



Virtual Fisheries Forum 08/12/2022 (What Does An Environment Agency Fisheries Officer Do).

Q&A session

Q. is Ben a SAFFA (Salmon And Freshwater Fisheries Act) warranted officer?

A. (Ben) No Tom Baird is our warranted officer for enforcement in the Essex region. My domain is to do research, work with fishing clubs, angling/fishery development projects. The role of an enforcement officer is a 24/7 job and that would be impossible to do alongside my own fisheries duties.

Q. I've got Mink on my lake. I'm not sure they are a major problem in respect of fish. I have captured just 6 in 6 years with the help of traps. I know they are around when I find piles of opened mussel shells. Will these minks have an impact on my fish stocks?

A. (Ben) Mink despite being an invasive species should not have a massive impact on fish stocks unless it is an overstocked lake with easy pickings for them. In my Essex region there has been some ongoing trapping work with mink and we've not had many reports of mink being problematic at fisheries since.

A. (Alex) Richard Bamforth and Jake Davoile are the Angling Trust [Fisheries Management Advisors](#) who are on hand for clubs & fisheries to consult free of charge with their fisheries management issues. Predation prevention is at the heart of their work so get in touch if you do feel the mink presence at your fishery does become a bigger problem.

Q. Installing planted floating islands to a fishery, will it improve the lake in any way regarding toxins in water during summer months?

A. (Ben) We are advocates for floating islands and I have seen good success first hand. They are very pleasing once they are installed with a multitude of benefits not just for fish but will also mitigate nutrient

loading of the water. The plants/vegetation on floating islands take in minerals and nutrients through their roots working against eutrophication. Some of the best I have seen are a partially rock/brush filled gabion cage base acting as fish refuge from predators and the vegetation planted on top via a coir mat. If anyone wants some direct information on how to build floating islands there is a Environment Agency [YouTube Video](#).

A. (Alex) We had a great virtual forum back in summer where water quality management and floating islands were covered in quite some detail. The resources are available to catch up: [Video Presentation 1](#), [Video Presentation 2](#) & [Q&A Document](#).

Q. I'm in the final year of studying a degree in environmental science with the goal of becoming a fisheries officer, what else would you recommend that I do or get involved with to increase my chances of becoming a fisheries officer?

A. (Ben) I would say open yourself up to as many possibilities as possible. It is easy to be very polarised in your approach enrolling on a course at a dedicated fisheries college for example but understanding the broader issues relevant to fisheries work can be achieved through learning about things like habitat management, sustainability, aquaculture, and agriculture etc. Also getting involved with volunteering for groups like wildlife trusts and doing any outdoor management industry opportunities you can find will be beneficial.

Q. Just wondered how the EA stocking programme for local clubs is progressing - is it still likely that the fish may be received this year?

A. (Ben) We should have a date for you soon.

Q. Where can you see your job in 5 / 10 years' time with global warming pressure on water usage etc?

A. (Ben) Hopefully not just rescuing fish! We work with clubs & fisheries in our region to build more resilient sustainable fisheries so I'm hopeful this will come into play down the line reducing the problems associated with global warming. With the temperatures we saw this year we have to concentrate efforts before the summers especially to be prepared

and work with stakeholders to minimise impacts. I would still like to be working with clubs & fisheries and developing angling in my area.

Q. how you are dealing with illegal fish movements in your area?

A. (Ben) We are constantly involved with illegal movements and netting of fish. The fisheries/fish dealing consultants we work with will always have fish health checks and do things by best practice following the law. Every lake in Essex has a site permit with information about what species are permitted to be present so if invasive species for example are reported to us we can act appropriately.

Q. Has illegal fishing numbers gone down or is it still as bad as it was a few years back?

A. (Ben) The lack of reporting has stopped us from seeing the full picture really. There is a grey area between the amount of incidents and those which are actually reported. Tom our enforcement officer has been actively removing illegal fish traps from waterways in the Essex catchment and patrols fisheries performing license checks. We work together with the police rural crime team as well to combine resources for patrols/coverage.

Q. If a fishery gets permission to stock "Cats" would it be lake specific, or can they put them into any other lake on the complex?

A. (Ben) It has to be a fully contained stillwater not in a flood plain. The site stocking permits I spoke about earlier would not be given for non-native species like catfish if there was a risk of river/floodplain connectivity with the lake. You need to register lakes with CEFAS and then contact us to get a permit for the fish species you want to stock. You can have different stocking permits under one complex but if all the lakes on a complex have the same stocking permit from being assessed as fully contained/secure then you will be able to move catfish around between these lakes. It is judged on a case-by-case basis. A substantial risk with catfish and other non-native fish species escaping into natural waterways is the novel parasites which they carry which can be very damaging to native fish which is just one reason we are very selective on where catfish can be stocked.

Q. Over the past couple of years, I've had a slight problem with Hornwort. Is this an invasive weed that I should take steps to control and if yes, How?

A. (Ben) Hornwort is a native species, but it has cycles where it dominates and then crashes. When it reaches its dominance stage it can be very problematic requiring mechanical removal. The best ways to prevent it becoming too dense is to have uneven depth in your lake, get splash aeration going and some wind action on the lake. Removing the Hornwort nodules by netting can be effective as well.

A. (Alex) The Environment Agency and Institute Of Fisheries Management run an online "Aquatic Weed Control" workshop each year in early springtime that will be of use for discussing plant management issues at fisheries.

Key contacts from this forum meeting:

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