

The National Anguilla Club 16-②

BULLETIN

THE NATIONAL ANGUILLA CLUB.

BULLETIN.

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List of Contents.

	Page
EDITORIAL	A.J.Sutton. 01
CHAIRMAN'S PAGE	Brian Crawford. 02
LETTER FROM SEVERN TRENT WATER AUTHORITY.....	03
EEL AND ELVER FISHING ON THE RIVER SEVERN.	ALLAN BLENKHARN 04
A CASE FOR MOONLIGHT EEL FISHING	A.J.Sutton. 07
LETTER TO THE EDITOR	Chris Davy 10

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EDITORIAL.

Firstly, I trust that you all enjoyed a very pleasant, if not merry Christmas. Yours truly was confined to bed with one of the heaviest colds I have had in years. There it was - all the food and drink piled high and there for the taking, but this poor soul just did not fancy any of it. All the same it WAS there had I wanted it, but I remember that there are those to whom Christmas meant little more than the luxury of a tin of salmon, so how can I complain.

Festivities over and the shortest day now well and truly behind us we can be excused now for looking forward a little. But first I think we must look retrospectively at 1978. What did it mean to you? What did you achieve and did it compare with what you set out to achieve? From the results emanating from our reporting scheme via Kevin Richmond I venture to say that many of you did enjoy reward for all your effort. Fortunes were divided, as they always will be, but on the whole it was a good year in which we caught rather more of the better sized eels.

Sadly, the year was marred by two periods of unrest when little troubles grew out of proportion. The Committee felt the brunt of this but they are not dismayed so I see no reason why any member should be.

So, we start 1979 a smaller unit than for some years past, but I always found that a smaller unit operates more efficiently. Let us all vow that through our efforts we will be as efficient as possible and strive to make '79 a year of great forward progress. A year in which you will do your best to get to the Club meetings and get on the Club trips. A year in which you will write at least two articles for your Bulletin. I could go on and on, but you know what you have to do. Just endeavour to do it, please.

You need have no fears with regard to your Committee, or the amount of effort they will put in. Many are the times when Committee members have to put aside their own enjoyment in order to do the work which has to be done. Work without which we would have no Club to run. The various Committee members accept this readily, asking in return only that you play your part.

What, then, can we look forward to in 1979? Given that you play your part I confidently expect a new awakening within the Club. The Social Officer will be playing his part, the P.R.O. will again put us in touch with the various angling publications, the Club will again be co-operating with the Universities which show interest in our subject and all things will be set fair to ensure that we are respected as a group as much, if not more so, than at any time in the past.

I will, as early as possible if not in this issue, prepare an article showing clearly the position with regard to 'close season eel fishing' as it stands at the present time. Well under way and possibly in this issue is an article on angling for eels during moonlit nights - in mid water or near to the surface. Here is an aspect of eel angling which could keep us very busy for several years to come. Several very interesting years. With the learning of the right approach, the results could be no less than dramatic.

But first things first. Have you paid your subs yet? If not I would remind you that the sands of time are fast running out, for the subs are long overdue. So cough up your five quid and send it to Ernie Orme our treasurer and so help poor Ernie to get some sleep at nights.

To those who sent Christmas cards to me and my family I thank you. To all of you, on behalf of our Committee, I extend the wish for a happy, successful and prosperous NEW YEAR.

May all your troubles be 4lbs at least.

A.J.Sutton.

CHAIRMAN'S PAGE

I hope all members are recovered from their Christmas activities - whatever they were, and that you have all enjoyed the festive season. It seems still too many weeks before I can adjust myself to serious efforts in eel angling. I will be having my usual futile attempts at catching *Essox lucius giganticus* in my local pits and rivers - still you never know.....

Onto business however, Tony Hollerbach, our newly appointed Social Officer and I have been corresponding on how we can set the wheels in motion to establish the role of Social Officer. We decided the best way initially was to set up a special fund to give us finances for special events and activities. So that you all can get the idea of our thinking we have set out a discussion paper which I will present to you for comments.

Discussion Paper For The Setting Up Of A Special Social and Distress Fund

1. Title National Anguilla Social and Distress Fund.

2. Aims To provide funds for special events. To further goodwill between members. To generate goodwill between the Club and outside organisations and individuals.

3. How It Can Be Achieved By raising funds from raffles at or between meetings, by donations, by a small levy on members (25p or so) incorporated in general subscriptions, by transferring funds from the Club's general account if the need is urgent and the Club's finances permit, for special events and/or distress.

4. Beneficiaries Members getting married, engaged, becoming parents or bereavement of members or close relatives or friends of the Club, for the hiring of films for showing to members at meetings, for financing special events such as the hiring of a minibus for special Club trips to places not normally visited (i.e. Scotland, Ireland, Etc.), to help finance outings for disabled anglers, and any other event or activity nominated by a member. In some cases, the outlay would only be a few pence for cards or small presents, in others a substantial amount.

