

West Thames Area Fisheries

Loddon opened up with new fish pass

Working in partnership, the Environment Agency completed works in July reconnecting the River Loddon up and downstream of the most significant barrier to fish migration in the catchment. The aim being to help improve ecological status required by Water Framework Directive (WFD).

For twenty years, impassable weirs at Arborfield were highlighted as a bottleneck to fish migration. Weirs backed up water flows over 4km upstream limiting important habitats like riffles. This water body fails ecological targets under the WFD. Nationally important wet woodland habitat, local flood risk and access concerns were also evident. A project to tackle these issues was hatched and a partnership formed with Thames Water, University of Reading, local angling clubs and communities.



The new channel under construction

Thames water completed works in July 2010 to lower the weirs reducing water overtopping the damaged banks upstream. This lowering of water levels gave energy back to the river and chub have been seen spawning on new riffles since the work was completed.

We then worked with Arborleigh Angling Club, Cain Bio Engineering and Avon Construction to construct a 'natural' bypass around the weirs enabling fish and wildlife to move up and downstream of the weirs. Providing new fish

spawning and nursery habitat in the 200m channel was a priority for our work as was creating habitats resembling pristine environments. We also improved access and used natural materials to protect damaged banks.



The newly constructed by-pass showing naturally incorporated large woody debris

Since completion, hundreds of fish have been observed using the bypass and backwaters including perch, chub, gudgeon amongst others. We surveyed over 100 fish in just 65m of the channel. Kingfishers, deer and many other wildlife appear to enjoy the new resource. This project is funded by Defra (WFD), Thames Water, Barbel Society, Environment Agency and was made possible with help from University of Reading and local communities.



Some of the happy group of helpers who made the project possible

Agency save stranded fish in the River Churn

Operations by Agency Fishery Officers have saved thousands of fish from perishing in a drought hit section of the River Churn in Gloucestershire. Overall in excess of 2000 fish were rescued from 2km of the river Churn around South Cerney and Cerney Wick.

Fish were trapped in pools in the river channel as a result of declining flows. Small numbers of fish had already before Agency staff arrived and many more were in danger from low oxygen levels, disease and predation.



EA staff carrying out the fish rescue

The rescued fish included, brown trout, dace, barbel, roach, perch, bullheads and brook lampreys. Interestingly the barbel are thought to have been fish previously stocked into the Thames from our Calverton Fish Farm.

Fisheries Team Leader, John Sutton said, "Water levels along the River Churn have dropped significantly over the past few months and while we have seen rainfall in recent weeks, it has not been enough to recharge the water along many stretches. The rescued fish were safely transferred to the nearby Thames from where they should be able to recolonise their original habitat when flows recover later in the year."



Fish being returned to the Thames

£500,000 facelift for Fobney Island

Fobney Island, in Reading is being transformed into a wetland haven for nature thanks to a £500,000 facelift.

The project will see the island turned into a rich new wetland and wildflower hay-meadow habitat. The site is expected to attract a vast array of wildlife, including birds, bats, water voles, and otters. These works, together with river restoration on the River Kennet, will make the island a more enjoyable place for people to visit, especially for bird watchers and anglers.

The Environment Agency has joined forces with Reading Borough Council, Thames Water and the Thames Rivers Restoration Trust to carry out the work.

The river restoration works will include restoring 310 metres of the River Kennet and introducing new river gravels to the channel to create 'riffles'. Gravel riffles provide the perfect breeding ground for fish, as well as an ideal habitat for invertebrate life to thrive. These are essential for fish spawning, in particular for chub, dace and barbel who lay their eggs in the gravel beds. Emerging fry find shelter amongst the gravel during early stages of their development. A new backwater will be created to provide vital refuge habitat for young fish fry.



The Fobney Island site

A circular walk will also be created at the site, with views across the new wetland features, which will help to make the site more accessible and attractive to visitors. The scheme will also include two bird hides with views across the new wetlands. Information boards at the site entrance points will provide information about the Wetland Park and its wildlife.

Graham Scholey, Conservation Technical Specialist, said: "This project will make a real difference to the diversity of wildlife at the site and I'm delighted we were able to start this week. Fobney Island is already very popular with local residents, and we hope the improvements will encourage even more people to enjoy this natural area.

Agency helps eradicate SVC

You may remember in the July edition of the Newsletter we reported how there had been the first outbreak of the deadly Spring Viraemia of Carp (SVC) in Britain since 2007. The disease which is almost in all cases caused by the introduction of infected fish and does have the potential to result in 100% mortalities.

