

OPEN MEETING, 13 FEBRUARY 2024



Jan Hobot is the Head Riverkeeper at the Haddon Estate near Bakewell. He gave a very interesting and enlightening talk on the 'Haddon Estate: fish, wildlife and conservation – a sustainable future'. Jan started working at Haddon Hall in 2007 after attending Winchester Agricultural College. The estate comprises four farms with a total of 3,500 acres. There are four rivers through the estate with sixteen miles of banks to care for. The rivers Bradford, Lathkil, Derbyshire Wye and Derwent are all different due to the underlying geology. The River Bradford is on limestone and is one of the few rivers to still have our indigenous White Crayfish. As the farmers are tenants of the estate Jan has more control of the amount of spraying of chemicals and requires buffer strips of eight metres from the river. This prevents the grass being grazed and allows nature to take its own course.

In the past at Haddon the rivers were managed just for anglers. In 1890 Wild Rainbow Trout were introduced from California (the Victorians have a lot to answer for), and stockfish (farmed fish) were fed twice a day in tanks with Sand Eel pellets. When these were put in the river it introduced parasites. In 2003 it was presented to Lord Edward, who was interested in nature, to change the system, so they stopped stocking the rivers. Gradually the rivers were managed to be a more natural habitat so that all stages of fish growth were accommodated. Meanders were made, weirs were removed and gravel put in the river for the Alvins (hatched fish). Walls were also taken down and the stones put in the river to protect small fish. Every five years the Willow and Hazel are harvested and put into bundles which are put in the river and Willow fences made as a refuge for small fish. Fallen trees are left to form leaky dams and habitat for numerous creatures. In 2007 the Environment Agency did a survey by stunning fish in a specific area to see what was there and took samples of the scales of the fish to estimate their ages. They counted 66 wild trout and four years earlier there had only been one. The colouration of the trout is quite different in each river which shows how an environment can affect the creatures that live in it. There are monthly water checks and if any problems are spotted Jan gets in touch with the water company. Riverfly also monitors the water quality and the creatures that live in it.

The change in management has had some amazing results. The fish are thriving as are creatures associated with rivers such as Ducks, Little Grebes, Water Voles, Otters, Bats, Herons, the occasional egret, Kingfishers, and Dippers. What Jan calls 'vermin' are also attracted to the rivers and can become a nuisance such as Cormorants, Goosanders and

introduced American Mink. Poaching around Bakewell is also a problem and since Covid many more people actually go in the river, which is not good for the wildlife. The rivers are still managed for angling for the Haddon Fishing Club members. Instead of daily permits they have to have a yearly contract which puts less pressure on the angler and fish and catches have to be released. The anglers also have a social club and events. They can also be involved in various studies on nature and work with farmers. As Jan says 'it takes time and patience', but it certainly seems to be working.

Joan Buckland