

RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION

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NEWSLETTER

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RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

February 2005

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Editorial

A shorter than usual editorial will come as a relief to many, including the editor. No point, I feel, in delaying for a moment longer than necessary your enjoyment of the feast of articles prepared for you in this edition.



I very much welcome the second instalment of Jenny James' study of the Deben Estuary's birds: one which manages, as before, to pack an enormous amount of information into an article of great readability. I am still savouring some of her arresting imagery, such as redshanks' legs in the light of a setting sun, like Christmas-tree candles, and the names of unfamiliar birds like the Gadwall and the Pochard. I have placed her article close to Denzil Cowdry's one on Deben fishing, in case there may be some tips for him there on the catching of cormorants. Although Denzil's appeal for a replacement RDA Fishing Correspondent is printed here, it is hoped that this won't be the last of his tales of fishing on the Deben . . . and on waters far beyond. New correspondents are always hugely welcome to the editor however comfortable he may be with the existing ones.

One of the delights, for me, of this Newsletter is the variety of contributions received on my desk. Readers will be as pleased as I am with a newsletter which combines an article from our Press Secretary, Rosemary Schlee, on her canoeing adventure on the upper reaches of the Deben, with another from Lily Kozmian-Ledward who is on board the sailing cutter, Amadis, dodging reefs in

the South Pacific. The latter boat has a special place in the editor's heart because it began life as a pile of wood and lead- ingots, half a mile from his house in South Australia and ended that part of its life under his ownership on a Deben mooring not much more than a mile from our family's second home in Woodbridge. Lily has just reported Amadis' arrival in Rarotonga in the southern Cook Islands. Rosemary, I hope, is preparing another more local voyage of exploration. We look forward to sharing it, once again: vicariously and comfortably transformed in Rosemary's inimitable style.

Anyone who missed Glen Cooper's talk on Conservation Designations after the last AGM in April will have a second chance in this generously-supplied and slightly edited version. We badly need a special guide through the bureaucratic thickets which surround this all-important issue of Deben conservation. Glen has kindly offered us that service and we are duly grateful to him. So, in a very different way, has Ed Stanford, whose chatty, fireside, Chairman's Notes reveal an immense activity on our behalf and provide some very valuable reflections upon it. Please, members, get involved in the big issues that effect our lives as Deben- livers (?) and -lovers; if only by encouraging new membership of the RDA and by coming to the next General Meeting announced on the rear cover of this Newsletter.

Best wishes for the autumn and winter of 2005. Hoping to see you on 28th October when I may have a quiz ready for you on Pochards and Gadwalls and the local whereabouts of the narrow-mouth whorled snail.

Nick Wright

Chairman's Notes

What a coincidence! I had just finished drafting my chairman's comments in early August making frequent reference to the erosion at East Lane when the East Anglian Daily Times of 11 August published a lengthy piece about a likely funding shortage for sea defence work at East Lane and Shingle Street. A re-write became necessary.

You might ask why East Lane is of such interest since it is not part of the Deben. The reason is that the river mouth will respond to coastal erosion in the area of East Lane, but in ways which are not fully understood. The EADT report quotes Mr Fell-Clark, the owner of the Martello Tower, as saying that, when he bought the tower in 1996, there was 25 metres of land and 15 metres of shingle between the tower and the sea. Now the tower stands 10 metres from the edge of the cliff. What has brought about this change, and will it continue?

In late-April, I attended the AGM of the Alde/Ore Association and listened to a lecture by Professor Ken Pye on coastal change. One of his key points was that the role of sea-level rise in coastal erosion is uncertain. He pointed out that the sea levels recorded at Lowestoft since the 1950s indicate a slight rise of about 13 cms since the mid-1970s, but that this would not, in his opinion, account for the current rate of erosion. A more likely cause is an increase in the height and frequency of storm surges, but even these may now be declining in frequency. Are the changes occurring at East Lane due to a change in the direction of wave impact? Whatever the cause, the rate of erosion there is rapid. I was at East Lane at the end of July, beyond the rock armour. Cracks could be seen a



metre or more back from the cliff. Barley had been sown at what presumably was then a safe distance from the cliff-edge but, by harvest time, a wide band had to be left uncut because it was not safe for the harvester to get so near to the edge.

[Editor's note: Please compare the picture which accompanies this article, drawn by Ron Wragg in August 2005, with his drawing of a year ago in Issue No. 29 of Autumn 2004]

Erosion at East Lane is paralleled by similar changes at South Felixstowe where the beach has dropped at least six feet from the promenade, making access from the promenade distinctly hazardous! Here the Environment Agency is creating "fish-tail" groynes to arrest further erosion and to try to restore the beach. We can only hope that this will offer a permanent solution. All this work has a very considerable cost, so it is important that it is done on the basis of good evidence. This point was stressed, amongst others, in a lecture given by Professor Tim O'Riordan of the University of East Anglia to a meeting of the Alde/Ore Planning Partnership on 20th May. Tim made the point that coastal change means that protection for towns and villages must take priority over agricultural areas. He repeatedly stressed that local consultation on defence-works was vital, but pointed out that hard data on the causes and effects of erosion were hard to come by. He also felt that history was not necessarily a good guide to the future. He wondered whether revenue from the carbon tax might not be used for coastal defence work and whether it was possible for those benefiting from defence-work to compensate, in some way, those who lose out. An interesting thought!

With all this in mind, I should draw your

attention to the outside back cover. The half-yearly meeting of the RDA will be held at Waldringfield Village Hall at 7.30 on Friday 28th October. The speaker will be Ms Gemma Costin of the Environment Agency. Gemma has specific responsibility for coastal works from the Felixstowe War Memorial to Landguard but she tells me that she can also cover developments further up the coast. (What was that question you wanted to ask about the effect on shingle of off-shore dredging?)

