



NEWSLETTER

RGCG OPEN DAY: SATURDAY 21ST OCTOBER.

The RGCG are holding an Open Day on Saturday the 21st October to demonstrate our first major practical conservation project.

This is taking place on the 1000 yard stretch of the river upstream of Letheringsett Ford. A range of measures are being used to improve the in-river habitat for the benefit of wildlife dependent on the river and immediately adjacent to it - see inside for the concept and implementation of the work programme.

The Open Day takes the form of a walk with RGCG committee members along the bank of the project stretch of the river, which runs through the County Wildlife Site, starting at the Ford. This Newsletter shows the various measures that are being carried out, and the aims for each. Some will be complete, others in progress, and some requiring further work or tidying up.

We will also have Display Boards set up in the Kings Head pub, including some "before and after" pictures. After the walk we would go there to view the boards and have some general discussion on the project and the work involved. Tea and biscuits will be made available.

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.

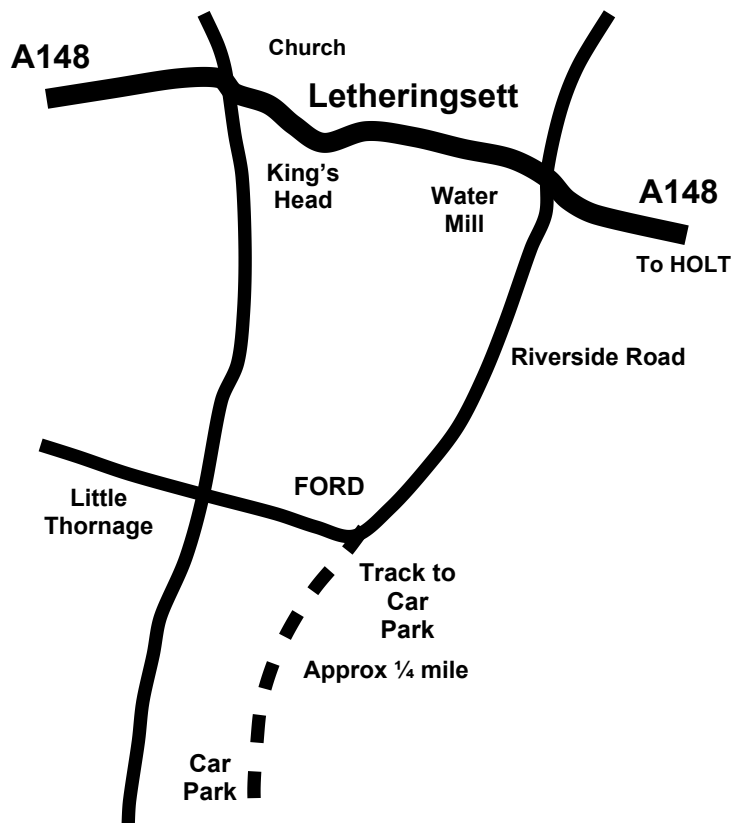
Car parking for the day is available on an upstream meadow, reached by driving up the farm track running parallel to the river from Letheringsett Ford. The track has been "tidied up" but requires some care. From the car park walk back along the meadows, on the other side of the hedge line from the farm track, to the Ford. An alternative parking arrangement is to leave your vehicle in the upper car park at the Kings Head and take a 5 minutes walk to the Ford. (see map). **We ask members and others not to try and park at or near the Ford, or in Riverside Road, on the grounds of safety and the free passage of other vehicles, including farm traffic.**

The walk will start from the Ford at 3pm, finishing by the car park meadow.

For this special event we invite members to bring friends who have an interest. We are also inviting Parish Councils and local people to inform them of our project. Hopefully new members will join the RGCG. We advise stout footwear or wellington boots if there has been recent rainfall

Finally we point out that the meadows and stretch of river are **not** under public access Stewardship, and ask all to make the tour in the RGCG conducted group.

