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The National Anguilla Club, 1968

EDITORIAL

Those of us who live in the more enlightened parts of the country where bona fide eel fishers are not prohibited from following their sport during the coarse fish close season, and those of us who have the means to transport ourselves and our kit to those Elysian fields, will - most of us - have made a start on our eel fishing these long weeks since. Those of us whom circumstances confine to more benighted regions will no doubt have made a start on the glorious sixteenth.

In either case, we are now all in full cry after our favourite quarry, the eel. And even for those of us who fished for eels during April and May there is something special about these days and nights of late June. The very thought of June Sixteenth evokes images of sultry-still, secret nights under skies of black velvet; of dark waters with an oily calm; of buzzers rending the night's silence like Klaxon horns; the heart-bursting tension of the double run, the strike; of stout rods bucking alive in the hands; of the sudden explosion in the margins of Leviathan itself lashing the water aboil in fury.

Ah! - those are the images these days evoke in anticipation. But the reality? That's something else again. The reality, to be sure, is often enough compounded of open skies with stars like icicles and temperatures dropping like a stone; of vital items of gear unfortunately left at home; of desperate attempts to rig in the teeth of a force 9 gale and slashing cloud-burst some means of indicating a bite which will not stop the eel dead in its tracks; of the new and expensive line which unaccountably parts on the hard-earned strike like a piece of sewing thread; of dour fights with a dogged opponent which turns out heart-breakingly to be a wretched little eel which has tangled the tackle inextricably about some unidentifiable piece of old iron.

Well, eel fishing is a blend of all these things. It needs a special sort of angler to live with some of these excruciating frustrations - anglers like ourselves. Maybe it helps to know that one is not alone in the catastrophes and in the crashing non-events of eel-less nights. But what really sustains us is that image we carry in our mind's eye of Leviathan threshing the shallows to foam on the end of a line singing with the tension.

Nor would it do if that orgasmic consummation were easily come by. One golden dawn with a few "good" eels in the bin pays for many desolate and fishless nights. For all we may tackle up with a double-figure eel in our heart of hearts, let us never get so blase as to deprive ourselves of the pleasure and satisfaction that the capture of two- and three-pounders should rightfully give.

The angler has never lived whose fishing fortunes have not at times ground sadly along at rock bottom. But the great thing is to keep trying. The gods of chance are most apt to mete out the good luck to the angler who keeps himself in the way of receiving it.

\*

A practical note. Laboratory tests kindly carried out for us at Chelsea College have shown that DYMO labels are suitable for labelling fish during storage in formalin solution. Dave Goodrum also reports that he has found these labels suitable. A supply of these labels is now available on request from the Chairman. The labels, which are marked with a code letter to identify the water and a serial number, can easily be attached to the eel with a loop of nylon through the lower jaw. They can usefully be used to identify eels' heads during storage preparatory to otolith removal, and for labelling whole specimens sent to Liverpool University against your checklist.

- Terence Coulson.

TACKLE & METHODS FOR EELS

by Maurice Johnson

Abortive Runs

Last season, whilst fishing Hatchett Pond in Hants., I caught a smallish eel on live gudgeon which had been swallowed tail first. This was the first time I had ever known an eel to do this, but several weeks later it happened again. This time, it was on a dead bait. Could it be that eels swallow fish tail first more often than we think? If so, it could account for a large proportion of abortive runs on dead baits.

With the line threaded through our baits in orthodox fashion, the eel is almost certain to feel it if he tries to swallow the bait tail first and consequently may drop it. Even if he ignores the line, he will feel the point of the hook which is projecting from the bait's mouth and facing towards the tail.

Abortive runs on lip-hooked live baits could happen when the eel tries to swallow the bait head first, feels the line and hook and drops the bait.

Another point is that after an abortive run with lip-hooked live baits, one sometimes winds in and finds a clean hook! At first, I was puzzled as to how an eel could get a bait off the hook without hooking himself. I was always careful to place the hook well back in the bait's mouth, through the bone.

I think I know now how this happens. The eel takes the bait head first, ignoring the line and hook (obviously, some eels will ignore them, even if aware of their presence) and as he swallows the bait, he pushes the hook shank back against the bait's head. This sends the point and barb back through the hole in which they came and the hook then simply falls clear of both bait and eel.

