



Virtual Fisheries Forum 19/07/2022 (Love Fishing Love Nature).

Q&A session

Q. Interested to hear a comment in the film about cutting trees to let light in when in our context in a migratory river in Scotland, Having MORE trees to keep temps lower and provide cover for migratory fish and restore riparian habitat is more important. Would the panel agree that it's key to make sure solutions are context specific?

A. (John) Absolutely, trees are hugely important for biodiversity and in many situations the solutions to improving biodiversity might be planting trees. Getting good advice to understand what is best practice is critical to success of projects. Local river/wildlife trusts, the wild trout trust and other conservation groups are great sources of knowledge to consult.

A. (liberty) Following on from John, scientifically speaking and for ecology projects in general, one solution is never a best fit for all situations. In the campaign film shown, I want to highlight that the angling club were working with the local wildlife trust on the wetland & fishery management scheme implementing developments that benefitted both stakeholders for managing the site. One of the main motivations for removing tree cover was to allow macrophytes and bankside plants to better establish intern providing enhanced wetland habitat for lots of species beyond fish alongside obviously being important cover for juvenile fish and benefitting water quality. In this case the wildlife trust were able to go away and successfully secure government funding to support the project.

A. (John) One thing to mention when it comes to the topic of tree work is to make sure you have the right skills and competence on hand. That means certification and recent training in use of power tools and practice. Health & safety is critical with projects like these. It is sensible

for clubs to be aware of who their members are and what skills they possess.

A. (Ian) Going back to the need for tree removal in this project for exposure to sunlight, phytoplankton needs it to thrive. Also, selective tree removal allows wind exposure which benefits dissolved oxygen in the water and provides dappled shade for fish. Scattered trees are key to good biodiversity.

A. (Alex) Yep, this just emphasises what anglers can bring to the table in terms of intimate knowledge of their local waterways and surrounding environments.

Q. Where can I get Barn owl boxes from?

A. (Ian) In the example I gave for my presentation about Prince Albert Angling Society we got our Barn owl boxes from the [Broxton Barn owl group](#). They are also quite easy to make yourself following a basic online guide [such as this one](#). One key thing to remember about erecting them is to ensure you put them away from the waters edge because fledglings can fall out into the water and drown.

Q. What's your views on the otter? They seem to be thriving on the rivers currently and there's always going to be the argument of them damaging the fishing, but it's great to see them in my opinion. I only saw my first otters 2 weeks ago and it was a great sight. Do you ever think their protected status will be changed?

A. (Alex) The answer to the protected status part is a firm no for me. The Trust has always done its best to help fishery managers protect their stock in stillwaters against Otters when there is financial implications and damage to livelihoods. The AT fishery management advisors provide consultation services for free and are also licensed to actually trap otters and remove them from fenced fishery sites. As for rivers there is a lot more going on and it is a case of where we should be striving for healthier waterway ecosystems where fish and otters can thrive alongside each other plus all the other composing wildlife.

A. (John) In the last few years there has been a couple of pushes from certain angling groups to change the protected status of the otter enabling some form of control or culling. The Angling Trust have pretty good connections in parliament and with MP's on both sides of the floor

and all dialog has clearly shown us that there is absolutely no parliamentary support for changing this law. You can take any form of approach to argue the case, but it is not going to get anywhere. The otter is one of the most loved mammals by the general population there is and it would be political suicide for any party to say they would allow a cull. Absolutely they do cause problems for lots of stocked stillwater fisheries and to wild river fisheries which have other issues de-stabilising the ecosystem. As Alex said in a healthy river ecosystem you should have otters just like kingfishers, herons, pike and other natural predators all co-habiting with predator prey balance. A lot of the problems were caused when the otters initially made their recovery because for generations fish had lived without the predation pressure of Otters and were not behaviourally conditioned to deal with it. Now we are seeing fish which have since developed behavioural adaptations to be more resilient against all forms of predation including Otters. If we can continue working on getting our rivers in a better all-round state and keep supporting stillwater fisheries to protect their stock, then the problem will be far less over time.

A. (Liberty) To echo on the end of that, ultimately to keep fishing good and a waterway ecosystem balanced predation is necessary. It maintains resilience/functionality to the other human pressures placed on waterways. Stillwater fisheries are a bit different to rivers with other implications at stake, but otters serve a purpose like all natural predators.

