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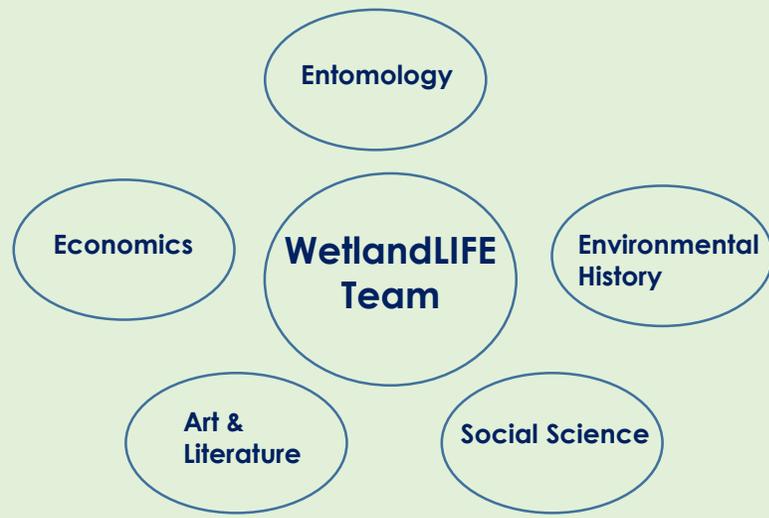
Placed Based Narratives and Contemporary Social Representations of English Wetlands

WetlandLIFE project July 2017- January 2020
WetlandLIFE: taking the bite out of wetlands
www.wetlandlife.org
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WetlandLIFE is a project exploring the ecological, economic, **social** and **cultural** values associated with wetlands in England to better understand how to manage change into the future.



University of Brighton's Social Science research

Contemporary Social Representations (CSR)

AIM: To understand how English wetlands are **co-constituted** by socio-cultural values; how society and culture are shaped by English wetlands.

To explore **tensions** which exist between different domains of knowledge, such as landscape planning, water resources management, legal frameworks and art, amongst many others, in 'knowing' wetlands.

To **understand** how these perspectives directly influence how we **use and value** wetlands today, interrogating understandings of what wetlands 'are', as a way of moving towards **sustainable futures**.

Place Based Narratives (PBN)

Aim: To understand a '**sense of place**' that is generated through diverse human relationships within wetland spaces.

To identify if **mosquitoes** impact on these human-wetlands experiences. Working together with the CVM approach to enable a fine-grained depiction of viewpoints, to interrogate the ways in which human health and wellbeing features within these narratives.

To use these findings together with WetlandLIFE's ecological, entomological and economic work to support evidence based **recommendations** for wetland site managers.



Tom Hammick: The night is a starry dome



Somerset Levels: Shapwick Heath (Adriana Ford)



University of Brighton's methodology:

- ★ **Somerset Levels:** Westhay Moor and Shapwick Heath
- ★ **Bedfordshire:** Priory Country Park & Millennium Country Park
- ★ **North Lincolnshire:** Alkborough Flats

Desk based study, spanning the duration of the project, exploring the 'domains of knowledge' which have shaped our contemporary wetland spaces, and the co-constituted social and cultural representations which underpin how we use and value these waterscapes.

Background research to **identify specialist users groups** within all three sites.

Qualitative, **semi structured interviews**, ten per site.

Working only with specialist interest groups; University of Greenwich's **CVM** focused on cohort from the local wetland communities.

To talk with those who use the wetlands and to access groups who could use these wetlands but **choose not to use these spaces**.

Preliminary **focus groups** held in Bedfordshire and Somerset to contextualise the range of issues impacting on the wetland sites.

Work took place between **January and September 2018**.

All interviews were recorded and have been **transcribed**.



Bedford Priory Country Park marina (Adriana Ford)

Results

Botanists, walkers, birders, artists, environmentalists, foragers, landowners, spiritual or religious practitioners, archaeologists, historians, educators, youth and community workers, health and wellbeing practitioners were among those interviewed.

Other groups were deselected for research ethics reasons: these would include minors, homeless campers, those involved in delinquent or illegal activity.

Our findings fall into four categories:

- English wetlands as **ludic spaces** for recreation and play, supporting physical and relational wellbeing
- English wetlands as **artistic spaces**, supporting cultural and creative engagements
- English wetlands as **remembrance spaces**, supporting emotional wellbeing
- English wetlands as exemplary landscapes within transitions towards **sustainable futures**



Julian's Bower overlooking Alkborough Flats: (Mary Gearey)

English wetlands as **ludic spaces** for recreation and play, supporting physical and relational wellbeing

- Wetlands as **learning spaces** – individual and group activities
- Wetlands repositioned as places of recreation, particularly around **family time**
- Places in which **expertise develops** – from hobby to forms of career development and life stage adaptation
- Emphasis is placed on engaging people at a **young age** and supporting on-site learning
- Access, safety and perceptions of risk play a part in **detering** people from enjoying wetland spaces



Margaret Micklewright: Shapwick Heath at dusk

English wetlands as **artistic spaces**, supporting cultural and creative engagements