Jo doubt you feel that I have gone on a bit too much about the coast, at the expense of the Deben. The big difference between the two is the rate of change. Changes in the river are much less dramatic and more subtle . . . although those sailing out over the bar might not entirely agree . . . but they are taking place, just the same. Although we can all have a view about the increase in mud deposition, we still have very little hard data, despite the Environment Agency's model. For this reason, whenever I am asked for a view on proposed changes to riverbanks, and so on, I always take the view that "hold the line" is the right approach. In his lecture, Ken Pye took the same view in relation to the Alde/Ore although he did admit that there are some rather difficult stress points which will require attention. The Deben is less problematic. Just recently, I have been re-reading W.G. Arnott's "Suffolk Estuary". When you realise how much work was done by hand to build banks, create docks and to dredge channels over the centuries, "holding the line" is easier to support if only in the interest of preserving some of the fruits of this great labour.

Another date for your diaries. A presentation on the Preferred Option for the Deben Estuary Strategy will take place at the Bull Hotel, Woodbridge, on 2nd November, 2pm-7pm. Please do take the opportunity to go along and make your views known. The heavy breathing

over your shoulder may be the shade of Mr Arnott!

Mention of formal plans for the river leads on to two other points. You will know that Suffolk Coastal, in common with other local authorities, is under pressure from John Prescott's office of the Deputy Prime Minister to approve the majority of planning applications within eight weeks or suffer a financial penalty. In addition, there have been moves to further restrict the ability of members of the public to influence planning decisions.

We need to be increasingly watchful about any plans which may impinge on the river so that a strong position can be adopted, if necessary. A case in point is the application to build more than 120 holiday cottages at Foxburrow Farm in Waldringfield. This application has been rejected, as has a cut-down proposal for half that number, but the matter has now gone to appeal. On your behalf, I have written to the inspector pointing out that although the application refers to an area outside the immediate confines of the river, approval would have implications for parking at Waldringfield where the available parking, and the access road, are already suffering considerable congestion at peak times. The ramp by the boatyard belongs to the Sailing Club and is not for general use. There will also be increased stress on the river walls if there is a major influx of people. No date has yet been set for a hearing.

In relation to money and to coastal erosion, the government has proposed the amalgamation of English Nature and the Environment Agency to form the unimaginatively-titled "Nature England". The creation of a larger Agency is likely to lead to the formulation of plans which pay less attention to local issues, concentrating on the "bigger picture". We will need to evaluate the effects of this change over time and make representations as necessary.

The debate on access to the river via the old ferry landing at Ramsholt continues. We have made a considerable contribution to the legal expenses and, with the agreement of the organisers, have also committed the proceeds of last year's River Deben Walk (some £600) to the same cause. The matter is now in the hands of Suffolk County Council to which more than 200 statements have been sent, most of them describing years of unrestricted crabbing, fishing, swimming and messing-about in the water at that point. Interestingly, the Alde/Ore people have a similar problem at Iken Beach where a new landowner has erected a fence at high-water mark which has the effect of preventing yachtsmen from landing from their dinghies as they have done for many years. It may also be restricting the public footpath . . . and the debate continues.

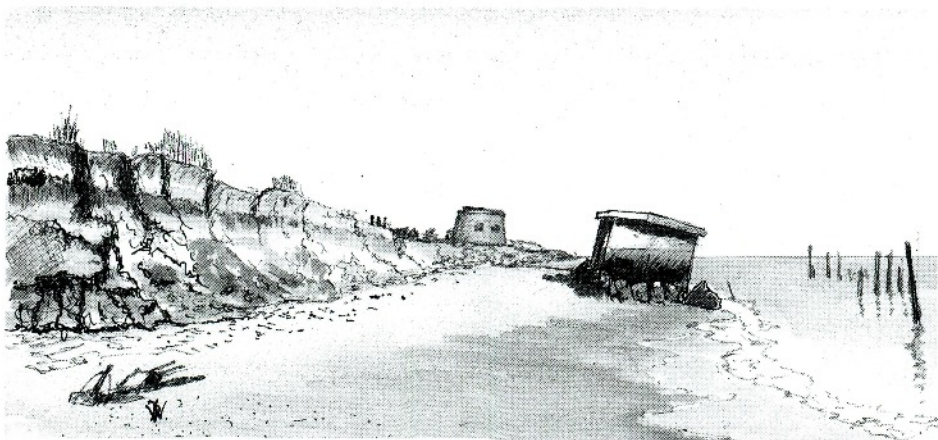
Let me refer in brief to three other matters. Jo Masters will be organising the annual litter pick again this year. It will be held on 8th October. If you are free on that day and are able to help, Jo would like to hear from you (01394 383825). Secondly, our Treasurer and Membership Secretary, Chris Brown, has had some heart problems over the last few months, requiring a new valve, but also leading to a rather nasty post-operative infection. I am happy to say that Chris is now

recovering and we hope to see Sea Drake back on the river before long. Its only when one of the committee goes hors de combat that you fully appreciate how much work they each do. My best wishes for Chris' continuing good health!

Finally, "sackcloth and ashes" time for the Chairman. In reporting the setting-up of Deben Watch in the last Newsletter, I referred to a charge of £37.50. This covers the cost of including a chip somewhere in the boat to ensure that if the boat were ever stolen, and the unique hull number obliterated, the boat can still be identified. The charge does not apply to the recording of the serial numbers of electronic equipment and so on. I apologise if my illegible notes made at the launch meeting may have deterred someone from participating in Deben Watch.

The weather so far this summer has been distinctly variable but I hope that you have been able to enjoy the river to the full. Now may be the time to remind your friends that the RDA was set up to help preserve and protect the river and that they should consider joining us. The subscription is modest. The collective voice is stronger the larger the membership.

Ed Stanford



The Environment Agency's Shortlist of Deben Estuary Options

The 8 options that have been shortlisted are summarised and explained below. For more detailed information on the process of shortlisting options and associated impacts please see the SES website

(www.suffolkestuaries.co.uk/Deben/ShortlistTheOptions.htm).

