



NEWSLETTER

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.

The AGM at Thornage Mill

Our AGM and "Open Day" has been arranged for Saturday 23rd April at 3.00pm at Thornage Mill. Much of the original workings of the mill have been restored, and the building is now a private residence. Our thanks go to the owner Alex van Someren for giving us the opportunity of holding our AGM at the Mill.

The formal business will be kept short, and the core of the programme will be twofold. There will be a talk by Dr Carl Sayer and Dr Tony Leech on plant surveys and some conservation issues. This will be followed by a walk around the meadow, which is set between the original, and still existing, course of the river and the banked diversion to operate the mill. During the walk we will be looking at the river and meadows for current and possible future conservation interests. A follow up report will be given to Alex.

After the talk and walk there will be tea and general discussion, with a departure time of around 5.00pm.

The talk and tea will be held in a large room in the upper part of the mill.



Please note there have been some changes from the short report in Pevsner.



"Watermill, c. 1800, derelict at time of writing. Three storeys, brick, lucam missing. Undershot waterwheel, pitwheel and drive to three pairs of stones."

Please see the enclosed flyer for more details on the programme and how to get to the Mill. All members are of course very welcome; please feel free to bring along a friend or two, especially if you think they may sign up to the £5 p.a . subscription!

THE NORTH NORFOLK CATCHMENT ABSTRACTION STRATEGY.

Catchment Abstraction Management Strategies (CAMS) are strategies for the management of water resources at a local level. They will make more information on water resources and licensing practice publicly available. They aim to reconcile the needs of abstractors and the aquatic environment in consultation with the local community and interested parties. CAMS are also the mechanism for managing time-limited licences by determining whether they should be renewed and, if so, on what terms.

The CAMS approach is new, and those in the Anglian Region of the Environment Agency are now completed or close to being completed. They will run on a 6 year cycle, and then are reviewed and a new document produced. The final version of the North Norfolk CAMS is now complete. The North Norfolk CAMS area comprises a relatively narrow strip of land along the North Norfolk Coast. It borders the Broadland Rivers CAMS to the south and the North West Norfolk CAMS to the west. The North Norfolk CAMS covers an area of 522km² including the surface water catchments of the Rivers Burn, Stiffkey, Glaven, Mundesley Beck and other smaller rivers.

The water dependent habitats support a rich and varied wildlife. The North Norfolk Coast is of international importance and designated a Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area and also has a Ramsar designation; covering European status for wildlife (SAC) and birds (SPA) and as an internationally recognised wetland area. The area also includes numerous other water dependent sites of national importance (SSSIs) consisting of a wide range of semi-natural habitats including salt marsh, intertidal mudflats, spring-fed fens and wet heaths. Of these Holt Lowes, Sheringham and Beeston Regis Common and Overstrand Cliffs also have SAC status. Under the "Review of Consents" legislation new licences and renewal of licences cannot be issued unless it can be ascertained that they will not adversely affect the integrity of SAC and SPA sites.

Public water supply accounts for 46% of the licensed volume abstracted (at Houghton St Giles, Glandford, Sheringham, Mundesley, Wighton and Ringstead). Agriculture accounts for 43% of the volume licensed, mainly for spray irrigation. The remaining 11% is used for



industrial and other purposes. The greatest pressure on water resource and the environment comes in the summer months; the resident and visitor pressure peak coincides with the demands for spray irrigation. This is when we get the lowest flows in the rivers and drier wetlands, affected by direct abstraction from river sources, and from the groundwater which feeds them both. The high flow periods occur mainly in the winter months.

The resource availability status at low flows for the three main river sub-catchment, which all have a connectivity between the groundwater and surface water flows, are determined by the Environment Agency as:

River Burn: no water available.

River Glaven: over-licensed, and if licences were used to the full allocation there is the potential to cause unacceptable environmental damage.

River Stiffkey: over-abstracted, existing abstraction is causing unacceptable environmental impact at low flows.

Ian Shepherd.

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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.

