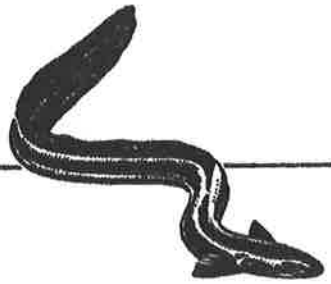

The National Anguilla Club

BULLETIN

VOLUME 10, NUMBER 3. AUGUST, 1973.

1972 Report

CONTENTS.

PICTURES

EDITORIAL.

A change, so they say, is as good as a rest. However true that may be of other walks of life we do not intend it to be so of this Bulletin. Allow me to explain.

For some considerable time now, we, in Committee, have felt that the job of Editing and producing the Club Bulletin was too much for Dave Smith. With all the good will in the world Dave simply could not produce the Bulletin and do justice to his other many commitments. He was loathe to tell us in case we felt that he had let the side down. As you well know, some considerable time has elapsed since the Bulletin was last produced - the opposite of what we promised you at the Spring meeting. With this in mind, our Chairman simply HAD to take the Editors job away from Dave and has taken on the job himself. Dave tells us that he is greatly relieved that we have made this move, for he just couldn't do justice to the job and had not known which way to tell us.

I trust that you will bear with us while we get organised. We WILL produce the Bulletin regularly from now on, although, of course, what the Bulletin contains is entirely up to you. If you do not send the material in, we have nothing to publish. We hope you like this particular issue, and apologise should it not contain material which you have sent in. This will naturally be put right in the next issue or two.

I know that we are all grateful for the service which Dave Smith has tried his best to render. I know too that we all look forward to his many amusing tales in future issues. Below is a piece from him. A.J.Sutton.

A SHORT TALE

by DAVE SMITH.

As evening fell, the clear sky gave way to clouds. Light at first, but then fairly heavy. Dusk crept round the brolly, but the occupant was far too busy to notice. Everything had to be right. He retired to his brolly having set up his tackle and sat down to prepare himself for a long night. It was now totally dark. Then the drizzle began.

In his brolly, protected from the elements, he was happy. These were ideal conditions. He drank a cup of coffee and settled down on his bed with a cigarette. The glow from the cigarette was the only light in this dark, dreary night. Soon, the angler fell into an uneasy sleep.

He was awoken by the screaming of his oscillator. Red light. Left hand rod. The drizzle now turned to light rain, but the puddles indicated that there had been heavier rain while he slept. He reached for the rod and felt the line. He found the line peeling off the spool rapidly. Then nothing. It had stopped, and he knew he must wait. The seconds seemed like hours, and the hours endless. Then, after an age, the line moved again at first jerkily and then more steadily. The adrenaline pumping through the anglers veins prepared him for the next move. A few feet of line were pulled from the spool followed by the closing of the bale arm and the strike. The rod arched round and the angler knew he was into a very good fish.

But, something was wrong. Not his tackle, for that was O.K. Yet there was some intangible thing which said 'all is not right '.

The angler could feel the mighty fish yielding under his pressure, but still he knew that something was amiss. Automatically he reeled in the mighty fish - applying strain first that way and then this. He pondered on what could be wrong, and suddenly he knew. HE AWOKE!

ANOTHER WORD FROM YOUR SECRETARY.

Further to my editorial above, I am now in a position whereby I can tell you that ALAN and I have decided, provisionally, that the Editorial contained in your Bulletin will be written by the two of us - alternately. That way you get the best of both worlds. You lucky people.

In a recent issue of the Newsletter, I did ask for material to be sent to me.(A.J.S.) May I now ask for all such material to be sent to Alan direct, for he is the Editor and must receive and Edit the material in the first instance. I will merely churn out the copies on the duplicating machine.

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A REPORT ON THE 1972 REPORTING SCHEME: PART I.

by Alan Hawkins

I propose to split the results of the 1972 reporting scheme between two Bulletin articles. In this, the first, I shall discuss members' performance during 1972, covering the effort put in and the eels caught - very much the material I presented at the recent Spring GM. The second article will be concerned with the results from individual fisheries, bringing our lists of waters ranked according to medians and quartiles up to date, and suggesting how we might use these tables to improve our eel fishing. For the sake of convenience, I shall present the information in the same format as used by our previous Chairman, Dr. Terence Coulson, wherever it is practical to do so.

One other point before getting down to the results. As you know, last year we adopted a new way of working in which individual members did part of the analytical work themselves, with the intention of easing the load on the Club analyst. For this first year of the scheme, my policy has been to check a sample of each member's session reports against the appropriate analysis forms; if I find no mistakes I accept the remainder on trust, if serious mistakes turn up I rework the lot. I am pleased to say that the amount of reworking needed has been very small indeed; almost without exception members made an excellent job of their own analytical work. Keep it up!

Now to the facts:-

1. Members performance

Eighteen members took part in the 1972 reporting scheme and reported 299 sessions covering the capture of 322 eels in 7,534 rod hours (RH) of angling.

The number of eels caught ranged from 0 to 71 per member. The median number caught was 11, the lower quartile (LQ) was 3 and the upper quartile (UQ) was 29. The four (25%) most successful members (i.e. those above the UQ) caught 193 (60%) of the eels; the four least successful members caught 7 (2%) of the eels.

The effort recorded ranged from 48 to 897 RH per member. The median effort was 425 RH, the LQ was 186 and the UQ was 650 RH. The four (25%) most active members put in a total of 3186 RH (42%) while the four (25%) least active members (below the LQ) put in 418 RH (6%).

The 1972 season marking the sixth year of the National Anguilla Club reporting scheme, it is instructive to compare some of the facts relating to members performance from year to year. The relevant figures are set out in Table 1, opposite.

Taking each item in turn from the top, we can see that the number of members reporting in 1972 - 18 - was the lowest number since the start of the scheme in 1967. While this is by no means an encouraging sign, I do not think it should cause any great despondancy as yet. To a large extent, this drop in numbers was caused by the resignation of several old established members whose interests have turned to other forms of angling; we have more than compensated for this decrease by the recruitment of new members who will begin reporting for the first time in 1973. Thus I am confident that the set back in 1972 was only temporary, and that we shall be back up to full strength this season.

Table 1. Members' Performance, 1967 - 1972.

