

Apologies Roger Gibbons, David Harper, Geoff Philips, Sarah Gelpke

Present:

Name	Organisation/Involvement
Kelvin Allen	Chair and BASG
Chris Bone	Dereham Angling
Colin Howlett	LADAC, Worthing Fisheries, WG
Dennis Willis	Norfolk Flycatchers Club. Riverfly
Jeremy Haddaway	WACA Bintree Mill Wensum Riverfly co-ord
Liam Smith	Norfolk CC NNIS
Arnie Warsop	EA Fisheries Officer
Tim Venes	Fakenham AC
Tim Ellis	Wensum Anglers Conservation Association
John Findley	EA Citizen science Officer
Graham Gamble	Retired EA Fisheries Officer, RiverFly, Fish surveys

Previous actions

All Actions achieved. Details below (See minutes Dec meeting)

Actions

Action	Responsible	By date
Continue to investigate and develop the FIP for the fishery recover plan	Kelvin Allen	See below
Riverfly training and locations	Jeremy, Kelvin or Sarah	Completed
Collaborative work on the River Wensum Strategy	Morphology and Ecology working group members	As per steering group outcomes from 18 th May

Fishery Recovery Plan (Slides 2 – 4)

EA Labs findings verbal update from John

Some level of parasite but not at a level to cause harm to fish health

Both locations showed slow growth rate < 3 years.

Above 3 years showed growth above normal

All other indicators where within normal boundaries

Kelvin requested if a copy of the final report would be made available to WCP.

Action JF

Kelvin's response was that he wasn't sure where this leaves us, giving the underlying stock densities evidenced in the river.

Many members asked the same question of the EA on where this leaves us.

Kelvin noted we are awaiting on the PhD report and would seek clarity from Calum on it's likely availability. John was asked what would be the EA stance if the two reports showed a variance on fish health, would the EA continue with investigations.

The response was that currently based on the evidence they have; no further surveys would be undertaken. But they would review the PhD report and consider the options.

Concerns were raised with the time lag between the respective surveys, the PhD undertook samples at Hellesden initially in Sept 2021. These showed poor health and we have an initial report on this

from Sterling Uni. A 2nd sample was undertaken in May 2022 at both Hellesden and Swanton Morley, the Hellesden fish were in such low densities at both locations and again the fish at Hellesden showed extreme signs of poor health. This was reported to the EA at the time, but little or no action was taken due to resources.

The Wensum annual survey was undertaken in September 2022, but again no fish were taken for analysis on health at the time, for whatever reason. The survey did show low densities throughout the sample points, including Hellesden. It wasn't until 22nd Feb 2023 that roach were caught and samples taken to the National Fish labs for analysis. This is 15 months after the initial findings and 9 months since the last evidence of poor roach health conditions at Hellesden.

So one consideration is that all the previous roach stock around Hellesden up to May 2022 have died and been replaced with fish from upstream or connected tributaries.

So it begs the question can neighbouring roach stock from flood connected lakes be transferred back into the Wensum. It still remains unclear on the policy from either EA or NE on this currently.

We agreed that we should continue to develop the plans for improving the fry refuges in the Swanton Morley area and Arnie is looking at the wider scheme to develop this. In parallel with this WCP via Elle is liaising with Billingford Lakes and will hopefully build relationships to enable access on their land to re-establish the previous fly refuges.

Action Plan

- ✓ Define the area of focus
- ✓ Define current Density
- Understand the current health concerns
 - PhD Analysis Awaiting report
 - EA Labs findings As above, but awaiting formal report
 - WACA Roach Spawning report from 2023
- Define the cause of these concerns
 - Continued statutory bodies policy on stocking
 - What needs to be done to enable this
- Define and improve the habitat
- Reach agreement with Landowners
- Define monitoring plan
- Reach agreement on stocking protocol

PHD Studies

Volunteer involvement in the otter spraint project was ceased due to concerns about otters catching avian flu. Jeremy Hadaway has completed the collection of spraints with some 20 frozen samples and 10 fresh refrigerated samples collected with the Nottingham team on March 23rd.

Roach research undertaken by a specialist fish pathologist at the University of Stirling has sadly ended and an alternative has been found in Canadian. They will need to discuss any analysis undertaken by the EA labs as Roach are being collected 22nd Feb for the National Fish Labs in Brampton. **Action KA to re-establish links and ensure the EA report is shared with Calum.**

Riverfly 2023 (Slide 4-7)

Overall structure presented by Dennis Willis

- 1 ARMI hub coordinator(s) **Dan Hoare & David Harper**
 - maintains/expands monitoring groups
 - contact at catchment/regional level
 - coordinates training and on-going support, incl. funding
- 2 ARMI group coordinator **Jeremy Hadaway**
 - contact for the group, statutory agency and Riverfly Partnership
 - maintains monitoring activity and ensures data sharing
 - verifies online data submissions
- 3 second contact point for ARMI group **Dennis Willis**
 - supports coordinator
- 4 Ecology Contact **John Findlay at Environment Agency**
 - liaison with the group coordinator
 - site registration & trigger levels
 - training support
 - ensures statutory response to incidents
- 5 Riverfly Partnership ARMI Coordinator **Trine at Riverflies Partnership**
 - support, ongoing training & communication

Matching Sites to Volunteers – Dennis has been leading on this.

