

Stillwater Report - June 2020

Rutland Water

Opening

We were all very fortunate that Anglian Water chose to open the fishing for us on June 2nd. Due to their measured opening of Rutland Water, the dreaded rush was averted and numbers of visitors gradually increased.

We had an idea that it could be a very exciting restart for the fishing. That would have been seriously to underestimate just how good actually was.

The fish had 10 weeks peace during which time they could feed freely without any human interference. Okay, we missed out on the buzzer fishing in April and May. To judge by the magnificent quality of the fish caught on the opening day, the fish quite clearly did not miss out on this immense hatch. There were stories of residents of Edith Weston having to draw curtains so as not to attract the insects to their house lights. Without exception, every fish caught was in superb silver condition. Not only that, having dined on 10 weeks-worth of insects, they were seriously fit: with, even 2 lb fish taking you out into the backing. Some excellent overwintered fish between 4 and 6lb have been caught. These larger fish have been in excellent condition and mercifully, unlike the last two seasons, exhibited no evidence of Ergasilus. They were just what you'd expect from overwintered rainbows: sleek, silver and very fit.

Maybe, as in earlier days of the reservoir fishing. In the first seasons at Grafham opening day was May 15th - May 1st would be ideal. The fish then, would already have started to silver up and we would be able to take advantage of the first annual hatches. Clearly, this would not make economic sense.

Fishing areas

Fish were caught widely around the banks. Some places, particularly the at Old Hall and Green Bank, which have produced some of the best bank fishing for a great many years. It is pleasing to report that fish moved freely throughout out the day and the dry fly-fishing was the most rewarding method.

Climate

After what has proved to be the sunniest, warmest and driest May in recorded meteorological history, the marginal temperature of the water on June 2nd was unusually high at 18° C. This is at least 4° C above the average for the beginning of June. The first two days of the re-opening were very sunny with the tremendous growth of ribbon weed -enteromorpha spp - in the margins.

This kept the fish very close into the bank as they felt quite safe. The fish moved all through the day under cloudless skies.

On the third day, cloud was forecast and we all shouted hurray and mistakenly thought it might get even better.

Quite clearly, the fish had a very different viewpoint and towards the end of the second week, appeared temporarily to vanish from the margins.

There could be a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, the cloud cover heralded a quite dramatic decline in atmospheric pressure following one of the longest periods of anti-cyclonic weather recorded in the UK.

This was also followed by a spell of very unstable thundery weather with some parts of the UK recording up to hundred millimetres of rain on 13th June.

Not only that, in contrast with May, June has so far proved very cool indeed and 24/7 overcast with some remarkably low day temperatures. Only 10° C maximum air temperature was recorded on the 11th. This compares with 12°C recorded on Christmas Eve!!

This caused a dramatic drop in the marginal water temperature from the exceptional high of 18° C on the 2nd to the average temperature of 15° C on 13th June.

Not only that, this cold was accompanied by an unusually strong north easterly wind which was almost certainly the main cause of this temperature drop. In addition to which, it stripped all the ribbon weed cover from the margins leaving crystal clear almost barren conditions.

Feeding habits

Another possible reason for the loss of fish appetite, is that we are suffering from what chalk stream anglers used the “post mayfly slump” following “duffers fortnight”. Could this be therefore a post buzzer slump?

Recent examination of contents of fish stomachs suggested that the rainbows had stopped feeding altogether, containing only a few food items.

It was noticeable also that, after this fourteen-day slump, some of the fish were slimming down a little.

Since that time, there have been very extensive hatches of Sedges and Caenis. The fish showed no interest in these ever preferring to pick up a few migrating snails.

There is nothing unusual in that, as Rutland Water trout seldom feed on sedge, either adults or pupae.

Water conditions

Despite the drought, the reservoir remains at a good level. There are various reasons for this, the main one being of course, that industry was using the minimum amount of water. The lake started at 96% full. By early June it had dropped by just under 1metre.

However, following recent heavy rain, between 16th & 19th June, Anglian Water were able to pump from source rivers and at the time of writing the level has increased considerably. This will help to retain the fauna in the margins and, hopefully keep the fish within range of the bank angler

This means, that, for the time being, we don't have to scramble down the rocks to land the fish. This is dodgy enough when it is dry. However, when wet these rocks can be seriously slippery.

It is worth noting here that, until the prolonged drought of 1995/96, when John Wadham and the late Henry Lowe mapped out their Bank Anglers Guide, the water remained at a high level. Since then there has been much housing and other development in the area, resulting in greater water usage with the consequently increasing rise and fall in water level. This has until recently left the margins exposed for long periods: particularly during the winter. This has generally, inhibited fish from coming to feed near the bank. We saw this exemplified when the fishing opened on June 2nd, when fish were caught from the margins all around the perimeter of the lake.

However, towards the end of June the fish appeared to have totally vacated the margins despite the much-reduced water temperature and the presence of the ribbon weed. In a number of seasons recently, the fish have come into the margins to graze on Corixa. This creature appears to have been absent for the last three years.

The early-season stock fish have put on a huge amount of weight. This clearly indicates the extent of the insect hatches in May.

Since that time, the main diet has been surface-migrating Limnaea snails and the newly hatched coarse fish "pin" fry.

A number of large Browns have appeared mainly in the 3 to 5lb range: although a 10lb specimen was captured in the North Arm.

Throughout the whole period under review the boat fishing has been of excellent quality.

Grafham Water,

The reservoir has provided excellent sport since the opening on June 2nd. Bank fishing, being, predominantly from the North Shore and The Dam. Predator fishing is in full swing with mainly Zander being caught. But unlike there seems to be plenty of fish in the margins. The main attraction being the shrimps.

Conclusion

We are grateful that Anglian Water continued stocking at all sites right throughout the “lock-down” period. This provided the anglers with one of the best openings for many years. It also gave the fish ample opportunity to spread out: thus, avoiding local “slaughters” of stock fish.

Provide the water level is maintained the margins should continue to colonise and provide good fishing.

John Wadham - June 2020