

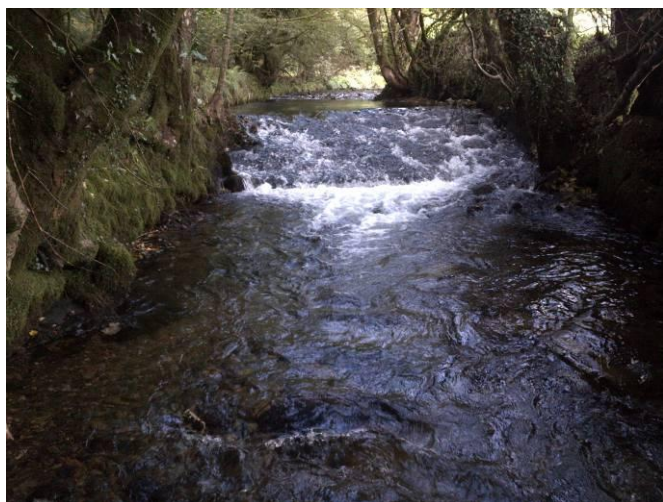
South West Fisheries Newsletter

May 2013

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 the South West region.

Fish passage improvements

Our Cornwall fisheries team employed APEM to undertake assessments for fish and eel passage at 11 weir sites and 24 hydrometric structures owned by us. The weir sites were selected on catchments that are failing for fish under the Water Framework Directive (WFD). Further action is being undertaken on the River Yealm where two weirs in Storridge Woods are to be removed in 2013. Feasibility studies have been completed on weirs at Blachford on the Yealm and Cann Weir on the River Plym. Improvements are being made at the highest priority hydrometric sites for fish and eel passage.



A weir at Lower Storridge, River Yealm

Two major fish pass projects at Colleton on the River Taw and Tipton St. John on the River Otter are nearing completion in Devon. It is hoped that the passes will sort out problems with WFD fish failures on both river systems, opening up many kilometres of additional spawning grounds to migratory species including salmon. Both projects have been slightly delayed as a result of extreme flows and flooding during November and December, but are due for completion over the coming months.



Colleton fish pass construction on the River Taw

As part of the Somerset Eel Passage Programme we have installed eight tilting weir eel passes and designed eel passes for 14 tidal outfalls, four gauging weirs and our Gold Corner Pumping. We have also installed an eel trap at Blagdon Reservoir in partnership with Bristol Water to improve passage upstream. We will provide future updates on the development of these eel passage schemes as they are installed.

In South Wessex, two fish passage projects at Crockway House on the Frome and Grimstone on the Sydling Water are being planned. Crockway House is only passable to fish in extreme high flow events. We have collaborated closely with landowners and interested parties, and hope that a Larinier fish pass will be built and operational by the end of October this year. It will allow free passage for salmon, brown trout, eels and dace. At Grimstone, there is good spawning and juvenile habitat upstream, but salmon cannot access this because of the weir. We would like to utilise an existing by-pass channel around the weir, creating a natural-like fish pass that will allow year-round passage for all fish species. Work is still ongoing with Natural England, the landowner and other interested parties and we hope to proceed with a partnership project this summer, involving the Westcountry Rivers Trust and the Frome, Piddle & West Dorset Fisheries Association.



The weir at Crockway House, River Frome

Angling development

We have started developing the programme for delivering angling participation events this year. With reduced funding, our Devon team are organising six events during 2013 of which four are coarse events and two are fly fishing events. We are also working with partners to see if the numbers of events can be increased through partners leading, with our support, including officer time and equipment loans.

Throughout 2012 our Cornwall team held eight events introducing new people into angling and the environment through free fishing days. We coached 180 people in partnership with the Bude Canal Angling Association, South West Lakes Trust and various angling coaches. The other projects that were funded included:

- Improving access of fishing pegs and fishing platforms
- Purchase of a wheelie boat for disabled users
- Work with charities such as Help for Heroes, Cornwall Blind Association, Echo Disability Centre and Children's Hospice South West

There are lots more planned for 2013!

