

Head Keeper's Mid-Season Report 2010

In the 30-odd years I've been doing this job, this has been the most difficult start to a season from a fishing point of view. With relatively low and clear water, prolonged periods of northerly winds and very little rain, conditions for hatches of upwinged flies have not been ideal. The stoneflies seem to have fared better, however. Plenty of fish were in evidence in the clear water, with several large overwintered specimens seen and some actually caught by a few lucky anglers.

The cold winter, which seems a long way off now, has certainly delayed hatches of fly this season. Olives were a couple of weeks late, Sedges a month later than normal and Mayfly hatches a week to ten days late. As hatching conditions started to improve during May on damp days we saw good numbers of Large Dark Olives, Medium Olives and Pale Wateries followed later in the month by some very good hatches of Iron Blue. One species that really seems to have taken off (excuse the pun) in the last few years is the Yellow Sally stonefly with very big hatches from mid May up to the end of June. They are still coming off in big numbers as I write in early July.

Turning to the Mayfly, which in this neck of the woods usually appears in the first two weeks of June, the results of the re-introduction programme of the last few years were in evidence throughout our upper beats. Some very large hatches were seen in Cheedale and some good spinner falls were experienced when conditions were right. Curiously, there were several days in the middle of the peak period when few flies were seen and worse still, there were several days of good hatches when the fish persisted in taking small flies (even Greenfly) in preference. So much for Duffer's Fortnight – maybe not this year?

The three minute kick samples are as good as usual (the results will be posted on the website) although a few species have fluctuated a bit more than normal. I think this is a natural occurrence but I will keep an eye out for any declining trends. I've decided to start sampling at Blackwell Cottages on our top boundary, making four sites in all. This new site will probably be surveyed on a bi-monthly basis. Initial results were very encouraging with decent numbers of stonefly, heptagenids and surprisingly large numbers of Blue Winged Olives in the large nymphal stage, ready to hatch.

The ranunculus weed planting we did last year has taken well and is starting to establish itself. This Spring we have planted more weed above and below Freddie's Weir and I shall plant more shortly. The Himalayan Balsam eradication programme, which is now in its third year, is going well. I checked the Tip recently and where there were thousands of plants in 2008 I found only four last month. We need to be vigilant however, and I would ask members to let Chris and I know if any are spotted on the riverbank.

The President has asked me to report on wild life generally in the Dale, as many anglers enjoy this aspect of our sport. We have had good numbers of Water Voles this year, probably due to the lack of winter floods. Another regular species, the Dipper, has bred in quantity but the Grey Wagtails have not fared so well because of the hard winter. However, they usually have two broods so they should soon bounce back. No doubt many of you will have witnessed the hard working pair in Duffers. We are seeing annual increases in the Mandarin duck, a very attractive bird which appears in early March. Several pairs have bred successfully, including two broods of ten. Several trans-Saharan migrants have been seen this year,

with good numbers of Willow Warbler, Redstart and Spotted Flycatcher in particular. The best place to see a Redstart is in the thorns above Quaker Ponds and also above the Pumping Ram Dam, the best times being the middle of April and from now until they migrate south in early September.

Several butterfly species have done well this year, with good numbers of Dark Green Fritillaries, Common Blue and Small Tortoise Shell. I also found a new breeding colony of Green Hairstreaks on the point at Water cum Jolly Dale. One stunning butterfly to look out for at the moment is the White-Letter Hairstreak which appears in small numbers on the Hemp Agrimony flowers in Monsal Dale. Newbridge is one of the best areas to see them.

Our Otter seems to be taking a holiday down south on Haddon this year. I've had reports of a family of Polecats near Millers' Dale – fortunately they don't like fish!

The two Rivercraft Courses held this year were fully booked and judging from the comments of those who took part, they were a great success. The one thing that everyone took away from the June course was that to succeed you needed something small (size 20 or smaller) and black, which could be good advice if the conditions on the river stay the same.

Poaching incidents have been down this year. We caught two groups of travelling persons and also two people trying to shoot trout with an air rifle at Morley Bridge. Unbelievably, the police returned the weapon to them the next day! We narrowly missed two other groups and I have seen evidence of other poaching activity so we need to be vigilant. If you see anyone acting suspiciously, do not approach them but try to contact the keepers or the police. The Alsatian is coming on well and has been very useful in apprehending the above. It is also possible that word has got round the criminal community that we have a dog, reducing the number of incidents. This has happened on other fisheries over the years.

I have recently had a complaint from some Litton Mill residents about members parking in the passing places between the Anglers' Rest and Litton Mill, in particular the point where we tend to park at the bottom of President's. This is apparently causing difficulties when the school bus or large vehicles are coming down the road. I have opened up an area under a willow tree about 40 yards below President's which I believe used to be a parking spot. If members could park here in preference and in other areas park so that there is still room for other vehicles to pass, I should be obliged. This will help keep up our generally good relations with the locals, who have been a great help to us over the years.

Finally, a few housekeeping matters. Would members and their guests please remember to flatten the barbs down on their hooks before fishing (proper de-barbing pliers are on sale in the huts) and remember to scramble the locks when locking up. *Chris and I will be checking your hooks!* If you forget to put your returns in the book when leaving the fishery, please email or telephone your returns to Chris Dore as soon as possible.

Tight lines!

Stephen