Suggested Remedy

In order to overcome these problems, instead of lip-hooking live baits from the inside of the mouth, I now hook them from the outside inwards. In this way, the point of the hook projects from the bait's mouth, and the shank will lie reasonably flat along the bait's head when the eel swallows it. Having tried this method, I can say that it is definitely better than the usual way of lip-hooking, as far as the eels are concerned. It might be worth a try on perch live-baits, too.

In addition to this, I tried a rig during the latter part of last season which employs two hooks (much to my dislike; but one must try these methods when others do not seem entirely satisfactory). The hooks I used for this were the spade-end type, tied one on each end of a short piece of nylon which has a



small loop tied in the centre to which the reel line is attached. One hook is attached to the bait through its top lip, from the outside inwards, the shank lying flat along the side of the bait's head with the point protruding from its mouth similarly to the orthodox dead-bait mount. The other hook is placed in

the back, just to the rear of the dorsal fin. If the short piece of nylon is about the right length for the size of the bait, it and both hooks should all lie flat along the body of the bait fish.

The idea behind this rig, of course, is obvious: no matter which end the eel decides to swallow first, there is a hook facing in the right direction. There is no reason why this method should not be used on dead-baits as well - in fact, I have already done so, although I cannot give any results as I did not start using it until very late last season, and those sessions were almost non-productive for me, anyway.

However, I intend to use this method during the present season on both dead and live baits, and will write a report on results next Winter after a thorough try-out. One last point: with live-baits, if the two hooks are not inserted too deeply, the rig does not seem to impair the bait's movements too much, and the bait will also stay alive for some time. On both live- and dead-baits, I think it may be found necessary to strike early on the second run, to prevent the eel feeling the second hook.

#### Trace materials

The ever-debateable subject! Personally, I do not use wire for eels. I have never been bitten through or severed while using nylon and therefore see no reason to change, as yet. However, I know there are quite a few who do prefer to use wire, most of whom use the nylon-covered stuff which is fairly supple and reasonably fine. There is, however, a wire which, although not nylon-covered, is much more supple and finer than any other I have seen. This wire is imported from Germany by Messrs. Sowerbutts of 151 Commercial Street, London E.1., and as far as I know this is the only source of supply in the Country. It comes in two weights, 16 lb. and 22 lb. B.S., and the 16 lb. stuff costs 2/9d. for a 10 yd. length, obtainable by post.

This wire is first-class for pike fishing and I see no reason why it should not be good for eels, too.

#### Blood

Just a few final words about blood as a bait additive. I used to have a high regard for blood as an attractor for eels, but now I am not so sure. My doubts started last season while fishing the Grand Union Canal with Bob Church and Bob Reynolds. Bob Church and I decided to groundbait with a mixture of blood and pilchard oil, absorbed in earth to make it sink. Having thrown several balls of earth well-saturated with blood and pilchard oil into our swims, we proceeded to inject our fish baits full of blood and started the night's fishing. Bob Reynolds, however, would have nothing to do with any of this; he said he doubted the merits of blood as an attractor for eels and would not use it. During that night, Bob Reynolds had several runs, while Bob Church and I looked on without any sign of a single run between us.

This on its own does not prove anything, but since that time I have seen several instances which point in the same direction. I also mentioned this point to Terry Coulson recently, and he had his doubts about blood as well! It looks as though you may be right, Bob.

\*

(Maurice is right about my doubts on blood. While we were discussing it, I pricked by thumb and squeezed out a large drop of the rich, warm Coulson blood and deposited it in my eel aquarium. The only effect on the eels - which had not been fed for several days - was to cause them to pull their heads back into the gravel and lie doggo! Apart from failing to find any encouragement for the use of blood as a bait-additive, I thought they were jolly rude! - Editor.)

THE FOOD OF EELS

(Continuing the account of the paper by Dr. Sinha and Dr. Jones, J. Zool., Lond. (1967) 153, 119-137.)

Synopsis

Following the results of a previous investigation into the predatory habits of eels we decided to enlarge on this work. Consequently we looked at the stomach contents of about 5,000 eels. In addition and at the same time two Welsh streams carrying salmonids were selected and sampled specifically to try to determine the relationship in the feeding habits of eels and salmonids.