Our North Wessex team have undertaken a collaborative project with the Somerset Children's University to improve angling participation in the Somerset area through angling courses in schools, family fishing days and inter-school angling competitions. The angling courses were attended by approximately 250 children from the local area. We also helped fund a community project led by Sedgemoor District Council and the Friends of Browne's Pond in Bridgwater. This included the

construction of five new angling platforms, a multi-purpose platform and habitat improvements.

Fisheries projects

In North Wessex, we have provided partnership funding to a fishery in the Bridgwater area to install fencing to deter otters from accessing the match lake. The fencing was installed by the angling club and has so far proven to be otter-proof. We have been assisting other angling clubs and fisheries in the area with advice on how to protect their lakes from predators. We also undertook a project on the Wellow Brook, Radstock to identify fisheries and biodiversity problems in the catchment that could be contributing to WFD failures. The report can be used to target areas for future improvement such as barriers to fish migration and habitat improvements.

For more information on the Wellow Brook project please contact Jody Armitage, Fisheries (North Wessex): jody.armitage@environment-agency.gov.uk



One of the new angling platforms at Browne's Pond

Our South Wessex team were praised on BBC Somerset (broadcast on 21/2/13) following the advice we gave to a group of volunteers in Wincanton, who have been cleaning up the River Cale. Two local residents, Guy Hunt and Matt Bishop, agreed that their local river was looking a little sorry for itself, so decided to do something about it. Working closely with ourselves and the Wild Trout Trust they organised a litter picking session and have carried out surveys, recording areas of collapsed river bank and barriers to migration. Both men expressed a special thank you to our fisheries officer, Jim Allan, for all his help and advice.



A barbel caught on rod and line by Fisheries Officer Jim Allan from the Stour at Blandford

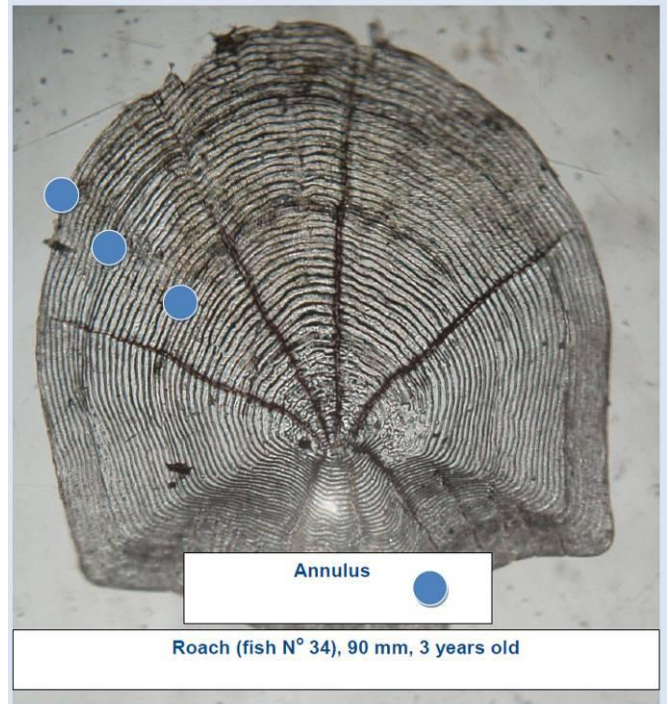
Dorset Stour boost to fish stocks

We finally completed this year's stocking of the Dorset Stour with fish from our Calverton Fish Farm. One thousand chub and 1,000 dace were stocked into the middle reaches of the river in areas where habitat improvement schemes have been completed or are planned, in partnership with the Barbel Society (BS) and the Wessex Chalk Stream and Rivers Trust (WCSRT). One thousand barbel were also stocked as part of the on-going partnership project with the BS, in which 9,000 were stocked between 2008 and 2010. As a result, small barbel have been caught and 4lb fish spotted between Blandford and Sturminster Marshall recently. Pete Reading, BS Conservation Officer said; *"We are delighted to see the further work being carried out by the Environment Agency, both in support of stocking and habitat improvement, that forms part of the growing partnership between the BS and also the WCSRT. The Environment Agency, BS and Rivers Trust are planning further co-funded works on the Stour in the coming year"*.

