

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

Fungal outbreak in Devon rivers

A number of rivers in Devon have seen salmonids with relatively high rates of fungal infection over the past two years. The samples we have collected have not been able to determine the exact nature of the disease or the cause. In 2015 we are again experiencing reports of fish arriving in rivers exhibiting signs of these fungal infections. We have already attempted to collect samples from the River Dart this year and are poised to collect fish for analysis on the River Lyn in North Devon (where disease had previously been most prevalent and resulted in closure of the fishery in 2013). We need to understand the disease and what is causing it, so that we know what options we have for management.

For more information on the outbreaks of fungal infections in Devon rivers or to report sightings, please contact Mike Holland (Fisheries, Biodiversity & Geomorphology) on Email: mike.holland@environment-agency.gov.uk or Tel: 01392 354019.



A diseased fish showing signs of fungal infection

Help for the River Cale

Post pollution re-stocking

The River Cale in Wincanton suffered a pollution event two years ago following a fire at a cheese factory. This resulted in a significant fish kill on the river. This event combined with noticeable amounts of litter in the river gave birth to the local community group 'CATCH' (Community Action to Transform Cale Habitat), who were fed up with the state the river was in.

After an initial visit from our Fisheries team with recommendations of how to improve habitat, we arranged for the Wild Trout Trust to visit the affected reach with CATCH, to provide an advisory report on habitat improvements and river restoration that the group could undertake themselves. We also surveyed the river, which proved what we all thought, that there were virtually no fish in the entire section so some chub, dace and roach were ordered from our Calverton Fish Farm. With help from the CATCH group and keen volunteers from three schools: Wincanton Primary, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Primary and King Arthurs School, 2,500 fish were stocked into the river. The CATCH group also showed the schools different species of invertebrates that could be found in the river and explained the work they had been doing on the river over the last two years.

The project is a roaring success and with our advice and help the very enthusiastic CATCH group have taken charge of their river and completed many habitat improvements and thoroughly raised the profile of this small Stour tributary. For more information please visit their website, www.rivercale.org.

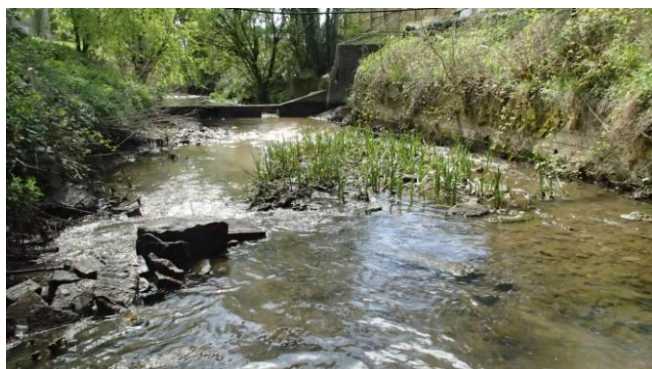
Fish passage improvements

Our Blandford fisheries team further helped the volunteer CATCH group by removing an old hatch in a weir in Wincanton, to create one and a half kilometres of improved fish passage into the upper reaches of the River Cale. This severe barrier to fish migration had been in place for over 50 years and once removed, the water level upstream dropped by over a foot and created a new island and braided channel vastly improving the habitat upstream, an excellent result!

UNCLASSIFIED

For more information on the River Cale project, please contact Jim Allan (Fisheries, Biodiversity & Geomorphology) on Email:

james.allan@environment-agency.gov.uk or Tel: 01258 483405.



The improvement to the River Cale following removal of a weir hatch in Wincanton

Wellow Brook restoration

We have helped fund a partnership project on the Wellow Brook in Midsomer Norton with the Bristol Avon Rivers Trust (BART) leading the project. The upper Wellow Brook is failing its Water Framework Directive classification due to lower than expected fish populations and high phosphate levels. The aim of the project was to help improve fish stocks by improving the in-river habitat, whilst also improving access to the river for the local community and increasing local interest in the river corridor.

As part of the project, the Wild Trout Trust undertook an advisory visit along some of the urbanised stretches of the river in Midsomer Norton and Radstock, in order to identify future improvements that could be made. They also helped run a series of volunteer days on the brook, installing brushwood refuge areas in the river as well as some coppicing to allow light to reach the brook and so encourage more aquatic plant growth (such as water crowfoot, *Ranunculus* sp.). A gravel access ramp was also installed at a location regularly used by locals to access the river, in order to make access safer and to provide access for school groups that want to learn more about the river and its wildlife.

BART have undertaken a lot of engagement with the local community, landowners, local council, schools and college and have a number of volunteer and family fun days planned to further increase awareness and encourage interest in the river. It is hoped that this project will encourage more work in the area that will benefit the brook and its wildlife, in particular the fish populations.

For more information on the Wellow Brook project, please contact Jody Armitage (Fisheries, Biodiversity & Geomorphology) on Email:

jody.armitage@environment-agency.gov.uk or Tel: 01278 484655.