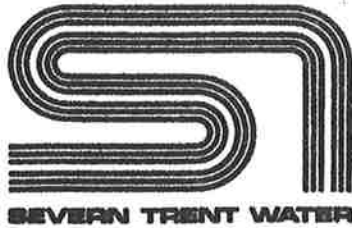
5. Authorisation of Expendature Any Club member can nominated cash outlay on the lines above, in writing to the Social Officer. He then presents the relevent information to the Committee, via the Secretary for approval. Any really large outlay may require the approval of a full Club meeting.

6. Amendment To Rules The present rules allow for only one set of accounts to be kept by the Club and it may be necessary, if members so wished, to make provision in the rules for a separate new 'fund' as outlined above.

Right you lot, there it is, something new to get your teeth (or gums) into. I will expect several letters to the Editor with comments on it, even if you only say you like it or dont like it, or feel one section needs words changing or whatever. I hope to present it at the SGM for final comment and approval as Club policy.

I have also enclosed with this article, a letter received from the Severn Trent Water Authority for publication as some of you may find it of intrest.

Brian Crawford



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My Reference FEB/BJH/AL 12

Your Reference

8 December 1978

Dear Mr Crawford

Review of Fisheries Byelaws

The current situation on our review of fisheries byelaws is that after consultation and final agreement of principles there has been a rather protracted correspondence with the MAFF over wording and so forth.

The byelaws should be advertised shortly in the usual way after which objections may be lodged.

On the question of fishing with rod and line for eels, you will recall that the present situation is that there is no restriction in the Severn area but that they may not be fished for in the freshwater fish close season in the Trent area. The Authority decided that this was unacceptable and that the rules for the Severn area should apply throughout the region. They decided that they did not wish to become involved in the regulation of hook size or babbing.

We await with interest the reaction after publication!

Yours sincerely

P E Bottomley
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EEL AND ELVER FISHING ON THE RIVER SEVERN

Allan Blenkarn takes a look at an ancient art that still flourishes

Little is known about eel resources in the Severn Basin. There is some data on catches, but this is scarce and unreliable. Adult eels and elvers are commercially exploited and what little information we have is derived from interviews and the recollections of local fishermen, several with 50—60 years' experience.

For generations past, the Severn-side dweller employed traditional methods of catching eels and perhaps the most notable implement was the eel spear. A typical spear consisted of a wrought iron head having from three to nine closely-spaced flat tines with serrated edges mounted on an ash handle up to 20ft long. The spear was plunged vertically into the mud bottom and the eels became wedged between the tines. The large spears were used from horse-drawn barges on the River Severn. In 1911 an Act relating specifically to the Severn and its tributaries was passed and byelaws under it purport to make eel spears illegal; this Act has not been repealed.

Eels

From August to November, depending on water and weather conditions, adult silver eels descend the Severn and its tributaries to the sea and are caught *en route* in large nets moored from bank to bank. The net is in the form a long tapering sleeve supported at intervals by iron hoops to which it is lashed, often with dried tanned eel skins. At the present time there are 13 nets licensed, seven operating on the River Severn downstream of Tewkesbury and six on the River Leaden; many more nets were operated up to approximately 20 years ago.

The silver eels migrate *en mass* on the dark nights in Autumn between the last and first quarter of the moon and generally between sunset and midnight. They are

particularly abundant when the flow in the river increases, where the water is muddy and in stormy weather. A large proportion of the annual catch of silver eels may be taken on about six nights.