Please send to the Secretary or contact him to discuss the content of your article.

Sea trout in the River Glaven?

It is a little known fact that the sea trout (*Salmo trutta*) is a brown trout that goes to sea – a fish that, like the salmon, feels the urge to migrate to the ocean after perhaps 2-4 years in freshwater. Then, after a period of feeding on fish and shrimps in estuaries and out at sea, these wild rovers of the coast feel the urge to move into rivers to spawn. The sea trout looks more like a salmon than a brown trout possessing a silvery coat with black spots, but in contrast to the salmon it has a much flatter (and less forked) end to the tail. It is a fish highly prized by anglers because of its size (it can grow to over 20 lbs) and reputation for being difficult to catch – a worthy quarry therefore. In many parts of Scotland and Wales



there are famous sea trout rivers and it is with these areas that it is most associated. So why write about it in the context of the Glaven? Well the Glaven, like the Stiffkey, is one of a few rivers on the south-east coast where they are found.

Before the building of mills and sluices (which is going back hundreds of years), there would have been sea trout high up river. However, today there are several physical barriers that much limit their movements. Cley

sluice is the first, which has poor fish passing facilities and then there is Glandford Mill where fish may only pass during extreme floods perhaps. Records of sea trout catches in the river are sporadic and mostly anecdotal. Cozens-Hardy (1965) writes of an entry in a court book of 1585 on some illegal angling on the Glaven when a certain John Gryxe and one Branker were caught with nets and other contrivances taking killing and destroying “*certain fish viz:-eels and trutt called salmon trowte in the common river within this lete*”.

In 1967/1968 famous local fisherman, John Bailey (interviewed by RGCG member Simon Lewin 29/3/2001) caught 20-30 sea trout from the lower river, the largest an amazing 11 lb fish. However he reports of stopping fishing for them in the late 1970s due to a much reduced run of fish. The late Wilfred Hargreaves-Turner occasionally caught sea trout in the 1980s and I believe also in the 1990s so it is clear that not all is lost. Also I caught something that certainly wasn't a typical brown trout (see photograph) in spring 2003 from a salty lower Glaven ditch that was avidly feeding on brine shrimps. Was it a sea trout? I am not totally sure and would welcome any views! However, it is clear that today sea trout are not doing as well as they used to.

The decline of the sea trout in the Glaven may be a consequence of several factors, among others, (i) a lack of clean, non-silted gravel areas below Glandford Mill where trout can spawn, thus reducing or perhaps eliminating the recruitment of fish from the river itself; (ii) pollution of various types; (iii) disease, and; (iv) the extreme difficulty of passing Cley sluice. The RGCG would like to help the sea trout and will apply pressure to improve fish passing facilities and spawning habitat in the river. If anyone has any reports of sea trout past and present and any thoughts on this issue more generally we would love to hear about it.

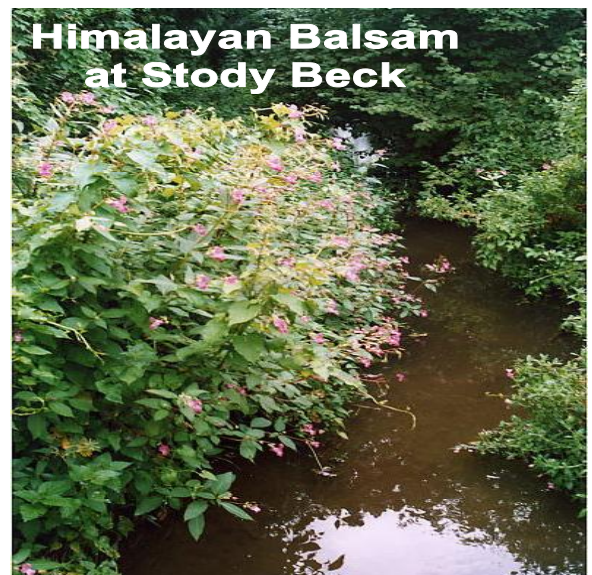
Carl Sayer, March 2005.

