

East Anglia (East) Area

Fisheries Newsletter

April 2020 – September 2020

The Environment Agency has a duty to maintain, improve and develop fisheries. We provide advice to fishery owners, managers, angling clubs and the public.

This newsletter has been produced to inform our customers of what the Fisheries team have been working on over the last few months and a forward look at areas of work which we will be concentrating on this quarter.

Looking After Fisheries in Lockdown

Whilst the UK is in lockdown and our fishing is understandably put on hold, it's still a busy time of year for fisheries management. And whilst Spring heralds the start of the fish spawning season, rising temperatures, algal blooms and long spells of dry weather can also bring problems and challenges for fish and fisheries.

So with anglers absent from the banks of stillwater fisheries, it is more important than ever for angling clubs and fishery managers to keep a regular check on water quality and the welfare of their fish stocks.

Oxygen levels in a lake can vary quite naturally over the course of the day and night, but factors such as algae blooms and sudden changes in weather conditions can cause rapid crashes, especially in highly stocked lakes. In normal times, anglers may report that fish have suddenly gone off the feed for no obvious reason, which can be a sign that something is not right. Keeping a regular check with an oxygen meter can help identify these problems at an early stage, quite often before there are any obvious signs of fish in distress, which can help reduce the risk of sudden fish kills.

In the absence of dissolved oxygen monitoring equipment, it is even more important to check for signs of fish in distress or unusual fish behaviour. Large numbers of fish gasping on the surface, particularly in the early morning when oxygen levels are at their lowest, or fish crowding round inlet pipes, can all be warnings that problems are occurring. Other signs, such as lethargic fish that do not move away when disturbed, can also indicate early signs of diseases that can make fish more susceptible to other environmental problems. Sudden changes in water colour can also indicate possible problems brewing. For example, lake water that suddenly switches from green to clear or brown water may indicate an algae bloom has crashed. Sometimes this can be triggered by thunderstorms or heavy rainfall following a long, hot spell. This can be quickly followed by a crash in oxygen levels, so it is important to monitor your lake closely if this occurs.



Figure 1 Regularly checking oxygen levels will help identify underlying problems at an early stage – in this example we found a dissolved oxygen level of just 47%. This confirmed the oxygen levels in the watercourse were dropping and aeration equipment was put in to help save fish



Figure 2 Fish crowding round an inlet pipe can be a sign of problems. In this case the fish were affected by a serious case of whitespot that had caused widespread gill damage

The Institute of Fisheries Management (IFM) has published some really useful guidance for stillwater fisheries during the current restrictions, covering things like supplementary feeding and the importance of checking oxygen levels. Check the IFM website for more information:

<https://ifm.org.uk/news/ifm-advice-for-fisheries-closed-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

The Angling Trust also has a COVID-19 support hub full of worthwhile information -

<https://joinanglingtrust.net/covid19-orgs/> - including FAQ's, links to the latest government guidance and advice around funding for fisheries affected by the lockdown.

Get in Touch

Phone us on: 03706 506506 (general enquiries)

Incident hotline: 0800 807060 (Illegal fishing or Fishery Incidents – fish in distress/dead)

Email us on: fbg.ens@environment-agency.gov.uk

Twitter: EA twitter @envagencyanglia

Our fisheries teams remain operational but we are working to strict Government advice. We will continue to prioritise responding to reported incidents of serious harm to the environment, subject to local conditions. It is therefore really important that clubs and fishery managers report any signs of problems to us at an early stage. This will help us to identify what may be going wrong and what can be done to monitor the situation and prevent things getting worse. Clubs and fishery managers should also be prepared to provide their own emergency aeration to help fish stocks if needed.



Figure 3 Using a 2" water pump to provide emergency aeration to help fish struggling in a small pond. The inlet pipe has been carefully placed away from the pump to avoid sucking up silt from the bottom