

Contact: Eleanor Colver
Conservation Officer
British Dragonfly Society
Tel: 07792 231 925
Email: Eleanor.Colver@British-Dragonflies.org.uk

Address: c/o Natural England
Parkside Court
Hall Park Way
TELFORD
TF3 4LR



Planning Department, Norfolk County Council
County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich
Norfolk
NR1 2DH

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Proposed Norwich Western Link; Public Consultation

To the Norwich Western Link Project team

I am writing on behalf of the British Dragonfly Society to express our concerns regarding the proposed Norwich Western Link, specifically the creation of a dual carriageway crossing over the River Wensum, and its flood plain, by means of a viaduct.

The River Wensum Site of Specific Scientific Interest provides important breeding habitat for a number of Odonata species; in addition, species such as the endangered Norfolk Hawker (*Aeshna isoceles*) utilise the waterway as a highway for dispersal. Norfolk Hawker, including its habitat, is currently protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Before 2010 this species was primarily confined to the Norfolk Broads east of Norwich. Since then the species' range has increased westwards along waterways, including the River Wensum (figure 1). Breeding populations have now been found as far west along the River Wensum as the Wensum wetlands near Fakenham.

The Norfolk Broads still make up the species' core range; according to climate change predictions much of its habitat within this area will be impacted by sea level rise in the next 50 years (Sea level rise and coastal flood risk maps -- a global screening tool by Climate Central, 2022). As a result, dispersal routes that provide access to new breeding sites further from the coast, such as the River Wensum, become vital, increasing this species resilience to freshwater habitat loss as a result of climate change.

As mentioned, there are already established breeding populations in the floodplains upstream of the proposed viaduct. However, these populations are small in size and number compared to those downstream of the future viaduct. Consequently, it is important to maintain the River Wensum dispersal route so that migrating individuals can support newly established populations and colonise new wetland areas upstream. A dual carriageway will likely reduce the movement of *Aeshna isoceles* upstream as a proportion of dispersing individuals will be lost as a result of mortality from vehicle collision (Furness and Soluk, 2014).

Patron, Sir David Attenborough OM, CH, FRS

President: Mike Dilger

Hon Secretary, Ms C. Cooksey, Ashcroft,
Brington Road, Old Weston, Huntingdon, PE28 5LP.
e: secretary@british-dragonflies.org.uk

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Our second concern regards the inevitable increase in water pollution that can be expected as a result of road run off and nitrogen deposition which will further reduce the habitat quality of river-fed breeding pools and ditches downstream.

We request that the potential impacts of the proposed dual carriageway on Norfolk Hawker dispersal and breeding habitat suitability be taken into consideration moving forward.

All BDS data is freely available via iRecord (<https://irecord.org.uk/>) and NBN atlas (<https://nbnatlas.org/>) should you wish to examine the distribution of Norfolk Hawker along the River Wensum further.

The Dragonfly Conservation Group of the British Dragonfly Society is happy to be consulted on matters regarding Odonata ecology and conservation.

