



The National Anguilla Club

BULLETIN

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EDITORIAL

This is rather a testing time of year for eel-fishers - and, indeed, for anglers after other 'warm-water' species, too.

It reminds me in some ways of a mild flirtation I had with the game of golf, years ago. At first, I didn't expect to hit the ball, and the divots and fresh-air shots dismayed me not at all. But as time went on, the hacking and threshing became depressing and irritating by turn, and my companion's well-meant but slightly pitying words of encouragement only increased my sense of acute displeasure. Then (and, as I now realise, entirely by chance) I happened to connect correctly with the ball, there was a satisfying sensation of fluent contact and the pill disappeared effortlessly into the blue. "I've got it!" I said to myself. "Well, it's not so difficult after all!"

And then, inevitably, there followed a succession of bone-jarring contacts with the turf and windmilling failures to contact anything: that's when it really gets under the skin! I had to decide whether to take it seriously, or pack it in, and as I had no difficulty in thinking of any number of less pointless activities than knocking a golf ball around, I packed it in.

Angling can be a bit like that, in some ways. An angler whose efforts have borne little if any fruit by the middle of the season is apt to get depressed or irritated or both - the black clouds roll over his whole fishing horizon and he begins to reflect that instead of getting fun out of his fishing he is getting only a pain in the neck.

In worse case still is the angler who nobbled a decent eel in the early part of the season (or last year), who said to himself "I've got it!" or words to that effect, and entertained secret notions of the long tally of fine specimens including the odd record-breaker here and there that he would have to his credit in the course of a few months: but who has had only the piscatorial equivalent of divots and fresh-air shots ever since.

All anglers have the ability to sustain enthusiasm over longish periods of failure and disappointment: they wouldn't be anglers, otherwise. Equally, there are few anglers who do not, at one time or another, find themselves in the proverbial slough of despond. Perhaps it is one of the chief merits of a Club such as ours that it enables us to share both our failures and our successes. During a run of blanks, the knowledge that friends whose ability one respects are 'suffering' too, helps to reassure us that we are not incompetent angling fools, after all! We can enjoy our fellow-members successes in the true Club spirit - that it doesn't matter so much who catches 'em, so long as some of us do. And the knowledge that we are pooling experience, in our session reporting and in other ways, offers the concrete prospect of better sport in the future.

But I think it goes a good deal deeper than that. It has always seemed to me that to set one's heart on catching a record - or, indeed, on achieving any arbitrarily chosen level of performance - is simply not realistic. Angling isn't like that, and it is difficult to think of a more certain route to grief. It's too narrow a target, too slender a chance. What makes much more sense is to take interest in a more objective way in the species, overall. We are interested - or should be - not in eels individually, of whatever size: but in The Eel as a species, in all its aspects. Herein lies the certainty of rewards and enjoyment and, it seems to me, it's what this Club is all about.

This season we have had the thrilling experience of seeing the eel record broken thrice - most lately by Alan Dart of the Bristol S.H., to whom we extend our warmest congratulations. It may well go again, before long! But for members with more modest immediate ambitions, there is still half of the season yet to come, and every chance of enjoying good sport with good fish.

LEPTOCEPHALUS BREVIROSTRIS

a poem by the late Professor Walter Garstang

(This unusual contribution was submitted by Dave Marlborough, who comments: "Prof. Garstang was, in the '20s. and '30s., one of the world's experts on planktonic marine larvae. An Oxford don must have some eccentricities, I suppose, and his was publishing his more contentious views - and other odd zoological matters - in doggerel, of which this is an example. Some are jolly good but intelligible only to systematic zoologists! I found a duplicated collection when cleaning out a drawer the other day, from my student days, and this is one from the anthology.")

Leptocephalus of the Gulf Stream, the larva of the eel,
Like a willow leaf of clearest glass, set edgewise for a keel,
With a pair of eyes astride the stalk and a tiny cleft for jaws,
That wanders for three thousand miles, two years without a pause.

We've known that other fish to distant spawning grounds would go,
Whence advantageous streams for drifting fry would tend to go,
But these would serve mere fragments of continental coast
And gather fish from ranges of a few hundred miles at most.

Yet from Iceland to Morocco and the Mediterranean lands
The silvered eels from every stream form vast autumnal bands
That in the sea converge to one far distant single goal,
Halfway between Bermuda and the Leeward Islands shoal.