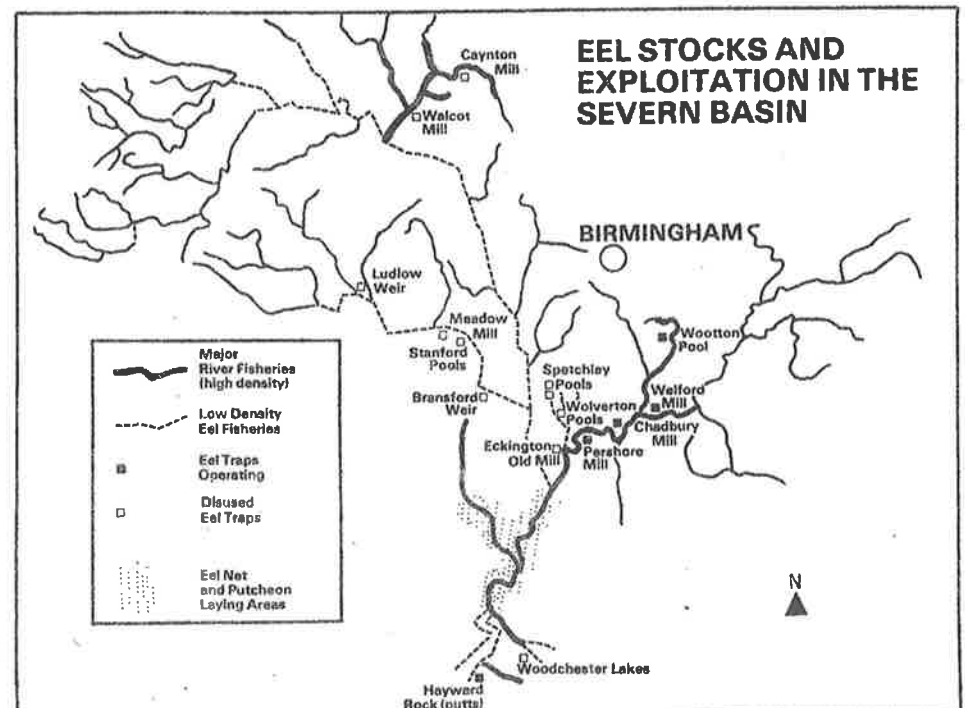
Single net catches up to 3cwt are relatively common and in 1959 one net is known to have taken one ton of eels in one night. The total annual silver eel net catch in the Severn Basin is estimated to be up to 50 tons but it must be emphasised that no statutory returns are required for eel catches and commercial fishermen do not readily disclose catches. Local fisherman have, however, confirmed that half-a-ton a night was an average eel net catch 40—50 years ago.

Alongside this commercial netting, traditional basket work traps have survived amongst the local riverside fishermen. Two sizes of traps are used on the Severn; the putcheon is 40 inches in length with a 10-inch mouth opening, and a larger trap is 50 inches long and with a 14-inch mouth opening. They are constructed of braided

withy canes and are open at both ends, the large mouth opening tapering to a narrow aperture which is baited with a piece of rabbit or lamprey and stopped up with turf, a handful of rags or a wooden plug. Inside each trap are fitted two constricted throats of canes called chales through which the eels must pass to reach the bait chamber. Unfortunately the basket traps are being superseded by modern constructions of galvanised iron wire netting; traditional equipment is lying rotting in many back sheds. The baited trap is weighted with stones, tethered to the bank and laid in the river. Above Gloucester the traps are usually laid with the trap mouth upstream to catch silver eels but below Gloucester they are laid with the mouth up or down river, catching eels moving up and down with the tides. Both methods actually catch both silver and yellow eels. Eels before migrating are yellow, and turn silver on their way to the sea.

A very local area within one mile of Gloucester produces catches far exceeding those even two or three miles up or downstream during the September/October period and local fishermen believe that this is a meeting place for male eels that are supposed to have migrated earlier in the year and females which are thought to constitute the major part of the Autumn silver eel run.

Several other ingenious ways of catching eels are employed by the riverside dweller. In "patting" or "bobbing" a length of 20ft or more of twine is threaded lengthwise



◀ A good catch of eels at Bristol Channel Fisheries' marine fish farm.



through freshly-dug earthworms until the whole length is covered. The twine is then looped into small coils and secured in a bunch to the end of a line. The "pat" is dangled at night near the river bottom and the eels take a mouthful of the worms. They hang on long enough to be hauled up and shaken into the boat.

"Snigglng" employs the principal of the gorge. A length of strong twine is whipped to the centre of a strong needle and an earthworm threaded lengthwise onto the needle. The sniggle is then dangled outside the entrance to a cavity in the bank, a favourite lie-up for eels in daytime. After a while the eel will venture to take the worm, and after allowing time for the gorge to be swallowed, the fisherman pulls steadily on the line, the needle crosses the gullet of the eel and a tug-of-war ensues.

The combined estimated eel catch from the quaint techniques of patting, snigglng and long-lining is not thought to exceed half-a-ton per annum.

The local Severnside dwellers still retain an eel box or trunk floating in the river at the bottom of their gardens in which eels are kept alive until required for eating or sufficient quantity for market is achieved.

The eel net fishery is clearly the most efficient of the existing techniques for cropping adult eels, but weir traps have in the past contributed significantly to catches. The map shows 15 known sites operating earlier in this century, many being used up to the early 1950s. By 1973/74 none were operated but three have been reinstated in the Avon Basin.

The only information available from the three existing traps on the Avon has been supplied by a previous owner of Chadbury Mill eel trap who kept detailed records of all catches from 1942 to 1960. The trap was operated principally in suitable water conditions during the period August to November and took a mean annual catch of 7.5cwt. Daily catches of between 1—2cwt were common during the period September to October, although occasionally 1cwt was taken in the last week in November. The mean daily catch of eels throughout the 19 year period was about 50lbs but the trap was only operated when conditions appeared suitable.

