

## Chairman Report 2020

Strange days indeed. Winter floods followed by the virus lock down have certainly made the start of 2020, one that none of us will forget.

To backtrack to more normal times we did manage a couple of stimulating meetings during the past year. Des Sussex of Natural England gave an interesting presentation on Dragon and Damsel flies at the April 2019 AGM, and this was followed by an update on the Arborfield Bypass Channel by Rob Britton of Bournemouth University, at the October meeting.

More recently the well-attended January 2020 meeting covered the subject of the current condition of our rivers. Presentations by Martin Salter wearing his Angling Trust hat, and Ashley Smith talking about the Windrush Against Sewage Pollution initiative opened many eyes to concerns that, despite some widely promoted contrary opinion, our rivers are in a far from satisfactory condition and the way that they are managed leaves a lot to be desired.

This viewpoint has recently been further supported by the fact that two local clubs (there are rumours of a third) are giving up leases on part of their River Loddon portfolio, entirely due to poor angling results which have led to low usage.

These concerns come on the back of investigations that the LFCC has been supporting, being conducted by Bournemouth University and part-funded by the Barbel Society, on fish fry in the Loddon Catchment. The result of 3 full days sampling with some further half day forays has produced not one Barbel fry, and with the exception of a couple of sites fry concentrations were lower than expected. Chub numbers were reasonable but even these have become elusive during the winter sampling. Quite unexpectedly a small number of young Tench have been caught. However this fry sampling, an area of study that is overlooked by the regular Environment Agency surveys, and further work may give a better understanding of the true situation. We have received extra financial support from some clubs to help fund this work, for which we are very grateful.

Some of us are also working on a document to bring together these issues, and this will be circulated for further input very soon.

We have continued to support the work of the Loddon Catchment Partnership. A significant proportion of their efforts have been directed at the improvement to the Emmbrook at Wooshill, Wokingham, and it is hoped that actual work on this project will occur during the next 15 months. Although the Emmbrook is not a part of the catchment that would attract anglers, we should not undervalue the importance of these smaller tributaries in providing nursery areas for fish fry, whilst it is highly desirable to see that the water flowing from them is in as good quality as possible.

The LFCC has also supported the Catchment Partnership during rivers week last September, and we again had a joint stand at the Fleet Pond event last June, (cancelled this year).

South East Rivers Trust (SERT) are currently working with us to get the Charvil backwater

project moving, whilst it is good to report that Swallowfield F C completed the first phase of their long awaited project by introducing gravel to a short section of the Blackwater and improving fry refuge areas on the Loddon just upstream of the Blackwater confluence. Baffles were also installed by SERT on Blackwater and Loddon Gauging Weirs at Swallowfield, aimed at improving fish passage. All small initiatives on their own, but it is hoped that they will benefit the catchment in the long term.

Some Barbel, Chub Dace and Roach were stocked by the EA last autumn and it is hoped that the catchment will benefit from some further coarse fish later this year.

We have also continued to join in with efforts to control Floating Pennywort and 2 sites at Yateley are showing a very encouraging absence of the plant. There are however concerns about the Basingstoke Canal at Fleet. I would encourage anyone to keep their eyes open and report any sightings to the EA or here at the consultative. There are also groups active in reducing Himalayan Balsam with good localised results. It is really easy to take ownership of a short stretch of river, a few minutes as part of any angling session can make a big impact.

Links with Reading University continue to be strong and we have been able to contribute at a number of meetings, whilst we continue to have input to some of the catchment flood groups.

I am sure that many of us are desperate to get back to some of our normal activities on the rivers and lakes, hopefully we will slowly be able to enjoy that part of our lives. Given the apparent current switch for more local recreation, we may find that there are more people wishing to enjoy the rivers and stillwaters, something that may give increased challenges, but hopefully a growing interest in LFCC aims.