

Fisheries newsletter

Wessex and Devon & Cornwall

January to March 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

Flood response

Since January, our fisheries teams have been assisting our Flood & Coastal Risk Management teams in the response and recovery to flooding. This has included assisting with evacuations, filling and positioning sand bags, tidal surge reconnaissance, manning our pumping stations and of course responding to reports of trapped fish. This meant that a lot of the day to day fisheries work had to be put on hold, while the incident was on-going. Thankfully, there were no fish kills or significant fish rescues required following the flooding, despite our teams being prepared for the worst. The only report of trapped fish that we had in Somerset was fish trapped in the pools created by the temporary pumps along the banks of the River Parrett. The lucky fish to be rescued were sticklebacks and a small number of elvers.

Improvements for the River Avill

The Avill is a short, steep salmonid river which flows through Exmoor National Park and discharges into the Bristol Channel at Dunster. It is a high energy, active river home to a good numbers of brown trout, eels, brook lamprey and minor fish species such as bullheads. A small sea trout run has been known to occur in the past and the occasional salmon has been spotted in previous years. Most of the Avill has a diverse range of habitat and is known to support healthy populations of fish. The lower section however, has been heavily modified for flood risk management and to reclaim land for agriculture. These modifications have resulted in an imbalance in the system causing major issues with flow and siltation. A 700m stretch of the river had become heavily silted causing a huge loss of habitat and channel capacity, creating issues for both the environment and flood risk. Local residents and



The River Avill before (a) and after (b) de-silting with further improvements planned

landowners were beginning to raise concerns about the condition of the river, so we helped devise and fund a collaborative project with the Angling Trust (AT), Wild Trout Trust (WTT) and the Local Parish Council and landowners to resolve the issues.

Our local flood risk management team de-silted the 700m stretch of river back to its original channel capacity to help reduce flooding, whilst our fisheries team and the AT have been working with the various stakeholders to see how we could deliver some environmental improvements and ensure that the river is maintained in the future. So far we have successfully delivered the de-silting work and have agreed to fund the materials needed to implement the environmental improvements. This part of the project will be delivered by the AT and WTT with the help of the local residents and landowners. Once the project

has been completed we will have successfully improved over 700m of river habitat and reduced the risk of flooding in the local area. We have agreed future maintenance with the landowners to prevent this from reoccurring and worked with various partners to deliver the work.

For more information on the River Avill habitat enhancements, please contact Matt Pang, Fisheries & Biodiversity on Tel: 01278 484517, or Email: matthew.pang@environment-agency.gov.uk



Re-instatement of a gravel beach (a) and LWD to trap sediment (b) on the River Piddle

River Piddle habitat enhancement

The River Piddle, Dorset, downstream of West Mills in Wareham is over wide, resulting in wide, shallow, slow-flowing stretches in low summer flows and sediment and vegetation build up along the banks which are washed away in high flow winters. Large stretches of the banks have little tree cover. The waterbody was failing to meet Good Ecological Status for the fish element under the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

In October 2013 we worked in partnership with Dorset Wildlife Trust and the landowner to improve the habitat in this 800m stretch by:

- reinstating a gravel “beach” area used extensively by local families to access the river

for paddling and created islands in the over wide stretch immediately downstream, increasing flow diversity;

- increasing habitat for white clawed crayfish by introducing large cobbles;
- using large woody debris (LWD) to consolidate the build up of sediment and vegetation during low summer flows;
- tree planting along bare banks to provide cover and bank protection.

For more information on the lower River Piddle habitat enhancements, please contact Nicole Caetano, Fisheries & Biodiversity on Tel: 01258 483404, or Email: nicole.caetano@environment-agency.gov.uk

By-pass channel in the Sydling Water

The barrier at Grimstone on the Sydling Water has long been recognised as a barrier to fish migration. Salmon were unable to access the good spawning habitat in this tributary of the River Frome, Dorset, and the waterbody was not meeting Good Ecological Status for fish under the WFD. In 2013 we secured funding to address this.

In partnership with the Frome, Piddle and West Dorset Fisheries Association, Westcountry Rivers Trust and the landowner we were able to improve an existing small by-pass channel by re-apportioning flow between the mill leat and the neglected by-pass channel, making this the favoured route. We also undertook in-channel work to redesign the channel, creating wide, sweeping meanders. This work has secured fish passage for all species and avoided the necessity for an expensive fish pass. The increased habitat in the new channel will also provide greater opportunities for wild brown trout fishing.

