

End of Project Report

Information provided in this report will be used to showcase your project on the Biodiversity Partnership web pages. Please expand boxes as needed or use a separate sheet.

**Project title:**

Melbourn Habitat Enhancement Project – Phase 2

Date of Project report submission: 16th November 2009

Date of Application: January 2009

Sites/Location (if applicable):

River Mel in Melbourn (MVC playing fields and the Parish Recreation Field)

Contact:

Name: Dr Sandra Webb _____

Organisation: River Mel Restoration Group _____

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Please enclose 2-3 photos of your project together with this project report form (they can be either of work being carried out or about the results achieved or both) – digital photos (in jpg. format) would be our preferred choice - see separate report

Please answer the following questions about your project:

If any aren't applicable insert N/A.

For Biodiversity Action Plans (BAPs) please see:

<http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/countryside/natureconservation/action/partnership/baps/>

* If your project involved habitat work, how much habitat area in terms of BAP habitat has been created/restored (please cross out accordingly)?
200 metres _____

Which habitat(s)? _____ Chalk river _____

* Which BAP species have benefited (or other species)?
Water voles, otters and wildlife associated with rivers and streams

* Did the project contribute to other Biodiversity action plan targets and actions? Which ones and how? _____

* Did the project generate ecological data? Yes No

Has the data been submitted to the Biological Records Centre?

Yes No

If no please state the reason why data has not been submitted. _____

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- * How many volunteers have been involved in the work? __100+__
 - * How many volunteer hours have gone into the project? ____500+____
 - * Any other information you would like to tell us about? ___see separate report_____
-
-

Please provide a summary report of your project:

What worked well, was/were your main successes?

What was difficult/challenging? What lessons have you learnt that could be shared with other projects, can be learnt for future projects?

See separate report

In this space we are interested in receiving your feedback on all aspects of the application process so that we might improve it in future. Send this final report form out with the initial grant offer – would make filling it in a lot more efficient.

Are you happy to share this information with other projects? X Yes No

Thank you!

Please email this form back to Fabiola Blum,
Fabiola.Blum@cambridgeshire.gov.uk or post it to
Biodiversity Partnership,
ET1001, Castle Court, Castle Hill, Cambridge, CB3 0AP

River Mel Restoration Group

Cambridge & Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership Grant

Melbourn Project

Background

The impetus for this project in Melbourn stemmed directly from members of the public who had seen the improvements that the River Mel Restoration Group had already made to a section of the river in Meldreth and who wanted to see similar improvements to their own stretch of the river.

The reasons this particular stretch of the river in Melbourn was chosen for improvement were:

- it had been over widened by past dredging and deep silt covered the natural bed
- it is known habitat of trout and water vole
- the river runs through the playing fields of Melbourn Village College (secondary school) and the Parish Council recreational field; both of which have open access to the public
- the Village College's desire to interest their students in the river as habitat

Community Involvement

In order to run two projects at the same time we also need to increase our pool of volunteers. So, in an effort to recruit new volunteers, and to prepare for the start of the Melbourn project, we held a major litter pick, sponsored by RiverCare, along the river in November 2008. As a direct result of this initiative, and a presence at the Village fete, our membership has risen to 65 member households, which represents an increase in membership of nearly 50%. This has meant that we can hold working-parties very three weeks instead of every six as we were, thus enabling the Melbourn project to run in parallel with our continuing Meldreth project.

EA Drainage Consent for our proposed improvements was received in November 2008 and we held our first work party there in January 2009. Since then we have installed approximately 200 metres of "soft" revetments along the river in Melbourn as part of the project funded by the Cambridge & Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership Grant. This is in addition to the 350 metres of river that the Group have restored in Meldreth since the Group started work in the river in September 2006.



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The first work-party in Melbourn January 2009

Involvement of Melbourn Village College

In July this year the Group was asked if it could provide ecologically based activities for the “Activities Week” run by the Melbourn Village College for pupils in years 7 and 8 (11-13 year olds). This included some pupils with special needs. After some careful planning and a risk assessment, we organised the children to be divided into small groups to be “buddied-up” with and work in the river alongside one of our experienced volunteers.



