

EXETER CANAL & ALPHIN BROOK

2017-2026: Confirmed Priority Site of National Importance

Ship canal and adjacent stretch of brook with breeding populations of White-legged Damselfly, Red-eyed Damselfly, Hairy Dragonfly and Scarce Chaser.

Last updated: 29/03/2025

Site: EXETER CANAL & ALPHIN BROOK	1987-1996			1997-2006			2007-2016			2017-2026		
Grid ref.: SX947888	Breeding		Other	Breeding		Other	Breeding		Other	Breeding		Other
	Succ	Poss		Succ	Poss		Succ	Poss		Succ	Poss	
<i>Damselflies</i>												
Beautiful Demoiselle						C			A			B
Banded Demoiselle	A		B	A	A	E	B		D			B
Emerald Damselfly									A			
White-legged Damselfly				A		C		B	B	A		C
Large Red Damselfly			B		A	D			B			C
Blue-tailed Damselfly	B		E	B	C	E	C	B	E			C
Scarce Blue-t Damselfly												
Common Blue Damselfly	B		D			D		A	E			E
Southern Damselfly												
Azure Damselfly	A	B	D	C		D	C		E	B	B	D
Red-eyed Damselfly	A		C	B	B	D	D	B	E	C	B	E
Small Red-eyed Damselfly							B	A	D	+	B	D
Small Red Damselfly												
<i>Dragonflies</i>												
Hairy Dragonfly	B		C	B		C			B	A		B
Common Hawker												
Norfolk Hawker												
Brown Hawker												
Southern Hawker			B			A			C			B
Migrant Hawker			+						C		B	C
Emperor Dragonfly	A		B	A		B	A	A	B	A		B
Lesser Emperor						A						A
Vagrant Emperor												
Golden-ringed Dragonfly						B						
Downy Emerald												
Broad-bodied Chaser						A			B			
Scarce Chaser						A				A	A	D
Four-spotted Chaser												
Keeled Skimmer						A						
Black-tailed Skimmer			A	A	A	C			C			C
Common Darter			A	B		C			C			A
Red-veined Darter												
Ruddy Darter												
Black Darter												
Yellow-winged Darter												
Scarlet Darter												
Total species in category:	7	1	12	8	6	18	6	6	17	6	5	16

Bold underlined = nationally important species **Bold black = important species**

Succ = Successful breeding (exuvia(e) and/or larva(e) and/or pre-flight emergent and/or oviposition); Poss = Possible breeding (copulating pair); Other = Adult(s) or unspecified.

Abundance codes: A=1; B=2-5; C=6-20; D=21-100; E=101-500; F=>500; + = no count.

Key Species History

White-legged Damselfly – small numbers regular along Alphin Brook, often wandering to the canal sides; 12 (1 emergent) on 6/6/24.

Red-eyed Damselfly – first recorded at this location in 1995, with a male at the edge of the Old Sludge Beds DWT Reserve on 30/5/95 and single females at two sites ovipositing into dead emergent vegetation on 25/6/95. By 2009, over 100 were in the basin by Countess Wear STW alone (D egg-laying); on 13/6/23, 320+ between Topsham Lock and Countess Wear.

Small Red-eyed Damselfly – first recorded in 2009 at the sewage works basin, with 25 by 21/7/14 between Countess Wear and the Double Locks.

Hairy Dragonfly – first recorded in 1995, with maxima of 12 males and three females (one ovipositing) in during 22/5/95-27/6/95; C (6-20) in 2001; 1 exuvia near Double Locks in 2024.

Scarce Chaser – the first record for Devon – a male – was on Alphin Brook at Countess Wear on 21/6/03, with a female there on 17/6/12. Not recorded again until 2017, when a few seen at three locations. Clearly established by 2023, when 52 (2 *in cop.*) on 13/6/23 between Topsham Lock and Countess Wear.

Other species of note

Lesser Emperor – single males near Countess Wear STW on 22-23/6/2005 and near Topsham Lock on 13/6/23.