The estimated net weight of eels caught commercially in the Severn Basin is between 50—150 tons per year which at current average buying prices of 80p per lb, represents a total wholesale value of between £90,000 and £270,000. The total value of all European eels is estimated to be £35-million.

It is not clear what happens to Severn eels and there is no known local holding and transporting equipment except for the eel boxes referred to earlier. Some of the catch is consumed locally, some smaller eels reach the London jellied eel market but most, caught in September/October period, are collected in minimum lots of about 1,000lbs at Gloucester by a Dutchman reputedly paying at least 90p per lb. The silver eels bought in Gloucester are probably smoked and consumed in Holland, Germany and Scandinavia. Consumption in England is approximately 1,000 tons

per year, most of this in the East End of London.

Elvers

Commercial returns from the exploitation of the juvenile stage of the eel (elvers) in the Severn Basin probably exceeds that from the adult eel and salmon combined. Elvers have been considered a great local delicacy for many centuries and the Severn Estuary forms a vast funnel in the path of the migrating elvers. The migration of elvers was once considered one of the wonders of the world. Elvers migrate all along the western coast of Europe and are taken in greatest numbers in the rivers flowing into the Bay of Biscay, principally the Loire and Gironde.

In the Severn, elvers are fished on high spring tides at night between Sharpness and Tewkesbury, although occasionally the day tides are also fished. Shoals of elvers are borne up river on the tide but on the ebb they move close to the banks to take cover in slacker water, and are caught by waiting fishermen who may have pegged their nets by a solid tump of turf as near to the water's edge as possible many hours earlier, the time-honoured method of staking a claim on a good spot. The fishing equipment is simple and comprises a net, buckets, two forked sticks, a hurricane lamp and a sack in which to carry home the catch. The homemade net, rather like a scoop, conforms to traditional dimensions of 3ft long and 2ft square and is made of strong cheese-cloth stretched tightly over willow and with a long willow handle of about 7ft. The elvers swim against the stream and the net is dipped into the river with the mouth downstream until it is about three-quarters submerged. It is held there for a few minutes before being lifted, drained and the elvers tipped into a bucket. If the run of elvers is poor, the fishermen may resort to tealing. Two sticks, one forked and one with a crook, are used to peg down the handle so that the net is at the correct angle to the water where it is left for some time before lifting. Occasionally elvers will drop back with the stream when they are said to sag; fishing with the mouth of the net upstream is termed sagging. The lantern is suspended

close to the surface of the water and induces elvers to congregate at the surface.

Although elvers have been traditional food for local Gloucestershire inhabitants for centuries, there has been a dramatic increase in exploitation in recent years and fishermen travel from far and wide to catch elvers which are sold live to elver collecting stations for export. One of these is a grain barge moored in Gloucester docks where the elvers are kept in conditions as natural to the River Severn as possible. The price paid for live elvers in 1941 was 3p per lb, it was 15p per lb in 1969, 60p per lb in 1974, whereas now it is about £1 per lb live and about 50p per lb for those which are dead.

The elver industry is subject to considerable local pressures for control. Although the quantities of elvers caught have not decreased, fewer elvers are now taken in the Tewkesbury area and local fishermen have been forced to move lower down the river; fears that numbers escaping the net has decreased appear to be confirmed by the gradual decrease in adult eel catches in the past 10 years. Local fishermen also object to the sudden increase in outsiders plundering their market and causing a great deal of damage to riverside properties, many of which carry the fishing rights by virtue of grant, charter or immemorial use despite the river being both tidal and navigable. They are particularly indignant at a new technique, mid-water trawling. At present there is only one confirmed trawler and its maximum

tidal catch taken is about 2cwt and the mean catch about 20lbs. Clearly this is no great threat to stocks. The trawler may, however, disturb traditional fishermen and any expansion of this technique will certainly be resisted.

Although the catching of elvers is unlicensed and uncontrolled, this has not always been so. An Act of Parliament of Henry VIII in 1533 totally prohibited the taking of elvers for a period of 10 years; in 1558, Elizabeth I made the prohibition permanent and these restrictions were reiterated in 1677 under Charles II. In 1778, an Act of George III permitted the taking of elvers for home consumption but not for sale, and thus for the first time in over 200 years the Severnsider could once more enjoy his traditional spring delicacy. However, in 1873, elver fishing was again prohibited. This caused a great local outcry and in the next three years a spirit of defiance swept through the ranks of the Severn elver fishermen. Between 1874 and 1876 many local men were brought before the local magistrates for catching elvers and fined various sums from 6d (2½p) to 10 shillings (50p). In 1876, William Worrall was summonsed at Whitminster for catching elvers and, on conviction, ordered to pay a fine of 27 shillings (£1.35) and 6d (2½p) costs. Being unable to pay, he was taken to Gloucester prison and "put on the treadmill every day for 14 days".

