Henry Shepherd joins River Action

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We’re delighted to introduce Henry Shepherd, our new Communities Coordinator, who will be joining Chloe and Erica in our growing Communities Team at River Action. In our latest blog, we get to know more about Henry and the role that he will play to help rescue Britain’s rivers.

Q1. Tell us about yourself

I’m a young, passionate environmentalist and advocate for protecting the natural world upon which my and my generation’s future depends on. I’ve grown up in-and-around nature, and even in my time I have witnessed its dramatic decline.

I’m desperate to protect and restore what little we have left, especially in the UK – not just because we rely upon it every day, but for its intrinsic value and beauty too. This has spurred my interest in the politics of environmental issues.

Most likely as a result of my appreciation of the natural world, I am a keen traveller, always looking

to visit new places and have new experiences. Apart from that, I enjoy a good country walk, love a bit of reggae, and still can't beat a kick-about with my mates at the park.

Q2. How did you become interested in river protection?

From the canals in Birmingham where I went to University, to the Loch's in the Highlands where I was born, I've always been around water. Every train journey, country walk, or road trip, we cross paths with our waterways. They are the veins of our environment running across the land. Their prolific pollution has infuriated me ever since I've known. How could we allow such short-sighted carelessness to take place, and even worse, allow people to profit from it?

Turning this frustration and sense of injustice into hope can be hard in a sector in which many feel hopeless. Rivers, however, are a great example of how we really can make a difference. They are woven into so many aspects of our society and economy, uniting a wide range of stakeholders and presenting countless opportunities to play a part in working together towards a solution.

So, whilst their desperate need for a voice was enough to motivate me, the potential for our rivers to set the standard for what people who care about the planet can achieve together also inspired me.

Q3. Tell us about your new role as Communities Coordinator at River Action…what can we expect to see from your role in 2024?

I am excited to be publishing and delivering the River Rescue Kit website, which aims to empower and encourage people from all walks of life to get involved in addressing the dire state of our rivers.

As part of this, I will support and work alongside communities and campaigners to ensure that the new government understands that river pollution is an issue that the public cares about, and one that requires immediate and serious action.

I'm also looking forward to coordinating campaigns at a grassroots level, as part of the Thames Campaign, and I'm keen to establish more community connections in Northern Ireland, North England, and in my homeland, Scotland.

Q4. Finally, in your opinion, what is further needed/what needs to change to rescue Britain's rivers?

Firstly, for me, it's an attitudinal shift that is required across certain sectors to one that sees our waterways not as resources to be exploited, but as essential infrastructure underpinning our society, food systems, economy, and our little remaining, wonderful wildlife.

We also need stricter regulation, enforcement of the law, and increased funding – all across the agricultural sector, water sector, and the Environment Agency. This necessitates that precedents be set and lines be drawn by our government and courts to make it clear that the current state of play is not sustainable, and must, and **can,** change.

To achieve this, we have to continue to use our voices to speak up for our rivers and demand that those in positions of power use their privilege to push for this issue to be addressed as a matter of urgency.