



Newsletter

Spring 2011



Hunworth project

Re-alignment of river channel
taken October 2010

**We aim to
work in
friendly
collaboration
with
landowners
and farmers,
conservation**

RGCG APPLY TO JOIN ART

The RGCG has applied for membership of the Association of River Trusts. We are also pursuing obtaining charitable status. See page 2

RGCG ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Saturday 4th June, 2.30pm

at Hunworth Village Hall

The Village Hall lies about halfway between the Hunnybelle pub and Hunworth Hall and the Mill. Car parking is available at the Village Hall.

The AGM and the members visit to the Hunworth Project site will be kindly hosted by the Stody Estate. The formal AGM business will be conducted between 2.30pm and 3pm. There will then be a conducted tour of the river site, leaving and returning to the Village Hall by tractor-trailer. The party will then be split into two halves, the first departing at 3pm and the second ten minutes later.

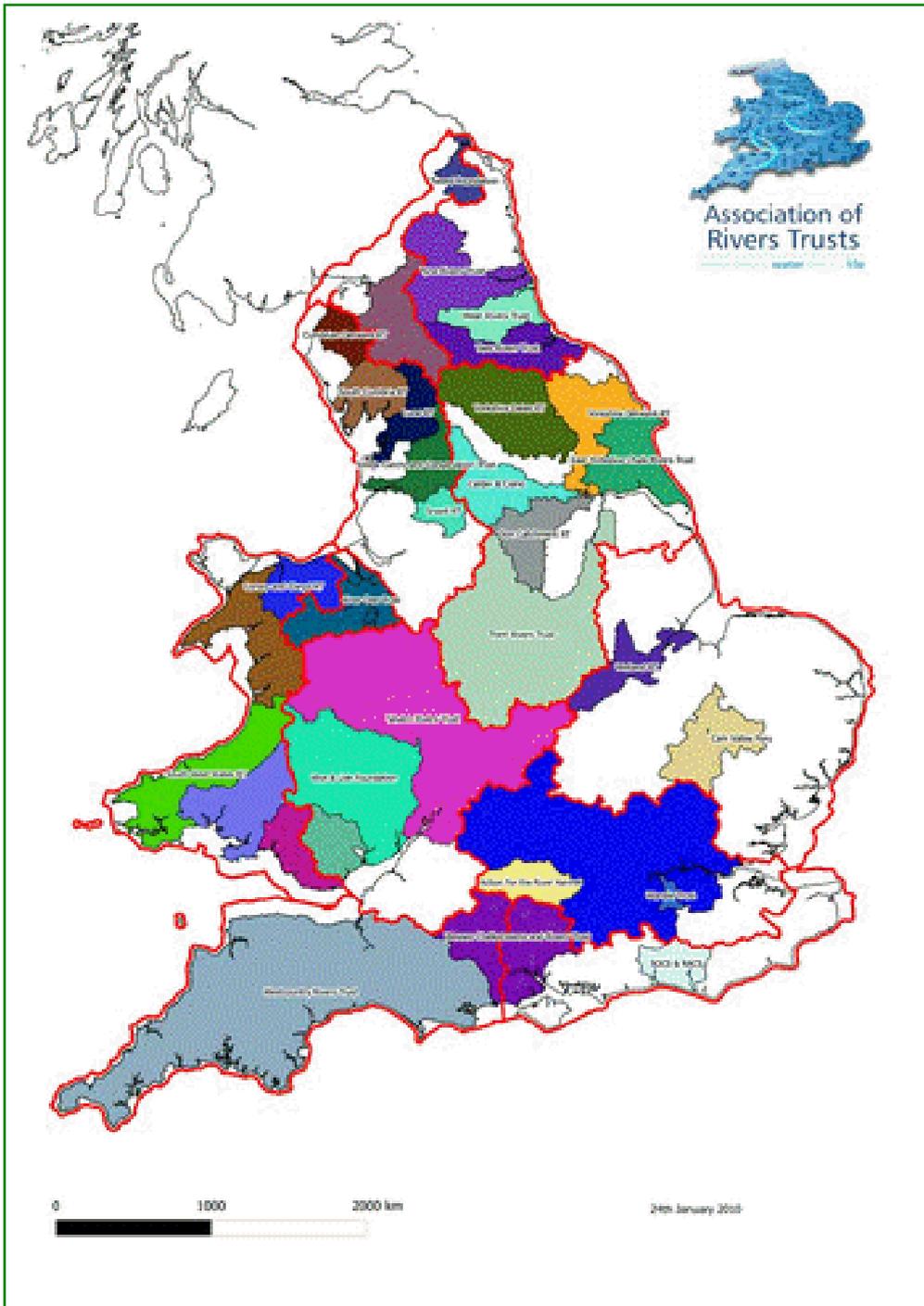
Those with a major role in the project will be stationed at points along the stretch of river and speak from their specialist contribution. They will include Professor Richard Hey on the river engineering aspects, Environment Agency operations team, Carl Sayer of the RGCG on the ecology and physical monitoring studies, and Tim Jacklin of the Wild Trout Trust.