Himalayan Balsam

We have received further reports of the presence of Himalayan Balsam on the River Glaven following the October newsletter article. There are also some outbreaks on the banks of the River Stiffkey.

In recent 'walk about' in the Lower Bodham area it was noted that an aquatic plant, Pygmy Pennywort [New Zealand] is progressively smothering a pond.

The threat from imported plants that can establish quickly on riverbanks and ponds, exclude native species, and destroy the habitat, is getting greater recognition. The Government plan to list extra species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 that bans the import and sale of certain plants. [Reported in The Times, 4th March 2005].



American Mink

The American mink, a non-native mammal related to the weasels and stoats, was introduced into the UK in the late 1920's to be reared and bred for its luxuriant fur. It was kept on fur farms first established in 1929 but frequent escapes meant that mink were soon at large in the countryside and by the 1960's mink were already widespread across Norfolk. Some control was exerted via the coypu eradication campaign in East Anglia during the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's, when several hundred mink were trapped and destroyed as a bycatch of the campaign. Since the end of the 1980's however, mink numbers in Norfolk appear to have increased, although some of this apparent increase is due to a more concerted recording effort and greater awareness of the presence of this species in the county.



It is now widely recognised by conservationists that the American mink has been one of the main factors to have caused a sudden and alarming decline in the UK's water vole population (the water vole is now a priority Biodiversity Action Plan species) and without doubt the water vole has declined in Norfolk, although the extent of the decline remains unclear. There is plenty of evidence that demonstrates what a devastating impact mink can have on water vole colonies; a female mink being able to eradicate an entire colony within months, in a single breeding season.

As yet, there is no co-ordinated mink control programme in the UK and this may never materialise, as the set-up and running costs for the first few years would cost around £4 million. Here in Norfolk, the Biodiversity Partnership has been determined to take action to control mink as a water vole conservation measure and it set up a 'pilot' mink control project on the River Wensum in autumn 2003. This project, which runs workshops, loans live-catch cage-traps to around 60 landowners and provides technical support, is still running and will continue until at least July 2006; to date it has destroyed 140 mink.

The presence and status of mink within the Glaven Valley is unclear at the moment: a few years ago one was seen nearby at NWT Cley Marshes and there have been secondhand reports, including one shot at Letheringsett, but nothing more 'concrete'. Perhaps you have trapped or seen a mink within the valley - if so, we'd like to hear about it. Limited trapping is being undertaken along a short stretch of the river between Glandford and Wiveton at the moment, although no mink have been trapped to date. We really need to establish whether or not mink are present within the valley at all or how frequently they visit, perhaps only sporadically. To find these things out we need to set up a monitoring scheme, initially to establish if and when mink are present and if so, to control them (all trapping is undertaken using humane methods and best practice approved by The Wildlife Trusts). Monitoring of their presence and/or absence will be undertaken using a 'raft' developed by the Game Conservancy Trust which is set up in the river channel at intervals of about 2km and which detects mink footprints. If mink prove to be present then these rafts can be converted to house traps so that the mink can be captured. If you would like to take part in this proposed new scheme or can provide access across your land to the river, where we can set up a raft and check it regularly, then please let the RGCG know. If interest is sufficient we would provide technical support as well as training in using and checking the rafts and hopefully set up a network of local volunteers to run the scheme.

Steve Henson, Conservation Officer (Rivers & Wetlands), Norfolk Wildlife Trust

On a slippery slope

Throughout Britain, there has been a massive fall in the eel population in recent years. Although there are niche markets, eels are not everybody's favourite food: they are however a staple item in the diet of the otter and bittern. When eel numbers fall these predators are more likely to look for other species.

A number of possible reasons have been put forward to explain the decline. This includes the loss of freshwater habitat [see Changing Course], over-fishing, dams/weirs, predators and parasites. However the most fundamental and worrying is the theory that due to a weakening in the flow of the Gulf Stream there is a major reduction in the number of elvers reaching our shores.