SHORTLISTED OPTION		INDICATIVE COST
No Active Intervention Options ¹	OPTION A: No Active Intervention throughout the whole Estuary + maintaining existing defences at mouth	LOW
Hold the line options ²	OPTION C: Hold the Line throughout the whole Estuary	HIGH
Managed Realignment Options	OPTION D: Managed Realignment at one or more sites in the Upper Estuary + Hold the Line in the Lower Estuary: Ramsholt Marsh Ramsholt Lodge Marsh Shottisham Marsh Pettistree Marsh Waldringfield South Waldringfield North Kyson Point Marsh Martlesham Marsh Methersgate Marsh Little Sutton Hoo Marsh Melton Marshes	LOW to MEDIUM Depending on number of Managed Realignment sites
	OPTION E: Managed Realignment at one or more sites in the Lower Estuary + Hold the Line in the Upper Estuary: Falkenham North Marshes Falkenham South Marshes Kirton Creek Marshes Partial Felixstowe Marshes	
	OPTION G: Managed Realignment at one or more sites in the Upper Estuary + partial Managed Realignment at Felixstowe Marshes + Hold the Line Elsewhere	
	OPTION I: Managed Realignment at one or more sites in the Upper Estuary + Managed Realignment at Falkenham North Marshes + Hold the Line Elsewhere	
	OPTION K: Managed Realignment at one or more sites in the Upper Estuary + Managed Realignment at Kirton Creek Marshes + Hold the Line Elsewhere	
Advance the Line Options	OPTION L: Barrier at Estuary Mouth or upstream towards Ramsholt	HIGH

¹ No active intervention

This is used as a baseline against which other options must be compared.

This option would involve stopping all maintenance, repair and renewal work on the defences throughout the Deben Estuary. The defences would continue to be monitored and assessed until they eventually failed. Areas of land currently protected from tidal flooding would no longer be protected.

All land would experience ad hoc flooding. Due to the reduction in erosion and water speeds in the Upper Estuary there would be a gain of intertidal habitats in front of the defences upstream of Ramsholt. Navigation may become more difficult due to the increased water speeds at the estuary mouth.

² Hold the line

This option represents the current situation and is also used as a baseline to compare against the other options. It would involve maintaining and eventually rebuilding the existing flood defences on their current alignment throughout the estuary.

Under this option all land and assets would continue to be protected. As sea levels rise, this option would result in an increase in water levels, water speeds and erosion pressure on the defences. The intertidal habitats in front of the defences would also experience increased erosion. To account for the increased pressure on the defences and rise in water levels, the existing defences would need to be raised and strengthened to provide the same standard of protection as today.

Treasurer's Note.

The last Newsletter was accompanied by a statement unless I had received the member's subscription by the time of preparing the newsletter for posting. I am sorry if, in some cases, this caused some confusion. Many of you already had a standing order for your bank to pay at a later date and no action was needed. However the statement did include information about the date of the last payment and the method of payment, which I hoped would reduce any confusion.

The overall effect of sending the statement has been beneficial in that many more have now paid their subscriptions at the correct time. I am aware that some members have raised questions about their subscription payments that have not yet been answered. For this I must apologise but my excuse is that I have been indisposed for most of the period since early April. I am now getting back to normal and will be communicating again, I hope, by the time this gets to you. Thank you for your patience.

Chris Brown

Deben Estuary Birds

Although it seems a distant thought as I write this at the height of summer, a winter walk by the River Deben, on the coldest and windiest of days, is an exhilarating experience. At dusk, just before high tide, take the walk along the river wall from the Tide Mill in Woodbridge down to Kyson Point and you will be in the midst of hundreds of circling and calling gulls, waders and other wildfowl.

There may be, right at your feet, pecking at or turning over stones on the path, on the river wall or perched on boats and jetties, small groups of scurrying, crouching, orange legged turnstones, with tortoiseshell backs, harlequin faces with the zig-zag stripes on their wings and back visible in flight.

Under the river wall there are certain to be noisy groups of mallards, more aloof mute swans and the ever present and perhaps less welcome feral Canada geese, all jostling for the crumbs of food which experience has shown them can be forthcoming when groups of humans appear above them.

On any mud banks still exposed in the river, there will be massed ranks of waders clinging to the last bit of dry land before being forced into the air by the rising tide. The low winter sun may pick out the red legs of the slim olive brown redshanks or the red beak and pink legs of the bulkier black and white oyster catchers. Both species have shrill piping calls, the oyster catcher being the

harsher, more strident of the two. Smaller dunlins may move around between them and then take off in flight, the compact flocks picking up the last of the afternoon light as they move across the water flicking light and then dark as they twist and turn in tight formation.

Above the water, lines of black-headed gulls, now with their white-headed winter plumage, fly up or down stream. Massed black clouds of lapwings, with their lazy flapping flight, wheel and turn, collect and disperse. They seek out the islands covered in salt marsh grasses and jostle for roosting space with redshanks and

black-tailed godwits. These

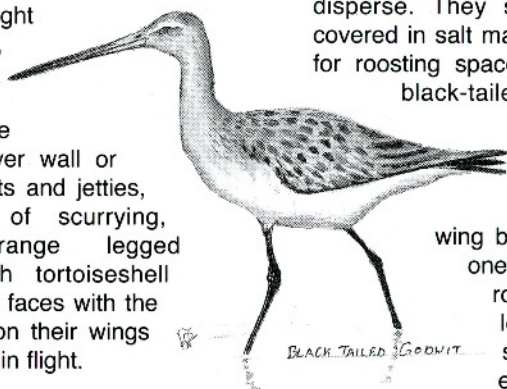
handsome godwits, revealing their boldly patterned white

wing bar and rump, arrive in ones and twos to join the roost. With their graceful long necks and long, slightly upturned, bills extended and their long legs dangling, they alight

into the shallow water and disappear among the grasses.

Other waders may take refuge from the high tide alongside the moorhens and Canada geese in the water-meadows behind the river wall. Often in the dusk there is an indefinable sound and an undulating movement of grey shapes as lapwings, godwits and the occasional zig-zagging snipe make use of the last precious moments of daylight to feed before the light fades.

