

THE NATIONAL ANGUILLA CLUB

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The National Anguilla Club, 1968

EDITORIAL

If there is anyone who finds angling politics more tiresome and tedious than I do, I'd like to meet him! I'd rather be at the waterside. Happily, there are some anglers who actually prefer to do their fishing in the Committee room, bless their cotton socks! What would we do without them? Unfortunately, armchair anglers and professional legislators alike sometimes let their zeal lead them into preposterous absurdities. Then, we have the choice: we must either involve ourselves in the politicking, or suffer in silence.

The present revision of the Thames Fishery Byelaws is a case in point. We accept that the Conservators are sincere and honest men, and it is to their credit that they have taken notice of the objections raised to their original misguided proposals to the extent of removing a few of the more obviously irrational items. For instance, it now seems that night fishing bans may be left to local controlling bodies instead of being imposed overall; this is sound sense - though the sense of it ought to have been appreciated in the first place. We eel-anglers, however, still have to see our main battle fought. The Conservators still want to prohibit eel fishing during the close season for coarse fish. Not on grounds of protecting the eel (that angling legislation is irrelevant to the protection of eels now seems to have got home) - but because bogus eel-anglers would use it as a pretext for pursuing other species, and the gravid fish liable to be caught during the close season (sic) could be injured by handling.

Well, there is nothing to be gained by fulminating at this nonsense here. We have made our objections direct to the Conservators; and we have helped to prepare the N.A.S.G's brief which will be argued for us at the Public Inquiry starting May 16th. by Dr. Charles Franklin. We could not be in better hands. Let us place our hope and trust in an unprejudiced hearing and a wise decision.

Because this Inquiry not only affects those of us in the Home Counties - it affects us all. River Authorities up and down the country will have their eyes on this Inquiry, and its outcome is bound to influence their attitudes to their own rules and regulations. Those of us who enjoy our hard-won rights in the Nene & Welland area and those of us who enjoy the traditional freedom in other parts of the country, may soon find ourselves defending those rights from the back foot if the Thames Inquiry goes against us. And those who hope, one day, to get needlessly prohibitive regulations in their own areas rescinded, will find their task immeasurably more difficult.

This little island of ours is getting ever smaller, and its angling is all of a piece. It may rob us of precious angling time; tedious and tiresome it surely is; but we can none of us afford to close our eyes to the political scene. Else we shall surely open them one day to find that our beloved angling has - like the Snark - softly and suddenly vanished away.

BEHAVIOUR OF EELS IN L. AINSLIE, NOVA SCOTIAA Summary and Comments

An interesting little scientific paper has come to hand, published by J.C. Medcof of the Fisheries Research Board of Canada (J. Fish. Res. Bd. Canada, 1101, 23(7), 1966). Of course, the eels observed in Canada were *A. rostrata*, not *A. anguilla*; but a number of interesting points emerge.

Medcof describes how anglers' catches of eels near the outflow of Lake Ainslie into the Margaree River improved as the season advanced through June and July. Between mid and late July, however, as the rooted water plants developed, eels began to be seen during daylight, lying motionless, looped in inverted "U"s over plants at or near the surface of the water. Sightings of these "lolling" eels were frequent by late July, but were less common by late August. During this change in the eels' habits, many fishermen "quit angling and took up summer spearing" because the lolling eels could be approached to within spearing distance. Do our eels do this? Does it affect our angling?

Another fairly common observation was of numbers of eels clumped together into more or less spherical balls, ranging from 18 inches to as much as 6 feet in diameter. These eel balls were sometimes stationary and knotted about the base of plants; and sometimes free-floating, the protruding tails causing a slow rotation and a bobbing up and down so that they sometimes broke the surface. Medcof quotes Fries et al. in "A History of Scandinavian Fishes" (1893) to the effect that similar behaviour had been observed with European eels, too. The possibility that such eel balls might account for some of the stories of "monsters" in Scottish, Irish and other lakes will immediately come to mind; and, interestingly enough, there is a traditional "great beast of Lake Ainslie", too. One local fisherman suggested to Medcof that free-floating eel balls might be the basis of this "beast".

