

# Fisheries newsletter

## Wessex and Devon & Cornwall

July to September 2014

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

### Angling participation in Devon

We have helped to organise four angling days with two local colleges, South Molton Community College and Bideford College (with 20 students per day), in partnership with Bideford & District Angling Club (BDAC). The venue was the BDAC lake, 'Tarka Swims', which we helped fund nearly 10 years ago; it has full disabled access from the entrance gates, parking, pathways and access to all swims, plus full toilet facilities. It is managed and looked after impeccably by the BDAC.

The angling coaches (three at Level 1 and one at Level 2) are club members who we have trained, as well as a young female coach, Ellie, who actually came on a school day several years ago and who expressed an interest in becoming a coach; once she was old enough she went through one of our arranged training courses. They all kindly provided their time, and several club members helped out on the day, and the colleges paid for the bait. We provided a block rod licence, fishing tackle and resource, in the form of one of our fisheries officers, Paul Carter. We used the opportunity to promote future rod licence sales and in good news, the club membership for juniors has been kept to a minimum to encourage joining (£2 per year up to the age of 17).

*For more information on these events, please contact Paul Carter, Fisheries, Environment Agency, Tel: 01392 354011, or Email: [pj.carter@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:pj.carter@environment-agency.gov.uk)*

### Family fishing fun at Apex Lakes

More than 100 people took up the offer of a free angling coaching session at the family fishing fun day at Apex Lakes, Burnham-on-Sea. Over half of those that participated had never fished before.



**Steve Bailey (BDAC coarse secretary and lead coach) with a student and a huge perch! Her first fish**

Richard Dearnley and Jody Armitage from our Fisheries, Biodiversity and Geomorphology Team represented us at this event, which was organised by the Angling Trust and the Get Hooked on Fishing charity. The event was also supported by Age UK, Leonard Cheshire Disability, Somerset Active Sports Partnership, South West Fishing for Life, Highbridge and Burnham Angling Club and Bitterwell Fishery.

Most of the people taking part were juniors, but parents, grandparents and friends alike also had a go. Everyone that took part caught a fish, whether it was a small roach or an adult bream and hopefully their enthusiasm for angling will continue. It is hoped that this will become an annual event, which we will continue to support.

## Wimbleball fisheries bank release

Water has been released from Wimbleball Reservoir to try and entice salmon to move upstream on the River Exe. More than 465 mega litres of water were released over three days; this is half the amount of water we could request be released annually.

The release is a mitigation measure resulting from the construction of Wimbleball Lake in the 1970s. It is particularly useful during dry summers when many salmon are stuck in the estuary or lower reaches of the Exe and are unable to negotiate the river's many weirs. This leaves them vulnerable to poaching and predation. There is also evidence to suggest that if salmon are unable to enter the river they may go back to sea without spawning.

We decide when and if the release will be used. Timing is crucial and is largely dependent on when salmon are arriving in the estuary, or if large numbers are concentrated in certain parts of the river and are unable to move upstream.

A large amount of water being released on Exmoor will equate to a rise of just a few centimetres by the time it gets to Exeter. But this is still enough, particularly in periods of prolonged low flows, to give salmon the incentive to move upstream.

If a release will not be of benefit it will not be used. Even though it's ours to have when needed, it's still a valuable resource and will only be used when necessary.

*For more information on the Wimbleball release, please contact Jay Rowntree, Fisheries, Biodiversity & Geomorphology on Tel: 01392 354022, or Email: [jay.rowntree@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:jay.rowntree@environment-agency.gov.uk)*



**The Wimbleball Reservoir bank release**

## Improving fish passage on the Wylfe

An old weir currently blocking fish passage on the River Wylfe at Mount Hill is to be removed as part of the River Avon restoration strategy. We will also be improving the deep canalised section upstream. To demonstrate the success of the project, our Sampling and Collection Team has been carrying out upstream and downstream fish surveys. These will be repeated next year and will hopefully show salmon parr in the newly open channel and improved chalk stream habitat.

The downstream reach was as expected and full of fish, especially mixed size and age classes of wild brown trout and grayling. The inclusion of three salmon parr caused excitement and gave greater support for the project, especially when the upstream survey showed less fish in total and no salmon parr.