For more information on Sydling Water by-pass channel, please contact Nicole Caetano, Fisheries & Biodiversity on Tel: 01258 483404, or Email: nicole.caetano@environment-agency.gov.uk

River Frome habitat enhancements

Between June and October 2013 we worked in partnership with the Dorset Wildlife Trust, West Country Rivers Trust and Frome Piddle & West Dorset Fisheries Association installing debris jams in the upper Frome catchment in Dorset. The Hooke, Wraxall and Frome headwaters have natural meanders, back channels and debris dams; features that are otherwise rare in the lowland reaches. Many of the natural log

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jams have been removed by landowners over the years. This project aimed to reinstate them.

The LWD structures installed as log jams and flow deflectors will help to create river features, such as scour pools, gravel berms and backwaters. This will provide good spawning and nursery habitat for brown trout. The log jams also help to hold up flood peaks and allow water to spill into the wet woodland on either side of the channels. As a result, any naturally occurring debris dams in the Frome headwaters which appeared un-stable, were tied into the river bed to secure them in place.

In total 19 debris dams and upstream deflectors were installed in 2013 within seven different land holdings within the upper Frome catchment. Discussions and agreements with other landholders may allow the programme to continue when further funds are made available, as this work continues to achieve the objectives of the WFD, moving towards Good Ecological Status for fish.



The barrier (a) at Grimstone and the newly modified channel (b) on the Sydling Water

For more information on the River Frome habitat enhancements, please contact Nicole Caetano, Fisheries & Biodiversity on Tel: 01258 483404, or Email: nicole.caetano@environment-agency.gov.uk

Hampshire Avon Severals Project

The Environment Agency, The Wessex Chalk Streams and Rivers Trust, The Barbel Society, The Avon Roach Project, Ringwood & District Anglers Association and landowner Derek Goulding have completed a large scale collaborative restoration project on the lower Hampshire Avon, Severals Fishery, with an aim to boost fish stocks. Twenty one pools were created within the reach, along with large log deflectors to enhance flow diversity, scour spawning gravels and provide cover for adult fish. Six large fry bays were also constructed to give shelter to young fish during high flows and also in the summer months. This large scale project has not only transformed the reach for the benefit of both coarse and salmonid fish populations locally, but was also designed to reduce the risk of flooding downstream in Ringwood. If you go fishing there this year you may be surprised with the results, which now offer more channel diversity new and different fishing swims.

For more information on the Severals Project, please contact Andy Martin, Fisheries & Biodiversity on Tel: 01258 483324, or Email: andy.martin@environment-agency.gov.uk

Avon roach project stocking

Help was on hand from our South Wessex fisheries team this year to complete the Avon Roach Project's (ARPs) annual release of their carefully looked after Hampshire Avon roach. Trevor Harrop and Budgie Price, the ARPs co-ordinators, have reared these roach from eggs, which are collected on spawning boards from true wild Hampshire Avon roach. The eggs develop into tiny pin head fry where they are grown on for a year in the mass of tanks in Trevor's back garden. After a year, the yearlings are then transferred to some of the many stew ponds in which they grow on for another two years. Once they are three years old they are released back into the Hampshire at select locations close to where they were spawned originally.

This year Fisheries Officers, Jim Allan and Andy Martin, helped net the stew ponds and provided

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the fish transport facilities and health checks to get these amazing fish back into their own river. Thousands of roach were released on three separate days at the Severals Fishery, Northend, Fordingbridge and East Mills with the kind help of local landowners and members of Ringwood and District Anglers Association. 'Seeing is believing' and having seen the parents of these fish spawn, watch the fry emerge and then the roach grow for three years and then finally swim off back into the Hampshire Avon again is a truly amazing experience. We would like to thank everyone who has helped on this project so far in what is a fantastic partnership project to boost roach populations on the Hampshire Avon.

