Fisheries Annual Report 2017 to 2018
Thames

We are the Environment Agency. We protect and improve the environment. We help people and wildlife adapt to climate change and reduce its impacts, including flooding, drought, sea level rise and coastal erosion. We improve the quality of our water, land and air by tackling pollution. We work with businesses to help them comply with environmental regulations. A healthy and diverse environment enhances people's lives and contributes to economic growth. We can't do this alone. We work as part of the Defra group (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs), with the rest of government, local councils, businesses, civil society groups and local communities to create a better place for people and wildlife.

Published by:

Environment Agency
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Bristol BS1 5AH

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Foreword

In each of our 14 areas we carry out a wide range of work in order to protect and improve fisheries. Below are some examples of what has been happening in the Thames Area, much of which benefits fisheries from funding from both Fishing licence fees and other sources. For a wider view of the work we do across the country for fisheries please see the national Annual Fisheries Report.

Contents

1. Fishing licence checks and prosecutions

During the 2017 to 2018 financial year (the last complete year of data) a total of 64,702 fishing licence checks were carried out by our fisheries enforcement staff across the country. Our checks show us that evasion was relatively low with a national average of 3.97%. Below are details from Thames:

54,721 rod licences sold

£1,202,390.25 income generated from rod licence sales

5,399 rod licences checked

60 successful prosecutions

£8,033 fines and costs imposed

853 Reasons to buy a fishing licence

Thames Area has some of the largest aggregations of fisheries in the country. The Area includes the Cotswold Water Park, the Lower Windrush Valley Pits and a multitude of waters around Reading, Newbury and Wraysbury. We also have some superb rivers including the Thames and Kennet. The prospect of some great fishing draws anglers from all over the country. Our Fisheries Enforcement Officers made over 2000 visits to waters and checked 5,399 licences.

The majority of anglers are fishing legally and purchase the correct fishing licence. We invest the money from fishing licences back into fisheries improvements, fish stocking and fishing, this is essential for the future of the sport. Anglers that fail to buy a fishing licence are cheating their fellow anglers and the future of the sport. In addition fishing licence cheats risk a criminal conviction, a significant fine and could lose their fishing equipment.

In September 2017 two anglers were checked whilst fishing by our patrolling officers at Badshot Lea Ponds, near Aldershot. The anglers were found to be fishing without a licence, they were reported for this offence and prosecuted. The Magistrate found them guilty of fishing without a licence. They were fined and ordered to pay costs and a victim surcharge. These illegal anglers had a magnificent whopper of a catch unfortunately for them it was a fine of £853.00 a very expensive day of fishing.

Fishing licence

2. Illegal fishing

Illegal fishing remains a threat to game and coarse fish stocks in England and the fisheries they support. The Environment Agency uses a combination of covert and overt patrols to deter and detect poachers, as well as responding to reports of illegal fishing where there is a credible threat to fish stocks and where we have a realistic chance of apprehending the alleged offenders. We cannot respond to every report of illegal fishing so we must prioritise where we focus our efforts. For Thames:

208 illegal fishing incidents were reported to our incident hotline (0800 80 70 60)

Working together

Our Fisheries Enforcement officers continued to work pan area with colleagues in Herts and North London .This approach enabled us to deploy operational staff where needed. Intelligence from reports to our Incident Hotline 0800 80 70 60, partner organisations and the police continued to be used to help direct this work.

During the annual close season for coarse fish, we acted on reports received by deploying officers across both areas. Following the principles of “detect and deter”, Enforcement officers continued to place warning signage at known hotspots advising of the close season. Officers also actively patrolled those same hotspot areas to re-enforce this message. The River Thames remained a targeted area particularly during the hours of darkness.

Both Enforcement officers and catchment colleagues continued to regularly engage with area consultative bodies and individual clubs.

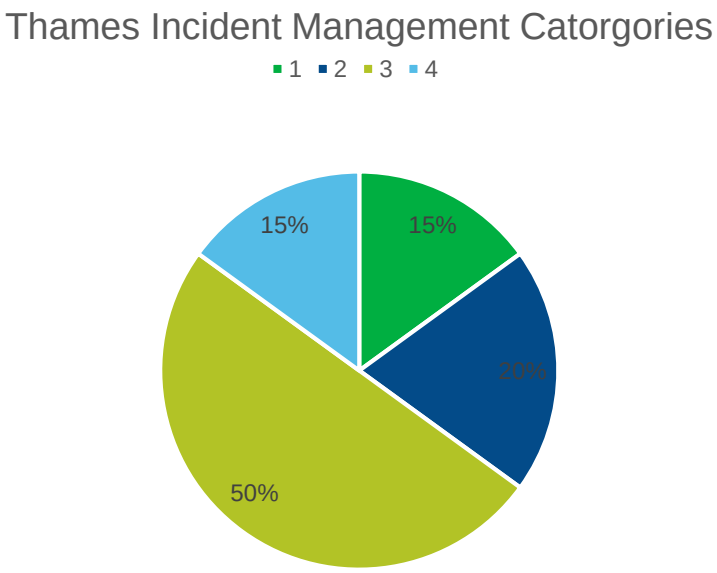
Working in partnership with local police Wildlife Crime officers, we successfully undertook joint investigations in to theft of fish for illegal consumption.

