

Pete Reading River Diary Season 2009/2010

Close Season Blues

14th March 2010

The end of the season always brings with it a mixture of regret and relief. Never having done so little barbel fishing over the winter, and with trips restricted by the weather amongst other factors, the season sort of withered away, finishing with a couple of trips after pond perch. The interest in perch was the saving grace however, and a four pounder and a sprinkling of threes made up for a fairly lacklustre period of fishing since I returned from India. These stillwater commercial perch are fat and bristly and remarkably photogenic fish, especially when they reach respectable sizes. They fight like stink too, and give very bold unhurried bites. Looking forward to searching out some more perch on the rivers and canals next season, though the barbel will still get a lot of attention!

Close season tasks lately involve going to a whole round of meetings with EA, Rivers Trusts, and local schools involved in the Wessex Salmon and Rivers Trust Trout in Schools project. We have seven sites at the moment, where little brown trout have hatched from eggs and are currently being fed and cared for by the kids. Soon time to release them into the river, and the tanks can then be converted into little river habitats, full of gravel, weed, invertebrates and tiny native fish like bullheads, sticklebacks and minnows. Last year one school grew on a tiny chub to quite respectable size.

I have meetings involving restoration works on the Kennet, the Teme, the Avon and the Stour shortly, and the paperwork and email exchanges involved make me feel like I am back at work! There hardly seems time to go fishing, but will wait until the weather perks up a bit more.

giving a presentation on his river fishing methods, and I will give a research and conservation presentation too. Hopefully Peter Wheat will be coming along too, and there will be a chance for local river anglers to have a good chat and share the experiences of the last season. The St Leonards Hotel, just outside Ringwood is the new venue. More details on the homepage and in the press.



Four two pond perch



Wish it was this warm; me and Dave Plummer wade the Cauvery



A beaker of baby browns ready to release

Avon chub on the feed

19th February 2010

The Hampshire Avon was clearing and dropping, and despite the news that three big salmon had been reported, I was after a winter chub session, and hoping for a bigger than average fish. The middle reaches have never fished better for chub, and the number of seven plus fish reported each year is rising, with fish scraping eight pounds on the cards. There are good numbers of fish too, and if you can find a big shoal then a dozen or more fish is easily possible, with a very high average size. I rarely weigh an Avon chub these days unless it looks over six, and fives are commonplace. In fact, they are more likely to be over five than under in some swims, and there are hordes of fish from a few inches to a pound coming through.

I must have chosen the wrong swim in terms of size of fish though, taking six chub up to a mere 4.12 in an afternoon and losing one big fish that may even have been a barbel. It was either a barbel or an eight pound chub, but I will never know, because it slipped the hook after chugging off downstream very strongly and then hanging solid and unmoving in the current for an eternity before coming off. I went back to the swim two days later to catch the big one, but never had a bite.

The water was clear enough to use maggots and a nice heavy feeder, and after a couple of tiny rainbow trout that must have escaped from a fish farm upstream, the tip banged right round more solidly as chub after chub homed in on the feeder and hooked themselves nicely and innocently in the top lip. No need for a super short

hooklength; these fish were hungry and well on the feed. Playing biggish chub on light tackle is good fun, and a little unnerving if you think the fish is really big, but unless there are bad snags nearby it is only a matter of time before they tire. These fish were all around four pounds, and I was unlucky not to get a five plus or even a six, considering the average size from the river these days. These fish were all rather lean and could easily be a pound underweight, and may not have fed much in the nasty cold conditions that have made river fishing so hard lately. Good fun though, and they all felt like seven pounders in the heavy flow.

I also had three bullheads, the sort of fish that are too small to give you a bite, but are found hanging glumly on the end when you reel in, no doubt having emerged greedy and unsuspecting from under a rock to grab a maggot. They are actually quite ugly fish if you look at them closely, and perhaps it is low self esteem that leads to them hiding under rocks for most of their lives.



Greedy bullhead



Greedy chub



Lean Avon chub

First day on the Frome

14th February 2010

My first visit to the Dorset Frome with grayling as the quarry, and encouraging to see the river back within its banks and looking to be in good order. The vile weather of the post Christmas period meant that even travelling on the winding lanes of Dorset was a risk, and the river had been reported as being high and coloured and full of snow water and road salt. A relatively mild and dry spell meant that there would be a chance of a grayling or two before the end of the season, and a grayling or two was all that resulted. They were both big fish though, and a respectable reward for an afternoon trotting. First fish was a great lump of 2.12, that hammered the float down at the end of a long tricky trot, and then sat on the bottom like a sulky salmon for ages. Sometimes the bigger ones do sit like this; a dead weight, just holding station in the current and acting as if they do not know they are hooked. A bit of teasing, changing direction of pull on the rod, an easing off the pressure, and it exploded briefly into action with a bit of frantic surface thrashing, before coming meekly to the net on its back. These big steely grey grayling are impressive beasts, and look absolutely huge in the net, and news of a four

pound plus from the river made me wonder how big one of those would look My biggest ever grayling was a lean three and a half pounder that would have been four the previous winter.

The only other bite of the day was a slightly smaller fish of two three, which was a brighter, fatter younger looking fish that showed all the signs of putting on a pound or so before the end of its life. He gave a much more lively fight, leaping and rushing about and shaking his head in apparent anger right to the end.

Both fish needed a long recovery time, and like all grayling of any size, must be retained in the net for several minutes until they right themselves and start to push at the meshes. Only then should they be released and allowed to return to the river. They may look undignified, lying upside down and gulping, but are best left alone in slack water and allowed to repay the oxygen debt to their muscles. They turn the right way up once their strength returns, and messing about with them and holding them in fast water only stresses them more and can kill them with misplaced kindness. The same can apply to barbel, which should generally be left to simply breathe in slack water rather than held in a current, which often actually delays a proper recovery.



2.12 Frome grayling



Fat two pounds three ounces,
fantastic fighter!

A day on the Test

5th February 2010

A day on a quiet stretch of the little River Test made a strange contrast to the raging waters of the Cauvery, but I needed to get used to the sort of fishing that would now be the norm for the last few weeks of the season. The tiny hooks, gossamer line and flimsy rod and reel felt a bit different to uptiders and multipliers, but a few hours trotting and I was soon back in the swing of things, although still feeling a bit jet-lagged and groggy. A layer or three of extra clothing was needed to help me acclimatise, and the thick jacket and boots felt most cumbersome after a couple of weeks fishing in shorts and sandals.

The fish were in a good mood, and responded nicely to a few pints of red maggot, and first to succumb were a selection of trout, from bright silver sea trout to well conditioned browns, out of season but in a fighting fit state for the time of year. The sea trout were very lean and clean, and no doubt recovering well after spawning, and on light tackle they were a testing adversary, with fish up to three pounds giving some strong and determined battles.

The grayling were equally fit, and as later spawners were rather fatter around the middle in most cases. The biggest grayling of the day was a real clonker of two pounds fourteen ounces, and it is said that these bigger fish with huge flamboyant dorsals are invariably the males. He was a lean fish, and in best condition would have been a comfortable three pounder. The dorsal was one of the most impressive I have seen, giving him the air of a marlin. These big fish are close to the end of their lives, but with luck we could meet again next year when he is a few ounces bigger. A spotless little chub of about a pound, and a lovely roach of about the same size came along in between the grayling, trout and salmon parr, and a few hours on the float had me quite exhausted, but well satisfied, at the end of my first day back to fishing at home.



2.14 Test grayling, impressive dorsal



Silvery sea trout

Mighty mahseer on the Cauvery

1st February 2010

After a period of either not fishing or failing to catch anything of any consequence on our icy cold, grim English rivers, a long awaited trip to the Cauvery River in Southern India proved to be a most welcome experience, which is a bit of an understatement really.

The journey from the airport to the river lodges was an amazing white-knuckle ride, with the mad chaos of Bangalore traffic only slightly less frightening than the country roads. Everybody is in a desperate hurry to get somewhere, and there seem to be no rules. The constant hooting of horns was apparently aimed blindly at

every other road user, which included the pedestrians, cattle, ox carts, motor bikes, motorised rickshaws and lorries, all overloaded with people and goods. Our driver was on his mobile phone for almost the entire journey, and was an exponent of the near head-on collision technique of overtaking. The nerve of the oncoming driver always broke first, thankfully.

The Cauvery is a wild, rocky mountain-fed river, with a tremendous fall, which meant that the long slow pools were interspersed with some scary rapids, which were often the favoured lie of the mahseer.

Fishing was either from frail looking coracles, home-made from bamboo and tarpaulin, or from rocky outcrops, with a coracle close by should a fish be hooked that needed to be followed. The river is full of fish, including small silver mahseer, a range of catfish, barbel and tilapia, as well as some carp-type things that were highly prized as food by the guides. The bigger mahseer are rarer, of course, and by no means as big as they used to be, but fish of 80-90lbs were reported this year.

Bait usually comprised a huge boilie the size of a grapefruit, made from ragi, a millet flour, and cunningly flavoured. Soft uncooked ragi would last only seconds because of the small fish, and the huge boiled ragi balls would often only survive for an hour or less. Forty pound mono and uptide rods are needed to cope with the power of the bigger mahseer, as well as the rocky nature of the bottom, which was mainly basalt or granite, with a few sandbanks in the slower areas. A bite from a mahseer is not so much a bite from a fish as a force of nature. One minute you are sitting peacefully, feeling the nibbles of small fish, or subtle changes in the current, the next you are having your arms wrenched from your sockets as something immensely powerful hooks itself and rushes off downstream, or upstream if you are lucky. My biggest did go upstream, fortunately, and despite going to ground behind a rock for a few minutes, and making some sizzling runs, it finally succumbed after a relatively short fight, and was soon recovering on the stringer. The fish are well cared for by the guides, who recognise their worth, and a great silver mahseer of almost fifty pounds was soon swimming strongly back into the current.

