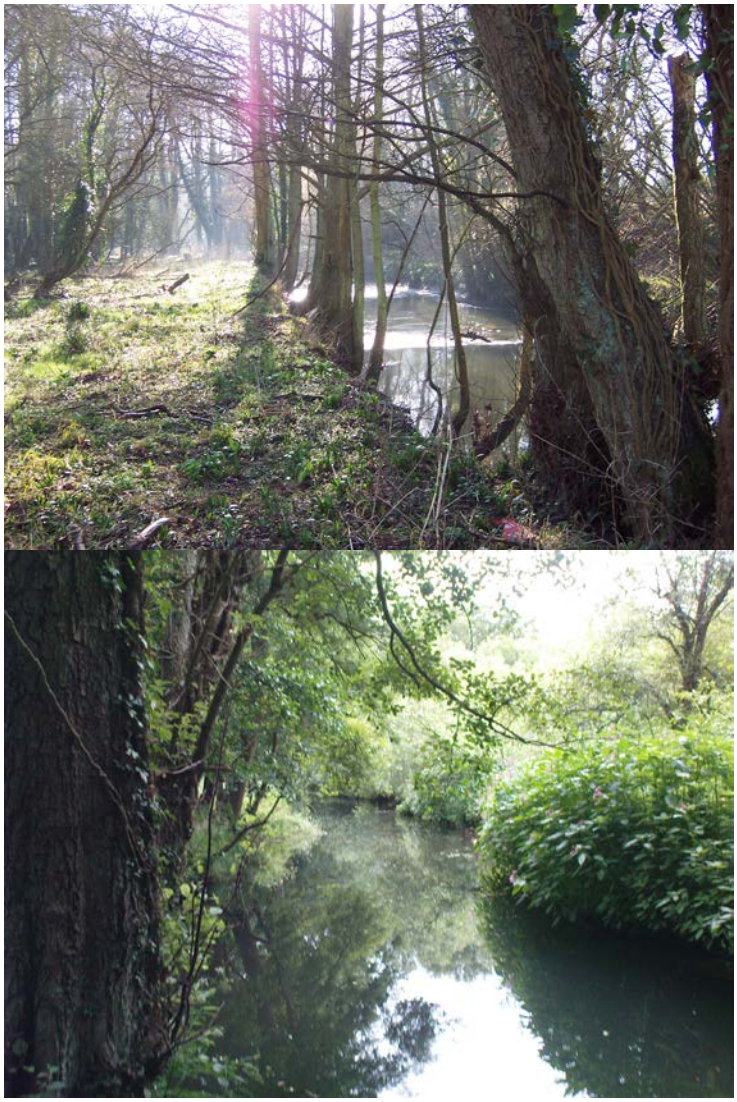
Fishery Plan for the River Hamble, Hants.



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by

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Version 1

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Description of water

The stretch of the River Hamble managed by the club runs on the East bank from the bridge at Wangfield Lane downstream to the railway bridge. The first part of the fishery covers 2 fields, the remainder runs through woodland. There is approximately 1000yds of bank.

The water level on the river is artificially controlled via a mechanical sluice at Botley Mill. This means that the water is impounded. Impoundments artificially change the velocity of the river, its depths, nutrients cycling, buffering and self-purification capacity. In addition, settling will increase, winter washout can occur and potentially eutrophication (over fertilisation of nutrients) can worsen.

The river holds many species, including trout, chub, dace, roach and grayling.

The depth of water varies with the control of the water level but in general the water is reasonably shallow (3 feet or less) with a few deeper glides and pools.

Stocking levels

The River Hamble has a reasonable head of fish but the 2010 EA survey has identified that the river is a failing water body i.e. it supports a population well below what would be expected in this type of river. This assessment is based on the EU model. The actual detail behind the low classification is unknown at time of writing but it is likely that the absence of certain species (e.g. eels) has contributed.

Anglers' catches have seen good bags of trout, chub, and dace. These are generally smallish fish but some of the chub are now around 1lb. The prime fish from the water is the grayling. These also go up around the 1lb mark with the occasional specimen to 1lb 12oz and provide excellent sport.

The brown trout grow to around the same size as the Grayling and can provide a good sport when the other species are proving elusive. Juvenile trout are regularly caught which shows the resident brown trout successfully spawn.

In addition, sea trout are making reappearance on the stretch following the installation of a new fish pass by the EA. For the first time in 250 years they are able to navigate to the Hamble headwaters to spawn. A substantial number were spotted in late September 2010 by the warden up to an estimated 8-10lb.

In the 2007/8 season the EA stocked the water with Chub, Roach and Dace. Chub and Roach were very scarce in the river up to this time. The fish were of varying sizes with some chub 8oz+

In December 2009, the EA again provided 500 chub, 500 dace and 500 roach. These were all small fish in the size 1-2oz.

The chub have thrived in the river and regularly feature in catches and all being well will provide superb sport in the future as they put on more weight. The roach and dace were less of a success and most dace caught are the resident stock rather than the new fish. The roach have almost all disappeared.

Current Status

At present the River Hamble provides the Clubs members a pleasant days fishing which can vary depending on weather conditions and water flow. It has provided many members with their first ever Grayling. It also affords members the facilities to enjoy fly fishing. It is one of two rivers that we manage as a Club with the River Wallington being the other.