The food of eels consisted mainly of larvae and nymphs, though at times snails, worms, crustaceans and fish were common in the stomachs. Fish was not an important dietary item but, when eaten, the fish most commonly taken were elvers and eels. There was no significant change of diet associated with increasing size but as few eels of over 50 cm were present in our sample this cannot be confirmed until many more large eels are examined.

The similarity in feeding between the eels and salmonids resulted in apparent competition during the warmer months. In winter when the eels ate little the competition was thus almost negligible. Even though we speak of competition for the food available in the summer months we feel that before this can be accepted as fact we must know the relative abundance of each food organism eaten at this time.

Method of assessing fullness of stomachs

Points were allotted as follows:

Empty - stomach collapsed, no food present	0 points
$\frac{1}{4}$ Full - food filling about $\frac{1}{4}$ volume of the stomach	5 points
$\frac{1}{2}$ Full - food filling about $\frac{1}{2}$ volume of the stomach	10 points
Full - food filling the stomach	20 points
Very full - stomach extended with food	30 points

The average number of points per stomach was calculated for the various samples and the resulting figure was termed the "fullness index".

Seasonal variation in food intake

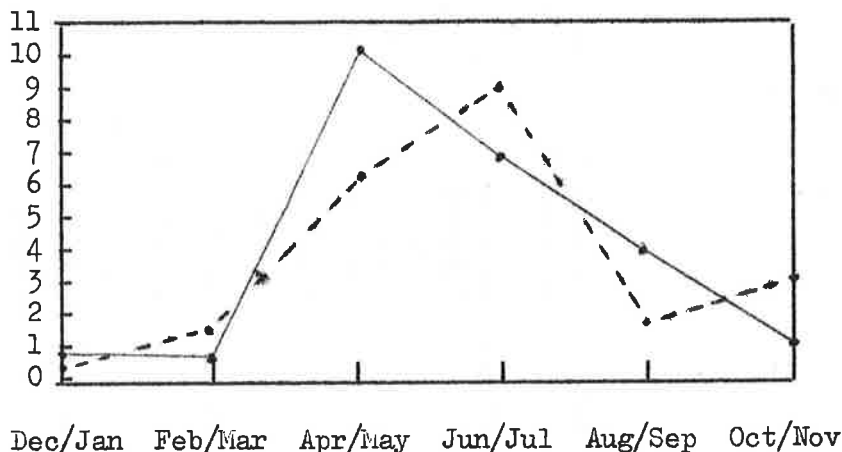
Analysis of the stomach contents of the eels showed that a high proportion of the stomachs were empty (from 34% to 75% in the various samples) but that more empty stomachs were found during the months October to March than at other times of the year; and that the fullness of the stomachs as indicated by the fullness index varied from 1.5 to 0.9 in October/December and increased to 2.6 to 8.4 in April to September (see diagram on p. 23).

It seems clear that eels do not feed much between October and March. Thus it is not surprising that we found no salmonid eggs in any of the stomachs (although Frost has reported that Windermere eels eat char eggs in November and December).

Seasonal changes in the type of food

In the rivers Wen and Dwyfach nymphs and larvae were found in the stomachs throughout the year. Most of the nymphs had been eaten during April to July and most of the larvae in June and July. Fish formed a good percentage of the diet by number from April to July; and aquatic worms during October and November. Crustaceans, snails and mussels were insignificant food items in any season, although the Dwyfach eels ate more molluscs than the Wen eels. Stickleback,

lampreys, salmonids and flat fish were found in the eels' stomachs but the fish most commonly eaten by eels were elvers and eels. Sixteen elvers were found in the stomach of a 33 cm eel from the Rhyd-hir; also a 54 cm eel and a 64 cm eel had each eaten a 26cm and a 30 cm eel.



Seasonal variation in food intake, Dwyfach & Wen eels

#### Food in relation to size

There was no significant change in diet relative to size in the eels from the Wen and Dwyfach. In some species of fish, a well-marked change in diet follows an increase in size and this may also be true of larger eels, but unfortunately these were not common in the rivers we sampled. Our investigations on larger eels commenced in 1965 and are still proceeding.