## Fish stocking activities

### *Devon salmon and sea trout stocking*

Fisheries Associations have begun collecting broodstock for the 2014/15 salmon stocking programmes on the River Torridge in North Devon plus the Rivers Exe and Axe in East Devon. The Axe also runs a sea trout stocking programme. The programmes are now run almost entirely by voluntary River Associations with support only where necessary from us.

Stocking is undertaken in accordance with an approved stocking plan, which is considered and approved in advanced by our local fisheries team.

### *Chub stocking in Somerset*

During August we stocked 5,000 juvenile chub into the River Parrett near Martock to enhance fish stocks. The numbers of chub had declined in recent years and due to the presence of impassable barriers downstream, fish are unable to migrate naturally upstream. These fish came from our Calverton Fish Farm. We were going to stock chub into the River Brue and Sheppey at the same time, but due to the low flows and warm temperatures in these rivers, we decided to hold off until the winter. We are therefore hoping to stock these rivers and other sites in Wessex, later this year.

## Fisheries disease updates

### *Fungal infections across rivers in Devon*

We have had multiple reports of diseased fish in rivers across Devon. Fish were showing signs of fungal infections. This follows the closure of the Lyn fishery in 2013 due to similar reports. The situation is not unique to any one river or location in the county, and we have had samples analysed by our Fish Health Team, to try and learn more. We are awaiting the results and will report them once they are received.

### *Koi Herpesvirus outbreaks in Wessex*

This summer has been a busy time for our local fisheries officers who have been responding to reports of fish mortalities in stillwaters across Somerset, parts of Wiltshire and the Bristol and Bath areas. For some fisheries, the losses were due to natural causes (such as low dissolved oxygen levels linked with the warm weather, low flows and algal blooms) while others were related to disease outbreaks. Four fisheries unfortunately suffered outbreaks of the notifiable disease, Koi Herpesvirus. These sites have been issued with Confirmed Designations (CD) by the Fish Health Inspectorate, Centre for Environment Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) and are now subject to strict biosecurity and monitoring regimes. For a list of all fisheries and sites with a CD in place, please visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/prevent-fish-or-shellfish-diseases>.

Good fisheries management and biosecurity, is an important part of managing a fishery, and owners and clubs should consider what they can do to protect their fishery at all times of the year, not just during the summer.

If you are worried about possible fish disease outbreaks then contact your local fisheries officer or call our Incident Hotline on 0800 80 70 60. Also, if you just want some fisheries management advice then please contact your local officer.

## Fisheries enforcement in Wessex

Since the 1 April 2014, our Wessex fisheries bailiffs have rod licence checked a whopping 3,332 anglers. Of these anglers checked, 177 have been reported for not having a valid rod licence. One angler was also arrested for fisheries offences and outstanding issues concerning bail conditions.

## Balsam bashing in Dorset

### *Team work at Gundry on the River Brit*

Work to improve biodiversity around the pond we own at Gundry weir, Bridport, went well when staff from several teams got together to control the invasive non-native plant, Himalayan balsam, from around the pond and a section of the neighbouring River Brit.

Last year a team from the Community Payback Scheme helped us to remove dense patches of balsam from around the pond. We are working with the local community to encourage the formation of a 'Friends' organisation to help manage the pond in order to improve the habitat for water voles, fish fry, and to discourage antisocial behaviour.

Removing the balsam this year will give the group a good base for managing the plant in the future. The pond was renovated by us as part of our works related to the installation of the eel and fish pass on the weir. The team also got to view the new fish and eel passes at Gundry and visit and discuss the river restoration work being carried out by us in partnership with Dorset Wildlife Trust in the nearby River Char catchment.

### *A 'Wey-ty' pile of balsam*

A fortunate encounter with a local group of community spirited youngsters has enabled Roger Genge, our fishery catchment officer for the West Dorset Streams, to survey the upper reaches of the River Wey, Weymouth for Himalayan balsam. Working with the River Wey Society and Weymouth Baptist Church, we have surveyed several sites, and removed this year's growth of balsam.

