

NEWBURY ANGLING ASSOCIATION



Founded 1878

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Martin Strike

See website for contact details

www.newburyaa.org.uk

THE NAAN WINTER 2023/24

Welcome to our latest quarterly newsletter.

This issue includes articles from some of the organisations with which we share an interest in our rivers and canals, together with some great tips and memories from other members. A BIG thankyou to everyone who contributed to this edition. Remember we'd like this to be YOUR

newsletter, so please don't be shy and send in ideas for content, brags about your magnificent catches and photos old and new to us at comms@newburyangling.org.uk



To a non-angler it might sound daft that a lake could be shut by flooding, but after the droughts of 2022, we end a year in which Bellwood in particular has been closed for pretty much for 5 months due to waterlogging. The more experienced of our membership, shall we put it, may recall that decades ago, the flooding of our lakes as they were (and we didn't secure Bellwood until 1991) was pretty much an annual event, so perhaps climate change is bringing us back to type. Who knows what the future will bring.

We'd like to share more fishing stories from these previous decades or else they'll be lost forever – so please consider sharing them with us.

In the meantime, enjoy your wintry fishing like this member snapped last Boxing Day.

The Editor



AROUND THE FISHERIES

Work at Widmead



Much work is required around the lakes at Widmead (ie Collins/Knotts/Dobsons/Dixons). A visit is to be arranged with Natural England to establish if any of the planned work requires consent and to discuss the new Management Plan for the Widmead SSSI. Prior to this, we will produce an outline plan of the work and stocking we are proposing to do. If you have a view as to what you would like to be included, please contact us at the email address at the top of this newsletter.

Getting to work with the BBOWT



Berkshire Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust

Our chairman, Dougie Hall, arranged a very constructive meeting with the BBOWT who own the Discovery Centre, along with Muddy Lane and much of the adjoining land we use for access to both the Widmead and Rawlings. Having walked the sites, it was confirmed that:

- Due to differences with their contractor, the 'new' green gate at the entrance to Muddy Lane/Lower Way is not currently in use.
- The difficulty of some NAA members in dealing with the single bar gate on the track down to the Widmead car park was expressed and we now have permission to investigate a simpler arrangement.
- BBOWT are looking at a water management plan to improve the flooding that affects the Dobson's railway bridge.

This was a positive start which served both parties and we intend to continue with regular meetings.



More fencing at Alders

Our neighbours, Thatcham Angling Association have raised a fence which segregates their land at Long lake from ours at the west end of Alders. This can only provide further protection from otters for both sides. NAA have not been asked to contribute to the cost of this.

Fish study at Speen Moors

An electro fish survey has been carried out by the EA at Speen Moors. This was largely unsuccessful because of the amount of submerged snags in the selected area. Most fish (we trust) managed to escape their attention as all that was recorded were some small pike and a dace! It is unclear as to whether another attempt will be made. It is also understood that the Aldershot stream at Brimpton is on the list for a fish survey.

A r-eely good idea

We noticed the following article on the recent Environment Agency Thames Fishery Newsletter which we thought might be of interest. NAA cannot be held responsible for the dreadful pun in the title!

The eel is a mysterious fish, spawning over the far west side of the Atlantic Ocean in the Sargasso Sea, but living much of its life in freshwater rivers, where it is rarely seen or caught. Stocks have been at a historic low level for around 30 years, and the species is now considered to be Critically Endangered, with very few eels caught in the Thames and tributaries above Reading. Thames Area Fisheries staff are working to try to improve populations by building eel ladders, improving habitat and reducing the numbers killed in water intakes. Now they have teamed up with Bournemouth University to consider whether releasing eels into a river might successfully increase numbers.



Sites have been chosen on the Rivers Kennet and Pang, and pre-release surveys were carried out in October consisting of electric fishing surveys and collecting samples of Environmental DNA (eDNA). The eDNA is a new technique whereby water samples are squeezed through a tiny filter that collects the DNA of all the animals and plants that are in and around the river. These will then be analysed by a team at Hull University and should give a list of species to complement the electric fishing. The next stage will be releasing small eels in the spring of 2024 and then following their growth and survival for the next five years. Hopefully this work will help us to identify new ways to save the eel.

Tree Survey being commissioned

We are commissioning a professional tree survey for the lands that we own at Rawlings, Widmead, Pallett's and Bellwood. This is so we can plan and prioritise any trees that could pose a danger to members. While this process takes place please be mindful when fishing near mature or dead trees, particularly in windy or cold conditions.

Temporary three rod allowance

It was proposed and agreed by a majority committee vote that three rods could be used on Dixons from 1st November to 28th February. This is to encourage more anglers to fish (subject to the existing maximum 4kg per angler all venues rule). The potential benefits of this to the lake are:

- Food going into to help support the fish.
- Keep the fish feeding longer and hence more catchable into the winter.
- Reduce the numbers of predators such as cormorants and otters with potential increased human presence.

As always with this kind of introduction, there will be members in favour and others against and the success or otherwise will be reviewed in the Spring.



Introducing Coxy (to the few that don't know him!)



The club are delighted to confirm that you may be seeing even more of John Cox than usual. John has started working for the club on its lakes and rivers on an ongoing basis to assist with keeping the banks and swims maintained. With nine lakes and miles of river together with the restrictions placed upon those waters covered by SSSI regulations, we'd need, heaven forbid, a small army of Coxy's to get every venue to the condition we would like, but John's experience from helping out in working parties for nearly 50 years and knowledge of our waters will make him a big asset. With the recent flooding on the lakes, John has been concentrating of improving the sections of the main river that can be reached at Speen, cutting out swims for the recent pike match. Once the waters have subsided sufficiently, an action plan will be drawn up with the club for 2024. Thanks, John. I'm sure all members, whether they know you yet or not, are very thankful for your efforts.

On the subject of Speen Moors, John confirmed that as you can see from the picture, at the start of December, the water is really high. Parliament Draft being completely under water. Advice is to stick to fishing main river, being careful of the banks as the water is pushing through. Be careful with the small bridges because they are under water. If you are a new member just stick to the main field river. Access from Guyer's Lock only as the tunnel under the A34 is pretty much unpassable. This is not envisaged to improve for some weeks/month.



Flood water at Speen

Winter permit offer

As usual, the club is offering half-price season tickets for the remainder of 2023 and up to 15th June 2024. Application forms can be downloaded from the NAA website and taken to Tony at Thatcham Angling with two head-and-shoulder photos and appropriate payment.

New shelter at the Widmead

We have a new addition to the lake side at Rawlings Retreat, where Willows and Alders live. An opportunity arose to obtain both a 10 x 10 shed and a quantity of large format paving slabs for free, which have been utilised in creating a shelter alongside the Willows lake, just inside the gate. We have called it a shelter rather than a shed, as it has no doors and looks out over the lake, available for all to shelter from the elements.

The erection of the shelter has been undertaken by Willows regulars, Lynn Hawkins and Steve Todd. You may not recognise the names but if you have fished Willows at any time you would have seen these members. Lynn is the unofficial site bailiff, who knows the lakes better than anyone else, and you'll recognise Steve because of his three black lab dogs. Steve also known for swishing the air catching a carp or two off the surface with a fly rod and a piece of cork!



The new shelter not being opened by Roy Orbison, Santa and Lassie, but Lynn, Steve and Maisie

Rawlings Retreat provides a welcoming and peaceful environment for members, both seasoned and family members, to pit their skills against the plentiful stock of carp and tench. The lakes holding carp to over 20 lbs, which can be caught without the need for all the paraphernalia of modern carp fishing. Also, after recent stocking there are tench in excess of 8 lbs, as well as crucian carp to over 3 lbs, which are a favourite of some of the regular visitors.

Lynn and Steve work hard to maintain the fishery to a high standard, cutting the grass and undergrowth, repairing swims and clearing away any litter. Litter is a problem at times. There are no facility to leave your litter on the fishery, so take it home with you. And do not leave it bushes or along the lane, which we find at times. Remember you are being watched and if found to be leaving litter your ticket could be at risk.

The club has provided loos, at great expense. Please use them and not the bushes. There has been instances of this behaviour, only to be found when grass cutting or worse clearing with a strimmer. Otters for many fisheries have become a major problem with the need to protect fish stocks. Fortunately, at Rawlings Retreat, we have an effective otter fence, but it is only any good if the gates are properly closed and locked. This summer there has been too many occasions when they have been left open. Please ensure both gates are always closed and locked as we do not want to share our fish with Mr. Otter.

In addition to providing a shelter to any harsh weather we intend to provide a Lost Property box, a first point of call in the future for members to check. We are always finding items left by members. Most we can return to the rightful owner, but at times things remain unclaimed. A Swap Shop box will also be provided for all those items you will never use but could be for other members.

Please visit Rawlings Retreat and enjoy a wonderful fishery. If you see either Lynn or Steve say hello and they will be happy to have a chat about fishing and other matters and most of all respect the facility for the use by others.

Cheers Dave

Having retired from the role of chairman earlier this year after an incredible stint of 18 years' service, the committee held the time-honoured tradition of thanking David Marshall with the presentation of a framed print. A short speech of appreciation was given by club president, Steve Pallett, during which Dave looked suitably embarrassed, particularly when a bouquet of flowers for his long-suffering wife Sheila was also handed over.

As one wag on the committee pointed out, the picture was completely lifelike showing Dave with swans in his swim! Congratulations and thank you again Dave, who is continuing to play an important role as a senior member of the committee.

Our new chairman, Dougie Hull has more news about Dave in his message below.



CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

by Dougie Hull

Well winter is definitely here, and all of the venues receive fewer anglers on the banks at this time of year. So, for those who do brave the elements at this time of year please wrap up appropriately. As Billy Connolly says *"there is no such thing as bad weather, just the wrong clothing, so just get yourself a sexy raincoat and live a little"* or in our case get out there and catch some fish. Overcoming the elements and putting a few specimens on the bank can be far more rewarding at this time of year.

With the idea of encouraging members on the bank we have the following initiatives in place.

- Three rods can be used by anglers who hold a **specimen permit** on Collin's & Dixons from the first of November till the end of February.
- Also, anglers who hold a **specimen permit** can use two rods on Willows, until the end of February.

The more anglers out fishing or members out for a winter walk round the venues will help deter the black plague (cormorants).



At the last Committee meeting it was proposed and agreed unanimously that Willows Lake be renamed as Marshall's Mere in recognition of the long service to NAA of our previous Chairman David Marshall, who was chairman for the twenty years. So, from the new fishing season Willows Lake will be known as Marshall's Mere.

Unfortunately, four members have recently received bans until the end of the season due to anti-social behaviour, putting fish safety at risk by being intoxicated and leaving rods unattended while they were still fishing. Our Head Bailiff and his team are on the case so please let's not have any more of this type of behaviour.

Whilst on the subject of behaviour, the issue of Safeguarding of juniors and vulnerable adults has finally caught up with Angling. Previously the issues associated with Safeguarding and the procedures required to demonstrate the safety of juniors and vulnerable adults was focussed mainly on sports such as Football, Rugby, Tennis, Cricket etc. Unfortunately, Angling has now come under the spotlight and all angling clubs & syndicates are legally required to have Safeguarding personnel and reporting procedures in place. So, members who have experience in this area and wish to help please make contact via 'enquiries@newburyangling.org.uk'. The workload does not get any easier.

That just leaves me to wish all our members a Very Happy Christmas and Tightlines for the New Year; also, fingers crossed for a drier start to the New Year. And finally, a huge thank you to all bailiffs, working party members and committee members.

FISHERY MANAGER'S REPORT

by Paul Futcher

Following a request made on the Forum, it was agreed that the communication of lake closures and other important messages should be made by email to all members as well as the traditional method of Facebook. This should ensure that ALL members get the messages.



30 tonnes of Kennet Gravel has been purchased to top off the swims at Widmead and the paths around Collins and the footpath side of Dixons. While a start was made, this has been delayed after the hired digger started to sink in



the mud! The job will be completed once the banks are firm enough. The idea will be to put larger grade gravel at the base with smaller diameter stones on the top.

We also intend to purchase scalplings to improve the car access between the swing bridge and car park at Pallett's.

Before the rains arrived the winds blew and much work was done removing fallen branches and clearing accesses. Thank you to all who joined in at short notice. Dougie Hull and I now have chainsaw licences to help maintain ground level work and another thank you to member Joe Wilkins for providing his Newbury Tree Services expertise.

At time of writing Bellwood remains closed. Though the level of the nearby Kennet has receded, the banks remain completely waterlogged and dangerous. We'll let you know the moment they are fishable. Until then, the lake remains out of bounds.



chalk at Enborne

The conditions also look to affect the working parties we'd like to run at what is the best time of year to do work.

A hole in the bank just west of the lock at Enborne was made good with a second load of chalk. We are keeping an eye on the situation, but should you notice any further significant collapse please inform us. Thanks to Nigel Whisten for the picture and for confirming that having spoken to the CRT, their maintenance work at Enborne is due to be completed on 22nd December.

HEAD BAILIFF'S REPORT

by Rob Allen

We currently have a total of 15 official bailiffs, all have been issued with bailiff warrant cards and report books. All bailiffs are set up on Clubmate though three who do not have access to a smart phone so they will continue checking members into the bailiff report books. We have sufficient bailiff numbers for the remainder of this season but this will be reviewed in time for next June.



Random rig checks are also being performed and are being recorded in the notes section of the bailiff clubmate App across all our lakes. A bailiff can check a members notes to see if they have been rig checked before or if the member has been reported for any previous issues. We also have eyes and ears on our venues all the time as many of our bailiffs are on the banks fishing or are just walking round, unrecorded reports of who's out on our lakes are also posted in the bailiffs WhatsApp group on a regular basis, which allows us to monitor how busy the lakes are and report it back to our members on the FB page when this is requested.

Two Storage Units, one on Willows/Alders and one on the Widmead complex are installed, and are fully equipped with bailiffs having padlock access to the units. These are proving to be very useful indeed and is making it a lot easier for us to deal with any issues on the fishery.

We are looking at the cost of providing peg numbers for Collins (18 swims), Knotts (23) and Bellwood (22) to correspond with the lake maps.

A reminder of a couple of rules:

- No pre-baiting is allowed on any of our waters between November and February.
- In the name of fish safety, if you are moving away from your swim wind-in your lines. Asking a pal in the next swim to cover is not sufficient.
- There has been an example of a barbeque unit posted on Facebook. Please be reminded that 'Open fires and barbeques are banned on all Association waters and properties unless specifically authorised by the Committee, and properly organised. Included in the ban is any device or product where the flame or source of heat *cannot be switched off* safely and immediately with a switch or controller. Small portable stoves where the flame can be switched off safely and immediately are permitted.



Unfortunately, the club's disciplinary process has been brought into action recently against a number of individuals for breaching club regulations. The offences were:

- Not attending rod(s) while baited hooks were in the water
- Anti-social behaviour not showing consideration for other anglers

Tight lines, all, and good fishing to you all in 2024.

MATCH NEWS AND UPDATE

By Dave Smith

DATE	VENUE	MATCH TIME	COMPETITION	TROPHY
January 2024				
Mon 1 st	Enborne Canal	10:00 – 15:00	New Years Day Rover	New Years Day Shield
Sun 7 th	Enborne (Upper)	08:00 – 16:00	VENUE CLOSED	
Sun 28 th	Knott's	10:00 – 15:00	Pike match	Buckingham Cup, Ben Smith Trophy
February 2024				
Wed 14 th	Enborne (Upper)	10:00 – 15:00	Over 60's	Field & Stream Cup
Sun 25 th	Enborne (Down)	08:00 – 16:00	VENUE CLOSED	
Sun 25 th	Bulls Lock	10:00 – 15:00	Pike match	Buckingham Cup, Ben Smith Trophy
March 2024				
Wed 24 th	Willows	10:00 – 15:00	Over 60's	Field & Stream Cup

As at 1st December 2023, the current standings were:

Over 60's League	points	Over 70's League	points
1 st - Dave Smith	67	1 st – Bill Bowsher	40
2 nd – Bill Bowsher	57	2 nd – Richard Wiggins	27
3 rd = Richard Wiggins	49	3 rd = Henry Sadler	24
3 rd = Henry Sadler	49	3 rd = Brian Pallet	24
5 th – Mervyn Burrows	44	5 th = Tim Wirth	23
6 th – Tim Wirth	36	5 th = Mervyn Burrows	23

The Over 70's league has now finished for the season. Many congratulations to Bill Bowsher for retaining his title. There are three rounds left in the Over 60's if anyone fancies overtaking Smithy? With only the top 5 scores per angler counting from the 8 rounds, the door is still ajar!

Recent match reports, as updated regularly on the club website are as follows:

15th November 2023 - Over 60's match - Enborne Canal A Shires match had been held a few days earlier on Enborne (Up) but the EA had cut the stick ups back on the far bank! It was a disaster. Of the 20 anglers 2-2-0 was the top weight. So when it came to the Over 60's it was agreed that we should fish from the pallets on Dog Sh*t Alley! Even that was quite hard. W Bowsher 8-0-0, H Sadler 2-8-0, M Burrows 2-2-0, D Smith 1-14-0, L Durnford 0-11-0.

1st November 23 - Over 60's - Avington Result of the Over 60's match on a wet and windy Avington. W Bowsher 6-12-0, D Smith 5-10-0, H Sadler 3-14-0, L Durnford 3-4-0, R Wiggins 1-15-0. Lots of fish to be caught, they didn't mind the weather!!



Bill Bowsher

18th October 23 - Over 60's - Willows. R Wiggins 19-8-0, W Bowsher 18-14-0, D Smith 12-8-0, T Wirth 11-14-0, M Burrows 7-14-0, H Sadler 5-6-0, L Durnford 3-10-0, B Pallett and K Rolfe DNW. Bill Bowsher had 3 Carp, Dave Smith 2. Wiggy had a Tench, a Crucian and one Carp that weighed 12-9-0.



Dave Smith & friends

10th October 2023 - Over 70's - Bellwood B Pallett 7-6-0, W Bowsher 4-14-8, M Burrows 4-10-0, D Smith 3-4-0, H Sadler 2-2-0, R Wiggins 2-1-0, S Myers 1-10-0, T Wirth 1-3-0, A McGarry 0-8-0. R Spiers DNW. No big fish caught on Bellwood just Roach and Perch (small perch at that!!)

8th October 2023 - Memorial Match – Willows. There were two trophies up for grabs, the Keith Scrivener and Norman Unwin trophies for 1st and 2nd. Wilf Squires won with 34-7-0, Keith was 2nd with 26-14-0, Alan Symes had 25-4-0, Steve Myers 16-14-0, Brian Pallett had 14-5-0, and Roy Speirs had 11-14-0. The rest chose not to weigh in.

Thank you to Keith Hallis for this bonus report: It was a sunny day with gentle SW winds with a high of 25 centigrade. The first three were pegged on the Discovery Centre side as the sun reaches this side first and warms the water quicker, so it's not surprising this side did better. The venue at Willows at this time of year is always a good one as the fish are building up their reserves for winter. In recent years, Richard Faithful, Jason Heaver and Wilf Squires have all won this Memorial match with extraordinary high weights. On the day I drew peg 52 - my favourite peg which I fish regularly. Wilf drew a few swims down to my right next to an overhanging tree which prevented him from getting a decent cast to the island but he still managed to win the match - well done! My set up included a hair rigged 12mm crab pellet wrapped in ground bait on a 25g method feeder.

