

South West RFERAC

Regional Report June

The following report was presented to the Regional Fisheries Ecology and Recreation Advisory Committee at its meeting on 25 June 2010 at the Environment Agency's Regional Offices in Exeter.

Regional Issues

Communicating with anglers

We have produced another regional fisheries magazine, partly as a mechanism for encouraging anglers to renew their rod licence. This was run as a national project which reduced regional and area workload whilst still using local stories and issues. Sending a reminder, such as the magazine, has proved to be very successful in the past in encouraging significant extra licence sales.

Licence income

In 2009/10, we received the following income from South West licence holders;

- £0.01m from salmon net licences
- £0.18m from salmon rod licences
- £1.8m from coarse and trout licences

Salmon rod and net licence money, therefore, pays for around three to four staff members, including essential items such as boats, night vision equipment and vehicles. The remainder of our salmon work is funded by Government grant-in-aid.

Fish kills

Following the national funding paper at the last meeting, members queried whether the national figure of 14% spent on fish kills was similar in South West Region. There were 62 incidents in 08/09 (the same period as that covered by the national statistics) and, even if we attended them all, would have only taken up a maximum of 100 mandays and probably much fewer than that. This equates to around 1% of our South West fisheries time. We recharged polluters around £12k for fisheries incidents where we could identify a source. Many of these reports were of fish in ponds and lakes rather than in the 'natural' environment. We can give more details of the south west incidents if requested by members.

Enforcement & Regulation

Wessex

In the 2009/10 season, our legal action for rod and line offences resulted in fines of £12,015 and costs of £6,620. Interesting cases include what must be a record fine of £700 for an angler who was found guilty of two charges of fishing in the close season and failing to produce a licence. Another case included a charge of causing harassment alarm or distress, (Sect 5 Public Order Act).

We are progressing the issue of catfish illegally introduced within the Avon Valley lakes. We are at the stage of knowing the size and nature of the issue, but just need to work out a sensible approach to their control.

Elver fishing season has been busy near Bridgwater on the Parrett system. As the season draws to an end, bailiffs have seized just under 50 illegal nets. 30 of these have been huge flow nets. More people have been caught operating flow nets this year than ever before, with court action planned against 10 fishermen. One flow net was removed from the river and found to contain 15 kilos of elvers, having been fishing for about an hour. The value of the catch was in the region of £3500. The elvers were returned to the river upstream above Oath Lock.

Devon & Cornwall

We continue to find anglers fishing without an appropriate licence. An angler was fined £90 plus £75 costs for rod fishing without a correct licence in December last year. He was fishing in the Wainsford stretch of the Fowey. He did have a valid non migratory trout and coarse licence but not a migratory salmon & sea trout licence.

An angler was fined £115 with £127 costs for fishing without a licence and for giving a false name to an officer in November last year. He was fishing in the Liskeard Angling Club's section of the Fowey.



Two men pleaded guilty to using a drift net in contravention of the SW1 Byelaw in the Fowey Estuary in October last year. They were discovered during a joint "Operation Jetsam" patrol with the Police. The net was 400 metres in length and stretched from one side of the Pont Pill creek to the other (picture a, appendix one). The skipper, who owned the vessel, was fined £215 and his net was confiscated. The other man was given a twelve month conditional discharge.

The links with Devon & Cornwall Police are continuing to gather strength and Operation Jetsam, the routine fisheries / anti marine crime patrols, have begun for this season. On the first patrol, one stolen boat was recovered and two suspected illegal fishermen were stopped and questioned on the Fowey Estuary.

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08708 506 506

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0800 80 70 60

floodline

0845 988 1188

During the winter months, when netting restrictions are relaxed in the Fowey and Camel, spot checks and surveillance revealed that fishermen were abiding by the rules. Day and night patrols, specifically on the Camel, used staff from all four of the Environment Management teams. These patrols underlined our presence to the fishermen.

There were 10 coastal and estuarine net seizures in areas relevant to the Tamar, Lynher, Tavy, Plym and Yealm catchments from April 2009 to March 2010. Any live salmon or sea trout found within the nets were released. All the nets were destroyed and we are pursuing enforcement action in connection with some of these seizures. We continue to work with our enforcement partners in the freshwater, estuarine and coastal areas, with the Ministry of Defence Police providing important assistance.

By December 2009, there had been 43 "Buyer beware" visits, warning outlets about the need to deal only in legally caught salmon and sea trout. Many of these were in the Plymouth and southeast Cornwall area.

Officers have been observing an increase of awareness of licensing requirements from the public. North Devon fisheries staff assisted with elver patrols on the River Parrett with the Wessex staff - very useful patrols with 15 sets of illegal gear being removed during three nights.

Monitoring & Data

Wessex

In the light of large numbers of eels and elvers using Greylake eel passes, we're trialling an automated elver counting device that counts, weighs and gives an image of all eels using it. The CCTV video monitoring will continue to audit the counter's performance. We normally expect to see around 40,000 eels use the passes here.

It is hoped to submit several otoliths, (ear stones), to the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquacultures Science (CEFAS) then Southampton University for micro analysis for strontium and calcium analysis. The ratio of these two elements gives us a view of the life history of the eel in terms of the amount of time spent in freshwater vs saltwater and everything inbetween. This will be important in establishing our compliance with the European target of 40% escapement for silver eels.

During 2009, over 1100 eels were electronically counted escaping the Huntspill, with a peak of activity in November, amounting to a biomass of 341kg. Taking a very difficult upstream wetted area estimate and various sources of uncertainty into account, this equates to a range between 0.6 to 5.7 kg/ha/yr. This range appears consistent with findings from the other monitoring locations in the Severn catchment. These data have been reported in accordance with our Eel Management Plan commitments. For 2010, a repeat deployment is planned to cover the period from October to December and allow for a comparison of results with the previous year's data.

