

River Wensum

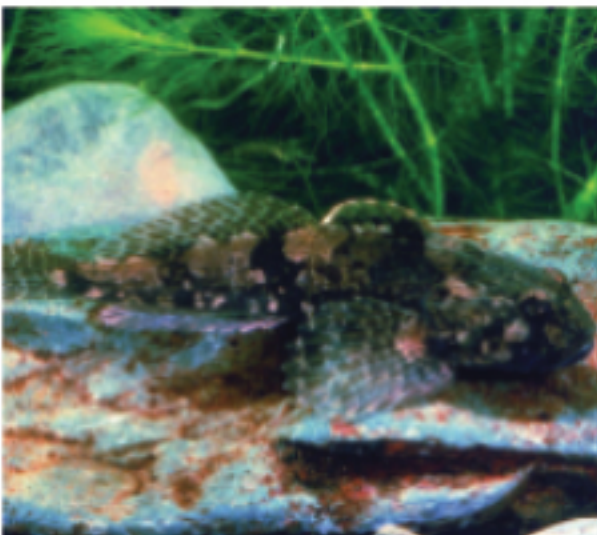
Restoration Strategy

Issue 6 March 2011

Welcome to our spring newsletter

It has been just over one year since we completed the first major pilot restoration scheme at Bintree. An important element of river restoration is monitoring, both before and after any work to investigate if the various restoration techniques used have performed as expected, in terms of increasing the ecological and physical habitat potential. At Bintree we have now completed post restoration monitoring. This has enabled us to compare results with monitoring we did before the work on the ground started. The good news is that electro fish surveys have shown the total number of fish recorded have increased post restoration. The most notable difference is the increase in the number of trout, bullhead and stone loach in the post restoration survey.

Bullhead



Stone Loach

The increase in bullhead, a species with a strong preference for gravel river beds, demonstrates that by carefully selecting locations in which to place gravel on the river bed, provides the suitable substrate and flow conditions for this European designated species.

National Farmers Union

In January 2011, staff from the River Wensum Restoration Strategy project were pleased to attend a National Farmers Union meeting for landowners within the River Wensum catchment. Talks were given on diffuse water pollution, access on the river and invasive non-native species. Rob Dryden, the Environment Agency's technical specialist on fisheries, recreation and biodiversity gave a presentation on river restoration.



The meeting was an opportunity to talk about the Strategy's objectives and our achievements to date; for landowners to ask questions about river restoration and feedback their knowledge of the river. Representatives from Natural England, Catchment Sensitive Farming and the Norfolk Non-Native Species Initiative were also on hand to answer questions and provide advice.

Great Ryburgh Meander Loop Scheme

We recently carried out a post restoration site visit with the landowners at Great Ryburgh. The works are bedding in nicely with the base flow of the river now using the re-instated meander loop. We are looking forward to completing the follow up environmental surveys in the summer, so we can measure the impact on the river's wildlife against the baseline surveys carried out before the works.

We are aware that much of the River Wensum is in private ownership, with little public access, but the work we carry out will not just benefit the immediate scheme area. Once the river beds and the habitat for species increases, whole reaches of the river will benefit, with increased populations of water borne species seen in many places as a result.

Feasibility reports

We have now completed all the site visits for the remaining feasibility reports. We would like to thank all the landowners who gave us permission to access their stretch of the river.

We are now working hard to produce the remaining feasibility reports and hope to have them completed and uploaded to the webpage later in the year. This will place us in the strong position of having the whole of the River Wensum fully appraised. This knowledge will ensure a holistic approach to river restoration and we can now concentrate on delivering detailed designs and implementing specific schemes in the future. If any landowners are interested in undertaking river restoration please do not hesitate to contact us and we will be happy to discuss further.

Abstraction report

Our Restoring Sustainable Abstraction (RSA) programme has identified that the River Wensum is over-abstracted at times of low

flows in its lower reaches, below Costessey. This has been associated with the public water supply abstraction which takes water directly from the river to serve the population of Norwich. Upstream of Costessey, the river is generally much less affected by abstraction, although if all existing licences were used to their full extent it is possible that wildlife would be affected.

We have put forward a plan of action to reduce the risk to the river from licensed abstraction. We are working with the farming community across the Wensum catchment to identify those licences which are not used to their full extent and which can be reduced without affecting the quantities of water that are currently required for irrigation or other farming purposes. We also intend to revoke those licences which have not been used for several years. This will avoid, as far as possible, restricting current farming practice.

A solution for the lower reaches of the river that are most heavily affected by abstraction will take a little longer to be achieved due to the importance of maintaining a public water supply. The water company has agreed not to increase the amount of water it takes from the river so that the risk of impacts will not be made worse. We are working together on identifying exactly how much water can be taken from the river without causing harm to wildlife but also on locating alternative sources of supply. This needs to take account of proposed growth in the greater Norwich area and an increase in population. Currently, the water company is aiming to have reduced its reliance on the River Wensum before 2015 and to have a long-term solution in place by 2020.

Contact details

If you would like further information or are interested in partnership working, please contact us at the following e-mail address: river.restoration@environment-agency.gov.uk
Or contact us by post: River Wensum Project Team, Environment Agency, Dragonfly House, 2 Gilders Way, Norwich, Norfolk, NR3 1UB.

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