Robin Combe, Chairman.



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Please do not park at Letheringsett Ford or near the entrance to or across the track. Note! The track is narrow with no passing places so be prepared to back up if need be.

A CINDERELLA RIVER: RGCG IN-RIVER HABITAT IMPROVEMENT. “THE CONCEPT.”

The River Glaven is set in most attractive countryside, and the closer the examination the more we realise how valuable it is as a wildlife habitat and the range of species dependent on it; including a number which are protected or feature in national and local Biodiversity Action Plans.

Nevertheless for a variety of reasons the river as a whole has suffered over past decades through changes in farming and land management practices, and policies for flood risk management; a principal reason for the existence of the RGCG to work with those concerned to make changes which are beneficial to the river and the wider catchment.

Even in the relatively short stretch of river that we are concerned with in this project there are considerable differences in the river landscape and wildlife habitat. There are broadly four reaches along “our” project stretch.

The upper reach is thickly wooded on both sides, with mature alder and some fine ash, with a fair amount of ivy on many trees. The river here is on a steep gradient and fast flowing, and retains natural bank formations. There are variations in the river course, with bends and deep pools, and areas where it races over the gravel bed. These characteristics make it good for brown trout, invertebrates in the river, and for the wildlife chain as a whole. The trees add some leaves and light woody debris to the river, which add to the value by nurturing insect life. We plan to do no work here other than in a short section where we clear a few sycamore trees and see some sunlight at the second footbridge (see the map summarising all our work proposals).

The upper-middle reach is similar in most respects but almost all the trees are confined to the west bank. Again this is a “good” stretch of river for trout, a marker species for much wildlife; and with the additional light the appearance of water crowsfoot in the river bed. It is also a part of the river frequented by the kingfisher.

It suffers however from the 70s and 80s legacy of dredging of the river with a subsequent lowering of the river bed; and a resulting high bank of spoil on the open side facing a meadow, where there are just one or two trees. Thus the natural progression of the degree of wetness between the river and meadow, and the characteristic species of plants and insects which depend on this, is lost to a high and dry spoil bank.

We have been keen to select a place such as this where the spoil bank could be removed and the natural regeneration that follows could be studied by the RGCG. The Environment Agency was supportive in principle for another reason. They favour where appropriate the re-connection of river and natural flood plain. In severe rain events, perhaps one every 3 or 4 years, flood water may be “held-up” in areas where there are no houses which could be affected. So spoil bank removal, and the formation of a more natural profile, was introduced into our programme. This involves the removal of some hundreds of tonnes of spoil off-site, and recovery of the gravel and flint in the spoil, and disposal of the separated soil on arable land.

The lower-middle reach of the river runs diagonally across the meadow, with high spoil banks on each side and no trees. The gradient of the river remains quite steep, so that the flow is fast over a generally good gravel bed. It is however rather uniform in nature, and the plan is to introduce some flow deflector measures, and in two areas “large woody debris”; a good “natural” example, a tree which had fallen but not pushed, was shown in the article “Let Sleeping Logs Lie” in our April Newsletter.

The lower reach of the stretch runs from footbridge 1 (see map) down to the Ford. Here the river profile has flattened. The flow is slower, and a sand silt deposit over the gravel dominates. The flow is also slowed by being a little too wide in places. The emphasis here is to carry out some narrowing in places, and introduce some gravel riffles. The riffles are beneficial to trout and invertebrates as noted above; and we would hope that they extend the amount of habitat available to 4 species all recorded in the vicinity of the Ford; bullhead, stone loach, brook lamprey and white clawed crayfish.

So while the stretch of river has a great deal to offer in terms of its wildlife, the RGCG project aims to make improvements to the river habitat as a whole, and to the micro-habitats so important to the wide range of wildlife that the river supports.

We have looked to close some circles in how we implement the works. The felled sycamore trees supply the trunk sections required for the large woody debris. But also we need some 120 faggots of 2m length and 0.5 m diameter for other works, and some 200 chestnut stakes; hazel faggots will come from Bayfield and other local sites.

