

David Moore on the AW reservoirs.

David Moore, Anglian water Recreational Manager, visited the club at the end of February hot on the publication of the annual in-house magazine "Hooked". 20,000 copies have been printed and all members should have received a copy by now. It is an excellent read and most of the aspects of David's talk are covered in some detail.

The objectives of the AW policy have been to:

- Maintain a stocking policy to enable a catch rate of 3-3.5 fish per visit to be achieved.
- Increase the proportion of stocked fish caught.
- Maintain a good safety record for both staff and customers.
- Offer a range of season tickets to give value for money for as many anglers as possible and to reinforce customer loyalty
- Bring new anglers into the sport.
- Attract prestige events to the AW reservoirs.

Record fish have been caught at Rutland, Ravensthorpe and Pitsford. At Grafham, there was twice the number of fish caught in the 2-3 pound category compared with those in the 1-2 pounds range. Over 50% of the trout caught weighed more than 3 pounds – a first. The catch rate dropped to less than 2 fish per visit on only two weeks of the season. Four weeks of the season saw the catch rate to exceed 4 fish per angler. 18% of the stocking are caught and released. Note that this data is based on returns which are still only running at 45% of the total tickets sold. Could do better here folks. The phenomenal growth rate at Grafham was almost certainly down to the high incidence of algae blooms. These were cause for concern between June and November but thankfully, the winds broke them up before they could form the soup-like rafts previously observed. No ill effects were reported from the presence of isolated areas of blue-green algae. Every effort is being made to reduce the phosphate levels, known to promote algae blooms, through processing at the treatment works.

There has been an increase in numbers of anglers visiting Grafham – the 4th consecutive annual rise. This includes established anglers and an encouraging rise in novices. The starters (intended for anglers who have attended a 1-day course @£40 including lunch) season ticket at £160 allowing the removal of 70 fish was considered to be a bargain and will be available in the 2003 season. Most wardens are now officially approved STANIC instructors and can offer on the spot advice *geared to the ability of the enquirer*. Anglers feel that they are being looked after like at no other time in the history of AW. Tracy Rathbone, from the shop at Grafham, has qualified to fish in the English Ladies National and Trevor Ashby at Rutland will be in the English Disabled Anglers team in 2003.

Safety pervades through the regular maintenance of the boats and motors and the provision of life jackets. However, it was of great interest to learn that at Rutland and Pitsford (and hopefully at Grafham in the not too distant future) it is possible to attend a 1-day boat handling course for £55 which entitles successful participants to a £1 discount on boat bookings for the next three years. See p.11 of "Hooked" for anglers' experiences and 10 useful boat-handling tips from John Seaton.

There was some fascinating data concerning the biology of the water. Alas most of this is archived away. I have often wondered for example what the limnological tower was used for at Rutland. I recall standing at the base before the reservoir was flooded. It looked a bit like Nelson's Column! Apparently there are six sites around the various reservoirs where samples are taken and analysed. Daphnia blooms can vary in intensity by as much as a factor of 10. David suggested from the data that additions of ferric sulphate had no effect on the water. *Come off it Dave!!! The bed of the reservoir in the early 80's was covered in a black slime resulting from rotting weeds, the banks, notably around G marker, were inches deep in caddis shucks, and the fish growth was close to zero. Or are you suggesting that there was another factor involved? The only beneficial effects of adding ferric sulphate was that it lead to the formation of GWFFA!* Other observations showed the presence of an average of 7000 chironomids per square metre. This in fact varied from 1000 to 15,000 per square metre. Assuming that there are 30,000 fish resident in Rutland for example, this means that there is an average of 1.5 – 2.0 million food forms available per trout. So why do they bother with our flies?

Fish proved difficult to catch at Rutland for a period during the summer and autumn of last year. This was attributed to the Rutland parasite otherwise known as *ergaslus sibildei* or simply as gill lice. AW must have learnt something from the ferric sulphate incident for on this occasion they have adopted a policy of complete openness. Firstly there is nothing new about the bug. It occurs throughout Europe, the USA and Russia – and probably most of the world. It was first recorded in the UK in a Yorkshire reservoir in 1967 and it has been inferred that it has been present in Bewl for at least the past 10 years. I did a web search and most interest seems to centre on the effect that the bug has on Koi carp. It has been found to affect most species of fish. The adult is about the size of a pinhead. David said that *ergaslus* has 12-stage life cycle of which 11 are free swimming and harmless to fish. The problems occur at stage 12 when the female attaches it self to and feeds on the gills of the fish. It clearly causes intense irritation as infected fish in captivity can be seen rubbing their bodies against the sides of the enclosure. The fish do not feed and those that are caught are a bit on the lean side. There are probably two complete cycles per year at Rutland although in exceptionally warm conditions this may increase to three. The life cycles are inhibited when the temperature drops below 7°C. However, as yet, there is no information that supports the notion that a prolonged cold winter would reduce or even eliminate the parasite. Given that it is much cooler in the winter on mainland Europe than in the UK, this doesn't look too hopeful a wish. Nevertheless, anglers will recall that the fishing at Rutland improved dramatically with the approach of winter.

AW has the following action plan for dealing with the *ergaslus* problem:

- Stocking will be done at more regular intervals, but maintaining the overall quantity and the weight of each fish above 650g (~1½lbs.).
- Catch and release will not be allowed at Rutland for the 2003 season – a precautionary measure, as the likely effect is not really known.
- All coarse fish must be killed and preferably returned to the lodge for examination.
- A research project will be set up to monitor infection rates and life cycles.

- Other AW reservoirs and the rivers, which are used as a source of their water, will be monitored for the presence of the parasite.

What are the prospects for 2003? By the time you read this if it is after 1st April, all of the reservoirs will have been opened and hopefully there has been a great start! The water level at Grafham is about a metre below top level. The water engineers are awaiting the advent of cheap electricity on 1st March before operating the pumps. No one wants to be pumping muddy floodwater in any case. Make no mistake, the costs of pumping water into the reservoirs runs into millions of pounds. There is, at least, no shortage of water at the moment so it is reasonable to expect that levels will remain high for most of the season. Incidentally, according to John Mees, pumping for 12 hours raises the water level in Grafham by about 2 inches! Another bit of info – the residence time of water in Grafham is about 1 year whereas in Rutland it is probably twice as long. All the fish have been ordered. Charges have been maintained at last year's levels with the exception of some boats. Similar permit options will be available including concessions for the oldies and loyalty discounts. A two-stage payment option will also be available. The Hardy/Greys International has been superseded by the AW/Fulling Mill event with modified rules which are intended to improve the chances of teams from the all over the UK, Ireland and mainland Europe, to reach the final at Rutland on the 6-8th October. AW is also nurturing youngsters by hosting the England Youth Team Fly Fishing Championships on July 20th. AW personnel will also run a workshop on the day before to ensure that competitors have the latest technical and fishing knowledge to hand.

Bank anglers might see a few changes around the car parks. Both Mander and Marlow will be open for anglers at all times but they have been divided into two sections in order to deter the boy racer fraternity who have been having regular meets over the past 12 months or so. Hopefully there might eventually be a car park serving the stumps area but this has to be negotiated with English Nature due to its proximity to the reserve.

Finally it remains to buy a NRA license. AW employees are not allowed to ask for proof of purchase. However, it was of interest to learn that a spot check by a NRA official at one of the big matches at Grafham did catch several competitors out and presumably they not only were excluded from the match but were also prosecuted.

Have a good season!

DGJ 07.03.03