



Newsletter

October 2007

Glaven wins!

The RGCG exists to protect and enhance the River Glaven, its tributaries and its flood plain

The annual Wild Trout Trust and Orvis Conservation Awards 2007 were held in the Natural History Museum in London on 16th October. The RGCG had submitted their River Glaven 'Cinderella' Chalk Rivers Restoration Project; and were declared Winner in one of the two categories of this prestigious national scheme.

RGCG representatives with Professor David Bellamy:

Steve Henson
David Bellamy
Ian Shepherd
Carl Sayer

They received the Winner's certificate, a cheque to the value of £1500 - and a bottle for use in toasting the RGCG success.



The independent panel of three Judges visited the sites of all entrants and spoke with the host group in each case; pages four and five illustrate some of what they saw when they came to the Glaven on the 25th September. The Conclusion from the Judges' Report said:

"The judges were inspired by the enthusiasm of the group: it is an excellent model for effective partnership-working to deliver results. On the technical side, reconnection of the river and floodplain by removing the floodbank was particularly innovative, as was the placement of woody debris anchored in newly constructed spawning riffles to diversify habitat. The web site, project reporting, newsletters and open-days all contributed to what the judges regarded as an excellent example of project reporting and dissemination of information to others."

The RGCG owe a debt of gratitude to several people and organisations for their encouragement and support in pursuing and implementing the Cinderella project; Simon Johnson of the Wild Trout Trust, Vaughan Lewis as consultant to the work, The Environment Agency on bank spoil removal and on other counts, the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and Cemex. We also add our grateful thanks to the landowners and farmer.

We aim to work in friendly collaboration with landowners and farmers, Conservation organisations and relevant public bodies.

River Glaven Re-alignment: What now for the Chapel area?

Following the re-alignment of the River Glaven in 2006 the landscaped area north of the channel has become popular for nesting Avocets and other waders. It is interesting to note that the Avocets only seem to select this site after they have failed elsewhere. Nonetheless, there were at least 24 incubating birds in total this year and up to 30 nests in 2006. The bare mud areas (those which are periodically flooded on the very highest tides and also those that are flooded more regularly) were the exact conditions favoured by this species. Unfortunately, four nests were lost due to flooding on Spring tides meeting a high River Glaven. In addition there were two Ringed Plover nests with two other pairs on territory, one Lapwing nest, at least five pairs of Oystercatcher nested and even a Little Ringed Plover utilised this site for breeding purposes.

Owing to the importance of this recently created habitat questions ought to be asked about the future management of the Chapel-scrape area. Should encroaching vegetation and succession be kept in check to keep the site bare and open? Should there be predator control? Should there be better signage and a less ambiguous fence established? Sadly a 'do nothing' approach caused the failure of over 80% of the nests before hatching and of those that did hatch only singletons were seen with parents at the near-fledgling stage. Stoats appear to be the main culprits although the tracks of a human with their dog off a lead was also spotted on one occasion in peak breeding season and this would have constituted a major disturbance.

David Wood National Trust

Spring AGM and Event.

We plan to hold the AGM next April at Cley Village Hall and invite the Environment Agency to speak in the re-alignment on the River Glaven so that it was set back from the shingle bank on the seashore.

This has been an interesting and successful project by the Environment Agency, but David Wood in the above article raises some issues on the future management of the area which now finds itself on the North side of the River Glaven, the Chapel Area.

The linked Event will be a short walk to view the work from the shingle bank and the new sluice for Cley Marshes. There we will have some discussion on the future management. Other things that might also be discussed are measures to aid the movement of sea trout up the river; and conservation grazing on the Blakeney Freshes and elsewhere.



Avocet, Oystercatcher, Little Ringed Plover and Ringed Plover

by courtesy of Richard Brooks

Blakeney Freshes: Breeding Birds 2007

It was a mixed year for breeding birds using the reed bed and reed-filled ditches of the reserve. Two female Marsh Harriers (sired by a single male) managed to fledge four youngsters between them. There were at least four Bearded Tit nests early in the season – one of these fledged three young but the others succumbed to the hostile weather at the end of May and beyond. In addition there were 52 male Sedge Warblers on territory, 47 Reed Warbler territories and four Cetti's Warblers holding territory throughout the breeding season and at least two confirmed nests for this species in one of the territories. Reed Bunting numbers were low once again with just two definite and three probable nests found.

