

New rod licence design finally revealed!

We have unveiled our new design for this year's rod licences. Designed by renowned angling and wildlife artist, David Miller, the new rod licences went on sale on Tuesday 1st March. The image on this year's non-migratory trout and coarse fishing rod licence is a chub (*Leuciscus cephalus*). The salmon and sea trout licence is a salmon (*Salmo salar*).



Sarah Chare, head of fisheries at the Environment Agency, said: 'All the money raised from rod licence sales is used to protect and improve fish stocks and fisheries benefiting anglers. We want more people to give fishing a go and everyone who does will need one of these licences. We're delighted to see David's stunning designs which promote the beauty of our natural environment and encourage people to give fishing a go.'

A rod licence is a legal requirement for fishing in England and Wales. At £27 for coarse fishing and non-migratory trout, or £72 to also fish for salmon and sea trout, the annual licence is great value for money, especially as it has remained the same price since 2010. There are flexible options to choose from too: a 1 or 8 day licence, or the full season. There are also junior and concession options. You can buy your rod licence online from the Post Office at www.postoffice.co.uk/rod-fishing-licence or by phoning 0344 800 5386 or at your local Post Office

Always ensure that you buy direct from the Post Office because there are some unofficial websites which may charge a handling fee.



Anyone fishing illegally is cheating other licence paying anglers, and can expect to be prosecuted and face a substantial fine. In 2014-2015 we checked 70,000 rod licences and prosecuted more than 2,000 anglers for fishing without a licence resulting in more than £500,000 in fines and costs.

The river closed season is upon us

By the time this newsletter reaches you, the closed season for coarse fish species on rivers, will be well under way. The closed season runs from 15th March to the 15th June inclusive for coarse fish species in rivers. Anglers wishing to fish for brown trout, migratory trout and salmon will have had to observe a closed season from 1st October to 31st March inclusive. The closed season applies to all running waters and some sections of canal which have interaction with the river. Please get in touch with one of the fisheries officers mentioned anywhere in the newsletter if you have any queries on whether a closed season applies to a particular stretch of water.

The legal basis for the statutory close seasons is to protect fisheries from the impacts of angling during the breeding season. For coarse fish, a close season was introduced at the end of the nineteenth century, when coarse fish were usually killed upon capture. Nowadays coarse fish are almost invariably returned to the fishery and therefore a close season may no longer be justified on all waters. Although the coarse fish close season may have benefits for wildlife, habitat and to other recreational users, these are incidental and close seasons cannot be imposed for these reasons.

There is still debate as to the worth of the closed season with strong advocates from each camp voicing their opinions. As it stands we are taking a precautionary stance on the matter of the closed season. It is felt that the current absence of any robust scientific evidence means we must maintain a closed season.

If you suspect someone is fishing in the closed season then please call the incident hotline on **0800 80 70 60** as soon as practically possible.

So I heard I can fish on the river for eels and trout in the closed season?

This is a scenario that crops up for us every closed season here in the office. The rumour goes around that you **can** fish in the closed season as long as you're fishing with a worm, for eels, on the third Thursday of the month and only between the hours of 20:15 and 21:45 whilst wearing pink wellies and a deer-stalker hat.

The truth of the matter is however slightly less fantastic. There is a period during the coarse fish closed season whereby an angler may legally fish for brown trout. The closed season for 'Brownies' is October 1st to March 31st inclusive. This means that from the 1st April onwards the trout angler has sole access to the river whilst his coarse fishing cousin is restricted to canals and stillwaters until the water are open to all on 16th June.

Now this doesn't mean you all get to head out to the river claiming to be "trout fishing"! You must be clearly seen to be actively fishing for trout with an artificial fly or lure. However, if one of the Bailiffs watched you pulling out perch on a small spinner in a section of river not exactly noted for its trout populations then they may be asking serious questions of you!

It's worth familiarising yourself with the South East Region rod fishing byelaws. They can be found here www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/295631/South_East_Byelaws.pdf

This document gives a nice, concise breakdown in understandable English (not legal jargon) of where and when you can fish, what methods may be used and what fish you may take. Do bear in mind though that the club controlling the fishing rights may implement more stringent rules than these, a popular one being that all fish must be returned to the water.