The church youth leader offered her team of helpful youngsters and they enthusiastically cleared balsam from the upper reaches of the Wey. Roger is now looking to survey the lower stretch of the Wey and prevent (if it's not already there) the introduction of balsam to Radipole Lake, a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

*For more information on work around the River Brit and River Wey, please contact Roger Genge, Fisheries, Biodiversity & Geomorphology on Tel: 01258 483403, or Email: [roger.genge@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:roger.genge@environment-agency.gov.uk)*

## Hunting for crayfish in the River Exe

This partnership project has been surveying significant stretches of the River Exe and its

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**White clawed crayfish being handled at Bristol Zoo as part of the public display and captive breeding programme**

tributaries, to try and understand how far the invasive, non-native signal crayfish has spread through the catchment. We now have a good understanding of how far they have spread and are beginning to learn more about the impacts this could have on the wider ecosystem, including fisheries.

Signal crayfish will feed on almost anything, including fish eggs and very small or juvenile fish. The increase in numbers and spread of this species therefore has the potential to impact on fish populations and our targets for improving the water environment.

As part of the project, techniques are being looked at to stop the spread and reduce overall numbers of signal crayfish on our rivers. It is also raising awareness through public involvement at Paignton and Bristol zoos and is trying to preserve the displaced native variety, the white clawed crayfish, through relocating them to refuge sites and a captive breeding programme.

## Crayfish plagued by disease

Crayfish plague has been found on Dorset's River Allen following our joint investigation with Dorset Wildlife Trust.

Until recently the river Allen's native white-clawed crayfish population, one of the few remaining in Dorset, had managed to remain free from disease but dead and distressed crayfish were spotted in the river in July. We sent samples to Cefas for disease analysis and they confirmed that the crayfish were infected with crayfish plague. The plague is carried by non-native American signal crayfish, which are not susceptible to it and are present in many of our Dorset rivers. It is

transferred to new waters either through the movement of the signal crayfish or by water and/or damp equipment that has come from waters that contain signal crayfish.

It is not clear yet how the disease reached the River Allen, but we are working closely with the Dorset Wildlife Trust and local landowners to monitor the situation and determine the extent of the outbreak. The River Allen is one of just three populations remaining in Dorset. We are urging river users to ensure that any equipment they use in the River Allen is clean and dry before entering the river, when moving between locations and at the end of the day. This will hopefully limit the spread of the disease through the river and reduce the risk of it being spread to other rivers that still have white-clawed crayfish populations.

Last year we translocated good numbers of white-clawed crayfish from the River Allen to a safe isolated stream away from the threat of any non-native crayfish species. We will monitor this population in future years to determine the success of the project. Other opportunities are also being investigated for any remaining potentially healthy white-clawed crayfish in the River Allen.

*Remember to always 'Check, clean, dry'. For more information please see:*

<http://www.nonnativespecies.org/checkcleandry/index.cfm>



## Updates from the Rivers Trusts

### Westcountry Rivers Trust (WRT)

*A new eel pass on the Bidwell Brook, River Dart*

The Bidwell Brook is a tributary of the River Dart located in the lower catchment. Due to its close proximity to the tidal limit, it provides important habitat for both juvenile and adult eels. In 2013, the waterwheel sluice at Dartington Hall Estate was identified as a priority obstruction for eel passage improvements. The wheel is driven by the leat off-take from the sluice weir structure on the Bidwell Brook. It was originally used to power the looms which made Dartington tweed, however it is now used to generate hydroelectric power.

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**Inspecting the weir (a) before the eel pass and a section of the eel pass (b) on one of the pre-barrages**

The structure presents multiple barriers to eel migration; notched pre-barrages that were put in place to ease fish migration, and a final vertical faced concrete weir. Therefore each barrier was tackled individually through a series of eel tile channel passes.

The eel pass solution was designed and installed by local fisheries consultants, FishTek. The tile passes were successfully installed after obtaining Land Drainage Consent, eel pass approval and local permission for in river working. The work was minimally invasive and we insured there was no obstruction to fish migration over the weir during the works. This project was a good example of a close working relationship between the Environment Agency, WRT and the landowner, Dartington Hall Estate. The work is a continuation of WRT involvement on the Bidwell Brook, with the notched pre-barrages funded through the Defra River Improvement Fund. It is funded by WRT under the Dart & Teign River Improvement Project, a Catchment Restoration Fund project

administered by the Environment Agency. The eel passes will be maintained by the Dartington Hall Trust to ensure the passes are clear of debris for eel migration.

