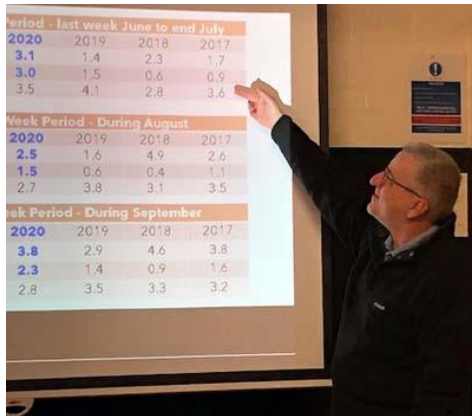


Ifor Jones “Managing Trout Fisheries”



Period	Last week	June to end July	
2020	2019	2018	2017
3.1	1.4	2.3	1.7
3.0	1.5	0.6	0.9
3.5	4.1	2.8	3.6

Week Period	During August		
2020	2019	2018	2017
2.5	1.6	4.9	2.6
1.5	0.6	0.4	1.1
2.7	3.8	3.1	3.5

Week Period	During September		
2020	2019	2018	2017
3.8	2.9	4.6	3.8
2.3	1.4	0.9	1.6
2.8	3.5	3.3	3.2

From a school leaving post at a small North Wales fishery and a spell at Carsholt College, Ifor is entering his 41st year in trout fishery management: he now runs Thornton, Eyebrook, and Draycote, all acclaimed still water trout reservoirs.

The waters are nicely spread between high density centres of population namely Leicester, Coventry and Corby. They also fit within the range of 70-1000 acres which Ifor considered the

optimum size for successful management. Anglers are quite likely to travel much greater distances (e.g Wales to Draycote) if the fishery reports look promising and indeed accurate. Catch returns, either by using the boxes provided or phoning in, are essential for prudent management of stocking policies.

Ifor prides himself and team to provide circumstances designed to welcome everyone. His fisheries are open for fly fishing for trout, pike and perch (zander?). He wants to make the fisheries more accessible to woman. He is frustrated by the lack of interest from the Indian community in Leicester who, by all accounts, are major buyers of trout from anglers. Apparently just five Asians visited Draycote last season.



Ifor recognised that he was part of the service industry where the customer is king especially in an environment where the number of anglers is declining. Managers and seasonal staff are all knowledgeable anglers who take an interest in their customers and ensure that the boats are in a pristine condition. Staff are present on the pontoons

during busy periods. The banks need to be managed to facilitate fishing and the lodges maintained to high standards of cleanness. The tackle shops are widely acclaimed and not only provide a wide range of tackle but the opportunity to try kit out before purchasing. Fishing reports must be honest. So the management are providing exemplary facilities and have facilitated the purchase of tickets through on-line booking. The decline in numbers was attributed to changes in life style partly caused by Covid. Anglers more frequently come for a half day or evening rather than a full day. It was interesting to hear that the shrinking volumes has been partly off-set by an increase in the demand for tuition; the target has to be to ensure that the newbies are hooked for life!

After over 40 years in the business, the quality of the fish has improved which is particularly noticeable in full fins. The standard weight of fish is 2 pounds and diploids have been replaced with triploids. Although triploids may well grow on more rapidly and, being sterile, provide other environmental benefits, Ifor had some evidence that fewer triploids over-wintered. Hence there were fewer double figure rainbows in the catch returns. Catch and release has become standard and again, Ifor had data which showed that there was a reasonable survival rate although he

questioned the lack of care some (*respected*) anglers exhibited in returning “immature” fish to the water. The predator anglers were way ahead in fish husbandry.

If the returns from Draycote last year (?) were analysed then out of the 29,000 fish stocked, 7471 were killed, 32,393 were returned, making a total catch over the season of 39,864. Ifor was pleased with these figures and I think, generally met with the approval of anglers. He did not think that the mortality resulting from C&R was high but he had no idea how many fish overwintered.

There are challenges to be met. Blue-green algae can appear suddenly depending upon the unpredictable weather conditions. Diseases such as foot and mouth have been known to close some waters. Indigenous species were mentioned but I don't think they are a problem in Ifor's waters. I was surprised to learn that, according to Ifor, cormorants were not the problem some anglers seem to think. Further financial pressures were caused by inflation and the Covid shutdown.

The cost of stocking has increased by 25% in a single year to something in excess of a quarter of a million pounds (not sure if this was all 3 reservoirs or just Draycote). Boat charges have been kept the same. In order to keep costs acceptable yet maintain the catch rate, a decision was taken to reduce the size of the fish stocked.