	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
No. Reporting	19	22	26	20	24	18
Median No. of eels	7	8	10	13	11	11
UQ	12	18	24	24	20	29
LQ	3	3	4	2	6	3
Median No. of RH	329	266	288	357	479	425
UQ	1184	442	662	255	742	650
LQ	214	108	126	153	281	186
Total E	204	294	423	334	363	322
Total RH	11,300	10,100	11,600	8,200	11,970	7,534
RH/E	55	34	27	25	33	23

As far as the number of eels caught per member is concerned, the median number - 11 - is the same as for the year before; indeed, the median has not changed greatly over the years. The UQ, at 29, however, represents a substantial increase over 1971 and is the highest yet recorded in the annual totals. By contrast, the LQ sank back down to 3. Thus the trend, if there was a trend, in 1972 was for the 'rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer'. In other words, the most successful (in terms of numbers) were even more successful than usual, while the least successful returned to the pre 1971 level. It is an interesting point that the RH put in had little bearing on the number of eels caught - a subject I shall return to below after finishing with the items in Table 1.

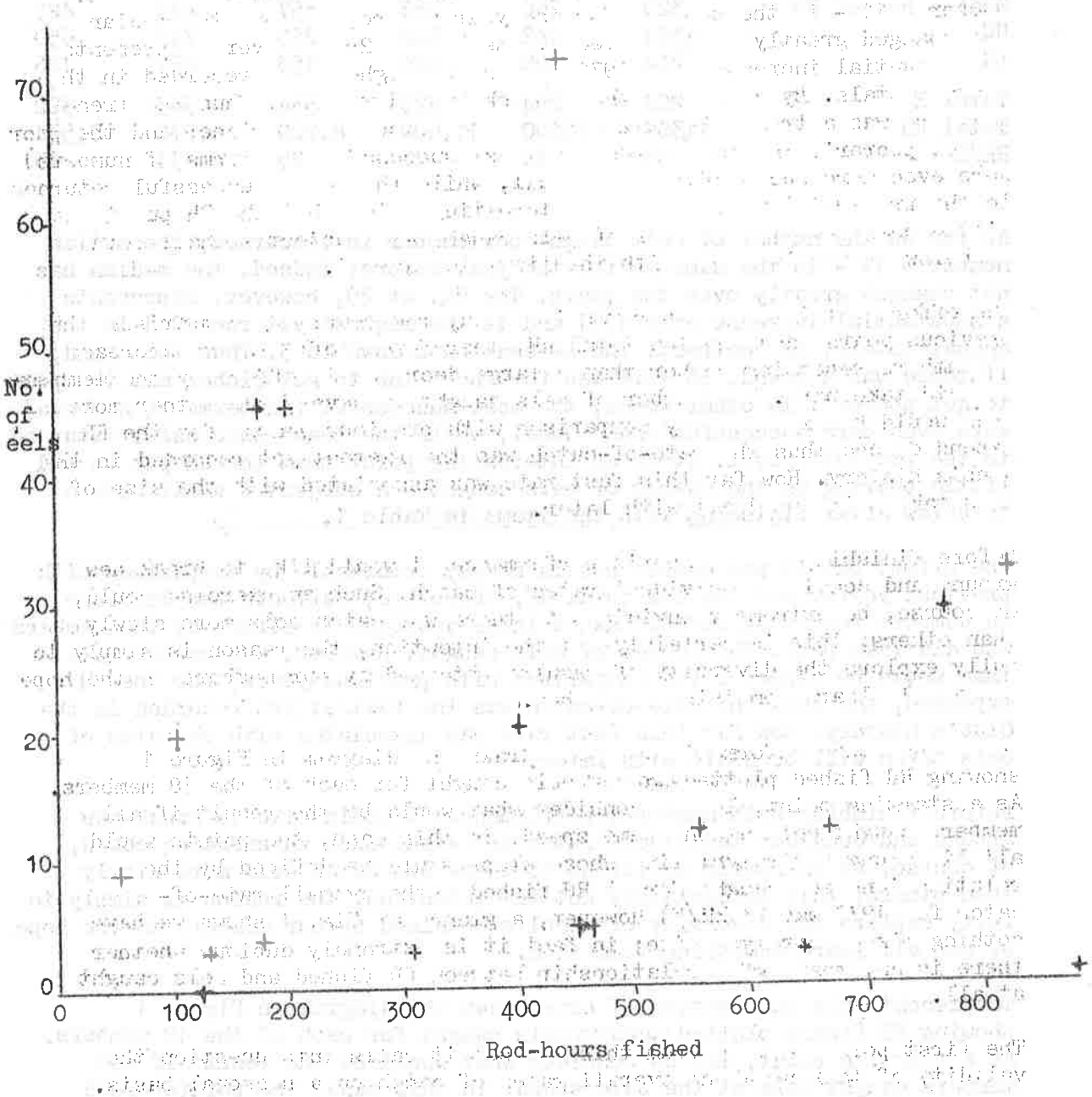
The effort put in per member was in no way remarkable by comparison with previous years, and the low total RH, therefore, reflects the decrease in numbers reporting rather than a large decrease in effort by the members who did take part. The number of eels caught, however, was rather more than would be expected (by comparison with previous years) for the RH expended, and thus the rate-of-catch was the fastest yet recorded in the Club's history. How far this fast rate was associated with the size of eels taken will be dealt with later.

Before finishing with member's performance, I would like to break new ground and consider individual rates of catch. Such an exercise could, of course, be extremely invidious to those who catch eels more slowly than others; this is certainly not the intention, the reason is simply to fully explore the diversity of results obtained by our members in the hope we can all learn something from them.

To present this information, I have drawn the diagram in Figure 1 showing RH fished plotted against eels caught for each of the 18 members. As a starting point, let us consider what would be the result if all members caught eels at the same speed. In this case, the points would all lie along a straight line whose slope would be defined by the relation 'one eel caught for 23 RH fished' (the overall rate-of-catch for 1972 was 23 RH/E) However, a glance at Fig. 1 shows we have nothing like a straight line; in fact it is extremely dubious whether there is any meaningful relationship between RH fished and eels caught at all.

The first point to note from this is that it calls into question the validity of talking about overall rates of catch on a seasonal basis.

Figure 1. Rate-of-Catch for Individual Members



To be generally meaningful, an average, such as overall rate of catch, should ideally be drawn from reasonable uniform data. For example, I think we can all see that, for example, that there would not be a lot of point in averaging the output from a coal mine over the last two hundred years, if it contained figures drawn from early pick and shovel days together with the latest mechanical shovel system. The average, lying between the relatively low output of the pick and shovel and the high output of the machine,would be representative of neither, and would not be a realistic estimate of the productivity of either method of extracting coal. Much the same system exists in our members performance. We catch eels at such widely different rates that an average rate is hardly representative of any of us.