4th October 2023 - Over 60's match - Avington W Bowsher 10-1-0, L Durnford 7-4-0, B Pallett 6-4-0, M Burrows 5-6-0, S Thame 5-2-0, R Wiggins 3-12-0, T Wirth 2-7-0, H Sadler 2-2-0. A McGarry DNW.

Result from the last 24-hour carp match of the year held on 23/24 September at Bellwood



1st) Adrian Janik - 74lb 15oz - 4fish, 2nd) Rob Allen - 44lb 14oz - 2 fish,
3rd) Kevin Greenroyd - 22lb 6oz -1 fish 4th) Andy Mason with 22lb 12oz - 2 fish
5th) Ben Greenroyd with 22lb 11oz 1 fish

The annual Help for Heroes charity match was held on the canal at Enborne and was well supported. The match fished hard with Dave Chandler winning with 7-15-0, but everyone caught fish and enjoyed the day. Ann in The Lamb spoiled us again with Bacon butties and very nice hot food afterwards. 355 raffle tickets were sold, our guests, Shipston AC kindly donated £100 and other donations totalled £50 (for instance one of the Shipston lads won his section and donated the £25 to H4H. Shipston had two young lads with them (under 23!!), one just starting in the sport and a worthy winner of the star prize in the raffle, an 11ft Pellet Waggler rod provided as a prize by Drennan. A nice ending to a fun day. I left Coxy, Matt and a couple of others in The Lamb drinking Guinness, no doubt I shall hear all about it in time!! £615 was raised which the club topped up to £1,000 in aid of Help For Heroes as per previous years.



Sadly the waterlogging at Bellwood meant the annual Christmas match had to be postponed. This was a shame as it's a popular event with participants normally choosing whether they fish the lake, the Civil Service stretch of the river or the canal at Hambridge. Other venues were considered, but none provided this mix. It is undecided at present as to whether the match will be reorganised for later in the year, or abandoned until next Christmas.

If you read this issue in time, please think of your mental health and get away from the family to fish our New Years Day match. Meet at 9am at the Lamb pub, Enborne.

The first pike match of the season brought three fish. Well done to Nathan Wheeler for the largest fish of 7lb 2 with Archie Keep and Dougie Hull the other two anglers to score. Unlike this kingfisher, no fish were caught on the second leg at Speen, but then that's piking!

All the details for these matches are on the match calendar and if you need further information on any match speak to me, Dave Smith on 01635 46285.



MY FIRST TASTE OF MATCH FISHING

By Keith Hallis

Let's get this straight from the beginning, I am not a match fisherman, more a pleasure fisherman. I sometimes go weeks on end and not catch anything according to my long-enduring wife. A spring day in 1962 brought a knock at our door in Harwell. 'It's David,' said Mum. 'Hi there how are you?' David and I had been schoolfriends who lived in the same road and now, both aged 19, were fishing buddies.

David looked at me sheepishly in case he'd done wrong and blurted out, 'I've booked us a fishing holiday to Ireland with Sealandair -they sponsor one of the biggest fishing events held annually.' I knew that anglers from the U.K flocked to Ireland in the day, encouraged by the excellent coarse fishing. To mine and David's relief, they were happy for us to go on this adventure. As the day to go drew near our expectation grew. It was going to be our first ever flight, which only added to the excitement. On the day itself, Dad drove us up to Luton

airport in our Morris Oxford (sometimes nicknamed Morris *Canhardly*, due to the fact we once reached half way up Porlock Hill in Devon but had to turn back because of the steepness). When we arrived at the airport it was announced our flight to Dublin had been re-routed to Manchester. There were all these peeved anglers mainly from the Midlands, all with rods, creels and tackle boxes waiting to board a coach to the Ringway airport. Eventually we got there and boarded our plane, a Vickers Viscount. Being a turbo prop the take-off was quite sedate however the descent had sudden drops in altitude, so not for the faint hearted – but our flight went without hitch, though David and myself could not get a beer due to the fact that everyone had their finger on the buzzer used to get the attention of the air hostess. Thirsty lot those Midlanders.

We eventually arrived at Dublin airport and were ushered on to another coach. We were told we were going to Clones, a small town in the west of the county of Monaghan. After singing all the Irish songs we knew and grabbing some sleep the delay and re-routing meant that we didn't arrive to the centre of Clones until 4 in the morning where, to our surprise, the rapturous applaud of cheering locals which will long stay in my memory. I could not believe that most of the inhabitants had been waiting all night to welcome us. The census of 2016 recorded a population of 1,680 and I reckon nearly all of the town were there. Despite the unearthly hour, we were immediately taken to a hall where there were long tables lovingly set out for a banquet meal with a welcome speech made by a local dignitary. A couple of hours after this amazing welcome meal and having been shown our rooms in the Hibernian hotel, we all gathered in the market square for a group photograph as shown. David and me are on the far right. David is wearing a hat and I am clutching - you guessed a can of beer! Note the cane baskets and the number of anglers wearing ties, not the usual attire today for angling!



The Sealadair match took place at a number of venues all over Ireland with participants probably running in to hundreds. Our match was held on the river Finn which flows immediately to the south of Clones and was recognised as an excellent coarse fishery with good quality bream and roach. We duly arrived at Annie's Bridge 4.5 km out of town. There were deep sluggish reaches with clean banks and this section was a popular match section with capacity for 50 anglers. I drew a good peg, with my set up being a simple ledgered Arlesey bomb with maggots or worm – all bait being provided by Salandair. At the end of the match I had caught four bream

for a total weight of twelve pounds. I was pleased with this, though in hindsight might have done better if I'd used groundbait like some of the others. The winner in our location finished third overall, having caught 85lbs of bream.

The next day David and myself decided to pleasure fish one of the 60 lakes within a 5 mile radius of Clones. We used a float set up and maggots. Two hours passed and nothing then suddenly David's float went under, at last a rudd. For the next two hours it was a rudd every cast for us both. We were well chuffed. The next day we left Dublin for home in a Fokker Friendship - well named as David and myself still keep in touch. My dad greeted us at Luton airport. 'Welcome back, did you have a good time?' What do you think? We had a fantastic trip that 61 years on, I still remember fondly. Since then, I've fished with David many times, though never again in Ireland. It was many years before I took up match fishing again. It was one morning I had turned up at Willows lake to do some pleasure fishing to be greeted by the voice of Dave Smith come and join us on Alders lake which I did rather nervously. I have enjoyed many fishing matches on the way, needless to say not that successfully! The social side of meeting other members is a bonus, so please do come along enjoy the fun and the challenge!



Keith Hallis 2023

These days carp fishing is my vocation in life and my best session ever came at the top lake at Frobury Farm in 2014 when I caught a total weight of 206 lbs 18 Carp in 8 hrs all on 6mm halibut pellet in heavy rain conditions NE 15C at the end of April. My catches in NAA waters have not been so good .My best carp stands at 23 lbs. bream 13lbs and Crucian 3lbs 4oz, all from Willows with my best session only 65lbs although having never fished Collins, and Knotts only a handful of times I have lots of goals to aim for.

POST SCRIPT – In an effort to find out more background to the match, the editor contacted Fisheries Ireland.

Their records from the early 60's are unfortunately scant, but they were so interested in Keith's memories that they picked the story up. You can read this [here](#).

Kevin Crowley, Angling Advisor of Fisheries Ireland added that 'please let your members know that Keith and any other members are very welcome back in Ireland, the coarse fishing is still excellent, and hopefully the facilities have improved since 1962!' Cheers Kevin. Anyone interested in fishing in Ireland can contact Kevin at Kevin.Crowley@fisheriesireland.ie.



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CANAL & RIVER TRUST

By Rob Coles

Hello Newbury! I'm the Canal and River Trust's Area Operations Manager for the Kennet and K&A canal responsible for the stretch between, Wootton Rivers to Reading, roughly 40 miles. I've been invited to tell you a little more about my role and about the CRT generally. I hope you find it of interest.

To assist with the upkeep of this area, I have a small but close-knit team of 8 full-time workers, many of whom have 30 years+ of experience on the waterway. They are supported by our invaluable team of around 150 volunteers, some who assist two or three times per week, others who make themselves available more in spring/summer when the waterway is at its busiest and vegetation is growing the fastest.

Before the Trust took responsibility for control of our waterways in 2012, their upkeep was with British Waterways, whose priority was maintaining navigation for boats. The Trust's role is much more inclusive of the needs of all water users, be they boat owners, walkers, cyclists and, of course fishermen. The Trust's view is that the more people who use the waterways, the higher profile keeping what I call our 'super-green highway' in good order for wildlife and the well-being of all our visitors and the less opportunity there is for nefarious activities such as vandalism and anti-social behaviour etc, incidents of which I am proud to say are few and intend to keep that way!

At this time of year, our biggest challenge is managing the amount of water passing through the system. Unlike some canals, the K&A is river fed, and heavy rainfall in Wiltshire, say, can cause parcels of water that we need to manage downstream to the Thames to ensure safe navigation and keep the possibility of flooding and associated damage to a minimum. This is achieved via a large network of sluices and weirs. The Trust owns many of these, but plenty are on private land so a lot of collaboration goes on with landowners and others owned by the Environment Agency, to keep the flow as steady and safe as possible.

Of course, in the summer we can have the opposite problem of trying to keep enough water in the canal at times of drought. The Kennet never sleeps!

