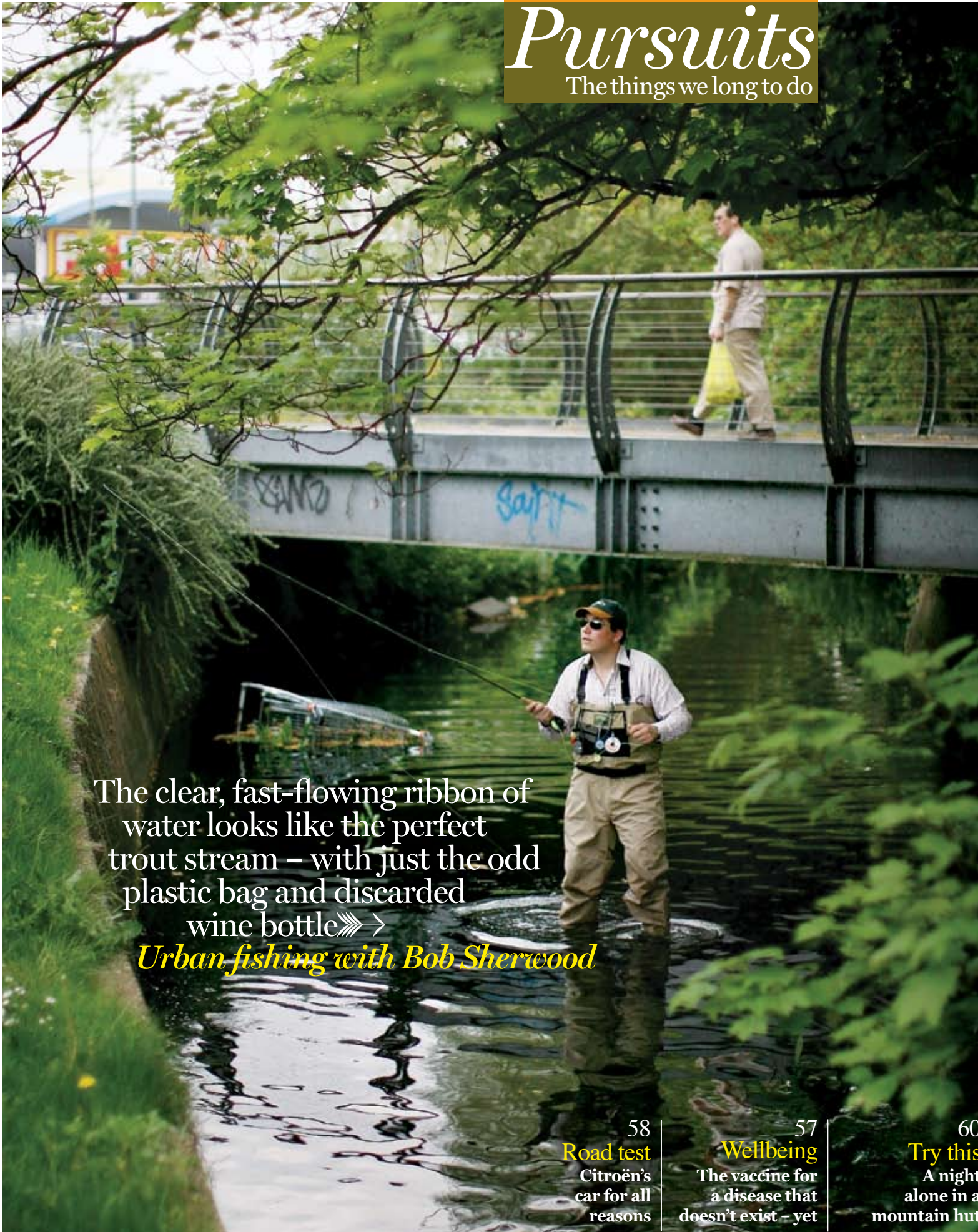


# Pursuits

The things we long to do



The clear, fast-flowing ribbon of water looks like the perfect trout stream – with just the odd plastic bag and discarded wine bottle»»→

*Urban fishing with Bob Sherwood*

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➤ This does not look like trout country. The south London rush-hour traffic is fierce, and my quest to find a brown trout within the city seems futile.