For more information on the Avon roach project, please contact Jim Allan, Fisheries & Biodiversity on Tel: 01258 483405, or Email: james.allan@environment-agency.gov.uk, or please visit the ARP blog on: www.avonroachproject.blogspot.co.uk



A naturally occurring debris dam in the Frome headwaters that was secured as part of the habitat enhancement works

Wessex rod licence blitz

More than a dozen licence-dodging anglers have been ordered to pay a total of £4,104 in fines and costs after being caught by Environment Agency bailiffs illegally fishing on lakes and rivers in Somerset. The highest fines of £300 were imposed on Andrew Templeman of Newton Road, Highbridge and Dean Loudon of Eastover, Bridgwater who were both caught fishing without a valid rod licence at Emerald Pool and Bridgwater Docks respectively. They were also ordered to pay £127 costs each.

Matthew Potter, of Marshall Road, Taunton and Keith Potter of Faversham Way, Taunton were each fined £200 and ordered to pay £127 costs for fishing at Emerald Pool without a licence.

Shaun Timmons of Hobart Road, Weston-super-Mare was fined £175 with £127 costs for illegally fishing at Emerald Pool.

The following anglers were each fined £120 and ordered to pay £127 costs after they were caught at The Sedges or Emerald Pool – Paul Smith, of North Town, North Wotton, Shepton Mallet, Jacob Marks, of Winters Field, Taunton, Paul Haggett, Windsor Road, Bridgwater and Alex Fleming, Mallory Close, Taunton.

David Watts of Slade Close, Stogumber, Taunton was fined £150 with £127 costs and Paul Watts, of Long Street, Williton £130 with £127 costs for fishing without a licence at Trinity Waters.

Robert Fisher of West Street, Bridgwater and Thomas Jones of Threwton Avenue, Birmingham were each fined £55 fine with £60 costs after they were caught fishing without a licence at Bridgwater Docks and Folly Foot Farm respectively.

Danny Hughes of Parklane Nursery, Kingston St Mary, John Templeton of Newton Road, Highbridge and Shaun Pearson, of Wheatfield, Wick St Lawrence were ordered to pay £180 £120 and £115 respectively in fines and costs for fishing illegally at Emerald Pool.

All the defendants pleaded guilty with the exception of Andrew Templeman and Dean Loudon who failed to enter a plea. The cases were heard by Taunton magistrates on 3 February 2014. Each defendant was also ordered to pay a £20 victim surcharge.

Licence dodging fishermen land hefty fines

An additional seven anglers have been ordered to pay a total of £6,269 in fines after they were caught fishing without rod licences at a series of Somerset lakes. The prosecutions were brought by the Environment Agency. All seven defendants were 'reeled in' during a rod licence blitz at Plantation Lakes, Kingston Seymour, North Somerset on August 25, 2013. One angler, David Atwell, of Broadlands Drive, Bristol was described as unsteady on his feet and 'visibly drunk' on cider. He was arrested after he tried to leave the fishery when challenged by Environment Agency bailiffs. Atwell, who had to be handcuffed to prevent him making off, was fined £600 by Weston-super-Mare magistrates for fishing without a valid rod licence. He was also fined £600 for failing to give his name and address and ordered to pay £127 costs.

Mark Barrett, of Charlton Road, Brentry, Bristol was ordered to pay similar fines and costs (£1,327) after he was also caught fishing without a licence and failed to provide his name and address.

The following anglers were each fined £600 and ordered to pay £127 costs for licence dodging: Jason and Alan Parsons, of Robin Close, Bristol, Lee Withey, of Chestnut Walk, Bristol and Tamarie Ingledew-Hartveldt of Pillowell Drive, Gloucester.

Clare Taylor, also of Pillowell Drive, Gloucester was fined £200 and ordered to pay £127 costs plus a £20 victim surcharge after pleading guilty to fishing without a licence contrary to Section 27(1)(a) of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975.

All six of the remaining defendants were found guilty in their absence. In addition to fines and costs, they were each ordered to pay a £60 victim surcharge. The cases were heard on 18 February 2014.

"It is much easier to buy a rod licence than risk being caught and face hefty fines as these latest cases show only too clearly," said Richard Dearnley for the Environment Agency.