On a bright icy winter afternoon, the walk from Martlesham along the south side of the creek can reveal many of the Deben's secrets. Near Kyson Point the sheltered south-facing bank of the creek is a



BLACK-TAILED GODWIT

favourite place for ducks and waders. Tucked in below the bank they can feed, rest and warm up in the winter sunshine. Long before you see them you will hear the haunting whistling of the wigeons sheltering in the salt marsh or feeding on the mud and in the water. The chestnut head and orange forehead of the males are a sharp contrast to the dowdy brown plumage of the females. Among the wigeons you may detect a few smaller ducks with a shiny green flash on the wing and head. These are male teals and are among the prettiest of our small surface feeding ducks.

There will be several species of wader in addition to the oyster-catchers, dunlins and redshanks. A curlew with its long down-curved beak may stand out, the bulky shape of its body contrasting with that of the more slender black-tailed godwit. If you are lucky you will catch sight of the black and white stripes and trailing legs of avocets in flight or see them feeding in small groups on the mud. In recent years these striking birds have been seen further and further up the river. Another increasingly common excitement is the appearance of a little egret, its snow white plumage easily visible as it stands quietly in the reeds like a small heron or flies with slow flaps of its wings across the mud and water. If you look really carefully through binoculars you may notice its bright yellow feet.

Looking across Troublesome Reach you will see groups of sea-birds floating on the water which probably include black-headed gulls and shelduck. Among them a tiny duck shape will tantalise you as it dives and reappears unpredictably some way off. These dabchicks or little grebes are a friendly presence in the Deben at many times of the year.

There are always plenty of the more common water birds in Martlesham Creek but occasionally you can detect something a little different. A rather stout grey bird with short legs is probably a knot. If it flies you can see the thin white wing bar. A rather larger darker redshank without the white wing-bar in flight could be a spotted redshank. Occasionally one may take up residence for the winter but more often they are birds of passage. You will certainly not mistake the iridescent blue and chestnut of a kingfisher as it flashes along the waterline. These birds feed more often around the estuaries in the winter months.

In the water meadows behind you, as you walk along the river-wall downstream, especially at high tide when the mud is covered and they cannot feed, there may be flocks of waders. Often you may not give these a second glance assuming that they are a mixture of curlew, lapwing and all the usual suspects. But, sunlight could catch the gold back and white under-parts of golden plovers. Up to fifty or even a hundred of these may be feeding quietly alongside the other birds. If they are disturbed and fly up you will see a gold and white swirl of wings before they land like dancers nearby.

For a closer look at some of the birds, the stretch of river-wall from Lime Kiln Quay to Melton, where the river is narrow, gives a chance to study the details of some of the more common birds as well as occasionally bringing you face to face with a rarity. From here you can see that the herring gull has pink legs and a larger bill with a red spot and that the similarly coloured but smaller common gull has blue grey legs and a smaller all-yellow bill. Similarly, the huge but infrequent greater black-backed gull has a larger bill with a red spot and flesh coloured legs whereas

the lesser black-backed gull has a smaller bill and yellow legs. From here you might see small groups of the wintering avocets and among the other waders, towards spring, you may see quite large flocks of grey plovers, which may have the beginnings of their handsome breeding plumage of black, white and silver. They stand motionless on the mud and then dart forward in short bursts to feed.

The stony mud near the sewage works is good place to see turnstones and also small groups of ringed plovers with their characteristic black and white collar busily darting, stopping and starting above the tide line. Cormorants are common in many parts of the river but here, the dead trees on the old river walls opposite the Melton Boatyard provide a secure sanctuary at high tide and can be covered with the dark huddled shapes of roosting birds. Redshanks also use these trees and a most striking image remains in my memory of the setting sun lighting up the red legs of perhaps one hundred redshanks like candles on a Christmas tree.

I have several other favourite places for winter bird-watching along the banks of the Deben, from Methersgate and the Hams and Tips, down to Stonor Point and beyond to Ramsholt and, on the other bank, below Waldringfield and downstream from Kirton Creek. These are the places for the big flocks of curlews or Brent geese on the arable fields and also where you can look out over the widest parts of the estuary for huge rafts of ducks and gulls and, at low tide, for massed ranks of waders feeding on the mud.

It is often the sound of the birds that will attract your attention, a low bubbling sound interspersed with harsher calls will suggest a flock of curlews feeding and as

they fly up over the water, their pale dagger shaped rumps and strong flight will confirm your identification. It will be hard to contain your excitement when you hear low murmurs and chuckles coming from beyond the brow of a field of winter wheat and as you walk further towards the river wall see the dark heads and necks of clusters of Brent geese with their striking white under-parts. Their formation flight over your head, their wings singing and their white tail bands shining against a sullen grey or bright blue winter sky will linger in the memory. Any other geese that you see are most likely to be the introduced and easily identified resident Canada geese or the increasingly resident greylag.

The expansive mudflats between the Hams and Tips and down to Stonor Point and beyond can be guaranteed to provide a wealth of birds at any state of the tide. Mid-tide on a rising tide will drive the feeding waders up the mud towards you and the ducks and gulls on the water may follow. The whistling wigeons will often be the most numerous of the ducks on the water surface. A careful search with binoculars, or better still a telescope, may reveal the elegant pointed tails and neck stripe of a small group of chocolate-headed pintails or the green flashes of some male teals. Heavy-billed shovelers, the males with green heads and distinctive white chest, may be feeding head down along with the dull brown females on the water surface. There will often be coots with their white foreheads and the rafts of gulls will be mostly black-headed gulls.

Places where the water is deep near the bank are the best place for spotting the long white neck and wedge shaped head of great crested grebes as they appear and disappear as they dive to feed. The

charming little goldeneye can sometimes be seen in similar situations. This small chunky diving duck, the male with black and white markings and triangular head, has been seen as far up the river as Woodbridge especially at times of severe weather.

There are other fresh water diving ducks which are more likely to be seen on the numerous stretches of fresh water, dykes and reservoirs in the fields beside this section of the Deben, which do retreat to the river when the weather is particularly cold. The compact tufted duck, the male with a white flank, and the chestnut headed pochard are the most likely. More rarely, the black stern and white wing patch of the otherwise grey male gadwall may attract your attention.