Under the partnership with the Angling Trust we have two warranted Volunteer Bailiffs. This year we were very pleased to appoint one of the volunteer bailiffs to a full time position after their successful application. We continued to actively engage with volunteers operating under the Voluntary Bailiff Service. Our officers and volunteer bailiffs worked together on a number of joint patrols. We also offered support at local meetings with the Angling Trust Regional Enforcement Manager.

3. Incident management

Responding to fish kills and other environmental incidents is a vitally important part of what we do. We respond to thousands of substantiated incidents annually. Members of the public report incidents through our Incident Hotline (0800 80 70 60) and we are able to respond 365 days a year and on any day, at any time, providing an effective and proportionate response.

All incidents are categorised according to potential and actual impact on the environment and the impact on our resources. We can then break this figure down into categories of incident as shown below. Category 1 is the most serious and Category 4 is a reported incident with no impact.



Pike seized from anglers on the River Thames

In October 2017 Fisheries Enforcement Officers (FEOs) responded to an incident on the River Thames at Sandford. A large group of fishermen were witnessed removing pike from the River. Due to the numbers of anglers involved support was requested from Kent and South London Area. Aided by additional officers the Fisheries Enforcement Officers approached the fisherman and seized two pike that had been caught and killed. A fisherman was reported for offences contrary to the regional Byelaws.

Seized pike

Harvey Stream fish rescue

A weekend during May 2017 Fisheries Officers were called to an incident on the River Kennet near Hungerford. A weir structure had failed resulting in water flows bypassing the adjacent Harvey Stream. Over 30 fish were killed and many more were trapped in pools. Oxygen levels in the pools of water were lower than expected, temperatures were rising and the water levels were dropping: It was important that the remaining fish were rescued as quickly as possible by transferring them to safer waters. A team was quickly assembled using weekend duty staff and pre-rostered weekend emergency standby officers. The safest way to remove the fish was by electrofishing. Electrofishing is a scientific method used to sample fish populations to determine abundance, density, and species composition and also can be used for rescuing fish in danger. Electrofishing results in no permanent harm to fish, which return to their natural state in as little as two minutes after being caught. The result of the electric fishing was 374 brown trout, grayling and a number of minor species were rescued and transferred to the River Kennet safely.

Harvey Stream incident

Blake's Lock fish rescue

In January 2018 Fisheries officers undertook a fish rescue at Blake's Lock on the River Kennet in Reading. The lock was due a refurbishment which required all of the water to be pumped out of the chamber. Once about a foot of water was left fisheries staff entered the chamber with electric fishing equipment. Several passes through the chamber were conducted and as a rough estimate two thousand fish were put over the coffer dams and back into the river. Of particular note were the numbers of roach fry present and a dozen or so juvenile tench. Perch, pike, dace, chub, bream, bull heads, minnows and ruffe were also present. Fisheries Officer Stuart Manwaring said "It was a particularly challenging operation for us. The side walls of the lock were being supported by large beams set at shoulder height which necessitated a degree of dodging and ducking and the drop down into the lock chamber, up and down which all the kit and fish had to be carried, was upwards of five metres. This provided an interesting set of risks we had to manage to make the operation safe and successful".

Blakes Lock

4. Fisheries improvement

The boxes below highlight some projects we have delivered followed by the table below listing many of our environmental improvement projects that have helped to deliver benefits to fisheries; many in conjunction with our partners. We have included the time of our fisheries officers in the funding considerations for the projects as their posts are funded by Fishing licence income. Considerable amounts of their time and expertise has been provided for the projects. Many projects have also received funding from government or from other parts of the Environment Agency e.g. flooding, the Environment Programme or Water Framework Directive budgets however where contribution has included Fishing licence income, this has been noted.

£364,600 + £45,100 = £409,700

EA Funding | Match Funding | Fisheries Improvements

In 2017 to 2018 Thames installed 2 fish passes and opened up 24.15km of habitat or spawning ground for fish.