Why should this be? Two possible explanations come to mind. First, we might suggest that members differ widely in their ability to catch eels. Secondly, we could suggest that members differ widely in their attitudes to eel fishing, some electing to fish very slow waters in the belief that ultimately such waters hold out the best chance for a real buster; others may believe that faster waters give them a better chance of landing the quality of fish they are after!

It is not easy to distinguish between these two possibilities; however, what evidence there is tends towards the second explanation. We have seen, from the past reports of Terry Coulson, that team changes from year to year do not appear to have any great effects on the results; such is unlikely to be the case if members' ability varies widely within the Club. Further, the whole of the session reporting scheme is built upon the premise that the unit of angling effort, the rod-hour, is the same irrespective of which member puts it in. This unit has given consistent and meaningful results over the past six years; again, this would be unlikely to have happened if the rod-hour was not more or less equivalent from member to member.

Apart from negative evidence of this sort, I have positive evidence from the session reports that members do differ in their attitudes to waters, and that the slow rates of catch are returned, in many cases, by some of our more dedicated members who refuse to lose heart at a long series of blanks. The question is, does persistence of this sort really pay off? In other words, in the long term do we catch more very big eels from slow waters than from fast ones. This, I believe is a very important question, and one that I intend to try and answer in the second article of this series, when we consider the results from individual fisheries.

In the meantime, it is my personal view that this diversity of performance is a very healthy sign indeed. I believe that if we all caught very much the same eels, the Anguilla Club would be, to all intents and purposes, dead! Only by having a wide range of experience to draw on can we progress. Thus there is no question of criticising members for catching eels slower than others; they have a different approach which may turn out to be the right one in the end.

2. The overall result: eels caught.

As in previous years, it is necessary to separate Abberton resevoir from the main body of the results, since this water remains exceptional in the rate-of-catch, size of eels caught and the time of day at which they are caught. This does not mean that the Abberton results are wasted; indeed, I have already devoted a Bulletin article to the results from this water; simply that the Abberton results could bias the other results towards an unrealistic pattern for the majority of the waters we fish. As before, therefore, the following discussion is concerned with all eels except those caught at this resevoir, termed 'all other' in the tables which follow.

The overall results for the 1972 season are set out in Table 2.1, and are compared with results for previous seasons in Table 2.2. These tables confirm the impression already noted - that the effort put in in 1972 was rather less than in earlier seasons, but that it was put in to better effect.

Table 2.1; The overall result, 1972.

Weight Range	Abberton Res N	All Other N	All Other CF%	Total 1972 N	Total 1972 CF%
0 - 1	1	60	24	61	19
1 - 2	12	96	62	108	52
2 - 3	25	64	88	89	80
3 - 4	28	22	97	50	96
4 - 5	5	7	99.2	12	99.6
5 - 6	0	2	100	2	100
Total E	71	251		322	
Total RH	230	7,304		7,534	
Mean RH/E	3.2	29		23	
RH/2	4.0	77		49	
Median	2:11	1:9			
UQ	3:4	2:7			
LQ	2:2	1:1			
IQR	1:2	1:6			

Table 2:2 : Annual Trends 1967 - 1972 and Cumulative Total. 'All Other' only

Weight Range	1967 N	1967 CF%	1968 N	1968 CF%	1969 N	1969 CF%	1970 N	1970 CF%	1971 N	1971 CF%	1972 N	1972 CF%	Cumulative 1967-72 N	Cumulative 1967-72 CF%
0 - 1	111	54	157	53	181	43	131	39	118	35	60	24	758	41
1 - 2	51	79	81	81	179	85	129	78	105	67	96	62	631	71
2 - 3	24	91	38	94	43	95	48	92	71	88	64	88	288	92
3 - 4	15	98.5	13	98.5	11	98	21	98.5	30	97	22	97	112	98
4 - 5	2	99.5	3	99.5	7	99.5	3	99.5	8	99.2	7	99.2	30	99.5
5 - 6	1	100	2	100	2	100	2	100	2	99.8	2	100	11	99.9
6 - 7	0		0		0		0		1	100	0		1	100
Total E	204		294		423		334		363		251		1,831	
Total RH	11,300		10,100		11,600		8,220		12,000		7,304		60,524	
Mean RH/E	55		34		27		25		35		29		33	
RH/2	270		180		180		110		100		77		140	
RH/3	630		560		580		316		291		251		390	
Median	0:13		0:14		1:2		1:2		1:5		1:9			
UQ	1:12		1:11		1:9		1:14		2:5		2:7			
LQ	0:8		0:8		0:11		0;11		0:11		1:1			
IQR	1:4		1:3		0;14		1:2		1:10		1:6			

Two of the most important measures of progress, rate-of-catch and cumulative frequency, are also set out in diagram form in Figs 1 and 2, covering the years 1967 - 1972. Taking rate-of-catch first, it is obvious that the six years of the scheme have seen a steady improvement, to the extent that RH/E, RH/ and RH/3 have all more or less halved over the period. In other words, we are now catching eels about twice as fast as when the Club started. It is worth noting that this improvement also extends to 4 and 5 lb eels, but because the numbers are rather small in these categories, one would hesitate to draw definite conclusions on this.