The mahseer are a major resource to the area, but like our rivers, their home is under threat from the usual demands of humanity. The pools outside the national parks are still dynamited, and dead and stunned fish retrieved for food. The hydroelectric dams are utilised more intensively, and plans are afoot to build more of them, and the water of the river is going to be increasingly abstracted to meet the needs of the rising tide of the Indian population. Pollution will no doubt take a toll in the future too, and there was some risk in wading in the river, which I was careful not to drink. A dead body, partly consumed by crocodiles, drifted past on the last day, and nobody in camp seemed to be remotely surprised.



48lb Cauvery mahseer



Big mahseer, big mouth!



A murrel, destined to be dinner!

Final Stour stocking goes ahead

14th December 2009

The recent high water conditions meant that the stocking of the final 3000 barbel into the Dorset Stour has been delayed, and it was at barely 24 hours notice that we heard that Calverton was sending the precious cargo down from Nottingham to Dorset. This is only part of a restoration strategy for the middle river that the BS, local clubs and the EA have been involved in, and there is still a lot of river enhancement to be done. The Agency have done some really impressive work on the river downstream of Blandford, targeted at areas degraded by the dredgings done in the seventies. The removal of millions of tonnes of gravel destroyed spawning areas and changed the flow regime of the river in such a way that the salmon population was all but wiped out, with salmon catches collapsing almost immediately. It may well be that we are only now seeing the effect on barbel populations, as the numbers of barbel continue to decline throughout the river. It is to be hoped that some thought will be given to further restoration on the lower river at Throop, where the barbel fishing is getting worse every year, with little sign of recruitment in sufficient numbers to see a viable barbel fishery being maintained. I remember wading across the river at Barbel Corner at Throop and fishing swims where a dozen or more barbel in a day was a common bag of fish. I also remember watching the dragline dredging huge amounts of gravel out of the river to produce an enormous hole that even now becomes static in the summer. Shallow streamy gravel runs replaced with a great, still pool that offers habitat for bream and carp rather than dace, chub, salmon and barbel. This exercise was repeated all along the river, and it is no coincidence that gravel spawners have all suffered as a result, and fry have to cope with violent flash floods as the newly sculpted river rushes rainwater to the sea in a matter of hours, when it used to take days or weeks.

The little barbel were a welcome sight, and all of them swam off full of life, and into a seemingly vast and dangerous environment. It will be a few years before there is any evidence that they have survived in sufficient numbers to repopulate the river. Next season I intend to spend a lot of time spotting for them on the shallows close to the stocking sites, and am encouraged by the news that there have already been sightings of some fish that must have been from the first stocking two years ago. These were fish of between one and two pounds, and

they may be breeders by next year! Stocking should only be considered when the causes of a decline have been identified and are being addressed, and I am much happier to see funds going into habitat work and research than stock fish.

The fish we stocked yesterday would have cost four or five pounds each from a commercial supplier, so we are most grateful for the EA supplying us with nine thousand of them over the last three years! Now we must plan and spend the five thousand pounds plus that the BS and local clubs have on the habitat work that will ensure that the barbel and other coarse fish populations in the river have a better home to live in, and will be able to sustain their own numbers!



Baby barbel go into a new home



This bit of Stour recently restored, with backwater reopened



Bucket of barbel

Perch in the cold

7th December 2009

Not been fishing much at all in this wet and miserable weather, but the cold dry days are OK for a bit of perchng, especially in new territory. There is plenty of scope to explore on the River Kennet, and it is quite interesting just spending a few hours walking the river and looking for likely spots, then just concentrating on fishing for the last few hours, when the chance of a fish is better anyway. I am told that these Kennet fish are much more likely to feed at dusk and into darkness, though dusk is late enough for me. I planned to stop when I could not see my float, but I had four nice fish in the last hour, topped by a three pounder just on dusk. They all picked up lobs laid well on the bottom, close to far bank cover and the bites were a delight; a quick bob as the dead-looking float suddenly comes alive, then it sails off smoothly, sinking as it goes. Plenty of time to strike and to imagine how big the thing on the end will turn out to be. Clearly not that heavily fished for, these perch fight like demons, and seem in good condition. They undoubtedly feed on the infestation of crays that so often mar a days fishing on the Kennet, but they still loved a lobworm. The crays were no trouble at all, maybe because of the cold weather, or maybe because there were a few perch about. The footage of perch hunting and engulfing crays in the latest

edition of the excellent Catching the Impossible DVD is fascinating. It is clear that perch will actively hunt along the bottom, head down and with those yellow eyes alert, peering into likely looking crevices in search of food. They will attack quite big crays with a mixture of greed and bravery, and a modestly sized perch will swallow an enormous crayfish with apparent ease. This hunting on the bottom is probably normal behaviour, and may explain why they sometimes seem to prefer a lob on the deck, as opposed to on the move or dangling mid-water.

The next day was forecast fairly dry as well, so tried a little commercial fishery with perch advertised amongst the carp/roach/tench/chub/bream/crucians/gudgeon that seem to typify the stocking policy on such fisheries. The roach and carp were delighted to gorge themselves on the lobs I offered over a bed of red maggot, but I did get a few perch to almost two, very fat and well fed fish that would probably have preferred a little live bait. Crayfish were a nuisance too, and with no shortage of grub, those perch may get really big one day. I will wait for some really cold weather before going back, when the carp might have slowed down a bit. They are good fun on light tackle, but not when you are after something stripey.



3lb Kennet perch at last knockings



I like lobworms!



Typical fat commercial perch

Welcome rain, but no barbel, plus good news from the Cherwell

14th November 2009

At last some heavy rain to raise levels and flush out the dead and dying weed and wake up the barbel into a bit of pre-winter feeding. Well, that is the theory anyway. The Avon is a difficult river to target barbel on when it is low and clear and you can find the fish by spotting, but when the clarity goes the location of barbel becomes extremely difficult, and it is most likely you will be fishing a swim devoid of barbel. They are still very few and far between, but there is still a real urge to get out and fish when the river is full of warm coloured water. The drifting weed and debris that accompanies that first good flush makes fishing impossible other than in a few swims, and a heavy backlead under the well sunken rod tip is the order of the day. The swim I chose was a deepish hole under the bank, and a two ounce backlead under the rod meant I could hold bottom for more than half an

hour before the swirling, drifting weed built up too much and pulled the bait out of position. Three big golden bream took a liking to the paste wrapped boilie, as well as a fat five pound chub, but there were no barbel in evidence despite the seemingly ideal conditions. The bream were typical clean, bright Avon specimens, with enough fight in them to nearly stop you reeling in. The barbel should have been really on the prod, as they say, but maybe next time.

Good news from the Cherwell, which I visited earlier in the year to share some ideas with a local club and the EA. We were in agreement that there would be some scope for a bit of habitat improvement that should link with some stocking of barbel to address a serious decline in stocks, and I was delighted to hear that the EA had not only researched, planned and funded the fry bays, but stocked 500 barbel from Calverton. Some chub and roach were provided too, and it shows that a bit of sensible dialogue with the Agency and sharing of ideas can reap rewards. The local fishery officer and club officials are to be commended for working together to try and make something happen that will go some way towards repairing the little rivers that have been so damaged by dredging and linkage with canals, and the badly impounded stretches like the upper Cherwell do need a helping hand. The crays and the otters will have some effect too, I am sure, but making the habitat more amenable to survival of fish and fry is a key issue. The BS has offered funds to help with more habitat work in the coming season, and it will be interesting to see if the barbel show up next summer too!



Greedy seven pound Avon bream



Cherwell fry bay



Cherwell barbel, dye marked

Perch for a change

10th November 2009

With the rivers still low and clearish and full of dying weed, the barbel and chub fishing has been a bit lackluster, and this transition period between the summer and winter river can often spell slow sport if there have been no nice warm autumnal floods to flush things through. The perch on the Avon are an up and coming quarry, and although they can not compete with the monsters of the Thames, Kennet and Ouse, they are becoming more and more attractive and accessible in terms of numbers and size. A three pounder is a realistic target, and more

importantly there is some real exploratory, exciting fishing to be had on the way. These fish are not fished for much, probably because they are quite hard to find, but when you do it is really satisfying. Every little slack, eddy and weirpool looks like perch heaven, and although you can spot them in the summer, marking them down for future reference, you can never be sure they will still be in residence. There is often a bonus chub to be taken as well!

Even the little perch are a real event, and very welcome after a few hours of fruitlessly searching the Avon backwaters with a lively, enquiring lobworm. The solid thump of a bigger fish is even more welcome, and they fight as hard as any winter chub, probably a bit harder, actually, for their size. The best of the season picked up a big fat lob laid on well over depth in a corner of a weirpool this afternoon, and at two-ten, a very respectable and satisfying fish. The previous afternoon I had a good bag of perch from the Stour, a dozen fish all between half a pound and a pound, and they all snapped up the lobworm on the bottom in preference to a moving bait, even though there were perch regularly striking at the swarms of minnows that infest both rivers at the moment. These bold and handsome fish make a nice change from the barbel and chub, and there is much to learn about them and some good fishing to be had in the next few years, especially since they are spreading and growing on both my local rivers.

The Research and Conservation auction will be in full flow soon, and there is a very striking picture of a perch from the Ouse that was taken by Martin Bowler in his search to catch the impossible as one of the lots on offer. The original proof from the book that accompanies the series is signed by both Martin and Hugh Miles, and nicely framed. Well worth a look at the other lots too; all great bargains and in a good cause!