The results of a novel eel-specific electric fishing technique have been assessed using data collected between 2007 and 2009. These have shown that standard electric-fishing surveys under-estimate the number of eels present by between 15% and 45% depending on a range of environmental variables and river conditions. The method allows for the collection of multi-species data suitable for Water Framework Directive classifications.

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In Blandford, we've begun the annual electric-fishing monitoring programme starting with coarse fish surveys on the lower Stour. On the Hants Avon, the fish counter has recorded a comparatively slow start to the spring run of salmon, and we hope this is down to low water temperatures. However there have been some notable catches of salmon in the last few weeks with a 24 ½lb fish and an estimated 33lb fish being caught. Not to be outdone, the Dorset Frome has also produced a salmon of around 30lb. All of these fish were returned safely to carry on their journey.

Devon & Cornwall

An electric-fishing survey in May 2010 recorded salmon on the River Par for the first time. A single salmon parr was recorded in the lower river adjacent to the A3092 road bridge.

Over 20 pike were removed from Par duckpond during an Agency initiative to improve brown trout stocks in the river and restore the natural fish population of the pond.



2009 saw the highest sea trout run on the Tamar for many years. We estimate that over 17,000 sea trout ran into the river. This is the best recorded run since 1996. The salmon run recorded was about the average.

In collaboration with Cornwall County Council, we surveyed the fish populations in Bude Marshes. This area is a nature reserve used for education. Brown trout, bass, mullet, stickleback, eels, tench, roach and rudd were recorded.

A survey of the marsh pools created by the Agency at Sladesbridge on the Camel revealed a diverse fish fauna. Some of the ponds supported coarse fish, whilst others were used by estuarine fish species such as grey mullet.

We recorded a gilthead bream during a WFD survey on the Fal near Tresillian. This is the first time we have caught giltheads on this highly diverse estuary. It was a surprise to see this species so far up the estuary at such low salinity.

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In Devon, we have just began our fish survey season. There will be over 115 fish surveys carried out this year on the range of habitats in Devon. 37 of these surveys will be for Water Framework Directive sites to assess waterbodies for their fish status.

Projects & Data

Wessex



Since the last update in November, fishing projects have been delivered including part-funding of otter-proof fencing to Taunton AA's Maunsell Ponds fishery, floating islands at Henleaze angling lakes and Walrow Ponds, improved all ability access at Bridgwater AA's Comwich Lake and improved access at Bristol's Amalgamated Fisheries lakes in Calne.

We funded 4 Bridgwater AA and 8 Clevedon AA members to be trained as Level 1 angling coaches which will help future Club Mark accreditation and angling coaching. In February, Wessex (Bridgwater) put on a well-attended Coarse Fisheries Management Seminar at Cannington College.

Nationally, in 2009/10 we installed 108 eel passes/easements. This year we have a great selection of eel pass/easement projects in the south west, 17 candidates, most of which should go ahead depending on the funding available (we're waiting for a Defra announcement). We have £35K already from the Coarse, Trout and Eels (CTE) budget. The local rivers trust are likely to be match funded to help with delivering these obligations under the new regulations and also delivering our actions in the South West Eel Management Plan.

Locally we have developed a modular eel pass system which uses standardized channel and substrate to make purchase and installation as simple and cost effective as possible. This system has proved very popular and has been used by many other Regions. The channel costs £120 per 2.4 m length. There are two product types which cater for gravity fed and pump fed systems.

This year we have secured project funds for a number of coarse and trout projects. In Blandford, these projects are focusing on improvement habitat on the Lower Stour, Wylde and Dorset Frome. We will also be working very closely with Water Level Management Plan colleagues as they move forward with river restoration on the Hants Avon and Dorset Frome. We have also recently completed an eel pass on Baggs Mill at the bottom of the River Piddle and a low cost baffle fish pass at Jessop's Avenue on the River Asker, to aid sea trout migration into this river.

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Over the next few months we have a number of angling participation events planned with local angling clubs. With the Angling Development Board, we are also continuing angling development by increasing the pool of local coaches within angling clubs.

Devon & Cornwall

Work has been completed on a new fish pass on a tributary of the River Lew. Combebow pipe bridge previously caused a major problem for salmon and sea trout migrating to spawning grounds upstream. The small pipes and long downstream sill made upstream migration rarely possible.

The Environment Agency Operation Delivery team removed the central two pipes and replaced them with a large box section, providing much improved migration access and an increased flow capacity. The village residents requiring access via the bridge managed with a temporary bridge during construction and were happy with this short-term arrangement to enable us install these fisheries improvements.



Operations Delivery staff did a fantastic job despite the very cold weather and at times had to use a blow torch to remove gravel that had frozen to the walling stone that they were using. Lesley Newport, Project Manager said, "the team worked very hard in difficult conditions to get the job done well and now fish can migrate freely under all flows".



Approximately 10km of riverine bankside habitat was protected by stock fencing on the River Tamar in 2009. The organisation and running of this work has been completed in partnership with local landowners and farmers. Future benefits of this work include reduced siltation inputs, reduced diffuse runoff and significantly enhanced riparian vegetation leading to cleaner rivers and improved fish stocks.

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We have continued to use the gravel screening bucket, (purchased last year), on the upper Tamar.

Eight spawning areas at Tetcott and five at Luffincott were cleaned using this apparatus. The larger cleaned gravels were returned to the river creating improvements to these spawning sites.

The Whalesborough elver pass was installed this spring using Defra funds and follows on from the elver pass placed on the tidal weir at Bude, some 3km downstream. This now allows access to 25km of catchment.

This now completes the fish passage work at Whalesborough weir which includes an “Alaskan A” fishpass for sea trout installed on the weir in 2009.



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