Site	Location	Monitors.	
Tat 1 (Tatterford Common)	TF 86450 27975 W3W: otherwise.starting.laugh	DH/RB*	
Wensum Raynham Hall Church Bridge	TF8787525399 slang.freely.niece	DH/RB/?	
Wensum (SMNR)	TF89650 30325 elsewhere.headers.incur	DH/RB*	
Wensum Fakenham 1	TF 92220 29233 gardens.engineers.widgets	DH/TV/?	
Wensum Fakenham 2	?	TV/?	New site?
Wensum Pensthorpe	?	DH**	
Blackwater/Worthing	TG 00301 19975 reworked.overused.scared	CH/GG/DW**	
Wensum Bintry	TF 99465 24000 amphibian.prowl.shops	JH/KF/RW*	
Wensum Swanton Morley	TG 01684 19393 workbench.juror.trials	DW/RG/GG/RW/CH **	
Wensum Sparham	TG 05716 18442 crowd.dressings.declares	CH/GG*	

Wensum Lyng	TG 07721 17637 jiffy.walnuts.fractions	CH/JH/GG*	
Wensum Lenwade	TG1074218715 bolsters.meatballs.scam	DW/CH/GG*	
Wensum Ringland	TG 13998 13767	JH/KF	Old site to restart
Wensum Attlebridge	TG 12669 16794	??	Old site to restart?
Wensum Costessey	TG 17587 13239	??	Old site to restart?
Tud 1 Gunton Lane	TG 19279 10837 Vital.sands.urban	DW?/GR/RR/EC	New site – tried by former sampler/DW
Tud 2 Queen Hills	TG1532411616 masses.basket.hourglass	DW?/GR/RR/EC	?

What should be our defined strategy on Taxa Groupings and analysis

Riverfly AMRI 8 Taxa Groups
Riverfly + AMRI 33 Taxa Groups
Smartrivers 40 Taxa Groups
eCountability 20 Taxa Groups

Are current strategy is to build on developing our Riverfly ARMI solution, starting with the 8 Taxa grouping. David Harper is already exploring extending this to the Riverfly + and 33 Taxa grouping. However we continue to get challenged from other groups who use different protocols and Taxa groupings. Wildfish use the Smart rivers approach and have recently published reports showing the Wensum as the worst chalk stream in the country, using their own smart water protocol scoring.

eCountability a consultancy working on the Wendling Beck project is suggesting a different protocol of 20 Taxa Groups.

John explained the EA position in recognising Riverfly as the formal scoring and would investigate breaches in agreed low level scores, where as the other protocols this isn't provided.

The group agreed that we should have one standard approach for scoring across the Wensum and that this should be based on the Riverfly system, which is also currently being enhanced to support an extension to Riverfly + in 2023.

It was agreed that Kelvin, Dennis and Jermay would work up a paper to reply to other groups on the position that WCP has on such matters. Not stopping their own ambitions to monitor the Wensum, but this would be at their own cost and risk. We wouldn't stop any of our volunteers wanting to train on these, what seem more complex and time consuming samples. But it was felt we needed to have a WCP position on this.

Action KA to draft a letter for review.

Wensum Monitoring Dashboard 2023 (Slide 8)

Kelvin has updated the dashboard to include the wider Wensum Tributaries, he is currently seeking data sets to populate these. This now breaks the catchment into 52 compartments. This include: Langor Drain, Guist Drain, Foulsham Drain, Blackwater Drain, Blackwater Drain Trib, Kerdiston Drain Swannington Drain, Wendling Beck - Dillington – Worthing, Wendling Beck - Grt Farnsham – Dillington, River Tud - Source – Hockering, River Tud - Hockering - New Costessey This make an additional of 82kms of the total 172kms.

River Flow Ecological Impacts (Slides 9-12)

Kelvin presented material from the regional drought group on the status of the groundwater at Bircham Newton and historic flow data trends at Swanton Morley. Both show signs of stress. The ecology on the river Tat following the BioBlitz shows clear signs of damage caused by lack of water and flow, with the river bed full of dead snail shells and low Riverfly scores.

Evidenced by:

Poor Riverfly Scores

Dead Mussels and Snails

Exceptional low flows

EA's own groundwater charts

Yet Fakenham shows good flows

Where is the water going?

Can a reassessment made on the licenced and actual abstraction volumes, impacting on the Wensum headwaters.

How is the flow actually assessed today, when the nearest gauging station is at Fakenham.

Action KA to discuss across the WCP Groups.

Next meeting

21st Aug 2023