Bristly little brigand



Two pound ten ounce Avon perch



Original proof from Catching the Impossible

Back from the Ebro

3rd November 2009

A week in Spain gave the last dose of sunshine before the cold damp gloomy days of autumn and winter, and my first visit to the mighty River Ebro proved to be quite memorable. The river is, like most big European rivers, heavily impounded by hydro-electric dams, and flows sluggishly for the most part through some stark and apparently barren landscapes. In the middle reaches that we fished, the river is flanked by towering rocky cliffs and escarpments, and access is fairly limited unless you use a boat. We were mostly interested in bank fishing for the big common carp, and the fishing is, just as on the St Lawrence, reasonably unsophisticated. The carp are well fed on fishy based boilies and especially halibut pellet, which is piled in by the tonne by those seeking the massive Ebro catfish. It was a case of being guided to a reliable spot, and casting out a big boilie over a bed of loosefeed, and waiting for a hungry Spanish carp to grab hold.

These carp are impressive fish, nearly all commons, and the paleness of their flanks was more than made up for by their brightly coloured fins and tails. Sport was a bit slow to begin with, but we soon racked up a reasonable tally of fish each day, with a good average size. It seems that these fish are still growing, and there is a real chance of a forty during a weeks visit, with a good head of big thirties about. My best was a bit over thirty eight, but mid thirties and twenty plus fish came in very regularly. Best fish in our group was a forty two. They do not fight as hard as their Canadian cousins, but can be very dogged under the rod tip; I can still picture my biggest fish thumping away, six feet down in the clear water under my feet as I stood on tiptoe on the rocks and struggled to keep him out of the jagged rock face. A fish that big is hard to move, even when he is tired and almost ready for the net.

The main quarry for the mix of anglers that visit the Ebro seemed to be the catfish, and the beds of bait ferried out by boat are astounding in quantity; several sacks of monster halibut pellet are apparently needed in order to lure the big cats to your bait, and some people spend a lot of money in search of seven foot of ugly slime. The beastly things have no attraction for me, but I might give it a go next year if pushed. The carp are a more interesting quarry, as are the shoals of roach that can be a real pest at times, I am informed. We had a bit of trouble with roach on one day, with two pound plus fish trying to take 20mm boilies. My pb Spanish roach is now two pounds three ounces, an average fish, with three plus and even four pound roach regularly reported. Some roach tackle is going along next time.



Visit to St Patricks Stream

10th October 2009

Some of the funds from the Research and Conservation account have been used to help out an angling club which owns a bit of a Thames distributary called the St Patricks Stream, which is producing a small and dwindling number of big barbel, but apparently showing little sign of recruitment of smaller ones for the future. As part of a larger scale project to identify spawning areas, current fish stocks and ideas for habitat improvement, the BS has helped to pay for a survey of fish stocks on the stretch. The EA and the other club are involved in the project in partnership, and armed with some proper information about the stocks and a careful survey of the habitat, it is to be hoped that the barbel and other fish stocks in the river can be supported. The river looks very nice at first sight, with plenty of weed and some instream cover, but there may be scope for some engineering to improve potential spawning gravels and to produce fry refuges for small fish in both summer and winter. Regular monitoring of fish stocks will always help to give an idea of what is there in the first place, and I was interested to see that very few baby barbel showed up on the day that I visited, although it is not certain that the stream generates its own stock or if they migrate in from the Loddon or Thames.

Work on smaller river sections like this can be very worthwhile, and every bit of extra information from research like this could have benefits for barbel rivers elsewhere. It seems that there are several river systems where the pattern of barbel getting fewer and fewer and bigger and bigger, with no real sign of smaller fish to replace the big old girls, is being repeated. Of course, some small fish may be very old, and it could be that there are six and seven pounders out there as old as the fifteen and sixteens, we do not really know. Some rivers like the Wye and Trent, are enjoying a bit of a boom at the moment, while others like the Bristol Avon and Thames tributaries are suffering a fairly sudden slump. The Severn and Teme are seemingly lacking in numbers of barbel too. It could be that such boom and bust population changes are quite natural, and in some cases they are accelerated by other factors such as loss of spawning areas, or predator increases. Again, we do not know, although some angling pundits claim to have all the answers!

The situation is not as simple as some would suggest, I think, but the more we find out the better, and the more effort we make to protect and repair damaged rivers the more chance we have of maintaining a self sustaining stock of fish. The next Research and Conservation Auction is coming up soon, and with your help we can continue to make a contribution to a range of projects that will aid efforts to help our rivers.

We had a little event on the Avon in conjunction with the Roach Club recently, and raised over four thousand pounds, half of which will be going into restoration work on the river targeted at barbel in particular.



Electrofishing on the St Pats



Every fish is counted and measured



Nice gravel and ranunculus on the St Pats; should be full of barbel!

Gerry and his first brush with the Avon

3rd October 2009

BS member Gerry Higham bid successfully on last years Research and Conservation Auction for a day on the Hampshire Avon, and it was my job to try and catch him a few fish. The Avon has fished a lot better this year, and for once I was fairly confident we would have a swim with some fish in it so that he would at not only be able to see some barbel and chub, and also have a fair chance of catching one or two. Gerry is an extremely nice chap, and kept saying he was more interested in the experience and happy to just see the river and learn about a few methods for catching barbell. He was impressed with the river, and was delighted to be able to see the fish swimming around in the clear water; we had about eight chub and four barbel munching on a bed of casters and hemp within a short time, and he was soon keen to catch one rather than just look at them. A nice fat barbel of about six pounds was his first fish, and he finished up with several five pound plus chub which he was just as pleased with.

The Avon chub are going from strength to strength in terms of both size and numbers, and there are also signs that the barbel are recruiting well, with fish of one or two pounds showing up quite regularly. There were smaller barbel than the one Gerry caught in the shoal we saw, and reports of them all over the river.

Let us hope they are there in enough numbers to replace the big fish that still seem to dominate the barbel scene on the river at the moment. The swim we fished was the one which produced an Avon fish of just under sixteen for me a few years ago, and that one is gone for certain now because it was found dead the following season a few miles downstream and now gazes at me forlornly from a case on the living room wall. Gerry left very satisfied with his first day on the river, and it was a pleasure to sit and chat with him, discussing the past and future of our rivers and generally putting the world to rights.



Gerry looking pleased with his first Avon barbel



Gerry with his first Avon chub



My best Hants Avon barbel

Avon still on form

27th September 2009

The tranquil lush banks of the Hampshire Avon seem rather tame after the crocodile infested margins of the Zambezi. Fishing from the banks on that river is not really recommended, and even in a big aluminium boat you feel a bit vulnerable. The average hippo could overturn you and crunch you up with no trouble. The only boats I saw on the Avon were a couple of stupid canoeists who thought they had the right to go where they pleased, and seemed astounded that rivers were not just public rights of way. The politics and complexities of life on the Avon are rather vexing, and yet it is interesting that the Zambezi has a fishing close season and a catch and release, dead or alive policy, at least in the National Parks, for tigerfish, as we do for salmon on the Avon. The shoot to kill policy for poachers in the Zimbabwean parks is a bit extreme, with no evidence left when the bodies of miscreants are left to the wildlife in the river to dispose of. The news that weedcutting on the Avon is to be severely reduced is probably good news, although some fishery interests will still want to do it for the benefit of salmon anglers, and I hope it will be kept an eye on. Frying pans and fire spring to mind. Along with representatives from local fishing clubs, we have been involved in talks and meetings over the years with the relevant authorities to reduce and amend weedcutting, and managed to get the opinions of fishermen taken into account, with subsequent changes in the scale and timing of weedcutting altered as a result. The effect of weedcutting on coarse fish stocks is difficult to measure, but less must be better, I suppose, and the decision to stop the cutting was advised to us in advance a couple of years ago. I note that one local angler who has been involved this year with making a lot of noise is credited with "leading a crusade" against weedcutting; strange, I thought all he had done was annoy weedcutting staff by photographing them from bridges and making himself and anglers look silly. Shows you should not believe all you read in the papers.

The barbel are still about, and apart from regular reports of small fish from a few inches to a pound, the doubles are still showing well. I had three doubles in three afternoon sessions since my return, and it seems that the middle river continues to fish as well as ever it has in recent years. That said, there are stretches that are

suffering from low populations of both chub and barbel, and roach and dace stocks are still very patchy indeed. A low river through the summer will no doubt benefit this year's fry, and if we do not get too many fierce and savage flood events over the winter, the coarse fish will benefit. Unfortunately, dry summers and very wet winters are a likely result of climate change, and any river restoration or habitat improvements envisaged must take these changes into account.



Nice ten pounder on first visit back to the Avon



Another ten pounder from same swim



Eleven ten taken at dusk, getting bigger!

More Zambezi memories

20th September 2009

Last year was special one. My first visit to Africa, in search of the tigerfish of the Zambezi, constituted a life changing experience. This year, it was even more unforgettable, and the entire holiday was a profound delight. The fishing was superb, and I am told it gets even better later in the year, when the tigers appear to relish the real hot weather!