A brushwood refuge installed as part of the Wellow Brook project at Midsomer Norton

New fish passes on the Exe

Two new fish passes are being installed at Trews Weir on the River Exe. One is being installed at the main weir itself and another into the flood relief channel. Both passes have also been designed so that they are suitable for eels. These works are being funded and completed as part of the flood defence improvements for Exeter.

Fish passes for the Tone

Two pool and traverse fish passes located at French and Firepool weir on the River Tone, Taunton were repaired at the end of March this year. The fish passes haven't functioned correctly for some time due to missing boards, which are used to create the pools and traverses needed to give fish upstream passage. The Environment Agency's Parrett and Tone Asset Performance Team provided funding to repair the fish passes and Gareth Varney from the Hydrometry and Telemetry Team offered to managed the project and include it in a package of work to improve fish and eel passage in other locations.

The boards were reinstated and fixed into position to ensure that they remain in place throughout their design life and notches were also included to make passage easier. French and Firepool weir are both considered to be significant barriers to fish migration so it is important that the fish passes are in good working order at all times. The River Tone is also one of the few rivers in Wessex where we have a significant salmon run

customer service line
03708 506 506

incident hotline
0800 80 70 60

floodline
0345 988 1188

www.gov.uk/environment-agency

UNCLASSIFIED

and, although we have evidence that salmon are getting over these structures, we have made their passage significantly easier for future years.

For more information on fish passage on the River Tone, please contact Matt Pang (Fisheries, Biodiversity & Geomorphology) on Email: matthew.pang@environment-agency.gov.uk or Tel: 01278 484600.



French weir fish pass before (top) and after (bottom) repair

Congresbury Weir eel pass

We have installed a gravity fed eel pass on Congresbury Weir on the Congresbury Yeo. This is part of our project to improve access for eels in the river and to allow them access to Bristol Water's Blagdon Lake, which provides excellent habitat for eels, but until recently was inaccessible for eels, except by stocking. In recent years we have installed eel passes at other structures on the river: Tutshill Sluice, Iwood gauging station and an eel trap at Blagdon Lake (this was in partnership with Bristol Water). We will continue to monitor these passes in the

hope that more eels can reach the habitat that is present throughout the catchment and which was previously inaccessible.

Gussage Stream flood benefit work

A group of 120 volunteers and staff from Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT) and Sembcorp Bournemouth Water have put in 600 hours of work, improving the Gussage Stream near Wimborne. They have cleared two kilometres of weed and vegetation to support rare and threatened wildlife, such as otters and white-clawed crayfish. The work also compliments how we and Sembcorp are working out how to manage flows in the future, and explores innovative ways of managing the Gussage Stream in partnership with others, and in a wildlife friendly manner. This is the first year 'man-power' has been used to clear the stream, whereas in previous years the work was done by machinery. Sembcorp Bournemouth Water has been a long term supporter of DWT's River Allen project, generously donating annually to conservation work.

Wildlife and people will benefit from improved flood defences in the village of Wick in Bournemouth, Dorset. We have begun work raising and extending flood embankments at Wick to protect properties from tidal flooding from the nearby River Stour. Land and Water Services working with Bartlett Contractors, have started work on site and construction of the new defences is going well. The works will help maintain the scheme and provide the appropriate standard of protection. The project includes many environmental improvements. The ditches in the adjacent Christchurch Harbour Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) have been improved for wildlife. We have dug out 500 metres of ditches and shallow 'scrapes' to encourage wading birds such as redshank, curlew and lapwing.

We hope this proposal, which has been developed with Natural England and Bournemouth Borough Council, will enhance the outdoor experience of people using this area. A lapwing arrived on site as we were inspecting the ditch! We have also put up bat boxes and felled as few trees as possible to make way for a new flood bank. Many of our British bat species roost in trees, including the common pipistrelle and noctule bat. Trees provide shelter and attract a diverse range of insects for bats to feed on.

For more information on the Gussage Stream improvements, please contact Sarah Guest (Fisheries, Biodiversity & Geomorphology) on

customer service line
03708 506 506

incident hotline
0800 80 70 60

floodline
0345 988 1188

www.gov.uk/environment-agency

Email: sarah.guest@environment-agency.gov.uk
or Tel: 01258 483441.

Navitus Bay Wind Park

Over the last 9 months we have been advising the Planning Inspectorate (PI) on the proposal to install and operate up to 192 wind turbines to the South of Poole Bay. All salmon leaving and returning to our southern chalk stream rivers are likely to pass near or through the turbine development area, and we have been particularly concerned about the effect the construction of the turbine foundations will have on these fish.

We have been working with the developers to understand what these risks are and as a result have made recommendations to the PI. These included no offshore foundation piling during the time that salmon smolts will be in this area (April and May) and restrictions on piling activity during the period that adult salmon are returning through the development area to their home waters. These measures will also provide protection for sea trout.