The seasonal downstream migration of silver eels in Canada takes place during August to November, and as in Europe, the most prolific runs were "in the dark of the moon" and especially on rainy nights. There is a curious apparent oversight in the paper, in which Medcof is by no means alone. He writes at one point of "the downriver migrations of mature (nonfeeding) eels" and at another point of an angler's capture of "five eels including one yellow-bellied...and four white-bellied...white (silver) characterising mature eels ready for seaward migration". I have written about this bit of double-think before, and once again we may wonder whether statements that "silver eels are not feeding" are in the same category as "carp do not feed in winter"!

Medcof also mentions "minute, bird-like chirping or sucking noises" heard around these waters on calm evenings after dark; and he heard eels making precisely the same sounds in the bottom of a punt after netting. Local fishermen told him they were eels' feeding noises. He speculates that the occurrence of these noises might be useful to eel-weir fishermen as indicators of when to set their nets. No doubt, we have all heard similar noises after dark, when eel-fishing. I, at least, have always assumed they were caused by small rudd, roach etc. feeding at the surface; but perhaps we ought to take more notice of them. Might they - at least, sometimes - be due to feeding eels?

It is unusual, these days, to find scientific papers describing straight observations of behaviour in Nature; and this is not only an unusual paper in this respect - it gives some interesting food for angling thought, too.

- Terence Coulson.

THE GRANTHAM GROUP

by David Goodrum

Formation

The Grantham section of the National Anguilla Club was first formed during the autumn of 1966. Although we were fishing together and meeting quite frequently during the previous year, the idea of making it a more formal Group came from Terry Coulson's proposals in the Supplement to the Bulletin for August, 1966.

The Group consisted of six members when first formed - Jack Bellamy, Stan Hill, Roy Ecob, Dennis Ecob, Dave Woods and myself. Just recently, Dave Woods has left the Club, owing to work.

I took on the job of Group Secretary and began to get things organised. We had a meeting to decide how we were going to run things, a treasurer was elected and a shilling a week was given towards the Group's fund. The money soon began to mount up and with it we have purchased such items as three full sized plastic dustbins to put eels in, some MS 222 and a set of Avon scales. We also intend to obtain one of Arthur Sutton's electronic thermometers.

We have a meeting once a month to discuss our plans for each month's eel fishing, and also have a chat about Club affairs in the Bulletin and Newsheet. The majority of things we do are done as a Group; of course, we all have our own ideas, and when a difference of opinion crops up, we thresh it out at our meetings.

We spend a great deal of our time fishing together, just about every weekend during the summer. I think this is a great advantage of Group working, especially if you are working on a project water. The rod-hours soon mount up and you learn a great deal about one water in a season, as much as would take three seasons on your own.

Projects

Our first project water was Lake Helen at Wigtoft near Boston, Lincs. We first started to fish this lake during the Autumn of 1966. I had heard of eels in this water, but that is all we did know. Well, we went all-out on this lake, fishing it at every opportunity during the latter part of the eel season of 1966. Fishing from September to November, we put in about 700 rod-hours for 20 eels, the best eel being 4 lb. 7 oz. We made maps of the lake, plumbed depths and named swims. We kept very detailed records of each session all of which went into our Group file. During those first two months, we got to know a great deal about Lake Helen, far more than if we had been fishing as individuals.

During the winter months, we discussed Lake Helen a great deal; looking at our past records, we thought this water looked quite promising. We decided to really flog the water during the 1967 season, starting in March, and also to start taking otoliths for growth rate studies.

