



Virtual Fisheries Forum – East of England Environment Agency Updates (Essex)

Q&A Session with Ben Norrington

Q. I'm a member of CPS which has a large section of the river Stour. A lot of members have asked if there are plans for a restocking barbel back in to the river.

A. In 2007 there were 15000 barbel released and we only picked them up in 2 surveys over the next 10 years. This told us that the habitat availability wasn't quite right. We've since found that there are a few deep gravel sections where barbel are occasionally sighted. Maybe we can look at improving habitat for these fish with the club in future – projects like weir removals can go a long way towards creating a better environment for fish like barbel. It's worth the club putting something in writing to ask for maybe 5000 which we can then tag and monitor.

Q. If a club or fishery wanted to investigate the possibility of conducting habitat improvements like flood scrapes etc, where would they start?

A. It all starts with a phone call. One recent example was a club who got in contact with us after seeing the work we helped with on another angling club's stretch of river. We started off by heading out for a walkover survey with the farmer and club officials – then got a map and looked at the permissions needed. The club then put a funding bid in which we helped write, got a contractor out and got things moving. The club has continued to put work in maintaining the newly constructed scrape, and it continues to flourish. Effectively, it's about finding the relevant landowner, and then giving your local fisheries officer a call to get the process started.

Q. The surveys the EA carry out on the Chelmer appear all to be between Dunmow and Chelmsford, where access for angling is restricted. Why do you not survey the areas where most angling is carried out between Chelmsford and Maldon?

A. We used to have a much bigger survey programme on the Chelmer, but unfortunately we now only monitor farm sensitive areas. If there was more funding available, then we'd no doubt do other sites on a regular basis. It's important to note as well that these are historic sites, used in order to show trends over a long period of time – often as much as 35 years. Because the survey programme is reduced now, we are looking at bespoke surveys for fishing clubs.

Q. Is match catch data useful to you?

A. All of our fish population numbers go in to something called the NFPD which is our national database. This now has an option to put rod catches on, so there could theoretically be a vector included which details 'x fishing club' match catch data. It would be especially useful if the data can be accrued over a long period, i.e an annual event fished on the same day on the same length of river.

Q. I'm a member of Chelmsford AA and have an interest in small river fishing such as upstream of Chelmsford to Little Waltham. It's an easy section to walk and identify places that could be used to improve the river. What I would really like to do is walk with an "expert" who could identify projects that are of real value for money also. Who would be the expert?

A. Looking at what we've gone through in the video with what other clubs have done to develop more natural features in their rivers, I'd be more than happy to organise someone or come out myself. There are some cracking sections out there, but the trouble is that farmland has squeezed the river hugely - changing the dynamics with silt, runoff etc. Bigger buffer strips are needed, not just huge swathes of willow planted on the bank. If you'd like to get in contact with myself, I'm sure we can arrange something to start identifying where improvements can be made.

Q. How important would you say DO meters are for angling clubs?

A. It's the one bit of kit I carry in my car everywhere I go. It's not just a piece of kit you use to look at a crash in oxygen – it's vital for getting an early indication of when you are likely to encounter problems. With algae rich eutrophic rivers, you can often get over-saturations of oxygen which are prone to crashing. A lot of people only use their DO meters in retrospect, but the message we are trying to drive home is to use it as a preventative measure to monitor any changes which could be an early sign of things to come. Around 7 years ago we had a meeting with a few local clubs in the area and asked them if they'd like to set up a monitoring network to take routine samples on specific sections of river. This has been a massive help going forward and we'd like to do the same again with other clubs, especially in light of recent drier and hotter summers.

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