The shallow waters between the Hams and Tips are favoured feeding places for the numerous herons which frequent the river and also large groups of mute swans, shelducks and Canada geese. The sand spits extending out from the Hams and Tips are popular roosting places for oyster-catchers and out on the mud groups of redshanks, dunlins, black-tailed godwits and curlews can be seen moving towards the beach with the rising tide.

We do not always associate the River Deben with birds of prey. But we must not forget the proximity of Minsmere where the marsh harrier has been successfully re-established as a secure breeding species. These and other raptors take advantage of the water meadows with nearby woods and copses which provide undisturbed cover and winter feeding

territory. On a walk by the river wall above Ramsholt on a bright winter morning or towards dusk you could be rewarded with the task of deciding whether the silhouette ahead of you is the V shaped, gliding flight of a marsh harrier or the broader winged, soaring flight of a common buzzard. It would be an exciting moment if you detected a white tail on your buzzard as this would reveal a rough-legged buzzard on one of its rare winter forays across the North Sea in search of milder weather. The hovering kestrels or fast agile flight of a sparrowhawk may be familiar but a smaller raptor with a dashing flight which also perches on bushes or fence-posts could be a merlin. A much larger, heavily-built bird with fast wing beats and gliding flight that causes havoc among the feeding birds on the mud could be a peregrine falcon. It is a wonderful moment when that obscure bird flying low and quartering over the reed bed in the distance resolves into the pale wings with black tips of a male hen harrier or the white rump (ring tail) of a female. If any of these birds are around, you will not be alone on the river wall as word soon spreads among the bird-watching enthusiasts.

At this time of year, while the boats are laid up for winter, the birds have the water to themselves, the only disturbances coming from the river banks or from the air. Winter bird watching may be uncomfortable, but if you do venture out and brave the cold east winds you will be thrilled by the variety and number of birds which use our estuary as their winter feeding ground.

Jenny James



MARSH HARRIER, HARTLEY.

How do you catch a cormorant?



The first boat over which I took sole charge was a 14-foot RNSA dinghy in Portsmouth Harbour. These dinghies were built as a trade test by naval shipwrights and provided to the Royal Navy for

recreational sailing. Thus, in 1949, on the Sunday afternoons of alternate duty week-ends, I would hasten down to Gunwharf, via Weevil Lane (!) to venture forth into Portsmouth Harbour and the Solent. I can remember one windy afternoon, after a splendid lunch, with a young Fay as crew, being blown flat as we came out from the lee of a Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker moored on the wharf. There followed a quick swim, chasing one disappearing Admiralty galvanised bailer with a wooden handle (negative buoyancy) and four floating belaying pins. As a boy in the late 1930s, I had sailed under canvas (yes, real canvas!) in an 8-metre but told to "get under the cuddy and keep your hands away from the winch". My recollection is only of the heady smell of hemp rope! Such early experience embedded a lifetime involvement with small boats.

I came to fishing rather late, via a variety of dinghies and cruisers on which this pastime was either barely possible or not good form! Owning a Drascombe Dabber puts fishing in a different context: the little boat was designed for it. So why not try?

Since I reported on my Deben winter catch, I have caught, or contributed to the catching of, about half-a-bucket of smallish bass, either on long-lines or a

rod, and baited with squid, herring, hermit crab or worm. Only the last, at about £1 an ounce, were taken by the bass. At 10p each for worms, you have to catch a lot of fish to cover the bait overhead, let alone other costs.

In an attempt to find out more about this new endeavour, I have also travelled away from the Deben. What happens on the Alde and the Ore? One enterprising fisherman at Orford takes fee-paying guests, most of them animated under-10s, to watch him draw a half-dozen lobster pots. As an estimate, he nets about £150 an evening from the observers but, on my outing, the one edible-size lobster and the one edible crab he caught would not have covered the cost of the diesel and the small herring with which he had to re-bait his pots.

It was the same in China. There, on the River Li, I checked up on fishing with cormorants. Imagine a balmy evening and a large flat-bottomed craft with a kerosene light forward; a quite fast-flowing river 400 metres across and against a moonlit background of beautiful rounded limestone hills; twenty patrons at about £1 equivalent per head (China is low-cost tourism); a dozen lively hungry cormorants, obviously pinioned to prevent flight and with a tie on their necks to prevent them from swallowing; a long pole onto which the birds have been trained to jump in order to be returned to their perch on the fore-deck; and, inevitably, an empty bucket.

We were barely away from the jetty before the excited birds, yellow eyes darting, began to dive into the water: becoming sleek torpedoes, legs outstretched, zooming up and down and turning sharply in pursuit of their quarry. One by one, the birds surfaced, each with a fish across the beak or disappearing into the long gullet,

swimming vigorously towards the long pole held with the tip just below the surface to assist their return to the boat. Some even walked sideways up the pole in their eagerness to get on with the job. Clapsed firmly upside-down over the bucket the birds fairly happily regurgitated their catch, sometimes assisted by firm fingers to open their beaks. They were then back over the side as quickly as ungainly webbed feet allowed. In an hour we had a bucketful of small fish, enough to feed the hungry birds and sufficient larger fish to feed a small family. The evening did set me thinking. But how do you catch a cormorant? The light is a different matter . . . ever tried night fishing on the Deben?

I did learn one thing on the quay at Orford. Large bass feed on the bottom, small bass feed at all depths. Now, I have been fishing on the bottom and the small bass of the Deben may call for a different technique. I recall an early experience of fishing for mackerel off Mallaig on the west coast of Scotland, in very deep water. The professionals there fished with a hand line with up to 100 hooks and a heavy weight. You could feel the mackerel striking the lures long before the weight reached the bottom. So . . . away with the net, the long line and the rod, and let's try a hand line with as many hooks as Deben depths will permit.

