

River Chelt restoration attracts much more wildlife

Written by Elaine

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On Tuesday 24 April, volunteers will be helping the Environment Agency and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust with landscaping works on the River Chelt in Priors Norton, Gloucestershire.

Over the coming weeks the area will be landscaped, attracting more wildlife such as birds, bats, dragonflies and eels. Surplus wetland plants from the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's Coombe Hill nature reserve and a section of the Stroudwater Navigation at Wallbridge, are being rehomed, thanks to volunteers. These local reeds, flag iris and purple loosetrife will give natural colonisation a helping hand.

Residents in the Tewkesbury area may have noticed machinery on the River Chelt along the A38 at Priors Norton last autumn. This work is a part of an ongoing river restoration project led by the Environment Agency and supported by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. A new meandering section of river has been created to bypass the Norton Weir. Fish can now move freely up another 6km of the River Chelt, where they were not able to before. The previously straight and deep channel has been reengineered into an attractive and dynamic river, complete with two ponds and three backwaters. The clay that was dug out from the channel was recycled to rebuild the flood bank further away from the river, to create an additional hectare of space for water and wetlands.

Cathy Beeching, Project Manager for the Environment Agency said: "This exciting project been made possible by funding from DEFRA. The River Chelt is important for many river and floodplain species, which will all benefit from the improvements at Priors Norton."

Approximately 200 trees, including the endangered black poplar, have already been planted by the landowner, the Environment Agency and Trust volunteers.

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Karen Lloyd, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's Severn Vale Living Landscape Project Officer said: "This restoration project is a fantastic haven for wildlife. We've already spotted egrets, green sandpiper, a variety of fish and signs of otters have been found too. Now we are doing the finishing touches to make this area even richer in wildlife!." This project has been made possible thanks to Dr Peter Whitehead who owns the land. Peter said: "We already have nesting waders in the flood meadows and hope the river restoration project will attract many more bird species, as well as other wildlife. I am delighted to be working with these organisations on this project to give these species more opportunity to thrive in the Severn Vale".