Stillwater management packs

We have given two fisheries in the Bristol area our stillwater fisheries management packs. These packs are free to stillwater fisheries that have open membership and that require advice on how well their fish stocks are doing. They are designed to aid future fisheries management plans through scale ageing. The packs are issued following an advisory visit by Environment Agency fisheries officers. A report is sent out by our National Fisheries Technical Services team with recommendations for future management.

For more information on this, please contact your local fisheries officer, or Email: jody.armitage@environment-agency.gov.uk



A scale reading from a roach

Fisheries incidents

During the exceptional floods of November and December 2012, a significant number of rainbow trout escaped from fish farms throughout Devon. The River Exe was most affected. Our priority was to minimize damage to the local environment by removing as many of the fish as possible. Whilst electric fishing was used, we also dis-applied the byelaw that prevents fishing for rainbow trout and actively encouraged the local river association to fish using rod and line. Approximately 2,500 fish have been removed to date. Further monitoring is being undertaken to understand the potential impacts to native fish stocks using gut content analysis. In order to minimise the risk of escapes happening again, all sites in the Exe catchment will be audited against permit conditions in conjunction with Cefas. Voluntary measures have also been put in place through collaboration with the local river association and the fish farmers.

Following the major bank collapse on the Grand Western Canal, Tiverton in November 2012, an additional fish rescue was undertaken in April 2013 to relocate any remaining fish from the affected section of the canal. Grand Western Canal Manager, Mark Baker, said: *"Works to*

repair the breached canal embankment and re-line the canal in this area are due to commence at the start of June and it is likely that this stretch of canal between Greenway Bridge and Swing Bridge will need to be drained to undertake the works. We are very grateful for the Environment Agency fisheries team once again doing a fine job in rescuing fish here. It follows up on their heroic efforts, with the help of Tiverton & District Angling Club volunteers, to save fish from the lagoon that formed behind the breached embankment, in very adverse conditions, during the winter. We are confident that the vast majority of fish have now been saved, and with restocking work that the Environment Agency have already begun, I'm sure the Canal will remain a healthy fishery and a great place to enjoy a day's angling."



Undertaking a fish rescue in the Grand Western Canal

Following the summer flooding last year, we have stocked 3,000 roach and 29,000 chub into some of the rivers in Somerset, including the Blind Yeo, River Yeo and River Brue to help the fish stocks recover. Some of the roach were kindly donated by Wessex Water. Our North Wessex team have also undertaken fish surveys on the Wellow Brook, River Wriggle, Pill and Fivehead River following recent pollution incidents. This is to understand the impacts of the incidents on the fish populations and guide future management of the affected stretches.

Non-native fish eradication in Devon

Operation Salix was an investigation into Import of Live Fish Act 1980 (ILFA) offences and eradication of non-native species from a fishery in Devon. It resulted in a successful prosecution for unlicensed keeping of topmouth gudgeon, wels catfish and grass carp. It was brought to our attention that the owners of the fishery advertised they had rosy red minnow (also known as fathead minnow, an

invasive species) in their lakes. During our investigation, no rosy red minnows were found, but topmouth gudgeon, another illegal invasive species, was discovered. This fish is classified as a non-native species of 'high' risk under ILFA. We surveyed the 17 lakes and removed the larger native fish before a programme of eradication began. A piscicide, called Rotenone, was put in the water to eradicate the topmouth gudgeon population. All of the native fish species have been returned and the fishery has reopened for business. The successful delivery of Operation Salix is, in no small part, down to the commitment of a small number of key personnel. They were supported by a multifunctional team, drawing upon various skills across our functions within the region and from national colleagues.