We made a start on March 26th., 1967, and caught two eels that session of 2 lb. 9 oz. and 1 lb. 12 oz. The water temperature was 48^oF. We were off to a good start, but as the summer went on, we found the decent-sized eels hard to come by. The rod-hours began to mount, but although we caught 38 eels, only two of these were between 2 and 3 lb. These were very poor results considering we had put in something like 2,240 rod-hours. Small eels came quite frequently on lobworms; in fact, the rod-hours per eel on lobs worked out at 11. But rod-hours on dead-baits worked out at 187 per eel - as you

can see, quite a slow job! We took 33 sets of otoliths, which have been mentioned in the Report on the 1967 Growth Rate Work. As can be seen from the graph, Lake Helen eels seem well below the average compared with other waters.

Planning

What now had to be decided was whether we were going to continue with this water as we had in the past. We had a Group meeting to decide just what was to be done. I consulted Terry Coulson and discussed with him what the members of this Group thought of the situation at Lake Helen.

What it all came down to was this: were we going to spend another 2,000-odd rod-hours on Lake Helen, or start from scratch on a new water? After very serious consideration, we decided that we just could not afford another 2,000-odd rod-hours on this water. We are not just going to drop the water altogether, but as a Group project it will be taken off our list. We shall still have a few sessions there, just to keep a bit of data coming in.

We have now started on Butler's Pit near Peterborough, a very interesting water as far as we are concerned. We had quite a bit of information about Butler's before we took it on as a project water, because we had fished it as individuals and we had one of the Club's "trips" there in 1966. On that occasion, an eel of 4 lb. 9 oz. was taken by Stan Hill, and Les Hudson had a nine inch rudd bitten in half, so things looked interesting.

So far, our results from Butler's have been quite satisfactory. Fishing from June of last year to October, we caught 47 eels, and put in around 1,890 rod-hours. The two best eels were 5 lb. and 4 lb. 14 oz.* We also took 23 sets of otoliths which, again, are covered in the Growth Rate Report.

As those members who have fished this water will know, it is a fair-sized one, and fishing it as a Group is the only way to give the water decent coverage. We now have use of a punt at Butler's, which enables us to get out onto some of the islands off which there are some very nice swims. The punt also has other uses, such as depth soundings, bottom study and location of weed beds. All this we are going to do this summer, and we have maps drawn up which will be available to any member of the Club who is interested.

Enjoyment

Since the formation of our Group in 1966, we have been able to do things that as individuals would have been impossible. Also - and I am sure the lads will agree - we have had many a laugh and a good argument since we have been fishing together. I, for one, have enjoyed the companionship of the lads very much; never have I enjoyed my fishing so much as I do now. It does not matter who catches the eels - so long as one of us does. We are fishing as a team and it is only by team-work that we are going to get the results we want.

Apart from the serious side of things, there are two things a Group must have. The first is a Duty Tea Masher. This chap is the life's blood of the Group. I ask you, what can be better when you come round in the morning than a chap standing there with a good, hot cup of tea? Our tea-lad is Stanley Hill; good old Stan, award yourself the C.D.M., mate - you bloody deserve it! The other thing is a good joke teller, and we have the best in Jack Bellamy. I will match our Jack against any Club member; old Jack has you rolling on the bank like a 5 lb. eel with a size one hook through its snout. All this is part of our Group, and I for one hope we have many more seasons fishing together.

When the new Groups are formed, I would like to wish each of them success and if you get the same kind of spirit in your Group as I have found in mine, I think you will agree it is well worth while.

*Both of these fine eels were caught by the author - Editor.

NOTABLE EELS OF THE BRITISH ISLES

by Terence Coulson

For the past few years, I have been collecting information on eels of 4 lb. and over from members' reports, from the Press and from friends in other Groups, and storing it in a punched-card system. We are now beginning to learn something from our Session Reporting work, and the time is approaching to start analysing the data in this system, to see whether it will shed any extra light, confirm, clarify, confuse or contradict!

Before attempting any analyses, however, I propose to publish the contents of the system, running through all the Counties in turn and setting out full details of all the big eels on record. The first three County lists are presented in this issue. The purpose of compiling and publishing these lists is not only to give members an opportunity to make use of the information, but also to amend, correct and add to it wherever possible, before it is used in the analyses.