Here the Atlantic deepens to its uttermost abyss
(Olympus piled on Etna here would still the surface miss!)
And over it the assembled eels their bouyant eggs set free
- And never reappear! They've fulfilled their destiny.

Warm currents from the Canaries and the equatorial belt,
Sweep broadly on above this spot and with the Gulf Stream melt,
And, swirling round Bermuda, set the whole Sargasso Sea
Gyrating like a whirlpool of gigantic majesty.

Blocked to the west, the rising waters pour their surplus east
To northern lands, which hail its warmth as a recurrent feast:
It fills the Bay of Biscay, too, and the thirsty Midland Sea,
Thus bathing all the coastal lands from which the eels went free.

Their fry, mere glassy filaments six millimetres long,
At first the quiet underzones of the surface waters throng,
Like willow-leaves expanding then, their muscles spread each side,
And beginning now to undulate, they rise into the tide.

Here, they're wafted to and fro, and eddies circulate them,
But, hatched in spring, the bulk attain an inch in length by June
And one year on, to twice that length and quadruple depth have grown.

As active now as whitebait, and swimming on in schools,
To get the best of currents, they have doubtless learnt the rules
Of nosing from the weaker sides to where the greater force is,
Thereby securing lodgement in the stronger water courses.

So, in spite of all the eddies at the outset to delay them,
In time they strike the Atlantic drift where nothing more can stay them:
By midsummer as two-year-olds they are almost their full size -
Three inches long, three quarters high - and crowned their enterprise.

They glide in now by millions o'er the Continental Shelf,
 A pause ensues, and each begins to feel 'not quite himself',
 He's lost his hearty appetite, for months he shrinks a deal,
 And finds himself, when three years old, an elver or glass-eel!

'Tis sad but true, he loses now all maritime ambitions,
 His only aim's to settle down to all the old traditions:
 To find some nice salubrious ditch or muddy-bottimed stream,
 Where he may fatten quietly and of his youth's adventure dream.

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TACKLE REVIEW

"Efgeeco" Angler's Thermometer

The taking of an accurate water temperature reading of the place where one is actually fishing (i.e. normally, on the bottom) can often be a difficult task, especially in deep water. All too often, a sensitive spirit thermometer gives a false reading by being drawn through warmer surface water. The "Efgeeco" thermometer solves this problem by taking a small water sample from the bottom, which is retained round the bulb of the thermometer.

The instrument consists of a small spirit/glass thermometer $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. long, firmly held inside a Perspex tube about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter, with shock-absorbent end-caps, to give an overall length of only $3\frac{1}{4}$ in. At the top, it has a large brass loop for attaching to one's line, and neatly drilled holes about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. from the top and bottom of the tube to allow passage of water.

When one retrieves the instrument, about 2 or 3 c.c. of water from the lake or river bottom are trapped in the tube, to give a true reading of the collected (bottom) water.

The major criticism of the instrument is that the scale is difficult to read, especially in poor light. The scale is rather small and easily distorted by the thick-walled tube. Also, after use in water, the tube tends to 'steam up' rather badly.

On the whole, this is a well-made and very useful instrument, but possibly a little pricey at 11/6d. - Rodney Storey.

The "Protectalarm"

This device, which is made for use as a burglar alarm, is sold by Woolworths, price complete 8/10d. It is contained in a strong plastics case and works off a U.11 battery. I have adapted one of these devices for use as a bite alarm in conjunction with either a Heron head or fixed contacts - this requires only a few minutes work, to wire it up to the contacts - and it works very satisfactorily. The sound is very audible (loud enough to wake even Dave Ball!) and I have muted mine down.

The Protectalarm is made in Hong Kong but they are making some good stuff nowadays and in this case there does not seem to be much to go wrong. The box itself is in two parts, snap-fitting (not screw fixing) and is a convenient size. I am very pleased with the performance of this alarm, and if it only lasts a season, it is still cheap at the price. - Arthur Smith.

A FEW HOURS IN THE LIFE OF AN EEL FAN

by Ernest Orme

Arriving at Castle Howard late on the afternoon of Monday, July 7th., I felt relieved to have reached base; at last, I was in the Anguilla Camp with 'the lads' who were all resting and meditating on their previous night's assault on the frustrating eel! I received such a welcome, it made me feel really warm inside. "Would you like a cup of coffee, Ernie?" "Yes, thanks!" "How long are you staying?" "Only till tomorrow, I'm sorry to say."

