

# South West Fisheries Newsletter

April to June 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

We have paid for the feasibility studies and designs for fish and eel passes at Clapton and Seaborough on the River Axe, Dorset. Both of these projects are being managed by the Westcountry Rivers Trust with funding through the Axe Exe River Restoration Project. Feasibility studies and initial designs have also been completed for a number of other sites, including St. James weir in Exeter. Pre-work preparations are also underway, for the removal of two weirs at Storridge on the River Yealm, Devon.

After significant operational issues throughout construction, the Tipton St. John fish pass on the River Otter is due for completion in September. The Colleton fish pass on the River Taw has now been completed, with work now focusing on reinstatement of the working area.



A retarder on a tide flap that slows the closure rate

A 'pet flap' (small tidal flap) has been installed on the tidal gate of the River Amble. This forms part of the Amble Marches SSSI water level management plan as well as contributing to Good Ecological Status under the Water Framework Directive (WFD). We have also installed retarders on 14 tidal flaps and dampers on 1 tidal flap, from

the River Axe in Somerset to the Little Avon in Gloucestershire. These modifications slow the rate at which the tidal flaps close, increasing the opportunities for fish to migrate upstream. We have also improved fish and eel passage at our Iwood gauging weir on the Congresbury Yeo by installing a vertical tile eel pass and low cost baffles.

## UDN disease in Devon & Cornwall

We have been investigating reports that early run salmon and sea trout in some Devon and Cornwall rivers are showing signs of disease and have been dying. The symptoms include open lesions around the head and areas of fungal growth on fins and other parts of the body. These symptoms are consistent with a condition known as Ulcerative Dermal Necrosis (UDN) which affects migratory salmonids.

As a result of the number of fish affected, the East Lyn fishery has been closed and is continuing to be monitored. We sent a single salmon from the East Lyn to our fish health laboratory, Bampton for disease investigation. This fish was exhibiting notable head lesions, but was otherwise in good condition. Unfortunately, it was not possible to conclude the presence of UDN in this fish, despite the absence of other pathogens. We are therefore trying to get additional samples of affected salmon for examination. We will consider re-opening the East Lyn fishery when water levels in the rivers increase. We will monitor suspected UDN cases across all major salmon rivers in the region. We will also continue working closely with other organisations to progress understanding of UDN in salmon stocks throughout the UK.

A fact sheet on UDN can be found at:

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/static/documents/Research/UDN.pdf>.

For more information on suspected outbreak of UDN on the East Lyn fishery please contact Mike Holland, Tel: 01392 354019, Email: [mike.holland@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:mike.holland@environment-agency.gov.uk)



Sea trout from the River Taw with UDN symptoms

### Fisheries enforcement

Two of our Devon fisheries officers, have been supporting teams in Wessex and our South East region. This was to help create better, and more effective, fisheries enforcement and intelligence gathering. In North Wessex, rod licences of more than 600 anglers were checked and 37 offences recorded on dozens of still waters in one weekend. Many of the fishery owners and anglers commented on how good it was to see several fisheries bailiffs working together as a group. This team working meant that there were no public order issues and a large number of fisheries could be visited as part of the national rod licence blitz. Similar weekends are planned for later in the year. In the South East they assisted with a 'Buyer beware' campaign, visiting more than 100 retail outlets where nine intelligence leads were picked up. A large number of premises said that they had been offered fresh, locally caught sea trout and salmon. This highlights the importance of the campaign. By reducing the 'demand' side of the market, poachers will find their customers are less willing to break the law now they are fully aware of the risks to themselves and the environmental consequences.

During one of our routine patrols in the Poole harbour area, our officers recovered and seized a long line of baited hooks set in the River Frome and a gill net set in the lower River Piddle. The net contained large roach and an 18lb common carp. It was probably set to catch salmon and sea trout migrating into the river. These routine patrols allow us to detect offences and quickly minimise the effect on the environment. When needed they provide a strong visible presence and are a deterrent to possible offenders.