The spoil from the river bank will be sieved off-site nearby by machine to give two “cuts” of stone. These are a spawn gravel in the size range 10-50mm, and larger stone, to be used in the construction of the riffles. The recovered soil will be spread over arable land.

Finally we have the potential for flood risk reduction in the removal of the spoil bank as well as the conservation and landscape benefits, where we restore the natural linkage between river and meadow.

Committee Conservation Sub-Group.

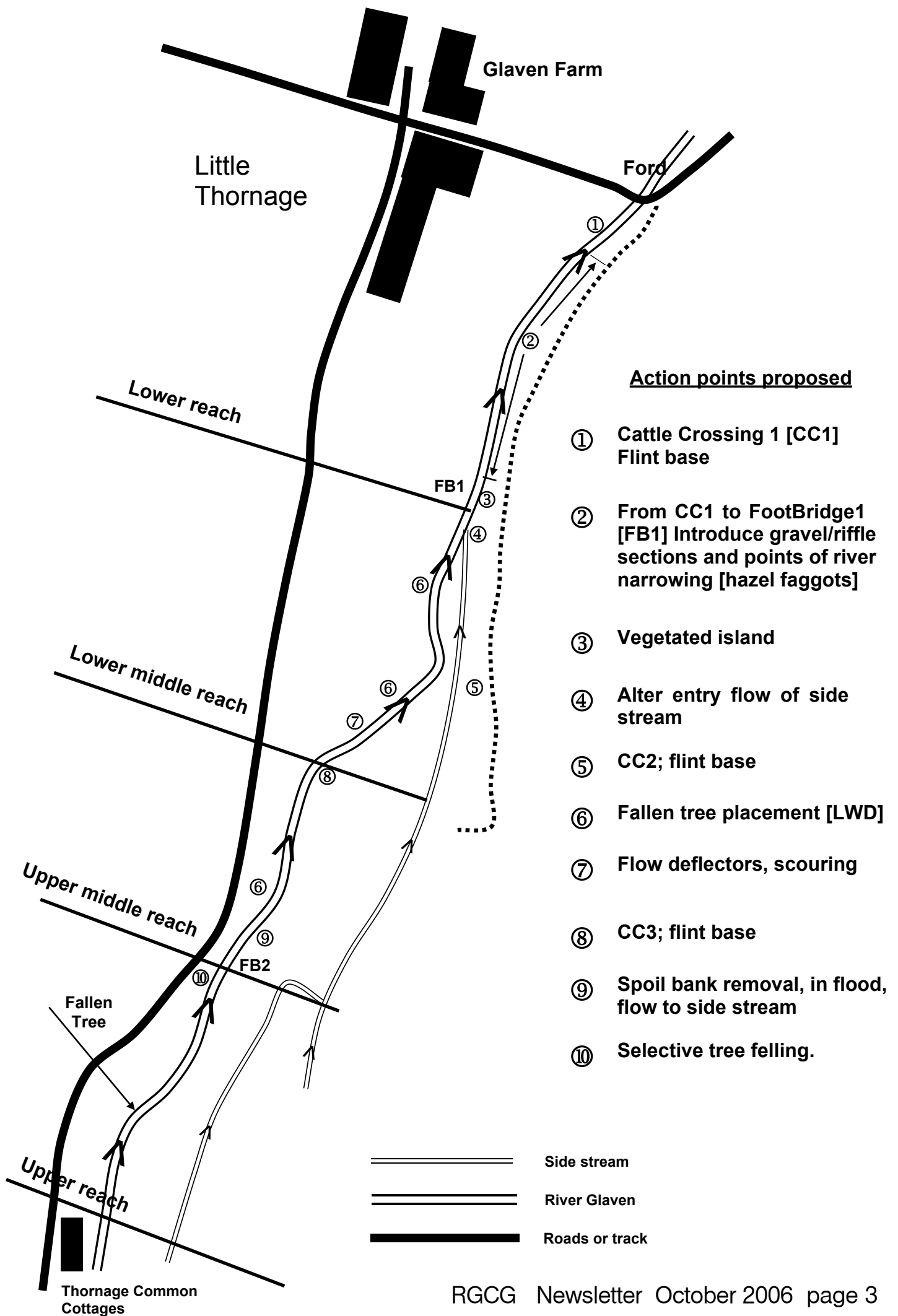
The Cinderella Chalk Rivers Project vision:

