

Thames Rivers Trust

Restoring the Thames and its tributaries for people and wildlife

4th June 2018 **An international visit**

TRT Deputy Chairman, Robert Oates, was invited back to Colombia in May to speak again on river restoration; this time at the Seven Rivers Festival organised by new Friends of the River groups from the seven tributaries of the River Cauca which flow through the city of Cali.

These emerging Friends groups operate much like Rivers Trusts in the UK being NGOs and not for profit and run by volunteers ranging from university professors to Uber drivers. They face many of the same issues we have in the UK including pollution, canalisation and loss of biodiversity. They also have issues that we do not often face including illegal slum developments, armed criminal gangs and regular earthquakes!

The Seven Rivers Festival had large media coverage and raised awareness of the issues and possible solutions. It was attended by thousands of members of the public and school students and featured many eye-catching initiatives. Among these was a 'Free water dispensing machine' where the public could choose a free bottle of water from any of the seven tributary rivers. This was a popular free gift in a hot, tropical country. The only catch was the bottle contained the raw water from the river, pollution and all! This machine gained a lot of publicity on a recent tour of shopping centres in the city.

Many schools had stands at the festival and it was inspiring to see their enthusiasm and creativity for tackling the needs of the city's rivers. This Festival follows on from the success of the first ever conference on the River Cauca held in Cali last September. As a result of that conference a 'River Cauca Committee' of stakeholder organisations is being formally set up to plan, fund and deliver the restoration of this major waterway. So long as the current political consensus holds together, the future looks brighter for the rivers, their wildlife and the people of Colombia.'



1 Free water dispensing machine



2 A school water project being explained

3 Rob Oates, TRT Deputy Chairman being interviewed