John Channon, estate manager, of the Dartington Hall Trust said *"We are very lucky to have the support of Westcountry Rivers Trust and to have the expertise right here in Dartington with Fishtek to get this eel pass installed. Our conservation work sometimes goes unnoticed so it is always gratifying to see projects we have worked on over time happen"*.

We hope to work with FishTek in spring to carry out some monitoring of the pass to ensure the pass is being used successfully by eels.

The project greatly improves eel migration on the Bidwell Brook and access to more habitat; equal to an additional 6 kilometres or 3.7 miles.

News of the eel pass installation has been well received in the press, with comments from the public such as; *"Thanks for your contribution to the sustainable solution"* and *"I've noticed a decline in eels in the Bidwell over the years. They were very numerous 20 years ago and I almost never see them now. Let's hope it works. This is very welcome news"*.

For more information on WRT, please contact,  
Web: [www.wrt.org.uk](http://www.wrt.org.uk), Email: [info@wrt.org.uk](mailto:info@wrt.org.uk) or  
Tel: 01579 372140

## **Bristol Avon Rivers Trust (BART)**

### *By Brook project update*

The By Brook project made proposals for improving fish passage and other environmental factors on the brook, as well as achieving some 'quick win' actions such as fencing and re-locating gateways.

The project report has proved of sufficient interest for the Environment Agency to invest in further detailed investigations, which will lead to a plan of action for the By Brook catchment. Our plans are to work with a firm of consulting engineers to assess last year's work and build wider plans for the whole catchment, which can be discussed and prioritised, and hopefully lead to actions in future years.

Our initial project concentrated on options for the area between Ford and Shockerwick. We will now be extending the area of coverage to include the whole catchment. This work will take place up to



### **A habitat workshop on the Wellow Brook with the Wild Trout Trust**

the end of March 2015 and will include an ecosystems services assessment of the catchment as a whole, as it is vital that any future work is set in a catchment context rather than as a series of isolated actions. And, of course, a continuing dialogue with stakeholders will need to take place before any options can be taken forward.

#### *Wellow Brook project update*

The Environment Agency have also provided some funding to support our Wellow and Cam initiative. We are working in the towns of Radstock and Midsomer Norton looking at options to make improvements to the river which will encourage more river life into the town centres along the river corridor. We have a great opportunity to involve lots of people in the river and are planning a number of engagement events over the next year.

Whilst BART is a charity and carries out a lot of activities with volunteers funding is vital if real improvement actions can take place across the catchment and we are grateful therefore for this support from the Environment Agency which is helping BART make a difference in a number of areas now. We now have a small additional fund to add to the Environment Agency funding and will be holding a number of habitat workshops elsewhere on the brook.

#### *Juvenile eel releases in the upper Bristol Avon*

BART and the Sustainable Eel Group (SEG) combined efforts to place 100,000 juvenile eels into the upper Bristol Avon as part of the SEGs continued efforts to secure the future of the eel.

#### *River Trym improvements*

BART have commissioned a report on the possibilities of improving fish passage by removal of obstructions on the River Trym and Hazel Brook in Bristol. We have also worked hard to bring new funding into the area and raise interest in the river.

We have just received a small award which will help us work closely with local communities in the months ahead, and lead to further improvements to the river in time.

For more information on BART, please contact, Web: [www.bristolavonrivertrust.org](http://www.bristolavonrivertrust.org), Email: [info@bristolavonrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:info@bristolavonrivertrust.org.uk) or contact Ian Mock on Tel: 07411 488084

### **Calling all Rivers Trusts**

*If you represent a Rivers Trust in Wessex or Devon & Cornwall and want to contribute to these newsletters then please get in contact*

### **Local Environment Agency contacts**

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

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

Wessex (North, Bridgwater) - [sw\\_nwessexfrb@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:sw_nwessexfrb@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Wessex (South, Blandford) - [sw\\_swessexfrb@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:sw_swessexfrb@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Devon (Exeter) - [swexeterfrb@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:swexeterfrb@environment-agency.gov.uk)

Cornwall (Bodmin) - [swbodminfrb@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:swbodminfrb@environment-agency.gov.uk)

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