As a preamble, it will be interesting to list off the Counties, and state the total number of eels on record from each, so as to give some sort of overall picture - although, of course, eels may be added to the tally by the time a County comes round to its turn for a summary. *466+*

<u>COUNTY</u>	<u>No. of Eels</u>	<u>COUNTY</u>	<u>No. of Eels</u>
	1968		1968
Beds.	18		c/f 222
Berks.	8	Norfolk	23
Bucks.	14	Northants.	21
Cambs. & Ely	7	Northumbs.	2
Cheshire	10	Notts.	5
Cornwall	-	Oxfords.	5
Cumberland	1	Rutland	1
Derbys.	-	Shrops.	11
Devon	9	Somerset	19
Dorset	1	Staffs.	7
Durham	-	Suffolk	6
Essex	17	Surrey	15
Glos.	4	Sussex	8
Hants.	9	Warwicks.	11
Herefs.	8	Westmorland	1
Herts.	37	Wilts.	4
Hunts.	14	Worcs.	23
Kent	6	Yorks.	12
Lancs.	7	Wales & Mon.	14
Leics.	11	Scotland	1
Lincs.	13	Ireland	-
London	10		<u>410</u>
Middx.	16	Unknown	10
	<u>222</u>	Total	<u>420</u>

Over 400 eels of 4 lb. and over; some of them dubious, and some of them entirely bogus, no doubt; but overall, it must represent quite the most comprehensive collection of data on big eels ever assembled. Compare with the list of only 37 in Raymond Perret's excellent little book, "Eels: How To Catch Them". Incidentally, this book is abbreviated "E:HTCT" under "Source" in the lists; other abbreviations include: AT = Angling Times; AM = Angler's Mail; FG = Fishing Gazette.

Notable Eels: BEDFORDSHIRE

<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>CLASS</u>	<u>WEIGHT</u>	<u>LENGTH</u>	<u>GIRTH</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>BAIT</u>	<u>CAPTOR</u>	<u>SOURCE</u>	
R.Gt.Ouse, Eaton Socon	1.	4:8	38	$8\frac{1}{2}$	Aug 66		Bleak db	K.Layton	AT 19.8.66, p. 2 (P)	
		4:4			1 Oct 67	01.15	Mouse	A.J.Sutton	A.J.Sutton	
		4:2			Jul 65		Worm	D.Carter	AT 6.8.65, p. 15	
		4:0			Jun 63		Lobworm	A.Sarrington	AT 5.7.63, p. 13	
A ditch, Ickwell		5:0	40	$8\frac{3}{4}$	22 May 61	day	Ct. by hand		AT 9.6.61, p. 17 FG17.6.61,p.565 (P)	
G.U.Canal, Slapton, Dunstable	2.3	5:4	41	$8\frac{1}{2}$	5 Aug 65	15.00	Worm	K.Makin	AT 27.8.65, p. 13	
A pond, Stotfold	2.	12:4			ca 32		Ct. by hand		A.Wilkie	
		9:0			ca 56		Found dead	F.Guttfield	A.Wilkie	
		5:1			18 Aug 66	03.45	Roach db	A.Wilkie	AT 9.9.66, p. 21 AM 9.9.66, p. 3	
		4:14						F.Guttfield	A.Wilkie	
		4:11			15 Aug 66	22.30	Roach db	D.Boothroyd	AT .8.66	
		4:1	$38\frac{1}{4}$		$7\frac{1}{2}$	21 Aug 65	22.30	Gudgeon db	A.Wilkie	A.Wilkie
		4:0	$34\frac{3}{4}$		$8\frac{1}{2}$	17 Aug 66	04.00	Roach db	A.Wilkie	AT 9.9.66, p. 21 AM 9.9.66, p. 3
"Wilson's Water", Bedford	2.2	6:6	$44\frac{1}{2}$	$9\frac{3}{4}$	20 Jun 67	04.00	Bleak db	J.Wilson	AT 29.6.67, p. 17	
		5:0			23 Jun 67	22.00	Rudd db	A.Wilkie	A.Wilkie	
		4:14			24 Jun 67	01.00	Rudd db	A.Wilkie	A.Wilkie	
A small pond, Arlesey	2.	8:4	36+	10	Jul 58		Lobworm	J.Taylor	AT 1.8.58, p. 1 Where To Fish	
		6:8			Jul 58			J.Taylor	AT 1.8.58, p. 1	