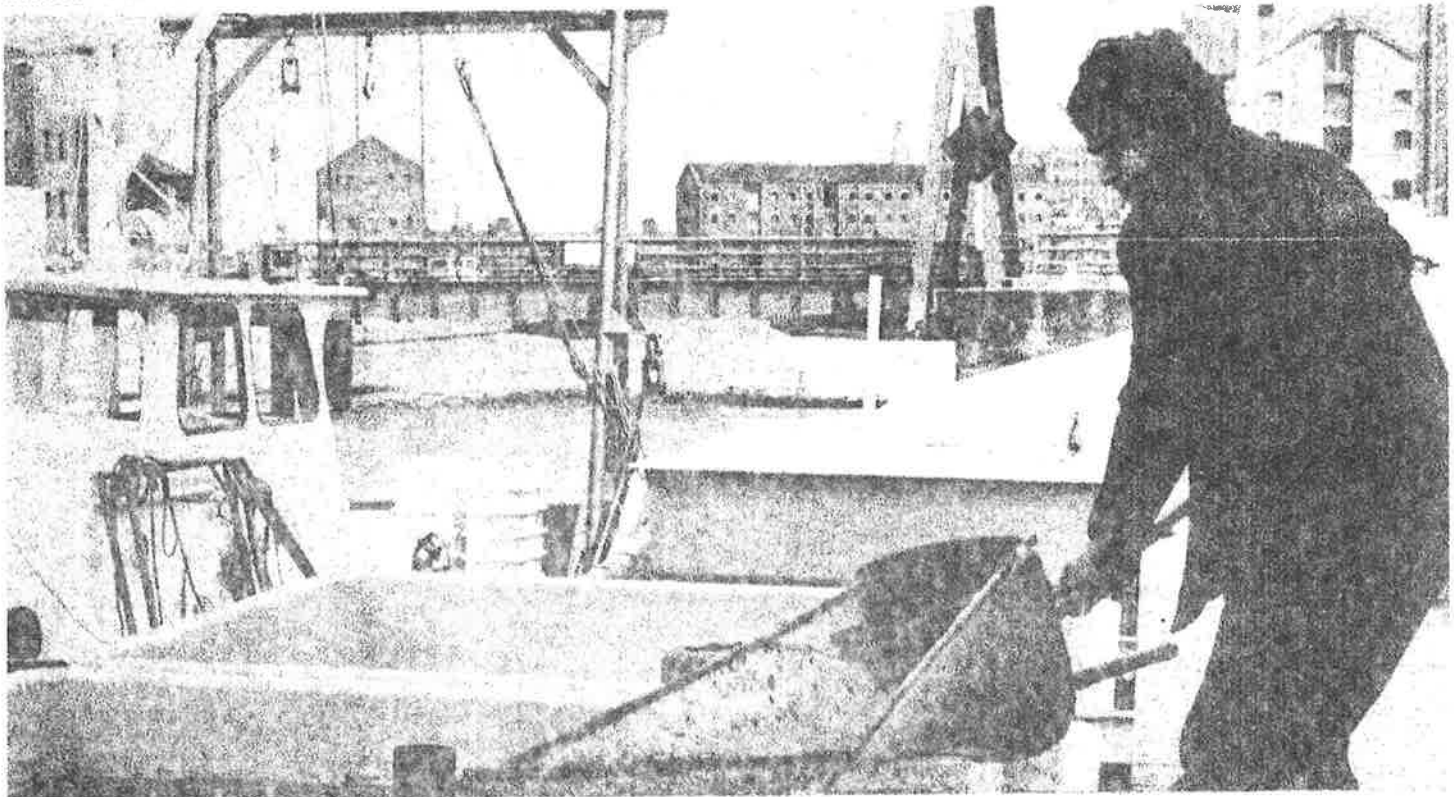
Such was the pressure that the Elver Fishing Act, 1876 repealed the prohibition on elver fishing and

▼ Bottom: *Checking the night's catch at an elver station aboard a converted barge in Gloucester Docks.*

substituted close seasons for elver fishing in the Severn Fishery District only. On the Severn and its tributaries it was illegal to catch elvers between January 1 and the last day in February, and between April 26 and June 24, but on all other rivers there were no such restrictions. The provision for a close season was repealed in the 1925 Act.

Clearly the catching of adult eels for home consumption or export is preferable to the export of elvers for other countries to exploit and the Severn Trent Water Authority is anxious to stock suitable environments with elvers and encourage the re-establishment of as many eel traps as possible and to investigate further sites for future development.

Suggested alternatives for the control of elver fishing include the imposition of a close season, the definition of legal instruments and the possible licensing of elver nets, although, as most fishing occurs at night, enforcement would be almost impossible. Fortunately there has, as yet, been no urgent case to develop either byelaws or a licensing system in relation to eel and elver fishing but it is apparent that the development of this fishery and its protection are at a stage when both these must be considered if the Severnsider fishermen are to continue with this ancient right. ■



A CASE FOR MOONLIGHT EEL FISHING.