Imagine drifting almost silently down the river, a mile wide expanse of mysterious and ever changing combination of fast runs and hippo infested drop offs, with the sounds of elephant, hippo and a wealth of birdlife interrupted by the scream of a clutch as an angry tigerfish engulfs your bait and hurtles into the distance at awesome speed, then suddenly leaps skywards, shaking its head and gnashing its teeth as it tries to unhook itself. We had nearly seventy tigers over twelve days, and many were well into double figures, with me taking a personal best of sixteen pounds and several fourteen pound plus fish. Dave Steuart was keen on the vundu, and he had a couple of thirty pound plus fish. I was not so keen on them, preferring to concentrate on the tigers, but I ended up being impressed with the vundu, which is a sort of catfish, but without the eel like appearance of the European variety. It fights like hell too, and Dave did well to land his biggest on tiger tackle when it took a bit of fish strip in the middle of the day on a tigerfish run.

We met some really nice people, especially the locals, who were kept in stitches by Dave. We saw some incredible wildlife, and had some scary and very close encounters with hippos and elephants, an apparently dead croc that burst into life inches from my rod tip, and an untimely puncture of a Landrover tyre far too close to lions for comfort. I have been closer to these creatures than ever before, and it is a bit humbling. When you can see the whites in the eyes of animals that would kill or eat you with ease, it tends to concentrate your attention, but I was pleased to have no sightings of snakes or insect trouble at all.

Most days we took out a coolbox of drink and a lavish packed lunch, and anchored up to a convenient tree for the hottest part of the day. One day we were sat at the head of an island under a huge Acacia festooned with nests of bright little weaver birds, with a pod of thirty hippo a few yards upstream, water buffalo on the island beside us and a herd of elephant squabbling noisily across the channel. Giant herons, storks, kingfishers and circling fish eagles completed the picture. Being surrounded by wildlife was not enough; the odd tigerfish would grab bait left legered out of the back of the boat, interrupting lunch.

Booking again for next year shortly!



Baby tigers bite though 8lb mono; nuisance when bait fishing!



16lb tigerfish



Bransford barbel biting well

2nd September 2009

I do not visit the BS fishery at Bransford often enough, and an opportunity to fish the stretch is always welcomed. The regrowth of willows and all the bankside regeneration meant that the substantial works carried out in the spring were quite invisible, but the extra light let in by topping I off the bigger willows and sky lighting the river has caused a burst of growth of marginal plants, and the low bankside willows will flourish and give even more fish cover than they do already. Even on a hard bottomed river like the Teme, light getting to the river bed will encourage growth of algae and small plants, and this all boosts the food chain from the bottom up. Good ranunculus growth was apparent on the few gravelly areas also.

I had heard reports that the fishery was fishing as well as ever, with bags of half a dozen fish in a day quite common, and specimens to twelve pounds. There had been sightings of good shoals of fish in the usual swims, and I was also delighted to hear from a bailiff that the new swims with overhead cover of willow rafts had all produced fish. I fished a couple of swims, a couple of hours in each, and had four nice barbel, typical spirited Teme fish in the three to seven pound range, and a bag of fish like that by someone who does not know the stretch that well sounds more than OK to me. The inevitable bait was a small Elips pellet, fished in conjunction with a PVA bag of crushed pellet and micropellet, and the barbel responded with great enthusiasm. The chub seemed to be very numerous too, and one was a good five pounder.

As ever, we saw only one other angler, and it was nice to be able to park securely and safely close to the river. The Teme is as uncomfortable to fish as ever, and it takes some getting used to; clambering up and down steep banks, but that is all part of the Teme experience.



Avon success for Simon

1st September 2009

On returning from my Wensum trip, it was time to check out a few swims on the Avon for a day that I had promised to Simon Asbury, in search of his first Avon barbel. I found two suitable spots, but elected to fish one of them myself, and after watching a group of three nice barbel gratefully munching the crumbled boilie for an hour or two, I carefully lowered a bait in and was rewarded within five minutes with a very fat and chunky eleven pounder. No hookmarks, clean as a whistle and obviously growing fat on a natural diet, since the stretch is hardly ever fished. The effect of bait on fish growth is a bit exaggerated, in my view, and we can blame climate change for our current stock of monster coarse fish, I think.

Back to Simon, who arrived full of anticipation, and even more eager to catch an Avon barbel after his three previous fruitless visits? Catching one to order is not guaranteed these days by any means, but there were fish in his swim that showed a real interest in the bait. After three failed attempts, it took eight minutes before a beautiful bright eight pounder grabbed his bait, and it was a relief for both Simon and me that he had finally bagged his Avon fish. Full of confidence, we rebaited and cast again, and would have been more than happy if that fish and a few chub had made the day worthwhile. I spotted a most respectable fish in the swim a little later, which was really getting its head down, and quietly advised Simon that he could well do an Avon double as well!

He did it in style, and a solid thirteen eight was his reward for the persistence and confidence he had shown; a fantastic fish, which had him jumping up and down and grinning in delight. Well done that man and next target a seven pound chub!



Fat Avon eleven pounder, from a natural diet!



First Avon barbel, brightly coloured eight pounder



Simon and his thirteen pound Avon barbel

Interesting Wensum visit

27th August 2009

I was pleased to accept an invitation to both fish the River Wensum in Norfolk, and to attend an EANACA meeting where the current problems of the river were to be discussed. It was most enlightening, and not surprising that the Wensum issues are very similar to those which concern anglers and conservationists on the Dorset Stour and Hampshire Avon. Historical dredging has damaged barbel spawning habitat and indeed habitat for most fish species. The work done by NACA has been outstanding, and river restoration spearheaded by them is continuing. Just as on the Stour, shallow bays and backwaters are seen as crucial fry refuges, and as on the Avon, weedcutting is a balancing act between flood defence, farming and fishery interests. The otter predation on the Wensum appears to be more of a problem, and it seems that smaller rivers with low stocks of big old barbel are going to be sensitive to otters, although the river still has a good population of chub and barbel in a few stretches. The stocking of small numbers of barbel to mitigate against undue predation, while habitat restoration begins to have an effect, seems to be acceptable. Stocking can never be a long term solution, but is useful to kick start a failing population until Mother Nature can get a grip again! The NACA, Norfolk Anglers Conservation Association, website is well worth a visit.

The barbel of the Wensum were kind to me on the two days I fished, and along with at least fifteen goodly chub, several over five pounds, I had four barbel from a new river, including a ten pounder and a very welcome monster of fourteen five. A memorable first visit to the river, and not to be my last, I am sure.

My guide was extremely helpful, and we sat and chatted for the whole of the time, after a grand tour of the river. He did make me some tea that was perhaps the worst brew that I have ever experienced, but the barbel made up for it! Thanks again for the help and hospitality Mark! I have promised to get him an Avon barbel or two in return.



This is called tea in Norfolk



Fourteen pounder returns to the Wensum



A lovely river, once restored and well managed

Back to Beauchamp Court

22nd August 2009

The banks of the River Severn are a bit different to the rather more tranquil and serene meadows of the Avon, and it is a bit of a culture shock to find swans bold and brash enough to come up the bank at you and almost mug you for food. The pheasants on the Avon are the only avian beggars we get, and they keep a respectful distance. The boat traffic and those steep banksides are a novelty, but once settled most swims are quite cosy and comfortable. The day on the Severn was a bit of a BS Committee get together, and aimed at organising a boost for a fishery that is currently somewhat under fished.

The river was low and clearish, and the lack of flow was not ideal for bagging up with barbel, though we managed about a dozen between us, and Simon A got the best bag of fish, although not the biggest on the stretch. Someone lost an estimated double at the net, I am told. Most of the fish came during the day, and there were loads of bream and roach and occasional perch about too.

It was nice to fish the Severn again, and especially at Beauchamp, where the BS fishery is secluded and secure both in terms of other people and car parking, and never even remotely crowded. Beauchamp has produced some big barbel in the past, up to nearly sixteen, and was once noted for a high proportion of doubles. This area of river is not now very fashionable, but there is the potential for some excellent fishing if only more people got down there. I will go again later in the year, and go for a nice bag of Severn barbel again. They do fight remarkably well, and it a long time since a strong fish has zoomed off across that wide mysterious river and plodded scarily upstream. I used to do well on the hemp and caster or maggot feeder approach, catching all day long even in bright weather. Even with a centrepin you can bait heavily along the shelf about three rod lengths out, and draw the fish into swims right under the bank in some places. Most fish came from the middle of the river when I was there, and only the bream deigned to come into my close-in swim that day. Some of the fish caught were bright and beautiful three pounders, which give screaming bites worthy of barbel three times their size and good omens for the future of the river.



Mysterious River Severn at
Beauchamp

Simon and Dave Brown in a comfy
Beauchamp swim

Beautiful Beauchamp barbel

Mixed bags

20th August 2009

A day on the Kennet makes a nice change from the Avon every now and then, but it is frustrating not to be able to see the fish, even in low water conditions. The grey/brown colouration makes it nigh impossible to make out anything much apart from the occasional weedbeds and snags, and it takes some getting used to after the clarity and fish spotting routine on the Hampshire Avon. Perhaps it works to your advantage as well, because if you can't see them, they can't see you either and it possible to extract fish from fairly shallow open swims, and Kennet barbel are much more likely to move away from cover. It is satisfying to work up a swim, feeding it carefully and baiting heavily and then waiting for a good time before fishing. Then you have to hope that that first cast can be retrieved without finding a crayfish on the end; better still if it results in a barbel, which is a good sign indeed! Six hard fighting Kennet barbel was a satisfactory result, and off the water by dusk confident that the swim had given its best. Best fish were a 9.15 and a scraper ten, and well worth the journey.