Our next Newsletter will carry a more detailed article on the eel, which has an important place in the ecology of the Glaven and other rivers.

Cley Harbour

Within Cley village there is a 200m stretch of the Glaven River which is of special interest. The southern end, which is the upper limit of the tide, is bounded by a sluice gate on the line of the Cley/Blakeney road (A 149). At the down-stream limit of this stretch there is a pair of automatic flood gates which were built with an embankment in the 1990's to protect Cley village from floods. This part of the river flows through an area of about 8 hectares bounded on the south, west and north by embankments, and on the west by a concrete wall roughly on the line of the harbour wall of years gone by when Cley was a port.

This enclosed area is of interest and value to many different groups. Firstly it includes the windmill, which has been restored and is a site of special interest. There are about ten small jetties used by Cley Boat Club, a launching slipway and a public landing stage. A small area of open water close to the river has for some time attracted several species of water-birds, but this is rapidly being reduced in size by the spread of reeds. The marshland within the enclosed area is now almost entirely covered in reeds which are

harvested for thatching. Significant wild-life inhabits this area, ducks, heron, coots, swans and other water birds; barn-owls, bearded tits and kingfishers are regularly seen. Many more would be attracted by careful management. Local anglers claim to have caught sea-trout in the river just below the sluice.

Whilst the river is still navigable to small boats (up to 5m.) there is a growing problem of silt deposition which limits boats to a short period either side of high tide. The Boat Club makes an effort to clear this silt in some places, and also to clear the reeds which are narrowing the river along this length of its course. There is a need however for more significant clearance to maintain the river flow at this point. If the river silted much more there is a danger that heavy rain inland could back up above the sluice and cause extensive flooding to Wiveton and other areas. The Environment Agency has from time to time cleared parts of the river, especially close to the flood gates.

Overall this is an amenity which is deteriorating and which needs to be significantly revived by appropriate action.

We are pleased to report that some action is being taken upstream of the A149 sluice through separate discussions of the River Glaven Fishing Association and the Environment Agency. There will be dredging in the first area downstream of Wiveton Bridge early 2005. The river vegetation will be trimmed to allow silt to move downstream. Also baffles will be introduced at places to narrow the flow and make the river move faster. Again this will help to move silt, and aid the dredging process.



Compare the 2004 photographs with these of 1930 & 1996

John Woodward

CHANGING COURSE.

The Environment Agency is planning to re-direct the course of the lower reach of the River Glaven, where it runs into Blakeney Pit on a course roughly parallel to the sea wall. The new cut for the river will be made 200 m further inland. This work is essential to prevent the river being blocked by the inland movement of the shingle beach. This Blakeney Freshes Scheme is not the only change planned for the area.

The Salthouse and Cley Marshes Drainage Improvements are proposed after the change of thinking on building a new embankment across the marshes as a new flood defence for Salthouse and the east end of Cley, and the decision not to pursue this option. The use of bulldozers to form an embanked shingle wall is no longer viable, as there is a progressive loss of shingle from the area and the bank is increasingly prone to being broken through by the sea as happened in 1996. The proposals now are for an improved drainage of the marshes into the River Glaven in the event of a 'break through' or 'over top' of the shingle, for quicker removal of the salt water from the freshwater marsh.



Picture 1.

Drainage channel across the fresh water Cley Marshes, viewed from the Cley East Bank.



Picture 2.

Shingle embankment fronting Cley Marshes. Note the impact of sea action.