A more constant challenge is controlling vegetation. We are lucky that the Kennet rolls largely through rural areas which inevitably



Rob Coles



requires a massive task in terms of upkeep, though we must always be mindful of certain restrictions, such as conservation areas, SSSI's and the benefit of restricted species such as water voles etc. The control of vegetation takes up a large proportion of our resource, both in terms of our staff and volunteers, but also in the hiring of contractors where necessary. The cost of maintaining suitable levels for the benefit of all water-users runs into tens of thousands of pounds per year. CRT are a charity, and as in all walks of life, are

finding costs are going up while budgets aren't, so are always looking at new initiatives to keep the standards that all users expect. For example, we have found that the presence of reeds helps protect the integrity of banks from flood waters and crayfish attack etc, though with it comes a requirement for more maintenance. We know that cutting these back leaves the chopped stems looking awful in the winter, and inevitably causes some detritus in the water and creates a disruption to fish and thus fishing, but they do grow back in Spring and please understand this maintenance does play an important role in preventing failing banks. Don't worry, there are no plans to plant more reeds! If I could make one request of you, it's that



anglers (and others) please do not trample down or cut back new swims in the reedbeds as this causes areas where the banks are more prone to degradation through channelled water flow while allowing access to crayfish, dogs and boat parking – thank you.

We work with feedback from anglers, such as Reading & District AA, where as an example we have agreed to limit trimming of overhangs in certain areas. We do strive to strike a middle ground for the benefit of all users, and I'm very happy to receive and consider feedback, but please, only if it's constructive – no rants or ramblings please! You can email me on Robert.coles@canalrivertrust.org.uk you may not get an instant response...

Water quality has quite rightly become a subject of national publicity and concern, and we certainly play our part in monitoring standards on our patch, for example at your stretch of the canal at Kintbury. We immediately report any adverse reading to the EA who have the powers to act quickly. The Trust recognises the important



role that anglers play in the ongoing health of the waterways. You are on the banks as much as anyone after all, and are our eyes for spotting changes and potential problems.

Should you notice any significant pollution please contact the Environment Agency 24-hour emergency line on 0800 80 70 60. You will be asked to describe the circumstances as you see them, together with any affecting issues, such as any fish or birds in distress.

Other, lower priority issues, such as trees down or broken assets etc can also be reported to the Trust via 0303 040 4040

I've been asked for my thoughts on your friends and mine – the Red Signal Crayfish. As you know, this invasive species creates a huge problem for the integrity of banksides. In areas where we have diverted water, the bank

can look like a colander with the amount of burrows. Our Environmental Team are working with the EA and Natural England to address this issue, but there seem to be no easy – or even difficult - answers at the present time. One of the only natural predators we have on our waterways are otters 😊 It is permitted for individual fishermen to trap crayfish whilst fishing and remove. I strongly recommend this takes place with your members within the terms of the following:



**Canal &
River Trust**

Making life better by water

NON NATIVE CRAYFISH POLICY

The Trust currently does not permit intensive trapping of crayfish on our property. This is in common with many conservation organisations that cite potential detrimental effects from such trapping as well as unintentional risks such as by-catch and the spread of crayfish plague.

There is also a fundamental issue with putting a value on an invasive pest which could (and probably has historically) lead to a financial incentive to spread the species further. There are concerns over the suitability of those seeking to carry out trapping (there is no quality mark) and especially around the practical and health & safety issues associated with the methods frequently employed (involving the driving of vehicles along narrow towpaths and working at night whilst setting large numbers of traps).

There are issues of unmanned or lost traps being caught in propellers of navigating craft.

There are potentially issues around unintended by-catch e.g we have had otters captured in illegal crayfish traps on three separate occasions in past 2.5 years. Some people persist in intensive trapping for financial gain and we believe that some of them do it on our estate without our permission but possibly (sometimes bizarrely) with consent from the Environment Agency. We do permit angling clubs (on receipt of written request), where crayfish are adversely affecting fishing on our waters, to authorise members to place a single catch-pot by their swim while fishing to draw crayfish away from their lines.

Invasive crayfish caught by this method must be humanely destroyed while native crayfish should be returned to the water (there is little likelihood of the two species co-existing in reality). We recognise the need to consider action on controlling invasive crayfish species which are encroaching on remaining native white-clawed populations and we are awaiting the results of a CEFAS trial on control methods (started in 2013) to inform on the best way of tackling their spread. If this recommends intensive trapping, we would seek to work with reputable commercial trappers at specific locations rather than permitting wholesale trapping and we would do it with full partnership support of the angling community, who help us manage the fishing rights on our waterways.

I mentioned volunteers at the start. If you would like to know more, please contact [here](#) I can assure you a rewarding time and in the locations you choose doing the kind of work you enjoy. You will also get to make a claim for any snagged fishing tackle you may find!

Finally, I think this is a good opportunity to open communications with you to help us all get as much as we can from our amazing waterways. Should you feel there is an aspect of the Trusts role you would like to see in a future issue of the NAAN, please contact the editor at the address at the top of this newsletter.

Cheers!
Rob

ACTION for the RIVER KENNET (ARK)

‘Showing Some Love for the Lambourn’

By Anna Forbes – ARK Senior Project Officer & Volunteer Co-ordinator

There are 260 chalk streams in the world and here in England we have 224 of them, including the Kennet and its tributaries.

What makes them special is their cold, clean and clear water, which supports a wealth of native wildlife and sadly some invasive non-native species too!

It was back in 1990 that a group of local people, concerned by the rivers poor health decided to form an action group to bring pressure on bodies, including Thames Water and the Environment Agency. Jack Ainslie, Roger deVere, and friends formed Action for the River Kennet (ARK). Their focus was the abstraction on the Kennet and the impact this was having on the wildlife, including fish.

Abstraction is the extracting of water from the chalk aquifer. The chalk aquifer is the underground layer of water-bearing permeable rock. Chalk streams rely on plenty of winter rain to filter down into the aquifer, which acts like a giant sponge. When the aquifer is saturated the water feeds into the river from the source and natural springs along its path.

The water that comes out of your taps has been extracted by the water company from the aquifer. So, valuing water is paramount. The less we can all use, the more that can reach our rivers and keep them flowing.

Since those early years ARK has become a registered charity and is now a Rivers Trust hosting both the Kennet Catchment and more recently taking on the Pang Catchment. We continue to campaign and lobby but have evolved and now carry out practical conservation from small to large scale, including river restoration, habitat improvements, fish passage, wetland creation, a range of citizen science surveying and monitoring, extensive educational outreach (known as River School), rain garden builds and catchment sensitive farming.

We are busy not only on the Kennet but on the tributaries too carrying out projects at a breadth of scales. To make bigger impacts today's thinking is very much at a catchment scale, so you'll see us not only working in the river but by it and sometimes quite far away from it too.

Over the last 3 years our Love the Lambourn project, phase 1 and 2 have improved habitat diversity and quality to a half a kilometre stretch of the Lambourn, a SSSI chalk stream. The goal was to transform the stretch that flows through Clay Hill and involve and share skills with the Newbury community.

Our advertised expert led community river day tasks offered the opportunity for anyone to book in for the days, no experience required. ARK provides the kit required for the day and leads a hands-on day of outdoor practical learning of new skills, learning about your local river, what the task is, why and how we are going to do it and what this will achieve.



It was also a chance to meet like-minded individuals of all ages and many backgrounds, whilst for many it was also experiencing the river and its wildlife from a completely new perspective. For some seeing their first kingfisher or wading past a shoal of grayling or an impressive pike.

The community river day volunteering has run over the summer and early autumn months, so we don't disturb spawning activities. Each year has begun with a big in river litter pick (we clear the banks and nearby too) as sadly this site never fails to disappoint on the litter front.

Our wonderful volunteers have removed amongst other things, numerous trolleys, bikes, cans, plastic and glass bottles, lots of plastic snack packaging, the odd TV, suitcase, CD rack and 2 double mattresses.

The mattresses were quite the challenge to raise from the riverbed! Not only are these items unsightly, but they are also polluting the river. Microplastics are being ingested by fish and thus accumulating in the food chain and PFAs, also known as 'forever chemicals' will be present from furnishings, clothes and carpet dumped in the Lambourn, so litter picking really is an important part of the project.



We know that well led volunteer tasks can achieve conservation work of an excellent standard. Given clear guidance, training, the right equipment, oversight, and lots of biscuits our volunteers have repaired two types of in channel existing wooden structures known as brushwood mattresses and deflectors. These are made from natural materials and in the case of our project we were able to use local site won materials which helped create a better balance of light and shade along the riverbank and was cost efficient.

Using this approach to river restoration, letting in more light where the mattresses had originally been created and our volunteers planting up the mattresses with thousands of native marginal plants means the plants get enough light to thrive and establish sending out their roots and rhizomes into the silt that the mattresses trap. This helps keep the gravels clean for spawning and means there should be no need for further repair to the structure, the roots hold riverbanks together and prevent erosion.

The plants volunteers have planted are flag iris, purple loosestrife, figwort, sedge, marsh marigold and hemp agrimony. Well established plants along the riverbank forge a healthy buffer strip. These shouldn't be mown, they help make the river more resilient, helping to filter runoff and joining up the riverbank corridor for wildlife. This healthy marginal habitat benefits ground nesting birds, mammals, insects such as beautiful and banded demoiselles, pollinating insects such as bees, butterflies and moths and provides important cover for spawning fish including brown trout and grayling.

When mayfly emerge from the riverbed to continue their life cycle into its dun, then spinner stages they will often land on marginal vegetation.

The shape of the brushwood mattresses creates meanders in an otherwise fairly straight channel. Meanders put flow diversity back into the Lambourn, this is important because it has a positive impact on biodiversity by creating a mosaic of habitats for a wide range of aquatic and land species.

