



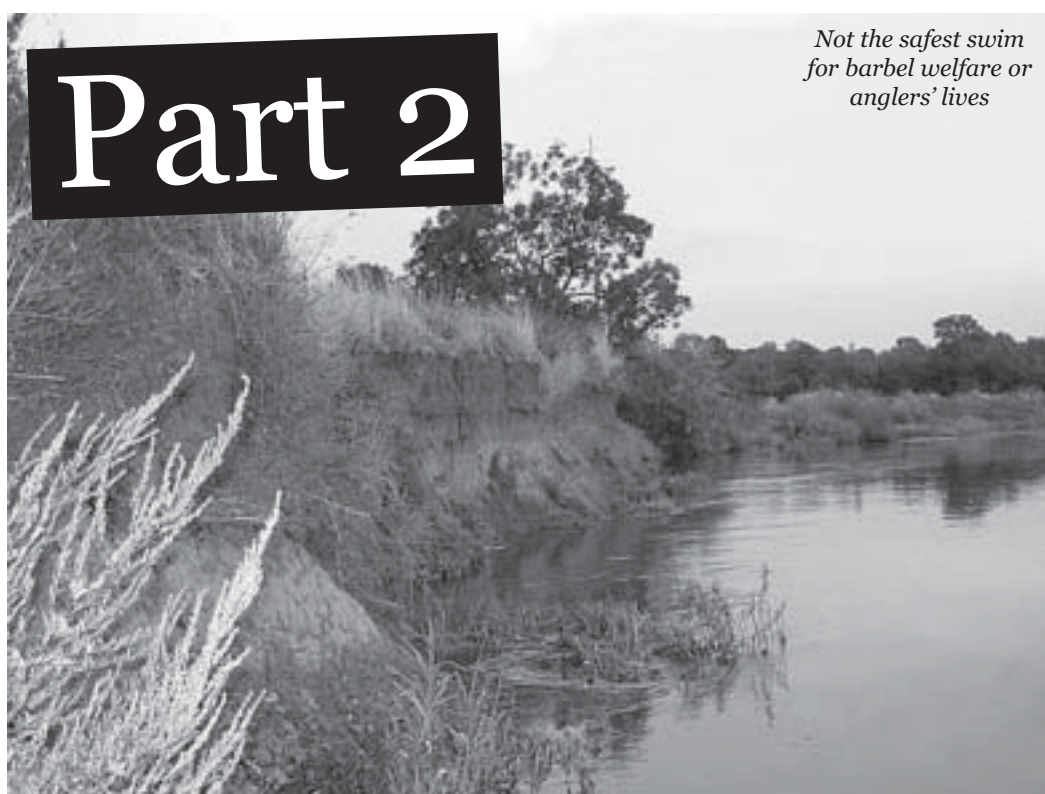
What's wrong with Keepnets anyway?

My initial question/ reaction to this was, "I wonder why not?", but, as I kept one beady eye on the e-mail facility for threatening incoming messages and the other less beady eye on the closed BS forum springing up with a thread entitled 'Hang that eelfisher chappie from the highest tree at Sutton by the seaside' (borrowed with thanks from the Denton loon TB), nothing materialised to substantiate my fears.

What a bunch of 'wusses' I thought (northern jargon for 'softies')..... then the candlelight started to flicker in my small brain. Either the readership of BF21 thought I had made a reasonable point in that keepnets, and a banning of them, might not be the issue here but rather a start to education of better barbel welfare with our fellow anglers out there was the correct way forward.....or.....such was the guilt that many of you felt, realising that given our huge self-elevated position over those mere mortals that fish for barbel outside of the maroon polo shirt brigade that we call the Holy BS, that nearly all of you were actually barbel fishing with 'less' barbel welfare involved than you originally thought. (It's never a bad thing to admit that you could do things better.....I admit it after every article I write!!)

There was one other suggested reason for the lack of reaction to the article and one, not to be named member of the RATS, said that "probably no one

What's wrong with keepnets anyway? Or should that now read 'The route to better barbel welfare', inside and outside the ranks of the BS. Firstly, let me say that I was expecting a small amount of flack from the first article... however, shock horror, it never came my way.



bothered to read it after the opening paragraph"... (thanks for that fellowship support 'Jinx'.)

Anyway, regardless of the reaction, or lack of it, to the first article, I did say that I would write a second part to it, so here goes. At the end of the initial article I said "in part two we'll see where I

have actually got to in my quest and where 'we' can make a difference in the barbel welfare cause".

Okay.....here's the rub....I personally haven't got much further in the quest for total barbel welfare from every angler that fishes our river systems but something did happen after BF21 was

published that made me re-think this issue from another angle. There's good news and there's more good news. The first bit of good news is that since I wrote the first article, a couple of things sort of came to fruition unexpectedly, to give me clearer hope that one day anglers might adopt a more



What's Wrong With Keepnets Anyway? By Steve 'eelfisher' Richardson

knowledgeable attitude to better barbel welfare. The other good news is that there won't be a 'part three' to this article (sighs all round).

