



NEWSLETTER

THE AGM AT GLANDFORD MILL

Our AGM and "Open Day" has been arranged for Saturday the 29th April at 3pm at Glandford Mill. Our thanks go to the owner Willie Brownlow for giving us the opportunity to have the meeting at the Mill house. Leave the Wiveton- Letheringsett road and head for the ford at Glandford and follow directions.

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

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

At 3pm we start with the brief formal business, supported by a one page Members Report. This will be followed by a half hour illustrated talk by Steve Henson on "Grazing Glaven Valley Grassland". Dr. Carl Sayer will follow with 15 minutes or so on the theme that "Messy Rivers are Good Rivers". There will be time for questions on both talks before taking a walk to look at the nearby river valley wetlands. We will conclude with tea, and a chance for further discussion, at 4.30pm.

Both Steve and Carl are members of the RGCG committee. Steve is a staff member of the Norfolk Wildlife Trust; as a conservation officer he has a particular interest in river valley wetlands including wet grassland and fens. Carl is a lecturer at University College London, and is a specialist on freshwater plants and algae.



Volunteers Wanted.

The article on the next page illustrates how we are gradually expanding our practical conservation work and now looking beyond committee members for volunteer resource. There are a range of activities we seek to carry out. We are not necessarily asking for a "heavy" commitment, either in time or physical effort. If you think you might be able to help then please catch one of the committee members over a cup of tea at the AGM, or call one of the officers (see back page).

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News in Brief

Contributors to this Newsletter express their own opinions which do not necessarily reflect those of RGCG.

The RGCG would be pleased to receive articles for inclusion in their future Newsletters.

In-River Improvements.

The Wild Trout Trust has awarded the RGCG a grant of £1,500, for which we are most grateful. This comes from a National Scheme, the Cinderella Project, which is administered by the Trust and the Environment Agency. The scheme seeks to promote conservation work on some of the less well known English chalk rivers. The RGCG objective is to improve a stretch of in-river habitat for various species of fish, invertebrates and water plants.

A significant part of the grant will be spent on a consultant who can advise on the practical detail of our proposals; and the costing for materials, machine work and man hours of labour (the voluntary component will be funding in kind).

The reasons for obtaining this expert advice are two-fold. The first is to ensure that the landowners are in agreement of what is planned, both the wider concept and the specific work; and the second is to enable us to apply for a licence of consent from the Environment Agency, necessary for any river works great or small. Also of course we want to see the work done to the best of our ability.

The stretch of the river for which the work is proposed runs through the river meadows immediately upstream from Letheringsett Ford to beyond Thornage Common. Our ambition is that the "before and after" measures and wildlife improvements will have an educational purpose for schools as well as the intrinsic wildlife benefits. If as we very much hope the project comes to fruition then there will certainly be scope for voluntary labour!

Alder Clearance on wet fens and grasslands

Alder trees add value to the landscape and wildlife of wet areas; as a group of trees, overhanging the river, or along a meadow boundary. The wildlife contribution is perhaps most evident in winter, when they can attract feeding flocks of siskins mixed with some redpolls, or provide a day roost area on the ground for woodcock.

However alder are less welcome when they spread across the river meadows. These are very important not only in landscape terms but in the habitat for wild flowers, small mammals and barn owl hunting ground.

Alder spread easily on wet ground and grow very quickly. Normally they would be grazed out as small saplings by cattle, but most of our meadows have suffered in recent years from a lack of grazing, because of economic pressures on British beef.

An RGCG work party recently removed some 50 selected saplings, some grown to a substantial size, that were encroaching on parts of the river meadows upstream of Letheringsett Ford. Care was taken to leave saplings growing along the banks of the river as these are an important source of food for invertebrates and fish, as well as for the input of woody material which is important for the overall ecological well-being and diversity of the riverine system. This was done by hand using a bow saw. The trees were cut close to the ground, and the stump treated to prevent new growth. The felled young trees were trimmed of their branches and reduced to the pole and brash. The poles were set aside for use for in-river habitat improvement works; and the brash collected and put in piles elsewhere on the river bank to provide cover and a feeding area for wildlife; birds, invertebrates and small mammals.

The whole exercise took about 50 man hours, spread over three or four of the less cold days in February.



Himalayan Balsam

Last year we cleared some “hot spots” of Himalayan Balsam, an alien invasive plant which just loves to grow along river banks. It looks quite attractive as a garden flower, but unless controlled will quite quickly spread and blot everything else out.