Cumulative frequency, a more difficult, but equally valuable concept, also shows the same encouraging trends (Fig. 2) What these graphs show is the

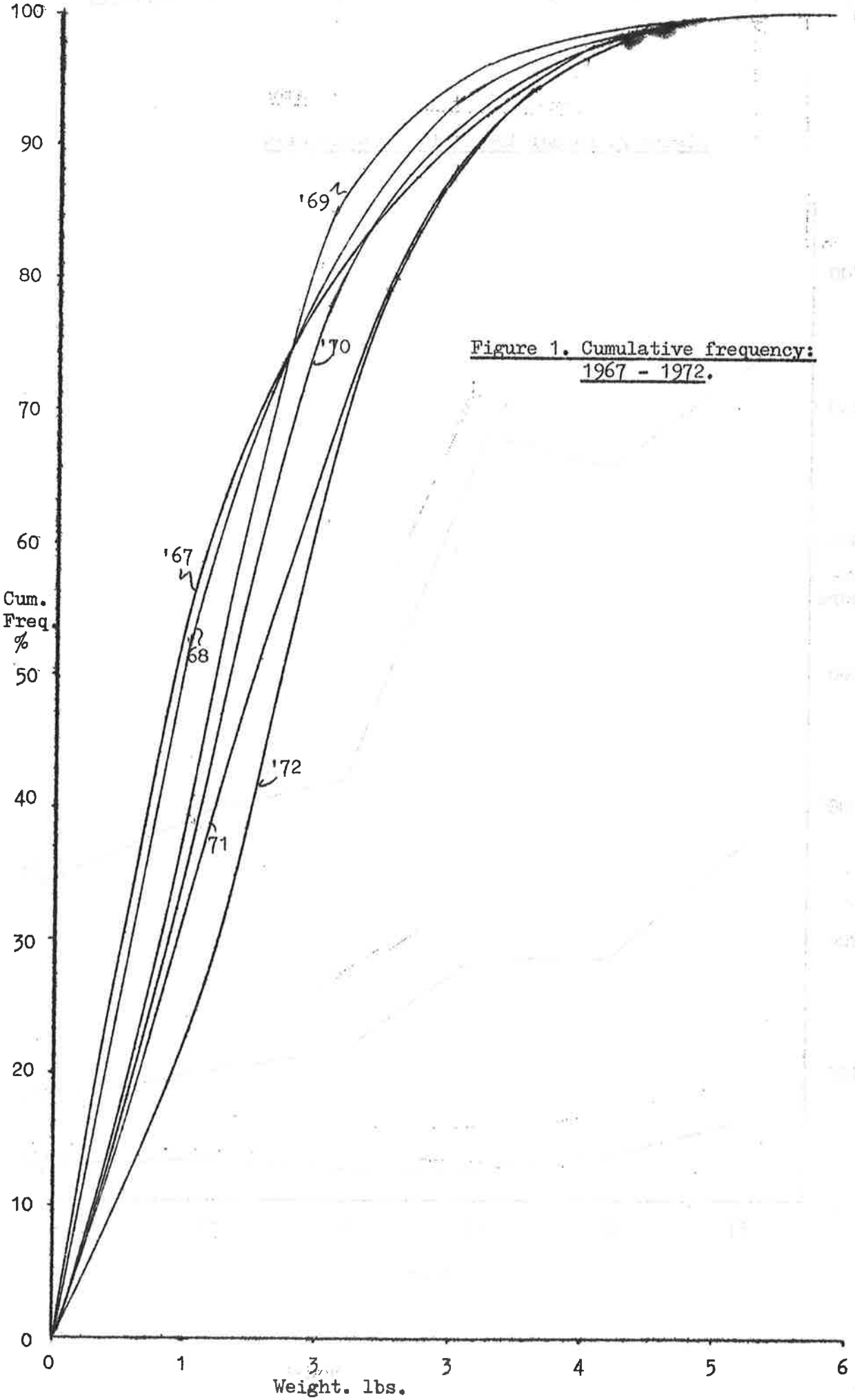
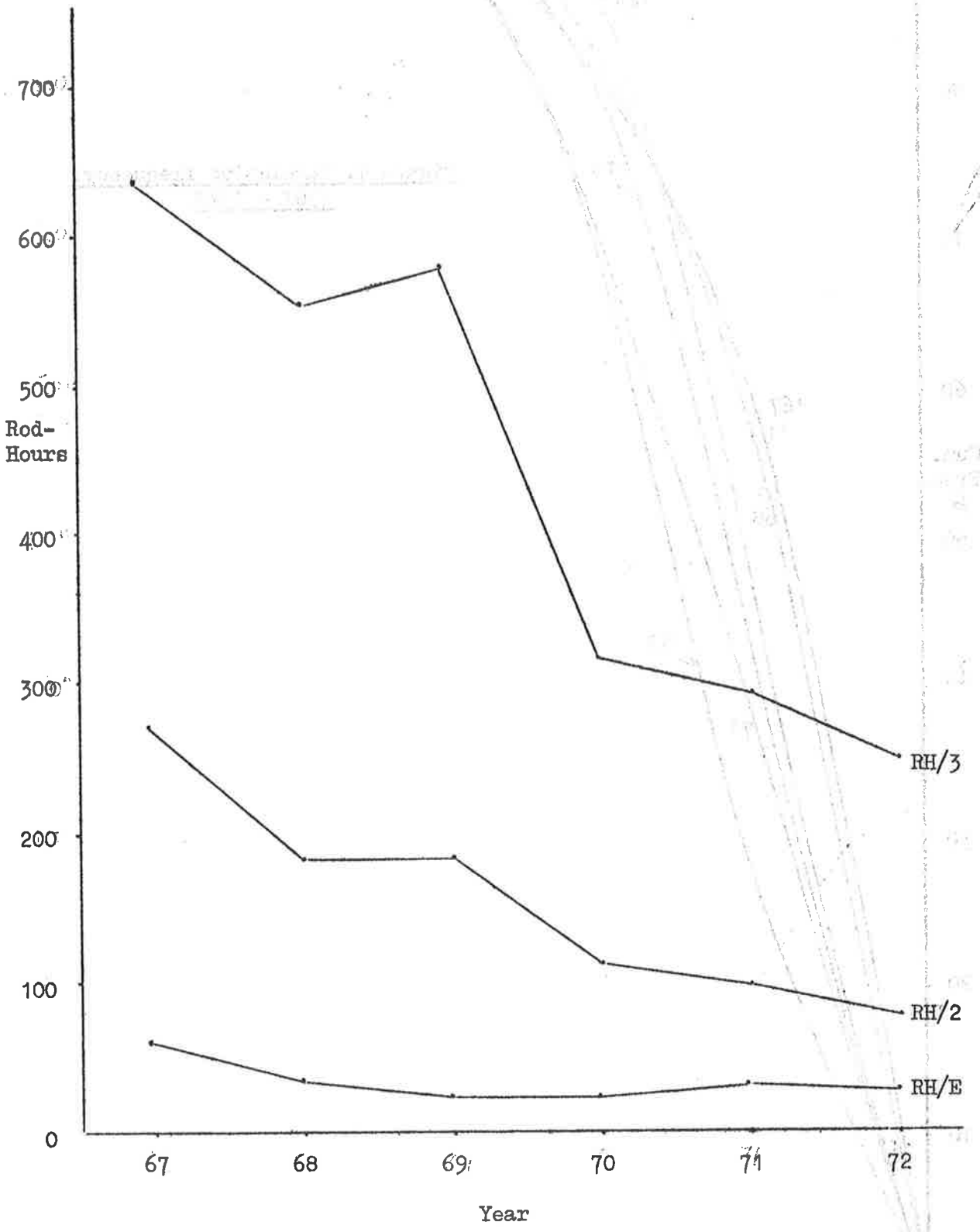


Figure 1. Cumulative frequency: 1967 - 1972.