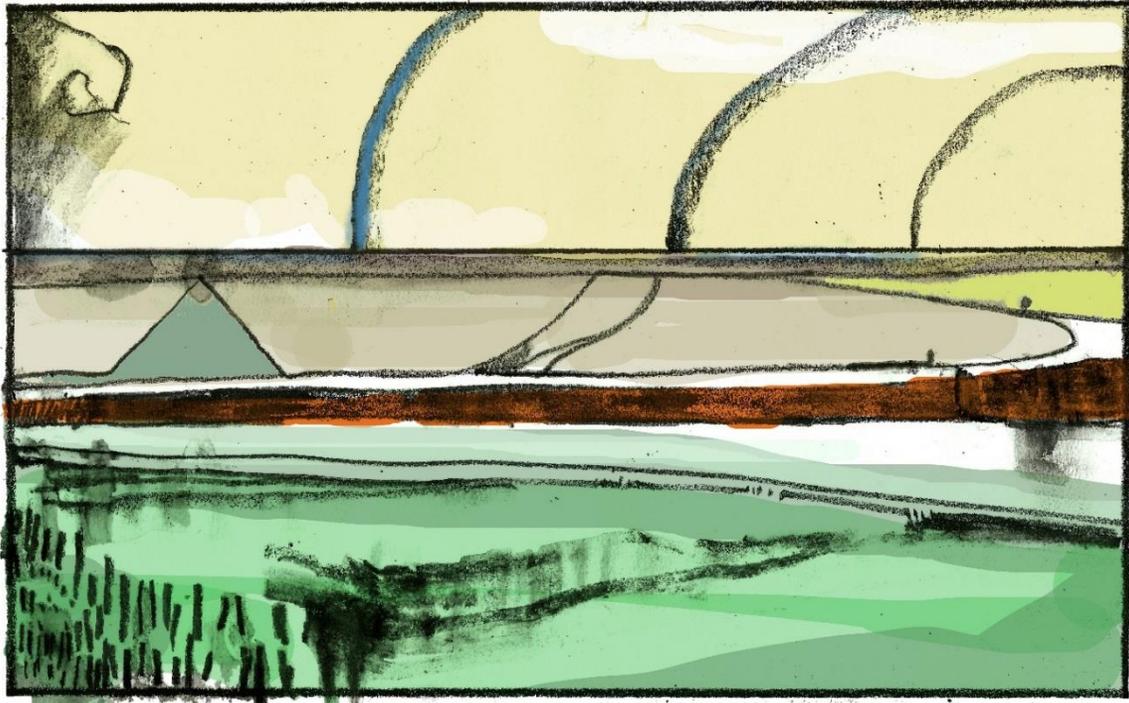
- Wetlands as inspirational, **emotive landscapes** which enable forms of writing, painting, film-making
- **Literature** is a key part of this – from Classical works and New Nature Writing to the English Eerie and Pastoral Noir
- Self expression in all forms supporting **mental wellbeing**
- The importance of the **Art economy** to these rural spaces - festivals, workshops, courses inspired by these waterscapes
- The project artists have highlighted **social equity** issues – the need to bring wetlands to communities with less access, less desire to dwell within these spaces



Memorial bench: Millennium Country Park, Bedfordshire (Mary Gearey)

English wetlands as **remembrance spaces**, supporting emotional wellbeing

- Places for **commemoration** – tree planting, ash scattering, memorial benches, paeans to loved ones past and present
- **Less managed space**, providing quiet engagements with nature
- **Creating memories** –family activities, third age rejuvenation, murmurations, ‘delinquency’ and counter cultures
- Spaces in which to contemplate other human lives and **deep time** – Neolithic trackways, Roman turf mazes, artillery and ordnance sites, post industrial
- Wetlands as liminal, **threshold spaces**, connecting us with other humans and the more-than-human
- Recognition that these are inclusive spaces for all forms of human and more-than-human life



Maxim Peter Griffin: Alkborough Flats

English wetlands as exemplary landscapes within transitions towards **sustainable futures**

- Wetlands are exemplary landscapes in support of **sustainability transitions**
- **Nature based solutions** and green-blue infrastructure
- **Biosecurity** – mosquitoes as vectors
- Land management in **post Brexit** era
- Wetland grabbing – **green gentrification** and social justice
- **Terrain vague** and shifting mindsets towards challenging landscapes
- **Heritage**, ecosystems services and legacy



Somerset Levels: Westhay Moor (Adriana Ford)

English wetlands: key reflections & recommendations

- **Improve** access to, and on, the sites
- **Widen** diversity across different demographic spheres through outreach
- **Communicate** wetlands as adaptation and mitigation spaces
- **Connect** with creative practitioners
- **Engage** with pedagogic learning on-site
- **Appreciate mosquitoes** - as pollinators and an abundant food source in wetlands. Midges and ticks are the most cited pests/threats by our respondents.



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Forthcoming from Palgrave Macmillan:

English wetlands: spaces of nature, culture, imagination

Mary Gearey, Andrew Church, Neil Ravenscroft