### Four year ban for illegal eel fishing

A Somerset man has been banned for four years after being caught illegally fishing for eels on the River Parrett near Huntworth, in Somerset. Ashley Meadows was also ordered to pay a total of £2,000 in fines and costs after being convicted at Taunton Crown Court for breaching section 27(b) Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975. On 20 March 2012, Environment Agency bailiffs spotted Meadows while on patrol on the River Parrett at a place known locally as Cotties Corner. The officers watched and filmed his activities. Meadows was seen taking an illegally sized fishing net from his van and setting it in the river. When approached, he denied any knowledge of the net and claimed it had nothing to do with him. There were two kilos of elvers caught in the net, which had a cash value of £400. He had been joined on the river bank by Matthew Palmer, who had helped him to set the nets. Palmer, of King George Avenue, Bridgwater, later pleaded guilty to illegal fishing and was fined £200 with £1,000 costs at an earlier hearing last year.

Elvers (baby eels) come from the Sargasso Sea to find freshwater to grow. Fishermen are licensed by the Environment Agency, and the size of their nets is strictly regulated. The use of larger nets gives an unfair advantage to the fisherman, enabling them to catch more of their fair share. It also reduces the number of elvers that are able to escape into our lakes and rivers. Eels are an important part of our eco-system and are vital to the health and well-being of our water environment. *“Illegal fishing damages eel stocks, harms the environment and is unfair to law-abiding fishermen. We won't hesitate to prosecute*



Removal of an illegal net during a routine patrol

offenders” said Richard Dearnley for the Environment Agency. “Some people think that electing to have a Crown Court trial will give them a better chance of escaping a guilty verdict even when we have caught them red-handed. This verdict demonstrates that this is not the case”, Judge Ticehurst said after the verdict that Meadows knew ‘all the tricks for elver fishing’ and was motivated purely by the financial gain. ‘This case was brought on the clearest possible evidence and had you the sense to plead guilty, the fine and costs would have been much less,’ he added. Appearing before Taunton Crown Court, Meadows, of Darkfield Way, Woolavington, Somerset, was fined £500 and ordered to pay £1,500 costs after being found guilty of illegally fishing for elvers. An order was made for the elver nets and equipment to be forfeited and destroyed

### Rod fishing byelaw review

Due to pressure of urgent work at Head Office, the national review has been delayed. As soon as we have a firm timetable, we’ll begin our consultation with all interested people and organisations. In the meantime, we have updated our SW rod-fishing byelaws and will shortly publish them on our EA website and on the Get Hooked! Fishing guide website at [www.gethooked.co.uk](http://www.gethooked.co.uk).

If you have any queries over the byelaws, then please contact your local fisheries officer

### Net limitation orders

Net Limitation Orders are in place for 3 estuaries; the Tamar, Tavy and Lynher. There has been a lot of data analysis from the past 10 years, following the complete net buy back on these estuaries. Work is continuing, to assess the impact and current state of fish stocks in the estuaries. We are looking at what options are available that will be sustainable in the longer term.

### Longleat fishing & country show

On the 14 & 15 June we had a stall with the Get Hooked! Team at the Longleat Fishing & Country Show. This was the first fishing show to be held at Longleat and it attracted a lot of visitors. We were inundated with queries from anglers and keen members of the public from all over the south west making it a worthwhile event.

### Angling development

We have not undertaken any angling participation events throughout the early part of the summer. However, we have a limited number planned to coincide with the summer school holidays and we will be assisting clubs and organisations by providing partnership funding to help run events.

### Flood defence schemes

We have been working very closely with our Flood and Coastal Risk Management (FCRM) team on the Exeter Flood Defence Scheme. Significant mitigation and enhancement (for both fisheries and biodiversity) in the Exeter area has been secured through the scheme, which should begin construction in April 2014. We have also provided fisheries and biodiversity input into several new and forthcoming capital schemes as a result of last year’s flooding.



Our joint stall at the Longleat Fishing and Country Show with the Get Hooked Team

### Floodplain woodland project

We are continuing to work on our Floodplain Woodland Partnership Project. The aim of the project is to identify sites for woodland creation in locations that will benefit from water retention and ultimately improved water quality. It is being delivered through the North Devon Nature Improvement Area (NIA) and the Taw River Improvement Project (TRIP) that are funded through the Catchment Restoration Fund.

### Freshwater pearl mussel project

Our Freshwater Pearl Mussel Project is continuing through the NIA and TRIP projects. Work is currently focusing on surveying existing sites and

identifying potential sites for relocation. Pearl mussels are found in the River Torridge in Devon. They rely on migrating salmon and high quality water to successfully breed. Those populations being observed are estimated to be over 50 years old. Work on improving water quality is continuing through the NIA and TRIP projects and through Catchment Sensitive Farming our regulatory work.