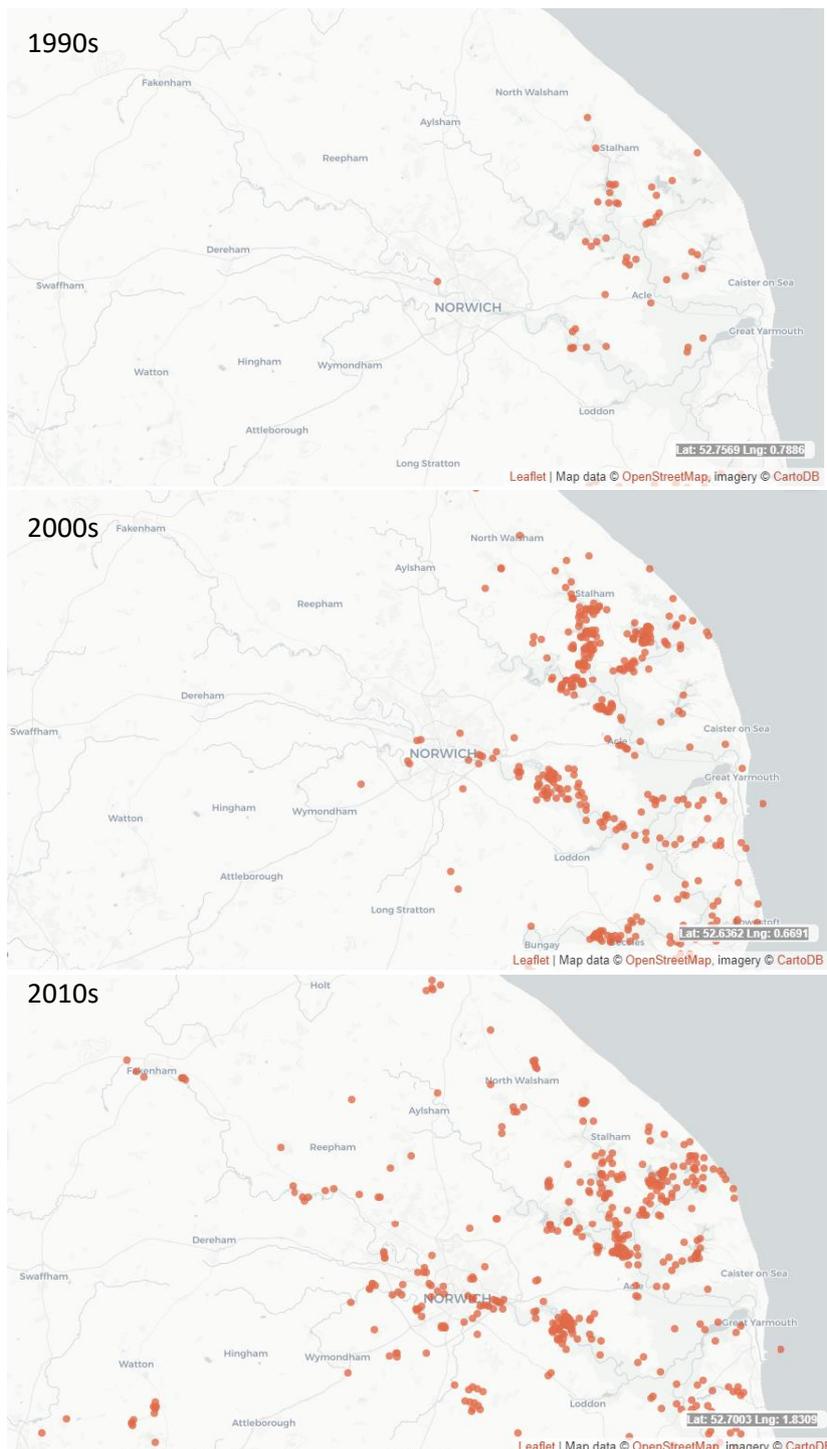


Figure 1: *Aeshna isoceles* (Norfolk Hawker) sightings over three decades: 1990s, 2000s and 2010.

Reference

Furness, A. and Soluk, D. (2014). *Why shouldn't the dragonfly cross the road?: Factors that influence dragonfly vulnerability to vehicular collisions*. Conference: 99th ESA Annual Convention 2014.

Coastal.climatecentral.org. 2022. *Sea level rise and coastal flood risk maps -- a global screening tool by Climate Central*. [online] Available at: https://coastal.climatecentral.org/map/8/-1.7946/53.1161/?theme=sea_level_rise&map_type=year&basemap=roadmap&contiguous=true&elevation_model=best_available&forecast_year=2050&pathway=ssp3rcp70&percentile=p50&refresh=true&return_level=return_level_1&rl_model=gtsr&slr_model=ipcc_2021_med [Accessed 11 August 2022].

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, c. 69. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/contents> [Accessed 11 August 2022].