Back to the Avon next day, and this time it was stalking a single fish, spotted as a mere glimpse of fins through the weed fronds, but it rolled gently on its side just once and showed off a very long deep flank. A very good double, and it was reacting very favourably to Glyn the Baitmakers latest concoction. It took until early evening, when the fish could no longer be properly sighted, before it took a hook bait, and the powerful way it cruised across the river, stopped, then went some more, made me realise it was a special fish. Slow and deep it fought, and when it swam purposefully off upstream and took line off the pin without too much effort, it confirmed again to me that it was a very good fish. At 14.4, the best of the season and a terrific way to christen my new rod, a pair of which I was forced to purchase after I reversed the car over my rod bag last week and crunched my Harrisons beyond repair. Mr Harrison made a pretty penny out of me last week, but his rod still worked a treat, and I have taken two doubles in a row on it, because the next fish to come out of the swim was a lovely chocolate and bronze eleven six, a typical highly coloured Avon specimen. Must give Glyn a ring and congratulate him, four doubles in a fortnight on his new bait, and when I picked it up he had run out of coffee, so I was saved the ordeal of having to drink it. My luck will run out soon.



Brightly coloured eleven six, typical Avon fish



Ubiquitous begging pheasant



Avon fourteen christens new rod in style

Avon still on form

12th August 2009

Not been fishing for a while, so it pays to spend some time walking the banks and looking for fish or likely spots. The usual swims are usually occupied by the usual barbel anglers fishing for the usual fish, and although fishing tried and tested spots is unavoidable to an extent, I much prefer to hunt out some swims where nobody goes much and you can fish in peace, without any disturbance. It generally means you are not disturbed by fish either, but the satisfaction of getting a fish from a new swim is immense when it does happen. You can use up a lot of time and rack up a few blanks like this, but the rewards can be very worthwhile, and even a modest barbel from somewhere fresh is a real treat. There is still a lot of lightly fished water on the Avon, and if you are brave enough to take your time walking and feeding swims and persevere with revisiting again and again, it can sometimes pay off.

I saw a nice clean patch, with no barbel in evidence, but it looked right and the first two sessions produced a few nondescript chub. The fourth visit produced a brief glimpse of a pinky pectoral, and a flick of a tail that was certainly not a chub. The swim was very hard to see into, and standing for half an hour or more was needed before a shadow, or even better a waving tail as a barbel grubbed about briefly in the weed and betrayed its presence and interest in the crumbled boilies and hemp. Over a couple of days, five fish including two clean double figure fish were to succumb; slow fishing, but two in a day from the Middle Avon is often as good as it gets these days. One of the fish was a fresh little four pounder, hopefully evidence of some year classes that will sustain a viable population for the future.

The ratio of doubles remains at about one in three, and I have had seven doubles out of twenty three fish so far from the Avon this year, which is as good as it has been in recent years. I reckon if I had fished the Avon exclusively, done whole day sessions, fished well into dark, or not been distracted by other species, that tally could have been doubled easily. In the Eighties, it was common to catch six or seven barbel in a session, but a

double was almost unheard of, and would have been one in a hundred. Fish populations change; they grow and they die, and we are only ever experiencing a snapshot of the population structure. We may have to face a period of lots of four to six pound shoalies, and with doubles a rarity again in a few years. That scenario would be popular with a lot of anglers, and there is a very strong argument that size isn't everything.



Spotless 11.13 from new swim



Nice little four pounder



Older, golden ten pounder

River habitat improvements go ahead

9th August 2009

As well as trying to increase the amount of habitat restoration on barbel rivers, with barbel in mind, it is interesting and rewarding in attempting to make improvements for other species. My bit of the Avon was once famous for roach, and although there are a few chub and dace on the stretch these days, the roach are extremely few and far between. I have had two over three pounds from here over the years, but they are long dead by now and not much sign of their progeny coming through. One theory is that the loss of water meadow streams and ditches, and quiet backwaters in general, has meant a loss of habitat for fry to shelter in, particularly over the winter months and in flood conditions. The EA have been doing some good work in reinstating ditches and minor carriers over the years, but every bit of backwater helps, and after a long and complicated period of seeking agreements and permissions, and filling in forms and seeking more permissions and negotiating with EA and Natural England and more form filling consent for the reinstatement of some ditches was finally granted. Over a few days, the accumulated silt and reed and rush growth was extracted and spread thinly over the floodplain, and some watery refuges were reborn. The diversity in habitat will also provide shelter for a range of insects and invertebrates, and the silty bed of the ditches is excellent habitat for lamprey larvae, a few of which were seen during the digging. The Desmoulins Whorl snail will be happy too!

Within hours, the ditches were colonised by fry from the margins of the main river, and hopefully this new habitat will give shelter to them to grow in over the warmer months as well as a shelter from the fierce flows of winter. The margins of the ditches will quickly sprout new growth of rush and reed to provide cover, and I am eager to

see how they look after a few weeks and all the spoil has dried out and regrowth has started. The local cattle herd were fascinated by the work, and they were kept fenced out for the duration. The British White breed are a smallish variety that are not too damaging as far as poaching is concerned, a term used to describe damage to banks and soil structure by trampling with their hooves, rather than illegal fishing. Cattle poaching can lead to bankside erosion and siltation of rivers in certain circumstances, and I am assured this lot are less damaging than most. They look very cute and innocent, it must be said.



New fry bays nearly complete



Years of silt being removed



British White calf, curious, cute, not a poacher!

Avon firsts for Bernard

7th August 2009

I had promised to take an old BS Committee member for a day on the Avon, and Bernard C. was full of enthusiasm and excitement about fishing the river. I decided to take him to swim where both chub and barbel were likely to be seen at least, but warned him that catching a barbel to order on the river is not as easy as it once was. He was perfectly happy just to fish the river for the first time, and assured me that any fish would be a bonus. It was a nice to spend a day with him, and we sat and chatted and reminisced and put the world to rights, and he was very open to learning about the hemp and caster technique that can work very well in the right swim on the right day. It proved to be one of those days, and a succession of chub were a terrific start for him, especially when the six pounder proved to be a personal best. The barbel slowly gained confidence, and followed the chub out of cover and onto an area we kept heavily fed with several droppers of bait every half hour or so.

One barbel would have made his day, but he ended up with two, although the best one refused to weigh more than nine pounds fifteen and a half ounces, but Bernard was delighted. He is one of those rare breed who enjoy fishing for the whole experience, not the numbers or targets or personal bests, and he kept reassuring me that a day sitting on a peaceful stretch of the Hampshire Avon would have been more than enough to make his day.

Two barbel and six chub were a dream come true, and we both left feeling well pleased.

The barbel was a recognisable fish that has been around the area for a while, and I have caught him at least twice before at a bit over ten pounds as a rule. He is one of those fish that is a bit crooked and cranked, a hump backed fish that does not fight overly hard, but is surviving well despite the alleged ravages of floods and otters.



Bernards first Avon barbel



Old Humpy makes a welcome appearance



Bernards six pound chub

Mixed bird life

5th August 2009

It is said that sighting a pair of magpies is supposed to be good luck, especially if you wish them a good morning. No magpies today, but while trying to persuade a couple of decent barbel to move onto my baited area I spotted a gang of three goosanders pootling along the river under the opposite bank, and then a group of four ravens circling and wheeling and croaking hoarsely at each other overhead. These combinations are clearly bad omens for barbel, because the barbel refused to come out of cover, and just slinked about suspiciously. Perhaps they had been recently caught, or were just not in the mood. It happens sometimes, and when they defy you and you fail to stick a hook in them, it needs to be taken philosophically.

There were some biggish chub in the swim too, in fact big enough for me to adapt tactics in order to try and fool one or two of them at the same time. I was using small pellets, and made the hook link a bit shorter, the hook a bit smaller, and the lead a bit heavier. Every time I baited the swim with hemp and micro pellet, put in with a bait dropper, the chub moved in, and six of them hooked themselves a treat in the centre of the bottom lip as they picked up the hook bait. Avon chub are a good average size, and all the fish were over five pounds, with two six plus specimens that were quite long and lean and looked like sevens in the water.

I do not mind catching the chub when barbel fishing, especially when they are that size and they often bring in the barbel as they home in on your bait.

The final bird experience of the day was the frightening sight of a swan exploding as it hit the power lines that cross the river nearby. Not sure if they actually hit the lines, or whether they just fly by close enough to cause a short circuit. A few thousand volts soon made short work of the swan though, and a deafening bang, a brilliant flash of light and a brief flurry of singed feathers signaled the demise of a bird that will not be missed by many. They are becoming rather numerous, and I would much sooner see a few more of the rarer species.



Seven pound plus chub welcome as any barbel!



Six pounder and irresistible pellets



They dont like fifty thousand volts

Another Kennet success, and Avon success for all!

28th July 2009

Another stretch of the Kennet was tried today, where success with the bigger fish had eluded me, although it must be said that the Kennet is a much more productive river than the Hampshire Avon these days, and trips there are mostly aimed at just catching a few fish to boost confidence levels. The stretches that hold the bigger specimens are a bit more demanding, and blanks are par for the course, on this stretch, barbel are more numerous, and consequently a thirteen is a monster. The fish that took kindly to me today was a bit of an old soldier, probably well known to regulars, but a first for me and despite being a bit more aged than most of its shoalmates, it fought with tremendous tenacity.