On returning from the river walk tea and cake will be served in the Village Hall, where there will be a poster display.

RGCG members are welcome to bring a guest who would be interested in the river; and particularly so should they consider becoming a member!

The Stody Estate will also invite some guests. Because of the logistics of the river walk it would be very helpful if we had some indication of the total numbers who would like to do the walk - or go for the ride and just look at river without walking the 400 yards of river bank . We ask therefore that you ring Ruth Keen at the estate office with number attending on 01263 860572 ahead of the day.

The Association of River Trusts



Archie Ruggles-Brise, director SE region of the Association of River Trusts, gave a presentation of the aims and activities of ART to the RGCG committee on 14th March.

It was clear that the objectives and work of the RGCG over the past 10 years closely mirrored the ART philosophy and strategy, in both partnership working and project activities.

ART has 37 Trusts, near 100 full-time employees, 1,400 volunteers and 15,000 supporters. They have a National Partnership Agreement with the Environment Agency, and a memorandum of Agreed Principles with Natural England.

ART have had responsibility for the distribution of £5m over the past 5 years, and Defra has channelled £4m funding through ART over the past two years. Some 85% of all funding received by ART is distributed to the constituent membership.

The Rivers Trusts movement is entirely voluntary, they work on the river catchment approach and eco principles. They seek to engage people who own or manage land, such as riparian owners. They work with the landowner, but do not own land. While there is a wide geographical spread of the Trusts across

the country, there is currently something of a gap in East Anglia, see map.

The committee felt that the RGCG embodied all that ART represented, and decided that the RGCG should seek membership of ART (cost £50pa).

Prior to the meeting, committee members had looked at the very helpful extracts of the ART web site on how to progress to charitable status, to which Archie had referred us. The advantage of being a member of ART for the exchange of information and experience was clear, and so were the increased opportunities for funding support for major projects on the Glaven. In fact it might

be very difficult to achieve our ambitions without a change of status and method of operating.

A key issue is that registration as a charity with the Charity Commission requires a minimum annual income of £5,000pa. While the RGCG could not register with the Charity Commission, we could apply directly to Her Majesty's Revenue and Custom for tax relief. Like a registered charity number, an HMRC charity number should be accepted by banks and grant bodies as evidence of charitable status. This appears to be a rather long and tortuous process, but the committee felt that we should seek to pursue this objective.

Summarised by Ian Shepherd

Rolling News: £100m cash boost for river wildlife

An EDP report of the 16th April was headlined '£100m cash boost for river wildlife'. We quote the report verbatim, and highlight in **'bold'** some points upon which to comment from an RGCG perspective.

*More than £100m is being provided to help improve England's rivers for wildlife such as otters and trout, environment secretary Caroline Spelman said yesterday. Some £92m will go to **removing invasive weeds and animals**, clearing up pollution and removing redundant weirs, dams and other man-made structures over the next four years to restore rivers to a better condition.*

The money will be shared between the Environment Agency, Natural England and groups such as the Association of River Trusts, with a significant portion going to a "catchment restoration" fund to support local projects across the country. An additional £18m will be provided this year to help farmers reduce pollution from agriculture and protect rivers, for example putting in "buffer strips" of land between fields and water courses.

Mrs Spelman said: "The health of our rivers has come along in leaps and bounds, but we still see nasty invasive weeds and lifeless waters blight our blue spaces in our cities and

countryside. With this funding, we'll help all our waterways and streams thrive by tackling problems that until now have been sitting in the 'too-hard' basket.

Our new grassroots approach to boosting healthier waterways and flourishing wildlife has local experience and knowledge at its heart," she added.

