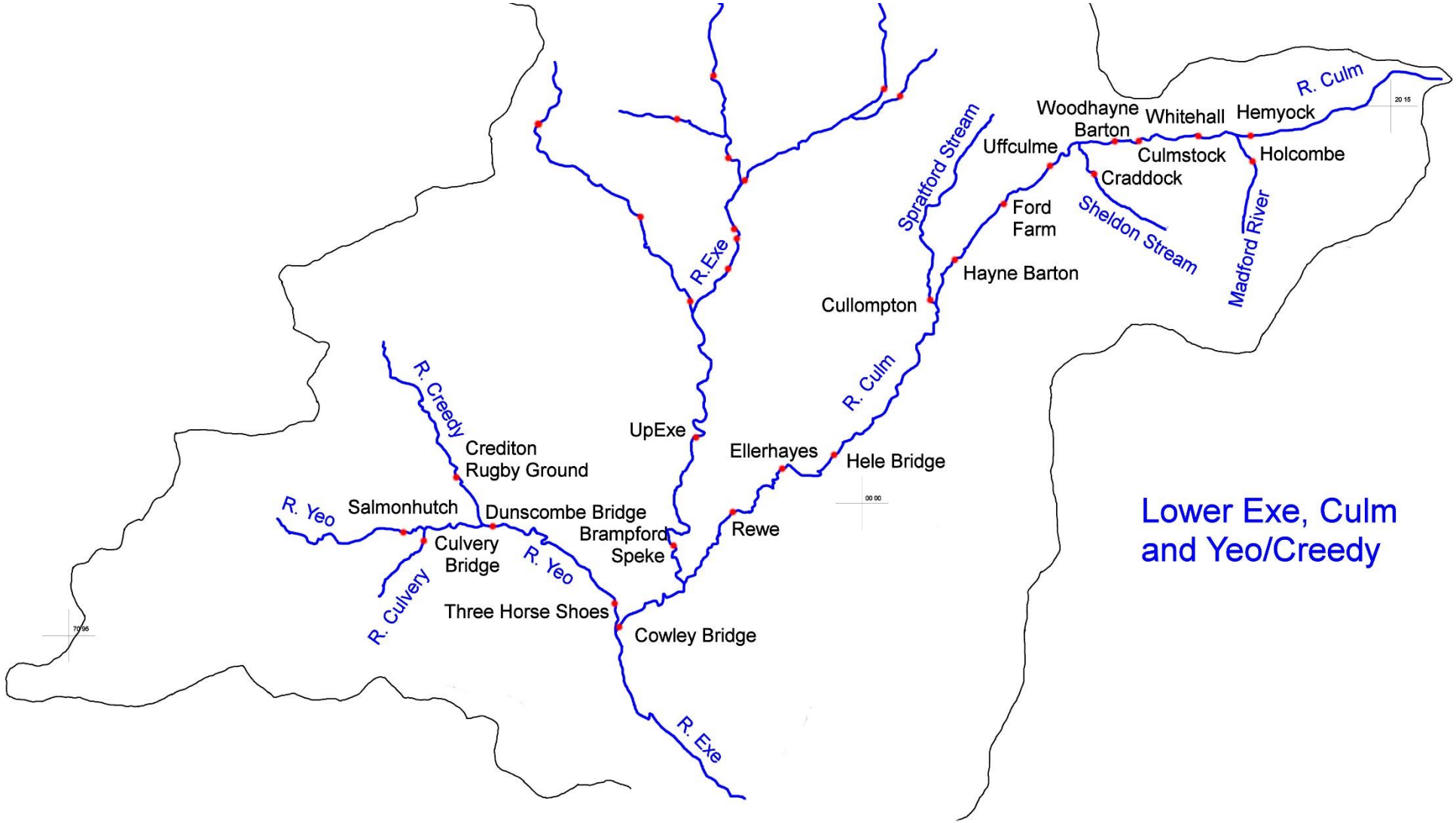
The third column ‘2023-Ave’ shows the difference.

The fourth column ‘2023-Trigger’, shows the difference between the score and the trigger score.


Pennycombe Water
Chibbet
Ferny Ball
Sherdon Water
R. Quarme
Witheridge Farm
R.Exe
Pulham R.
R.Haddeo
Brompton Regis
Lower Haddeo
Bury Bridge
R.Barle
R. Batherm
R. Exe
us Bampton
ds Bampton
Iron Mill Bridge
Iron Mill Stream
Chieflowman Bridge
Lowman Trib.
Uplowman
Palmers Mill
Calverleigh Stream
R. Lowman
Templeton Bridge
R. Dart
Collipriest
Thongsleigh
R. Exe
Riverside
Upper Exe and
Exmoor National Park
Tributaries

Summary ENP and Middle Exe Devon Tribs.

