

# NAR VALLEY FISHERIES

Advisory Visit Report

Undertaken on behalf of the Wild Trout Trust

By Ron Holloway MIFM

12<sup>th</sup> March 2002



**Fig 1. The River Nar**

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## **NAR VALLEY FISHERIES ADVISORY VISIT**

**12<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2002**

This Advisory Visit was undertaken by Ron Holloway ( R H Associates ) on behalf of the Wild Trout Trust (WTT) in the company of David Burrows (Secretary of Nar Valley Fisheries and five Committee and Club Members) and Roger Handford (Environment Agency Fisheries & Recreation Officer).

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE ADVISORY VISIT:**

To look at the River Nar within the boundaries of the Nar Valley Fisheries and to pinpoint and identify problems within the Brown Trout Habitat that are controlling the natural holding and breeding potential of the fishery and to recommend such measures that could be taken to mitigate or solve any problems found and advise on any habitat enhancements or restoration which could be made.

### **BACKGROUND:**

The whole River Nar is an all encompassing SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest). An electro fishing survey in 1990 revealed that there is a remnant stock of self sustaining stock of brown trout, albeit very small. The other species identified at the time were – Spined Loach and the odd escapee rainbow trout. Due to the effect of flood control structures upstream and downstream, and the river being heavily embanked from historic dredging, flooding is not, nor has been, an issue. The fishery is annually stocked with 600 12” brown trout. There is plenty of hard substrate along the stretch though sediment deposition is occurring in the overwide and overdeepened stretches. Further dredging to remove these accumulations has, rightly, been strongly resisted by the fishing club. Proposals for Flood Defence to weedrake the lower end of the water has been suggested but has, also rightly, been questioned by the EA and English Nature on ecological grounds.

Annual growth of aquatic plants (weed) appears to be strong and when not managed does impede flows and raise water levels besides making fishing very difficult for club members.

### **SITE ONE – From Car Park Downstream.**

The River channel here is overwide and has been overdeepened from historic heavy dredging. This action has reduced flow speeds along this stretch which is now

encouraging large deposits of silt to form on point bars and along stream margins (See Fig. 1 on cover).

Removal of these deposits by further dredging will only compound the present problem as further deposits would soon return. The river now, is naturally indicating its required optimum channel width and to reduce further silt deposits these silt banks could be stabilised by installing a line of willow or hazel faggots (brushwood bundles) along the outside of the silt bank. These faggots to be firmly wired down and fixed with stout stakes, to the bed of the river and to be placed so that they are just out of the water at average river heights. Once in place, the faggots will filter out silt and protect the silt bed behind, thus enabling bankside vegetation to take root and further stabilise the silt bed thus creating a new narrower channel. Wherever silt beds are being created and appear to be becoming permanent features, it is suggested that this faggoting programme be used.

#### **SITE TWO – (See Fig.2)**



**Fig.2**

The flow deflectors that have been previously installed are now, in most instances, disintegrating and need to be replaced with more substantial triangular groynes, set to

appear just above water level, at normal river height. It is suggested there could be several pairs of these groynes placed opposite each other in the slow deeper stretches and once in place these should speed up water flow and create useful scoured trout holding pools just downstream of each construction. To instil even more energy into the slow flows, a series of alternating triangular groynes would create useful instream meanders by nudging the current to and fro.

### **SITE THREE – Fig. 3**

The reed bed should be retained but stabilised by faggots as described, to its present extent



**Fig.3. Reed Bed**

#### **SITE FOUR – Fig.4**

This treelined stretch offers excellent habitat and required little attention apart from the removal of the dead trees. Once removed, replanting with suitable species should be considered. Other than some cosmetic pruning of some overhanging “fly snatching” branches, little needs to be done along here.



**Fig.4**

#### **SITE FIVE – Fig 5.**

This site exhibits excellent chalkstream characteristics which have been created by the increased gradient that speeds flows and keeps the substrate clean and encourages the right type of aquatic weed life. To enhance trout holding capacity, marginal bankside vegetation along the water edge should be encouraged to provide cover for fish and to increase terrestrial insect life. The heavily embanked margins of the stream do create access problems. A series of cut in wooden edge steps that run down to the edge of the river could be considered but may be deemed a hazard to the general public if this is a right of way.



**Fig.5**

**GENERAL COMMENTS:**

The Nar Valley Fishery exhibits excellent trout holding potential and the river is trying hard to regain its historic channel width, despite the ravages of past dredging activity.

There are areas of gravel bed that resident trout could utilise for spawning but further spawning gravel enhancement could be carried out by the importation of several tons of washed gravel which would create riffles, particularly in the upper reaches of this fishery. Once installed, these riffles would also offer useful juvenile trout habitat and, more importantly, encourage the regeneration of essential species of macro invertebrates that are vital for food for the juvenile trout as well as adults.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is minimal insect life by way of the traditional “fly fishermen” insects and flies. It is suggested that a request be made to the EA for them to undertake an indepth macro invertebrate survey to quantify and identify the present state of the invertebrate life of the whole stretch.

Aquatic weed growth management has been a major problem in the past and some drastic operations have been undertaken by the Flood Defence people. Alternatives

to weed dragging operations have to be considered. To maintain fly fishing opportunities throughout the season and to keep the water levels relatively constant, it is recommended that a programme of hand weedcutting be organised by the Club to establish a weed growth pattern which can be easily maintained throughout the season. This programme of hand cutting weed into a “bar” fashion – i.e. cut 90% of the weed down to the river bed, leaving roots and cut bank to bank for approximately 10 yds, then moving upstream for 10 yards, leaving all the weed, then cutting a further 10yds down to the roots, as above. This bar fashion weed cutting should be pursued throughout the whole stretch. Once cut, this should allow water levels to remain fairly constant yet afford adequate fishing opportunities. Furthermore, once established, this pattern will also help to spread the stocked trout along the river. Unfortunately, hand weedcutting is very hard work!

There are signs of undercutting of the steep banks at water level in several places. Repairs to these erosion points is essential as if they are left untreated, further erosion will lead to major bank slumping in the near future. A line of faggots, firmly pegged into these erosion spots will filter out silt and encourage natural vegetation to help stabilise the bank.

Excessive growths of watercress have been a problem in late summer and early autumn. To maintain a good channel it is possible to use a long handled, down turned, farmyard dung rake to pull cress back towards the river bank and layer it at the rivers edge. The first frosts of autumn will speed up the natural decomposition of this accumulated cress.

It is essential to formulate a plan of action and then consult closely with Roger Handford of EA Fisheries to gain consents and advice on the placement of structures etc. As the area is an SSSI, English Nature will also have to be consulted. As and when a plan for the structures and the gravel planting is formulated and costed, it is suggested that a presentation of the project be given to the WTT for match funding consideration.

This Fishery has great potential and with planning and consultation, a five year programme of work will, in my opinion, show considerable improvement in the river. A long term plan for the whole river system is to link up the restored habitat on Nar Fishery with the quality trout habitat upstream at Castle Acre and this could be a long term objective for which to strive!

## **SUGGESTED ORDER OF PRIORITIES:**

1. Stabilise marginal silt beds and repair undermined banks.
2. Replace deflectors with substantial triangular groynes, in pairs and in an alternate series.
3. Consider installing gravel to create riffles
4. Establish a general annual river maintenance programme – weedcutting, bank maintenance etc.