Ralph Underhill, co-ordinator of Our Rivers campaign, which is backed by the RSPB, WWW-UK, the Angling Trust and the Salmon and Trout Association said: "This new funding may not solve all the problems overnight but it is a significant step towards securing the future of the river environment in England and Wales, which is under great pressure from a variety of threats including pollution and abstraction."

The RGCG can lay a claim to having contributed to these aims over the ten years of its existence, and have the capability and contacts to do more so in the future. We are a local voluntary group, with much local experience and knowledge, working with the Environment Agency and Natural England and individual specialists and organisations such as the Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Our aims embody a 'whole catchment' approach and links to the wildlife of the river, the meadows, tributaries and ponds; and to factors which affect water quality, and the whole ecology of the river system.



The last has been the focus of much of our voluntary effort, and we single out the signal crayfish as a massive problem, which has been firmly stuck in the 'too-hard' basket. As long ago as 1996, the angler John Wilson in the Norfolk Journal pointed out that the advance into East Anglia river systems of the American signal crayfish was 'unquestionably on its way'. 'It would have eventually a catastrophic effect upon coast and game fishing due to its dominance of the invertebrate life inhabiting the bottom of our river systems'. 'As far as freshwater anglers are concerned, the signal is undoubtedly the crayfish from hell'. Already it has spread through most rivers in Oxfordshire and Berkshire and I know for certain that it's now common in parts of the Upper Wensum between Norwich and Fakenham'.

The signal not only wipes out the indigenous white-clawed crayfish it upsets the whole ecology of the river. It can also do much physical damage by large numbers burrowing some 2-3m into the bank and causing collapse into the river. At a national 'chalk rivers' symposium organised by the Environment Agency in 2007 the signal was recognised by all conservation groups as right at the top of their priorities as it had taken a huge hold in rivers and looked to be almost impossible to eradicate, certainly not without long term and very expensive programmes.

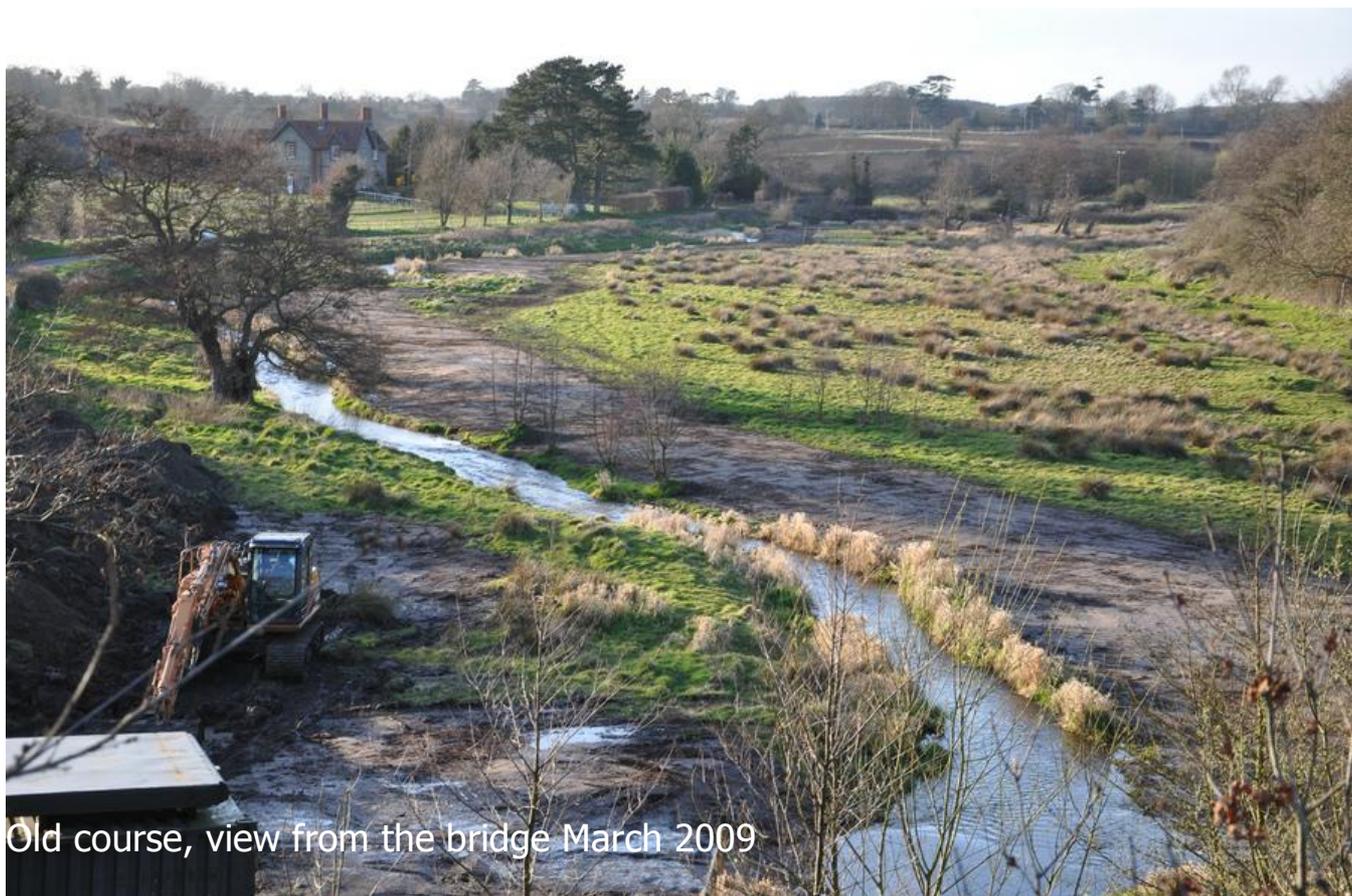
The RGCG have been trying to hold the line in the Glaven, which still can boast a healthy population of the native species in much of the river. But one stream in the middle reach is heavily infected and there is a great danger that this will spread to the river itself. We have enlisted the help of not only our own volunteers, but have had very considerable support from the Environment Agency, and a