Figure 2. Annual trends in rate-of-catch



the graph is moved to the right, the better the result. Thus in 1967, no less than 79% of the eels taken were under 2lb; this number gradually decreased until by 1972 only 52% were less than 2lb.

Closer inspection suggests that most of the improvement has been made by eliminating bootlaces and replacing them with 1 and 2lb eels; we have made relatively less impression on the bigger fish. Nevertheless, it is perhaps only to be expected that we would have to work from the bottom up in this way.

3. Effect of Bait Choice.

3.1. Worm versus Dead Bait

Worm and dead bait continued to form the major part of all the baits used by the Anguilla Club in 1972, and once again it is worth comparing results from the two. The numbers caught and size distribution are set out in table 3.1 (overleaf). About 1½ times as many fish were taken on worm as on DB, but in general, worm eels were smaller. Thus, the cumulative frequency tables show for example, that 71% of worm eels weighed less than 2lb, whereas only 49% of the fish taken on DB were less than 2lb. The greater selectivity of DB for taking bigger eels is absolutely in line with previous seasons, and requires no further comment here.

Rate-of-catch, however, gives a completely different picture from past years, as shown in Table 3.2, where 1972 is compared with 1971. In 1971, as in other past seasons, worm gave the fastest overall rate-of-catch, as exemplified by the RH/E figures. When one reached eels over two pounds, however, the advantage swung over to DB, so that DB gave the fastest rate for 2lb plus fish. This advantage continued up to about 3½lb, and then appeared to swing back towards worm baits, although the relatively small numbers of eels in the upper weight brackets always made the upper end of the distribution a bit uncertain. In other words, past results suggested that little eels preferred worms, eels from about 2 - 3½ lbs preferred DB, and very big eels preferred worms again. This gave a U-shaped curve for the relative advantage of worms and DB, as shown in Fig 3. For a more detailed discussion of this, see (1, 2).

By contrast, all eels appeared to prefer worms in 1972, and worm gave the fastest rate of catch right up to 4lb fish during this season (Table 3.2). However, the size of the advantage for worms decreased as the eels got bigger. Nevertheless, the 1972 results give a completely different picture than those of previous seasons, as shown by the diffement shaped graph in Fig 3.

Closer inspection of the data suggests it was the rate-of-catch on worms which changed dramatically in 1972, rather than a worse than average result for DB. In fact, comparison of the DB results, in terms of rate-of-catch, shows that 1971 and 1972 were remarkably similar, so much so, in fact, that on would not conclude there was any meaningful difference between them. For worms, however, rate-of-catch accelerated across the board (Table 3.2).

It will be of the greatest possible interest to see if this new trend is maintained in 1973, or whether we revert to the more normal pattern of other seasons. If the trend is maintained, we shall have to rethink our ideas on bait choice, to the extent of suggesting that worm baits are generally better than DB for all sizes of eels, but that one has to put up with catching rather a lot of bootlaces as well as good fish on worm baits. At the moment, it is not at all clear why a new pattern should have emerged, though it is the writer's opinion that the answer may well lie in an increasingly intelligent choice of waters by members, where bootlace bother on worms is not the daunting problem it has been in the past. Whatever the reason, the new pattern of results on worm baits is the most important fact to emerge from the 1972 reporting scheme, and members comments would be most welcome.

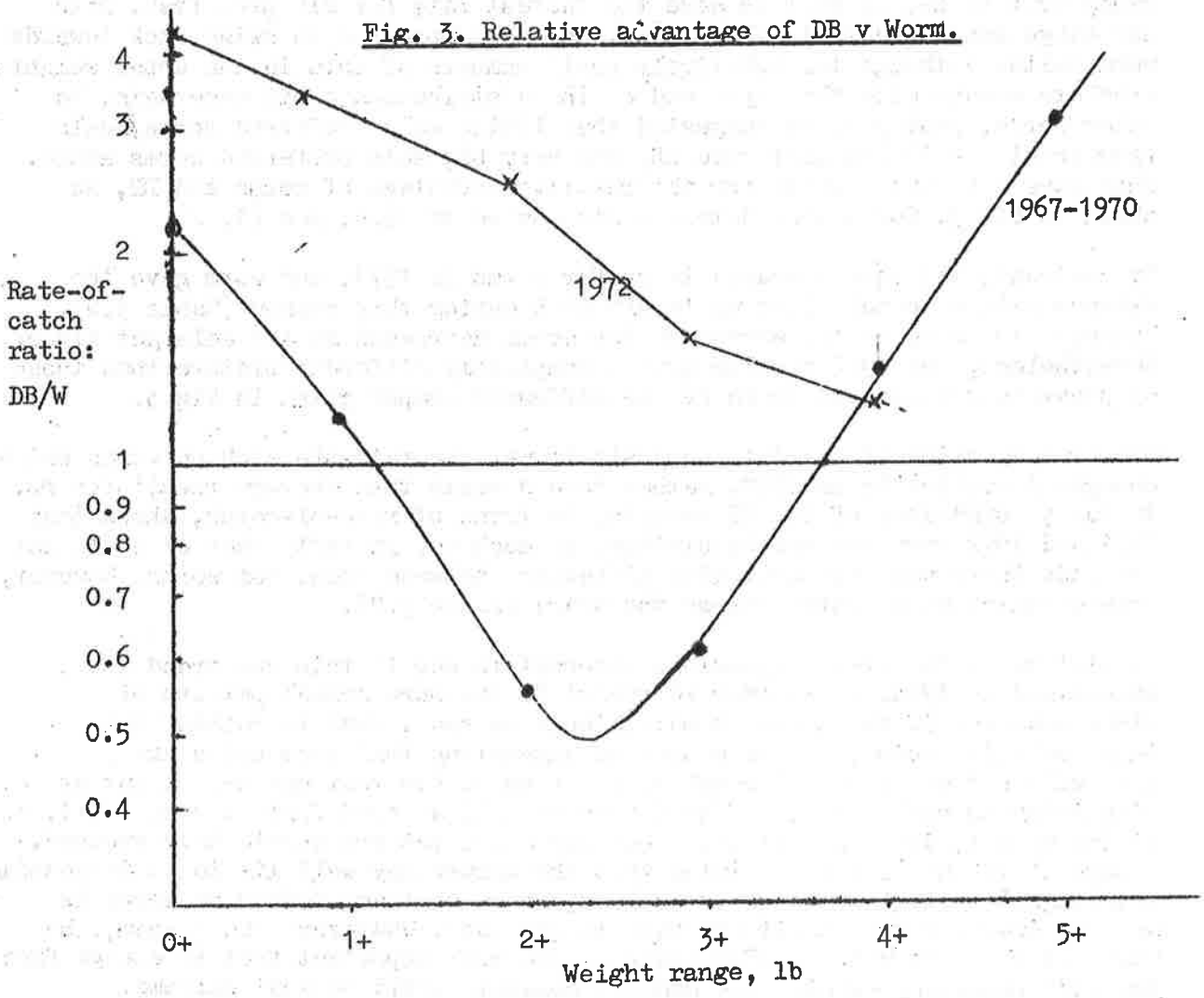
Table 3.1. Worm versus Dead Bait 1972.

