

## Kye Jerrom from the Environment Agency



I think that we were expecting a discourse on the Grafham shrimp but it turned out to be a general discussion on the role of the Environment Agency. Kye is a Fisheries Technical Specialist for the Great Ouse although the actual area his team covers now extends from Brackley to Kings Lynn and all areas south down to the Thames. Kye confided that he was really a coarse fisherman (ace matchman) but we did not hold that against him. He mistakenly thought that we all held Sea Trout Licences so we put him straight on that one! Coarse anglers contribute £22 million to the coffers on a National scale so it is only fair that us trout anglers from Grafham get their fair share.

The EA is divided into three schools although all cooperate to solve problems. The Fisheries department covers population surveys, pollution, crime, fish health and parasites to mention a few. The Diversity group is concerned with species other than fish including otters and water voles. I had not heard of Geomorphology before but this title covers a knowledge of how rivers work. Hence they are in a strong position to advise on how to restore rivers for example by including glides, riffles, deep pools and features which avoid erosion and sedimentation.

I recall a previous speaker urging us to vote to stay in Europe if only for the Water Frame Directive to remain in operation. The EA has used this as a big stick in the event that they are unable to secure cooperation with miscreants. Efforts to restore the European eel population, which have collapsed over the past 40 years, have been partly funded by Europe. Part of the problem was believed to be related to a bladder parasite which hindered the eel from returning across the Atlantic to its breeding ground. Kye did not believe that eels travelled across land so that the EA has provided eel passes for example at Jesus Green (<http://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2013-10-17/eel-pass-opens-in-cambridge/>) and Baitesbite Lock. Eels in Hanningfield have been tagged in order to find the route by which they leave the reservoir. Over fishing is not a problem as there are only four registered eel catchers in the Ouse area. This could change if more punters realised that elvers at one time fetched £700/kilo.

Although there are no salmon in the area outside of a super market, we briefly touched on the decline of the natural species. Kye attributed this to the marine phase of the life cycle. His view is that simply restocking is a waste of time if the environment was not improved to maximise the natural spawning success. This may include removing barriers and ensuring river flows are maintained. I note that there was no discussion of the effect of commercial fish farms and beaver dams! The once mighty Tweed is apparently in decline whereas English waters such as the Ure and Tyne are booming. It will be a good test of Kye's theory when the effect of closing the salmon hatchery on the Tyne is finally assessed. There is an intrusion of an alien species – the Pink Salmon. This may be the result of heavy stocking in Russian waters. Kye said if any are caught they should be destroyed and the EA notified. Alan Sefton, who knows a thing or two about salmon, reckoned that the problem was exaggerated as their spawning habits are completely different to one another.

The first session finished with a video showing the EA in action electro fishing dace from the River Snail. These were taken to the EA fish farm at Calverton (Notts), stripped and fertilized, and the progeny grown on to a reasonable size before being introduced into streams around the country (<https://www.facebook.com/environmentagency/videos/10155236759813026/>).

After the break he had a little rant about flooding, in particular the events on the Somerset Levels. In his opinion extensive dredging belatedly introduced in some of the rivers on the Levels was not the best solution but if there is water coming through the letter box of local residents then longer-term measures might not be immediately acceptable.

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/somerset-levels-and-moors-reducing-the-risk-of-flooding/somerset-levels-and-moors-reducing-the-risk-of-flooding>)

Kye favours restoration and indeed this has been achieved on local waters, notably the Mel where Norman Shippey was very much involved. Rivers should be re-meandered possibly by reconnecting back waters. Banks should be stabilised. Flow deflectors in the river can change the nature of the river. Where necessary, jetting of the river bed probably helps clearing out silt but at Shepreth I understand that a significant quantity of fresh gravel was introduced to generate fresh spawning areas.

We were about to get to invasive species when someone asked about Burbot. Apparently, the last specimens were caught on the Wissey in the 1970's. There needs to be a hard frost for burbot to spawn successfully, ideally beneath a layer of ice. When was the last ice skating events on the Fens?

The so called Killer Shrimp has revived the winter fishing experience at Grafham. It originated from Eastern Europe but there is some doubt concerning the route it may have followed. A few have been found in the Diddington Brook (runs out of Grafham) but there is no evidence that it has moved into the rivers of East Anglia. Despite the name, there is no evidence that it has caused significant harm at Grafham. Indeed, there are reports of a massive increase in the number of tufted ducks which may well be feeding (as a diving species) on these alien shrimps. There are reports of the shrimp also occurring in Eglwys Nunydd reservoir and at a Marina in Cardiff Bay in South Wales. A concise summary can be found at [http://www.ywt.org.uk/sites/default/files/killer\\_shrimp\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.ywt.org.uk/sites/default/files/killer_shrimp_factsheet.pdf). The fact that it has not spread to the extent of other invasive species suggests that it requires specific water conditions especially as illegal attempts must have been made to introduce them into other waterways in order to "improve" the trout fishing. The alien shrimp at Rutland for example, is an entirely different species possibly the Demon Shrimp as established in the London canals.

The Signal Crayfish is well embedded in the area. Apart from eating fry and invertebrates, it destroys the river bank by its burrowing activities. I was astounded to learn that at one time, one tonne a week was being removed from the Lark! Another menace is the Mitten Crab which was probably introduced through ports on the east coast as the result of discharging water from cargo vessels. The crabs then migrate up rivers which in this area extends at least to Earith and possibly St Ives. I am sure Kye said they could be a foot wide but the literature suggests that they are probably one half of that size. Nobody doubts that they are extremely aggressive but on the other hand they are regarded as a delicacy and maybe they should be harvested at £5 a shot?

Finally, we had another video, this time of the Houghton trout stream near St Ives which showed some examples of how the EA deploy their philosophy in restoring an environment (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubVX4pla10Y>). I was quite taken aback by the sight of real reeds (as opposed to bulrushes) which are a sure sign of a gravel bottom. I thought that they had been dredged out as far upstream as Bedford. If this is a sign of restoration then I am all in favour!

Dave Jones

9<sup>th</sup> November 2017