The crayfish were about that day, and nearly forced me to move swims, since I knew from experience that crays are rarely in evidence when barbel are around. A last minute baitdropping session must have moved the barbel in and the crays out, because a quiet couple of casts, with no twiddles and tweaks at the rod tip betraying the robbing crustaceans, preceded a rod wrencher that signaled a big greedy barbel grabbing my hook bait. The crays are heavily trapped on the stretch, and this has seen a decline in their numbers that makes fishing much easier. There is a theory that removal of the large breeders only encourages proliferation of smaller crays in large numbers that are more damaging to other species, but I am not convinced. The smaller ones are more likely to become fish food, and chub and barbel will undoubtedly munch smaller crayfish. There is no doubt that

pike eat them as well, as I have taken stillwater pike bulging with crays in their gut. Otters will also relish in preference to chasing fish. The theory that they make our fish bigger is not one that I subscribe to; big barbel, chub and perch are evident in many crayfish free waters! They are a damn nuisance, and do not belong, and it may be that some form of biological control of crays will need to be researched before they take over most of our freshwater fisheries. They have been on the Hampshire Avon for years, but thankfully only in tiny numbers. They will reach the Severn and Warks Avon soon, and are probably already there in fact.

The Avon does not seem to suit them, thank the Lord, and it may be that they will never take hold on fast, gravelly rivers. Avon and Stour chub, barbel, and perch for that matter are growing quite nicely without crays to feed on, and any GCSE Biology student can give us a simple explanation of food chain/biomass science to explain that. The Avon is fishing well, with lots of barbel from all sorts of swims, along with chub of all sizes, proving that the poor fishing of last year was not due to otter predation/ pollution/ floodwater washing fish away. The barbel are there in good numbers, for the Avon, and were always there, and most people are having good results. One or two barbel in a day is good for the river these days, and I have had thirteen barbel in twelve trips, all afternoon/evening sessions. Most anglers I know are having similar results. Last fish was a lovely chocolate bronze ten fifteen, full of life and fitness, clean and fin perfect with no hookmarks. I found him, fed him and watched him switch on to hemp and caster in a golden gravel run, and he pulled the rod in after a couple of hours of tempting and feeding.



Big old Kennet 13 pounder



These things have to go!



Spotless Avon 10.15

Bream and barbel galore

21st July 2009

I saw a large shoal of bream at Ibsley today on the Avon, and impressive fish they are once they start to get big, above eight pounds or so. The river bream are much cleaner and fitter, more muscular and less slimy than the average lake bream, and I never complain when a big Avon bream muscles in on a barbel swim. This lot were a bit frisky, for bream that is, and moved off sullenly when I started fishing the swim. I never caught a bream that

day, but next day a nice bag of fish from a stillwater reminded me of the slime problems. These big stillwater bream are a nice distraction from barbelling, and the doubles are dogged and determined under the rod tip sometimes. I was reminded of the sharp, insistent annoyance of electronic bite alarms in the wrong hands, when anglers in adjacent swims insisted on full volume and ignorance of the off switch when adjusting your bobbins. I never even switched mine on, and caught sixteen fish through the day and heard, or noticed the bobbin fall off and the reel click urgently at every bite, and I fail to see how you need to use the electronics unless you are falling asleep. Why you need a barrage of bleeps to tell you your rod is being pulled in escapes me, but the mentality persists that they must be on at full volume all the while. This mentality sometimes persists with the ratchet on centrepins, and although mine only signals a bite for a second or two, there are those who leave a ratchet on while fishing and playing a fish, and pin ratchets are just as annoying as buzzers when used with lack of consideration. I do not know what the world is coming to, no respect for others; starting to sound like my dad.

A trip to the Kennet and a new stretch proved remarkably productive, with a brace of twelves and an eleven in a catch of six fish that kept me nicely occupied through the afternoon. They made the ratchet screech alarmingly at every bite! The bigger fish were chunky and well proportioned, and the smaller samples were similarly fit and seemingly well recovered from spawning. A few trout and dace were in evidence too, and it seems that the river has a good fish population in general, and a range of barbel year classes, unlike some rivers where the barbel shoals are dominated by a few big, old fish. The range of barbel population structures on our rivers is in need of some study, but how we do it is beyond current EA funding, perhaps we should encourage much more angler monitoring of catches; something the BS intends to do on its fisheries from this season onwards.



Nice clean eleven pound bream!



Chunky Kennet 12.11



Another Kennet twelve, 12.3 next cast!



Irrestistible daytime barbel bait!

Giant mint humbugs invade Avon valley

17th July 2009

The low water levels are an advantage to farmers and fishermen alike in my view, because location of fish is much easier, the fry survival is likely to be good without the unseasonal flash floods of recent years, and there is going to be less weedcutting. The dryer meadows and sunnier weather mean that the hay crop can be taken earlier and more efficiently, and modern methods mean that a lot of grass can be baled and removed in double quick time. The huge bales looked like giant mint humbugs littering the fields, and are carted away in a matter of hours by heavy machinery. When I was a lad on the old farmstead, we worked for days loading up the trailer with bales thrown up on pitchforks, and each bale was then handled again to stack up in the barn, sometimes it took two of us to hoist a bale up to the top of the stack How times have changed, but work like that was accepted in those days.

The barbel of the Avon are well on the feed, and that afternoon I had three nice fat fish on a paste I had knocked up from last years ingredients, up to a healthy 9.14. The biggest fish in the swim evaded me, and unusually came off the hook after charging off across the river. It was possible to watch the fish as they cautiously moved out of cover in response to the trail of hemp and bits of paste that I was introducing, and eventually they became confident almost under the rod top. I left them for a couple of hours to gain even more confidence, feeding them up before I finally cast in. Once they get really used to feeding in your chosen area, it is possible to lure them back even after one of their number has been caught. Cast in too early, too greedily, and you may land one, but spook the others for the duration.

There are no signs that the Avon barbel have been slaughtered by the otters that have been here in numbers for several years, and the chub seem even more numerous. Catches are back to the expected normal after the disaster of last season, proving that the fish were there all the time, and not the victims of floods or pollution or predators. Let us hope that the same story is repeating itself on other rivers, and my visits to Kennet and

Loddon would support that. Our stretch at Bransford on the Teme is also fishing very well, with good bags of fish to eleven pounds and sightings of big shoals of barbel. I must get up there in the next week or so and catch some fish from under our new willow rafts! This fishery is a delight, quiet and peaceful and under fished, with loads of productive swims and unfished water too, and apparently a good head of barbel are in evidence again.



Giant Mint Humbugs invade the Avon Valley



Avon barbel, damaged by otters or anglers?



An ugly Avon carp taken recently; hook damage to mouth or natural deformity?

Kennet imperfection

4th July 2009

The River Kennet is still a very productive barbel river, and can provide the opportunity for a good bag of middling fish, as well as a few stretches that hold some real monsters. The more accessible bits with a good head of barbel can be nice to visit early season, and the fish do respond well to daytime fishing, although there are those who like fishing it at night, although not one of my favourite pastimes. The river has some nice swims that brim with feature; all overhanging bushes and woody debris and deep runs under the bank, and it is still possible to seek out a few new swims where the changes in flow and variation in weed growth can move the barbel from year to year. There are bits of the river where the willows are getting too big and bushy, and the excessive shading from tall willows is of little benefit to fish as a rule. The EA have done some work on the tallest willows lately, and it is probably a good thing for the ranunculus that is struggling to survive in the almost permanently coloured water. More light will mean more weed, and more food and shelter for inverts and fish, both fry and adults.

The barbel were responsive today, and the particle approach bagged seven and a couple of fish that slipped the hook, which was quite unusual, so I should have had nine. It rained heavily and persistently in the afternoon, and I was so wet and miserable by about six that I gave it up and headed for home, even though a couple more fish would have been likely. The forecast said light showers, and I soon became soaked with only an umbrella

and no waterproofs with me. Enough is enough, and I was more than happy with a day where the rod was dragged in every hour or so, and I could work at the swim actively, baiting and waiting and figuring out the best routine.

One of the fish was a fish I remembered from last year. It had a really nasty looking hole in the head and an ugly growth within it, all sore and horrible, but it has clearly survived and is on the mend. It certainly fought well, and was otherwise in excellent condition. Fish are capable of surviving quite severe injuries, and I always return a dodgy looking fish, confident that it can make a recovery without much help.



Kennet barbel with a hole in the head



This was the injury last October



Fit and healthy Kennet barbel from the same swim!

Avon rules supreme

29th June 2009

Trips to other rivers are an interesting diversion, and offer a new experience and a chance to broaden the outlook, and it must be said that rivers abroad are becoming increasingly attractive to me. The Vienne in France, the St Lawrence in Canada, the Zambezi on the Zambia/Zimbabwe border, and next year the Cauvery in India, are all rivers with a difference. The Hampshire Avon will always be my favourite, however, and a few days back on its lush banks have soon rekindled that special magic that will make fishing the river become a lifetime addiction, I suppose.

The Hampshire Avon barbel are special too, and although they are probably genetically indistinguishable from barbel in any other UK river, they have a sort of look about them that I have not seen in any other barbel. They are rich with colour and vibrance, and although not truly native to the river, they still draw anglers from all over the country to fish for them in the magnificent surroundings of the Avon valley.

Not so much a valley as a floodplain, and likely to be afforded even more protection and care as the various government bodies vie to manage the SSSI. SAC areas as well as follow the latest directives to protect and

restore the Avon to its former glory. Leaving it alone could have some benefit too.

The birthday treat of a gallon of maggots was worth a try in a swim that seemed ideal for a go at the old established maggot feeder approach, and the barbel that are possibly becoming a bit wary of boilies and pellet were certainly keen on the maggot, and I knew they would be. A pint or two of white maggot, wriggling furiously in the heat, was carefully droppered in before fishing, along with a similar amount of hemp, and a big blockend with four maggots hair rigged on a long tail was eventually plopped in on top of it all half an hour later, after the fish had been given time to get frenzied. An afternoon in this fast streamy run between the thick ranunculus beds resulted in three barbel, a good catch for the Avon these days, and topped by a very welcome twelve six that looked young and healthy and full of spirit. It certainly took some getting out, and a more gratefully received birthday present could hardly be imagined.