Crawling through the urban sprawl, I reach Merton High Street, where a ribbon of water flows alongside the pavement in front of Sainsbury's. It is what a trout stream is supposed to look like – clear, fast-paced, with waving beds of weed. And just the odd plastic bag and discarded wine bottle.

Mark Lloyd, executive director of the Anglers' Conservation Association (ACA), is already clad in chest waders and attracting strange glances from shoppers as he peers into the river Wandle from the footbridge that leads to the supermarket. Lloyd and I are meeting to see if we can find a London trout in a river that was brought back from the dead, only to suffer more devastating pollution last autumn from a chemical spill at a sewage treatment works.

Lloyd chats to one of the locals, who tells him categorically that there are no fish in the river. He calmly hands the man his polarising sunglasses and points out a fat chub below. "Blimey, look at the size of that," the man chokes. "I remember when this was all just foam."

The water's clarity is testament to the work of organisations such as the ACA and the Wandle Trust. Once the playground of aristocrats, the Wandle was destroyed by the industrial revolution, turning it into a sewer until even its name was largely forgotten. But the modern sanitisation work is making progress. The water is 80 per cent sewage effluent, treated to such a high standard that it can support the notoriously sensitive trout.

Upstream of the bridge, dace are rising to hatching insects. Lloyd and



Bob Sherwood fishes for trout in the Wandle in south London; (below) with Mark Lloyd, who has led the campaign to clean the river up

**"I cast my dry fly into a run of braided currents opposite Merton bus garage"**

I scan the water for signs of feeding trout. Just as we give up, a small fish breaks cover from a strand of ranunculus weed and works its way nervously across a patch of clear gravel. It is a brown trout.

Lloyd is enthused. He has been obsessed by rivers since his boyhood on the banks of the river Yeo in west Dorset. At the age of seven, he started writing protest letters to the local water company, which he perceived to be misusing the river. "I was a real pain the arse, basically."

His passion became a vocation and he founded Thames 21, a charity dedicated to cleaning up London's waterways. He then moved to the ACA, which is the only organisation to sue polluters using common law. "It's my dream job. Rivers are where our most exciting wildlife is. When you clean up the rivers, you get dippers and kingfishers and otters. If you look after the fish, you get all that too."

I'm impatient to try for my trout and climb into the river just as an ambulance roars down the road,

siren blaring. As I start to cast, a fire engine races in the opposite direction. I cast my tiny dry fly into a run of braided currents opposite Merton bus garage. This is weird. It's as though an angling god has dropped a miniature Wessex chalk stream on to the high street.

Almost instantly there is a cry upstream – Lloyd has hooked the first fish. Though it is a dace rather than a trout, it is a symbol of professional achievement for Lloyd.

It was the ACA that stepped in last year after a mistake by Thames Water resulted in thousands of fish being killed by chemical waste. Negotiations with the company led to a deal securing £500,000 over five years to restore the river, which is badly depleted upstream of where we are fishing. "I am optimistic about this river," Lloyd says. "It's going to be better than it was pre-pollution. CSR [corporate social responsibility] is actively biting – it's not just greenwash."

Lloyd quickly catches another fish but I'm struggling. I bite off my



fly to change it – and belatedly remember the sewage effluent.

I work up below the supermarket footbridge until I can cast into the spot where we saw the trout earlier on. Finally, my little paradun fly disappears and a fish pulls back when I lift the rod in triumph. It's not big – and it's not my London trout.

It's another dace. I realise my trout will have to wait – perhaps until more of Thames Water's half a million quid has been spent on improving the river.

The Wandle might turn out to be a success story, but there is still a way to go. There are plenty more legal battles for Lloyd and his team to tackle. Another potential development on the horizon could prove significant for angling's future. The ACA has been working with five other angling organisations, including the Salmon and Trout Association and the National Federation of Anglers, on a unification plan to create a single body for anglers.

