

South West Regional Fisheries

Wessex Bridgwater Fisheries Report

Using new technology on the Huntspill we're trying to count eels leaving to go to sea and spawn. The dual-frequency identification sonar (DIDSON) is capable of recording high-resolution footage from within the river. The EU's Eel Directive says we must allow at least 40% of the silver eels, that would occur in the absence of man's influences, to escape to the sea. It's been possible to produce a count of eel movements and to produce a model to measure the net biomass of eel escapement.

The eel passes at Oath Lock (River Parrett) and Greylake Sluice (King's Sedgemoor Drain) continue to yield good images on CCTV. The two Greylake eel passes recorded 42,000 ascending eels last year and 36,000 to date this year. They are now seen as significant monitoring sites within Europe.



Trout in the classroom



Having fun at Somerset Water Festival

Angling participation events

Several angling participation events were held over the summer resulting in the coaching of over 1,500 anglers. Events included one in Eastville, Bristol and one in Bridgwater Docks at the Somerset Water Festival.

Projects

A new angling club at a Leonard Cheshire home near Bath has been supported with equipment and fishing tackle.

In July, a Trout in the Classroom project culminated in the release of brown trout fingerlings into the North Petherton stream near Bridgwater. Both the infant and the junior school raised trout from eggs to fingerlings and released them into the local stream.

Witch Lodge Lake, near Taunton, was officially reopened having had dam repairs, de-silting and new access created as part of an Environment Agency supported Heritage Lottery project carried out with the Forestry Commission.

At Walrow Ponds, Highbridge, the club has put in floating islands to provide refuge for fish with spawning substrate. The islands also help to deter anglers from casting towards residents' gardens.

Up to 15 more eel passes (designed by Andy Don) are being installed on tilting weirs throughout Somerset contributing to the Eel Management Plan and Water Framework Directive actions.

Fish kill response

Water quality monitoring stations are being installed on the River Yeo and River Parrett in Somerset to give early warning of water quality problems. Fish kills on rivers and drains across the Somerset Levels are associated with low oxygen levels, algal blooms and floodwater.



Floating island at Walrow Ponds

The stations will automatically monitor dissolved oxygen levels. Five sites have been identified as part of a £45,000 pilot project. The equipment will also help identify long term trends and changes in the river environment. Data from each site is sent to the Environment Agency at Bridgwater where the data can be monitored around the clock to allow an immediate response to a sudden drop in oxygen levels. The project has started with the most vulnerable sites where fish have been killed in the past. If successful, the plan is to create a network of sites across the Somerset Levels.

Wessex enforcement

The River Parrett elver fishery has around 150 licensed fishermen. Bailiffs seized 69 nets this year, of which 25 were vastly oversized flow nets.



Andy Don's tilting eel pass

We have at least 15 cases pending prosecution and three guilty pleas have already been heard. One case was for the use of an illegal flow net and two related to dip nets being used in an illegal way. All three cases have seen significant fines but also the court has banned each of the fishermen from holding a licence for three years.

Invasive weeds

Environment Agency staff have found that two invasive weeds are now present in the King's Sedgemoor Drain: water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) and water lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*). Both of these are free-floating plants which can have detrimental effects on native flora and fauna. Please contact the Bridgwater office on 01278 484786 if you see any of these plants.



Water lettuce and water hyacinth

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