Well recovered Avon six pounder



Avon twelve pounder with a super long offside rear whisker!



Not the Hampshire Avon

Plenty of doubles, nearly

20th June 2009

The Loddon was to be the venue for my first river trip of the season, and as soon as the jet lag had sort of worn off, it was up the M3 for an afternoon on that intimate little river. The water was very clear, certainly a big change from last year, and it was nice to find a few fish by spotting, and to feed them up and sort of stalk them out of the swim. They responded quite enthusiastically to some well prepared secret particles, and there were two nice fish that made a mistake in the afternoon and started the season off well, one a good eight and the other a scraper ten pounder, both seemed well recovered from spawning and fighting fit.

The third fish in the swim could not cope with the pressure, and disappeared, never to return that day, though I did nab him on my next visit! He, or probably she, was another big eight, but looked much bigger in the water, and again seemed very fat and chunky for the time of year. First barbel and first double, so the season was off to a satisfactory start.

Next day and I was to get a bag of ten fish, with seven doubles all in the ten to eleven pound class, but they fought very poorly and made me stop reeling in on a couple of occasions. Not barbel, of course, but bream, and a really satisfying catch despite the lack of fighting qualities. The bigger bream make up for lack of fight with an impressive bulk, and the tactics and the whole experience of baiting, spodding, distance casting and tricky rigs makes a nice change from barbel fishing. I even used those clever little black boxes that bleep at you when you get a bite, but like in Canada I never even switched them on., apart from a couple of occasions when I almost nodded off. It is a bit unpleasant getting slimed when these great sullen fish give a slow, resentful kick during the unhooking process, but they are sort of exciting and very intriguing to fish for and good fun to catch when they behave and feed lustily.

The unhooking mat was deslimed a day or two later on the Hampshire Avon, when a couple of fit fighting barbel started the account on that river. They were also well recovered from spawning, like the Loddon fish, though there were tales on several southern rivers of barbel doing a second spawning in response to the hot weather. They do not always deposit everything in the initial spawning, especially when it occurred early as it did this year, and it is not unusual for them to have another go if conditions trigger it. Every third Avon barbel is a double, I always say these days, and my third nearly made it at 9.14. A leanish fish that had maybe done a second spawn, and a good pound underweight for its length.



Loddon ten pounder, first double of the season



Eleven pounds of a sullen slimy, but an impressive fish



Avon 9.14 and PVA rig that fooled him

Back from Canada with jetlag

15th June 2009

The St Lawrence was particularly clear this year, and I still have very clear memories of thirty plus wild common carp emerging from the depths and foraging innocently about on the beds of stinky maize that were used to attract and hold them, or even better fighting furiously on the end of my line. Surprisingly little maize was needed from my observations, but some English anglers used huge amounts to little real effect. It was only the English

anglers really that can spoil fishing in Canada, but there is usually room to avoid them. If I want to be annoyed by noisy greedy Essex carp anglers with no concept of volume control on either their gobs or their bite alarms, mindlessly piling in bait in the next swim, I can go to any lake in Essex, but in truth there were only one or two occasions when we were unlucky enough to be close to our noble countrymen.

Mostly, the fishing is set in vast scenic vistas, with the cry of the loon, the redwing blackbird or the snuffling raccoon the main background noise, apart from at the weekends when the boat traffic increases a bit. The river is huge, and can easily accommodate the human visitors that take advantage of this wonderful natural resource. The carp were a little late in migrating from the deep water into the bays to spawn, but this meant that the fewer fish we caught were a bit bigger, though the size is not that important. You can not predict whether the next bite will be a mere big double or a thirty plus, and the experience of these wild bold biting fish in numbers to keep you busy all day is enough. The fight they put up is astounding, and I can not get enough of that experience of a lean, big finned, fit and fast moving common hurtling off into the deep water and making my heavy tackle seem oddly inadequate.

The plan is to keep up an annual pilgrimage to the river, and to meet even more interesting people, absorb the atmosphere and observe the wildlife, eat more Canadian breakfasts, and maybe try and educate the locals away from either ignoring or eating the carp. On the other hand, the culture is theirs, and perhaps we are wrong in seeing all fish life as sacred, and wishing to impose our values on them. The trouble is, they have loads more fish and a lot less anglers!

We have anglers who worship and treasure a carp, with hunters outnumbering the hunted sometimes a hundred to one when you consider the lot of a targeted named carp on an established UK carp water. In Canada, the new brand of local carper takes the family out for a day, and if lucky enough to hook and land a carp, they will gut, descale and barbecue it on the bank and think it entirely acceptable. There are millions of carp in the system, and rod and lining probably makes a negligible impact on their welfare or numbers.



Raccoon burgles my maize bucket, see his paws full of grains!



Thirty pounder on the only wet day



Typical twenty plus fish. Fresh out of the deeps, these fish often carry

Bonne peche en France

27th May 2009

The River Vienne is a rather beautiful river, wide and fast and a bit rocky in places, and it starts up in the Massif Central, flowing east to west, then suddenly sweeps north after Limoges and finally enters the Loire. It teems with fish of all sorts, and is hardly fished at all by the locals, mostly because there is a lot of it and not very many of them. The Anglais tend to leave it alone as well; more interested they seem to be in sitting round lakes in bivies and catching monster carpes in the dark.

It was a delight to spend a week in the sparsely populated French countryside, fishing a new, previously unfished swim every day, and trying out local restaurants, or a selection of fine wines, cheeses, bread and meat back at the farmhouse in the evenings. There were smallish powerful little barbel, bream, carp, chub and nase, and although there are sileurs there up to forty pounds or so, we never contacted one, although some big heavy fish did get away in the rocks.

The fishing was simple and restful, with small pellets, corn or maggot combined with cage feeders and method mix, and an underarm lob with a centrepin in the smooth glides generally produced a fairly instant response. The fish are not big, but the surroundings and the ambience, and the friendly attitude of all the local pecheurs we met made it a most relaxing break. My French was rather good when I got a Grade 1 O level a good few years ago, but has become a bit rusty. It was good to awaken all that almost forgotten knowledge, and to share the French enthusiasm for fishing. My mate Steve could only manage the phrases "mange tout Rodney", and "Le Singe est dans l'arbre", which kept the Frenchies away from him most of the time, which suited him and them both really.

Must go again soon, I could easily become very keen on that sort of fishing.



Bransford Looking Brilliant

25th April 2009

I remember Burt Lancaster making a solemn point in that excellent film, *Ulzanas Raid*, in which he stated that Apache war parties can come in any size, from one to a hundred, and the one can be as deadly as the hundred, or something to that effect. Such is the case with BS work parties, or Fishery Enhancement Projects as they are called these days. The turnout for the FEP at Bransford was only a small war party, but between us we did a good deal of very useful enhancement work I think. The sky lighting that was done in the late winter by the EA was already repairing itself, and most of the pollarded willows were showing signs of regrowth. Lowering the canopy like this will not only let more light in to the river bed and margins; it will lengthen the life of the trees and beef up their root systems, so that they are better at stabilising the banks. A great tall willow will often lever itself out of a soft bank, fall over and rip up the bank, causing a big damming effect and further erosion. The light that is let in will boost low marginal growth, providing more bank stabilisation and more cover for fish and other wildlife. There will be better weed growth on the river bed where the bottom is suitable, and the stony/gravelly areas must benefit from more light. The objective is to produce a varied mosaic of habitats, rather than the gloomy shaded tunnel that was in evidence before the work.

There was loads of instream cover left in, commonly known as Large Woody Debris, but we added a bit of low cover in several places in the form of willow rafts that will provide direct overhead shelter and give chub and barbel safe hidey holes without being nasty snags. A bit of an experiment that we will be keeping an eye on this coming season. The removal of a lot of tangled straggly old willow on the banks has produced some access to terrific new swims, and the fishery looks a treat at the moment, although the initial shock when the work was first done was a cause of concern for some. This time of year produces growth of willow bushes from dead-looking stumps that is astounding, and a low bushy willow at the waters edge is much better for fish than a straggly overhanging attempt at a tree that is only providing shade. Some of the stumps at the waters edge are now little bushes two feet tall, and will make fine overhangs by mid summer. It was a shame to see the Himalayan Balsam in profusion, and there is a worry that it will oust the nettles and cause bank erosion when it dies and exposes bare soil in the winter. Nettles have tough root systems that are excellent at binding bankside soil, so I never worry about them on a river bank. This year I will pull up all the balsam I see at Bransford, and will encourage others to do the same.

This fishery is perhaps my favourite of all the BS fisheries, with safe secure and convenient parking, and a lot more swims now to try in a mile of water, with the option of sneaking into your own personal hidey hole. The fish are still there in good numbers and there are rarely more than two or three anglers on the water, and most often you can have the fishery to yourself. Burt Lancaster came to a bit of an unfortunate end in that film at the hands of the Apache, but I am confident the Bransford story is going to have a very happy ending!