If it comes off – and it has been tried before – Lloyd believes it could at last create a powerful national voice for angling, combining political lobbying, conservation and membership benefits. And I wouldn't bet against him as the ideal candidate to lead it.

"It needs to be in the same league as the RSPB," he says. "If anglers really stood up for themselves, we could have healthy rivers that support fantastic fish numbers and millions more people could go out and enjoy fishing."

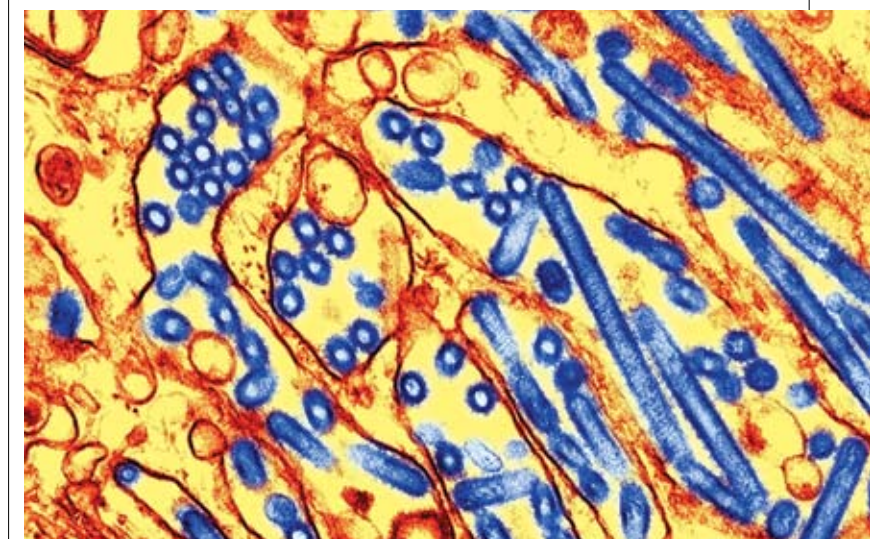
It is heady talk. Yet the Wandle is an example of what can happen with concerted action. Maybe more neglected, abused and forgotten rivers could look like this.

And maybe we need to change our perception of trout country. ■

pursuits@ft.com

## Wellbeing Bird flu jab for humans

By Andrew Jack



Vaccines usually prevent or mitigate the effects of known and serious diseases; an intriguing new one licensed for GlaxoSmithKline is designed for an infection that does not even exist.

Prepandrix has just been authorised by European regulators to protect against the threat of a future human flu pandemic. In theory, regulatory approval means that the vaccine could be given preventively to Europeans and those in Asia, who are closest to the likely epicentre of a pandemic. In practice, the costs, uncertainties and risks mean that only a handful of governments have so far placed orders.

Pandemics kill millions of people every few decades, but the unpredictable nature of the flu virus means that no one can predict how serious a new outbreak will prove. It could be that a variant of the current H5N1 "bird flu" strain, which has killed millions of animals since the turn of the decade, mutates into a form easily transmissible between humans. So far, that has not happened: the worldwide death toll is 240 people.

The fear of virus mutations has spurred pharmaceutical firms to develop what they call "pre-pandemic vaccines" against the H5N1 strain (pictured). Some, such as Glaxo's, include chemical "adjuvants" to boost their effectiveness, which protect against a range of H5N1 variants. But public health officials prefer to dub them "H5N1" vaccines, stressing that they protect against a specific flu strain. They may prove totally ineffective if a pandemic variant is derived from a different family. The Spanish flu of 1918, which killed at least 20 million people, was the sub-type H1N1, for instance.

There is another problem. The current generation of H5N1 products is based on the same manufacturing methods used for seasonal flu jabs, which are cultivated in chickens' eggs. The process – from identifying that year's particular strain, to culture and delivery – takes months. If a pandemic strikes in the next few years, only the lucky few are likely to have access to an effective vaccine in time.

Andrew Jack is the FT's pharmaceuticals correspondent.