

Electrofishing Results October 5th 2023

An electrofishing survey was conducted by Hadlow College students with two experienced staff on October 5th 2023. The counting of overall fish numbers and more detailed checking of trout at the bankside was carried out by members of Darent Valley Trout Fishers.

The Dairy Field beat results were as follows :

14 brown trout (13 with clipped adipose fins so therefore stocked, 1 of 14" with apparently intact adipose fin so possibly wild).

1 rainbow trout

42 dace to 8oz, 34 chub to 2lb, 10 roach to 12oz, 3 pike to 2lb, 5 gudgeon, 3 perch, 2 eels to 1lb 2lb, minnows.

The Preston Farm beat (excluding the S-bend above the wall at the upper section which was not covered) had the following results:

10 brown trout (all with clipped adipose fins so therefore stocked).

35 dace to 8oz, 30 chub to 2lb 8oz, 34 roach to 12oz, 12 pike to 4lb, 4 gudgeon, 6 perch to 8oz, 16 eels to 2lb, 12 pike to 4lb, 1 stone loach, 1 bullhead, minnows.

The Roman Villa beat (from 40yards upstream of the viaduct to the Bailey Bridge) had the following results:

2 brown trout (both with clipped adipose fins so therefore stocked)

43 chub to 3lb, 71 dace to 8 oz, 60 roach to 12oz, 17 eels to 2lb, 17 pike to 5lb, 11 perch to 8oz, 3 tench to 8oz, 2 gudgeon, minnows.

Overview

The trout population was lower than was found last year over the same waters with 26 brown trout compared to 52 in 2022 (24 in 2021). More than 700 brown trout were stocked this season in these same beats. The last 2 stockings in July and August totalled 76 brown trout in Dairy Field, 43 in Preston farm, and 84 in Roman Villa. The result of only 2 trout found at Roman Villa is most disappointing. If our members had been catching and taking plenty of fish then it would be less worrying but in fact our catches at Roman Villa were poor

throughout the season and for the last 3 months only 2 trout were reported, which is hard to believe in what only a few years ago was one of our most productive fisheries. To add to the disappointment only one possibly wild trout was found in this survey and only 2 possible wild trout were reported in members' catches. None of these trout were under 9 inches and so we now have no evidence of successful breeding and survival of wild trout over the last 2 years.

There are many possible causes for these disappointing results. Cormorants, herons and mink and pike are present and take a share of the trout, but they have been present even in our most productive years. River conditions have been more problematic in the last 3 years with flash floods, low flows (but not this year), and periods of extremely high temperatures. Our insect surveys have not indicated any large decline in invertebrate numbers although shrimp numbers have been falling. It is possible that trout have moved elsewhere during flash floods, particularly just after stocking events. Water quality testing has only just begun and at this stage we have no information to suggest that this is a cause. The other strong possibility is poachers, particularly at the Roman Villa where they can more easily stay out of sight and can park easily. The Roman Villa building has been unoccupied for most of the season and the staff there used to report incidents and phone the police as they had an unobstructed view over the Bailey Bridge area.

Meanwhile the coarse fish populations do not appear to be declining significantly and judging by the good numbers of small juveniles, appear to be breeding and surviving successfully.

Colin Lambert

Darent Valley Trout Fishers

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