

Caring for the environment - *fact file*

The Thames Water region covers about 13,000 square kilometres (5,000 square miles) and includes hundreds of protected or important conservation sites.

Some of these have rare or protected wildlife or habitats ('biodiversity' – the variety of life); others include important archaeological remains, historic features or landscapes of outstanding natural beauty. Thames Water owns many important conservation sites and always takes environmental issues into account during its work, whether on Thames Water land or across the wider region.

Wildlife on our land

Water and sewage treatment sites are often in remote locations or are fenced off to keep them safe. This means that many species of birds, plants and animals can be found here. Thames Water carries out surveys to check what species are using these sites and to work out how to protect them.

At our Staines Reservoir, a site of European importance for its birdlife, we launched a 64 metre square raft to provide a platform for common terns to nest on. Despite its name, the common tern is no longer seen as often as it used to be. The new raft helps the birds to breed safely away from disturbance by people or predators like foxes.

At Thames Water's Crossness sewage works in east London, we have a major nature reserve that provides special homes for wildlife species that love water. We built a bat cave out of recycled concrete pillars, created shallow wetland areas for wading birds, and reed-filled ditches and banks for water voles, one of the country's most threatened mammals. We also installed paths and bird hides so that the public can come and see the wildlife without disturbing it.

In Oxfordshire, we created three award-winning wetland nature reserves at our Farmoor reservoir: Pinkhill, Shrike and Buckthorn Meadows. These provide a wide range of habitats for animals like the otter (a rare animal that needs good clean water to live in), dragonflies and birds such as redshank, little ringed plover and snipe. We recorded 153 bird species at Farmoor in 2004 alone!

Our cultural heritage

Archaeology is an important consideration in Thames Water's work. Before we lay new pipelines or build new treatment works, we check that we are not going to disturb or destroy important archaeological remains. When we think might affect archaeology, we get archaeologists to monitor excavation and record and preserve any finds. These usually then go to local museums for people to see.

When Thames Water needed to lay a new water main in Buckinghamshire, we made sure that archaeologists checked the route before construction started. We made some exciting unexpected discoveries including the remains of a settlement that may have dated back to the Bronze Age, around 850BC. Archaeologists believe this would have been a farm over 2,800 years ago!

Thames Water owns many historic buildings as well. We recently helped restore the world's biggest steam engine at our Kempton Water Treatment Works where the Kempton Great Engines Museum looks after the historic pump house. The 800-tonne, 62ft engine, named "Sir William Prescott", was built in 1928. It used to



help pump eight million gallons of water per day to north London, working 24 hours per day, seven days a week, and can now be seen in action by visitors to the museum.

The River Thames

Another way in which Thames Water cares for the environment is by making sure that the River Thames can support life. Forty years ago, the quality of the Thames was so poor that it had little or no oxygen to support life. In fact, there were hardly any fish in the river through London. Since then, we have improved the quality of the river so much that over 121 species of fish have been found in the river and its estuary. Even dolphins and seals have been seen in the river.

If oxygen levels suddenly drop, Thames Water can launch a special barge called the Thames Bubbler. This can pump up to 30 tonnes of oxygen back into the river in a single day!

What can you do to care for the environment?

Now you know some of what Thames Water does to care for the environment, why not think about what you could do?

You could carry out a survey to work out what birds and animals visit your school and then see what you can do to protect and encourage them. You put up a bird table or feeding station, or create new homes for wildlife by making boxes for birds or bats. Perhaps you could create a new wildlife garden or wildflower meadow for butterflies in your school grounds – be certain to make sure you use water wisely when creating and managing your garden!

If there are any parks or open countryside near your school, you could try to find out more about the wildlife there. Never visit these sites alone though and always get permission first. Remember not to drop litter or pick wild flowers too! You could even ask local conservation organisations what they know about the area and how you can get involved – try the local Wildlife Trust or the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) who have active groups for young people.

You could also find out what historic sites are near you, learn more about why they are important and what you could do to help protect them. In west London, for example, Thames Water's Kew Bridge Steam Museum is a good place to start.

Why not look at Thames Water's website to see what else we do to care for the environment and think if you could do something similar? If everyone made a small difference, the results would be amazing!