Chalk rivers should be protected or restored to a quality which sustains the high conservation value of their wildlife, healthy water supplies, recreation opportunities and their place in the character and cultural history of the landscape.

See also at their web sites.

Cinderella Chalk Rivers <http://tinyurl.com/zjukx>

River Glaven project <http://tinyurl.com/19cb2>



Barn Owls - A Glaven Success

Nationally, Barn Owls have declined dramatically in recent years and one of the contributory factors is thought to have been the loss of nest sites. Barn Owls need a hole to nest in, sometimes in a tree and traditionally in - barns! A great many barns have been converted into holiday homes, thus robbing the owls of their homes, and dead and dying trees are these days soon felled. Once this problem was appreciated a solution became clear and the erection of properly designed owl nesting boxes was undertaken by many interested people. The Hawk & Owl Trust designed and made the boxes, and can be purchased from the Trust. A number of such boxes have been erected along the Glaven, at no cost to the RGCG, and there are now 8 pairs with territories between Wiveton Bridge and Thornage Mill. This is a very good and encouraging number, and there are almost certainly more pairs in the wider catchment area, and up river of Thornage Mill, which wait to be recorded. Along the river the owls hunt over the adjacent water meadows and the proposal to graze some of these will help to keep the grass short, to the benefit of the vole population - and the owls.

The spring this year was a very bad one for most breeding birds (although the terns had a good year on Blakeney Point): strong cold winds in April, a wet May followed by searing heat in June and July. Barn Owls suffered as most birds did and

breeding success was low this year. However on the Bayfield Estate there are 2 pairs not using nest boxes, and one of these in the disused dovecot raised three young which were ringed by Phil Littler. When close to fledging it is possible to sex them and there was a female and two males. At the same time we collected a number of pellets, and added them to others previously collected. The pellets consist of regurgitated fur and bones and by separating out the latter (by soaking and teasing apart) it is possible to identify the prey items.

An analysis of 28 pellets:

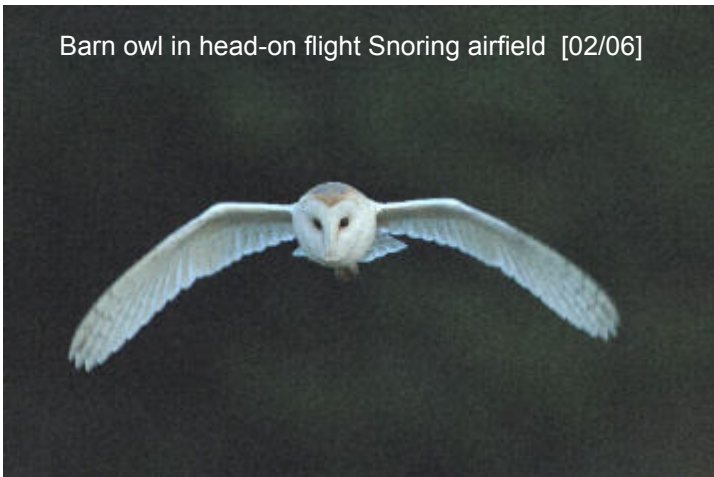
Brown rat	3	House mouse	1
Wood mouse	11	Common shrew	21
Pygmy shrew	2	Water vole	1
Bank vole	26	Short-tailed vole	44

Barn Owls are charismatic birds and, since they sometimes hunt in daylight hours, are more visible than other owls. If you have the pleasure of seeing one quartering a field in the catchment area of the Glaven do first enjoy it and then make a note of the place, time and date.

