

Water~Lines

News from the Haddon Estate Fisheries Issue No.3

Spring/Summer 2005

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MORE!



More wildlife, more interesting fishing, more fish and bigger fish. Thanks to natural, sustainable policies!

You may recall from from Water~Lines No. 2 we are working hard to develop the wild trout fishing on Haddon Estate and have ceased any stocking of trout into the rivers. The buffer fencing is now giving anglers a generous eight metre wide fishing path between fence and river and is designed to allow easy unencumbered casting. Our wild brown trout, rainbow trout and grayling have all spawned successfully this year. The fry are now finding homes by the un-grazed natural river margins.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the very many of you who have given us constant encouragement and support for our new policy. Particularly heartening is that so many anglers are treating our wild fish with such special care when unhooking and returning them to live and breed as Nature intended. As the rivers and their inhabitants come first, our anglers become winners too.

*Warren Slaney
Head River Keeper*

Haddon Estate Fisheries Policy

2005 and Beyond

Background

For over one hundred years we have chosen to raise fish from spawn stripped and fertilised, by hand, from our native strains of trout. In recent years, we have been watching closely and monitoring their impact upon our rivers and streams. As a result of our findings we have been cutting down on the numbers of stock fish introduced to our rivers. The upper third of the fishing on the Wye and a main tributary haven't been stocked now for just over three years.

Solid research is now making us realise the harm we were doing by any stocking at all. Our stock fish were driving out the perfectly suited wild trout and out competing them in every event through the summer. Come the winter, those stock fish would leave in search of more comfortable habitat.

To illustrate this, an experiment was carried out on a Wye tributary. No stock fish were added to a particular pool and riffle sequence. Any resident and semi-resident stock fish were removed and counted. The river was treated to moderate restoration work over a three year period. The population was then re-assessed. Where once there had been two stock fish there are now thirty wild trout. From this we concluded stocking was upsetting the ecological balance of the river and destroying its ability to create healthy, large populations of wild trout. River restoration improves the rivers' ability to reverse the damage more rapidly.

Catch and Release

Each year numbers of the larger wild fish were quite legitimately killed and removed from the river by anglers. Similar fish caught and returned would go back to their lies and eddies and, after a short time spent recovering, they sometimes provided further sport to other visiting anglers. These fish got the chance to grow even bigger and spawn naturally each winter, thus adding their vital genes to the wild population. Considerate and well practised Catch and Release has now been adopted on the Wye. Most of our rods are have been calling for it for some time. In the interests of fishes' welfare, de-barbed or barbless hooks are now to be used exclusively.

Policy for the Future

The Haddon Estate hatcheries have closed. This will improve water quality to the rivers. We will use intelligent restorations and improvements on all sections of our main rivers and every feeder stream on the Estate by the introductions of buffer strips and other husbandry works. 5km of buffer strip fencing is already in place. Our aim is to work with the superb water quality available to us in Derbyshire and create the right habitat to sustain large numbers of free rising wild trout and further benefit the river corridor for all native wildlife and fly life. The rivers will be transformed to a super abundant natural state, every aspect of which the discerning fisherman can appreciate and enjoy.

One for the pot

We stock a convenient beat of the Wye at the bottom of the fishing, near to the Peacock, with rainbow trout. These rainbow trout cannot progress up river because of weirs and hatches. This will provide an area of put-and-take fishing for our hotel guests and others who would like to take "one for the pot" with no risk to the wild fish population.

Warren

As Easy as ABC!

Etiquette for Newcomers by Dill

Many anglers start their fly-fishing days on still waters. They typically have a wealth of experience in this specialised branch of the Art. Ask any of these rods about their favourite flies and the list will be mainly of flies fished under the surface. Results gained by using these favourites have built great confidence over the seasons. Now they are being asked to use flies that may not be so second nature to them and also in a way that is unfamiliar.

Of course on still waters the dry fly is often used to great effect. But on rivers even the method of covering the water is different from that used on still water fisheries. What flies are allowed? Where do you start? What is expected from you? How can you make sure you are fishing in the style to which your fellow anglers will be accustomed? How do you ensure that you are not breaking these seemingly rigid rules?

Dry fly means choosing and using a fly that is presented with at least half of the fly above the surface. Some dry flies stand completely above the surface and others lie in the surface film. What you must leave in the box are flies like wet flies and emergers that are presented with most, or all, of the fly under the surface. Going even a tiny bit under the surface means the fly has broken into the fishes' sanctuary and is actually unsporting and not fair on the fish if the rules are "dry fly only".