Since these may be my last "fishing" notes, let me end with an outrageous thought. You don't have to sail to windward. Of course I understand that this is the point of sail on which most

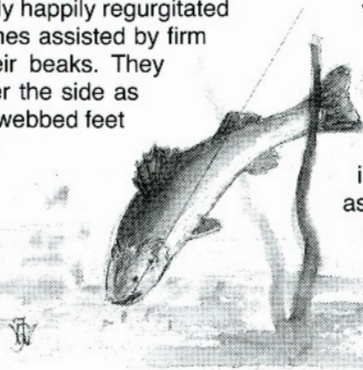
racers are won and you may spend three-quarters of a lifetime endeavouring to do it better. However, recall that until 200 years ago with the introduction of fore-and-aft sails and masthead styles of rig, nearly all boats actually went from A to B off the

wind, waiting for a favourable direction and tide. It is possible to reach the happy state where you don't want to go to windward under sail! Another symptom of age (and idleness) is to be content on a boat as long as it does have some sails, but you don't necessarily have to put them up! When you reach that stage, take up fishing.

Perhaps I have written enough to encourage a real Deben fisherman to pick up a pen and tell us some stories. However, I will go on trying to get that much sought-after "big one". If you see a Dabber with a kerosene lamp on the forestay, you will know its me.

Denzil Cowdry

Editor's Note: I hope readers are as alarmed as the editor that Denzil is threatening to write no more on the subject of Deben fishing. It is true that the Deben sometimes doesn't feature large in his wide-ranging accounts, that his catches are not of a size seriously to affect the trim of his boat and that he touches lightly on issues we might like to see more developed – such as how you tell whether a cormorant is "happy" when suspended upside-down with a string around its neck and fingers thrust down its throat. But I feel sure that readers of this Newsletter trust Denzil's judgement on such matters as much as its editor does, enjoy his delightful style, and will strongly urge him to continue with his informative reports



Conservation designations and the River Deben

There are several conservation and environmental designations that apply to the Deben and its environs. This article gives an overview of what the main designations are, what they mean, who makes them, and what they mean for the people that work, live on and enjoy the River Deben.

Background about English Nature

English Nature is the Government agency that champions conservation of wildlife and natural features throughout England. As a non-departmental public body, one of its key functions is to give independent advice to Government on nature conservation issues. English Nature began life as the organisation 'Nature Conservancy' in 1946, becoming 'The Nature Conservancy Council' in 1973 by Royal Commission, and has been known as English Nature since 1990. The Suffolk Team is based in Bury St Edmunds.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

The Deben Estuary is designated as a SSSI. There are about 4,000 SSSIs in England, totalling 6% of the land area. The SSSI series represents the country's very best wildlife and geological sites (about one third of these are geological sites and local examples include Ramsholt and Ferry Cliff).

The legislation that supports the designation of the SSSIs is the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000.

This legislation stipulates English Nature's legal duty to notify sites that are of special interest. Site selection is carried out according to guidelines produced by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee which is a different independent advisory scientific body. SSSI status gives a high level of legal protection to these sites.

The Deben Estuary SSSI

The Deben Estuary is notified for its nationally significant populations of overwintering waders and wildfowl, including avocet, dark bellied Brent geese, redshank, shelduck, and black tailed godwit. They rely on the intertidal mudflats to produce the food supply of algae, small molluscs, worms, etc that the birds come to feed on.

The Deben Estuary has extensive saltmarshes – approximately 40% of all the saltmarsh in Suffolk. This habitat supports some nationally rare estuarine plants and invertebrates. It's also an important habitat for roosting and nesting birds such as redshank.

The smaller reed fringes around the estuary and river are also highly valuable for all sorts of birds, mammals, and also for invertebrates. For example, the saltmarsh-to-reedbed 'transition' zone at Martlesham Creek hosts one of Britain's rarest snails, *Vertigo angustior* - or the 'the narrow-mouth whorled snail' a species found at only nine sites in UK.

For the Deben, only the estuary itself up to the tidal limit is designated as a SSSI as, although the main river is valuable for wildlife, it doesn't meet the criteria set for SSSI selection.

International designations

In 1979 the Bern Convention was signed and created a European-wide Agreement to "Conserve wild flora and fauna in their natural habitats". From that evolved the Birds Directive in 1979 and Habitats Directive in 1992. These Directives require EU member states to take special measures to:

- i. protect migratory rare and vulnerable bird species - by designating Special Protection Areas - or SPAs, and
- ii. to ensure the 'favourable conservation status' of internationally significant species and habitats - in areas designated as Special Areas of Conservation - or SACs.

Another international conservation designation is 'Ramsar Wetland sites', named after a town in Iran, where the convention to declare them was first held.

Sites are identified under similar criteria to SPAs, although they refer principally to wetland areas and they also consider other wetland flora and fauna. (SPAs can also be dry habitats such as the 'Sandlings' heaths and forests of Suffolk.) Ramsar sites are regarded as having the same 'legal status' as Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation.

In the UK, these Directives have been translated into UK national laws by means of the Conservation Regulations - often referred to as the 'Habitats Regulations'. These Regulations provide the highest level of legal protection to the habitats and species for which the sites are designated. They are 'underpinned' by nationally important wildlife designations which in the UK are the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) - the boundaries are usually the same.

A key principle of the Regulations is that they are precautionary. In a nutshell, authorities can only agree to a plan or project, having first assessed it, to decide whether it's likely to have an adverse effect on the special habitats or species.

English Nature is responsible for advising other bodies (such as the Environment Agency) on how these Regulations may affect any projects or plans, that could affect the internationally important sites.

The Deben Estuary is both a SPA and Ramsar site and qualifies on the following counts:

- It regularly supports nationally important numbers of overwintering avocet - a significant proportion of the British wintering population.
- Regularly supports internationally important numbers of migratory dark-bellied Brent geese.
- Supports nationally important numbers of migratory shelduck, grey plover, black-tailed godwit and redshank.

Both Ramsar and SPA selection criteria also consider the habitats that support these birds.

Why International?

Internationally important sites such as Deben Estuary, are designated under the EU Natura 2000 programme and collectively the sites are referred to as the Natura 2000 series. The chief aims of the programme are to maintain or restore habitats and species of European importance to 'Favourable Conservation Status' and to maintain the extent of the network.

