

This newsletter is a quarterly update on some of the fisheries work undertaken by the Environment Agency and other partners including the Rivers Trusts, within Wessex and Devon & Cornwall

Nicky Noo nicked

A joint operation between the Environment Agency and the Cornwall Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (CIFCA) has led to the successful prosecution of two fishermen found guilty of illegally setting nets in the River Camel.

The offenders Dean Rollason and Shane Barton, both from Plymouth, pleaded not guilty when they appeared at Bodmin magistrates court last week, but were found guilty on the evidence presented by us and the CIFCA. They were fined £500 and £400, plus £50 and £40 victim surcharge, respectively, with each having to pay £2889.25 costs.

Our fisheries patrol with CIFCA found the offenders in their boat the Nicky Noo, hauling a net which had become fixed by becoming entangled with the rocky shore.

The court heard that the net was not intended to be fixed, but had been drifting before becoming snagged and stationary. The CIFCA had written to both defendants last year, stating that if a net should become anchored in any way it could be considered a fixed net.



Our fisheries patrol on the River Camel

Two banned for elver fishing

Two men have been ordered to pay nearly £2,300 in fines and costs and banned for a total of five years for illegally fishing for elvers (baby eels) on the River Parrett in Somerset.

Magistrates heard how Paul Baxter of, Bridgwater stood on the riverbank acting as lookout while Sonny Bale, also Bridgwater, fished within a restricted area at the Huntspill sluice. Our bailiffs observed the defendants as they arrived beside the river with two other men early on the evening of March 15, 2014. Sonny Bale and the other fisherman were seen emptying their nets into buckets on at least five occasions. Satisfied offences had been committed, the bailiffs shone their torches on the offenders and called out to them. Sonny Bale threw his net in the river and left a bucket of elvers tied to the railings of the sluice. After a few minutes Bale returned to the river bank, out of breath, covered in mud and agitated.

The second man who returned to the riverbank was identified as Paul Baxter. A total of 2.3kg of live elvers (worth £230) were seized and the dip net Sonny Bale had earlier thrown into the river, retrieved. At the time of the incident Sonny Bale was a licensed elver fisherman provided with the details of where and how to fish legally. *“Eel numbers are in steep decline and restrictions are necessary to help preserve stocks and ensure their survival”* said Richard Dearnley for the Environment Agency.

Appearing before Taunton magistrates, Sonny Bale was fined £400 and ordered to pay £1,700 costs plus a £40 victim surcharge. The court also ordered the forfeiture of his nets, equipment and a night sight and banned him from elver fishing for three years. Paul Baxter received a conditional discharge, two year ban and was ordered to pay £250 costs.

Net limitation orders

We are currently reviewing the net limitation orders for the Dart and Teign, which will need renewing in December 2015.

This involves meeting with all relevant parties and trying to set the number of nets on the river at a level that the fishery can sustain and involves balancing net and rod fishing interests. We will keep you updated on progress with this during 2015.

Devon drift netting

We are looking at the impact of drift netting on salmon and sea trout stocks on some of the Devon estuaries. Typically netting for mullet, this drift netting activity can have a significant impact on salmonids, which are caught as a by-catch and must be returned to the river, usually dead.

Lyn fishery restrictions

Restrictions will be placed on the River Lyn fishery (owned by the Environment Agency) for 2015 to try and help conserve salmon stocks which have been hit hard with disease for the past two years. We are requiring 100 per cent catch and release whilst also restricting fishing methods. We have also warned that the salmon fishery may need to close at short notice if significant levels of disease are seen again. Steps have been put in place to obtain samples of any diseased fish that are witnessed. Previous analysis of samples proved inconclusive in diagnosing the disease.

For more information on the Lyn restrictions, please contact Mike Holland (Fisheries, Biodiversity & Geomorphology) on Email: mike.holland@environment-agency.gov.uk or Tel: 01392 354019.

Fish stockings

Stocking the upper Stour system

We have stocked 1,500 roach, 500 chub and 500 dace into the River Cale as part of a restoration stocking following a pollution event back in 2012. Subsequent fish surveys have shown very poor recovery following this event, which we understand will be due to fish passage issues downstream and poor habitat in the river. Therefore, we decided to stock these fish to kick-start the population again. Work is also going on with the local river interest group to improve habitat and fish passage.