Notable Eels: BERKSHIRE

<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>CLASS</u>	<u>WEIGHT</u>	<u>LENGTH</u>	<u>GIRTH</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>BAIT</u>	<u>CAPTOR</u>	<u>SOURCE</u>
R.Thames, Romney Lock, Windsor	1.2	7:8	48	10	Sep 54	night	Deadbait	G.Moss	G.Moss
		7:8	45		Sep 54	night	Deadbait	G.Moss	G.Moss
Clewer Point, Windsor		5:0	40	9	19 Aug 66	21.15	6 oz. Roach db	W.Phillips	AT 2.9.66, p. 21 AM 2.9.66, p.1, 24 (P)
Sonning		4:0	38	8	21 Feb 67	13.00	3-4" Roach lb	T.Thompson	G.Moss
R.Kennett, Newbury	1.	15:0							E:HTCT, quoting Thos. Boosey (1835)
Reading		4:5			Jul 57			P.Arlott	AT 2.8.57, p. 16
Holy Brook, Reading	1.	4:11 $\frac{3}{4}$			Sep 61		Gudgeon	A.M.Chandler	AT 29.9.61, p. 12
Private lake	2.	4:8			Jul 56		Lobworm	C.Ratchford	AT 27.7.56, p. 13

Notable Eels: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>CLASS</u>	<u>WEIGHT</u>	<u>LENGTH</u>	<u>GIRTH</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>BAIT</u>	<u>CAPTOR</u>	<u>SOURCE</u>
R.Thames, Datchet	1.2	5:2			Jul 56		Brndlgs+mggts	F.Parker	AT 10.8.56, p. 1 E:HTCT
Boveney Lock		4:3			Aug 56		Lobworm	G.Ball	AT 24.8.56, p. 2 E:HTCT
R.Gt.Ouse, Buckingham	1.	4:0	37		9 Oct 66	13.30	Lobworm	P.Abbot	AT 28.10.66, p. 14
Kingsmead Pit, Wraysbury	2.1	6:5			25 Aug 66	14.55	4 Redworms	G.Moss	G.Moss
Langley Pit, Slough	2.1	4:9	39		8 $\frac{7}{8}$ 23 Jul 66	22.00	Roach db	A.J.Sutton	A.J.Sutton
G.U. Canal, Iver	2.3	7:4	46		ca 53	day	Worm	G.Moss	G.Moss
		7:0	40		ca 53	day	Worm	G.Moss	G.Moss
		6:8	38		ca 53	day	Deadbait	G.Moss	G.Moss
Bletchley		5:8 $\frac{1}{2}$	43		25 Jun 66	05.30	Lobworm	C.Craft	AT 8.7.66 p. 21
Slapton		4:3 $\frac{1}{2}$			Aug 60		Lobworm	L.Bates	AT 19.8.60, p. 1
Denbigh Pit, Stoke Hammond	2.	4:3 $\frac{1}{2}$			Jul 61		Gudgeon db	P.Scott	AT 14.7.61, p. 17
Gravel pit, Wraysbury	2.	4:8	36		Aug 54			E.W.Robbins	AT 13.8.54, p.2
A private lake	2.	5:8	44+		28 Jul 67	03.15	Lobworms	R.E.Nunn	AT 10.8.67, p. 11 (P) AM 11.8.67, p. 3 (P)
Langley Park near Langley Marish	?	6:4			Jul 64		Rudd db	J.Pope	AT 31.7.64, p. 1