

Richmond and District Angling Society

Fish Welfare Guide for River Swale Waters

Catch and Release – Care and Respect for Every Fish! As guardians of the River Swale, we take fish welfare seriously. This guide is designed to help all anglers on our waters ensure fish are returned safely, with the best chance of survival. Please follow these best practices whenever you fish with us.

General Principles

- We are a catch and release fishery. All fish must be returned to the water with minimal harm.
- Respect the river and its wildlife. Angling is about enjoying nature – treat it gently and leave no trace.

Equipment and Tackle

Use Barbless Hooks

- Barbless or de-barbed hooks cause less damage and are easier to remove.
- They reduce handling time, helping fish get back to the water faster.

Use Single Hooks – Avoid Doubles and Trebles

- Single hooks are much easier to remove and result in fewer injuries.
- Double and Treble hooks increase the risk of deep hooking and damage to gills or eyes.
- Doubles and Trebles increase the risk of foul hooking.

Use Tackle Appropriate for the Fish

- Don't play fish for too long. Use suitable rods, lines, and leaders to land fish efficiently and safely.

Temperature Awareness

Take Extra Care in Warm Weather

- In hot summer conditions, oxygen levels in the river drop, and fish stress levels rise.
- Avoid fishing during the hottest part of the day.
- Handle the fish as little as possible.
- Consider not fishing at all if water temperatures are excessively high.
- Avoid keeping fish in keepnets.
- Bring the fish in quickly.
- Keep the fish facing upstream to help it recover, keep it in the upright position.
- A thermometer reading can help you assess whether you should fish or not. If in doubt, don't.

Photographing Fish

- Keep the fish in the water as much as possible.
- Wet your hands before handling to avoid removing the protective slime.
- Support the fish properly, avoiding contact with dry or rough surfaces.
- Keep air exposure under 10 seconds. Plan your photo before lifting the fish.
- Use a soft mesh landing net and a wet unhooking mat if fish must be laid down.

Handling Fish

- Keep fish in the water until you're ready to unhook or take a photo.
- Wet your hands before touching a fish.

- Do not squeeze the fish or hold it by the gills.
- Cradle the fish gently, supporting it under the belly and near the tail.

Hook Removal

- Use long-nose forceps or a disgorging tool to remove hooks gently.
- If the hook is deeply embedded, cut the line and leave the hook in place – the fish is more likely to survive this way.
- Don't try to retrieve a hook at all costs – the fish's welfare comes first.

Releasing Fish – Letting Them Recover

- Hold the fish upright in calm water, facing upstream.
- Allow water to flow over its gills – do not push or drag the fish forward and back.
- Wait until the fish swims away under its own power.
- Be patient – some fish take a little while to regain strength.

Clean Gear, Healthy River

- Wash waders, nets, and gear between fishing trips to prevent the spread of diseases and invasive species.
- Follow Check–Clean–Dry procedures.

Additional Notes

- Report any sick or dead fish to the club promptly.
- Avoid fishing during flood or drought conditions where fish are particularly vulnerable.
- Use fish-friendly, knotless mesh nets only.
- If you're unsure about anything, ask an experienced angler or contact the club.

Thank you for helping us protect the River Swale and its wildlife. Together, we can ensure future generations enjoy the same incredible fishing we do today.

 Visit: www.richmondangling.org.uk