Habitat

Ship canal with regular rowing boats and occasional motor boats; formerly, sewage sludge removed regularly from Countess Wear Sewage Treatment Works by boat and taken out to sea. Narrow, discontinuous emergent zone, with *Phragmites*, nettles (*Urtica dioica*) and small amounts of *Scirpus lacustris*, *Iris psuedacorus* and *Acorus calamus*. Fringed Water-lily (*Nymphoides peltatus*) abundant until control measures; frequent extensive mats of blanketweed *Enteromorpha* (increasing during the summer) suggesting high trophic status. Abundant *Elodea nuttallii*, with extensive beds of *Potamogeton lucens*. Well stocked and fished by anglers. pH: 8.0 (13/8/95). Conductivity: 410 μ S/cm (30/5/95).

Status

Parts are Country Park, SSSI, SPA and Ramsar.

Owner/tenant

Exeter City Council and Environment Agency

Local Authority: Exeter City Council

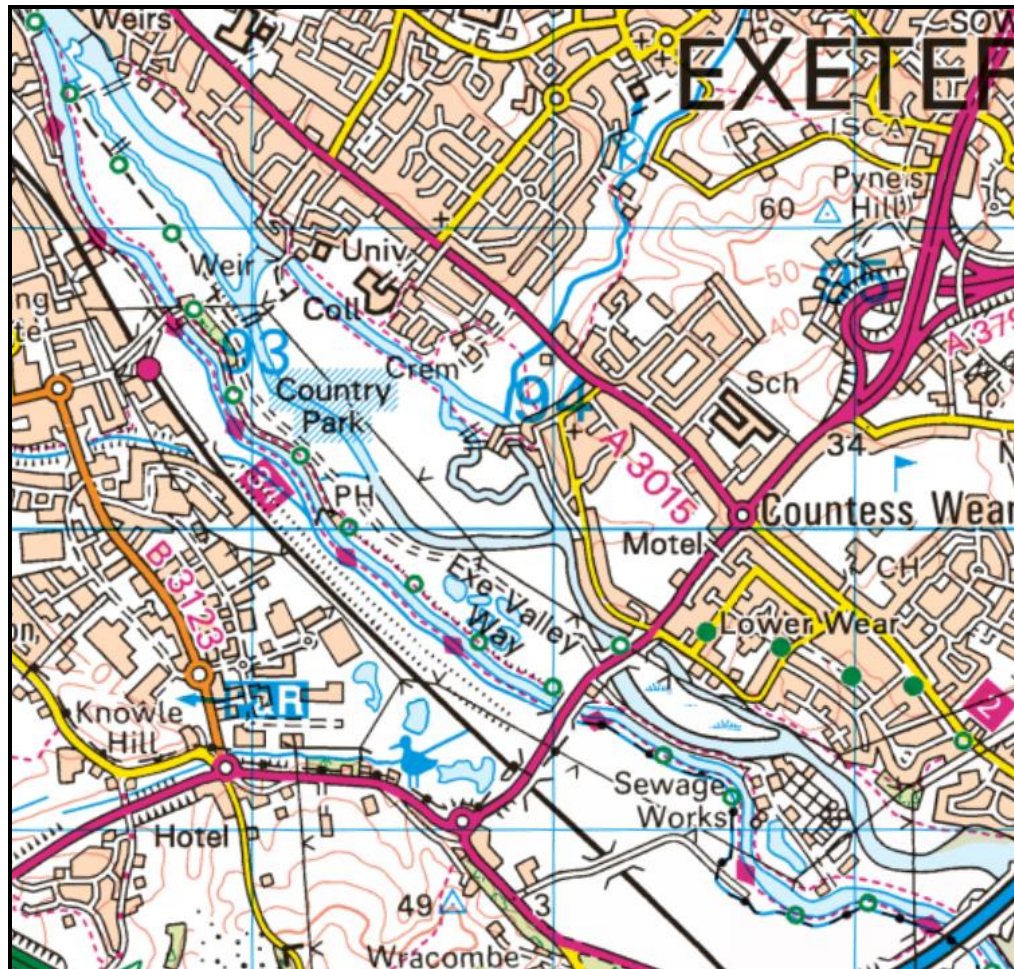
Threats

- Over-stocking with fish.
- Increase in motor boat traffic.
- Further increase in nutrient status.
- Pollution from Marsh Barton trading estate.
- Cutting and/or removal of aquatic vegetation.

Management suggestions

- Reduce fish stocks and nutrient input.
- Ensure no increase in motor boat traffic.

Exeter Canal – north of M5



Exeter Canal – south of M5