	River	Location	#	2023			Average			2023 - Ave			2022-Trigger		
				Spr	Sum	Aut	Spr	Sum	Aut	Spr	Sum	Aut	Spr	Sum	Aut
Exmoor NP	Sherdon Water	Ferny Ball	6	11	7	8	8.3	9.4	8.1	2.7	-2.4	-0.1	5	1	2
	Quarme	Witheridge Farm	7				13.1	11.7	11.5						
	Pulham	d/s Brompton Regis	6	15	12	11	11.9	10.3	9.8	3.1	1.7	1.3	9	6	5
	Haddeo	Bury Bridge	7	9	9	6	9.0	9.0	9.5	0.0	0.0	-3.5	2	2	-1
	Haddeo	Lower Haddeo	7	10		7	16.4	15.0	14.3	-6.4		-7.3	3		0
	Pennycombe Water	Chibbet	6				16.0	16.0	14.6						
Middle Exe Devon Tribs.	Batherm	us Bampton	6	10	8	5	10.6	10.2	8.7	-0.6	-2.2	-3.7	4	2	-1
	Batherm	ds Bampton	6	10	10	8	11.7	10.0	8.6	-1.7	0.0	-0.6	4	4	2
	Iron Mill Stream	Iron Mill Bridge	7	8	10	8	9.6	8.0	8.6	-1.6	2.0	-0.6	1	3	1
	Lowman Trib	Uplowman	7	7	6	6	10.6	8.3	6.9	-3.6	-2.3	-0.9	0	-1	-1
	Lowman	Chieflowman Bridge	7	10	9	7	11.1	9.6	7.7	-1.1	-0.6	-0.7	3	2	0
	Lowman	Collipriest	7	11		7	13.6	10.6	9.5	-2.6		-2.5	4		0
	Calverleigh Stream	Palmers Mill	7	10	12	6	9.3	9.8	9.0	0.7	2.2	-3.0	3	5	-1
	Dart	Templeton Bridge	7	8	9	7	9.8	7.6	7.9	-1.8	1.4	-0.9	1	2	0
	Dart	Thongsleigh	7	8	8	9	10.1	8.4	6.9	-2.1	-0.4	2.1	1	1	2
	Dart	Riverside	7	7	7	7	9.4	7.6	7.5	-2.4	-0.6	-0.5	0	0	0


R. Culm
Woodhayne
Barton
Whitehall
Hemyock
Uffculme
Culmstock
Holcombe
Craddock
Spratford Stream
Ford
Farm
Sheldon Stream
Madford River
Hayne Barton
R.Exe
Cullompton
R. Culm
R. Creedy
UpExe
Ellerhayes
Hele Bridge
Crediton
Rugby Ground
R. Yeo
Salmonhutch
Dunscombe Bridge
Brampford
Speke
Rewe
Culvery
Bridge
R. Yeo
R. Culvery
Three Horse Shoes
Cowley Bridge
R. Exe
Lower Exe, Culm
and Yeo/Creedy

Summary Culm, Lower Exe and Creedy/Yeo

	River	Location	#	2023			Average			2023 - Ave			2022-Trigger		
				Spr	Sum	Aut	Spr	Sum	Aut	Spr	Sum	Aut	Spr	Sum	Aut
Culm & Tributaries	Culm	Rewe	5	7	4		7.0	5.8	4.3	0.0	-1.8		2	-1	
	Culm	ds Ellerhayes Bridge	5	4	4		9.0	8.0	5.5	-5.0	-4.0		-1	-1	
	Culm	ds Hele Rail Bridge	5				10.0	9.0	7.0						
	Culm	Hayne Barton	7		8		10.7	9.6	8.3		-1.6			1	
	Culm	Ford Farm	7	11	9		13.3	11.9	10.0	-2.3	-2.9		4	2	
	Culm	us Uffculme	7	8	5	5	11.0	10.1	9.0	-3.0	-5.1	-4.0	1	-2	-2
	Culm	Woodhayne Barton	7	12	13		10.4	9.4	9.1	1.6	3.6		5	6	
	Culm	Culmstock	7	9	9	9	11.9	11.2	8.1	-2.9	-2.2	0.9	2	2	2
	Culm	Whitehall	7	9	5	5	11.0	9.9	8.1	-2.0	-4.9	-3.1	2	-2	-2
	Culm	us Hemyock	7	19	16	12	17.4	15.1	13.0	1.6	0.9	-1.0	12	9	5
	Spratford Stream	Cullompton	6	4	5	5	8.5	6.1	5.9	-4.5	-1.1	-0.9	-2	-1	-1
	Sheldon Stream	Craddock	7	11	10	9	12.6	11.5	10.0	-1.6	-1.5	-1.0	4	3	2
	Madford River	Holcombe	7	18	17	12	17.4	16.0	14.1	0.6	1.0	-2.1	11	10	5
Lower Exe and Creedy	Exe	Cowley Bridge	7		13		15.0	13.8	11.8		-0.8			6	
	Exe	Brampford Speke	7				10.7	7.4	7.5						
	Exe	UpExe Mill	7	12	12		16.7	14.3	11.8	-4.7	-2.3		5	5	
	Creedy	Three Horse Shoes	6	11		9	14.4	11.3	11.7	-3.4		-2.7	5		3
	Culvery	Culvery Bridge	6				13.7	15.0	9.0						
	Yeo	Dunscombe Bridge	6	12	11	9	12.5	9.5	8.0	-0.5	1.5	1.0	6	5	3
	Yeo	Salmonhutch	6	9	9	5	11.7	9.5	6.8	-2.7	-0.5	-1.8	3	3	-1
	Creedy	Crediton Rugby Ground	6	11	11	13	11.6	11.1	10.8	-0.6	-0.1	2.2	5	5	7