specialist ecologist who has done surveys on the distribution of the native white-clawed species, which still thrives upstream of Letheringsett Mill, and who also has joined in on the trapping programme for the signal, which originated as 'escapes' when introduced for food in a pond fed by a watercourse.

Our first restoration project was the Cinderella Project at Little Thornage in October 2007. The Hunworth river restoration project saw a phase 1 in March 2009, when spoil on the east bank from past river dredgings was removed. The main works in Phase 2 took place in August 2010, and involved a major re-alignment of the river channel to make it more sinuous (and re-profiled the river bed into deep pools and sallow riffles). Some of the original channel was left as backwaters. These changes are shown by the three aerial photographs on pages 4 and 5, taken in October 2010.

Ian Shepherd

Hunworth project



Old course, view from the bridge March 2009



New channel downstream stretch October 2010

Hunworth project contd



New channel mid stretch October 2010



New channel upstream stretch October 2010

What do otters eat in the Glaven catchment?

In the Autumn 2009 edition of the RGCG newsletter we talked about forth-coming research into otter diet within the Glaven catchment. Well, after lots of hard work both collecting and analysing otter spraints here are the results...

Otters have undergone a dramatic recovery in England over the last decade and this is also the case for the Glaven. Only a decade ago signs of otter were rare within the Glaven catchment, but today there are regular sightings of animals and we have been finding spraints (otter droppings) all over the place, by the river, beside ditches and at ponds, some of which are some distance away from the nearest water course. Otters running through the corn fields at night I hear you say? Its true! All of this suggests that otter may now be at peak population levels.

Over 2009-2010 Derek Sayer, Terry Linford (RGCG members) and Carl Cornwall (Bayfield Angling Society) collected otter spraints on a weekly to bi-weekly basis from six locations in the Glaven catchment and in spring-summer 2010 several ponds were also visited by UCL MSc student Mizuki Murai, again under the expert supervision of Derek and Terry. Rain, shine and snow the spraint collectors wandered the Glaven's waterways searching for otter signs. Often Derek and Terry were rewarded by a cup of tea by some very friendly lake owners, but despite 50-60 fieldtrips, an otter they did not see! The collected spraints, numbering several hundred, were analysed by visiting academic

David Almeida with the later assistance of Mizuki.

So what did we find? In the 1970s otters were quite rare along the Glaven and diet studies at this time (two studies by Weir & Bannister) recorded eel and stickleback as the dominant diet components. Today, white-clawed crayfish, brown trout, cyprinid fishes (e.g. roach, rudd and common carp), perch, waterbirds (especially duck, coot and moorhen) and amphibians (especially in spring) are more important. Also, whereas some sea fishes were consumed (e.g. bass, flounder) in the 1970s, this if not the case currently and we found little evidence for coastal feeding. These results likely reflect changes in the local abundance of fishes, especially the decline of eel (a symptom of the more general European decline) and a relatively recent recovery of white-clawed crayfish.