A.J.Sutton.

We in the National Anguilla Club have always, mainly through our reporting scheme, sought to improve our rate of catch. Since we first started, back in the days when it was thought that a few chaps only had to band together to catch eels in order to break the record, we have learnt a fair deal about certain aspects of eel angling. We learnt conclusively that eels are to be caught much faster at night than during the day. That worms produce a faster rate of catch than dead bait. That the later months do produce more bigger eels than do the early ones. We learnt, too, that brightly moonlit nights were generally a waste of time. Etc etc.

Now let us look at that last one again. Put it several different ways i.e. we do not catch many eels on moonlit nights - er - our methods do not produce enough on moonlit nights to make the effort worthwhile. Sooner or later we arrive at a conclusion. Eels do not feed on brightly moonlit nights.

If ever we dropped a big clanger this is it! We have plenty of fact, and have read into it the wrong conclusion. True, eels do not get caught readily on moonlit nights, BUT WHO PROVED THAT THEY DO NOT FEED at such times? I put it to you that eels do feed on moonlit nights and that, using the correct method or methods we can take them. Big ones too. Let me explain.

Nearly all animals are affected in one way or another by light. That goes for birds and fishes too. Most creatures react to light, or the absence of light, right down through the microscopic organisms. A glaring example, if you'll pardon the term, is the way we used to sort maggots from crysalids during the war when maggots were so scarce. The trick was this. One went into a room with subdued lighting armed with an empty container, a sheet of brown paper, the mixture of maggots and crysalids and a bright torch or a lantern. We laid out the paper on a table, emptied the mixture onto it and placed the lantern at one side of the paper, preferably that side furthest from the edge of the table. Within seconds of switching on the lantern the maggots would make great haste to wriggle away from the source of light and once near the edge of the table were simply brushed into the empty container. A few of you will be saying "oh what a marvellous tip" so, having gained your interest, hopefully you will read on.

Another example, and one more closely allied to what this article is about. Put a load of live daphnia into an aquarium and let them stay in the dark for some time. Now go into the room and suspend a light above the aquarium. Initially you will see that the daphnia have taken up a station at or near to the bottom, but under the influence of the light they will, within a minute or two, rise to the surface and stay there for as long as the light is on. The same happens to the smaller creatures, the copepods, infusorians and plankton. The effect is not always similar between artificial and natural light, but the smaller creatures appear to react the same way to either light. Bear that in mind as it does have some significance. At sea, plankton is very easily collected on a moonlit night using a very fine sieve. Such is the concentration of the plankton at such times that the surface water is more akin to soup.

I knew, just after the war years, a baitcatcher of some repute. This chap gave up worming at night when he found it more profitable to collect daphnia which he supplied regularly to the local aquarium shops. He first became known to me when I approached him one night 'messing about' on the water I was fishing. Asked what the hell he was up to he replied that he had a permit entitling him to collect daphnia. Says I "there are no daphnia in this lake" to which he replied "yes there are, but you don't see them during the daytime for they are scattered all over the lake. At night under the influence of my lamp or the moon they concentrate near to the surface where I collect them in very profitable quantities".

We now bring the pike angler into the illustration. In any pike angling circle you will sooner or later hear the saying "The pike are not feeding well today on account of that blasted moon last night". You may be forgiven for wondering exactly what last night's moon has to do with the pikes reluctance to feed today. Here, brother, is the low down.

Last nights moon brought about a migration to the surface of most of the smaller life forms. Now fish may not be brainy, but they know that under such conditions their feed will be concentrated at or near to the surface where it can be taken by the fish far more easily than at other times. So they, too, take up station near the surface where they have a banquet. It often happens that after feeding near the surface the fish become comatose and remain quite still. That is how the pike find them. All the pike has to do is to become more buoyant and rise from below, coming up amid the shoals of smaller fish. They can have a ball, and rarely need to feed the following day.

Whether eels do exactly the same is open to doubt, for I do not believe that they can increase their buoyancy as easily as other species and therefore would have to swim about in order to remain off the bottom. Whether or not they can I am not knowledgeable enough on the subject to say, but I make the point that being predators they will act similarly to the pike in that they will seek the surface feeding fish.