The Riverfly Partnership

Newsletter

October 2023

From the team

It's been a very busy year for the Riverfly Partnership and we have some thanks to give out. Firstly, thank you all for your continued surveying! Secondly, thanks for your patience this year — Trine has done her best keeping things going after Alex's departure in September last year and is absolutely overjoyed to have been joined by Beth and Ellen this September. A last thank you goes to all the folk in the Riverfly community who took part in our surveys last month — all the information is being collated now and will help us develop over the coming years.

The switch to Cartographer is in full swing now. We hope you like the new data platform so far and please know that we are working on a data visualisation dashboard too. Finally, a reminder for submissions to feature in our 'Meet the Monitor' section — let us know about you, why you take part in Riverfly Monitoring and don't forget to include a pic!

From December 2022 to October 2023, you have:

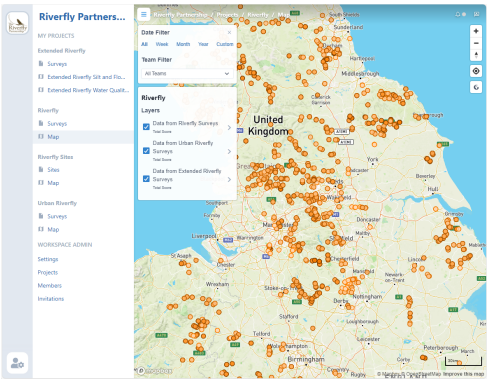
- Uploaded 2357 records.
- Captured information from 728 sites, in 311 rivers, across 94 catchments.
- Highlighted 91 trigger level breaches.

New faces

Here at Riverfly HQ in Cumbria, the Riverfly Partnership team has tripled in size! We now have two Co-ordinators to help out our Development Manager, Trine Bregstein.

Beth Korab is currently studying towards her Environmental Science degree, and has worked for an environmental conservation charity. Ellen Burton previously worked in the science team at an educational publisher, following her degree in Ecology and Conservation. They both began their new jobs in September, and will be helping to co-ordinate all things Riverfly.

Our new database — Cartographer



Another big change at the Riverfly Partnership is the ongoing move away from our old ARMI database onto Cartographer. Some of you will have already received your invitation to Cartographer — if not, look out for it in your inbox in the coming weeks.

We hope that monitors will enjoy this new platform for uploading records — it's hopefully a smoother, more intuitive experience. Trine has recorded some handy videos on how to use Cartographer that you can see when you log in, but if you have any trouble with using it then don't hesitate to get in touch.

Stuart Crofts — fly fishing expert, entomologist, environmentalist and all-round decent bloke

After 13 years working alongside the Riverfly Partnership, Stuart Crofts Riverfly Tutor extraordinaire is stepping back due to health concerns.

In the early days, coordinator Bridget Peacock asked him to be the Northern Area Tutor, and when Stuart asked what that might cover the answer was Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Lancashire. Then Bridget added Staffordshire, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and even Suffolk! Over the years Stuart has run training days in all these areas as well as helping set up the monitoring groups, some of which have grown dramatically and become self-sufficient. In total, Stuart has trained close to 500 volunteers, each one issued with their own numbered certificate.

Stuart has not only enthused and inspired Riverfly monitors across most of the country, he has also helped deliver Entomology for Anglers courses here at the FBA, written a book about adult caddisfly, submitted a report every year about adult caddisfly occurrence scheme and spent time identifying people's specimens sent to him via post. Stuart's contribution is enormous, and we are forever grateful for all that he has done for the Riverfly Partnership and wish him the very best in his recovery.