If you have any queries relating to non-native fish species then please contact your local fisheries officer



Our national non-native team applying rotenone to the lakes

Safe passage for eels

We have powers granted to us by the Eels (England and Wales) Regulations 2009 to require eel passes and/or screening at water intakes and outfalls to be installed, or obstructions to be removed to improve the safe passage of eels. Using these powers, we will contact the person identified as responsible for the obstructions or water abstractions to inform them of the regulations. We may serve notice on the responsible person to, at their own cost, improve conditions at the site for eel passage. This will include serving notice on ourselves for the structures we own.

We will start implementing these powers over the next few months, for those obstructions or abstractions that are classed as high priority (either due to their position in the catchment or the volume of water abstracted). We are also in discussions with the water companies in our region as part of the Periodic Review 2014 (also known as PR14). This is to ensure that improvements for the safe passage of eels and other fish species are included in this review process.

More information on the PR14 process can be found on our website at: www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/sectors/33065.aspx

Problems in our waterways?

From the 22 June, we're opening up a consultation called "Challenges and Choices". This is your opportunity to tell us what you think are the issues with the water environment in your area. We need to hear your views so that we know which issues are priorities. This consultation will be available through our online consultation portal on our website (www.environment-agency.gov.uk) or by requesting a form from your local Environment Agency Office.

For more information on this consultation, please contact Richard Shillito, Wessex WFD Engagement Officer, Tel: 01278 484523, or Email: richard.shillito@environment-agency.gov.uk



Stocking roach into the Blind Yeo

Biodiversity 2020 - Synergies Project

Defra has asked Natural England and the Environment Agency, supported by the Forestry Commission, to identify how more synergistic delivery can be achieved for the objectives of the Biodiversity 2020, WFD and Flood and Coastal

Risk Management programmes. The aim is to identify both the opportunities for, and the barriers to, more efficient and cost-effective achievement of multiple outcomes through a range of delivery mechanisms and measures. One ambition is to create priority habitats (Biodiversity Action Plan) to help deliver the objectives of Biodiversity 2020.

For more information please contact Elly Andison, Conservation by Email: elly.andison@environment-agency.gov.uk

Restoration proposal of Allington Pond, Bridport

Allington Pond, upstream of Bridport Gundry Weir suffers from heavy siltation. It is an on-line pond that was constructed as part of the mitigation for the Bridport Flood Alleviation Scheme (FAS). In the past we have de-silted the pond but this has not been done for over 10 years. A number of enhancements were carried out as part of the Brit Valley Way Project which was led by a West Dorset District Council Ranger during the period 2000 to 2002. The pond improvements included de-silting, tree coppicing, construction of a dipping platform, seat, wooden sculptures, boardwalk and a duck raft. We made contributions towards the cost of these works and carried out the de-silting. The West Dorset Ranger service was removed in 2002 and the area rapidly declined back into its present overgrown state. In addition the site was vandalised.

A method statement was approved by Natural England in 2011 which confirmed compensatory habitat would be created for the loss. Restoration of the pond would provide:

- Compensatory habitat for water voles, plus a surplus which could be used as compensation for future works on the River Brit FAS
- Providing refuge habitat for water voles during flood conditions
- Suitable fish fry habitat
- Restoration of a community site

It is vital that a management plan is drawn up in advance of the works and a group is identified who will take on the long term responsibility for the future management of the site to ensure it does not decline back into its previous state.

It is important to remember that the driver for this project would be to increase and maintain the protected species (water vole) habitat.

For more information on this proposal, please contact Sandie Moors, Biodiversity Officer, Tel: 01258 483486, or Email: sandie.moors@environment-agency.gov.uk



