

Water Conservators Report

Self-Introduction



Riverfly training, picture of Richard Bently who ran the training session. (6.9.24)



Picture of all RHC staff members and speakers at the conference. From left to right lee Scofield, Jane Birch, Dominick Spraklen, Lynva Russell, Rosslyn Colderley and Christi Stewart. Photo by Micheal Forster-Jones. (6.11.24).

I am a dedicated student of wildlife conservation at Aberystwyth University. I was looking for a placement to supplement my studies with practical experience in addition to previous volunteering. The placement with River Holme Connections was the perfect opportunity to grow my knowledge. I am very grateful to have been selected after interview and have found the placement very valuable.

My dissertation research, which I have also been able to do fieldwork for, is a control impact study on the effect Signal Crayfish have on macroinvertebrate populations. I have been doing kick samples at five sites in the Holme and Colne rivers and will be writing this up during my final year.

After I graduate, I hope to secure a job as a ranger or assistant ranger. I am excited by the prospect of my career and look forward to having a positive impact for wildlife, habitats and the environment.

Personal Involvement

Assisting in leading the weekly volunteer tasks such as tree planting, balsam bashing, meadow and woodland management, tree guard collection, skunk cabbage removal, and seed harvesting. There have also been corporate groups attending the practical conservation tasks, which involves managing more people.

Coordinating the riverfly volunteers of the Holme catchment for Calder Rivers Trust.

The responsibilities of this role included attending the monthly river health meetings with the other catchment coordinators, ensuring volunteers had the necessary equipment needed for

surveying, visiting possible new river access points for survey sites and responding to any queries from volunteers. Monitoring a site with a volunteer to keep record of the ARMI score to monitor for pollution events and changes to invert populations over time.



Figure 1 picture of the audience of the landscape recovery conference. Photo by Michael Forster-Jones (6.11.24).



Engagement event at Huddersfield uni. (28.4.25)

Assisting with education and engagement events such as the “River Explorer” and “Mayfly in the Classroom” sessions with the engagement officer, teaching the children about the invertebrates found in the river, and how pollution affects riparian ecosystems. Further engagement events where we ran fun activities for the local children such as bird box building, activity sheets and clay modelling.



Figure 3 Steve Hindle- a fun guy- inspecting an UNAMED variant of the crimson waxcap! (24.10.24)



Figure 1 botanical survey with Kay Woodward left, Jill Lucas right. (23.8.24)



Figure 2 Image of the soil survey for peat presence. This is one location out of many across the site. There was no peat present, so we can continue with the tree planting scheme at Greengate's Farm tree planting site (29.7.24)

Accompanying experts on baseline surveys for example, soil, water vole, crayfish, botanical, and waxcap surveys.

Creating an excel database for baseline bird surveys used for the landscape recovery plans. This included helping to arrange a suitable database, inputting all the data collected by the birders and analysing the data for a report. As well as writing a simplified report with highlighted species seen.

Keeping on top of admin and desk work such as emails, monthly staff meetings, scanning in documents and creating maps on QGIS.

Helping create content for “tributree” which was an advent calendar to engage with local communities and educate them on their local tributary of the Holme River. I helped to write information to pair with the interactive icons a local artist had created.

Helping create content for social media.

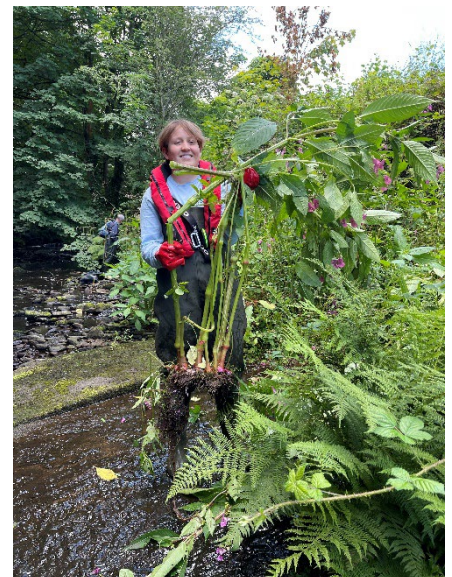
Writing updates for the monthly newsletter.