The place to start is the downstream end of the area you have chosen to fish. Starting there and working your way up you avoid any conflict with other rods.

In covering a still water with dry flies the angler will cast in any direction from the casting position. On the river if a cast is made downstream, or allowed to drift downstream onto a tightening line, the fly will be dragged under and becomes a wet fly encroaching that sacred sanctuary under the surface that belongs to the fish and not to us! So we cast into the direction that the current is coming from and pick the fly off the water before it is dragged under. This can of course include casting downriver (but upstream) when fishing in an eddy. Happily for us, casting upstream is the best way to approach all the fish as we are sneaking up on them from behind their line of sight!

So:

- A Choose true dry flies (not emergers or wets)
- B Cast upstream
- C Pick the fly off the water before it drags under the surface

And you will be fine!

Dill

Haddon Estate is proud to be associated with these excellent organisations:



Anglers' Conservation Association
Eastwood House
6 Rainbow Street
Leominster
Herefordshire
HR6 8DQ



The Wild Trout Trust
PO Box 120
Waterlooville
PO8 0WZ

If you would like to join, just ask at the Peacock.

New Season! New Rules! New World Order!



Some Observations from Regular Rod

Many of us have practised catch and release, with de-barbed and barbless hooks, for quite a long time now. So, to us, the new policy is already the norm. Conversations with fellow rods have revealed that, whilst most are quite happy to fish under the new rules, a bit of help is needed, by a few rods, on the best ways to proceed with safe releasing of fish intended to live and breed another day...

Err... Have I picked up a poisoned chalice here?

The Spanish have a very wise saying about the English. Loosely translated it goes: "You may criticize an Englishman's wife, but not his driving!" Yes, it raised my eyebrows too when I first came across it, but there is a very clear ring of truth here. I wonder, is there a similar taboo with regard to our fishing? So it is dearly hoped that what follows is taken entirely in the spirit in which it is intended.

When a fish is hooked and fighting to escape it builds up lactic acid in its muscles. If the fight is prolonged the fish can die as a result. Our responsibility to a hooked fish is to land it as quickly as possible to minimise the build up of lactic acid and to prevent the fish from being over tired. So we must do what we can to reduce the time needed to bring the fish in.

A slightly heavier breaking strain of tippet is a great help, but the biggest difference is made by always using a net. If that net is a long handled net you can: reach the fish much earlier in the proceedings, have the fish unhooked and returned safely, in shorter time and in better condition than is possible when bringing a fish to hand or to a short handled net.

Another big difference is made by first laying the fish in the net, gently, onto soft vegetation, such as grass or dock leaves, prior to carefully removing the hook, all the while doing our best to take it out in a direct reverse of the path it took on the strike. Under no circumstances should a fish ever be touched by anything dry, like a hand or cloth or the ground. The wet meshes of the net and your wet hands are all that should ever make contact with the fish. Another thing to avoid is holding a fish by its body. Far better to lay it in the wet net on the ground and simply use your fingers to open its mouth and remove the hook, using forceps if needed.

Follows then the release. Use the net to carry the fish back to the water and, choosing a suitable spot, lower it into the water. Let the rim of the net down and guide the fish over the rim, facing into the current. Usually the fish will simply swim away strongly and no more attention is needed. Occasionally it will be necessary to cradle the fish in wet hands, again with its head and mouth facing into the current until the fish is ready to swim away. This is a wonderful part of the release, when the fish has clearly regained its composure and is now full of life and so ready to go that it may even kick a good tail full of water right in your face as a parting shot! I carry a towel for just such exigencies...

By the way, whilst on the subject of matters new, a warning! We have a kingfisher who, this season, does things somewhat differently from his predecessors. As long as I can remember, the Haddon kingfishers have used the rivers as their very own personal high speed aerial highways. This is convenient for anglers as we only need to look up or downstream when observing them and listening to that joyous piping that must be kingfisher-ese for "I've got one!"

This year, Halcyon is a time and motion expert. He flies cross country in almost dead straight lines at very high speed. This cuts off quite a bit of distance from his journeys and must save time. He nearly always has a fish in his bill with the fish turned head out ready for to be thrust down the throat of one of his hungry chicks. A dutiful parent certainly but he has a naughty sense of humour. I'm fairly certain that he deliberately pipes just as he is about an Imperial yard over our heads! The first time he did it to me I nearly fell in. It may be an idea that, along with floatant, amadou and our other pocket impedimenta, as an aid to recovery from sudden shock, we should now be carrying little bottles of smelling salts...