Perhaps one of the best examples of why an international approach to conservation and designation is necessary is demonstrated by bird migration. British estuaries like the Deben are important because of our island's position on the globe. We also have a (relatively!) mild climate and our estuaries comprise an extensive area. Many bird species are migratory. For example, one race of dark-bellied Brent geese breeds in the short summer of high arctic in Russia, then migrates down to the north-west European estuaries and coasts for our comparatively warmer winters. In 1960 the global population comprised only about 22,000 birds. Now, with co-ordinated approach to protecting sites, their numbers have recovered back to their former range and now number approximately 300,000. It is also worth noting that the Deben Estuary becomes even more important for many species of waterfowl in years when severe weather reduces food resources available on the continent.

Another designation that applies to the Deben is that of 'European Marine Site'. This designation refers to areas of internationally important sites that are below high water mark - and in this case it's the marine part of the Deben Estuary SPA. Designation gives special provisions within the Habitats Regulations, one of which is that it allows for a Management Scheme to be made for each European Marine Site (as on the Stour and Orwell) to ensure Habitats Regulations are adhered to.

'Non-Statutory' Designations:

The Deben is within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). AONBs are designated by Government under the National Parks Act, 1949. They are selected according to

quality of landscape, natural beauty, unspoilt or special quality of national significance. The Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB was confirmed in March 1970. It stretches from Kessingland in the north to the River Stour in the south.

AONBs are now designated by the Countryside Agency in England - the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000 requires that planning policies and decisions take account of them. It also requires that a formal plan exists to manage them. This and much other work is carried out by Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit based at Melton which has been in existence since 1993.

The River Deben is also within an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA). This designation's aim is to safeguard and enhance parts of the country with high landscape, wildlife or historic value. The Suffolk River Valleys ESA comprises eight river valleys which includes the valleys of the Deben Estuary and the main river.

Within the area, a voluntary scheme operates that offers incentives to farmers to adopt agricultural practices which are sympathetic to maintaining these values. The scheme is run by Rural Development Service of Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs. Its focus is on traditional grassland management, to maintain traditional landscape and improve conditions for wildlife.

County Wildlife Sites represent sites of county importance for wildlife and habitats, eg Bromeswell Meadows at Melton. They are identified by Suffolk Wildlife Trust and Suffolk County Council and there are over 800 in Suffolk. They give no statutory legal protection, but are identified and recognised within Local Authority Plans.

What can designations do for the Deben?

The main purpose of these designations is to ensure that the importance of the wildlife and landscape is recognised when decisions involving the river and estuary are being made. However, in addition, the designations can bring with them other benefits, which include:

- Improvements to the environmental quality of the river and surrounding landscape. For example, the legal designation brings with it requirements to ensure that sewage effluent discharges are not having a detrimental effect on the special interests of the estuary.
- Attracting funding that contributes to managing the river in ways that recognise its wildlife and landscape interests. For example, the recent appointment of an Estuaries Officer by the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit. This post is funded by several partners, including English Nature. Its remit will include working with communities and users of the estuaries. The majority of English Nature funding was made available because of the Suffolk Estuaries European Marine Site status. English Nature has also been able to contribute additional funds to a forthcoming initiative to improve understanding of the Deben Estuary.

Keeping the Deben special

If you've got this far, you'll now appreciate there are quite a few designations that apply to the River Deben and its Estuary! However, even if you've forgotten some of the acronyms and definitions already, it is perhaps most important to remember the fundamental purpose of them, which is:

that the designations recognise, and give some protection to, the wildlife and landscapes that help to make the Deben such a special place and, most importantly, to help ensure that the special wildlife and habitats that we value now, remain for future generations to enjoy.

Thank you to the River Deben Association for its invitation to speak at the AGM and to submit this article

Glen Cooper, Conservation Officer,
English Nature Suffolk Team,
redshank

More information is available on various websites including the following:

English Nature

www.english-nature.org.uk

Joint Nature Conservation Committee

www.jncc.gov.uk

Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit

www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org.uk

Environment Agency

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Defra - Rural Development Service

www.defra.gov.uk

The Hazards of the Upper Deben!

Two ladies well past 70 decided to canoe to Letheringham Mill, having got permission to land there. After consulting local canoeists, we were told to go to Sanctuary Bridge near Easton Farm Park where we would find a proper launching slip. We found it, and then brought the car through the gate onto some rough land so as to unload the canoes right by the river. After a delightful paddle to the Mill, we returned to find the gate padlocked so that the car was

immobile. We were considerably alarmed as, even if there were a nearby phone box, we had only a £10 note! We seriously visualised having to hitch-hike back down the A12 to Melton.

But then we heard a tractor, a good way off. The driver kindly phoned his boss, saying "Sir, they don't look like New Age Travellers". He passed me his phone and I told the boss that we were definitely Old Age Travellers. Eventually, to our great relief, we were set free. We have since discovered that you can paddle up there, with private land on both sides, if you obtain permission beforehand, and we might be brave enough to have another go.

Rosemary Schlee

Editor's note: Rosemary's contact details are on the list of RDA officers at the beginning of this Newsletter. If you want to repeat her triumph without suffering some of its trauma, I'm sure that she could advise you!



News From Amadis. August 2005

It is now a whole year since I left Woodbridge on Amadis bound for New Zealand, 13,000 miles away. The main objectives of the Amadis project are to carry out surveys of coral reef health in previously unresearched areas of the Eastern Caribbean and South Pacific, and to teach worldwide about the importance of coral reefs.

Over 9,500 nautical miles later, we are now mid-Pacific and have just departed from the island of Moorea in French Polynesia, having stocked up on bananas and having acquired the souvenir of aching shoulders from a morning surf at the reef pass. Next stop: Rorotonga in the southern Cook Islands, some 600 miles to the southwest, where the project continues with partners including the World Wildlife Fund.

As I am writing this, we are sailing along beautifully at 6-7 knots on a close reach, under full sail and in bright sunshine. We were lucky to spot both humpback and pilot whales

yesterday and a large Mahi-mahi was hooked at sunrise which will make a tasty couple of meals. Sailing across the Pacific involves many long passages. Self-sufficiency is essential and Amadis is well stocked with the necessary food, fuel, spares and water required to keep five people going for up to six weeks from land. We also have packed in five sets of dive gear, a small compressor, two dinghies, surfboards and all the numerous other gear required to conduct our project work.