Japanese knotweed treatment on land site. Cowcliffe Rec (04.10.24). Photo by Kayleigh Szostak.



Narrow clawed crayfish caught from ART before recording them. (23.7.24)



Himalayan balsam removal task. (23.7.25)

Practical conservation work with the River Ranger and Assistant River Ranger such as brushcutting and Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) control- knotweed, crayfish, mink.

Organising the fieldwork and logistics of my dissertation project and undertaking sampling. This involved finding suitable access points and gaining permissions, learning family IDs of freshwater invertebrates, gathering equipment needed for sampling and organising and completing surveying. Working closely with a PHD student at Leeds University with a project that aligned with mine.

Reflections and Learning

In the first month at RHC I received training, useful for furthering my conservation career. For example, brushcutter, first aid and safe use of pesticides. This included maintenance, storage

and use of the equipment. The experience further expanded my knowledge in practical conservation actions. These tickets will make me more employable on graduation.

When helping to lead groups of retired volunteers, who have more experience and knowledge than me, being able to learn from them, whilst ensuring they enjoy their time, stay safe and have all the necessary equipment needed for the task. Running primary school aged education sessions, volunteer sessions with college students, cubs, guides and scout groups, covers a range of ages with different capacity for learning and concentration. Directing stimulating content suited to these groups with different learning needs, allowing them to take away as much knowledge as possible. This has given me soft skills such as managing people of all ages, communication and strong initiative when making decisions without having to involve others.

In addition, personal self-management, alongside being able to ask for help, has been an important lesson when fulfilling tasks to high standards. For example, when creating the QGIS maps and tributree content, I made mistakes that could have been avoided if I had asked questions to clarify the task. Another example, when completing the baseline bird survey



The BRUVs equipment, used by Leeds university in Dean Dike. (19.8.24)



Figure 4 Pictures of me brushcutting and scything with the volunteers to prevent the grassland from becoming rank- all the grass must be cut then removed so nutrients are not added to the soil. Thongsbridge community meadow. (26.09.24) Photo by Kayleigh Szostak.

database, there were many changes to the task as the project went on. This would have been more time efficient to clarify before starting. On reflection, ensuring understanding of expectations to fulfil a task correctly and efficiently is imperative.

Another area of self-improvement during my placement has been organisation tools. For instance, the help of a paper diary. learning techniques to help with organising myself and keeping consistency with them, ensures punctuality, efficient time management and task prioritisation.

Involvement in surveying with a variety of experts such as soil surveys for peat presence, water vole sign surveys, crayfish surveys (hand search, trapping, baited trapping and Baited Remote Underwater Video [BRUVS]), botanical surveying and waxcap surveys. These have all been valuable field skills I will use in my future career. The practical element of the placement is what

I have appreciated most about the experience and will be the most valuable when finding employment on graduation.

Special Thanks

Overall, during the 11 months I have done 29 days of tree planting and 18 other volunteer tasks including Himalayan balsam control, meadow management, tree guard removal for recycling, skunk cabbage removal, seed harvesting, and footpath maintenance. INNs control including 5 days of knotweed treatment, 6 mink trapping days and 8 Signal and Narrow clawed crayfish surveying and trapping days. I have helped with 18 school education sessions and 22 other engagement events.

I just wanted to express a special thank you to the Water Conservators Trust for enabling this invaluable opportunity. This placement will make me much more employable on graduation and has given me countless relevant skills for career development. RHC is grateful for your continued support of past and future industrial placements allowing a legacy of young people to flourish in their conservation careers. This would not have been possible without your contributions.

Ella has gone on to work for The Rivers Trust, Luke works for the Ribble Rivers Trust, Natasha works for an environmental land management company and Arwen will graduate from York University this summer. My goal is to be a Ranger when I graduate and this opportunity, alongside my degree and past volunteering, has given me the skills needed for the foundations.