MVC students helping to build a revetment



MVC students planting-up revetments (pictures © MVC and used with the permission of the students shown)

These students experienced all aspects of the project: cutting brushings to size; completing a revetment; and preparing and planting rushes and sedges. They are now watching the development of “their” revetment and that particular stretch of the river with great interest. In addition to this activity run by the Restoration Group, this particular stretch of the river is used by the College on a regular basis for environmental studies run by their Science and Geography departments.

Willow Pollarding

As part of our proposals, we had asked for funding to enable us to pollard a group of four mature willows. This will increase the lifespan of these particular trees as well as improve levels of light to this particular part of the river. Willow pollarding is not a

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job for the amateur, so this grant from the Cambridge and Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership enabled the work to be carried out in March by local tree surgeon Sam Howell on behalf of the RMRG. Re-growth has been rapid and the trees are regaining their characteristic volume. No wood from the pollarded trees was wasted; the smaller branches were used to infill the newly constructed revetments where they will help consolidate the revetments and act as silt-traps, whilst the thicker logs have been used to provide a solid edge in areas where the banks have been eroded by animals.

Water voles

There is a large colony of water voles that live along this particular stretch of the river Mel in Melbourn. We have taken particular care not to disturb their habitat during the conservation work and it is hoped that some of the trimming of bank side shrubs that has been undertaken will create new areas of habitat for them. Areas that have been similarly improved in Meldreth are seeing increased colonisation by water voles.

Construction of Access Point



August 2009

The recreational area by the river in Melbourn is used heavily by dog walkers and families with young children, so an access point was included in our plans to provide a place where children can go “pond-dipping”, but also to provide a solid access to the river for dogs. It is hoped that the installation of this access point this will assist in lessening erosion along other stretches of the river bank as well as helping to prevent the destruction of bank side vegetation that provides cover for water voles and other small mammals and fish. The access point was installed in August and the ground has been re-seeded, so that it should be established and fully functional by next spring.

Time-line of Significant Events

- June 2008 Information Stall - Melbourn Fete
- Aug 2008 Site visit RMRG, Ecology Officer and Melbourn Parish Council
- Nov 2008 1st Litter Pick Event
- Nov 2008 EA consent received for the Melbourn Project
- Jan 2009 First Work Party
- Mar 2009 Willow pollarding
- May 2009 Weed cutting on established trout spawning ground

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- June 2009 Melbourn Fete – in-river demonstration of restoration techniques used by the Group
- July 2009 Melbourn Village College's Activity Week
- Aug 2009 Installation of Access point

Wild Trout Trust & Orvis Conservation Award 2009

After being finalists last year, the River Mel Restoration Group have this year won the Wild Trout Trust & Orvis Conservation Award for 2009 (Amateur category) for the work they have carried out on the Mel. This is a prestigious national, competitive award. As part of the judging process, three independent judges visited both the Melbourn and Meldreth projects.

Summery

Since the start of the project in January, volunteers from the River Mel Restoration Group have, to date, devoted 436 man-hours on site. This enthusiastic community support sees this phase of the scheme almost complete and the river bed starting to reappear. It is too soon to assess the long term impact of the project on fish and associated wildlife, but young trout were seen in the river in Melbourn this summer, as well as a significant number of stickleback and bullheads. In addition, adhoc sighting of kingfishers, water voles and grass snakes are all significantly up on those recorded last year. Clumps of water crowfoot have established in the restored stretch of the river and were in flower this summer.

Future Plans

The River Mel Restoration Group would like to continue to restore further stretches of the river Mel in Melbourn, but this is dependant on the Group being able to obtain further funding for the project.

Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without the financial support of the South Cambridgeshire District Council and the Cambridgeshire County Council through this Cambridge & Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership Grant.

We would also like to acknowledge the financial support of the Cam Valley Forum, the Melbourn Parish Council, the Melbourn Fete Committee, Wrights Mowers (Melbourn), and a local Melbourn based Society who wishes to remain anonymous. The donations from these organisations allowed us to purchase the tools and chest waders need to carry out this project.

We also thank Rob Mungovan for his encouragement, advice and support, which was instrumental in getting this project up and running.

Report prepared by Sandra Webb on behalf of Steve Hawkins, Chairman, River Mel Restoration Group. November 2009