

A bit of background:

- The Sweatsford Water is a notably rare type of river called a 'chalk stream'. There are only ~200 chalk streams in the world, and over 80% of them are in the southern England.
- In their natural state, these streams are incredibly biodiverse, and home to some of the country's rarest plants and insects.
- You may have noticed the headlines in the national press highlighting the fact so few of our rivers fail to meet their conservation targets year on year. Unfortunately, this is the case for a number of our chalk streams as well.
- So it's worth noting the Sweatsford is one of the highest scoring watercourses in the whole Avon catchment, achieving the vast majority of its targets. This means it's relatively free of pollutants and has limited abstraction pressures (e.g. extraction of water for drinking and industry).
- But with climate change placing even more stress on our chalk streams, the wildlife associated with these rivers are showing worrying signs of stress and decline. So it's our responsibility to do all can to make the Sweatsford as resilient to climate change impacts as possible.

If you're lucky enough to have river frontage in the village, you have an important role to play in determining the health of this special little stream! What can you do?

Managing plant growth for wildlife and water (in-channel and on the bank)

- Avoid cutting or clearing plant growth in the stream. Why? Chalk stream plants (aka river weeds) are the building blocks of life in our rivers. Just like on land, everything below the water surface relies on these plants. Without them, there are no trout, kingfishers, otters, or water voles.
- These plants not only provide shelter for wildlife, they also help keep the water clean and cool (especially during hot summers). As flows naturally recede as the year progresses, plants will encroach into the channel, sometimes covering it from bank to bank. This is a natural process, posing no risk to wildlife or flooding.
- Removal of plant growth will not help reduce flooding when groundwater levels are high, as is this case this winter.
- A do nothing approach is invariably the best approach!

Please do share the link to our website and river bank management guide for further details - <https://www.wessexrt.org.uk/assets/files/GardenEdgeGuide-INNSUpdated.pdf>

Photos on the next page

Water crowfoot (*Ranunculus* sp.) and other submerged plants found in the Sweatsford are excellent indicators of river health. Leave these plants to grow freely throughout the year.





A bare river bed offers nothing for wildlife. Allow plants to naturally recolonise.



A 'tidy' river bank is not good for wildlife or river water quality. Allow marginal and bankside species space to thrive. Their flowers are also good for pollinators.



Roadside verge erosion poses a significant risk to water quality. Run-off from the road network contains a cocktail of toxic contaminants to both wildlife and people. Avoid cutting roadside drainage notches into the verge and leave plants to thrive. This helps reduce pollution to the stream.