On the wet grasslands of the Freshes a total of 11 Avocet nests were counted. Of these eight nests successfully hatched at least 15 chicks. There were certainly five fledglings and possibly more from these survivors.

Factors in their favour included the farmer acting on advice and keeping his cattle out of the fields with the greatest concentration of nests until they had hatched, the wet summer ensuring good conditions for the chicks to feed, tall grass to hide from predators and continuous vermin control.

There were 54 Lapwing nests in total although several of these included second and third attempts at nesting after earlier failure. Twenty-one of these nests actually reached hatching stage. Later in the season at least six fledglings were seen but several more were suspected. It was impossible to determine the actual number of successfully fledged young owing to the long grass and birds arriving from elsewhere to swell the numbers.

Twenty Redshank nests were found during the season (a number in line with the number of adults using the Freshes at the beginning of April) and apart from five nests being trampled by cattle most of these produced several young. The wet conditions in early summer were really valuable for chick survival as they were able to find plenty of food. At least seven fledglings were known about and it is thought that many more survived to this stage but again it was difficult to get a final total.

Ten pairs of Oystercatcher attempted to nest on the reserve some tried at least twice but only two nests produced any chicks due to predation. Two fledged juveniles were seen later in the summer on the outer fields.

There were fewer nesting waders in 2007 compared to the previous year. However, there was a better rate of survival for chicks. Much work remains to be done to make the Trust-owned wet grasslands more suitable for wader species to breed in the numbers seen in 2001. More intensive grazing with bigger cattle and bigger appetites is a must especially where there is no chance of trampling nests (owing to their absence in certain fields that used to be excellent for breeding waders).

David Wood National Trust



Male Marsh Harrier, Lapwing
by courtesy of **Richard Brooks**

Richard Brooks is a professional wildlife photographer who lives at Fulmodeston. He publishes his images and articles regularly in the bird watching press, and produces limited edition greeting cards, prints and framed pictures.

His 2008 calendar hints at his main passion with 12 photographs of UK raptors. He spends much time on a voluntary basis erecting nest boxes for Barn Owls.

Those interested in his work can contact him on 01328 878632, or email@richard-brooks.co.uk Further details see www.richard-brooks.co.uk

Cinderella Chalk Rivers Project. Restoration Measures One Year On

Photographs are an important part in monitoring the project, before, during and after the various measures were put in place. Photographs taken in late September 2007 illustrate the changes that have taken place since September and mid-October 2006. Our objectives in carrying out this work were summarised in the Judges' Report.

To restore and enhance one km of in-river habitat and increase biodiversity for brown trout, brook lamprey, bullhead and white-clawed crayfish; to enhance the ecological and geomorphological functioning of the river and re-connect the river and floodplain by removing a section of raised floodbank; to develop an experience base for the group in relation to further restoration projects and to establish a demonstration site to show the techniques to other interested parties.



Spoil bank removal, October 2006



The re profiled bank: natural re-generation
September 2007

The successful reconnection of the River and its natural flood plain was demonstrated in the heavy rain event of 25th June 2007 when the meadow retained for 24 hours a large volume of flood water.

The re-profiled bank area, formerly covered by nettles has seen a very successful natural regeneration with a range of plant species. Those on the ledge, plants which thrive in a wet soil.

This stretch of River is no longer shaded by a steep and high bank; sunlight now promotes the growth of aquatic plants such as Water Crowfoot and Starwort.



Aquatic plant growth September 2007

Cinderella Chalk Rivers Project. Restoration Measures One Year On

The photographs below illustrate enhancement of the geomorphological functioning of the River, in the lower reach of the one km stretch



Pre-works September 2006
A slow and uniform river flow



Large woody debris [length of secured tree trunk]
set on a riffle. September 2007



Mid-stream islands set on a riffle and
splitting river flow. September 2007



River narrowing as silt is trapped and plants grow,
increasing rate of flow. September 2007

In addition to the photographic record other 'before and after' studies have taken place on plants and the Water Vole. Tony Leech recorded the vascular plant species on the bank spoil removal area.

A university student Tori Shepherd has undertaken a more detailed study that records plant species composition in a series of one metre squares. The stepped ledge from the River showed some 20 plant species.

Dr. Carl Sayer made a comprehensive survey of the type and distribution of aquatic in-river plants along the whole stretch of the river pre-works in 2006 and the study will be repeated shortly.

The water vole surveys by Steve Henson recorded the density and distribution of burrows, feeding stations and latrines. They showed the works had no adverse impact while improving the in river habitat for the benefit other species.

