

**Big River Society carves a bright future for UK rivers
3RD RIVERFLY CONFERENCE DEMONSTRATES HOW**

Lord (Chris) Smith, Environment Agency Chairman, champions rivers Big Society. Riverfly Partnership's Anglers' Monitoring Initiative given as prime example

The 3rd Riverfly Conference, held on Thursday March 10th at the Natural History Museum, organised by the Riverfly Partnership (RP) - a network of 100 partners and hosted by the Salmon & Trout Association, attracted a "full house" audience drawn from all quarters of UK fishery and aquatic environment interests, in the 200-seater Flett Theatre. The conference, *Your Rivers – Their Future*, united citizen scientists (angling and community groups), regulators, regulated organisations and academic interests, on an equal platform for the first time. Lord Smith opened the programme that featured speakers ranging from the volunteer and statutory body representatives who make such projects as the Anglers' Monitoring Initiative (AMI) the success it is, academia (Prof Steve Ormerod, University of Wales) to industry (Richard Aylard of Thames Water) and anglers (Dr. Cyril Bennett, John Spedan Lewis Trust for the Advancement of the Natural Sciences).

In his opening remarks, Lord Smith declared, "It is impossible for a statutory body to replicate the work of River Trusts, the valuable work of the Riverfly Partnership and the AMI."

The conference celebrated the progress of the AMI (launched at the 2nd Conference four years ago) – with more than 50 'Big Society' volunteer groups regularly monitoring riverflies – the pollution sensitive canaries of our rivers – at more than 380 river sites across the UK.

The AMI is a scientific health check of rivers carried out by trained volunteer groups with unique local knowledge.

Groups from

- the industrial Welsh valleys (led by Dai Roberts, of the SE Wales Monitoring Group) described triumphs – AMI leading to successful Environment Agency prosecutions against polluters in Wales (and fines in excess of £40k)
- suburban London (Will Tall, of Wandle Piscators) - tragedies – the devastating bleach pollution and recorded recovery of the Wandle
- rural Northern Ireland (Ballinderry River Enhancement Association) introducing the AMI to Ireland

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Stuart Croft, former captain of the England Fly Fishing team, asked the question "Where does the volunteer come from?" with a case history of how his volunteer group, led by the late Gerald Stocks, turned the River Don, dead from the impact of industrial effluent, to a living one – the long established Big River Society.

Water companies do not enjoy universally good press, but Richard Aylard gave a cogent account of Thames Water's anti-pollution programme while Prof Steve Ormerod threw down the gauntlet with a challenge to the AMI programme to "think big" in the Big Society, instancing the work of the British Trust for Ornithology as a template for engaging all sections of society, especially children. Geoff Bateman, EA Head of River Basin Management, concluding the morning, took up the cry with a heartfelt, "UK society **needs** to think of the water environment" And went on to explain the critical role the Water Framework will play in protecting and improving our rivers.

Conservation and Management considerations occupied the afternoon session, which ranged from the problems outlined by leading entomologist Craig Macadam, of the RP Species and Habitat Group, in conserving riverfly diversity, to the challenges and possibility of correct restoration of rivers and waterways, detailed by Dr. Judy England of the River Restoration Centre; from the potential disaster that the killer shrimp could create, as described by Dr. Mark Diamond, Environment Agency Ecology & Biodiversity Manager, to the potential revitalisation of a declining riverfly, the blue winged olive, that Dr. Cyril Bennett is working on.

There followed a lively discussion period, ably chaired by Tom Fort, where the day's issues were debated, particularly the protocols surrounding the invasion of alien species such as the killer shrimp, and the pros and cons of attempts to restore locally declining flylife.

Paul Knight, Chairman of the Riverfly Partnership & CEO of the Salmon & Trout Association, "The Conference demonstrated conclusively what a power for good the collective energy of these organisations create, particularly the volunteer network, and it must be the prime object of everyone attending to ensure that this is developed even further to safeguard our waterways for future generations."

ENDS

For more information or images, contact: info@riverflies.org 07590928842

Issued by The Salmon & Trout Association on behalf of The Riverfly Partnership

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Notes to Editors:

- Riverflies include mayflies or up-winged flies (Ephemeroptera), caddisflies or sedges (Trichoptera) and stoneflies (Plecoptera) with approximately 280 species in the UK. These groups represent the natural flies flyfishermen imitate with their artificial lures.
- The Riverfly Partnership is a network of 100 partner organisations working to:
 - protect the water quality of our rivers;
 - further the understanding of riverfly populations; and
 - actively conserve riverfly habitats
- *Your rivers – their future* conference was sponsored by The Natural History Museum, Thames Water, Fishmongers' Company, Salmon and Trout Association, Wild Trout Trust, Freshwater Biological Association, Natural England, Scottish Environment Protection Agency and The Environment Agency
- Speakers included: Chairman of the Environment Agency, Rt. Hon. Lord Smith of Finsbury; environmental scientist Professor Steve Ormerod; Anglers' Monitoring Initiative leads Will Tall (Wandle Piscators), mayfly expert Cyril Bennett and international fly fisherman Stuart Crofts amongst others.
- The Riverfly Partnership www.riverflies.org is hosted by the charity The Salmon & Trout Association www.salmon-trout.org.
- Winner of Visit London's 2010 Evening Standard's Peoples Choice Best London for Free Experience Award and Best Family Fun Award the Natural History Museum is also a world-leading science research centre. Through its collections and scientific expertise, the Museum is helping to conserve the extraordinary richness and diversity of the natural world with groundbreaking projects in more than 68 countries.
- The Water Framework Directive encourages everyone with an interest in water to work together to protect and improve the quality of every aspect of the water environment. It will help us improve and protect inland and coastal waters; drive wiser, sustainable use of water as a natural resource; and create better habitats for wildlife that live in and around water. www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/planning/33106.aspx