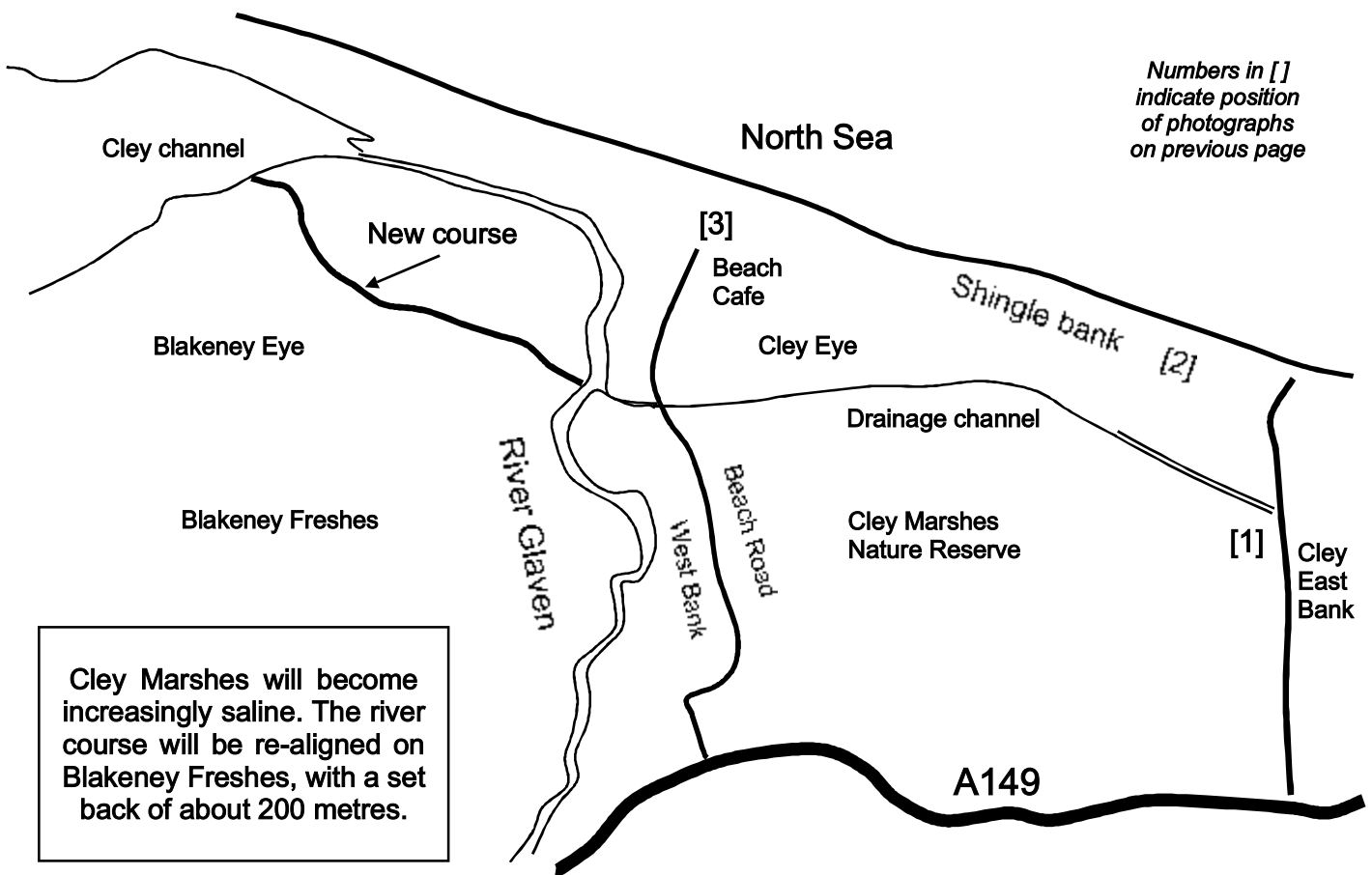
In time, the shingle bank at Cley and Salthouse is expected to adopt a much flatter, and more natural and stable, profile. It will be comparable to that to the west of the Cley beach café. In turn, the freshwater marsh at Cley will become more saline, with a loss of the very extensive reed beds and the eel population. The long-term loser will be the bittern. The bittern is hard to see, as it is very shy and slinks about in the high reeds. It 'freezes' with its bill pointing upwards when disturbed and is very difficult to distinguish from the

As a welcome example of 'joined-up' thinking, it is now proposed that the Blakeney Freshes Scheme and the Drainage Scheme will be constructed at the same time. It will reduce the overall time of disturbance in the area. It will also allow surplus excavated material from the sluice, downstream channel works and lowering of the Cley East Bank to be used to backfill the old River Glaven channel rather than disposing of it off site. Sand and gravel from the River Glaven excavations can also be used to provide stable access for machines excavating the widened channel downstream of the sluice.