On a personal note, Trine and Simon Johnson (FBA Chief Executive) wanted to share the following:

"*Stuart taught me RMI when I first started at the FBA, working part-time for the Riverfly Partnership. His enthusiasm and passion for riverflies, monitoring and caring for the environment was infectious and so easily transmitted to anyone that he spent time with. That day spent*

with colleagues down by the river was an unforgettable one. A truly inspirational chap. Thanks Stuart for always taking time for a chat in the FBA kitchen." — Trine Bregstein

"*I first met Stuart back in the early 2000s. Since that time, I've hugely benefited from his friendship, advice and his amazing support during my time at Wild Trout Trust, Riverfly and now at FBA. His infectious enthusiasm and ability to share his incredible entomological knowledge with everyone (no matter their backgrounds) will be hugely missed by us all in the wonderful, sometimes crazy Riverfly family! Thank you, my friend.*" — Simon Johnson

From left to right: Aaron Watson (Environment Agency), Simon Johnson and Stuart Crofts at the British Fly Fair, Summer 2022

Meet the monitor

Action for the River Kennet (ARK) is a charity as well as the host for both the Kennet and Pang catchments. It is also the Riverfly Hub for those catchments and began Riverfly monitoring way back in 2007. Since then, ARK has successfully built up a network of more than 60 Riverfly sites, not only on the Kennet, but many of the tributaries; and in addition to this last autumn began establishing sites on the Pang. What is key to the ongoing monitoring is the wonderful, trained volunteers and maintaining their interest and commitment. One of ARK's monitors who gets a great deal out of her time monitoring is Glyn Horn (pictured below).

Glyn says: ‘Before I started to Riverfly I had volunteered with ARK and got involved with river restoration. Riverfly seemed a natural progression and the best way to learn more about the life in the river. ‘To start with, it was curiosity that brought me to monitoring and wanting to do something different from anything I had done before. Over the years that has morphed into a desire to learn more about the creatures that live in the riverbed and a fascination with the idea that a riverbed has so much living in it.

‘I have been monitoring for about 7 years and now have 7 sites. Five of them run consecutively along the River Lambourn (a SSSI chalk stream and a SAC in Berkshire) and the North Brook Stream flows into the Lambourn which gives an interesting insight into just how a river can be affected by the area it flows through. The other 2 sites are on a private fishery which is a big contrast, mainly no litter.

‘I can't really say I have a favourite site as even at the very urbanised area sites, where not everyone is valuing their river, the river itself is full of life and there is still the chance to spot kingfishers.

‘My favourite invertebrate is definitely a cased caddis as they come with such a variety of cases and in such varying sizes. A close runner-up would be flat-bodied heptageniidae as I have a sneaking feeling they are smiling at a private joke.

‘I enjoy so much about Riverfly — in the public areas, it's good to meet people who are interested in the concept. Although I don't have any set times, it's amazing how often I meet the same people, which I enjoy.

‘On the fishing estates the joy is kneeling quietly by myself on riverbank surrounded by natural noises, so that even on a cold winter day it feels peaceful. Although I monitor on my own it is a very companionable feeling to know that all over the country on all sorts of rivers there other people doing the same thing and all the data collected goes to give a picture (for better or worse) of the state of the country’s rivers.

‘I am not sure that there is a specific highlight to single out. I can be very enthusiastic in getting a high shrimp count after a slump caused by drought and algae but equally I enjoy finding a cased caddis with an interesting case.’

Priority Habitats Training

The winter months can be quiet while there’s no Riverfly training going on, so here’s another citizen science opportunity you might like to get involved in:

Priority Habitats

FRESHWATER BIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

NATURAL ENGLAND

'**Discovering Priority Habitats**' is being delivered on behalf of Natural England by the Freshwater Biological Association (the FBA, who also host the Riverfly Partnership). They're aiming to train citizen scientists to carry out 'naturalness assessments' on smaller waterbodies — areas that usually get missed by traditional monitoring methods. The data will inform Natural England in identifying and prioritising waterbodies for protection and restoration, as well as providing you with accessible information about the condition of your local water habitats. Further information can be found on the Priority Habitats website, including their FAQs.

Free training days are being offered from November to staff/volunteers of organisations with an interest in facilitating citizen science monitoring projects. If interested, in-person training would be provided at a suitable venue of your choosing. You would then have the freedom to highlight areas for protection and restoration. While the naturalness assessments are targeted towards people with little experience and expertise in freshwater habitats, the tool is designed to also be used as a rapid assessment method by professionals and many staff find this a useful day to attend too.

If you would like more information or to express your interest, please contact the FBA's Priority Habitats Officer Josie Niemira at jniemira@fba.org.uk

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Visit the Riverfly Partnership website

Visit the Riverfly Partnership Teemill shop