This plant is by no means alone in creating very serious problems as an escapee, and is by no means the worst, but is now widespread through the UK, not infrequently arising off anglers boots or equipment. In the case of the Glaven probably most often from seeds carried into the river during heavy rainfall, from gardens and via tracks or roads or ditches. Amongst the plethora of gardening programmes it is about time there was a TV series on what you might buy and put in your garden or pond, and the devastation it can cause elsewhere to our native habitats.

It takes at least two or three years to completely eradicate Himalayan Balsam and exhaust the seed bank in the soil. This summer we will re-visit affected sites and no doubt find some new ones. Potential volunteers please note that the good news is that the plant is easy to pull, and flowers in the summer when the weather is generally pleasant, or at least warmer than it has been of late!*Ian Shepherd*

LET SLEEPING LOGS LIE

The UK Wildlife Trusts and Water for Wildlife have produced an illustrated booklet “Managing Woody Debris in Rivers and Streams”.

The case is made for woody debris being a vital component in our watercourses and its removal has severely degraded their health. The positive ecological contribution of woody debris has often been overlooked or downplayed, while impacts on water flow and bank erosion have been misunderstood or exaggerated.

Branches, large limbs, root boles or entire trees that have fallen into rivers are commonly referred to as large woody debris. Accumulation of small branches, twigs and leaf litter are known as coarse woody debris. A great deal of taxpayers' money has been spent on the removal of woody debris from rivers. As recently as the late 1990s over 400 “timber blockages” were cleared from the Wye River Catchment, a river noted for its Salmon interest.

However the role of woody debris in the healthy functioning of freshwater ecosystems has become increasingly recognised in research carried out in different parts of the world since the 1980s. Large woody debris provides habitat for fish by promoting shelter from high velocity flows, shade, feeding and spawning and nursery sites. It creates different in-stream habitats by adding complexity to the river channel; it helps to create new sediment pathways resulting in a range of micro-habitats for aquatic plants and animals.



Woody debris provides an abundance of surfaces, in which algae, microbes and invertebrates can colonise. These make up the base of the aquatic food chain and provide food, directly and indirectly, for all creatures associated with the watercourse - including mayflies, crayfish, trout, kingfishers and otters.

One of the main functions performed by woody debris is the removal of fine silt from the system by creating silt “benches” immediately upstream. It allows the oxygenation of deposited silts, thus improving water quality. The process also helps to prevent gravels, a key habitat for invertebrates and for fish to spawn, from becoming silted over.

The pamphlet offers some advice on managing woody debris; but the overriding principle is that, unless there is a strong and well supported case to the contrary, you should let sleeping logs lie!

A download PDF version of the pamphlet can be found at www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk or is available from Steve Henson at Norfolk Wildlife Trust

THE CRYSTAL CLEAR WATERS OF SELBRIGG POND

Over the last few centuries several lakes and ponds have been dug in the Glaven valley, including, mill ponds, stew ponds, duck decoys and ornamental lakes. As with the Norfolk Broads many of these waterbodies are connected to, or are directly associated with the river, and consequently are very much part of the conservation interest of the valley. However, in contrast to the Broads where most lakes have been severely damaged by pollution and intense boating activity, a number of the Glaven lakes have remained relatively little disturbed over time. One such lake is Selbrigg Pond in the upper reaches of the Glaven between lower Bodham and Holt. Dug in the early 1800s as a decoy pond and later harnessed as a store of water to help power Hempstead Mill, Selbrigg is probably one of the highest quality freshwater lakes in eastern England (honestly this is not an exaggeration!). Whereas eutrophication (the enrichment of freshwaters by phosphorus and nitrogen compounds) has made most of the Norfolk Broads green with algae, Selbrigg has retained its clear waters to the present day. If you look over the dam wall the waters of the pond are almost always gin clear and in the summer you will see dense beds of submerged weeds – this is what shallow lakes should be like!



At least 10 species of underwater plant (among others various pondweeds, rigid hornwort, ivy-leaved duckweed, fan-leaved water crowfoot) inhabit the lake, including in some years dense meadows of stoneworts, a group of simple plants that are only present in the very cleanest of lakes (see our newsletter for Autumn 2004). However, it is not just plants that make the lake an important site for nature conservation. The pond contains the rare **lesser whirlpool ram's-horn snail** (*Anisus vorticulus*), a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species, and a recent dragonfly survey found an amazing 18 species. Moreover, the pond is also an important site for wildfowl and other important birds such as kingfisher and although there are not many recent sightings, otter has also been seen by early morning fisherman.

In Selbrigg Pond we have one of the very best places for aquatic plants and animals in Norfolk.

