

River Stour becomes more fish friendly

This follows the successful completion of the first phase of a fish passage and habitat improvement scheme.

The project has been delivered by the Environment Agency in partnership with the Wessex Chalkstream Rivers Trust, Bryanston School and local landowners and funded through the Fisheries Improvement Programme which comes directly from national rod licence sales.

The scheme, carried out in the grounds of Bryanston School at Blandford Forum, will enable fish to bypass a large weir that previously prevented their passage upstream. Contractors adjusted disused hatches on a bypass channel to improve flows down a redundant stream. A notch was then cut in a disused cast iron weir to make it easier for fish to swim upstream. Finally, a number of woody habitat features were installed to improve habitat for fish and invertebrates.

The notch cut in the weir to aid fish passage

Although not a chalk stream, the Stour is an important river rich in wildlife that is fed by several chalk-fed tributaries. It is home to numerous species of insects, animals and fish. Otters are regularly sighted on the river.

Luke Kozak, a spokesperson for the Environment Agency. said:

We're really pleased with the outcome of this project that has improved 300m of channel habitat and created fish passage for multiple species of fish. The improvements mean fish can bypass the 1.8m high Deer Park weir which prevents their passage upstream on the main river.

Subject to funding, the Environment Agency and its partners plan to carry out the second phase of the project next year. This will involve the reintroduction of gravel to the bypass channel to create fish spawning beds.