I'll share with you the two events that occurred that have given me hope in 'our' shared desired quest. Firstly, I started my 2006/07 season off with a decision to not take any of my barbel out of the water after landing them, should I be fortunate enough to hook any in the first instance.....this decision was also taken by my fellow RATS.....they, the barbel, would be given a couple of minutes recovery time in the landing net without being given the opportunity to gulp in air as they were hoisted up onto the unhooking mat. One natural factor to help me see whether this would really help the barbel to stabilise quicker after capture was the fact that we were to endure a long, dry, very hot summer with lower and slower than normal river conditions.

I, and my fellow Trent and Derwent RATS, fished favourite Trent and Derbyshire Derwent stretches and applied the same few minutes in the landing net scenario every time we caught a barbel. Quite amazingly, between us to date we have caught an awful lot of barbel (this is written 24/9/06).....every barbel we have caught has fought its rocks off and every barbel bar none never needed more than a minute recovery time before its release. All swam off as well as any nursed barbel did in the past; most swam off better than any nursed barbel in the past. This applied to those barbel that were simply unhooked and released back into the river as only a guestimate of their size was judged to be needed, as well as those that we thought warranted a ride in a weigh sling and a photo. (We are suitably pleased with the results thus far.)

At the forefront of my / our decision to introduce this new code into our barbel fishing repertoire I knew, from past experience, that a comparison to the way that we were going to treat our barbel and the way that others were going to treat theirs was soon to be exposed and it wasn't long in coming to the front once the initial first casts of the

"A couple of minutes recovery time in the landing net without being given the opportunity to gulp in air"

season had been made. All it needed was for me to switch on my computer and log-in to a couple of barbel related fishing sites. In 'internet land' the bells were ringing....."Should we stop fishing for barbel in the hot weather?"..."Is anyone else having trouble with recovery times?"..."What's the longest you have had to hold your barbel this year before release?"...etc, etc.

Some guy came on and said that he was fishing a slow and lower river than in normal conditions and that his barbel were taking up to 30 minutes to recover and he thought that, in his considered opinion, everyone should stop fishing for barbel due to this phenomenon until the weather subsidedI was almost compelled to hit the 'mouse' and suggest that perhaps instead of self banning barbel fishing throughout the country, that most folk would do better to assess their manner of barbel welfare applications in their fishing. Then I realised that I was about to fall into the trap of internet forum education suicide (my man Mr. Pope knows all about this.....as does our present General Secretary now.) Education via internet chat rooms is a pastime that I realised a long while back now is a wasted exercise.

Here is my example of how this education probably would have gone: I, a BS committee chappie, posts about a better way to do things immediately after the barbel is netted. A few posts follow this with some degree of support. Then some wag comes on and says 'BS barbel policeman'.....and all hell breaks out.....end result = credibility destruction.

Mind you, if I wasn't connected to the BS committee, my post would probably have enhanced the topic to go on and win thread of the month.....the moral of the tale is that when you take up some form of office within angling, there's folk out there who only want to kick you in the head, no matter how sound your debate is.

And so, back to the present, with this small initial action of leaving the barbel in the water for a short while after the fight. The signs look good for this being an immediate improvement on the welfare of the barbel. Undoubtedly there are a few reading this who have always done this whilst barbel fishing....good for you I say and here's hoping that many more of you will give it a go after reading this. Maybe those of you who write for the monthly publications and internet sites will add this little bit of advice to your articles and, by doing so, will educate a few more out there who hang on your every word.....there is power in the written word.

If you think this through, you will see that there's more to this than just leaving the barbel in the landing net rather than the usual lift straight out of the river. Swim selection comes into

the whole scenario. It's not a good move lying on your belly, toes securing a feeble hold on the last tussock of grass at bank height, with your arms stretched and fingers' grasping the last two inches of landing net pole, with the net head only just submerged as the barbel is enclosed within the mesh. There's barbel welfare and there's plain stupid.

And for those who have just said "there's always a drop-net".....I say, drop dead. (Not one to sit on the fence is this RAT.)

The first thing I would suggest if you are serious about barbel welfare is that you only select swims where you can safely hold a barbel in the water after capture. This does cause a problem because the barbel's welfare is now put before the angler's glory. It's a matter of conscience that I cannot help you with....only you can decide which is more important to you. There is a swim that I could fish on every visit to the river and catch many big barbel from it but I limit myself to only fishing it in flood conditions nowadays, simply because of its natural make-up. (You do have to be a happy bunny that floodwater and feeding barbel go hand in hand, don't you!!) In normal conditions the swim is difficult to net fish from and it's definitely a bitch to put fish back in from and so, in the past, I used to take the fish to the next up-river swim to return them.....and endure the twenty minute hold the fish routine, and my breath, until it was strong enough to swim off.

The key word there is 'in the past'. I made the decision to leave the swim alone in normal water level scenarios with the barbel's welfare in mind.....and that decision has knowingly cost me a few big barbel. However, when those rains come and the river rises.....it's fill your boots time.