If RGCG members have seen any interesting wildlife at Selbrigg Pond the committee would be very keen to hear from you. Please contact Carl Sayer (c.sayer@ucl.ac.uk; 01263 588 266).



Carl Sayer

MSc STUDENTS PROJECT

This summer two MSc students from University College London will carry out some studies on the Glaven. The National Trust has asked Carl Sayer to organise an examination of the River Bure and compare vegetation and invertebrates on two types of river bank. Firstly the more natural environment where the gradient gently slopes from the river into the adjoining meadow; and that resulting from the 1970's preoccupation with regularly dredging the river and creating high silt and gravel banks on one or both sides of the river. In other words study the hydrological and ecological connections between the river and the flood plain in two broadly different types of situation.

The National Trust is funding this project. Although their primary interest is the River Bure, they agreed that comparison and bench marking with another river in the area would be a good idea and the Glaven was chosen for this purpose



CREATING AN ECOLOGICAL NETWORK

Over the past 60 years in England we have seen in parallel a rise in intensive agriculture accompanied by the protection and management of designated wildlife sites, with a hierarchy from local to national to European/international in level of importance.

There is now an increasing awareness that such a situation will be inadequate for the long-term survival of biodiversity in the countryside. Because nature reserves are fragmented and isolated from one another movement of species between sites is hindered, but with climate change this is just what species will need to do more!

There is therefore the need for large scale restoration that links up these designated sites, and a "landscape scale" approach.

A new booklet* published by the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership envisages an ecological network in Norfolk that would consist of **core areas** – the current designated wildlife sites; **buffer areas** surrounding these sites to reduce the impact of adjacent land-uses; **enhancement areas** where there would be a focus on habitat creation; and **corridors**

designed to aid connectivity between the sites through the wider countryside.



The connectivity role becomes particularly important for non-flying wildlife. These are vulnerable to the population dwindling in a fragmented site, or a natural local disaster to the habitat. Further as climate change might require a more northerly migration of species this will be aided by the linking network between similar habitat types. The connectivity or stepping stone component is key to the ecological network, and will require the enhancement of parts which are already there, or putting

them in place where they are missing. River valleys are an existing and important part of the network, and a photograph of the Glaven Valley is used to make the point.

Making Space for Wildlife and People. Creating an Ecological Network for Norfolk. Copies can be downloaded from the Norfolk Biodiversity Website at www.norfolkbiodiversity.org. or from Reg Land at Norfolk Wildlife Trust.

GLAVEN RIVER AND BLAKENEY FRESHES; CLEY AND SALTHOUSE MARSHES

The Environment Agency, with contractor engineering companies Halcrow and Jackson, started work last September on the Blakeney Freshes-River Glaven Diversion project, and the Cley and Salthouse Marshes Drainage Improvement project. Construction work on these projects continues, and the new cut for the river from near the Blakeney Eye westwards has been completed, together with a new bank just south of the cut. The old course of the channel close to the shingle bank is being filled in and there is now a navigable channel from Cley Mill through to Blakeney Pit. At least



one boat sailed through the new route on the first day that it was open. The footpath from Blakeney to Cley along the river has now been re-opened along its modified route. Whilst some permanent signage has still to be erected, temporary signs are in place, and users are urged to stay on the crest for their own safety.

The flood relief scheme for Cley and Salthouse marshes is also now being built. At the Cley Beach Road a new sluice comprising of three very large pipes will allow any sea flood water that might breach the shingle bank to drain into the River Glaven as soon as the tide falls. The spoil from this sluice discharge channel is being used for the back fill of the old course. There is also a spillway in the East Bank to allow

any flood water in the Salthouse Marsh to be routed to the Glaven through these same sluices.

The combined cost of these two projects is about £1.5million. It is being funded by the Environment Agency with a grant from Defra (Department for the Environment, foods and Rural Affairs). Linked to it is a partnership of the Agency with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and the National Trust aimed at enhancing the nature conservation and recreational use of the area and promoting rural tourism. This attracts a further £0.5million of European Union funding, and £0.25million from the East of England Development Agency. This will finance the construction of a new visitor centre at the Norfolk Wildlife Trust's Cley Marshes reserve.



John Woodward

The RCGC are grateful to Mike Page for allowing us to reproduce his aerial photographs here.

WILD TROUT TRUST

The Wild Trout Trust works for the protection and enhancement of habitat that supports a healthy wild trout population. In doing do this benefits wild life in general [see page 2, "In-River Improvements"].

We enclose a leaflet which illustrates the work of the Trust. We would encourage RCGC members and people that they know to consider whether they would like to take membership of the Wild Trout Trust and support their work.