I come now to our quarry and two illustrations of how and when eels have been taken near to the surface, quite deliberately, under a bright moon. The first takes us to Norfolk where I was spending a few days motoring about in an area where I had spent several years during my youth. During an overnight stay at 'The Jelly Sailors' the landlord, who I knew well, asked if I was still as keen on fishing - to which question I replied that I was although my attention was now held by large eels. The landlord advised me to pay a visit to the blacksmith at a little hamlet named Field House within a few miles of one of the smaller breads. This I did, and found the chap to be well educated and very friendly. He was most interesting to talk to and went out of his way to be helpful. It appeared that he made more money from catching eels and sending them to the hotels of Norwich and other such large towns than he ever made from the blacksmiths shop. He used to obtain from the local longshore fishermen down at the creek a quantity of small white fish not unlike bleak in appearance. These he could collect at a minutes notice as there was always a good quantity swimming around in the cockle cleaning pits. The pits were rectangular and of concrete with a huge cork bung on the inside at one end, to stop the water running out. They were flooded on all but the lowest tides and the small fish were trapped there when the water receded. All very convenient.

It transpired that this good fellow went out after eels whenever the moon was bright. I naturally queried this, commenting that this was a bad time for the taking of eels. He looked both bemused and amused. He assured me that this was so and went on to add that he fished his bait dead - EIGHTEEN INCHES BELOW a cork hung ever about twelve feet of water! He had his tackle ready made up in a shed behind the 'smiths shop and readily showed me the same. He took his fair share of eels from 2½lb to 3½lb with the very occasional eel of four pounds - always eighteen inches below the surface on a bright moonlight night. One other point. He never took many small eels although they were present in abundance. "If I wanted smaller eels I would fish for them in the dark and right on the bottom, but the hotels only want the bigger ones" he told me. All was confirmed later that night back at my friendly pub, for the blacksmiths eel catching exploits were well known to many. I decreed that I would try this method, and the occasion when I did so brings us to my second illustration.

It was several years ago - the year in which we held our Spring trip to Pickmere(Ugh!) So as to get a good start to my journey on the Saturday morning I elected to fish the Friday night just south of Bugbrooke on the G.U. canal. No sooner had it got dusk when up rose a great full moon in a cloudless sky. I was sorely tempted to turn it in and get a good nights sleep prior to my journey. I am always, it seems, looking for such excuses. A moment of madness made me fix up a ¾" bubble float which I attached to the line and hung a big Thames bleak some twelve inches below it. I cast the assembly to the far bank only to find that the flow through the canal quickly brought the whole lot back to my bank some yards below me. A dozen or so such casts later and I was beginning to despair - for I never did fancy long trotting for eels! However, salvation was at hand for, casting again, the line got caught in a long frond of weed and the tackle remained where it was cast. This time I was able to use the bite alarm and within a few minutes I was nodding and dreaming of all those lovely Pickmere eels I was shortly to catch after what surely must be yet another blank on the G.U. One hour later, in conditions bright enough to read small print, the alarm sounded. I was quickly at the rod to see the line peeling off

steadily. On striking, the fish played gently at first, hardly feeling like an eel until quite close to me. Then suddenly the eel was in the net - and I was the more surprised of the two! That eel was just over 2½lbs but was worth its weight in gold and was, surely, food for thought.

Eels, even the larger eels, are far more free swimming than is generally supposed. Treat yourself to a visit to a large aquaria, like that which you will find in the London Zoological Gardens. The eels in the London Zoo will be seen swimming at all depths. If you are fortunate enough to have a word to the keeper he will confirm that during that period of darkness to which all the inhabitants are subject, the eels become stationary on the bottom. When the lights are switched on the eels soon rise from the bottom.

During a prolonged reading through my vast library of angling magazines I found plenty of reference to fish being attracted to light. Mention is made of eels being negatively phototropic. Broadly speaking, this means that eels only feed during darkness. As such, I cannot believe that this holds good for all conditions. Generally, I suppose, it is correct. But under a bright moon I now believe the reverse applies.

I think that it was carp angler Jim Gibbinson (ex NAC) who positively identified eels as being responsible for the loud, somewhat carp-like, noises he and his colleagues were experiencing. They were most certainly eels - large eels - striking at small fish near to the surface. Later on, Jim discovered that this 'surface striking' only occurred on moonlit nights. At that time Jim was about to leave the eel fishing scene and so took the matter no further. Speaking to him during 1977 I found him to share my belief that some day, fairly soon, anglers would start to catch good eels on moonlit nights by fishing for them at or near the surface. But of course that will only come about if we, the eel anglers, set out deliberately to do so.

Some years ago Mike Muse (ex NAC) took a very large pike from a Lincoln reservoir which I have fished several times for eels without success. He was joined by his fishing colleagues Bob Reynolds and Fred Wagstaffe (both ex NAC) and all three hammered that water but it failed to produce the pike which, in theory, it should have done. Mike had the feeling that the pike were feeding at night, so all three commenced a night fishing campaign aimed at the pike. Success was slow to come, until Bob found that the pike were very near to the surface on moonlit nights. They immediately increased their rate of catch tenfold by fishing very shallow in the moonlight and took a fair number of very good pike. **THEY ALSO CAUGHT EELS** on the baits intended for the pike fished right near to the surface, but, like the pike, they were only there on the moonlit nights - or at least they were only caught then. Little of this became known as this particular water was very strictly 'day fishing only'. I must also mention that this water had its fair share of attention from eel anglers who fished there because of the number of **VERY BIG** eels which had been found trapped in the grating at one end by the keepers. But they had very little success, using orthodox methods.