Allington Pond before restoration

Westcountry Rivers Trust

Atlantic Aquatic Resources Conservation (AARC) Project

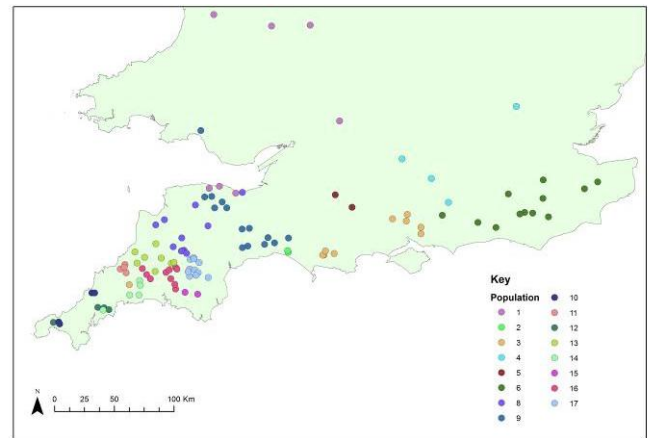
The Westcountry Rivers Trust is working with European partners to deliver the AARC project, which will conclude this year. The AARC project has developed a baseline DNA database identifying all the major, and not so major, sea trout rivers in the south of the UK. The data gathered helps us to better understand the populations of trout and their migratory movements between river systems and into the marine environment, producing a genetic monitoring tool to allow us to effectively target and plan conservation efforts in the future. This project was funded by the INTERREG Atlantic Area European Funding programme.

Catchment Restoration Fund (CRF) projects

The Westcountry Rivers Trust is currently leading five river restoration projects on catchments across the South West. These three-year partnership projects are funded by the CRF and include:

- The Dart and Teign River Improvement Project (DTRIP)
- The Axe and Exe River Improvement Project (AERIP)
- The Taw River Improvement Project (TRIP)

- The South Hams River Improvement Project (SHRIMP)
- The South Cornwall River Improvement Project (SCRIP)



Map showing the distribution of genetically different populations of sea trout in rivers across the south of the UK

The projects have got off to a great start and we have been collating some of the figures for the end of year one. We have:

- Surveyed over 60 km of river and carried out electrofishing surveys at over 230 sites to monitor salmonid populations
- Visited over 74 farms where we have provided farm advice and farm plans to reduce diffuse pollution from agriculture
- Delivered over 10 km of riparian management, including riverbank fencing and planting and coppicing of riparian vegetation
- Installed 15 fish passes to improve river connectivity for migratory species of fish, including Atlantic salmon, sea trout and eels
- Restored 22 salmonid spawning areas
- Carried out numerous school visits and workshops for local interest groups

Work will continue apace this year, including further in-channel and riparian habitat management work, weir easements and community engagement events.

For more information on these projects please contact the Westcountry Rivers Trust, Tel: 01579 372140, Web: www.wrt.org.uk, Email: info@wrt.org.uk, Twitter: @WestcountryRT



Carrying out a fish survey for DTRIP

Bristol Avon Rivers Trust (BART)

Payments for Ecosystem Services Project
BART are working in partnership with the world renowned wetlands expert, Rob McInnes, researchers from Bath Spa University and a local environmental consultancy called Engain, on a project to implement a cost-effective, natural wetland based system for preventing nutrient pollution from entering the Tortworth Brook from sewage treatment works and farm run-off. The project is jointly funded by Defra and Wessex Water and is being carried out in partnership with Tortworth Estate. The project is being developed as a Payments for Ecosystem Services, or PES for short. If this approach is successful, it is hoped that it will form a blueprint for roll-out in many locations, providing cleaner water for our rivers and fabulous new wildlife habitats.

For more information about how PES projects work, please see the Rivers Trust website at:
http://www.theriverstrust.org/seminars/archive/water/WRT_WATER_PES_Guide_27-06-12_A3.pdf

Roach spawning project

Thanks to the Severn Rivers Trust, BART were lucky enough to acquire eight roach spawning boards in readiness for this season's spawning. We hope that we can encourage the roach to spawn as successfully as the Avon Roach Project on the Hampshire Avon. We will not be taking the spawning boards out of the river to separate rearing ponds, so we have taken special care in positioning the boards so that the roach fry have the best chance of survival. We will be updating the website with news as the year progresses.

For more information on BART, please contact, Web:
www.bristolavonriverstrust.org, Email:
info@bristolavonriverstrust.org.uk



Installation of the roach spawning boards in the Bristol Avon

For more information on these newsletters, please contact Jody Armitage, Environment Agency,
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