The disease outbreak at a fishery near Banbury in south Northamptonshire killed over 100 carp. Working closely with the landowner and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) the decision was made to go for a total eradication at the site to prevent the spread of the disease and help maintain our status as an SVC free zone was confirmed by the EU last year.

To protect this status it was necessary to act rapidly to destroy all fish on the site and drain and disinfect 3 lakes using quicklime. Seine netting and electrofishing were used to capture in total of 1.6 tonnes of fish which were humanely destroyed and safely disposed of off site.



SVC has the potential to 'decimate a fishery'

Fisheries Officer, Tom Sherwood said "even though it was very sad to have to dispose of so many fish it is important that the angling community consider the bigger picture. By eradicating the disease from this fishery we hope that we have successfully prevented any further spread of the disease to other fisheries in the area."

"Once again we would like to appeal to anglers of the dangers of illegally moving fish. Fish that are moved between fisheries that have not been properly health checked can lead to catastrophic consequences and ultimately the decimation of a fishery"

Remember!

All fish introductions in England and Wales need consent from the EA under The salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975

Fish rescued at lakes in Fairford

In August and September Environment Agency Fisheries and Sampling and Collection staff carried out two fish rescues at gravel pits at Horcott, Fairford Gloucestershire.

Levels in the lakes had become dangerously low and it was feared that the fish would die if no action was taken. The levels left the fish vulnerable to predation by birds and there were concerns about the levels of dissolved oxygen.

In excess of 450 kg of tench, roach, bream, perch, rudd, crucian carp and pike were caught using seine nets and relocated to an adjacent water. Amongst the hundreds of fish moved were tench to over 5lb, carp to 18lb, bream to 6lb and pike to 13lb.



Agency staff rescuing fish

Environment Agency Fisheries Officer Jim Seymour said "Levels were critically low. By reducing the numbers of fish in the lake we hope that any remaining fish survive until the water levels rise". Rescue work by our Fisheries Officers is funded by money from the sale of rod licenses.

The Environment Agency is asking those enjoying the environment to keep a look out for problems such as fish gasping for air and to report any concerns to the incident hotline 0800 807060 (freephone, 24 hour service).

Alien weed chokes the Oxfordshire Ray!

In a matter of weeks an alien plant species from North America has carpeted a stretch of the Oxfordshire Ray. Low river flows have been blamed at aiding the plant's growth. Known commonly as floating water fern (or *Azolla*, it's Latin name), the plant has over the past four weeks has covered a 150 metre stretch of the river at Islip.



Pedro next to the carpet of *Azolla*

Environment Agency Conservation Officer Pedro Collins said, "the weed is not harmful to fish or other aquatic fauna and it will die off naturally in the next few weeks as the weather cools". The plant has created a carpet effect on the river and even ducks have been spotted walking across it. Pedro also added, "It does look like grass and the problem is sheep or cattle could wander into it thinking it was hard ground."

Plans are afoot to stop the alien invader in its tracks next year by using weevils, an insect that feeds and reproduces on the floating water fern. The plant was originally brought to the UK in the 1840s as an ornamental pond species.

Focus on ...The eel

The eel is a migratory species spending part of its life in salt water and part in freshwater. Other familiar migratory species such as the salmon and sea trout migrate into freshwater to spawn; eels do it the other way around spawning in salt water and spending most of their adult life in freshwater.

The European eel (*Anguilla Anguilla*) spawns in the Sargasso Sea (south west of Bermuda). The eel eggs and larvae travel with the gulf stream to reach land and then start migrating up rivers. Some choose to stay in coastal and estuarine waters, others continue upstream. As a general rule eel numbers tend to be lower further upstream but average size tends to be larger. There is a much higher proportion of

female eels in the upper reaches compared to the lower reaches.

The uneven distribution of eels is particularly noticeable on the River Thames where the locks and weirs slow down migration. Historically numbers of eels in the area must have been greater as there were eel traps on a number of rivers including the Coln, Cherwell and Kennet.



The European eel

There has been a decline in the European eel population of approximately 95% over the last 25 years. There are many possible factors including disease/parasites, pollution and exploitation. The increased use of concrete and steel in structures has also reduced migration. Changes in ocean temperatures and currents may well be the largest factor resulting in smaller numbers of glass eels reaching our shores.

The EC has recognised the severity of the problem and member countries are required to take action. In England and Wales, the Eel Statutory Instrument came into force in January 2010. This reduces exploitation by fishing and makes it a legal requirement to provide eel passage around structures.

Rod Licence Checks

Our Enforcement Officers in West Thames checked 3813 anglers for rod licences in July, August and September. Of those 262 failed to produce a valid licence. These anglers have been reported for possible prosecution.

Contact Us

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