FACILITATING CONSERVATION GRAZING IN THE RIVER GLAVEN VALLEY

The Glaven Valley supports a number of areas of wet floodplain grassland and small patches of fen (over peat), both priority habitats as part of the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan and there is also a corresponding Norfolk action plan for these habitats. In addition, in the Glaven Valley upstream of the coastal marshes, most if not all of the unimproved wet grasslands and any remaining areas of fen are notified County Wildlife Sites (CWS) where the management emphasis is ideally on the conservation of the semi-natural vegetation (most CWS support a species-rich or moderately species-rich flora) that these sites support. In the past these and other grassland habitats were managed principally by seasonal grazing with livestock (cattle and sheep), yielding an open and diverse sward and preventing succession to scrub and drying of sites. However during the last 5-10 years, a number of events and factors within farming have resulted in a reduction in the presence and availability of livestock within Norfolk and we now have a situation within the Glaven Valley where landowners are often unable – reluctantly – to undertake grazing management of these wet grassland and fen sites.

In many cases, the vegetation on these sites has become rank and in places is becoming dominated by tall, coarse and vigorous herb and grass species. Without intervention, the floristic diversity of these sites will decrease, become impoverished and both scrub encroachment and drying are likely to ensue. Scrub encroachment leads to further enclosure of the valley with trees and scrub, making it more difficult or impossible to encourage snipe, lapwing and redshank back to these meadows to breed once again.

It is essential that these sites are managed by grazing (preferably at low intensities using appropriate breeds e.g. Highland cattle) but unfortunately we are unlikely to see a return in the foreseeable future to a situation where separate landowners are able to viably manage and/or own livestock. This is a barrier to conservation management of these sites. Secondly, although the new DEFRA Environmental Stewardship (ES) scheme is now in operation, capital items including fencing, gates and other infrastructural items essential for the management of livestock are only available under Higher Level Stewardship and successful entry into this is likely to be difficult or impossible for owners with small landholdings.



Rush incursion due to lack of grazing



Flower rich meadow

The River Glaven Conservation Group would like to facilitate the recommencement of conservation grazing management of the Glaven Valley wet grasslands and fen sites by helping landowners to enter the new Environmental Stewardship scheme and there will be opportunities to work with graziers who can bring appropriate livestock breeds into the valley, yielding both nature conservation and landscape benefits that help to attract the many visitors to the Glaven Valley who contribute towards the local economy. The Group is working with the DEFRA Rural Development Service and a number of landowners to develop a joint Higher Level Stewardship scheme which we hope we will be able to submit to DEFRA within the coming months – many of you will be aware of this and have already demonstrated your commitment to the conservation of the Glaven Valley by agreeing to be part of this ambitious and exciting project. It is early days as yet and there are a number of potential hurdles left in developing such a project but we hope that it will benefit a number of local landowners, as well as the valley's wildlife and that there will be cattle grazing again quite soon. Watch this space!

Steve Henson



NEWSLETTER

News in brief.

- † The River Glaven has been highlighted as one of the top 40 areas in England and Wales suffering from diffuse pollution problems. In December DEFRA announced funding for about 30 new 'Catchment Sensitive Farming Officers' who will be working with landowners, farmers and other interested groups to reduce diffuse pollution entering the river. We are delighted that one of these posts will be covering the rivers Glaven, Stiffkey, Burn and Nar. The officer, funded for initially 2 years from April 2006, will raise awareness of diffuse Pollution (including soil, silt and nutrients) amongst the farming community and support change through advice and incentives
- † North Norfolk Camera Club. Their summer competition for 2005 was centred on the River Glaven. Some of their photographs will be able to be seen on our web site in the near future.
- † Two RGCG committee members met with the headteacher and a colleague at Blakeney School. They were keen to pursue a project to see trout hatch. A package for schools would be available from the Galloway Fisheries Trust. The RGC will be contributing towards the costs of the project
- † Approximately forty farmers and landowners have been interviewed in the Glaven River catchment area as part of a University of East Anglia research project investigation on agricultural and environmental management and policy change.
- † **The membership of the RGCG has now passed the 100 mark. This is most encouraging, but we shall continue to look for new members!**

Next committee date is to be held late May.

Please contact a committee member with any issues you wish to raise before this date.

Web site www.riverglaven.org.uk

A colour version of this Newsletter in PDF format is available from the Visitors Page.

Robin Combe Chairman 01263 712058;
Ian Shepherd Secretary 01263 713370;
Len Bentley Treasurer & Membership Secretary 01263 741076.
magavelda@freeuk.com