As the conversation progressed, I mentioned with disgust that I had left my bucket of lobworms at home. Immediately the offers came: "Don't worry, Ernie, you can have some of mine." "...and mine" "...and mine." Thank you very much, lads.

I also had the pleasure of seeing 'in the flesh' a 4 lb. eel from the previous night's fishing. It was a lovely sight to me - I've had so many blanks lately, I'd forgotten what one looks like. I was shown some wonderful snaps of a 5 lb.-plus eel, and chuckled at the story the captor told me of the lock-keeper's ill-fated attempts to take some photographs for him.

After many warm conversations and lots of joking, I declared I was going to tackle up, as I wanted to make the most of my short stay. My baits went out at 19.00 hours. At 20.45, I had a run on lobs - a perch of about 1 lb. "Cheeky basket!" At 01.30, a run on bleak dead-bait - a double-figure pike, gorged bait, lost at net. Another run on double-lobes at 01.45 - a 20 lb.-plus pike, lost it at the net.

A quiet spell. Then, at 07.30, another run on double-lobes. A pike. We landed this one! 17 lb. 4 oz. "Thank you, chaps, for all your help. I'm sorry for all the disturbance we made, the pike and me, I got a bit excited and didn't want to lose my 'monster eel'" Well, I promise not to use chopped kipper for ground-bait again; I'm sure it was that kipper that caused the trouble!

Looking back, I guess I must have dozed off at about 06.00 hours. At any rate, I was woken up a short while later and a sandwich crammed full of piping hot sausages was pressed into my hands. At that time in the morning, I would rather have had that banger sandwich than the Crown Jewels.

Alas, I'm sorry to say I didn't catch any eels at Castle Howard. But that didn't matter to me, it was pleasure enough just to be there amongst as fine a bunch of lads as one could wish to meet anywhere. One would have to look very far to find another Club of this warm spirit and true dedication. I've said it before and I must say it again: I am proud to be a member of the National Anguilla Club.

Late on Tuesday morning, the time came for me to leave, and my spirits were low. While I am writing this, you are all still at Castle Howard, and I wish I were with you: I am, at least in spirit, anyway! - and it has been some consolation to set my feelings down in writing. Let me say a sincere 'thank you' to you all, for making Castle Howard a vivid and wonderful experience for me. As the song says: memories are made of this.

** Ernie offered this piece for the Correspondence section, but we felt that such a warm-hearted and evocative piece of writing deserved a page to itself. A factual report on the week's results at Castle Howard is scheduled for a future edition. - Editor.

HOLDING PLACES: VII

by David Marlborough

Although the various contributors to this discussion have expressed it in different ways, as I see it there are two questions involved: firstly, do eels have a territory? and secondly, if so, what sort of territory?

As an angler, I believe the answer to the first question is 'yes'. With regard to the second question, perhaps it might help if I chip in a zoologist's knowledge of animal territories in general.

Territorial behaviour - getting a patch of ground and defending it against others of your own species - is very widespread in the animal kingdom. It isn't confined to solitary animals. Even so communal a place as a rookery has territories around each nest, and any intruder will meet squawks and pecks from the resident. Even swallows on a telephone wire are spaced at an individual distance, and get no closer to one another.

So territorial behaviour is very common. The error most people make is that, because the pioneer work was done on breeding territories in the robin, everyone assumes it's only seen in birds, or only seen in the breeding season. This is just not true: see Lorenz 'On Aggression' or Ardrey's 'The Territorial Imperative'. Indeed, it would be unusual if a non-shoaling fish like the eel did not have a territory.

Territories may be of many different sorts. We can ignore breeding territories with eels! The ones we are concerned with are the residence and/or feeding territories. The idea of this is that if each member of the species occupies a bit of ground and fends off others, there will be enough food to go round, and the geographical range of the species will always tend to get pushed wider and wider by those displaced from the middle.

Note the 'and/or'. Residence and feeding may be in the same place, like the cock blackbird in your garden. I think this is true of the Grand Union Canal. Eels are spaced at intervals along the canal, and hunt and rest each in his area. You catch the resident, and his place is not necessarily filled. Result: you get a blank next time. Several things can happen to that blank. The eels either side can enlarge their territories to cover the missing one. Or the big eel needs a large territory to get enough food (being big, he can chivvy smaller ones away) and when he goes several smaller eels move in. Eventually there will be one big survivor, and you are back to square one.