A coarse fishing rod licence costs £27.00 and can be purchased from the Environment Agency and the Post Office. For further details see our website at: www.gov.uk/environment-agency



Trevor Harrop and Jim Allan releasing roach from the Avon Roach Project

Illegal elver fisherman tagged

A Bridgwater man has become the first person in the south west ever to be tagged after he was caught illegally fishing for elvers on the River Tone, Somerset. Colin Biddiscombe was made the

subject of a two month night time curfew order and banned from elver fishing for two years when he appeared before Taunton magistrates in a case brought by the Environment Agency. The court heard how Environment Agency bailiffs were patrolling the River Tone on 9 April 2013 when they saw the defendant near the Currymoor pumping station. It soon became clear the fisherman was too close to the pumping station outfall. A condition of the licence issued to elver fishermen states they must not fish within 30m of the outfall at Currymoor pumping station to help protect elver stocks and prevent over fishing. Elvers are attracted to the flows of fresh water coming out of pumping stations. Colin Biddiscombe, who was 21m from the outfall, was told he would be reported for illegal fishing and his equipment confiscated. Environment Agency bailiffs checked the catch returns for the 9 April that showed Biddiscombe had sold 2.39kg of elvers to Eeline Aqua Trading Ltd. for £442.

In addition to a curfew, Biddiscombe, of Gloucester Road, Bridgwater was ordered to pay £300 costs and a £60 victim surcharge. His net and equipment were forfeited and he was banned from elver fishing for two years. A curfew means he will have to wear a security tag and will not be allowed to leave his home between the hours of 7.00pm and 5.00am. *"Illegal fishing damages eel stocks, harms the environment and is unfair to law-abiding fishermen. We won't hesitate to prosecute offenders,"* said Richard Dearnley for the Environment Agency.

Out of season anglers convicted

During our closed season patrols this year at Blue Pool, Ham common. We caught two anglers fishing out of season in the SSSI lake. Lee Torrington from Lymington, Hampshire was fined £600 for fishing during the statutory coarse fish closed season and forfeiture and disposal of his equipment. Julian John Baker from Hamworthy, Dorset was also caught fishing out of season also without a valid rod licence. He was fined £100 for fishing without a licence and £200 for fishing during the coarse fish closed season. His angling equipment was also forfeited and disposed of.

Paddling poacher in illegal fishing spree

Last year, Environment Agency officers caught a kayaker illegally netting bass and sea trout in the Taw estuary. The poacher tried to make off from fisheries officers after being caught illegally fishing.



Fishing close season signs at Ham Common SSSI

North Devon Magistrates was told how Beverley Nicholls, who lives on a houseboat in Barnstaple, had concealed bass and trout in his kayak after netting them on 4 June last year. Nicholls was given a 12 month conditional discharge and ordered to pay £200 costs plus £15 surcharge after pleading guilty to illegally fishing for bass and sea trout at Runsam Bridge. His net was confiscated.

He was caught after a member of the public saw him using a net and reported the sighting to the Environment Agency. Two fishery officers went to the scene and saw the defendant fishing from his canoe. When Nicholls was asked if he'd caught anything, Nicholls replied "only a couple of bass". He was asked to return the fish to the water unharmed as he was in a bass nursery area. Nicholls was asked to haul in his net so that it could be checked and to make sure it was legal. The net contained four mullet and a bass.

When the defendant was told by the Environment Agency officers that they were going to search his boat he tried to paddle away. But one officer waded into the river and grabbed the boat to stop him escaping. The canoe was brought ashore and the defendant asked to empty the boat of fish. When one of the officers checked inside the canoe he found a large bass that Nicholls had tried to hide. Nicholls was allowed to keep the mullet as netting this species within a bass nursery area is permitted.

The total number of fish recovered included three bass, five rainbow trout, a brown trout, a sea trout and 12 mullet. Nicholls said he knew there was a bass nursery area on the River Torridge, but didn't realise it extended to the Taw estuary. It is illegal to fish for bass from a boat within the tidal limits of the Taw from the old power station at Yelland to a point upstream at New Bridge between 1 May to

31 October. A net limitation order is in place on the Taw and Torridge estuary to protect salmon and sea trout on their migration from the sea to their spawning grounds. "Bass nurseries help safeguard stocks so it is important fishing from boats is restricted in these areas," said Paul Carter for the Environment Agency. The case was the first joint prosecution ever taken in the south west by the Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority (IFCA) and the Environment Agency.

Calling all Rivers Trusts

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

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