Large Woody Debris at Bransford



Live willows tied in will grow into overhead raft providing cover



Selective pollarding lets in light, but looks grim to begin with

Roach and barbel spawning success

14th April 2009

An anxious few days for the Avon Roach Project staff, as Trevor and Budgie toured round their spawning boards this week. They have placed the carefully constructed boards in several locations up and down the river, and also in an offline lake which has a high population of roach from the river. The river feeds this lake with water and of course fish, and many of the roach that populated it since it was dug find their way back into their parent river naturally through the inlet. Spawn taken from here will eventually be returned to the river after a year or so being raised and fed, safe from natural predation. The boards in the river were also very successful this year, much to the relief of Trev and Budge, and they were spawning very early, no doubt due to the very warm spring we are having. It was amazing to watch the roach gathering, getting all excited, and then going through the process of depositing their eggs. Roach eggs are very sticky, but these artificial boards are seemingly far more efficient at collecting spawn than the natural substrates such as willow roots and fontinalis weed. The cleverly designed boards are covered in old keepnet mesh, stapled on in a fashion that I suggested needed a patent. It is certainly effective at gathering tens of thousands of eggs on each board, and as I write I am informed that the roach have already hatched in the prepared rearing tanks at Roach Club headquarters. There are more than last year, and there is every chance that a hundred thousand little roach can be raised in safety, ready for eventual restocking into the river.

Trev and Budge have spent many hours planning and working on the project, and the learning curve has been steep and arduous, but they have worked a little miracle between them, and their efforts can only serve to give the Avon roach populations a helping hand, along with the habitat improvement work that is continuing to occur with the help of EA and other partners such as Natural England and the Rivers Trust.

The excavation and restoration of old oxbow lakes, backwaters ditches and water meadows will all contribute to the roach revival. A week later and I was watching barbel spawning in earnest on the Bristol Avon, with several groups of fish chasing and cavorting about on the gravels, with gangs of three or four little pale males harassing

much bigger and darker coloured females. These big girls, ten to twelve pounders, would eventually settle in one spot and shudder vigorously, sending up clouds of silt and gravel as they deposited their eggs. The whole process was then repeated after a bit more chasing about. I have seen barbel spawning before in April, when similar warm temperatures stimulated an early spurt of activity.

The hatchlings should have an advantage in that they will have a longer growing season and a better chance of over wintering, I expect, but none of our assumptions can be certain. There is certainly a lot of evidence that the exceptional warm dry conditions of 1976 produced a healthy and numerous fish population of many species, and our monitoring of fish populations these days is much improved. Watch out for a barbel boom in five to ten years time if this warm spring continues into a repeat of '76.

There has been much speculation about declining barbel stocks and poor sport last year, but we may just be experiencing a natural cycle, an expected boom and bust in populations that is unavoidable and a healthy and normal process. Predators and pollution will have a role to play also, but may not be the only factor in population changes.



New homes for the roach fry that will hatch



Avon roach spawning

Stour and Ouse on the agenda

7th April 2009

A visit to take some pics of the restoration/habitat enhancement on the Dorset Stour that the BS is helping with, along with the local clubs, was called for, especially since the BS had paid for some extra gravel to top up the stone croys that the EA has been constructing. The 6000 little barbel that have been stocked so far will welcome an improved habitat to grow up in, and the work will also be of benefit to all other species in the river. The stretch of river in question was heavily dredged in the early eighties, and the stone croys and backwaters and bays being constructed will not only provide diversity of flow in low water, but will produce some refuge for small fish in floodwater. The croys are also scouring the existing gravels nicely, and may provide extra spawning areas by

cleaning the gravel naturally. The twenty tonnes of gravel that the croy was top dressed with had settled nicely into the gaps between the boulders, and some was producing a small gravel shoal just downstream. The amount of work still to be done is considerable, but such instream work is fairly inexpensive and seems to be working in terms of the new flow regime. I think that there is some monitoring of the small fish found in the new fry bays, but the evidence was there to see already, with shoals of little fish taking advantage of the warm sheltered water. The local clubs are working on ideas to produce similar work with the help of the Agency further downstream in the coming year, and have contributed to a small lump of cash held by the Society to contribute to such works.

It was interesting to attend a presentation by the EA at the BS regional meeting in Bedfordshire last night, and note that the problems of the Stour are not that different to those on the Great Ouse, where the Great National Dredging of the late seventies and early eighties produced lengths of impounded water, with historical spawning gravels sacrificed in the process. Land drainage and navigation by barges was seen as more important than riverine habitats. Slackish flat bottomed reaches punctuated the barriers to fish in the form of weirs are not favourable to gravel spawners. We can not easily return the millions of tonnes of gravel, but there are ways of helping the rivers repair themselves. It could be that the decline in barbel stocks seen on the Stour, Ouse and Upper Thames are partly the result of those dredgings thirty years ago, and our current stock of doubles may well be that old.

Fish passes and habitat restoration are to be found in the current Water Framework Directive proposed actions, but let us hope that there will be the funding and the political will to make sure that damaged rivers are mended in our lifetimes. The EA project on the Great Ouse is looking at habitat that favours juvenile barbel, and they need all the information they can get on spawning sites, and present and historical catch returns, especially of small barbel. The BS will be helping all it can, so keep an eye out for more information on this one, and contribute to the spawning survey if you can, not just on the Ouse but all your rivers. We will be helping with funding some habitat work in the future as well.



Easy to lose ten tonnes of gravel here!



Fish refuge constructed just downstream of croy



Nice fry bay excavated by the EA on the Stour

Signs of spring and no signs of a salmon

28th March 2009

Went out for the first time to wave a fly rod in the hope of an Avon salmon, but my rather amateur efforts were in vain, as usual. The signs of a run of Avon salmon returning to historical abundance are not good, and only two fish have been reported so far this year, so the chances of me coming across a salmon are pretty slim in any event, and my skill with a salmon fly rod is best not witnessed. I can get a big heavy tube fly to the far bank in most of the pools, nevertheless. I am sure the fish are unaware of most of my incompetence's. One day a salmon will grab it, if I keep on putting the hours in. There are fears that the global warming that has been such good news for carp and barbel over the last quarter century is not favouring salmon from the southern chalk streams. Not only do raised ambient river temperatures not suit them ascending the river, the movement of their food sources further north due to ocean warming means that sea survival and growth is inhibited. Avon salmon smolts have much further to go to reach the feeding grounds, and less to eat on the way, it has been suggested.

The river looks very nice at this time of year, running quite low and clearing nicely, with signs of the green shoots of recovery in the sedge, nettle and willows after that harsh winter. The amazing growth of willow that has been damaged or cut back never ceases to impress me, and the willow coppiced and pollarded at the BS water at Bransford on the Teme will be springing into life now, albeit a little behind the regrowth to be seen on the more southerly Avon. Some pollards that I photographed last year are now about to green up, but the amount of sprouting that has occurred in less than a year is remarkable. These trees are real survivors, and it seems that the harder you cut them, the faster they grow, and any bit of twig or branch shoots and becomes another tree if left in the right conditions. The roots of willows make fine spawning substrate for a lot of fish, willows provide shade and can also strengthen river banks and slow down undesirable erosion if placed properly. They will overtake and envelop a river if not managed in any way, however.

It was my turn to check the salmon egg boxes on the upper river that the Wessex Salmon and Rivers Trust are using to investigate salmon procreation and the habitat requirements of young salmon. They are starting to swim up out of the gravel now, and are neatly captured in a little trap on the outlet of the box. These tiny salmon are counted and released daily, and only two were evident today. They were easily counted, therefore, and then taken to the release site a short distance away. The expectations are that a big increase in fry will occur any day now. It is hard to see how these tiny little slips of fish can eventually feed up, become parr, then smolts, and then make their way to the sea, avoiding a whole series of obstructions and predators on their journey up to the North Atlantic, only to return as monsters of perhaps twenty or thirty pounds in three years time.



Willow pollards twelve months ago A years growth on the same pollards Tiny salmon from our egg box

Visit to Bransford

21st March 2009

I combined a trip to Leicester with a site visit to the Society water on the Teme at Bransford. The EA had completed their tree work as part of a partnership project with the Barbel Society, and with shared funding and a combination of expertise and equipment from the EA Fisheries and Flood Defence teams, and after consultation with biodiversity interests, a huge amount of work has been done. Great overhanging old willows have been pollarded, and a great deal of very overgrown bank has been cleared to gain access. In places this bit of river was a dark and gloomy, inaccessible tunnel, and in dire need of some sky lighting.

The work was done very sympathetically, leaving untouched areas and pollarding and coppicing in rotation. The amount of extra light that will now reach the water and the margins means that the productivity of the stream will increase, and weed should return in places. A lot of instream cover was retained, but Ron and I made a note of various places where smaller willows could be planted or felled in order to produce low overhead cover and holding areas for fish. There are many new swims available as well, and the old Salmon Pool now looks very inviting. The willow stumps are already sprouting, and within a few weeks the regrowth will be considerable. The relatively small cash input from the Society linked with our initial idea has meant that work worth tens of thousands has resulted, and we expect it to be part of an ongoing process. We want to involve the newly formed Severn Rivers Trust with the continuing project, and with more funding from various sources we can keep on restoring and enhancing the habitat to suit all the fish and wildlife on the fishery.

Such enhancement work is likely to be listed as desirable action in the Water Framework Directive for the area, and having just spent some time trawling through the extensive documentation linked to the current round of consultation, I would urge all anglers to take a look too. The amount of information is staggering, but the highlights in my area, South West, are that our rivers are failing to achieve good status because of two main factors; phosphate levels, and low FISH populations. All the actions to address these failures should concentrate, therefore, on cleaning up sewage treatment work effluents, and improving FISH populations. At my recent EA meeting to discuss the WFD consultation, I mentioned that all their proposed actions seemed to help

fish in theory, so could not be criticised. However, I suggested that the effects of increased numbers of fish predators could have some effect on fish populations. I suggested that research into fish predator numbers should be added to the list. I would suggest that you all do the same!

Check out the EA website, and the WFD Consultation process in your area. Look in Appendix B for current proposed actions. Should keep you busy in the Close Season.



Some nice pollards at Bransford



Scope to add some low cover here



Worth another pic of a predator!