

# AINA CASE STUDY

## THE WAY FORWARD

### River Wardens



*Volunteer river wardens carrying out coppicing work alongside the Thames Path*

#### ***Volunteers from the River Thames Society monitor the full length of the river***

The River Thames Society, established fifty years ago, co-ordinates a network of volunteer river wardens who are each responsible for a reach of the river. Wardens undertake to walk their stretch of river four times a year and report any problems which have arisen. Fifteen wardens cover the tidal river, a further forty look after the non-tidal Thames and their work carries the full support of the Environment Agency, the Port of London Authority and other organisations working by the river.

Problems with the condition of the Thames Path, such as damaged or misplaced signs, missing lifebuoys, potholes, broken gates or footbridges are reported to the National Trails Office. Pollution incidents and fallen trees or other hazards that might block the river are reported directly to the Environment Agency. Injured swans are reported to Swan Lifeline or the RSPCA.

Most wardens take a plastic bag with them to pick up litter on their visits, and some are able to combine their wardening with a daily walk. The wardens also take part in litter clearing days, some of which use boats to reach rubbish in the river and side streams. A Society campaign called 'Tidy up the Thames' has been particularly successful in Oxford and key messages are promoted at boat shows and other events along the river.

The Society is often pleased to report that problems are sometimes addressed within a week. Some of the reaches are largely trouble free and stay in good repair – and the warden's report is able to record that all is well. Others keep an eye on wildlife or improvements, such as interesting or unusual species, enhancements to the path and better facilities for visitors or boats. Some wardens carry out habitat improvements, such as the coppicing of willows and the planting of reeds for birds such as warblers.

The wardens meet annually to share experiences and listen to guest speakers. Their volunteer work has attracted welcome publicity, including interviews on Radio 4 and features in touring photographic exhibitions. Their work is also promoted via the campaigns organised by London-based charity Thames 21, who are now starting to look at projects on the non-tidal river.

Further information: [www.riverthamesociety.org.uk](http://www.riverthamesociety.org.uk)