Claridges Pond, Swindon – Stock Assessment

On the 23rd March 2016 our West Thames Fisheries Officers carried out an electrofishing survey on Claridges Pond in Swindon. The assessment was done to help Stratton St Margaret Parish Council with their management of the water.

Jim Seymour, Fisheries Office, said, “Our aim was to assess the numbers and species of fish present in the water. We knew about the carp, which come to the surface during low oxygen events, but we were surprised at the quality and numbers of roach and tench which we caught.



The pond is one of several small waterbodies in the Swindon area that provides a valuable recreational resource for local people.

For more information on this please contact Jim Seymour on james.seymour@environment-agency.gov.uk

Blackwater surveys

Our Fisheries Officers recently carried out a fish population survey on the River Blackwater. This is just one of many electro fishing surveys we will be carrying out this spring in the Loddon Catchment. Amongst the hundreds of fish captured many year classes of chub, roach, perch and dace were recorded with scale samples taken to determine age. Minor species of fish also recorded were minnow, bullhead, and stone loach which were present in large numbers.



The River Blackwater appeared in good condition still carrying a little colour. A diverse habitat of gravel riffles, deep holes and both marginal and in-stream aquatic vegetation provided important habitat for fish and wildlife.

Working at this location gave us the opportunity to observe a riffle and river narrowing work which was delivered during one of our Rivers Weeks a few years ago. These river improvements appear to be working well and providing suitable habitat for the gravel spawning species present.

For Further information please contact Adrian Bicknell on 01252 729568.

Fisheries Enhancement on the Rivers Windrush and Dikler.

Our West Thames Fisheries have been working with the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and volunteers to improve fish populations on the Windrush and Dikler near to Great Rissington, Gloucestershire. The Dikler is the Windrush's largest tributary and the two meet south of Bourton-on-the-Water.

The River had become overly wide as a result of poaching by livestock and the reduced flow causes the deposition of silt. Fish require clean gravel to spawn. The improvement work included narrowing the river using posts and bundles of hazel. We also pinned in a series of deflectors to keep the gravel shoals free of silt and promote the growth of aquatic plants such as water crowfoot.



Jim setting a hazel bundle in place.

For further information contact Jim Seymour
james.seymour@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Screening developments for Water Companies

Water Companies can take a significant proportion of the flow from the River Thames to supply drinking water. When the abstraction pumps are in full operation they have the potential to draw in lots of fish, particularly juvenile fish that can't swim very well. This can have quite an impact on the numbers of fish along the reach containing the abstraction point.

In 2010, the Government brought in some legislation called the Eel Regulations, which required people that take water from rivers to screen their intakes to prevent eels being killed. These screens are also very effective at preventing coarse fish from being sucked up too. Ofwat, the economic regulator of the water industry have allowed the Water Companies to charge their customers to upgrade their screens at all of their water intakes.



A close up of one of the screens

Affinity Water have already installed screens at their Chertsey, Sunnymeads and Egham intakes that should protect hundreds of thousands of small fish every year. Thames Water are just starting their programme of works at their massive Walton intake on the lower Thames. They will then move on to their other sites on the Thames and River Lee. All of these screens should be up and

Letcombe Brook improvements

With help from our Fisheries Team the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust, with volunteer assistance as well, was able to begin a series of habitat improvements to the Letcombe Brook. The Trust looks after a local nature reserve near Letcombe Bassett, through which the delightful Letcombe Brook flows. Historical river engineering works and a large impoundment have widened and slowed the brook through the reserve site. As a consequence it is also now very shallow and silty – not ideal Brown trout habitat!

Several D-shaped groynes have been created to help narrow the stream and speed up flow. The groynes are a collection of brash contained within a frontage of wooden stakes and hazel faggots. The hope is that conditions will be ideal for a variety of plants to colonise the inside of the groynes and that before long, the shallow silty area will have deepened as the faster flow moves the silt along and out of the section.



Fisheries Officers lay hazel faggots along the front edge of the groyne. The area inside was then filled with any brash the volunteers could find from the surrounding woodland.