\*

Comment: Once again, the above paper is full of fascinating food for angling thought and discussion. For instance, I have noticed that many of the eels I have caught had empty stomachs, and I rather tended to assume that this was simply because, when bait-fishing, one is presumably more likely to catch hungry eels with empty stomachs, than well-fed eels with full stomachs! But most of the eels examined by Jones and Sinha were taken by electro-fishing and fyke nets - and still, a high proportion had empty stomachs. Work by Sinha and others shows that eels' digestion is slow - even small food items would be recognisable for at least 10 hours, and large items for 24 to 36 hours. Why had so many of these eels not been feeding? If we knew the answer to that, we might be able to exploit the knowledge with rod and line.

The conclusion that eels feed most actively during the period April to July and that food intake diminishes gradually from July down to the winter level of almost but not quite complete fasting: this, too, is of great interest. Our own Session Reporting work in 1967 also suggested that the rate-of-catch rose to a peak in July and then dropped off. The importance of being able to fish for eels during the coarse-fish close season is obvious. The hint that fish may be a more important item in the eels' diet in the early part of the season than in the later part is interesting, too, and our Session Reporting will eventually tell us whether there are seasonal advantages in different baits. There is more support for trying eels as bait; and for the old idea that lampreys make a particularly good eel-bait. Correspondence, please!

- Editor.

Notable Eels: DORSET

<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. Stour, Throop Mill	1.	4:0			Sep 55		Lobworm	M.Ayres	AT 7.10.55, p. 2 E:HTCT

Notable Eels: DURHAM

Nil.

Notable Eels: ESSEX

R. Stort, Harlow	1.	4:5	38		16 Jul 58	09.20	Gudgeon db	A.J.Sutton	A.J.Sutton
		4:1			16 Jul 58	12.15	Gudgeon db	A.J.Sutton	A.J.Sutton
Layer Pits, Colchester	2.	6:0	43	9	Apr 60		Trapped in shallow water		AT 15.4.60, p. 1
		5:2 $\frac{3}{4}$	40		Jul 61		Lobworm	C.Burch	AT 11.8.61, p. 17
		4:14 $\frac{1}{4}$			Aug 55			C.Burch	E:HTCT
		4:8			Oct 55		Small plug	A.H.Copping	AT 14.10.55, p. 1
		4:3 $\frac{1}{2}$			Sep 55		Worm	C.Large	A.T.9.10.55, p. 2
Sandpit, Corringham	2.	4:2			Aug 55			W.G.Barter	E:HTCT
S.E.Carp Fisheries, S.Ockenden	2.	5:2			Aug 66	02.00	Lobworm	E.Ridgwell	E.Ridgwell
Owl's Pit, ?	2.	4:4	38	7 $\frac{1}{2}$	Aug 62		2 x Lobworms	R.Wicks	AT 31.8.62, p. 8(P)
Priory Park Lake, Southend	2.	5:3			Jul 66	02.30	Roach db	C.Radford	AT 29.7.66, p. 6
Boreham Mere	2.	4:0			Aug 64	05.15	Roach db	J.A.Gibbinson	J.A.Gibbinson
Small pond, Theydon Bois	2.	4:10			Jun 64		Broke away, found dead later		K.A.Dickens
The Chase, Dagenham	?	5:9	42		Oct 60		Lobworm	I.Moom	AT 14.10.60, p. 1
?, Dagenham	?	4:0			Aug 55			D.L.Steuart	E:HTCT
?, Wickford	?	4:8			Jul 60		Worm	N.Gore	AT 15.7.60, p. 13
Club water, Dagenham	?	5:14	40 $\frac{1}{8}$	8 $\frac{3}{4}$	28 Aug 66	14.30	4 x Lobworms	D.W.Bell	AM 9.9.66, p. 6



Notable Eels: GLOUCESTERSHIRE

<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. Severn, Tewkesbury	1.	7:8							E:HTCT ex "Land & Water"
		4:4				60	Roach db	P. Rayment	P. Rayment
Chaceley		4:15	41½	8¼	May 59		Lobworm	J. Sargent	AT 12.6.59, p. 1
Bitterwell Lake, Bristol	2.	8:8	43 est.			22		C. Mitchell	British Record
Blagdon Reservoir, Bristol	2.	5:12	42		Jul 61		Spinner	C. Button	AT 11.8.61, p. 17