I would just add this little bit of extra thought to the 'hot summers and long recovery times' for barbel. Even in deepest winter, the barbel I have caught and removed from the water immediately have needed long recovery times. I believe that its 'air' being gulped rather than warm water conditions that cause us to have to nurse our barbel back to fitness. It's always air that passes out from the gills before the barbel becomes upright and back to full strength. I would add that warm water must have a detrimental effect as well though.

Enough of my thoughts on 'our' barbel welfare attitude.....preaching to the converted???.....not 100% me thinks.

The second event that occurred came about when a guy called Julian Taylor, the Angling Development Officer for the NFA, decided to compile a barbel welfare code on behalf of the NFA. Steve Pope directed Julian to our BS code of conduct and he had a tinker with it. At this point our leader, Steve Pope, spoke with Julian about his tinkered version and then forwarded it to me and asked me to give it a quick look over to make sure that we were happy with things. I did as I was asked and made a couple of three or four small word changes and sent this back to Steve for his consideration. Steve then suggested to Julian that he should ensure that the BS was mentioned as the compilers of the document. Julian looked over the draft sent back to him and after a short while decided that he could do no better than to download our code in its entirety. He added a few photos alongside each stage and submitted it for publication as the NFA's Barbel Welfare Code. From my perspective, all I can say to that is 'very nice and thank you very much'. (What

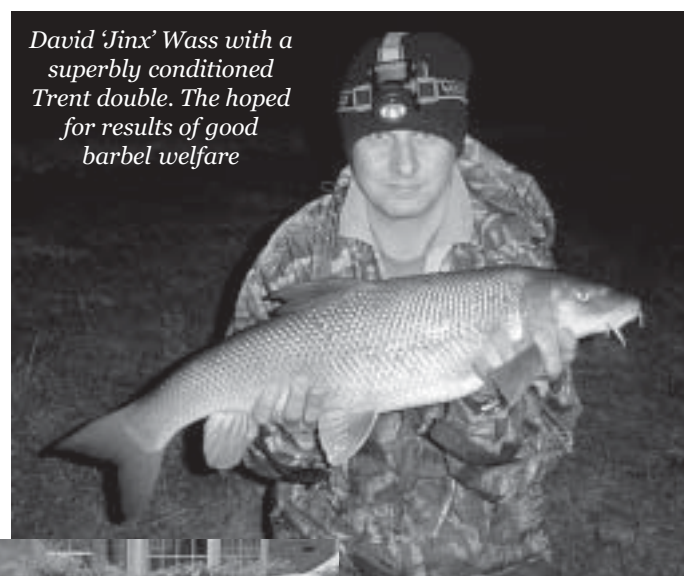
a tool for me to use now in my slow education of barbel welfare towards not only pleasure anglers but the match fishing fraternity as well....those fellow anglers who operate under the flag of the NFA.)

Since that action took place, I know that it has been sent around a huge loop of SAA, FACT and Fisheries Welfare Board members asking them if they were happy with its content as a code to put out to all fisheries and praising Julian



*The founder members of the T&D RATS
(Photo Courtesy of Mike Berridge)*

for the hard work he has put in to this project. I replied to all saying that the code was a full download of the BS barbel welfare code with a few photos added into it by Julian and that the BS had also put in some time into making the draft the document that is today. (I like for things to be credited to those who actually do the hard graft). I also said that I was more than happy for it to be issued to river angling clubs but couldn't support it being sent to stillwater fisheries as I and the BS believed that barbel had no place within stillwater environments and fisheries.....this message was looped to a cast of thousands and not one person replied to my response. So be it I thought, at least when the document is published the message will



David 'Jinx' Wass with a superbly conditioned Trent double. The hoped for results of good barbel welfare

be sent out to everyone and everyone will benefit from our efforts in putting the code together.

I later learned via an SAA member looped onto the cast of thousands that my message was received in the spirit that it was sent and came across as one of the most constructive 'against stillwater barbel' rants he had read.....my thoughts being 'cast your grains of wheat everywhere and some will fall on stony ground....but lots will fall on good soil and listening ears and the good work will continue'. If we (I) had decided to withdraw our code, our name and support for it, then surely this would be the worse of any scenario. My understanding and belief is that the BS are the guardians of barbel welfare and as such we should

ensure that we have our name attached to any barbel welfare schemes out there in politico land.

So, not too much forward movement since the last article but give 'ourselves' a pat on the back because it is forward movement at least....one step at a time. I'll give Barry Norris a much deserved thank you here, as due to his efforts and time in formulating the Auction on behalf of the Research and Conversation Fund, we should now be able to make stronger contributions within barbel welfare situations. Lastly, I should like to thank everyone who offered prizes for the auction and bigger thanks still to those who dug deep and bid successfully for the items on offer. The difficult bit will be deciding where the money can be used, but heck.....what a problem to be able to think about.

There's one last thank you and it goes to the guys who I photograph as added packing to my efforts in writing. I thank them here because I never ask permission before hand.....every one of them has barbel welfare at the forefront of their angling.

Good fishing to you all.....put as much thought into barbel welfare as you do in bait and tactics and we can't go far wrong in the end.