The riverbanks are managed and pruned to allow fishing by different methods along all stretches. There are areas of overhanging trees and bushes which provide

interest for the anglers to position their bait. There are specific swims which are identified and maintained. The first field has 4 potential swims (one is unfishable). The second field has a minimum of 6 swims (some areas of bank can support more than one angler). The bottom stretch through the woods down to the railway bridge has a number of areas to fish and less actually defined swims.

Parking is available to members in the lay-by on Wangfield Lane. Access to the fishery is via a club padlocked gate. Further access to swims and the lower stretches requires climbing stiles and some of the ground particularly around the second field is very wet and boggy underfoot.

Animals are often resident all along the stretch of river. In recent times there have been horses and cattle which anglers need to be aware of.

At quiet time anglers can see deer, kingfishers, foxes and buzzards.

It is believed that certain parts of the river bank and associated fields are designated as SINC…the actual details are to be confirmed

(There are 2 SINCs – Lower Wangfield Copse which comprises of the woodland bordering field 2 to the start of field 3 and Wangfield Meadow which is field 2)

Identified problems

- The flow of the river is mostly slow and even. There is little or no real velocity. The sluice effectively reduces the gradient of the river.

- The river has very few productive areas where micro organisms and invertebrates can thrive. There is not enough variable habitat, wood debris and too little light.

- The sluice at the water mill is often left open beyond what is ideal, allowing the river to get low in the winter. It is extremely unlikely that this will change so the fishery needs to cope with it.

- Juvenile Habitat – there is currently little refuge for juvenile fish. It is likely that the majority of the young fish get washed out of the stretch when the flow is opened up in the winter to remove potential flood risks

- Himalayan Balsam has taken over much of the river bank. This invasive non native species will ruin the eco system taking the space of native plants and eroding the surface soil.

- Although fly fishing is possible, easier access could be provided for those wishing to use that method.

- Access to the fishery in the winter can be difficult due to the waterlogged nature of the ground.

Long-term plan

The long-term plan for the River Hamble has several strands, some of which are major projects. The SINC status needs to be considered for any of the larger planned items. Some items will also require flood defence consent. The strands are:

1. Change the flow profile of the river with introduction of berms. There are some old berms in the river which can be renovated. Additional ones can be put in. The aim should be to create some faster flowing gravel glides which will also allow some of the gravel bottoms to be washed clear of silt further improving breeding grounds. The berms can be created from brushwood and gravel rejects. Cut alder and willow can be layered and pinned in the water to allow the retention of the gravel rejects. Sweet chestnut stakes can be used to hold the constructions in place.
2. Provide additional habitat for micro organisms by increasing the amount of wood debris in the

water (whilst not increasing any flood risk). Any fallen tree should be assessed and left in place if possible. The creation of the berms (above) can also increase the wood debris.

3. Provide an additional easier access fly fishing swim in the first field.
4. Remove the Himalayan Balsam by pulling the plant up in the period April to June. It should not be pulled up after the seed pods have formed; otherwise the spread of seeds will be increased.
5. Create a juvenile refuge possibly in the second field. This could be based on excavating a small pond away from the flow of the river. There are some suitable areas of water meadow which could be excavated, however this will need major planning.
6. Continued maintenance of the existing swims, increasing light and access into some of the swims which are little used.

Requirements for successful instigation of plan

The long term plan is quite aspirational and will need a considerable amount of time and money to realise. In addition, many parts need to be planned and approved before they can go ahead. Each of the strands in the plan is summarised below.

Change the flow profile -1: the reinstallation of old berms can be carried out without further permissions. There is some cost but it is limited. The warden and fishery team can progress this part of the plan in the shorter term (12 months)

Change the flow profile -2: the installation of new berms will need to be designed and approved with the EA. Again the cost is controllable, and the berms can be done in stages by the warden and the fishery team over a long period (suggest 36 months)

Additional habitat: this can be managed by the warden by utilising/leaving wood/trees which have already fallen, are close to falling or which are being pruned to improve access and light. There is no additional cost or planning required. (Continual activity starting with tree which fell into river in September 2010)

First field Fly fishing swim: this can be managed by the warden and produced by a normal work party. (Suggest target for start of season 2011)

Himalayan Balsam Removal: this can be carried out by the warden and work parties. Probably needs to be a continual process over the coming years with extraction being done between April and June.

Juvenile Refuge: this is a major project which will require plans to be drawn up and approval from EA and land owners. In addition, financial grants should be

sought to enable the project. It is likely that the EA will supportive however SSSI status may further limit the project. (Suggest start the planning and design in 2011/2)

Conclusion

The River Hamble is currently a river providing members of the Club pleasant fishing in picturesque and unspoilt surroundings. The river offers members the chance to use a variety of methods including fly fishing. The grayling fishing is unique in the club.

The above recommendations will see an improved fishery by providing improved habitat for juvenile fish, adult fish and more interesting swims for anglers to tackle. In the longer term there will be increased numbers of fish through all year groups.

I will finish off by giving recognition to the present Pond Warden who continues to work tirelessly on the river, reporting problems and keeping it open for fishing for members to enjoy.