Notable Eels: HAMPSHIRE

R. Avon, Christchurch	1.	4:9¾			Aug 58		Lobworm	J. Allen	AT 22.8.58, p. 13
		4:0			Jun 60		Cheese	L. Clayton	AT 8.7.60, p. 17
Ringwood		4:4			Sep 55		Dace db	E.A.J. Manktown	AT 9.10.55, p. 2
?		4:9½			Jul 49			C. Collier	E:HTCT
?		4:3¾			Jul 49			C. Large	E:HTCT
R. Stour, Christchurch	1.	7:0				31		W.F. Simmons	E:HTCT & Where To Fish
R. Test, Southampton	1.	4:1			Jun 56			R.J. Moore	AT 6.7.56, p. 2
Heath Pond, Petersfield	2.	5:5			Sep 62		Worm	R. Dodds	AT 28.9.62, p. 1

Notable Eels: HEREFORDSHIRE

R. Wye, Ross-on-Wye	1.	4:0			Sep 53		"Vivif" lure	E. Watson	AT 25.9.53, p. 1
Shobden Lake, Shobden	2.	8:7	54	14	netted when removing coarse fish				Newnes Encyclopaedia of Angling, Ed. Marston
Swan Pool, Shobden	2.1	5:4	40	9	6 Aug 67	23.30	4" Roach db	M.B. Palfrey	AT 17.8.67, p. 2
		4:3			22 Jun 64	23.30	Roach db	M.B. Palfrey	M.B. Palfrey
		4:1			24 Jun 64	08.30	Roach db	M.A. Bishop	M.B. Palfrey
		4:0			28 Jul 63	21.00	Roach db	M.B. Palfrey	M.B. Palfrey
Bodenham Gravel Pit, Hereford	2.	4:3			25 Jun 64	20.00	Roach db	M.A. Bishop	M.B. Palfrey
		4:0			24 Jun 64	24.00	Roach db	M.B. Palfrey	M.B. Palfrey

CORRESPONDENCE

## AGE ESTIMATES

From Dr. V.R.P.Sinha: "Herewith details of the eels caught by members of the National Anguilla Club from the Grand Union Canal during May 27th. - 30th., 1966:-

<u>Weight</u>	<u>Length</u>	<u>Age est.</u>	<u>Stomach contents</u>
5:5	43	20	Partly digested cyprinoid - bleak?
2:12	35	14	Partly digested Bullhead
2:6 $\frac{1}{2}$	31 $\frac{3}{8}$	12	Digested fish"

\*\*Once more, we are indebted to Dr. Sinha for his invaluable help. These additional data will be incorporated in future Growth Rate Reports.

## GREYSTONE LAKE

From Robert G. Jones: "How is the eel fishing going? Successfully, I hope. Ours has started off with a bang. Three nights and three fish - 4:12, 3:10 and 7:8. All were caught in the lake about which we corresponded, "Greystone Lake". My friend Pete caught the two smaller specimens and I took the large one. I am enclosing the head of the 4:12 fish which has been soaked in formaldehyde solution for one week, and will send the head of the 7:8 fish in due course. Could you please let me have age estimates? The hooks may still be in the heads, so be careful! The 4:12 eel, caught on May 11th., measured 41" x 8" and the 7:8 eel measured 48" x 10". Bait was worm in all cases. More proof of the potential in our part of the world....perhaps members of the National Anguilla Club will be convinced now. That record is not far away, now, and I am more determined than ever to break it. I won't rest satisfied until there is a double-figure eel in the record list."

\*\*Congratulations and best wishes to our friends in the Newport & Mon. S.H.G. A fine feat of angling at a fine water. We must look to our laurels, Gentlemen! There is Peter Bunce's 6 $\frac{1}{4}$  pounder from the G.U. Canal now, which we must also put in our pipes and smoke.

## WHIT TRIP

From Dave Goodrum: "The Whit trip was very enjoyable but the results at Crown were not very good. I put this down to the depth of the water - I should think the water temperature out there on the bottom was not much above 48°F. The Friday and Saturday nights produced only 7 eels, all small ones. Weather conditions were very good but the runs just did not come.

"I had a chat with the lads who were going to fish the Sunday night and suggested spending the night at Butler's. They all thought it was a good idea in the circumstances. On the Sunday morning, eight of us went over to Butler's. Well, we did catch a few eels between us that night - 18 in fact, but all small except for Les Hudson's 2 $\frac{1}{4}$  pounder. All the eels from Crown and Butler's were taken home by me for otoliths and gut contents.

"But I really enjoyed the trip and we did have some fun."