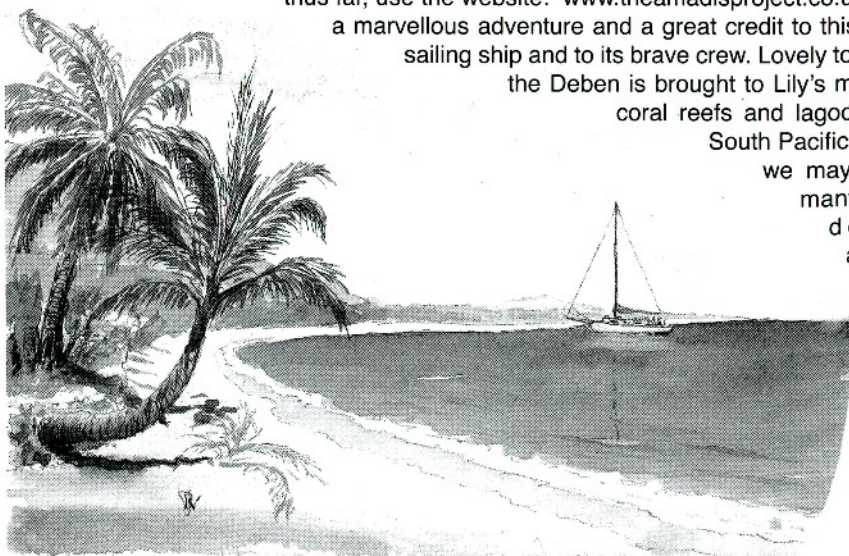
The best area we have visited so far has been the Tuamotu Archipelago, located to the east of Tahiti, and consisting of 76 atolls spread NW to SE over 1,000 miles of ocean. We visited just three of these atolls in the centre of the chain where the Polynesian people welcomed us with great generosity and enthusiasm. This is one area of the South Pacific where it is important to start thinking about tides again. Although the range is small, the ebb flowing through the reef passes can reach nine knots! Combined with the ocean swell this produces impressive standing waves, so correct timings of entries into the lagoons is essential. It reminded me, in some ways, of navigating the entrance to the River Deben and other smaller rivers of the East Coast, although here, for better or worse, the reef is clearly visible, flashing by beneath the keel.

With the sun on your back and calm conditions, navigating by eye through the reefs in uncharted waters is a refreshing change from GPS electronic navigation. Always on the hunt for new dive and survey spots we have taken Amadis to many out-of-the-way areas where anchoring is not always possible. Jumping into the water at every opportunity, we have experienced the underwater world at its best, witnessing beautiful reef life as well as pelagic species such as manta rays, dolphins, sharks and tuna. Certainly, this is the best way of experiencing the South Pacific.

Lily Kozmian-Ledward

Editor's note: if you want more information about the Amadis Project, and the voyage thus far, use the website: www.theamadisproject.co.uk This is a marvellous adventure and a great credit to this fine little sailing ship and to its brave crew. Lovely to think that the Deben is brought to Lily's mind in the coral reefs and lagoons of the South Pacific. Although

we may have no
manta rays,
dolphins
are now a
common
sight
here!



The Deben in 1928

[An extract from the Felixstowe Official Guide of 1928 kindly made available to the editor by Michael Thomas of Felixstowe]

[A gentleman describes his first visit to Felixstowe.

[It begins with a dialogue]

"They have a yacht."

"Really?"

"And I am going to sail with them tomorrow."

Where are you going?"

"We are going up the Deben."

"Oh, I know; that's the river I see from the golf links."

"Yes, it goes past your silly old golf links and round the village at Bawdsey, and what's more there's an invitation for you."

That day was one of the best of the whole holiday.

I went. We started across the bay, past the golf links and past the point into the estuary, and then for a solid hour we ran up with the tide for about twelve miles. I had no idea there was such a lovely stretch of water anywhere near. It is perfect. I had no idea what it was like before this. We passed Bawdsey and Ramsholt and Waldringfield and Martlesham up to Woodbridge. Such jolly names to jolly places.

That was the beginning of the end of my improved handicap. I remarked then, and say so still, that the people who run Felixstowe don't know their job. There is not a river on the whole East of England to compare with the Deben, and nobody seems to know anything about it. Nobody raves over it. Scarcely a mention of it in the guide books.

A great many judges of good scenery declare that the approach to [Woodbridge] from the river on a sunny day is a view that could not be surpassed. There is a quaintness of old-world setting; there is an unusualness of building design which might be continental, and there is such a wealth and richness of colour that one finds it difficult to realise that this is a little agricultural town visited occasionally by literary outsiders because of its associations with the name of Edward Fitzgerald and his translations of "Omar Khayyam".

Some day a far-seeing syndicate will exploit that river. It is far too beautiful to be monopolised by the few remaining masters of sailing boats, and yet one dreads the thought of the river being desecrated by any rowdy craft for the sake of whatsoever profit it can yield . . .

Dear Sir,

Newsletter No 30, Spring 2005 – p.12 – Deben Watch

I regret that I have found an important error in this report which I consider requires a prominent correction in the next issue. I realise that it may have been in Mr Stanford's original but it could have arisen as a result of editing. The text appears to state that registration of a boat in the Deben Watch Scheme cost £35.95, when in fact there is no charge. The charge of £35.95 relates to the cost of a (new) Boatmark scheme, involving the placing of an electronic tag in the structure of the boat.

It would be a pity if even one member were to be deterred from joining "Deben Watch" by this error.

Yours sincerely,

P.J. Jones

[Editor's Note: Our apologies to Peter Jones for this mistake and our thanks for the correction. Please note the Chairman's Notes in this edition of the Newsletter]

THE RIVER DEBEN ASSOCIATION

AUTUMN MEETING

To be held at
Waldringfield Village Hall

**On Friday 28th October 2005
at 7.30pm**

Gemma Costin

The Environment Agency Coastal Processes
Co-ordinator

will give an illustrated talk on
The Changing Coastline
Landguard to East Lane