### **Mires on the moors**

We have been working closely with Dartmoor National Park Authority to help formulate an extension to the Mires Project on Dartmoor. This is funded through the South West Waters Upstream Thinking project. The focus of the Mires Project is to reinstate eroding blanket bogs on Dartmoor. Between 2010 and 2015, over 100 hectares will have been restored. From 2015 to 2020 it is hoped that a further 500 hectares can be restored.

### **Periodic Review 2014 (PR14)**

Further to the update on the PR14 in the last newsletter with regards to protecting fish populations, water companies in the south west have included an investigation to assess the presence and risk of specific invasive non native species relating to their activities. They are also proposing a range of schemes and investigations for the improvement of SSSIs and delivery of England Biodiversity objectives for species and habitats. For example, drinking water quality catchment management schemes will be undertaken in such a way as to deliver benefits to habitats or species in line with the objectives of Biodiversity 2020. This includes work on mires on Exmoor and Dartmoor. There are a number of investigations in the south west to identify opportunities for biodiversity enhancement and increased connectivity in each catchment.

### **White-clawed crayfish translocation**

More than 100 white-clawed crayfish are being moved to an army range in Dorset in a £150,000 project to save them from extinction in south west England. The UK's only native crayfish is under threat because of the spread of the non-native American signal crayfish.

Andrew Whitehouse, from Buglife, said: "*We hope that the crayfish will thrive in their new home.*" The land is owned by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and part of the AFV (Armoured Fighting

Vehicles) Gunnery School. Oliver Howells, ecologist for the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), said: "*[We are] keen to support initiatives that benefit rare species. Like much of the MoD estate, the release site has good habitat and high water quality because of the lack of intensive agriculture within the catchment, which made it a good choice for this project.*" We, along with staff from Buglife, Avon Wildlife Trust, Dorset Wildlife Trust and the DIO moved the first batch over a two day period by first catching them in baited traps.



A native white-clawed crayfish, courtesy of the Dorset Wildlife Trust

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

#### **By Brook project**

The BART are leading a partnership project with the Environment Agency on the By Brook to deliver WFD improvements. It is an opportunity to engage with local landowners, farmers, community groups and sporting organisations along the river to deliver much needed environmental improvements to the brook and its tributaries. Initial funding for the project amounts to £140K, over the first year. The initial phase will include survey work, which is essential to determine numbers and types of invertebrates and fish present in the brook. Crayfish surveys will also be undertaken to determine the spread of the invasive signal crayfish into known native white clawed crayfish areas. Feasibility work for fish passes will also be carried out on a number of structures. An experienced Farm Liaison Officer will work with farmers within the catchment to help them develop

'catchment friendly' methods of farming that will greatly help the By Brook to recover some of its former ecological diversity. Much of this is now well underway and if you want to follow the progress of this project, you can do so on BART's website at [www.bristolavonrivertrust.org](http://www.bristolavonrivertrust.org). If you feel you'd like to contribute in any way to this or any future projects we would be delighted to hear from you.



Cattle poaching on the By Brook

issue of phosphorus loading from Cromhall STW to be implemented;

- to evaluate the stepped approach to setting up agreements given in Phase 2 of the Defra PES guidance document, and reporting back to Defra on its approach and findings.

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

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### **PES project – Little Avon at Tortworth**

This project has completed its second main stage and is likely to be completed in August this year. This work forms part of the Defra Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) research project, which aims to guide and learn from the development of real life PES agreements, through their development and implementation. A team of advisors, comprising members of Bath Spa University's Science Department, the environmental consultancy Engain and RM Wetlands have been brought together by the BART, which is acting as an intermediary, to facilitate the development of a PES agreement between Wessex Water (WW) and the Tortworth Estate. The PES agreement focuses on the development and on-going management of an integrated constructed wetland (ICW), principally designed to remove phosphorus from sewage effluent discharging from Cromhall Sewage Treatment Works (STW). The aims of this project are:

- to facilitate the development of a PES agreement between WW and the Tortworth Estate enabling a cost-effective and environmentally sustainable solution to the