Some additional work was carried out over three days in late August this year, when the weather was atrocious, and a further three days in September. This was supported financially and with practical help from the Wild Trout Trust, for which we are most grateful. Two further areas of river narrowing were put in place, using a different technique for interfacing with the river; existing riffles were extended using a total of 20 tonnes of reject flint; and 20 tonnes of 10-40 mm gravel were used to give a finer "top dressing" to these riffles, plus being placed on the river bed in two short lengths on the bank removal stretch of river. The finer gravel makes an improvement for trout spawning.



David Bellamy, a vice-President of the Wild Trout Trust, congratulates the RGCG on being declared the Winner in the Professional Category of the Wild Trout Trust and Orvis Conservation Awards 2007.



Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF)

The heavy rains we have had through the summer have posed many problems for farming, not only for production, but for soil erosion and runoff. These conditions have provided the 'worst case scenario' in order to test mitigation and management measures which farmers are putting in place. Driving around the catchment I have been pleased to see that the amount of soil washing off fields and on to the roads has been fairly minimal, which is testimony to the good practice already in place.

Since the April Newsletter ;

- Delivery of advice for farmers on completing Soil Management Plans has continued.
- Approximately 50% of the arable land in the Stiffkey / Glaven catchment is now covered by a CSF approved Soil Management Plan
- Various farm demonstrations / workshop events focusing on reducing soil erosion and run-off are being held through the autumn and winter, organised in conjunction with local agronomy companies and grower groups.
- A free drop in clinic is being held on Friday 16th November at the King's Head, Letheringsett from 10am to 4pm for farmers to get assistance with doing Soil Management Plan and Soil Protection Review Annual Updates.
- The Local Liaison Group, made up of local farmers and land managers, the RGCG, Environment Agency and Natural England continues to meet on a quarterly basis, to influence the CSF work in the area.
- Catchment Sensitive Farming currently has funding to run until March 2008. It is expected that will be funded beyond this, therefore plans are currently being made as to its future direction.

The deadline for applications for the CSF Capital Grant Scheme, which offers grants towards capital works to reduce diffuse pollution, was 30th June 2007. 19 applications were received in the North Norfolk Rivers Catchment, and of these 18 were approved totalling £118,375 of grant This is more applications than any other Norfolk Catchment. This was achieved with the assistance of Ross Haddow, Stody Estate Farm Manager who organised a Capital Grants workshop, and co-ordinated local applications in the Glaven. The most popular works were resurfacing of farm tracks, resurfacing of gateways, relocation of gateways, water crossings, livestock drinking bays, relocation of gates and fencing of watercourses and marshes.

Fencing for the Thornage Meadows County Wildlife Site is being funded using this grant money. This will enable the meadows to be grazed again which is very important to maintain a diverse ecology on the site.

If you are a farmer or land manager in this area and would like a free 1:1 advice visit, to come along to the drop in clinic or would be interested in attending an event on Soil Management to reduce erosion and runoff, please contact me on the number below.

Rosanna Dollman

Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer North Norfolk Rivers and River Nar

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Footnote: The RGCG has observed that the level of soil erosion from fields in 2007 has been less than the previous years of heavy rain events experienced in 2004 and 2001. This is welcome evidence a greater level of awareness of the problem, and actions to reduce, from the farming community. We look forward to the further improvements that will result from the implementation of the CSF grant aid works.

Invasive Alien Species: The Signal Crayfish

The RGCG were invited to a two-day national meeting on Chalk Rivers this summer. The problem of invasive species was a huge concern to all the river groups present: the Signal Crayfish, Himalayan Balsam, Giant Hogweed and Mink in particular. Plant species may totally dominate a river bank, the Signal Crayfish not only displaces permanently the native white-clawed crayfish but causes other severe damage; mink will wipe out water vole populations.

The Glaven so far is relatively unscathed, but in the light of national experience we cannot be complacent.



Signal Crayfish



White-clawed Crayfish



Himalayan Balsam

The greatest potential threat to the ecology of a chalk river is the Signal Crayfish, imported from the USA for the table. It is an absolute plague on the chalk rivers in the south east. It out competes and spreads a disease which is lethal to the native species (think grey and red squirrel on a telescoped time scale). The sheer weight of numbers, the range and amount of what they eat, upsets the whole food chain within a river. They grow large enough, and in such numbers, to burrow 2-3 feet into a river bank and cause collapse into the river. Some 10,000-15,000 a year have been trapped in the Upper Kennet-Lambourne system. The ultimate irony is that with the glut on the London market, in seeking to recoup money in attempting to reduce numbers, the financial returns do not cover the transport costs.

The Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership crayfish surveys of 2006 and 2007 have shown the presence of the signal in one small tributary of the Glaven. Otherwise the river has widespread and good numbers of the native white-clawed. But the Wensum provides a stark example of the dangers inherent in this situation.

The Signal Crayfish can travel significant distances overland. Some ten years ago Signal Crayfish made their way from a pond near Reepham, where they were introduced for food, to the Blackwater, a tributary of the Wensum. From this they moved down into the main river near Lenwade.

Now there is a very large population of Signals between Costessey and Bintree Mill. It has become a spectator sport to watch them moving about at the Ringland and Costessey bridges. The obstructions at Costessey and the Mill are having a check on their spread, but for how long? The Wensum experience repeats that of elsewhere. It is essential that action is taken early to contain the threat. If not, there is as yet little hope of getting rid of them once they expand their territory and population.

The ecologist who carried out the 2006-07 survey is a recognised expert and has to have a licence from Natural England to trap and handle the White-clawed Crayfish as part of his studies, and rightly so as it is a protected species. But neither land use planning, the Environment Agency or anybody else, seems to have the means to avoid the damage that can be caused to wild life by such introductions; they are an accident waiting to happen. We have to rely on trying to increase public awareness, and make landowners aware when there is a problem on their doorstep, and look for a sympathetic response - and at as early a stage as possible.

Finally we add that the RGCG had a one day work party on 22nd July to clear a hot spot of Himalayan Balsam on the Glaven, above Thornage Mill. Hopefully by clearing any patches each year, and even a few or single plants, we will be able to avoid on the Glaven the sight now very common along the banks of many rivers in England - solid lines of this plant as far as the eye can see.

Dr Ian Shepherd



Newsletter

October 2007

NEWS IN BRIEF

- Lisa Turner, the Environment Agency officer co-opted to the RGCG committee, has been able to source £3,000 for a project which would help to reduce the impact of diffuse pollution on the Glaven. The money will be targeted in installing a silt trap just upstream of Selbrigg Pond, in the upper reaches of the Glaven. This will improve the pond, a county wildlife site, but also make a contribution to a reduction in level which progressively moves downstream.
- Planning work is being progressed on two river restoration projects upstream of the Cinderella work, and seeking the necessary funding. The practical work would take place in the summer of 2008. If this comes to fruition, then the middle reach of the river from Letheringsett Ford to the disused rail bridge at Hunworth will be in good condition.
- Adrian Southern attached to the RGCG committee through PhD research at UEA gave a presentation of his work to local farmers and conservationists on the 9th October, followed by two workshops. The methodology has entailed creating a digital map derived from ordnance survey, aerial surveys and walking parts of the River Glaven catchment. Using computer modelling, the impact on the landscape of two broad alternative futures can be shown. These are not in the way of predictions of what will happen, but as a tool to help to think about the future, and the type and level of environmental and ecological benefits that might be sought.
- Holt Hall Field Studies Centre now uses the "Cinderella" stretch of river for field trips for Norfolk Schools. The students range from youngsters to A level, and the studies from the physical properties of the river to plant and invertebrate surveys. The RGCG are grateful to the land owning interests for granting access for this purpose.
- The AGM in April was held at Letheringsett Mill, and was followed by a very interesting talk and demonstration of the only working water mill in Norfolk, and some welcome refreshments. We are most grateful to Mike and Marion Thurlow for this. On the 6th October they celebrated the opening of the top floor of the mill to the public. Norman Lamb MP cut the ribbon, having intervened at national level to settle a difference lasting three years between English Heritage and the Fire Authorities on how best to reconcile the integrity of the Grade 2* listed building with public safety.

Volunteer Help Needed

We would like to hear from members if they might be interested in helping from time to time with a range of practical tasks. This could vary from two hours of light work pulling out Himalayan Balsam to moderately strenuous physical river restoration work. Tasks are often not easy to precisely plan well ahead, so we would like to be able to work from a list of those who might be available to help; in this case an e-mail address would be very useful as well as a telephone number to act at short notice. If you think you might be interested then please contact Ian Shepherd.

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Len Bentley Treasurer & Membership Secretary 01263 741076.
Web site www.riverglaven.org.uk