

CONSERVATION & ECOLOGY. THE OLD RIVER LEA, HACKNEY MARSHES News Sheet, October 2009

The Old River Lea (below Lea Bridge Weir) with its shallow, fast flow and more natural banks has a remarkable flora and fauna for a highly urbanised London area. The river is under constant threat from pollution and other factors, and needs monitoring to ensure it retains a healthy ecology. Fish and invertebrate surveys are carried out, and conservation volunteers provide extra data by watching the river for fish, insects, aquatic flora, pollution etc.

Fish and spawning. Fish species recorded:– Bream, Chub, Common Carp, Mirror Carp, Perch, Pike, Roach, Roach-Bream hybrid, Dace, Gudgeon, Bleak, Tench, Stone Loach, Common Goby, Minnow, Bullhead, Ten- and Three-spined Sticklebacks, Eel, Flounder, and Sea Bass. Other species will occur, for example, Zander, Trout and Barbel. Some fish are brought downriver via the Flood Relief Channel on storm-flows (golf-course tunnel exit). The shallow, weedy nature of the river provides conditions for a remarkable, annual fish-spawning event. Large shoals of (mainly) Bream 'migrate' from their deep-water wintering areas, which are further downriver, up to the Hackney Marshes stretch. They lay eggs that adhere to the aquatic flora, for example, tape grass beds. There is now concern that the new Olympic tidal barrage may disrupt this spawning cycle.

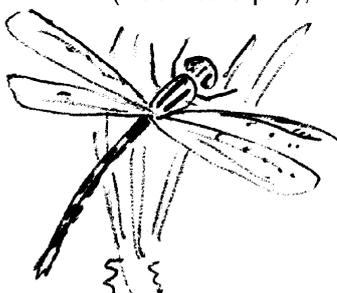
Tidal barrage – loss of tidal flows and alteration to river eco-systems.

As part of the Olympic City development downriver, two tidal barrages now block the former tidal flow (up to Hackney Marshes) at Three Mills, Bow. Water is now impounded behind the barrages for boat moorings and barge transport. Due to the river gradient and the long distance from the barrages, water levels at Hackney Marshes do not alter significantly. The flow off Lea Bridge Weir is retained, plus shallow beds. A fish-pass on the Prescott Channel barrage is not yet open (at the time of this News Sheet). Local reports suggest that many fish had the passage to their spawning grounds blocked this year at Bow, and were unable to spawn at Hackney Marshes. The change above the barrages from tidal saltwater–freshwater 'mix' to freshwater only will alter river eco-systems and fish biodiversity.

Storm water flows and pollution. Storm water flows (after heavy rain) are a natural part of the river's 'flow system' – they replenish the river and wash out pollutants and debris. Storm flows can also cause sewers to overflow and bring pollutants into the river. This can be especially critical after hot weather, when levels of dissolved oxygen in the water are low. Toxic pollution uses up more oxygen, and fish then die from suffocation. Some toxins also poison fish and other life-forms. Oil discharges are another a major problem, mainly from Lea Navigation outfalls.

Angling close-seasons. An angling 'close-season' applies to the Old River Lea from March 15th to June 15th due to its flow rate. There is no close-season on the Lea Navigation as it is classed as 'still water'. The close-season exists to protect fish during the spawning period. In 2008 and 2009, 'No Fishing' signs were put up along the Old River Lea at Hackney Marshes at the request of local conservation volunteers, due to the nation-wide increase in fish poaching during the close-season.

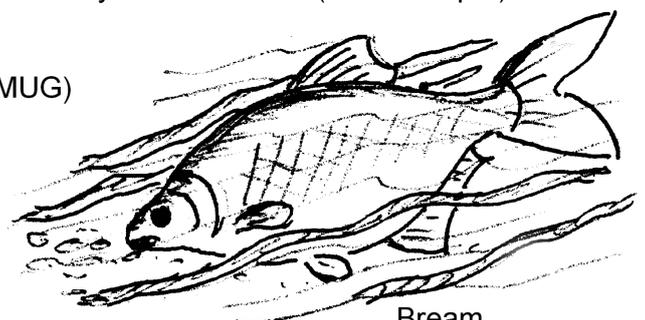
A free copy of this News Sheet and further information is available at the Tree Nursery on Hackney Marsh (next to the car park by Homerton Road). The Tree Nursery is open Tuesdays (noon to 3 pm), Fridays (9 am to noon), and the first Saturday of each month (noon to 3 pm).



Hawker dragonfly

Compiled for
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www.hackneyenvironment.org.uk/HMUG



Bream