

### **Scott Everett - the manager at Hanningfield**

Scott told us he was relieved to be facing relatively fresh faces instead of irate season ticket holders. He was going to talk about catching Nile perch on the fly but his trip had been thwarted by the Bin Laden episode. Nile perch are one of the largest fresh water fish in the world. According to other anglers the difficulty in catching them is not so much a reluctance to feed but the presence of Tiger fish of up to 8lb which snatch any lure as soon as it touches the water. Perhaps we can reserve that talk for another occasion. Instead he thought he would tell us about his honeymoon. That certainly generated instant interest!

His wife to be, insisted on sun, sea, sand and....palm trees! The Cayman Islands\* seemed to fit the bill. Scott then visited Jack Simpson for some advice on what might be caught there! Bonefish were mentioned. He was fitted out with a Ryobi Masterline 9½ft 2 piece capable of handling a 6/7 line, coupled with a BFR System 2 and loads of backing. Surprisingly only a few years ago traveller's rods were few and far between whereas now a 4 or 5 piece rod would be the preferred choice to avoid any chance of damage in the baggage handling department. I've got a 4 piece Ron Thompson 8/9 which at a shade under £70.00 is good value for money.

Scott stumbled on the fish by accident. The bar just happened to be overlooking a stretch of beach where these fishy objects appeared. These turned out to be bonefish. Normally they are very difficult to spot - the best way to seek them out was to look for their shadows. As these fish were only in a few inches of water it was easy to wade into the water and cast to them. Sometimes it was best to cast backwards towards the shore. Personally, after 3 months in Australian waters, I would be loathed to wade anywhere barefooted. Nevertheless he seemed to have escaped unscathed. Catching the bonefish was merely a matter of flicking out an epoxy nymph and bang the fish was on. Yards of line were stripped in an instant. Hence it was essential to keep retrieved line in an orderly state around your feet. I thought that bonefish were good at shedding the hook but apparently this was not the case at this venue.

Having whetted his appetite for seawater fly-fishing Scott hopes to go on to Tarpon - but these are expensive to fish for in terms of boat and guide hire. Another interesting fish is the tuna - the giant blue fin variety that is capable of stripping line at the rate of 1000metres per minute or 16 metres per second. That should give a reel a good testing.

Hanningfield contains about 250 fish per acre with an estimated population at present of 40-50,000. Catch returns average 1.1 fish per visit. Suggestions that there were no fish were scotched when a gill netting operation revealed enormous numbers. It is a mystery why the fish are not caught. Perhaps they are feeding at night or there might just be too much natural food.

Hanningfield is to open early next season for a couple of weeks (1<sup>st</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> March) in order to try and catch some of the overwintered fish. Its not likely to be busy so there will be plenty of room for techniques such as ruddering even though the reservoir is often looked upon as an anchoring water. After a weeks shut down, the reservoir will then open for the season as usual.

What other fish were present? This was a thinly disguised question seeking any indication that pike fishing might be allowed in the future. Unlike Abberton just up the road from Hanningfield, it seems that the water is not awash with other species. The Hanningfield lure was developed to catch perch in the 70's but these are no longer prolific. Neither is there bream, tench, or large carp. A few pike have put in an appearance this year but nothing like the extent to which they have been caught at Chew (10 over 30lbs). But never say never to an experimental pike session I think was the message.

Someone thought that the boats were dangerous in that their bottoms were slippery when wet. Scott was aware of this and some (the ones with the blue interior) have already been treated. The motors were described as temperamental to start. Scott did not necessarily agree and in any case there was no cash available to replace 70 motors at £600 apiece.

Hanningfield was once notorious for the huge fish caught around the cages using a pellet fly suspended under an indicator, or, as some would say - a float! The fish farm has now been closed and the cages have been removed. Nevertheless the method works elsewhere on the water in a modified form. Scott said that the technique was now to use a Di-7 line with a 10 foot leader with 2 carp hook buzzers and a couple of swan shot fished a couple of feet above the bottom, directly below the rod top. This seems a bit like fishing on the hang - a method I first came across when Mike Ball won a big event at Hanningfield many years ago.

I think I understood from Scott that catch and release was going (or has been?) to be tried. I noticed that within the audience there were some members who thought that fish mortality might be quite high especially if the fish were not unhooked in the water. Scott wasn't that keen because it could mean some anglers hogging a hot spot all day.

There seems to be a problem getting anglers to fish Hanningfield. Events have been organised with generous prizes (a season ticket for example worth £550) only for a dozen or so anglers to take part. I suppose it is difficult for us to head east with the Anglian reservoirs, with such good accessibility, on our doorstep. I personally have only fished it once and my most vivid recollection was not the fishing but the seemingly giant bats which came out in the evening. But looking back in past newsletters circa 1986, I find that I came away with the largest fish - only a 2¼ lb brownie but sufficient to win the sherry for the days efforts. I have often flown over Hanningfield since on trips in and out of Europe and wondered what was happening down there. Perhaps next season I will make the effort for a ground trip!

*\* A useful article on fishing in the Cayman Islands appeared in TF Feb.1996*

DGJ

3.12.01