Picture 3.

Natural shingle bank, west of Cley Beach café, with the River Glaven (top left) on a parallel course; the landward move of the beach will in time block the river channel.



surrounding reeds. It lives only in freshwater reed beds and the English population is centred on the Broads and East Anglia. It is best known for the characteristic booming call that you may occasionally hear around Cley.

Bitterns are classified as a biodiversity action plan (BAP) species under UK legislation and featured in the North Norfolk coast Special Protected Area Plan. It is imperative that if their habitat is removed or destroyed a nearby alternative is provided. For this reason the Environment Agency is working with the Norfolk Coast Partnership and various wildlife conservation organisations with the aim of finding 40 hectares of land suitable for turning into fresh water reed bed, possibly within the Glaven Valley. 40ha is considered suitable for two pair of breeding bitterns; it is not yet clear whether the 40 hectares has to be in one piece or can be split into several smaller marshes.

If this scheme is put into effect, it will clearly have some considerable effect on the Valley and on its agriculture, landscape and water resource. The Agency is working with its partners to arrive at agreements with local landowners in the part of the Valley between Glandford and the main coast road and hoping to arrive at solutions that will be acceptable to all parties, and will be beneficial to the environment. It is understood that some EU and other funding will be available for this.

The overall aim is for an integrated approach to the landscape of the Glaven catchment of which the newly formed reedbed may form a part. Over the coming months consultation with local landowners, agencies and communities will seek to evolve a common vision for the Glaven Valley. The Norfolk Coast Partnership has undertaken to co-ordinate the early stages of the process. Our website will endeavour to keep up to date with developments.

Jim Crossley

Editors Footnote:

"It has been pointed out to us that the reed bed could potentially go outside the Glaven Valley if this is not considered suitable for any reason. Apart from securing the agreement of landowners, there would be a loss of wet floodplain grassland, itself a Biodiversity Action Plan habitat"..



NEWSLETTER

News in brief.

- ❖ AWS are continuing with feasibility studies on the Baconsthorpe Sewage Treatment Works for the removal of phosphate nutrient from the effluent by percolating through a reed bed.
- ❖ We have a confirmed identification of a white-clawed crayfish in the middle reaches of the river. It was caught by local school children, photographed, and returned to the river.
- ❖ We plan a conservation survey and studies on the River Glaven flood plain habitats. This will be led by our Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT) committee member Steve Henson, and we will work to an agreed methodology for collecting data for the survey.
- ❖ We are also planning to map our data on silt entry points into the River Glaven so that we can make it available to the Environment Agency and Defra; this is against the background of the new agri-environment payment schemes coming into operation this summer.
- ❖ We have been informed of a project being developed by the Environment Agency, the Wild Trout Trust and English Nature to give funding support to the improvement of chalk rivers in England. When this is established it may offer some opportunities for advancing in-river habitat improvement work on the River Glaven
- ❖ We continue to be involved in any public exercises that affect the River Glaven and associated habitats. Recent examples are the plan for the diversion of the river to a new line across Blakeney Freshes; the improved drainage proposals for Cley Salthouse marshes, following the decision not to proceed with a flood defence wall set inland from the shingle bank; and discussions for possible habitat replacement, namely freshwater reed beds, consequent on the latter (these three are inter-linked, see Changing Course). Also the formulation by the Environment Agency of the North Norfolk Catchment Abstraction Strategy (CAMS), which determines licensing strategy for the next six years, and includes the Rivers Glaven, Stiffkey and Burn.

**Next committee date is
11th April**

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

Web site www.riverglaven.org.uk

Please do look at our site and remember to use the Message Board to tell us your thoughts. A colour version of this Newsletter in PDF format is available on the Visitors Page.

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