In the next Newsletter we shall describe a system for recording such sightings not only of Barn Owls but also other notable species of fauna and flora.

Len Bentley

Barn owl in head-on flight Snoring airfield [02/06]



Barn owl on a favourite perch



Barn owl diving after prey Thornham [01/06]

Richard Brooks, local wildlife photographer, has a particular passion for owls. In the past 10 years he has placed some 500 boxes as nest sites in farm and other buildings, and in trees. The photographs reproduced with his permission are best viewed in colour on the web site version of this Newsletter. Contact Richard [01328 878632] if you are interested in purchasing coloured prints or to enquire about the erection and maintenance of a nest box.



Hovering barn owl Thornham [01/06]

Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer appointed for the North Norfolk Rivers

The England Catchment Sensitive Farming Programme started on 1st April 2006, and is being run jointly by the Natural England Partnership (English Nature, Rural Development Service and the Countryside Agency) and the Environment Agency. The primary aim of CSF is to reduce levels of nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment making their way into watercourses, and so meet the Water Framework Directive requirements. In order to achieve this we aim to raise awareness of diffuse water pollution and encourage early voluntary action by farmers to tackle the problem.

CSF is being introduced in 40 priority catchments in England. Nine of these areas are within the Eastern Region, one of which is the North Norfolk Rivers. Each catchment has been appointed a Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer, and the Officer for the North Norfolk Rivers and River Nar is myself, **Rosanna Dollman**. I began in this post on 14th August and am covering the rivers Burn, Stiffkey, Glaven, Heacham and Nar.

Diffuse pollution arises from many sources. The single biggest threat of diffuse water pollution however, is from agriculture. This is perhaps unsurprising, as agriculture covers over 70% of the land area of England and Wales and sources of diffuse pollution, including nutrients from fertilisers and manure, are essential parts of farming. Increases in nutrient levels in water systems can result in toxic algal blooms leading to adverse impacts on the food chain which supports fish, animals and birds.



It is important to maintain healthy river systems, as in addition to their significant environmental value, they provide many social and economic benefits. These include cleaner drinking water, reduced flood risk and encouragement of recreation and tourism; hence contributing to the use of the countryside and benefiting rural businesses.

A number of international and domestic objectives have been agreed, relating to conservation and water quality, that require action on diffuse water pollution from agriculture (DWPA). Of these, the Water Framework Directive (WFD) which requires us to protect, enhance and restore all inland and coastal waters to reach 'good ecological and chemical status' by 2015, and our target of 95% of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) being in favourable condition by 2010, are key.

There's a lot of work to do over the next few months to get the CSFDI off to a flying start in North Norfolk.

- A Catchment Appraisal is currently being produced to assess the issues and locate the worst problem areas, in which the work will be targeted. This will feed in to a Local Catchment Delivery Plan which includes an Advice Delivery Plan and Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy. This will be completed by the end of September.

- The advice delivery programme will then follow this throughout autumn and winter. Farmers will be contacted via seminars, workshops, one to one advice, demonstration sites, farm walks and newsletters, all of which will be free of charge, to highlight the issues and encourage better land management practices.

- The risk of soil erosion occurring largely depends on the soil type and slope of the land, however the way in which the land is cropped and managed also has a great effect. Measures which farmers will be encouraged to take may include cropping across the slope instead of down it, sowing cereals earlier to reduce the amount of time that the field is left bare, or managing their crop rotations so that high risk crops including potatoes and sugar beet are not grown on high risk fields.