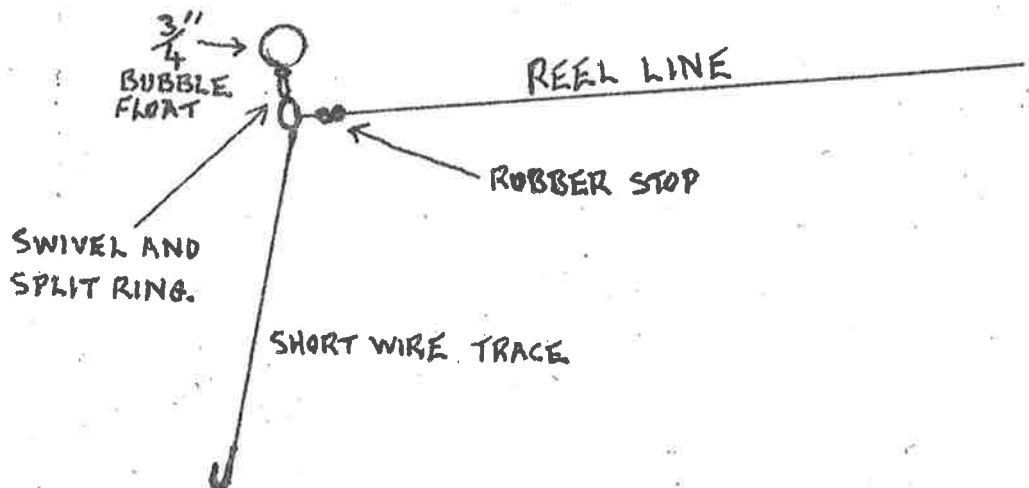
Should you still doubt that eels often leave the bottom, have a trip to Loch Ness. On a calm day you will see eels shealing in their thousands at the surface. I think that one last, but very valid, example will suffice.

Dave Goodrum, myself and others of the NAC started fishing a small private lake in Lincolnshire known as Lake Helen. During the first year results were very good indeed with the best eel falling to me at well over four pounds. We had plenty of evidence that this water held eels in excess of seven pounds. During the second summer results tailed right off until, in the third year, you could fish there for weeks on end without ever getting a run. That water just 'died' on us. We were discussing this with the owner, an R.A.F. Officer who we only saw occasionally. We were convinced that we had taken most of the eels and that there were very few left. The owner did not agree with us and took us round to a thickly wooded bank, a bank we were not allowed to fish from. We crawled out along tree trunks which were leaning out over the water and saw, to our great surprise, thousands of eels of all sizes with a few going well over seven pounds. This good chap made available to us another stretch of bank from which we could easily cast to the trees. Still no eels.

In despair we started fishing other waters, until one day I had a hurried note from Dave asking me to join him as soon as possible at Lake Helen. I found Dave fishing there and getting run after run. He was using a small rudd - fished nearer the surface than the bottom. We all started fishing this way and, although we lost more eels than we landed, that water came back to life. A little later we lost the fishing after some idiot lifted some prize bulbs and caused a lot of damage in doing so. But I recall the episode well and, although it has little to do with moonlit conditions, it does serve to show that eels can be taken at or near to the surface.

I think that this is a subject where a lot of theory may be put forward, but it will possibly take a lot of practical work and experimentation before we come to the right method. It is a subject, I feel, into which we can really set our teeth and an aspect of eel fishing in which this Club could take the lead.

I wish there were more I could tell you of the practical side - type of tackle to use etc. But this subject is a very open one and at this point in time I know little more than you - or even less! I can illustrate the tackle I used on the G.U. canal, but more than that I cannot do



What we require right now are your ideas on tackle to use. They may turn out to be useless, but we must have a starting point. I would be happier to start with a bait which was anchored in some way to stop it from drifting about. But it may prove best to leave the bait free to drift. Who knows.

Let us get a lively discussion going so that, come the summer, we have some useful ideas to work with.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR.

Dear Arthur,

Many thanks for your very nice letter and your kind remarks. Although I am no longer a member of the Anguilla Club I still feel very strongly connected with the Club and hope to follow its progress for many years to come.

I can only say how privileged I feel to have been a member for the past six years, a period in which I owe much of my eeling success to. I knew that I have made many good friends the length and breadth of the country. I hope that I may be tolerated on future Club trips which I would like to attend. Heres wishing the Anguilla Club the best of fortune in the future and a very happy New Year to all the members, yourself and your family.

Yours very sincerely,

CHRIS DAVY.