	WORM		DB	
	No	CF%	No	CF%
0-1	48	32	10	11
1-2	59	71	36	49
2-3	33	93	28	79
3-4	8	98	14	94
4-5	3	100	4	98
5-6	0		2	100
Total	151		94	

Table 3.2. Rate-of-Catch. Worm versus DB, 1971 v. 1972

	Worm		DB		Ratio DB/Worm	
	1971	1972	1971	1972	1971	1972
RH/E	20	12.5	53	55	2.7	4.4
RH/1	43	18.5	60	62	1.4	3.3
RH/2	110	43	97	108	0.88	2.5
RH/3	360	172	240	260	0.67	1.5
RH/4	1,100	630	960	860	0.90	1.3

Fig. 3. Relative advantage of DB v Worm.



3.2. Other Baits

As in previous years, the amount of effort put into baits other than worm or DB was relatively small in 1972. A total of 210 rod-hours accounted for on eel on maggets, on eel on a rudd's head, two fish on bream guts and two more on perch livebait. The amount of data is not enough to pursue in any greater detail; nevertheless, the Club is gradually accumulating records for novel baits and some future Bulletin could well contain a more informative feature on this subject.

4. Effect of Time of Day.

During 1971-1972 there was a revival of interest in day-time eel fishing, largley as a result of John Harris' excellent results in the heat of the noon-day sun. Because of this, it is worth seeing if this has resulted in any change in the relative success of day and night time fishing.

Another important reason for examining this subject is that in 1972 we dropped the category twilight for the first time, and referred instead to 'day' and 'night' only. We further simplified things by defining day and night as fixed points within each month, despite the fact that the time of sunrise and sunset can vary quite appreciably within a single month, particularly at the beginning and end of the Summer. Thus it is important to see if our simplified procedure still gives meaningful results.

The relevant facts are set out in Table 4.1, below.

Table 4.1. Day versus night: 1972.

	OVERALL		WORM		DB	
	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night
Total E	56	189	36	115	20	74
Total RH	2,397	4,697	538	1,361	1,859	3,336
RH/E	43	25	15	12	93	45
RH/2	100	68	45	43	170	90

The overall results show that in 1972 eels in general (RH/E) were caught 1.7 times as fast during the night as during the day, while 2lb plus eels were caught about 1½ times as fast at night as in the day. However, table 4.1. indicates a very marked difference between worm and DB results here: worm appeared to perform equally well in the day as in the night, whereas DB was about twice as effective at night.

How do these results compare with previous years? They agree in one important respect, in suggesting that worm is a better daytime bait than DB (1). But, because we have changed the system and dropped twilight from our records, it is rather difficult to compare the actual figures for 1972 and previous years. In the past, twilight has usually given rates of catch intermediate between day and night (1). What we have done is to divide these intermediate eels more or less equally between our two new day and night categories; the most likely effect of this will be to reduce the size of the difference between the two, independent of whether there has been any actual change in the fishing results.

In fact, the difference between day and night in 1972 was substantially less than previously; for RH/E ratios, the figures are 1.7 vs 3.2, and for 2LB plus eels, the RH/2 ratios are 1.5 vs. 3.6 reppectively (1).

For the reasons given above, we cannot be completely sure that this overall result reflects a genuine improvement in daytime fishing in 1972. However, for worm bait at least, the equality of day and night results appears quite remarkable, and would be unexpected even taking the twilight factor into account. For worm baits, therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that a new pattern of results was achieved in 1972; of course, the total no. of eels taken in the daytime was fairly small, and we shall need another season's results before we know if we have made a permanent change.

5. Effect of repeat sessions at the same swim.

Studying the effect of repeat visits to the same spot on a formal basis is new to the 1972 season. Examination of the results suggests some interesting facts may emerge, but that it would be much better to look at the results in relation to the waters concerned, rather than try and generalise here. Thus I propose to pospone discussion of this topic until the next article, which will tackle the results from individual fisheries.

Conclusions

It is gratifying to see that the modified and reduced session reporting scheme is fulfilling its main objectives; namely, to provide background information for our water description work, and to maintain detailed records of our angling results. Equally, it is reassuring to note that our changed methods of working still give us results generally consistent with those of past seasons, so that the continuity of the reporting is maintained.

Overall, the 1972 season appeared quite exceptional for the performance of worm baits; DB performed much as usual. Should the same trends appear in 1973, we could be justified in claiming a major breakthrough in eel fishing techniques; on the other hand, 1972 may just have been an exceptional year. Only more results will decide.

THE RIVER LEA AND ITS TRIBUTARIES

by Arthur Sutton.

Waltons river they still call it. It's a long time since old Izaak journeyed past Tottenham High Cross on his way to fish the river and yet his name is still remembered in these parts. There is a pub named the Izaak Walton and an angling society of the same name. The river has changed a great deal in places over the years and yet in others it remains very much as it was, as far as we know. The old course of the river now supplies North London with drinking water, and it does this by way of feeding some vast resevoirs. We have the vast King George resevoirs at Brimsdown and Ponders end, the newer W. Girling resevoir at Ponders end, the Banbury resevoir at Edmonton/Tottenham and the large group known as the Walthamstow resevoirs at Walthamstow. Over much of its fishable length the river is hard fished and good fish are rather difficult to take although present in good numbers. The very lower reaches, prior to the river's confluence with the Thames, are grossly polluted. Here, the water is a black evil looking liquid from which great oily bubbles rise to stay on the surface for minutes without bursting. Nothing lives, and I am certain that no eels could possibly enter the Lea from its lower reaches.