Hell's Ditch fish pass project

The Hell Ditch fish pass project was completed in March 2018. This exciting project opened up over 12km of the River Wey to fish through the installation of a brush pass on a weir at the upstream extent of the Hell Ditch. The fish pass, also known as a fish ladder, now allows fish to swim up and over the weir. A brush-like substrate (pictured below) has been fitted to the weir face to break up the flow and create a depth of water over the weir. Gravel used to facilitate access to the site during construction has also been reused and placed in the Hell Ditch to create new fish spawning habitat which will also provide valuable new habitats for invertebrates.

This work has helped to improve the health of the wider River Wey. The Hell Ditch provides an important wildlife corridor as it bypasses two weirs on the main River at Westbrook and Catteshall. The project was delivered as part of our ‘Wey Fish pass and Wetland Delivery Project (Wey FWD)’; a multi-benefit programme of works along the river Wey corridor which aims to provide fish passage at 9 priority weirs.

Hell Ditch fish pass

River Lambourn fish pass

The River Lambourn is an important chalk river. It is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), due to its chalk river features, including the wild fish populations. The river is failing its SSSI and SAC conservation targets, with one of the issues being the presence of inappropriate weirs and other structures, which impact habitat and prevent the free movement of fish throughout this important river. The EA has a 'Whole River Restoration Strategy' for the SSSI, which, amongst other things, aims to secure fish passage.

At Bagnor the River Lambourn has multiple channels due to the presence of a historic mill, old water meadow structures and an old weir. On the upper channel the mill itself is impassable and in the lower channel, the old weir is impassable. This project allows fish to move freely between the 2 channels, and around the mill. The construction of the fish pass opens up a reach of 3km that was previously impassable. It is one of many fish passage and river restoration projects that have been delivered on the River Lambourn in recent years.

River Lambourn

Bracknell's River Cut

The River Cut in Bracknell is a tributary of the River Thames and is a heavily urbanised catchment. There are several sewage treatment works that discharge along its course, and historically the channel was dredged and straightened at a time when this was considered necessary to avert flooding. Numerous weirs block fish migration and there is year-round run-off from roads and industrial estates. All this results in a river under pressure. The River Cut Project targeted improvements to a stretch of river owned by Bracknell Town Council, who already hosts a range of amenities including tennis, mini-golf and basketball. Working with a public land owner is really advantageous, especially because they recognised the value of angling and nature as both an amenity and a therapy to the rigours of urban life, for adults and children alike.

The council was able to attract funding from a diverse range of sources because of the high percentage of junior anglers registered with the recently formed Braybrooke Community Nature and Fishing Club. The club started out on a local pond and has juniors sitting alongside adults on the committee. Now the aim is to introduce members to the challenge of fishing on a flowing river. A successful application to the Angling Trust resulted in a grant from its Angling Improvement Fund which has allowed 10 fishing platforms to be built, 2 of which will soon have wheelchair access.

But the club didn't want to stop there. What if they could improve the river for fish and wildlife? Better habitat would bring more aquatic plants, insects, birds and of course fish. So we provided Fisheries Improvement Programme funding to contribute to the planned work. Volunteers help provide labour and woody debris and brush used in the habitat work was sourced locally to minimise cost. The partnership has started to transform this once neglected stream into a productive and accessible fishery for all.

As we thin out the tree canopy, light streams into the river and encourages aquatic plants to grow. Much of the river is over-wide and choked with silt, so by creating marginal berms (literally new bits of bank) with the harvested trees, we can make the river meander and increase the flow velocity in the channel. This in turn forces silt downstream, revealing clean gravel below.

Being sited on the edge of an urban centre brings inevitable challenges and this year the river has unfortunately been polluted on several occasions. But rather than being deterred, the partnership has taken this as a cue to engage the local public and business communities in an awareness campaign that is steadily gathering strength. Thames Water has joined forces with the Environment Agency to investigate and send out a strong message to deter dumping of oil and chemicals into roadside drains.

As the threat of pollution now looks to be receding, I decided it was safe to boost the river's native stock of fish from our national fish-rearing facility in Calverton. So on Thursday 14 December 2017, we introduced around 2,000 juvenile chub, roach and dace to help ensure a brighter future for this remarkable little river.

Grayling stocking on the Kennet and Lambourn

Grayling are a special species of fish, being angled for by both game and coarse anglers. They are a fish that has seen numbers decline in the past, although on the Kennet they are now being caught further and further downstream. As a result of this, habitat improvements and evidence of increased brown trout recruitment on the Lower Kennet, it was agreed to help the spread of this much loved fish. Grayling from the Kennet system make up a larger cohort of Thames strain fish, it was important that fish collected were from the same group that their offspring would introduced into. In March 2017 Officers from the Environment Agency's Fish Farm at Calverton collected broodstock from the Kennet and Lambourn, these fish were then spawned back at the Fish Farm.

