

# ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP IN THE BROADS

Dr N Mark Collins, Vice-Chairman, NSBA

The NSBA serves and protects the interests of private users of pleasure craft on the Broads, and, for many of us, one fundamental interest is to be closer to nature. We enjoy leaving our cars and cities behind, harnessing the natural forces of wind and tide, and being part of a lifestyle that should be in tune with our environment. We all have a role to play in keeping these pleasures safe for ourselves and future generations, but, as we know only too well, our waterways are constantly changing and are vulnerable to the impact of human use. What are the pressure points, and how can we be better stewards of these resources?

## Climate Change

Climate change is the biggest challenge we face today. A warming climate destroys forests, crops and fisheries worldwide, causing uncontrolled human migrations. It may seem a long way from boating on the Broads, but we are all part of this problem, and we need to be part of the solution too. The government has committed to cut carbon emissions by 78% by 2035 and to achieve net-zero by 2050. Eight bells have sounded for the fossil-fuelled internal combustion engine, and boats will be no exception. Battery, hydrogen and biofuel propulsion solutions are increasingly available and, until such technologies are commonplace, we need to cut the use of fossil fuels. Let's reduce speed wherever possible and use nature's forces by sailing or riding a favourable tide. Consider fitting solar panels, never use outdoor heaters, and do check the climate impact of your lubricants, antifoul, paints and varnishes.

## Flood Risk Management

The Broadland Futures Initiative is a partnership for assessing and managing flood risk. The goal is to build a management framework to cope with rising water levels, mainly using nature-based engineering. Warmer and wetter winters and hotter and drier summers may see more of us out on the water, but we can expect sea levels to rise by 19-22cm in 20 years, 22-46cm in 50 years and 54-102cm in 100 years. Storms and wind over tide events will be much

more severe, and, in our low-lying landscape, tidal rivers will flood marshlands, often with saline water. The geography of the Breydon estuary may gradually begin to resemble the scene in Roman times. Club managers and committees will want to make the necessary adjustments to marks, staithe and moorings and secure their clubhouses and stored boats well inside the river defences.

## Water Quality

The 2022 report from the Environmental Audit Committee on Water Quality in Rivers was a sobering read. The committee, which included Norfolk MPs Duncan Baker and Jerome Mayhew, described England's rivers as a "chemical cocktail" of sewage, agricultural waste and plastic pollution. The causes include pollution from fertilisers (with resulting algal blooms and deoxygenation in rivers), discharge of inadequately treated sewage and wastewater, and run-off from towns and roads. In the boating community, we know that no waste should go into our rivers. Let's avoid sea-toilets and unnecessary cleaning products, reduce the use of antifoul and never throw rubbish overboard. Avoid fuel spillages and oily bilge discharge at all costs – one litre of oil can pollute one million litres of water! The report lauds citizen engagement and the role of associations and charities – we can do our bit in NSBA by reporting problems to the relevant authorities and spreading good practice amongst our membership.



*A tranquil day at St Benet's*



*How Hill National Nature Reserve – accessible from the Ant*

### **Invasive Species**

Globalisation has led to the unintended spread of species worldwide, not least along and into our own rivers and lakes. The signal crayfish, quagga mussel, killer shrimp, Himalayan balsam and floating pennywort can destroy native species, clog up engineering works, and smother waterways. The Norfolk Non-Native Invasive Species Initiative helps us recognise and eliminate these unwanted visitors, some of whom we are unwittingly transporting on our boat hulls.

### **Protected Species**

The Broads are home to many of Britain's rarest species and NSBA members are often wildlife enthusiasts. Some of our most memorable moments come from seeing unusual and secretive species from our boat, including otters, kingfishers, and the elusive bittern. We look out for Britain's largest butterfly, the swallowtail, and the superb Norfolk hawker dragonfly. But pollution in our rivers may be impacting the breeding success of otters, and increasing salinity is putting at risk all our swallowtail breeding sites. Let's do what we can to protect such species from harm.

### **Protected Areas**

The Broads is, of course, a member of the family of UK national parks, but a unique one in that its management objectives include navigation, in addition to conservation of the natural and cultural heritage. These aims can sometimes conflict with one another. The role of NSBA is to work alongside the Broads Authority and nature conservation NGOs to ensure that navigation routes are kept open whilst maintaining a balance with nature.

The UK strongly supports the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. We have more Ramsar sites than any other country, 175 in all, including Broadland and Breydon Water. Many other protected areas,

mostly managed by NGOs like the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and RSPB. Ones that are accessible by boat, sometimes by arrangement, include Barton Broad, Berney Marshes & Breydon Water, Hoveton Great Broad, Martham Broad, Ranworth Broad and Upton Broad & Marshes. For details, see the List of Sites of Special Scientific Interest in Norfolk/Suffolk on the web.



*Swallowtail – an icon of the Broads*

In 2019 the Landscapes Review for DEFRA took a hard look at all ten national parks and 34 areas of outstanding natural beauty in England. It recommended reforms to structures and governance in expectation of greater visitor pressure in future, as was experienced during the COVID lockdown. At the time of writing, the government's response is open for public consultation and the NSBA is building a reply on behalf of its members.

Environmental stewardship is the responsibility of all NSBA members, and we should do what we can to ensure that the Broads is a place to enjoy, equitably and sustainably.