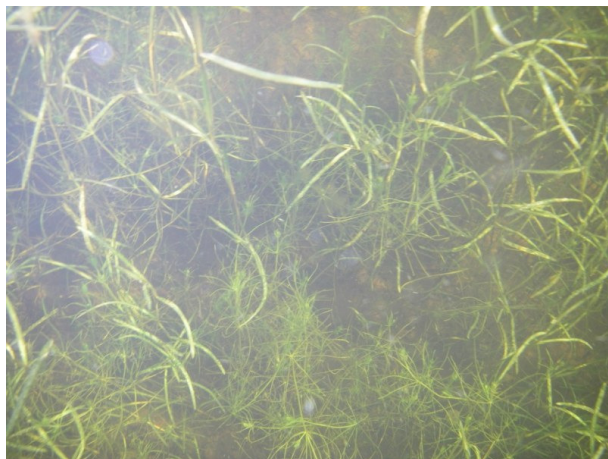


Condition assessment of Trinity Broads SSSI

The Trinity Broads are a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) of over 300 hectares. Natural England monitors the condition of SSSIs periodically. This summer, staff from the Trinity Broads partnership surveyed the fen, woodland and water to assess their condition.

The wet woodland, known as 'carr', surrounds the broads and is extensive in places covering almost 100 hectares. It can be very difficult to access due to marshy ground and tangled vegetation. There is virtually no human activity within much of this woodland because of the hazardous conditions. Once we had made our way deep into tracts of the wet woodland, it felt like a wilderness - we couldn't hear or see any evidence of people. Instead, we were surrounded by huge alders, twisted creepers and a carpet of flowering plants, including the wonderfully named Skull cap and Enchanter's nightshade. This kind of woodland is great for those of us who practice nature conservation, because in the right conditions, it looks after itself. We call this 'non-intervention management'. Older trees die and stay standing for many years, providing dead wood habitat for bats, birds and insects. When they eventually fall, they provide a gap in the canopy for saplings to grow up. Such naturally functioning woodland therefore has a varied age structure, with plenty of dead wood. It also has a scattering of glades, which provides light for delicate plants on the woodland floor, and flight areas for dragonflies and butterflies. In fact, in one part of the site we were lucky enough to see a beautiful White Admiral butterfly, flying along the edge of a glade, feeding on bramble flowers. These butterflies lay their eggs on honeysuckle, and there was plenty of that around. Not so pleasant were the many mosquitoes! Most of the woodland units we assessed were in good condition, although some show evidence of developing into drier woodland, with more nettles and sycamore present.

The fen at the Trinity Broads is generally spread in a thin line between the open water and the wet woodland, but still covers 56 hectares in total. This means it is in need of regular management, to keep the wet woodland from encroaching onto it. We have contractors clearing small willow and alders trees from sections of this reedbed margin each winter, which is supplemented by Trinity Broads volunteers and the Broads Authority Ladies Group, as well as corporate volunteer days. Our assessment of the condition of these fens was also good. Primarily we looked to see what plants are growing, with characteristic plants like Milk Parsley, Yellow Loosestrife and Hemp Agrimony present, along with Common Reed, Reedmace (pictured right) and True Bullrush. We also checked condition of the fens for European protected species present at the Trinity Broads, for example, ground moisture, as this affects the Desmoulin's Whorl Snail, and availability of wood along the margins, necessary for otters.



Each summer we monitor aquatic plants within the broads themselves, which cover over 150 hectares – 14% of the open water within Broadland. This summer, we have seen great improvements in the abundance of pondweeds and stoneworts in Rollesby Broad (pictured left), which may mean that this broad shifts to unfavourable recovering condition, along with Ormesby Broad. This would be a real success for the project, but we will await confirmation from Natural England, once they have analysed all their data and report on the condition of the overall Trinity Broads SSSI.