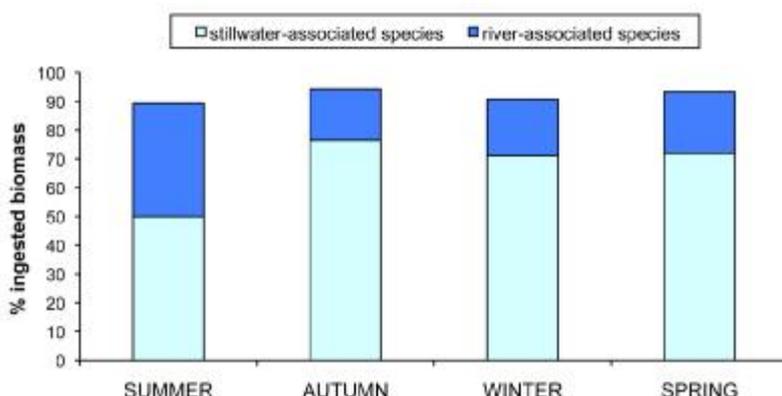
Overall the study suggests that otters feed more heavily on stillwater species today than they did in the 1970s. In turn this may reflect a general decline in fish populations within the river, an observation supported by long-term survey data. In particular feeding by otter on typical stillwater prey species was most prevalent in winter, spring and autumn (>70%), whereas river and stillwater species were consumed equally in summer. The later phenomenon is probably due to the summer emergence of white-clawed

crayfish from their burrows rendering them more easily eaten (Figure 1).

The otter recovery has led to quite a bit of friction between otters, conservationists and stillwater anglers/fishery owners over recent years. We can clearly show that stillwaters are heavily utilised by otters so it is not surprising that conflict has arisen. But what is the answer? Well...what about this. It is notable that some very healthy lakes (low nutrients, clear waters and high abundances of aquatic plants) have been subjected to massive otter predation pressure with little noticeable change to fish stocks, while other less healthy lakes and ponds, with already lowered fish stocks have clearly been impacted. The answer? Lets all work together to make the rivers and lakes of the Glaven healthy. By reducing sediment and nutrient inputs to the rivers and lakes and by improving habitat conditions, the fish producing capabilities of the aquatic environment will be increased. Then, with any luck, a balance might then be reached where all are happy.

We would like to thanks all the landowners who gave us access to their land so that we could undertake this study.

Carl Sayer (UCL and RGCG), David Almeida (University of Madrid), Gordon Copp (Cefas), Derek Sayer (RGCG), Terry Linford (RGCG), Carl Cornwall (Bayfield Angling Society) & Mizuki Murai (UCL)



Relative importance of otter feeding in stillwater and river habitats as reflected by consumption of typical "stillwater-associated" (e.g. roach, rudd, common carp, tench, pike) and "river-associated" (e.g. brown trout, bullhead, white-clawed crayfish) species. Note that eel was divided equally between categories.



Otter seen during fish survey at Hunworth. Photo credit: Gordon Copp

Natural Surroundings & Letheringsett Ford

Natural Surroundings

The 'Wildflower Centre' at Bayfield, has for several years been something of a 'missing link' as far as the co-ordinated management and conservation of the Glaven is concerned but now the business is under new, friendly ownership. Steve Hinder and Andrew Cannon are determined to bring *Natural Surroundings* back to where it belongs as a positive, constructive stakeholder at the heart of the Glaven conservation community.

Some RGCG members may not be familiar with the history of *NS*. It was started around 20 years ago by Anne Starling on a small patch of land near Bayfield Hall, kindly loaned rent-free by the Estate, with the objective of cultivating wild flowers and native plants for sale and for implementing wildlife-friendly garden designs. Anne was joined by Peter Loosley, they expanded the wild flower operation and added external contracting, consultancy and schools visits to their portfolio as well as developing the beautiful gardens as a family-friendly visitor attraction. They grew slowly but successfully and *NS* was

soon able to pay its way as a member of Bayfield's commercial community. Anne having moved on, Peter continued to grow the enterprise, latterly with his partner Cheryl, a small part-time staff and keen local volunteers.