Yet the river holds as good a stock of three pound eels as one could wish for, and if only one could fish at night they would be taken in good numbers (as I have proved in the past). Nor is the upper limit three pounds, for the river has produced many over that mark as we shall see later. One could devote a whole book to the river, and the description of the river and its various stations must therefore be rather sketchy in an article of this nature. I shall mention species other than eels merely to give you a mental picture of the river.

The river Lea is unique in that it consists of the old river Lea and the Lea Navigation which is a canal. In certain places the two join and follow the same course. We start at the lower fishable stretch and will work upstream.

TOTTENHAM LOCK.

Just below the lock the old river joins the canal and from this point the two are as one, running down past Hackney marshes towards the Thames. Below the lock the river is fishless, although many are the tales of the fishing there in the past. Above the lock is the canal, with the old river running parallel some few yards away. This stretch of canal can provide reasonable fishing and matches are staged there regularly. The occasional eel is taken during daylight on baits intended for other species.

STONEBRIDGE LOCK (North Tottenham)

Always noted for its easy fishing, the late Edward Ensom (Faddist) used to fish here on occasion. It was he who showed me just how to take good fish from the river. The stretch above Stonebridge Lock has improved since the installation of a second lock adjacent to the old one, thus allowing more water to flow through the section. It was upstream of the lock that I took my very first two pound eel while still a lad of only nine years old, and here I served my angling apprenticeship with the roach pole, fishing in typical Lea style. The stretch is a long one before we reach the next lock.

PICKETTS LOCK (Ponders End)

The fishing, although patchy and difficult, has always been good insofar as the canal here can yield an occasional surprise fish. In 1952 a carp of 24lbs was taken and I had the great pleasure of witnessing same. This stretch has produced quite a few surprises for local anglers in recent years. Let me explain. The old river is not far away at this point and, during the winter floods, many specimen fish are swept down from somewhere upstream. When the floodwater has subsided, a few local anglers, myself included, fish the old river and the fish we take are transferred by us to the canal. Were they to remain in the old river they would die as soon as summer levels allowed the pollution below Tottenham Lock to work upstream. Dace to 1lb 1oz(myself) and the odd barbel have been taken in the canal both below and above Picketts lock and matches staged in this area are frequently won with several chub. Again, the odd eel up to 2½lbs is taken on occasion. Above Picketts lock the canal continues upstream through Brimsdown, Enfield Wash, Enfield Lock and Waltham Abbey. These reaches are in a heavily industrialised area but are fishable all the way. Some exceedingly good eels have been taken from the filters of the power generating station at Brimsdown in the past. At Brimsdown and Enfield the old river is almost a mile away, while at Waltham Abbey it comes near once more, joining the canal only to leave it almost within sight of its junction. The old river and the canal WERE one water near to Waltham Abbey and the fishing there was excellent. But during 1971 a relief channel was laid and the old river now follows this course. It leaves the fishing at Waltham Abbey much the poorer and purely canal.

WALTHAM ABBEY (Upstream)

There are two locks in this section, and continuing upstream we come to the lower of two locks at CHESHUNT. The old river is but a meadow away.

CHESHUNT.

Perhaps the Mecca for the weekend Lea angler. The old river is noted for its Barbel fishing and many are the very good chub I have taken there on fly. The old river is both shallow and clear with a good growth of water plants, and the Chub rise well to the dry fly under suitable conditions. I have taken very good eels in this water, but being such good fishing it is frequently patrolled by the bailiffs. The surrounding area is a rich gravel bearing one, and the gravel pits from here to Broxbourne are numerous. The canal here holds some very good eels, and, were it not for the night fishing ban, I feel sure that many six

pound eels would be taken regularly. Upstream of Cheshunt, at the famous Kings Weir, the canal joins the old river and the two are as one. Here, above the weir we have the Crown Fishery. The 'Crown' has always been popular, for it is very easy to take a few fish even when things are not right, and at times this water does produce some really good specimens. Small eels are a regular feature in the daytime, and, judging from the number of small eels taken by anglers after the roach, dace and tench etc, there must be a very large head of eels indeed. I do think that there are a lot more eels in the river generally than at any time in the past - or within my memory at least. The river continues upstream - no, it doesn't flow upstream, that's merely the way we are traveling - through Broxbourne past Carthagena weir and Dobbs weir, both regularly in the news. Upstream past Fields weir and lock to where, just above the weir, the river Stort enters the Lea. A few hundred yards above this confluence we come to Rye House.

RYE HOUSE.

Memories come flooding back - oh what memories, and I remember when as a lad of only eight years I used to enjoy better roach fishing than I ever can find nowadays. Plenty of eels here, and again more now than at any time in the past. How I wish that I could fish at night in this section. No locks in this section, so upstream then, to a place I know so very well.

St MARGARETS.

The canal and the river seperate just below St Margarets lock. The river upstream being a carefully preserved trout water renowned also for the coarse fish it holds. The stretch of river above St Margarets is still known as the 25 Guinea fishery, for such was the cost of a season permit prior to the second world war. Above the lock, the canal goes its own seperate way, and let me say now that I know of no finer canal eel fishing anywhere. It betters the Grand Union canal in the number of good eels it always holds, and possibly in the quality of its eels too. I am not ashamed to admit that I used to fish the St Margarets section at night, regularly, and would be tempted to do so again if I thought that I could get away with it. For what man can ignore the hold that St Margarets has over me ? My records show over forty eels above or exactly four pounds from the section. I once took a friend to fish at night there, and he had the fortune to take an eel of seven pounds. I dare not mention his name but he is well known among the specimen groups. I was once invited to look over the Club house on the 25 Guinea water here, and among the excellent fish in glass cases I was thrilled to see an eel. Oh, what an eel. It was not taken on rod and line but had been recovered after having been trapped in the weir. Such were its proportions that it had been set up by the syndicate. The weight had not been recorded, or if it had, the records were no longer available. I was asked to estimate how heavy it was and had no hesitation is stating that, in my own estimation the eel must have weighed nine pounds and could easily have been heavier. Until the year 1920 there used to be eel baskets erected at the weir in early Autumn and the Father of the present weir keeper had told him of the baskets of good eels, with eels of five pounds being common.