Spawning of the fish was successful and the broodstock were returned after only a few days away from their native rivers. Over the summer 16,500 juvenile grayling were returned to the Kennet and the Lambourn. It is early days yet but hopefully anglers will be catching grayling below Thatcham once again.

Grayling stocking

Watercourse	Outcome or benefit	Partners	EA Funding (£)	Match funding (£)	Total Cost (£)
Chalgrove Brook, Stadhampton	Improved Habitat: Introduction of gravel, installation of berms, shade reduction.	River Trust	£1,000		£1,000
Chalgrove Brook, Watlington	Improved Habitat: Introduction of gravel, installation of berms, shade reduction.	River Trust	£1,500		£1,500
Chertsey Bourne	Improved Habitat: Bank reprofiling, introduction of gravel, berms and deflectors.	Wildlife Trust	£2,000	£5,000	£7,000
Sherbourne Brook	Improved Habitat: Shade reduction, install large woody debris and flow deflectors	National Trust, Wildlife Trust	£2,600	£800	£3,400
Hell Ditch Fish Pass Project	Fish Passage: Install a brush fish pass		£102,000		£102,000
River Evenlode, Pudlicote	Habitat Improvement: Instream bed raising and narrowing to restore a degraded reach.	Rivers Trust	£17,000	£33,000	£50,000
River Lambourn, Bagnor Fish Pass Project	Fish Passage: Install a combined Larinier & Pool Fish Pass	Natural England	£225,000		£225,000
River Thame, Shabbington	Habitat Improvement: Shade reduction and installation of 5 berms	Angling Club	£5,000		£5,000
River Windrush, Aston	Habitat Improvement: shade reduction	Wildlife Trust	£500	£300	£800
River Windrush, Newbridge	Habitat Improvement: Install Large Woody Debris	Wildlife Trust	£1,500	£500	£2,000
River Dikler	Habitat Improvement: Fencing to reduce cattle poaching	Wildlife Trust	£500	£500	£1,000

The Cut, Bracknell	Habitat Improvement: Install marginal berms and shade reduction.	Local Authority	£6,000	£5,000	£11,000
Total			**£364,600**	**£45,100**	**£409,700**

5. Monitoring

Monitoring of all fish species is vital to our assessment of the condition of the environment. Surveys of fish populations, including coarse fish, are used to assess the status of stocks and contribute to the overall assessment of ecological status of a water body. In Thames:

116 Waterbodies **assessed** for fish 2016/17

26% of waterbodies assessed were at good status or above for fish

You can look at our Catchment Data Explorer for more information.

Monitoring large Rivers

We monitor fish populations in rivers using a number of different methods as part of our National Fisheries Monitoring Programme. Nationally we complete around 2500 surveys annually, approximately 90 per cent of which we carry out by electric fishing. Every year we perform surveys on the river Thames by means of Electric fishing from a boom boat. One of the challenges of fishing such a large river is deciding when and where to fish. This year we have started an investigation to explore whether the time of day or night affects our survey results. We have repeated surveys at Gods tow to Osney, which is near to Oxford. Although our data is limited we appear to catch twice as many fish per minute during the night than in the daytime (11.7 fish per minute compared to the night survey when we caught 19.3 fish per minute). We will continue this investigation as the information will help us develop our understanding fish populations in the River.

River Thames

Argulus Egg laying project

Thames West Fisheries Officers have been working with our National Fish Health Team at Brampton and a local still water club to trial methods of controlling Argulus. Outbreaks of notifiable diseases, such as spring viraemia of carp (SVC) and koi herpes virus (KHV), often make the headlines but common parasites and diseases can also cause serious disease problems, with large mortalities nationwide. Most anglers will have come across Argulus, commonly called fish lice, on their fish. Argulus attach to their host by means of hooks and suckers and feed through a mouth tube. Low numbers of Argulus are common and relatively harmless in our fisheries, but heavy infestations cause considerable irritation, skin damage, haemorrhaging and lesions leading to secondary infections. All species of fish are affected but still water trout fisheries are hit hardest often suffering large mortalities, with loss of revenue as a result of the fish losing condition and becoming uncatchable.

Argulus lay strings of eggs on hard smooth surfaces such as rocks, pontoons and moored boats. We have been trialling the use of artificial egg laying substrate that can be easily installed and managed to remove egg strings and break the life cycle of the parasite. The egg strings are monitored every two weeks to assess effectiveness. The trials are in their infancy but initial results are encouraging. We are hoping that this approach, alongside other management practices will help reduce the impact of this parasite and help fisheries across the country.

Controlling Argulus

Our fish count data is now available online here

For information on what we are doing across the rest of the country read our other Area reports

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