In 2006 Peter & Cheryl retired to Wales, selling the business to four new co-owners who were bravely led towards a vision of a much larger and more complex *NS* which leased around ten times as much land and was run essentially as a private nature reserve. This business model proved unfortunately to be unsustainable and at the start of 2011 Steve Hinder, one of those four investors and until then a 'sleeping partner', unexpectedly found himself the sole owner of *NS*. Steve recruited former employee Andrew Cannon to help out; they are now joint owners and proprietors and, having retreated to Peter & Cheryl's original boundaries, are embarking on a year of stabilisation and consolidation with the support of the Bayfield Estate and the generous support, once again, of local friends and volunteers – not least original founder Anne and her husband Simon Harrap.

Our riverside walk is a key differentiator of *NS* as a visitor attraction and 'river study' is a critical component of our educational offering. It is vital to our business that the Glaven is clean, clear and rich in wildlife. But our interest in the RGCG is more fundamental; *Natural Surroundings* is in the conservation business by design and philosophy. We enable visitors to experience 'the countryside as it used to be', less managed and more diverse, in the process generating modest incomes for local people and exemplifying how, considered as a whole, both the Estate and the wider river catchment can hopefully combine economic and ecological sustainability and we can all enjoy a rich and inspiring biodiversity.

Neither of the new owners is experienced in river management and we will welcome any advice, just as we will also welcome RGCG members to *Natural Surroundings* either informally as visitors or more formally as a group event.

**Andrew Cannon, Director,
Natural Surroundings Ltd**

Letheringsett Ford

This is a much visited place for quiet leisure and enjoyment, and where children might see bullhead and other fish under stones in the river bed. One local ten year old girl caught two fish on the 11th April which looked like 6" eels. In fact they were brook lamprey, a primitive creature which fossil remains show to have been around for some 300 million years.

The brook lamprey has an interesting life cycle, and it is not surprising that they were caught in April. This is the time when the adults are most likely to be seen, when they spawn by working a hole in a sandy part of the river bed. The adults die shortly after this, having a very short adult life after five or six years as larvae in the river.

In common with other species of lamprey, they have a sucker mouth by which they can attach themselves to a stone or other object. In this case, for the fish on the left, to the side of the pail in which they were held for a short time before being returned to the river. The next day she returned to witness them holding on to stones in the river.



Brook Lamprey, caught with child's fishing net.

Note sucker holding on to side of pail.



Newsletter

Spring 2011

Membership and finance

The membership now numbers 122 people. It is pleasing that the 100 mark is now well exceeded, and that the in annual subscription from £5 to £10 had been well accepted.

The balance at the year end was £5,002, of which £3,000 was ring-fenced for project work. This balance sheet will be tabled at the AGM.

A leaflet is being developed to support further recruitment efforts. In conjunction with this our web site is being re-designed .

News in brief

The RGCG welcome the continuation of a link with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, following the sad loss of Steve Henson. Adrina Walmsley will attend committee meetings on an as-and-when basis centred on her main interest and the link with us, on grazing. Conservation grazing continues to be a key interest for the RGCG.

The Norfolk Coast Partnership has been investigating whether an umbrella group of organisations in the Glaven Valley might be eligible for grant under the Lottery Heritage scheme. This is a regional scheme on a competitive basis. The purpose of the scheme is to help people learn about their heritage; conserve for the present and future generations, and to take decisions in heritage.

Helen Mandley's contract as Catchment Sensitive Farming officer for North Norfolk ended on the 31st March. Helen has found a position with another organisation. It is unclear at this time whether a new CSF officer will be appointed by Natural England. The committee have expressed their thanks to Helen for her interest and support and wished her well in her new role.

The RGCG are working up a proposal for rejuvenating the upper reaches of the Glaven through reduction of the sediment load, grass strips on arable land adjacent to water course, etc. Recent research has indicated that much of the silt which moves down the river originates from the headwaters.

There will be a weekend of Himalayan Balsam clearance on the 25th/26th June. This is an easy task as the plant is readily pulled out of the ground, but care is required not to dislodge any seed in doing so! Contact Carl Sayer for details if you may be able to help: 07766717245/c.sayer@ucl.ac.uk.

Robin Combe Chairman 01263 712058
Ian Shepherd Secretary 01263 713370
Tori Shepherd Treasurer & Membership Secretary v.shepherd@ucl.ac.uk
Web site www.riverglaven.org.uk