



RICHMOND AND DISTRICT ANGLING SOCIETY

Established 1912

President: The Most Honourable The Marquis of Zetland

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MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER

Skeeby Beck Pollution Update

Following the major pollution incident on Skeeby Beck on 13 April much has been going on in terms of assessing the impact, seeking compensation for damages and considering steps to recovery.

There is little doubt that the incident had a major impact on what has long been recognised as a major River Swale spawning tributary for brown trout, grayling and salmon, as well as providing habitat for significant numbers of trout and grayling throughout their full life cycle.

The committee of Richmond & District Angling Society has long championed membership of both the Angling Trust and its legal wing Fish Legal. While some anglers occasionally may have questioned the value of belonging to such organisations, when something like the disaster which hit Skeeby Beck occurs the help they can offer becomes apparent.

One of the society's first actions was to contact Fish Legal who have taken up the case to seek compensation. Fish Legal have recommended that the R&DAS claim is combined with that from Fly Fishing Yorkshire, which is owned and run by Olly Shepherd, who is well-known as a professional guide and coach and who runs a syndicate on the beck downstream of the R&DAS water.

It is known that the pollution was caused by a release over several hours of digestate from a large capacity storage tank at Hutton Magna. An extensive grey, strong-smelling cloud was observed making its way down the beck and into the River Swale. It took several days for the beck to clear and for the smell to disappear.

In terms of its effect on fish worst fears of total kill seem to have been confirmed. The Environment Agency electro-fished seven miles of the beck at the end of April and the society believes that they found one of the worst post pollution situations experienced. In terms of the effect on the whole ecology of the beck, including its invertebrate life, information is still being collected at the time of writing.

How long it will take the beck to recover depends on a range of factors. Restocking may eventually be an option but if this isn't possible then it could be several years before the beck is fishable and many more before it returns to its pre-pollution state.

As was mentioned in a recent newsletter to members, R&DAS had been working on plans to improve the section fished by its members along the lines of the excellent work of recent years undertaken by both Olly Shepherd downstream and Gilling West Fly Fishers immediately upstream.

Following a report from the Wild Trout Trust, the society had engaged with the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust to explore improvement options and how they might be carried out. This included a meeting with Zetland Estates, which leases the water to the society, and the tenant farmer. At the time of the pollution incident improvement plans were still in the process of being formulated.

The society has also been in contact with the regional fisheries team of the Environment Agency and is pressing for the EA to take steps to ensure that incidents such as occurred don't happen again.

Several R&DAS members have already written to the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, who is also the constituency Member of Parliament, as well as to Therese Coffey, Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, saying how appalled they have been by the pollution event and urging the government to tighten legislation to prevent similar occurrences.

R&DAS Committee

8 May 2023