- Free advice will be given to farmers on how to complete, and get the most from their **Soil Protection Review**, required under **Cross Compliance** and how to complete an **Entry Level Scheme Soil Management Plan**. Environmental Stewardship, including both the **Entry Level** and **Higher Level Scheme**, will provide incentives where appropriate, and a **Capital Grants Scheme** will also be available to help towards the costs of carrying out works to reduce soil erosion and run off.

Local knowledge and stakeholder involvement will be key to the success of the CSF Initiative. In order to ensure this happens a Catchment Steering Group is being set up to oversee my work and to pass on and gather information. I was kindly invited to attend the River Glaven Conservation Group Meeting held on the 7th August, which was extremely useful, and I was very impressed to learn of the work which they are doing. I wish to thank Ian Shepherd for agreeing to sit on the Catchment Steering Group.

If you are a farmer or landowner and think you may have Diffuse Water Pollution issues on your farm, and could benefit from some advice, or if you have any queries about the CSF Programme please do not hesitate to contact me, **Rosanna Dollman on 01603 663895 or 07785513119 or e-mail rosanna.dolman@defra.gsi.gov.uk**. Alternatively you can feed in your comments to the Catchment Steering Group through Ian Shepherd.



Rosanna Dollman

A CINDERELLA RIVER: RGCG IN-RIVER HABITAT PROJECT. “THE IMPLEMENTATION.”

We reported in the April Newsletter that the RGCG had received a £1,500 grant from the Cinderella Project, administered by the Wild Trout Trust and the Environment Agency. This is a national initiative, and aims to promote improvements to the less well known chalk streams in England. The RGCG ear-marked the grant to obtain the services of a consultant to “work up” our proposals in the detail of what would be done, and how it should be done, to comply with the licence consent required from the Environment Agency.

In May we heard that the Biodiversity team of the Anglian Region of the Agency was prepared to fund the proposed works to the tune of £7,000, plus a further £1,500 to carry out a Demonstration Day on behalf of the Cinderella Project. The money was for this financial year only. We were on a very tight time schedule from the start, as will be seen below, but the RGCG very much welcomed the opportunity to take the project forward.

Within the RGCG we had discussed and refined the concepts for what we wanted to do over many months previously, but we were very much aware the implementation is as important as the ideas in making a successful project.

First was the need to obtain a licence of consent to carry out the works from the Environment Agency engineering development control. In our case this was for a complex and interacting series of measures. The Agency considerations are, as they must be, thorough and detailed and involve a number of staff in various disciplines. The time it would take to prepare the necessary documentation and hopefully receive approval was going to be absolutely crucial to the timing of the programme.

We were fortunate in having Vaughan Lewis, a nationally respected consultant, to see us through this process. He visited the site for an initial familiarisation. Also for the pre-application site visit, when RGCG members discussed our proposals with the Agency, who fielded the Norfolk Development Control Engineer, and colleagues in flood protection and conservation.

This visit took place on the 13th July, and was invaluable in helping discussion on the general principles and approaches to be taken. Following this the extensive documentation was prepared and submitted to the Agency by the end of July. The Agency worked to see approval by mid-September. This involved, under the rather special circumstances, giving a high priority to the application.



Spoil bank with exploratory excavation



Spoil bank viewed from river

In progressing the actual work we faced a variety of constraints and some logistical considerations; plus working within the money available. The natural constraints include conservation issues. We had to ensure that in doing what we planned we would not have an inadvertent adverse impact on wildlife. In particular this included a very detailed survey of water vole sites, and looking for the presence of the otter. This was carried out by committee member Steve Henson of the Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT). In addition Tony Leech carried out a survey of vascular plants on the spoil bank to be

removed, to make sure that there were no significant plants that might have to be moved.

One important reason to complete the bulk of the work quickly was that water voles tend to hold to their burrows from November for the winter, and trout start to spawn. But the nature of the terrain was another pressing reason to start the work by mid-September and finish by end October, certainly all the “heavy” work. The meadows are peaty, wet and soft. Heavy plant can cause “cut-up” even without vehicles getting stuck and literally becoming “bogged down”.