The deflectors our volunteers have been restoring are known as Large Wood Debris (LWD). This is when large wood such as big branches or a tree trunk are pinned into the river. Nowadays it is widely recognised that trees in rivers are a good thing. To have truly rich and diverse river habitats we need to resist the urge to

pull everything natural that's in the river out and in many cases start to actively put natural features back in or replicate natural processes, like trees falling into rivers.

Trees in the channel instantly creates flow diversity and cover for fish from predators. They also support aquatic invertebrate populations; these are important processors in the river ecosystem, as well as the main food source for many species.

Fish populations are likely to be healthier when there are plenty of places for young fish to disperse and hide and where there's a healthy population of their favoured food source.



Well placed deflectors trap silt behind towards the bank which encourages growth of watercress and water mint in the lower flow months. This is where small fry will hide out and grow. Further into the channel deflectors scour out pools that large fish use.

The improved balance of light and shade has also brought success with re-establishing successful growth of the desirable aquatic plant, stream-water crowfoot. This plant, also known as ranunculus puts oxygen into the river and supports healthy invertebrate populations.

We've been monitoring invertebrates in the Kennet catchment since 2007, when we began riverfly monitoring. Over the years we've increased this nationally recognised citizen science method for detecting serious pollution incidents and since 2015 have built up 8 riverfly sites on the Lambourn, including on our Love the Lambourn stretch in Newbury.

Local businesses have supported the Love the Lambourn project by taking part in our corporate volunteer days on the Lambourn. Cirrus Logic, James Cowper Kreston and KeyLoop employees have donned waders and learnt about chalk streams, they are now aware of how special the Lambourn is the pressures chalk streams are under and what we are doing to help them. The staff have also had a great day out of the office, improving their local environment whilst team building. Feedback about the days has been brilliant!

Our volunteer days were not just for adults, we ran two sessions for local Cub groups. Both groups got to get into our children's thigh waders, get into the river and carry out three activities with us. River restoration, litter picking and an introduction to kick sampling.



Through the first activity contributing to restoring one of the brushwood mattresses Cubs learnt to use tools such as bow saws, loppers, wire cutters and hammers to improve their river. Planting up introduced them to identifying native plant species. Through the second they worked in teams using litter pickers and could see for themselves just how much litter ends up in the river and why this is a bad thing and the third activity introduced the Cubs to how we check the health of the river and allowed them to discover and identify the freshwater invertebrates living in the clean gravel riverbed of their local chalk stream. Children have often never set foot in a river before and these experiences are really valuable,

we hope the excitement of finding and watching a cased caddis or minnow ignites or furthers a passion and connection with the natural world on their doorstep.

The Love the Lambourn project phase 2 is complete but we hope to expand on this work and show some love to other stretches of this beautiful river in the future. Many of the new volunteers that first joined us through this project are now regular volunteers with us on other projects, discovering other rivers in the catchment and further building their knowledge and skills whilst being great assets to us.

As a charity our projects require funding to be developed and delivered. Love the Lambourn has been possible thanks to our funders for the project, these include Newbury Town Council, West Berkshire Council, Rivers & Wetlands Community Days Fund and Greenham Trust.

We would also like to recognise Riverside Community Centre for supporting us with use of their facilities.

ARK is a membership organisation and you can find details on our website to join and support us. To volunteer email anna@riverkennet.org You can follow us on social media too.

Particularly welcome are the positive comments that we receive from anglers and people walking the banks. The restoration and litter picks that we tackle, particularly in Turnpike and Shaw are definitely improving the habitats and wider environment for people and wildlife. Have a walk through and enjoy it yourself. Long may it continue.

To end, the following quote comes from Paul Gray, one of ARKs Newbury-based volunteers:

I joined Ark as a volunteer having worked all my life within an office environment and what a great decision it has been! I have been involved on some wonderful projects around Berkshire, Hampshire and Wiltshire in chalk streams, wetlands, tree planting and more. I have been wowed by the dedication of the river keepers and the keepers of the beautiful countryside and surroundings within which we live. The camaraderie and benefits to wellbeing that we all receive is there to see in abundance come rain or shine. The Lambourn is a river that we need to cherish as it touches both countryside and urban areas where it is particularly welcome. Having the Lambourn close by to Thatcham and Newbury makes the work we do even more special. What a great stretch to have on the doorstep! The underwater filming from professional photographer Paul Colley, who joined us on the Lambourn was a real eye-opener for me what happens under the waterline.

Note: All pictures used are courtesy of ARK



WINTER PIKE FISHING

By Barry Murrer

As I write this in mid-November, the Kennet is full of muddy water, one of the lakes is flooded, it's 6 degrees C and it's raining - perfect conditions for winter piking!

I've always been interested in pike and pike fishing- as an important apex predator they serve to keep the fish stock healthy and in balance. They are also a key indicator species of the health of the river or lake environment- if the ecosystem can't support big pike, then there is something wrong with the rest of the fish population. Thankfully there are good stocks of pike in NAA waters with some of doubles and a few 20lb+ fish. Pike are big, toothy and have survived in their current form for millions of years. They are also



one of the few fish that will look you in the eye, almost to say 'I'm going to get you'. Some anglers find this a bit disconcerting and will not go anywhere near a pike. That's your choice but there is no reason for mistreating pike or mishandling them when they have been caught. They are a surprisingly delicate fish and are much less tolerant than carp of being badly treated on the bank or kept out of the water for too long. I'll explain later the safest methods of unhooking and handling.

Pike were the first fish that really inspired me to catch bigger and better fish. I was always happy to catch little perch, roach and dace on maggots and worms until an enormous pike (well, probably about 5lb) drifted into my swim, had a good look at me, ignored my maggots and swam away. Cue a visit to my uncle who had a boat on the River Ouse in Bedfordshire and had many tales of big pike caught or lost and indeed, once had to visit hospital to be sewn up after a brush with a pike's teeth. In those days livebaiting was the only option and pike were seen as food, either for humans or the cat, or as a menace. Not many were returned. My uncle's advice on what to do when you had a bite was typical for the time- wait for the pike to turn the bait after its first run has stopped. When it runs again, count to ten and strike as hard as you can. Very few pike were missed, and nearly all were deeply hooked. Unhooking involved a pike gag (a nasty spring-loaded thing with sharp points which kept the pike's mouth open) and a long-handled pike disgorger which didn't really grip the hooks.

We caught small pike, the cat was fed a few times but even then I felt a bit uneasy with how these magnificent fish were treated. My friends and I discovered the effectiveness of Ondex spinners and small plugs and the mortality rate of hooked fish decreased dramatically. Around that time the likes of Fred J Taylor and Barrie Rickards were writing of catches of huge pike using dead baits (old-school pike anglers at the time just didn't believe that pike would eat a dead fish from the fishmonger's slab) and we were keen to try them out. Sprats and herrings were the only widely available deadbait material and we were quick to find that they were instantly effective. No more anxious scratching around for a few roach and then a perilous bike ride to the pike swim with a bucket of water on the handlebars- a half pound of sprats was all you needed! I think that was the end of my livebaiting activity- because deadbaits are just as good, if not better than livebaits, and so much more convenient. The average size of pike caught also increased although the first twenty pounder had to wait until I got to fish the Thames regularly in the early 1980s. Also, around that time unhooking techniques for pike improved dramatically with the advent of artery forceps and the realization that it was perfectly safe to hold a pike's mouth open with a finger under the chin whilst unhooking.

I still enjoy lure fishing for pike in our local waters, but I'll leave it to better lure anglers to write about that. Deadbaiting is my usual method from November to March. I'm very happy to sit it out carp style with two rods, bite alarms, comfortable chair and so on if I'm fishing a lake where I



If you're scared of pike then don't fish for them

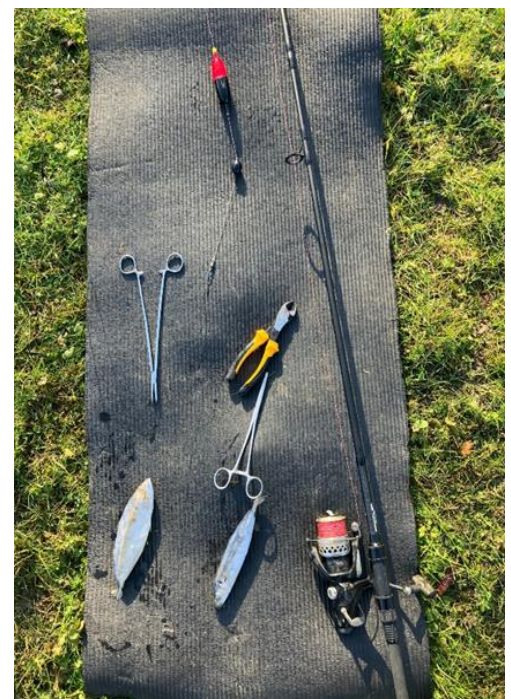
know there are big pike. Nowadays though, my most productive fishing is on our rivers and canals and is very mobile. I have a small rucksack/seat which goes on my back and holds a small cool bag with frozen baits, tackle spares, scales, unhooking gear and lunch and I carry a folding rubberized landing net and an unhooking mat made from a cut-down yoga mat (why are all unhooking mats carp shaped? For big pike you need at least 1.2 meters). Yoga mats are very well padded, waterproof and roll up nicely. I like short rods as they can be used under trees so a 9ft 2.5lb test stalking rod is fine along with a baitrunner reel with 50lb braid. I know at least one local club that bans braid for pike deadbaiting but allows it for lure fishing. I just can't see why. Braid is safe, very strong for its diameter and it floats (vital for float fishing). If you use 50lb braid and 45lb trace wire

you can nearly always pull your hooks out a snag, which is a major improvement in pike safety; cracked off or snagged baited hooks are pike killers and should be minimized however possible.