Nadder receives restoration stocking

The River Nadder at Tisbury, was stocked with 500 chub and 500 dace following an incident at one of our structures, where a hatch unavoidably drained an impounded stretch of river. The angling club who fish this stretch have recorded

poor catches since this incident, and we have undertaken two years worth of stocking (plus relocation of adult fish from downstream) to help re-establish the population. This was the last year of the work and the longer term aim is to sort out the flood defence structure so that it is passable for fish.

More barbel for the Bristol Avon

As part of our barbel re-stocking programme in the Bristol Avon, we have stocked 4,000 juvenile barbel in the Bristol Avon near Claverton and Christian Malford. We have also stocked 2,000 barbel into the Somerset Frome near Shawford and 2,000 in the River Chew near Chewton Keynsham. The aim of these stockings are to boost declining populations in the river and to improve angling for this popular species.



Barbel being released into the Bristol Avon

Bream boost for West Sedgemoor

We have stocked 2,500 juvenile common bream into the West Sedgemoor Main Drain following previous pollution incidents and water quality problems in the system. Our surveys this year, showed that whilst other coarse fish species in the drain were present in good numbers, the bream population was lower than expected. Therefore we decided to stock some bream to help boost the population.

Assisting local fisheries in Wessex

We have helped a small number of angling clubs and fisheries in North Wessex by donating small numbers of coarse fish (such as roach, rudd, bream, crucian carp and tench). One fishery near Frome, had suffered a significant fish kill that was linked to water quality problems caused by natural events. We helped the other fisheries in order to encourage more angling opportunities in the area.

Channel catfish removal

We worked with a local fishery owner to remove two non-native channel catfish from their lake near Frome. Channel catfish are considered a high risk species and are therefore generally not allowed to be kept in any watercourse (though they can be kept by dealers and in garden ponds where there is no chance that they can escape into the wild). The fish were examined by our Fish Health and Fish Ageing Teams to confirm the species and to make sure they were not carrying any unwanted non-native parasites.

These fish were illegally introduced into the lake a few years ago and could have put wild fish stocks at risk if they had escaped from the fishery. They could have also put at risk the fishery if they had been carrying harmful parasites or diseases.

For more information on non-native fish species and the risks they pose, please visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/introduce-or-keep-non-native-fish-and-shellfish>

River Avon restoration project

This year's construction work under the River Avon Restoration Project is coming to an end with the completion of the final project at Upavon, on the Upper Avon in Wiltshire. A partially collapsed weir and hatch structure has been removed whilst being carefully recorded for archaeological record. This has removed a barrier to fish as well as reducing the impounded nature of the river upstream, typified by slow moving uniform flow and silt deposits.

In-channel work including channel narrowing berms, tree hinging and woody deflectors have further enhanced the river habitat, both upstream and downstream of the old weir, to encourage a more lively and diverse flow pattern. This will provide a greater variety of river habitat, including more mobilised and silt free gravel deposits ideal for fish spawning, and areas of slack water ideal for fish fry and various plant and invertebrates.

The third element of the project has been to re-profile the banks, lowering the floodplain next to the river to remove old spoil deposits and to provide a better connection between the river and the floodplain (this was not previously ideal as the river channel was moved toward the edge of the floodplain for milling purposes well over a century ago). Approximately 800 cubic metres of material has been removed from the floodplain and spread on a nearby arable field.

Along with other projects this year under the restoration project, such as Mount Mill at Norton

Bavant and Butts Sportsfield near Salisbury, well over 2,000 cubic metres of material has been removed from the floodplain, which will provide additional flood storage along with the environmental benefits.

The works at Upavon have been carried by Cain Bio-Engineering, contracted under the Southeast's Soft Engineering Framework and designed by Black & Veatch.



Weir removal on the River Avon showing the weir before (top) and after (bottom) removal

A stitch in time

Last year's proposed fish passage on the River Tarrant took a bit of a bashing during the very high flood events of last winter when the bank between a weir pre-barrage was eroded causing water to bypass the structure. With funding at a premium, Jim Allan and Roger Genge in our Fisheries, Biodiversity and Geomorphology (FBG) Team (Blandford), lent a hand and carried out a bit of river repair work themselves to prevent any high flows this coming winter causing even more erosion.

Not only did the work get done quickly and at low cost (a local contractor, Casterbridge Fisheries, donated the materials), but the local riparian owners were also impressed by our 'can do' attitude and quick response to their concerns.