Q. As one of the participants of the Water Vole Project, one of the biggest benefits was the creation of a communication network within the Colne Valley where clubs within the valley can share good ideas & help deal with issues. A problem shared is often a problem solved!

A. (Alex) Couldn't agree more. Having done the fisheries forums for a long time it is clear how angling clubs sharing information and working with other stakeholders in local communication networks is important for sustainable progress.

A. (Liberty) It's great to see you here! Last Thursday I was lucky to attend the celebration evening for your water vole projects success. It really is the perfect example of what I hope to facilitate more of around the country through this campaign.

A. (John) Yes, hopefully as we put more success stories out there and release videos like the one, we've just seen it will act as food for thought to many others who have means of being involved with similar works in their local area.

A. (Ian) It highlights how anglers are a critical asset to conservation as we sit in these environments for extensive time periods and notice the changes. We all need to stick together for the greater good of all-round environmental/conservation progress.

Q. I suppose it's a no brainer, but surely working with nature has positive benefits for fish health and makes them more resilient to things like fish diseases and climate change. Do we agree?

A. (Alex) Yep, the panel is nodding in agreement.

A. (Liberty) Yeah, taking ecosystems as a whole removing human influence from the question, they are perfectly capable of adapting to even quite dramatic changes. The issue is that humans are putting so many extra stresses and pressures on our environments all at the same time and now we have the larger issues at hand like climate change. The result is our ecosystems are being significantly more damaged by smaller stresses/pressures and taking much longer to recover/adapt due to lack of resilience. Humans need to become part of the solution for this mitigating anthropogenic stresses and damage where possible. Every little bit of progress helps and as a stakeholder group, anglers are very engaged/involved in this respect just from my campaign findings already. It seems the more I look the more I find in terms of examples where angling communities are doing great work. Hopefully in the future, we will see much greater resilience in our ecosystems with credit due to such projects and conservation efforts.

A. (Ian) There is nothing worse than a naked bank on a commercial fishery for ecosystem resilience is there. It does all sorts of detriment to water quality, bank stability, habitat etc. Without these the fishery is never going to be healthy and resilient.

A. (John) To follow on from Ian, stocking densities is a key factor as well. If you stock too densely with the wrong fish species, then you can just about wipe out your invertebrate communities and macrophytes. Careful consideration to fishery management in this regard is important.

Q. We all know the issues with mink. However, we have seen mink's favourite diet on the river Irwell at our section being American crayfish which are also independently causing a big problem. The mink eat loads of these Crayfish through the river. What is your opinion on this?

A. (Ian) This is the new food chain adaptation to biodiversity changes in action. Other things are also eating the crayfish. The different species in the ecosystem all find their niche for survival. I would not advocate that this is a good thing in terms of the invasive species getting established and integrated creating an ultimately unnatural ecosystem as in terms of conservation this is counterproductive because the niches filled by invasives should be filled by indigenous species. We can help restrain these ecosystem developments from spreading with good biosecurity practices and control/eradication where possible.

A. (Liberty) Ecosystems are dynamic, and a lot of people assume conservation is a static thing and that shouldn't be allowed to change. We need balance and equilibrium which is difficult to maintain when invasives enter the equation. Some species naturally expand their range due to climate change and a lot of the examples in the case of freshwater are human resultant where accidental/deliberate introductions of species occur causing an accelerated rate of change. For the example you mention of mink and signal crayfish, ultimately you want to eradicate both but whether this is realistically achievable, or it would better to leave them to find an equilibrium together within the new ecosystem is something I couldn't answer now. It really depends on where they are, and how fragile/resilient the rest of the ecosystem is. With invasives there is the idea that they are always bad which is not always the case.

A. (John) At a fisheries forum this same scenario was raised and an audience member came in with a great analogy saying that it is like where you have one street gang causing dis-order/violence, and then you get another rival street gang moving in and beating the first gang up but still causing dis-order/violence. Both mink and signal crayfish are very hard to get rid of once they're there so it is about working around it trying to do what you can. Personally, I feel there is less mink around now than there was 20 years ago but that is possibly due to fishing different rivers. There is lots of bad news about our environment from

an angling/nature point of view all the time, indeed even reading through the AT Facebook pages, but I think it is worth remembering all the good environmental news stories as well which is what this “Love Fishing Love Nature” campaign is all about!

A. (Liberty) Just a quick reminder for the audience, if you have any of your own success stories please do contact me or share them including the “#LoveFishingLoveNature” hashtag.

Key contacts from this forum meeting:

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