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The River Lea, a river in trouble

Theo Thomas



It was a summer in which the pollution of the River Lea was all too apparent – the [deaths of thousands of fish](#), killed by road run-off. We've continued to see East London's rivers damaged by oil and sewage. There is rarely a day that you can't visit a river in the Lower Lea Catchment and see a rainbow slick across the water. Or smell sewage from a misconnected waste pipe that's come down a drainpipe and so to a river.

The pollution the river faces has proven inspiration for three MA TV Journalism students from City

University who produced a current affairs documentary called '[Murky Waters](#)'.

Love the Lea boost at Countryside Live.



The Countryside Live festival in late September was a great chance to tell more people about what needs to be done to make the River Lea and its tributaries healthy. We spoke to hundreds of people at the festival on Leyton Marsh, old supporters and new, all shocked by the state of the Lea. Children loved our 'River Doctor' game where they had to remove objects from a paddling pool that make a river sick – from detergent to poo (of the rubbery joke shop variety).

Salmons Brook – Healthy River Challenge

This is our project to show that there is a different way to design drainage in London. One that doesn't see road run-off washed into rivers every time it rains; one that re-creates a more natural drainage system. This involves directing rain water through sunken gardens or turning grass verges into mini-wetlands, with plants that clean pollutants from the water before it reaches a river.

We now have 3 sites in Enfield where we'll create Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).

One upstream of Boxer's Lake, one where the A10 road passes over the Salmons Brook and at Grovelands Park. We are working with people who live near to the sites, the London Borough of Enfield, and the Environment Agency. To help with this project contact [Aimee Felus](#)

Project Reedbed

So far we've identified 15 sites which we're looking to create new reedbeds in the River Lea. These are great at diffusing pollution and provide valuable habitat for all sorts of riparian wildlife. Only there are not enough of them on the River Lea and its tributaries. What will be vital for the project is having people that live near to the proposed sites who can champion them (the first will be from Tottenham through to Hackney).

If you want to help promote a reedbed site contact [Ben Fenton](#)



Water Quality

Citizen scientists continue to test for pollution along the River

Lea and its tributaries. It started back in the Spring and has seen many pollution incidents spotted and reported to the Environment Agency. We are analysing the results for the first 6 months now. So far they confirm what our eyes and noses tell us. The rivers of the Lower Lea Valley are struggling, with many of them compromised. It also shows how the problem accumulates the further down the valley you get.

Eel Monitoring

For the second year, we have teamed up with the Zoological Society of London (London Zoo) to monitor the eel numbers at Bow Locks on the River Lea. We rely on regular volunteers to come and check the eel trap at Bow Locks. This year we have seen a massive increase on the number of eels passing through. The European Eel travels to our waters from the Sargasso Sea on possibly one of the greatest migrations and the numbers that been recorded this year are very promising. However this does not mean that the river is healthy. Eels are hardy creatures and can survive in polluted water. The end of year review will tell us what the early findings are for this year and we'll have a report in the next Love the Lea News.

Green Wall Watch



August



October

Our green walls are looking great. Despite a very dry summer they have been flourishing. Project co-ordinator, Ben Fenton said 'I'm really impressed with how they are doing, once just a concrete slab now a thriving ecosystem' The green walls now face their first winter...

What you can do

If you see pollution call 0800 80 70 60 and tell the Environment Agency where, what and when. Ask to be called back.

If you see pollution and can take a photo email it to theo.thomas@thames21.org.uk

Pledge to Love the Lea – we need more people to show they care about their river