The PI are currently reviewing all the issues raised as part of the Development Consent Order formal consultation and will be making their recommendation to the relevant Secretary of State in mid June. The Secretary of State is then due to make their decision public in mid September.

For further information on the project and the written responses made as part of the consultation process please go to:

<http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/projects/South%20East/Navitus-Bay-Wind-Park/>.

Or to find out more about the work we been involved with, then please contact Andy Martin on Email: andy.martin1@environment-agency.gov.uk or Tel: 01258 483324.

Fish stockings

Fish delivery for Bideford Angling Club

We have donated fish (crucian carp, tench and bream) to Bideford Angling Club in Devon. Our hatchery at Calverton had a surplus of fish and Fisheries Enforcement Officer Paul Carter collected and delivered the fish to the club at 'Tarka Swims' in Bideford.



Bideford Angling Club receiving the fish from our Calverton Fish Farm

Another barbel boost for the Bristol Avon

At the end of February, we stocked a further 4,000 juvenile barbel into the Bristol Avon and lower Somerset Frome from our Calverton Fish Farm. We weren't due to get these fish until late 2015, however the farm had a surplus, so we accepted the offer of taking them early so as not to miss out later in the year if they weren't available for us. This is part of our five year barbel restocking programme in the Bristol Avon, which we will complete in late 2016.

New Live Fish Movements Scheme

On the 19 January 2015, new regulations came into force for introducing fish. Sites that want to stock fish now require a Site Permit, instead of the old Section 30 consent, which is obtained by applying to the Environment Agency. As a result of these new regulations, our fisheries officers have been busy assessing and approving (where appropriate) the permits, to ensure that the fish can be stocked with as little delay as possible.

If you do want to stock fish to your fishery or watercourse, and want information on the new scheme, then please contact your local fisheries team (see the contacts at the end of the newsletter) or our national Fish Movements Team on Tel: 01480 483968.

Elver fishing patrols

Our Wessex and Devon & Cornwall fisheries enforcement staff have been busy undertaking elver (juvenile eel) patrols. The 2015 elver season has been quiet compared to other years, with no nets being seized and no one being caught fishing illegally. This is the only time this has happened since elver fishing restrictions came into place in the late 1980s. We have

undertaken the same number of patrols as in previous years, and we can only assume that the fines and penalties are now so severe that most people do not want to take the risk.

Devon & Cornwall crayfish project

We have been monitoring the spread of the non-native signal crayfish in our waters for several years. The impact of these animals is significant, and in several rivers in the country there are stretches where there is nothing left alive except the signal crayfish. Until now there has been no option to prevent this spread, or to reduce the overall numbers.

In Devon & Cornwall we are now trialling a new technique which may provide an option for reversing this spread. Adult male signal crayfish are removed from the river, sterilised and returned. The largest males will remain dominant, killing off smaller fertile males, but will not be able to breed themselves. These trials have begun in partnership with Paignton & Bristol zoos.



A non-native signal crayfish

Angling participation events

Do you know someone that may want to have a go at angling? Well why not come along to one of the following angling participation events being organised by the Angling Trust.

- **24 June, 01, 08 and 15 July (open event): Brixham Breakwater Family Fishing (follow up event) Berry Head Rd, Brixham, TQ5 9AF (5:30pm – 7pm)** – Family sea fishing programme, participants must bring their own bait and tackle. Please contact Volunteer Champion Martyn Green for further information; Tel: 07704 602180.
- **05 August (open event): Apex Lakes play day, Apex Leisure and Wildlife Park, which straddles Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge: (10am – 4:30pm)** – Have a go

at coarse angling sessions. Please contact Dean Asplin, Angling Trust for further information; Tel: 07854 239731.

- **16 August (open event): Bitterwell Lakes, Family Fishing (Angling Trust flagship event), The Bitterwell Lake Fishery, Coalpit Heath, Bristol BS36 2UF (10am – 4:30pm)** – Coarse, game and sea angling as well as displays, face painters, art stalls, tackle stalls, fun & games stalls. Tackle & bait provided. Please contact Dean Asplin, Angling Trust for further information; Tel: 07854 239731.
- **05 and 12 August, 03 and 10 September (open event): Bitterwell Lakes Family fishing follow on events (times to be confirmed)** – Coarse angling. Participants must bring their own fishing equipment, bait and have a rod licence. Please contact Lake Manager, Terry Smith for further information; Tel: 07901 074158.

For more information on angling participation opportunities in the area, please contact Dean Asplin (Angling Trust) on Tel: 07854 239731

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

If you want to contact your local Environment Agency, Fisheries, Biodiversity & Geomorphology Team directly, please email:

Wessex (Bridgwater) –

sw_nwessexfrb@environment-agency.gov.uk

Wessex (Blandford) –

sw_swessexfrb@environment-agency.gov.uk

Devon (Exeter) –

swexeterfrb@environment-agency.gov.uk

Cornwall (Bodmin) –

swbodminfrb@environment-agency.gov.uk