Eels used to be taken at St Margarets on night lines by local people and sold in the local market place, where they fetched a good price. The head of eels here is still such that the local people could all exist on a diet of eels. I have tried extremely hard to take eels here during daylight hours, but without any success at all.

There are also some good eels in the river Stort, as one would expect and as witness the occasional good eel taken by daytime anglers, but alas, no night fishing.

A favourite venue of mine in the winter is where the Stort joins the Lea. I try to fish the spot when both the Stort and Lea are in flood, for the confluence forms a large eddy which fishes very well under these conditions. One interesting thing, worthy of note, is that when fishing there, no matter how cold the weather, I cannot use either worm or maggot. If I do, then all I take are small eels - not just one or two - but dozens of them one after the other in quick succesion. I think that the flood water moves them and that they all congregate in the large eddy.

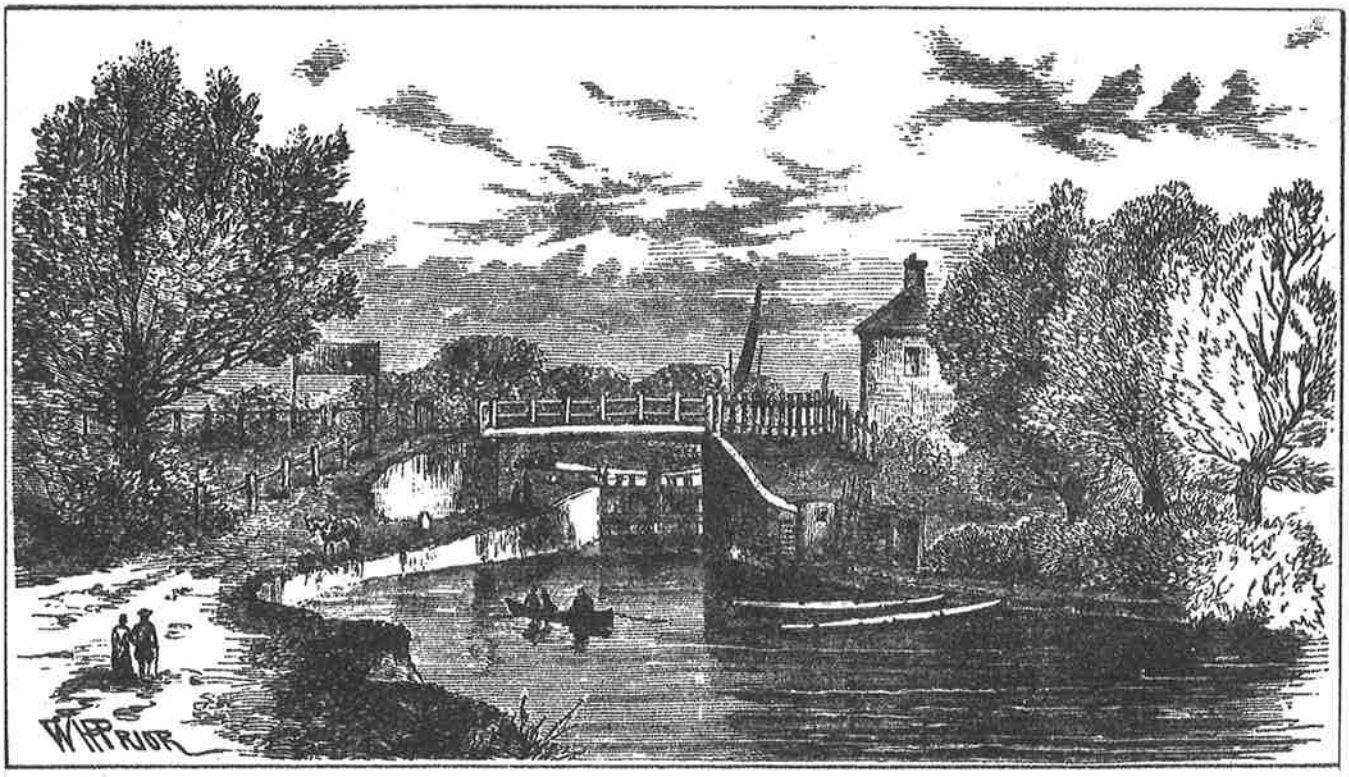
The river continues upstream through WARE and HERTFORD, but I know

Little of the river in these upper reaches or of the fishing therein. In these upper reaches the river Lea is fed by several tributaries. Notable among them are the rivers RIB and BEANE. Both these rivers hold exceptional dace and still hold a reasonable head of trout, although, sad to relate, they are suffering ill effects caused by abstraction. Nevertheless, they are still famous Hertfordshire rivers. Less well known, and smaller by comparison, is the little river Mimram. This little river holds hardly any coarse fish. How the trout which inhabit it survive I shall never know, for abstraction and pollution regularly affect the river. All the same, it is yet another river for the eels to navigate. R.Walker told me of two four pound eels taken on worm intended for the trout, and of yet another on wet fly tackle. Both of these were taken from the BEANE.

The 'NEW RIVER', a man made conduit which flows from Ware all the way to built up London, rises from natural springs just outside Ware town. It is not, as some anglers think, connected directly to the Lea. In those very few areas where angling is allowed at all, some really exceptional fish of nearly every species are taken. Trout in the New River grow big and taste as good as any I have eaten. I know of no eels from the New River, although I venture to say that they are there.

Back to Tottenham and Edmonton, ere we leave the river. I told you that I and other local anglers take some really good fish after the floods have only just subsided in the old river. What I did not tell you of are the eels we have seen there in the winter. Eels which would make your hair stand on end. During the winter of 1969, I was called to the river by the keeper of Picketts Lock. He wanted me to see and investigate what looked like a good fish floating dead in the river. I did so. The fish he had seen was an eel. It had been partly eaten by the rats - but still scaled 6½ lbs!

I hope that I have created a picture of the river and the canal in your minds eye. Below is a reproduction of a line drawing of Tottenham Lock as it was in days gone by - and before any of you have the chance to ask - NO, I do NOT remember it that way!



Tottenham Lock, River Lea, 1880

How about a similar article for the Bulletin, on your particular river ?