For more information on this story please contact Stuart Manwaring on stuart.manwaring@environment-agency.gov.uk

Habitat enhancement works on the North Branch of the Wey

The Farnham Town section of River Wey North Branch is a very popular section of river for anglers, with most species of coarse fish and wild brown trout found in this water. Although the river is in good condition there is always room for improvement through some sections. Our Fisheries Officers recently delivered some habitat improvement and soft bank protection through Farnham Town Centre.

This work was carried out as a partnership project with Waverley Borough Council Rangers and the Surrey Wildlife Trust. Using locally sourced natural materials, work saw the creation of a Faggot berm to narrow the river, speed up flow and expose gravels to improve fish spawning habitat. The berm also protects the undercut bank from erosion and provides habitat for juvenile fish and invertebrates.



Other work delivered included pinning in 'Large woody Debris' for further fish habitat and installing flow deflectors to scour the river bed and create deeper pools.

For further information please contact Adrian Bicknell on 01252 729568

Benyons Backwaters Boost

Reading and District Angling Association have dug two backwaters on their Lower Benyons stretch of the Kennet. This has been with advice from our local Fisheries Team and Rod Licence money to help with the erection of a fence around the newly dug fish refuges. The two backwaters were dug below an area that fish, including barbel, chub and dace, are known to spawn. During high water, the juvenile fish can be washed downstream. These areas will provide a haven for these fish to rest and also grow. The two refuges are different in design. One has a smaller surface area but is deeper, and the other covers a larger area, but is shallower. This means they will complement each other depending on the level of the river.



The backwaters were completed late last year and it is hoped that many fish will have already used their new facility over the winter. Over the coming months, this year's fry will also make use of these hugely important features.

For more information on this story please contact Adam Hilliard on adam.hilliard@environment-agency.gov.uk

The Kennet Roach Project

Del Shackleford of Reading & District AA has been working with our local Fisheries Team to setup an exciting new project for the Kennet, and has included a visit to the Avon Roach Project for inspiration. There have been several stages to the project. Spawning boards have been constructed and placed in the Kennet for the roach to spawn on. These will then be taken back to the Rod Licence funded poly tunnel where tanks are ready to accommodate the roach spawn. The eggs will then hatch and the young fish will be placed into growing-on ponds. When they are a few years old they will then be stocked out into the Kennet.



The spawning boards are out in the river at this very moment, and it is now up to the roach to complete this part of the process. It is important to remember that this project is not a standalone project. It has been completed in conjunction with other habitat improvements that have been completed on the Lower Kennet. Assuming the roach found the boards, there will be more updates in the next newsletter.

For more information on this story please contact Adam Hilliard on adam.hilliard@environment-agency.gov.uk or have a look at the Reading and District facebook page for updates.

A baffling solution to fish passage

Achieving free movement of fish throughout a catchment is crucial in protecting the health and integrity of our fish populations into the future. In ecology, any fragmented or isolated populations are at a much higher risk of extinction than those that are well connected. The genetic health of all individuals is critical in the population's ability to withstand environmental either natural or man-made. A population of fish upstream of a weir that has been severely affected by a prolonged drought, will take many years to recover without input from fish downstream.

The presence of impassable weirs and other structures has been identified as one of the main reasons for failure of fish under the Water Framework Directive on many waterbodies. Many of these barriers are historic mills or locks, and weir structures for navigation purposes, but there is also a network of gauging weirs present throughout the country. Monitoring flow is an important aspect of the work that we do – both for protection of water resources but also for flood warning reasons. Unfortunately these also cause obstruction to fish passage.

We have developed a low cost technique that uses baffles to create conditions suitable for fish passage up these weirs. They are designed in such a way that they do not impact on the ability of the weir to accurately record flow. Since Christmas we have fitted baffles to five weirs, making them passable to fish for the first time in decades. The sites are: High Furlong and Hedsor on the River wye, Farnham on the Wey, Swallowfield on the Loddon and the Pang at Pangbourne. Two of the sites, Farnham and Hedsor, also had eel tiles fitted to allow free passage of eels.

For more information on this story please email Paul St Pierre at paul.stpierre@environment-agency.gov.uk



One of the recently installed baffle fish passes on an EA gauging weir

Contact Us

If you would like any further information about any articles in this newsletter or have any other queries please contact Stuart Manwaring, Fisheries Technical Officer.

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