On rivers and canals I always use a sliding float with two float stops to set the depth and a bead between the float and the stops to avoid tangles. I like the interchangeable weights from various companies which can be swapped over very quickly without removing the trace and I generally carry two sizes (big and small, big ones for float-ledgering and small for trotting). A link swivel is tied to the end of the braid (make sure you use a Uni knot, blood knots weaken the braid) and terminal tackle is either an 18 inch 45lb wire trace with a barbless size 2 circle hook or two barbless size 6 trebles, crimped to the wire with 1.2 mm diameter crimps. Circle hooks are very good and have certainly revolutionised my tope and conger fishing when at sea. Hook up there is 100% and the fish are nearly always hooked in the scissors making unhooking very simple. Nowadays tope and congers do not come into the boat- they are simply unhooked over the side with a T-bar- better for fish and anglers. When using circle hooks for pike you don't strike- as soon as you see indications of a bite hold the rod horizontally and just tighten down to the fish. Nearly every time the hook will be in the scissors and can be removed without even using forceps. However.....every now and again a big fish takes a small bait and the hook takes hold in the back of the pike's throat. Easily removed using the techniques below but this is not an infallible way for beginners to avoid deeply hooked pike. I am confident to use circle hooks with small baits- sprat or smelt sized- but with bigger baits the hookup ratio declines so I use the classic snap tackle.

Importantly, all hooks are always barbless. There is no need for one hook of a treble to have a barb- we're not livebaiting and a dead fish is hardly likely to swim away. If you are using very soft baits such as sardines a few turns of sea angler's bait elastic will hold them on. As well as being easier to remove from the pike, barbless hooks are easier to remove from your landing net and the rubberized mesh also helps.

Bait can be any dead fish you can buy. After many years of pike fishing I really don't think pike are fussy. Sea fish, coarse fish, game fish, whole fish, half fish or chunks; they are all the same to a feeding pike. I could fill a paragraph with the baits I have used and caught pike with and nowadays fish anything with confidence although I don't often use smelts because the crayfish seem to love them and demolish them before a pike turns up. Tony at Thatcham Angling usually has a good range of deadbaits, the supermarkets are ok for mackerel, herring and sprats, but they are not



The tackle. Always carry 8 and 12 inch forceps and wire cutters

always the freshest and there are a couple of online stores which are good but pricey. A good source of frozen bait is a Chinese supermarket- the one in Reading has a very good range of bait-sized frozen fish at very reasonable prices. It feels bit odd to be casting out half a gourami, but the pike don't mind!

So, on to the fishing! I usually look for near bank slacks and features, slacks below locks or smooth glides. With the float set slightly over depth, I drop in a bait and hold the float steady in the current with the weight on the bottom- if it is too fast for the bait to hold then there probably aren't pike there. Usually 10 or 15 minutes is enough then I move the bait or change swim. And that's it! Keep moving and you can cover a lot of water. There is generally no need to fish far out and indeed it is surprising to find how close to the bank a pike will take a bait. Treading softly and keeping low to the water are always good. You will sometimes find concentrations of pike at certain spots at certain times of year and have some astonishing catches. I'm not saying any more- find these spots for yourself!

Classic bites are when the float disappears, and line is pulled from the reel. Don't wait, the hooks will be in the pike's mouth so with the rod horizontal tighten the line firmly and away you go. No need for a dramatic strike, if your hooks are sharp, the fish is hooked. Sometimes you tighten and there is nothing there, this is generally a small pike so don't get cross, just drop the bait back in the same spot and it usually comes back. I'm going to say this once more though- to minimize deep hooking you need to be alert and tighten up to a bite immediately. If you can't keep your attention on the float at all times then take a bite alarm.

Sometimes the float will dither around with small ripples but never moves away. That is usually crayfish, but sometimes it can be a pike. Feel for a fish and if it is there tighten up to it. If not, and your bait has been partially eaten then move away from the pesky crayfish- they won't feed if there is a pike about. Another sort of bite you sometimes get is when the float bobs, moves a few inches, bobs again and so on. This could be a trout and I have caught some huge out of season brown trout from the Kennet and the canal. Nice to see, but out of season.

So, you have the pike in the net, what next? You should have your unhooking mat unrolled and wetted and forceps in your pocket and you should be wearing waterproof overtrousers. Put the pike in the net on the mat, turn it onto its back then get astride it and restrain it very gently between your knees. Don't sit on it! Then check where your hooks are. You then need to put a finger of your less dominant hand into the top of the gill slit away from the hooks- see picture. The pike is generally quiet, it cannot jump as it is between your knees and you can easily raise its head off the ground. It will then open its mouth and you can remove the hooks with forceps. If it really wants to it could still close its mouth so keep your fingers away from the teeth and sharp gill rakers. If you cannot reach the hooks with 8-inch forceps from the front you can close the forceps and very carefully insert the closed forceps through the space between the gill cover and the

first gill raker and unhook from there-usually grasping one arm of the treble and turning it upside down will release it. Very



Open wide please



Unhooking a Kennet pike



occasionally the lower treble is taken deeper and is not visible. (Why? Because you left the bite too long- don't do it again!) All may not be lost- pull very gently on the trace and the top part of the pike's stomach will invert slightly and the treble will usually become visible. Remove as above. Be careful here though – do not pull too hard as you could pull the hook points into the pike's heart- and that's the end of it. If you are absolutely sure that you cannot get the hook out then cut the wire with your wire cutters, release the pike with care, hope that it survives and review your bite indication to make sure it never happens again.

The pike is now unhooked and is still in the net on your mat. Hopefully it has been on the bank for well under a minute. If you want to weigh it, the safest way is to weigh the net and the pike and subtract the weight of the net afterwards. There are good weigh slings for pike and by all means use one but don't hang around too long- unlike carp, pike do not take kindly to being out of the water for more than a minute or so. Photos seem to be more important nowadays, but be quick, no mooning around looking thoughtful whilst having pictures from every angle – it's not a carp, right! Get it back in the water and let it rest awhile if it is distressed before letting it swim off. A final grumble - I see so many pictures of big pike being held up in mid-air for the camera with one hand near the head and the other near the tail with an alarming bend in their middle- pike are not carp (which are shorter and don't bend) and that bend could be very harmful; don't do it - best to leave a big pike on the mat, hold its head just off the ground and be photographed for your fans on social media like that. Not so impressive but the pike goes back unharmed.

So, despite my grumbles do please enjoy your pike fishing this winter: keep moving, look after the pike on the bank and do let the editor know about your successes- there are some lovely pike in NAA waters.



LEE STONELL'S ANGLING STORY



I first got into fishing with my Dad when I was 9. It started with a sea fishing rod which we used for lure fishing for pike. We didn't have much money for tackle back then so improvised with a cut off teaspoon and a treble hook on a swivel!!!! With that make shift lure we caught a 15lb 6 pike at the stretch by the French Horn on the Thames in Sonning

That was it – I'd caught the bug! We went most weekends after that and I got to spend some quality time with old man on the bank. Later we got in to beach casting for cod and various other fish down by Bracklesham Bay.

Over the years, I invested in upgraded kit and found a passion in carp fishing. Now it's my time to bring my son along, which keeps a family tradition going that has been passed down. I've been an NAA member for over three years and have also fished for

barbel at Aldermaston as well as pike (and crayfish!) at Bellwood. Recently I gave Dobson's a go where we landed nine commons in a 48hr session!! A chod rig with a snowman 14mm pop up and a mix of ground baits seemed to attract the carp in. In my experience open water is like fishing in the desert, I personally stick to around one rods length from the margins which has brought much success. With Dobsons avoid the low hanging trees on the island as the carp seem to hang around the points and then dive for a snag when hooked. Tight lines!



THE GRAYLING (*Thymallus thymallus*)

By Chris Plumb

The first frosts of autumn always put me in the mood for one of my most favourite fish – the lovely grayling, and aptly named ‘Lady of the Stream’. Grayling are one of the few species you can still tempt when the temperature plummets and they have graced my net on many a cold winter’s day when the mercury has struggled to make it into positive territory. Over the years I have become something of an addicted Thymallophile and the pursuit of a big lady will often see me travelling well beyond the confines of West Berkshire in that quest.



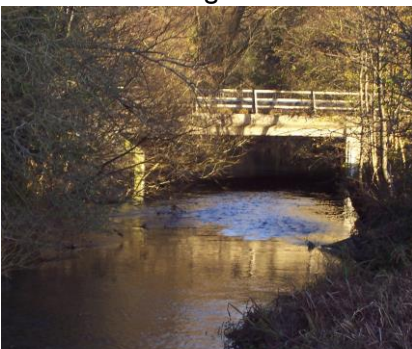
These days – in the south at least – grayling are associated with clear running chalk streams such as the Test, Itchen, Kennet, Lambourn and Dorset Frome. Yet we have the Victorians to thank for this distribution. Grayling were stocked in all these rivers by 19th century river keepers and landowners – and many quickly regretted the decision! In the right conditions grayling can be very fecund – and can rapidly become the dominant species in a stretch of river.

This unwelcome population explosion saw the grayling be described as ‘rather an ugly duckling’ and persecuted by many trout fishing purists. A view I find hard to fathom for such a beautiful looking fish. Some of these beliefs still linger today – and I well remember fishing a stretch of Kennet around 20 years ago where the owner expressly said we could ‘take’ as many grayling as we wanted. We never killed a single one, although we did turn up one time to find over a dozen freshly killed fish in the fishing hut from the previous day’s rods. (These were subsequently taken home and frozen for pike dead baits!)

