

# Why does the Kennet need a Coarse Fish Hatchery?

Those anglers lucky enough to fish the River Kennet below Newbury in 1970s and 80s will remember a swift flowing, crystal clear chalk stream with abundant shoals of chub, barbel, roach and dace drifting over golden gravels between gently swaying beds of ranunculus. Whilst the river still holds a much reduced population of bigger fish it is a far cry from the abundant fishery it once was. The re-opening of the canal in 1990 saw a dramatic rise in sediment loads leading to increased turbidity, the siltation of vital gravel spawning beds and a huge decline in ranunculus – an important habitat for invertebrates.



Gravel jetting the main river



Off channel fry refuge

## And then came the Signal Crayfish

The decision to allow the importation of signal crayfish from 1976 has been little short of disastrous and has created predation of plague proportions as they spread into many river systems including the Kennet. Despite regular trapping their numbers remain unsustainably high with the one crayfish trapper working for Reading & District Angling Association (RDAA) removing an estimated 100 tonnes from the Kennet in the last ten years. Crayfish average 25 to the kilo equating to 2,500,000 crayfish eating their way through invertebrates, fish spawn and displacing vast quantities of silt as they burrow into the river banks. It is little wonder that coarse fish recruitment of gravel spawners such as chub, barbel and dace, is now so poor.

## Habitat Improvements and Water Quality

Angling clubs and fisheries have spent many years working closely with the Environment Agency, Action for the River Kennet (ARK) and other partners on projects such as off-channel juvenile fish shelters, gravel jetting, installation of woody debris and general habitat restoration. Important though this is it can only be of limited impact in the face of the other challenges the river faces. On the plus side, the successful re-introduction of grayling by RDAA and the EA into the Kennet in Padworth has demonstrated that the water quality remains good enough to allow these most delicate of fish to survive and grow. The presence of mature grayling in the lower river gave us the confidence to believe that a coarse fish hatchery would be a viable project to help restore this wonderful river to something like its former glory.

Creating better spawning habitat



## Advice from Calverton

It is clear that demand for juvenile fish, large enough to survive the crayfish and in sufficient numbers to re-establish a critical spawning mass, is always going to exceed what we can reasonably expect from the Environment Agency's national fish farm at Calverton.

Fortunately we have been able to learn from excellent work carried out by Calverton who hosted us on a visit and generously provided technical advice and support. As a result we are now in the fortunate position to have created a unique, not for profit coarse fish hatchery, dedicated solely to supplying the whole of the Lower River Kennet, from Newbury to Reading, with juvenile fish such as chub, barbel, dace and roach.

## How will the Hatchery work?

Brood fish will be removed from the Kennet to the hatchery, just as they are at the point of spawning naturally. Before returning the mature 'borrowed' fish, the eggs will be harvested, mixed with the milt from the males and then nurtured within the hatchery until such a time that they can stand the maximum chance of survival in the wild. After this, 70% of the free swimming fry - now able to escape the crayfish - will be released into appropriate locations below Newbury. These areas will be specially

selected to provide the best possible chance of survival. The remaining 30% of the fry will be kept at the hatchery for a longer period to be fed and grown on before being released as mature 'two summer plus' fish. Our goal is not to artificially increase the number of fish in the river with farm bred fish - these are Kennet fish only - but to ensure successful spawning and to make the first few days/weeks of their lives easier when they are most at risk from crayfish predation. The Hatchery begins operation in March 2024 and will start production each year with dace, followed by roach, then chub and barbel - just as happens in the wild.



From an empty plot to the first fully functioning coarse fish hatchery on the Kennet

## Who will run and pay for the Hatchery?

The Hatchery is a not for profit, collaborative project, led by RDAA but with the involvement of local clubs and fisheries with the sole aim of improving fish stocks on the river downstream of Newbury. The facilities will be managed by Del Shackelford (RDAA fisheries manager) with input from local volunteers and guided by advice from the EA and IFM. A Project Group is being established and will involve major contributing clubs and fisheries who hold fishing rights between Reading and Newbury to provide local input, feedback and help with fundraising. The project group will also include representatives from Kennet Valley Fisheries Association (KVFA) and will include space for the EA, CRT, ARK and other environmental interests. It will be able to review progress on an annual basis and will maintain separate and transparent accounts. The Hatchery has been built and paid for by RDAA from its own funds and through a combination of donations and grants. However, with running costs expected to exceed £5k per annum the project will be heavily reliant on financial contributions from those clubs, fisheries and individual anglers who will either benefit from this work or who retain a long standing affection for this beautiful river.

## Open Days

We begin operating from Mid-March 2024 from which time strict bio-security measures will be in place making general visits impossible. So we have organised three open days for anybody interested. Numbers are limited to 10 per session. Location and directions will be provided with booking confirmations.

**At 10am, 11.30 and 1pm on the following Saturdays -  
24th February, 2nd & 9th March.**

**Coffee, Tea and refreshments on sale with all proceeds to  
hatchery fund.**

**Book a place at - [kennethatchery@gmail.com](mailto:kennethatchery@gmail.com)**

**THE HATCHERY NEEDS CLUB AND INDIVIDUAL  
DONATIONS TO COVER THE ANNUAL  
RUNNING COSTS - PLEASE DONATE NOW**

### **Sign up your Club or Fishery as Supporter**

Name of Club or Fishery

Contact person

Email

Tel No

**Make a one off or regular donation to Kennet Valley Fishery Association**

**TSB Bank**

**Account name: Kennet Valley Fishery Association**

**Sort code: 30-94-46**

**Account number: 07062216**

**Ref : Hatchery**

**THANKS FOR HELPING GIVE THE KENNET A FISHING FUTURE!**