

Tale Valley



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Winning National

As a result of the combined efforts of volunteers, local farmers, landowners and businesses in the valley the Trust has recently won two National Awards for their conservation and education work.

Our small charity beat competition from much larger organisations across the country to win first prize in the 2005 Wild Trout Trust & Classic Malts Conservation Awards (see page 2).

Once again the thanks must go to the individuals up and down the valley who have taken our suggestions on board and invested their own time and money in changing farming practices to improve the river.

The fact that the Environment Agency were able to demonstrate the benefits of this work with their long-term monitoring of water quality must have helped convince the judges that we delivered tangible results for the benefit of wildlife and the community in the Tale Valley.

The other major award went to Alan Bruford, a local Education Ranger whom we contract to carry out environmental education work for the Trust in the Tale Valley.

I hope you will forgive me for blowing our own trumpet, but I wanted you to realise that our combined efforts are making real changes that have been recognised nationally.

I don't simply want to bathe in the glory of these awards, I want you to see how investment in the community and the environment is bringing tangible results.

I ask you to respond to this success by giving us a donation for our work in 2007 so that we can continue to bring benefits to the valley on your behalf.

**Miles Leonard
Chairman of Trustees.**



Above - Stephanie Kruse (Local Heritage Initiative) gives Alan Bruford his Heritage Star Award for his environmental education work.

Below - Dr Jeremy Bradshaw-Smith (Trust Secretary) receives the Trust's prize from Lord Steel and the Wild Trout Trust.



National Conservation Award

The Tale Valley Trust won the Wild Trout Trust & Classic Malts Conservation Award thanks to the work of local farmers. This is an abridged version of the judges' report.

The River Tale rises in the Blackdown Hills, sweeping through east Devon to join the River Otter at Ottery St. Mary. A small charity was set up in 1999 to preserve and restore the ecological interest of the valley and promote the education of the public into the history, archaeology, art and architecture as well as the river and wildlife interests of this area of Devon.

Key Objectives

The Trust initiated some challenging objectives to improve the river corridor for the benefit of the community and wildlife; targeting all riparian owners on the catchment and funding the production of farm and land management plans.

“... excluding cattle from the river and ditches ...”

There was to be a particular focus on excluding cattle from the main river and feeder ditches so as to improve habitat and water quality.

An Education Ranger was to be employed to carry out various activities including group talks, running events, and river tours for children and adults. A river demonstration walk was to be created to facilitate the adoption of best practice and raise the awareness of other river users and the general public.

Water vole populations in the catchment were to be restored by creating a contained breeding area and by controlling mink. An area of working water meadows was to be restored as a demonstration project.

Work Initiated & Completed

Every major farm was visited in the catchment and advice given on river-friendly management; 25 integrated river management plans have been produced for key landowners in the valley; 5.5km of fencing installed; 4km of coppicing completed to allow light back into the river; 1896 hectares of farmland surveyed and land management advice given to encourage river friendly practices. River habitat improved by in-river faggot-bundles, flow deflectors and installing large woody debris. Buffer zones have been incorporated to lessen the impact of modern agriculture on watercourses. Cattle pasture-pumps have been provided for stock that previ-

ously drank from the river.

Three sites in the valley now have open access; there is a working farm demonstrating how farming interacts with the river, an eight-acre wetland and a 1.2km demonstration trail with interpretation of good and bad management practice. Timber information boards describe different restoration techniques and a newsletter is regularly produced to update on project progress.

“... electric fishing surveys confirm that populations have increased ...”

The water vole refuge has succeeded in establishing new populations on the River Tale; brown trout are more evident and electric fishing surveys confirm that populations have increased since restoration work began; kingfishers are common, and dippers, otters and voles are back.

Conclusion

The Tale Valley Trust is a relatively small but determined group who have made excellent progress in five years tackling a whole host of initiatives. The judges were particularly impressed by

the emphasis placed on the educational aspects of the project and the need to engage the local community, wider public and schoolchildren.

The quality of the interpretation material, particularly the wood carvings was superb and the demonstration of both good and bad farming practice was particularly innovative and easily understood. Project management, reporting and the newsletter were also of high quality. The considerable efforts in gaining project money from a variety of funding sources were recognised.

Finally, the project has a measurable result for trout. Implementing the land management plans, the river rehabilitation, fencing and coppicing initiatives have resulted in a much improved habitat, demonstrated by the increase in the wild brown trout population.



Janet East, one of the many farmers on the River Tale who have changed their farming methods to improve the water quality and wildlife habitat along the