Having said that grayling flourish in the right conditions, they are also very sensitive to pollution – both chemical and thermal – and are usually the first species to disappear when water quality starts to drop. This ‘role’ as a bio-marker is reflected in the way European rivers are classified – European River Zonation classifies rivers in four taxonomies – one of which is actually called the Grayling Zone. (The other three are; Trout, Barbel & Bream zones!)

Grayling spawn between March and May, hence, despite sometimes being referred to as the 4th Game Fish they share a closed season with coarse species. They lay dark yellow eggs which hatch after 3 weeks to fry with very small yolk sacs – so will quickly look for food and can grow-on rapidly. Yearlings may be over 6 inches long and can reach sexual maturity from 2 years. In the UK the species is quite short lived with an average lifespan of 5-6 years. (They live longer in colder climes such as Norway & Russia). They can grow to a maximum of around 55cm – and a fish this size will be around 4lb. I consider anything over 2lb a rare specimen, this will be a fish of around 45cm – 18 inches in old money.

This interest in Grayling length was fostered by a survey I took part in over several years in the early part of the millennium. (From 2001-2009). I had a scale taped to my landing net handle and every grayling caught was faithfully recorded in a log book which was then posted off at the end of each season. I caught nearly 1300 grayling over this period, from the Itchen, Kennet & Lambourn – and the results of the study were written up in this paper https://www.wildtrout.org/assets/files/news/Grayling-Conservation-Guide_2018_v2.pdf (Page 28 onwards). Even today I still post my catches to the Grayling Society for continued research and monitoring of the species. See: <https://www.graylingsociety.net/catch-returns>



River Kennet, Hambridge

Unfortunately, there are very few grayling to be found in NAA waters. When I first joined the club in the early 1980s they were reasonably abundant at Speen Moors – and I caught a 11b+ grayling on my first ever visit there in 1982. Alas, the ‘Grayling

Zone' has moved upstream and I've not caught a lady from Speen in nearly 2 decades. The last time, as recorded in my angling diary, was 12/3/04 when I caught 3 that day.

In the past, attempts have been made to stock Brimpton with them – and whilst the fast streamy section looks ideal habitat, they have failed to get established. In the last couple of seasons I've caught the odd one from Widmead and Aldermaston – but the most 'reliable' spot for a Kennet grayling from an NAA water is Hambridge. I often catch grayling here – though suspect these fish have dropped down from the River Lambourn.

We are VERY lucky however, to have some free grayling fishing on our doorstep. There are 2 free stretches of the River Lambourn – one behind Shaw social club and Shaw church (up and downstream of the A339), the other upstream of The

Swan on the A4. Both hold reasonable heads of fish with a realistic prospect of fish to 1¼lb and the chance of something bigger. My best this autumn being a fish of 2lb 2oz – a fabled 18inch Grayling and my best from the Lambourn in over 20 years.

Unfortunately, both beats see quite a bit of angling pressure as they have been publicised in the national angling press in recent years. Anglers Mail did a big write up around a decade ago as did Improve Your Coarse Fishing last year. I see quite a few other anglers on these stretches – and they are often asking for directions! Just this autumn I was chatting to someone who had made a 300 mile round trip from Suffolk to try and catch his first grayling!

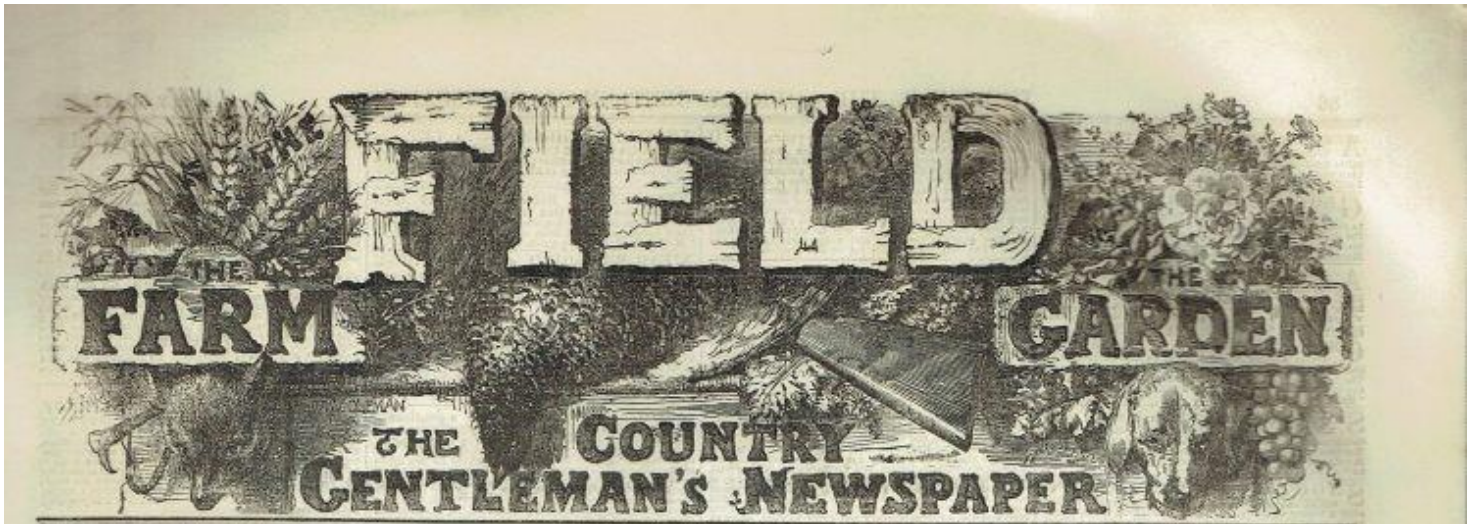
My tactics for catching Grayling are very straightforward – always with a trotting rod, centre-pin and float gear with maggots or red sweetcorn as bait. The biggest challenge is always having hooks and hook-lengths fine enough to get bites yet strong enough to hold a good fish. I usually fish 3lb (0.14mm) bottoms and 18s on the Lambourn, scaling up to 16s to 0.16mm bottoms when I fish the Itchen or Frome. It pays to travel light and keep moving – swims 'go quiet' very quickly after catching fish in clear, shallow water so my maxim is 'catch a couple and move on'. Plus, it also pays to have a change bait – if I've been catching on maggot and the swim has gone dead switching to corn often brings instant results – and the reverse can also happen if I started out with corn.

Some anglers will ledger for grayling – this however is fraught with dangers for the fish as they are very prone to deep hooking with this method. The fight of a grayling is VERY resolute – they will just sit in the current twisting and turning and it can be a real challenge to bring them upstream in fast water. Where possible I might even have my landing net downstream – and walk down to a hooked fish to land. Once banked your problems aren't over, they just will not give up and trying to unhook a grayling and/or take its picture is akin to trying to give a cat a pill. (As illustrated here by Chris's much missed friend, Paul – Ed.) Another reason why trying to unhook a deep hooked fish is such a struggle and to be avoided if possible. After all this exertion in the water and on the bank, grayling are very prone to going 'belly up' when returned so it pays to return them as quickly as possible and ensure they swim off strongly. If I intend to photograph a fish I will often rest it in a net in the water after unhooking before I take its portrait.



My PB grayling has stood at 2lb 15oz since 2001 and I have spent every winter for the past 2 decades trying to get a 3lber. This PB was from Lower Itchen Fishery – a day ticket venue I still fish every year and which still gives you a chance of a 2lber. Since 2011 I have also been a member Dorchester and District AS. They have 2 beats of the River Frome – the river that holds the current British Record (a fish of 4lb 8oz caught in 2019) and the DDAS beats do throw up the occasional 3lb+ fish. Alas, one has not graced my net yet, still, my Frome best was a stunning fish of 2lb 14oz – but the quest for an even bigger one continues!

THE GRAYLING(2)



The 9th May 1891 issue of '*The Field, the Country Gentleman's Newspaper*', contains a locally-written article attracted our interest

THE GRAYLING IN A NEW ROLE

Whether grayling are or are not a desirable addition on a trout stream is a point on which very high authorities are inclined to differ, and we have no intention of reopening the controversy. But putting trout streams as such out of the question, it may be profitable to consider whether grayling might not be introduced with advantage into the clearer of those rivers and streams which are at present devoted principally to coarse fish, so called. It is very doubtful whether grayling would survive in those very slow-flowing streams, which after all are the best for the bottom fisher, such as one finds in the fens country; but in rivers like the Colne and the Kennet in its lower reaches, where coarse fish are plentiful and trout few, grayling would be a great addition to the bottom fisher. We are inclined to think that in suitable water grayling increase far faster than trout. Take the Kennet at Hungerford, for example. Wallace, the keeper of the Hungerford Fly Fishing Club, informed the writer that the great stock of grayling which are now to be found in that part of the river all sprang from about twenty brace of mature fish and a couple of thousand fry. Now the grayling outnumber the trout by far, and are of large size. They do not rise to the fly, in that respect resembling the Hungerford trout, but anyone who fished after the method of roach fishers, or swum the worm in north country fashion, would doubtless enjoy fine sport. Another stream in which the number of grayling have greatly increased is the River Lambourn in Berkshire. At present they have not been systematically fished for, but a few were caught last autumn. They are most of considerable size, some of them over 2lb. in weight, and if they are found to rise freely, will be esteemed by many an acquisition to the stream. One landowner, who feared the too great increase of these fish, recently had his water netted, and presented the results to the Newbury Angling Association. Nearly 200 large fish, averaging about a pound, were caught and turned into the Kennet. The rapid increase in grayling may be accounted for by the fact that they spawn at a time of year (April) when floods, so destructive to ova, are of rare occurrence. The eggs hatch out in a few weeks, so are not exposed for any length of time to raids by waterfowl, &c. Trout and salmon, on the other hand, spawn in autumn and winter, the season of floods, and their eggs are over two months in the hatching. The streams which seem to suit the grayling best of all are those which are spring fed, and do not principally rely on their water on drainage from the land, For example, we may point to the Hampshire Avon, the Kennet and the Lambourn. But in the Thames, that drains a considerable watershed, grayling do not seem to have thriven. It may be, however, that a sufficient number have not been introduced to properly try the experiment. In the lower reaches of the Lodden grayling have been introduced within the last two or three years, and it is too soon yet to say what amount of success has resulted from the experiment. It seems more probable that grayling would thrive in the Thames or the Lodden

than in less clear streams, such as the Bedfordshire Ouse. At the same time, anyone who has the control of a river which is for any reason unsuited for trout, might try the experiment of introducing a few brace of grayling, ten brace or so of mature fish probably yielding better results than a considerable number of fry. If these fish multiplied and rose to the fly, they would afford excellent sport, and if they were bad risers they could be fished for successfully with bait, and would be far more satisfactory to catch than roach or dace.