The work took about two hours to complete and Roger and Jim were able to explain the reasoning behind restoration works to the stream of

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interested people who regularly stopped throughout the morning to enquire about the river.

A bonus for Jim, former fisheries officer for the Tarrant and now fisheries enforcement officer, was hearing that grayling have been caught above the weir at Tarrant Keyneston. This is the first reported capture of grayling being caught so far up the river.

Jim said *"Wow! I've been working on improving fish passage for this river for a number of years and it's great to get confirmation that the works are a success. In the past we've also had salmon spawning below this particular weir and the route is now open for them to also spawn higher up the catchment"*.

For more information on the River Tarrant project, please contact Roger Genge (Fisheries, Biodiversity & Geomorphology) on Email: roger.genge@environment-agency.gov.uk or Tel: 01258 483403.



The weir on the River Tarrant after the improvements were made

Ratty's Bridport home saved

We have carried out major desilting on the River Brit within Bridport's flood defence scheme in order to remove silt which had accumulated on flood berms, and at a critical site to improve flow around a mid channel island. Maintaining the channel is important to ensure the flood defence scheme's standard of protection is maintained, but any works need to be compliant with environmental and wildlife legislation. There are native brown trout, migratory salmonids and water voles in the rivers around Bridport.

Water voles have full protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act and so the work had to be done sensitively to minimise impacts on all of these species. We worked with Natural England and the contractors to ensure works were sensitive to water voles and also compliant with wildlife legislation.

One area which was particularly challenging in terms of the logistics of carrying out the works was where a mid channel island and berm had significantly grown up and needed to be reduced to increase flow conveyance. Flow has been improved around the island and also important water vole habitat in the upper sections of the island has been maintained. The working methods were designed to avoid the need for heavy plant to go in the channel and a boat skip and crane were used to remove the silt for disposal off site. Using this approach we protected river gravels for migratory salmonids which had already been spotted moving up into the system ready to spawn.

For more information on the Bridport de-silting project, please contact Amy Wilson (Fisheries, Biodiversity & Geomorphology) on Email: amy.wilson@environment-agency.gov.uk or Tel: 01258 483567.

Volunteering on the Char

The jolly band of volunteers started work again on River Char restoration project following funding support from our Integrated Environment Programme. We were able to partner with the Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT) to continue with the five year plan to deliver improvements to ecology and reduce diffuse pollution within the river corridor. DWT's project manager, Nick Gray, who has co-ordinated the delivery programme, said *"It's great that we can get together again and continue our work to reduce pollution getting into the river and revitalise the biodiversity of this beautiful part of Dorset. The first project of this year was to improve a small section of the river upstream of Stockham Bridge, Whitchurch Canonorum. The works involved cutting back the tree canopy and using some of the woody debris to create better flows over the gravels during low flows as well as trying to reduce bank erosion. This is the third year that the Environment Agency and DWT have been able to get volunteer working parties on the Char going and the number of volunteers turning up regularly has grown to about 12 and we are meeting once or twice a month"*.

The River Char is currently failing various Water Framework Delivery targets and teams within the Agency are working alongside Dorset Wildlife Trust and Natural England to reduce pollution entering the system and working to improve the biodiversity of the river's corridor.

For more information on the River Char project, please contact Roger Genge (Fisheries,

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The River Char volunteers take a well earned break

Success for native crayfish

In recent months we've discovered the crayfish plague on the River Allen in Dorset, a devastating disease for our native white-clawed crayfish. Fortunately, we have been working on the South West Crayfish Project with Buglife and the Wildlife Trusts, which has focused on protecting the endangered native crayfish. One of the main parts of the project involved translocating white-clawed crayfish to safe isolated sites away from the threat of non-native crayfish species, which can carry the plague and also out compete our native species for food and habitat.

More than 300 white-clawed crayfish were translocated from the Allen to a safe isolated stream in Dorset in 2013 away from the threat of any non-native crayfish species and before the plague entered the river.

We have recently conducted a survey with Buglife to check how the population is doing in the undisclosed location and we have found some healthy crayfish in their new home. Amy Wilson said "We're just so thrilled the translocation was a success and we hope the new population can grow from strength to strength". Monitoring of the 'Ark' site will be carried out annually to monitor the success of the project.



A native white-clawed crayfish

Environment Agency contacts

For more information on these newsletters, please contact Jody Armitage, Fisheries, Biodiversity & Geomorphology, Tel: 01278 484655, or Email: jody.armitage@environment-agency.gov.uk

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