You can regard this sort of territory as a fried egg with a minute yolk: the yolk is the 'holding place' where he rests, the white the much larger area where he hunts. Foxes and badgers have the same system. The same system might operate on other waters, but because there are more eels, there is always a spare landless one to move into a vacant territory, so the effect is not apparent.

However, this is not the only sort of territory possible. Imagine a small holding place with several eels in it, each spaced like swallows on the wire, a short distance away from his neighbour. We know this occurs; it's been seen by skin-divers. And the feeding territory of each eel comes away from this cluster like the slice of a cake, radially all round. This would happen without any basic change of behaviour: it would need more eels as stock, and fewer good lairs - less broken stonework than you get on the canal, fewer patches of mud of the right consistency, so they've got to share what is available. In the canal, they've got more choice, and fewer eels, so they space themselves out.

The third possibility is that feeding and resting territories may be quite

different and separated by neutral ground over which they all travel. Hippopotami do just this: lie in a river and walk miles away from it by night to feed. If you have a water with few good feeding spots, or at some distance from the good resting spots, then this pattern of behaviour would make best use of resources, again without upsetting the suggested basic nature of the eel.

The neutral ground, I would further suggest, would be strewn with landmarks which the eels use to navigate by. A gully would be a very good landmark, and would funnel a lot of moving eels through.

In other words, we are dealing with a pattern of behaviour which is modified by the type of water and the density of the eel population in different waters, but all variations on the same thing. The angling problem is whether we fish the holding place or resting territory if we can find it; the neutral ground on waters where it occurs; or the feeding territory.

The feeding territory is the surer bet, but only because it covers the biggest area, and hence it's the easiest to find. But, to be sure, you would have to go in saturation fishing, and you'll only get the one resident eel. And there's always the chance that he may have found his meal for the night in some part of his territory he visited before coming to your bait.

I think I'm taking estuary eels in their feeding territory, and they either rest upstream and come down on the ebb, or downstream and come up on the flood. Here, the rhythm of coming out to forage is tidal, not dependent so much on day and night.

A ray of hope is that territories may be in time, as well as in space: that different individuals cover the same ground but at different times. Cats do this. If eels did, too, then we might not be too pessimistic.

I think a far better chance would be given us if we could find and fish the 'neutral ground' where it exists. A gully, as above, would be a good place to start looking. Even better still, would be a resting territory (i.e. a 'holding place') - the problem being it will probably be snaggy and need some gruesome tackle to extract A. anguilla from his lair.

At the moment we are only guessing from our experiences. Why? Because we can't see eel territories. A chub swim can be seen: you can look in and see feeding area and lair, into which he bolts when you hook him. With eels, you have to surmise. But I hope I've shown that what we've been discussing are aspects of the same thing, and when we know more we can better assess strategy on different waters.

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** Thank you, Dave, for this stalwart support for the appraisal I suggested at the outset of this discussion. It is particularly interesting, too, that you have been able to suggest a basis for Chris Bowyer's observations on the merits of fishing gullies. It is most certainly true, as you imply, that the great need is for more angling facts, and my offer to analyse members' experience still stands: all that is needed is for 'spots' or 'swims' to be identified on the Session Reports. On this members may be interested to know that one spot on the G.U. Canal - and I mean one exact spot - produced a 4:2 eel for me on 10.5.69, two blanks for another member during the Club's Whit trip, then eels of 5:5 $\frac{1}{2}$ and 0:8 $\frac{3}{4}$ for me on the night of 20/21.6.69 followed by a blank on the night of 21/22.6.69. Interesting, isn't it? We assuredly do have a lot to learn! - Editor.