With the farmer Peter Howard we discussed how best this could be avoided, and also how to cross the side stream to get off the meadows. The chosen route was for the heavy plant to travel along the raised spoil banks on the east side of the river. This in turn dictated the felling and removal of the sycamore trees as the first piece of

work; to be followed by the removal of the selected section of spoil river bank, working from the upstream part to the downstream end. Apart from the movement of the heavy plant, we wished to make the timber available for other work, and similarly reclaim gravel and stone from the spoil.



The offer by the flood protection wing of the Agency to take out the designated spoil bank section will be a huge help to the project on time-scale and project costs. It will involve a caterpillar tracked digger, with two 2.5 tonne tracked dumpers working alongside to take the spoil away and place in heaps along the arable field adjacent to the meadows.

The bank removal is scheduled to link to the off-site riddling operation. Vaughan Lewis will return early October to supervise and work with RGCG volunteers for the implementation of much of the in-river work. Volunteers have carried out some preparation work in the second half of September, such as the making the faggot bundles. There are other important tasks that also have been done, such as the “flagging up” of the

water vole sites, where we need to avoid the use of heavy plant on the banks.

The programme of works is planned for completion by the end of October, but that will not be the end of the story. We will follow through by monitoring to see how the measures bed down, and observe the broad changes in the river and wildlife over time. The whole project has been a learning curve experience for the RGCG, which will undoubtedly benefit future projects that we expect to undertake.

Finally we wish to express our thanks to those who have given encouragement and practical and financial support to the project. We start with Simon Johnson who has been a champion of the project from the earliest days, and which carried on through to his appointment as Director of the Wild Trout Trust.



Secondly the Cinderella Project for providing the seed corn grant. The Environment Agency at Peterborough for the Cinderella funding for the work programme. Also the local officers of the Environment Agency for their pre-application site visit and efforts to move our application with all possible speed; and the machine work offer for spoil bank removal. Vaughan Lewis for his technical help and prompt response to a great number of e-mails. Nearer home we thank Steve Henson who has taken much time around his day job with the NWT to carry out the detailed studies on protected species and his input to the project implementation. Robin and Roger Combe for the supply of hazel faggots made up at Bayfield, and the offer if required of mixed flint for the cattle crossings and riffle beds; and similarly gravel from Cemex. Last but not least, our warm thanks are due to the Cozens-Hardy family as the landowner with most of the riparian ownership; and Peter Howard, the tenant farmer with the Ellis family, and John Shrive, for supporting our aims.

Ian Shepherd



NEWSLETTER

News in brief.

- † Our AGM and Open Day held at Glandford Mill on the 27th April was most successful. Interesting and informative talks were given by Carl Sayer on 'Messy Rivers are Good Rivers' and by Steve Henson on 'Grazing Glaven Valley Grassland'. Willie Brownlow followed with a history of the Mill. We enjoyed good weather for a look at the nearby river wetland. Our thanks to Mr & Mrs Brownlow for hosting the event and providing excellent refreshments.
- † Some Himalayan Balsam has again been cleared from the banks of part of the Glaven this summer. It will be necessary to repeat this exercise for some seasons to keep this invasive plant under tight control.
- † Our efforts to facilitate the recommencement of conservation grazing management of the Glaven Valley wet grasslands and fen sites have had to be put 'on hold' while going through a very intensive period in planning and implementing the in-river habitat improvement project. However we plan to return to this soon.
- † The Local Development Framework (LDF) for North Norfolk is out for consultation from 25th September for 6 weeks to 6th November 2006. The outcome will influence the policies of the District Council. Do look at the "preferred options" in The Core Strategy and Site Specific Proposals. We encourage you to think how these might affect the River Glaven Valley, and include this in as part of any response you might wish to make. For example on water resource, the tensions between housing development and overall usage of public water supply and the needs for our natural aquatic environment.

Next committee date is to be held late November

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

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