Using Draycote as an example, the proposed stocking policy is as follows:

Prop ⁿ stocked	2022. lbs. oz	2023. lbs. oz	Range. lbs oz
40%	2.00	1.14	1.14 – 2.0
50%	1.14	1.12	1.10 – 1.14
6%	1.12	1.10	1.08 – 1.12

The aim is to achieve an average stocking weight of 1lb 14oz with a catch return of 4 - 4.5. A 2oz reduction in stockie weight saves around £10,000 with an order for ~30,000 fish.

The corresponding stocking figures for Eyebrook and Thornton for 2023 are (31% 2lbs, 43% 1lb 14oz, 26% 1lb 12oz), and (27% 1lb 14oz – 2.00lb oz, 73% 1.08lbs oz - 1lb 12oz) respectively.

These proposals have been broadly welcomed by anglers. Typical questions asked prior to a visit are the recent rod average, when stocking was planned, weather and best methods. A rarely asked question was the current water temperature. Triploids are more sensitive to high water temperatures, and, according to my notes, 19°C is the critical level at which feeding falls away. Draycote lags a few degrees behind Eyebrook and Thornton, presumably because of the greater volume. The fish do not seem to descend to the depths as the temperature increases but can be found in the surface layers. Consequently, floating lines in their various forms, out-fish sinkers. There has also been a move towards lighter tackle, typically 9'6" rods and 5-6 lines.



Dealing specifically with Thornton, this is the oldest of the 3 reservoirs having opened in 1858 covering just 75 acres and a maximum depth of 30 feet: it is fed from two streams. The season extends from 1st February until 30th November. We were told that there can be really good buzzer hatches. Bank fishing can be good early in

the season but anglers need to take care as there is public access. 15-20 pulling boats are available but anglers can take their own electric motors. Thornton was one of the first reservoirs to open up to float tubes which can be hired on a daily basis. This was partly driven by the late Steve Parton who is now mostly remembered for lead lining at Rutland. *He visited the club in May 1979 and as a result I am fairly certain that the club organised a visit to Thornton. This was probably unofficial as I cannot find any record of the trip in the archives. My recollection was that I was still in the reservoir distance casting mode when in fact, modest casting in the range 10-15 yards, was all that it required. I blanked! If anyone else has recollections of the event over 40 years ago then please let me know!*

Eyebrook is fairly well known to Invicta anglers. It was built just before the 2nd World War to supply water to a steel works in nearby Corby. Many of the workers were from Scotland who were well versed in still water trout fishing from their experience on lochs. It covers around 400 acres and it is clear, when approached on the hilly road from Uppingham, that it is set in a “V” shaped valley. Although claimed to have an average depth of 35 feet, one map (fishing-ap.gpsnauticalcharts.com) shows extensive regions in the middle of the reservoir with depths of 60 feet or more and cliff-like fall-offs. It has SSS status and set in a private estate so no public access (or sailing) is allowed. Anglers can drive all around the reservoir. A boat for disabled anglers was available. It was described as a top-of-the-water fishery. Several varieties of damsel hatch and the trout can become very selective as to what pattern is successful. Brownies are not stocked but breed in the feeder river. Fish of 19 lbs have been caught. Rainbows grow to 9 pounds: pike of 38 pounds have been recorded on a fly but pike anglers are notoriously secretive regarding their real captures. (4 predator boats available a day). It was said that a couple of tench were caught on fly each season!



Draycote was opened in 1970 and covers about 600 acres. The maximum depth is 70 feet but features four shoals rising from the bed, some even breaking the surface in periods of low water. I have never been to Draycote although at one time I saw it quite regularly when the M45 was the major route into Birmingham. Apparently, it is a proper public facility attracting visitors on the perimeter track as well as an active sailing club. Ifor has a good relationship with the sailors but regards windsurfers as a bit of a pain! So, there are 32 boats available, including a Wheely boat, although the total can be expanded to 50. Bank fishing is limited to about half the perimeter: no fishing is permitted from the dam walls. 30 car passes are available which permits anglers to drive around the perimeter. The reservoir contains shrimp but not the same species found at Grafham. They were probably introduced via the Severn. Given the central location and served by several M-ways, and the excellent fishing, Draycote has attracted many prestigious competitions: on a decent day it is about 90 minutes from Cambridge.

These 3 waters offer a wide choice of fishing permits details of which may be accessed from their web sites. Look at flyfishdraycote.co.uk (eyebrook or thornton as appropriate) and select the tab “About us”. I particularly liked the “last 4 hours C & R ticket for £11.50”. Very informative web sites which provide up-to-date information for the angler.