Notable Eels : NORTH HUMBERLAND

<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>
The Whiteadder Water	1.	16:8	48	15	Jul 1926		Taken in a salmon net		Many sources.
R. Tyne	1.	4:10			Jun 62		Minnow db	P.Spackman	AT 22.6.62 p. 1

Notable Eels : NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

A stream, Cupstone	1.	7:0	42		Sep 58		Found stranded	B.Wisley	AT 10.10.58, p. 1
Balderton East Pit	2.2	4:0	34	7	26 Sep 65	01.10		S.Hill	S.Hill
A pit, Farndon	2.	5:0			Jan 58			A boy	AT 7.2.58 p. 1
A pond, Long Eaton	2.	4:4			Aug 57		Worm	D.Gregg	AT 23.8.57 p. 13
Police Pond, Hucknall	2.	4:0			Aug 62		Gudgeon db	B.Cook	AT 17.8.62 p. 17

Notable Eels : OXFORDSHIRE

R. Thames, Medley stretch	1.	5:2	41	8	18 Aug 68	20.00	Gudgeon db	A.Holt	AT 22.8.68 p. 10
R.Cherwell	1.	5:6			Jul 68		Bleak db	J.Cadd	AT 18.7.68 p. 11
Shelswell Park L., Bicester	2.	5:11			Jul 57			R.Waddup	(AT 26.7.57 p. 1 (E:HTCT)
		4:8 $\frac{1}{2}$			Jul 57		Lobworm	R.Waddup	
Witney Gravel Pit	2.	4:6	37 $\frac{5}{8}$	8 $\frac{7}{8}$	10 Jul 66	03.00	Minnow db	K.A.Dickens	{K.A.Dickens
		4:3 $\frac{1}{2}$	37 $\frac{3}{8}$	8 $\frac{7}{8}$	6 Aug 66	20.00	Minnow db	K.A.Dickens	
Oxford Canal, Kirtlington	2.3	4:5 $\frac{1}{2}$			Sep 61		Lobworm	O.Archer	AT 6.10.61 p. 17

Notable Eels : RUTLAND

Burley Lake, Oakham	2.1	5:8			1950		Lobworm	Mr. Horton	M.Muse
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CORRESPONDENCE

LOCATION

From Rodney Storey: 'As a new member of the NAC, may I add a few comments to some recent articles in the Bulletin? Firstly, the question of first sessions and holding places. Is it not possible that on a smallish water these concepts might apply to the whole water, and not just certain swims? During 1960, I regularly fished a pond of about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -2 acres. On one memorable morning early in the season, myself and two companions had some 15 or 20 runs on dead-bait in about 3 hours. Alas, in our innocence, we struck at the first run in each case, and missed them all! After consultation of Walker's 'Still-Water Angling' we were much more successful, but by about the end of August, we simply ceased to get any runs at all. Had we 'fished it out'? This particular lake is about 20 yd. from a local drain and about 10 miles from the sea, and thus could be naturally restocked quite quickly. I must return, one day!

'Talking of locations near waterways, each of the eel waters that I used to fish in North Lincolnshire not only had a ditch very close by, but was within half a mile of a drain and within a few miles of the sea. We all know that Anguilla will travel overland under suitable conditions, but do they want to? Could it not be that our friends prefer not only to live in a water close to an access/escape route (ie. river or drain) but also reasonably close to the sea, if possible? Perhaps they only travel far inland when they cannot find suitable homes close to the sea. Should we concentrate our efforts on waters closer to the coast?'

pH

From David Marlborough: 'I liked Brian Knott's summary on this subject, but having used comparators for years, the indicator dye I would recommend is Phenol Red, with a yellow-to-red change over the range 6.8 - 8.4. This covers most pH values between Sussex and Grantham, lying as they do slightly on the alkaline side - pH 7 - 8. You would only go over these limits with peaty waters, or the Irish Limestone lakes. In fact, the highest pH I know occurring naturally are some near Mullingar, pH 8.8'

BITE DETECTORS

From Brian Crawford: 'I was very interested, during the Castle Howard trip, to see several members using the 'old original' type of bite detector in which the line is gripped between the contact points - the line being pulled out by the run allowing the contacts to close and sound the buzzer. A number of failures occurred during a rainy night due to electrolytic corrosion of the wet contact points, and we all discussed possible means of overcoming this fault, as several members thought that if it could be cured this type of alarm would have some advantages over the antenna type for eel-fishing. The remedy emerged in the discussion: the contacts should be mounted horizontally and roughly level with the rod, where they could be fitted with a 'roof' to shed the rain and where water would not run onto them down the line. I have now made one to this pattern, double-sided so that it serves two rods at once, with a hood made from a plastics food box, and an off-switch in the buzzer box. The diagram shows the construction from relay-contacts, and it works a treat!'