BLANKETY BLANK

By Martin Strike

You can watch all of the YouTube videos, follow the angling press and read every one of the books recommended in the last newsletter by friend of the newsletter Chris Plumb, but there is one aspect of our great sport that you will have to learn about yourself. The hard way.

I'm happy to give anyone a 'how to do it' lesson as I'm particularly well qualified, but you can't be a REAL angler without becoming proficient for yourself, and that's the noble art of blanking, particularly in the winter months.

It's hard enough when you've had a netful to explain to your loved ones how eight hours spent on a chilly river bank has been both a good use of time and preferable to their company, but when you've blanked – well that's a toughie.

Of course, blanking for some is almost a badge of honour. Yes, I'm looking to you, carp and barbel hunters. Jake Pictor of this manor admitted to me that blanked for 20+ nights on Collins saying, 'It felt like everything I did was wrong – I just couldn't find them.' I shiver at the prospect, not only the cold nights – which are for bed time in my book – but I'm just too impatient. Within reason, I'd rather catch a number of smaller fish than one fairly big one.

We all know that there is more to fishing than catching fish, and we only ever go out hoping to catch, not expecting to, yet sitting there blanking still triggers the confidence gremlins into driving the brain to churn and rechurn the following:

'Have I got the presentation right?'

'Am I using the right bait?'

'Did I put out enough loose feed?'

'Have small fish mopped it up?'

'Did I put out too much loose feed?'

'How did that guy on Facebook catch so much here yesterday?'

'Did my rig tangle on the cast?'

'Was my cast accurate enough?'

'Am I in the right swim?'

'If I move, will fish enter the swim I was in previously?'

'Are there actually any fish in this goddam lake?'



The word 'blank' itself has a surprisingly confusing etymology. As one might guess, It's recorded from Norman times as coming from the French word *blanc* meaning 'white, pale and colourless', and this is certainly fitting of my face, heart and soul when returning from yet another fishless session. However, blank also means 'white and gleaming' in Frankish, but it's in Old High German that the confusion starts where *blanc* translates to shining, bright, which certainly doesn't reflect the general mood. This is sweetened by the Old English *blanca*, meaning 'white horse'. On balance, I'd much rather trudge back to the car thinking I'd not actually blanked at all, but had a while horse.

This Spring I had enough white horses to rival the field of the Grand National, even managing a third blank in five trips to Willows – yes that Willows, where the carp need little excuse jump out of the water on to your unhooking mat. Something had to be done, so on one of my many hours of I started researching blanks and how to avoid them.

The Best of Fishing cites 12 contributing factors to excessive levels of blanking:

- You're not putting enough thought into the location you're fishing
- You're not willing to pack up and move
- You're not altering rigs
- You're not paying attention to the water
- You're not trying to target the fish at different depths
- Your baits and hooks are too large
- You're not trying to stalk fish
- You're not fishing highly stocked venues
- You're not casting accurately to a baited swim
- You're not maximising attraction
- Your hooks are not sharp enough



Dean Butler clearly NOT blanking

Hmm, if I'm honest with myself, I'm certainly guilty of at least four of these, and probably more. I take a journal with me when I fish, ideally to record catches, but has more than enough empty pages for me to write some of these down as reminders to refer to and steel my resolve.

Confidence in the method, the bait and your water craft is essential, the rest is down to time. As revered member Dean Butler told me as I stomped back to the car after another fishless session, 'you didn't blank – you just ran out of time!'

And then it's good to remember that fish are cold blooded therefore their body temperature is that of the surrounding water. As it gets colder their metabolic rate drops, so less food is needed to survive. In some cases the need to feed stops altogether. The result...we blank. In such conditions we might change the species we fish for ie fish for roach and perch or chub as these will feed better in the colder conditions.

As well as movements in temperature, fish behaviour can be changed by air moving from low to high pressure or vice versa, the wind, even the position of the moon and these influences will always be largely a mystery to us. It's all part of life's rich tapestry and perhaps it's more surprising we ever catch anything.

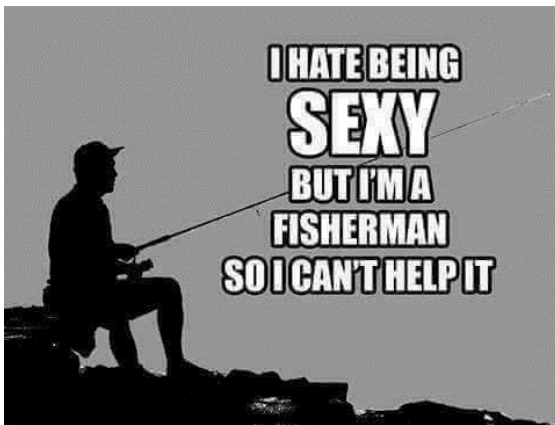
I read the following in my research and thought there may be value in it: 'I work on an hourly change if things are quiet. If there is activity, such as bubbles but no bites, I change bait or methods 1/2 hourly. If I'm waggler or pole fishing I set my rig so that the float will just sink with the weight of the bait, then set the depth so the tip is only just out of the water. This rig is going to indicate if anything even looks at it. If I'm getting indications but no real bites, I fish more over depth and change baits between worm corn/corn maggot etc. While over depth

I take some ground bait and make it damp enough to bind it to the line and put a marble-sized ball on the line 2 inches from the hook.

I'm certainly going to bear this in mind, but is there an upside to blanking? Of course not, but here are some affirmations that might help ease the self-loathing while staring at a steadfastly unmoving bobbin:

- Blanking make me even more appreciative of catching fish of any size.
- A day fishing, even blanking, must be better than daytime television.
- Remember you are hunting wild animals in an environment alien to your own. It's a bit like playing chess, only the fish keep changing the rules.
- Inactivity gives the perfect opportunity to re-organise your tackle box, make up some hook links, cut your toe nails and scratch off that dried-on ground bait from the bottom of your luggage.
- When as a young man you went clubbing expecting to pull a bird, remember how many times have you blanked, and spent even more on those futile attempts that you are now spending on bait.
- You have time and opportunity in this busy world to take in your surrounding and appreciate the wonders of nature. Alternatively you can contemplate you navel or consider the meaning of life and you place in the Cosmos. It goes without saying that whilst you are engaged in such enlightening reveries, you will miss the only bite you get all day.

It's *how* you blank that counts. As long as a few hours after you've flung your useless rods back in the garage you've got past the disappointment and can admit to yourself that you still had fun and would give it another go tomorrow if you could, then you've blanked well. If your rods have been snapped and thrown into the trees behind your swim, then perhaps there's room for improvement.



Often it's down to just a bad day and there is a reason the fish have not come on and not because we did something wrong – unless others have been catching which is especially gut-wrenching. But even if they're not, it's natural to feel some disappointment when packing up, but try not dwell on it for long. Blanking occasionally is all part and parcel of what we do and gives us something that offers a perspective on which to judge the better days.

Blanks even happen to the best. NAA's terrific-trout catcher Josh Golding told me 'I have my fair share of blanks. I'll always say to people especially if they're doing a couple of nights fishing, if you're

on a blank have a good walk of the lake and try and find the fish.'

But whether your blanking or catching the only thing that matters is that you enjoy it! Remember, one more blank is a session closer to a landing a Kipper. If you cannot cope with the blanks, you are doing the wrong type of fishing and if fishing big waters with low fish stocks, then you have to do the time. And after all, there are worse things to blank at – to lose a rugby match to nil is humiliating, and sitting polishing your snooker cue while your opponent racks up a 147 break is a killer. Darts is an odd one – a 'nil' score means you either got to 501 first, or else had everyone in the pub running as every chuck bounced off the wire frame, the surrounding tyre or the scoreboard.

In the sagely words of NAA trustee Richard Sylvester, 'my suggestion would be don't go fishing - then the blanks disappear!'

Learn from your mistakes, fish for the conditions and time of year, watch your rigs on any given day and adapt to conditions, if it means fishing lighter do it, fish the snags, don't follow the crowd, never believe that one peg will produce day after day, use your eyes and your instincts, play the percentages, accept some days it ain't going to happen and then you will be an angler my son - ala Kipling.

THAT'S ALL FOLKS!

A big thank you to all who have contributed to this issue. It's particularly good to hear the views of ARK and the CRT with whom we share a passion for our waterways.

If you enjoyed this issue and found other members fishing stories of interest, please consider sharing your own angling story with us for a future newsletter. You know the address by now: comms@newburyangling.org.uk

I hope you enjoy your winter fishing as much as this feller.

Martin Strike

Editor

