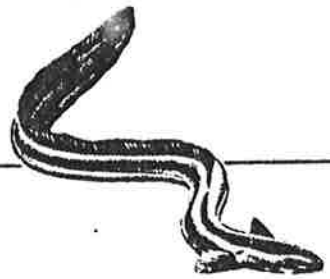

The National Anguilla Club

BULLETIN

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EDITORIAL

It is strange that we are now beginning to think of the new season and the remainder of the coarse fishing fraternity is thinking of packing up. For some of us the new season will begin a mere fourteen days following the end of the official season. Yes, folks, my season gets under way at Easter.

As has happened with carp fishermen before us, the eel fisherman is becoming an all seasons fisherman. Not too long ago it was stated as gospel that eels could not be caught in winter. I remember reading an article by Fred Taylor about the catchibility of summer fish in winter, and even he was bold enough to say that in his opinion the eel was a true summer fish. The odd winter eel that has turned up in the past has been looked upon with a certain amount of suspicion and regarded as a freak (but then aren't all eels freaks?). But the Anguilla Club has taken another first step into the little known world of the eel. Thanks to the brave activities of Henry Hansen and Steve Hope in the north, and Kevin Richmond in the south west - there are, no doubt, others of whom I have not heard - we have shown that eels can be sought and caught in winter: admitted its been a mild winter, but winter is winter is it not? No doubt, spurred on by their successes in this field, a few more of us will venture out with the coming of next winter to catch a few eels.

I have, for some time, been convinced that the winter puts the angler off angling much more than it puts the eel off feeding. Although the advent of excessive cold may put us off actual winter fishing, it is true to say that most people now carry on much longer into the autumn and early winter - many of our members are still at it come late October.

The biggest prblem with winter eel fishing, as I see it, is the problem of keeping warm - a clear night in August can be very cold if the wind is coming from the wrong quarter. In fact, I believe the frost got through to Kevin Richmond with some undesirable results - never mind, Kev, every cause needs a martyr! In view of their greater experience in the field of winter eel fishing, perhaps our winter experts could give us the benefit of their knowledge in the form of a Bulletin article. Come on, lads, you know there are no secrets in the Anguilla Club!

Having ventured onto the subject of future Bulletins, that gives me the lead into talking about this issue. It's nice to see Alan Hawkins back in print again. As a former Editor, one would think that he'd had enough of writing articles, but it is to our good fortune that he does not feel that way and has put pen to paper. Alan provides us with two interesting pieces - one on the senses of eels and another on the debate that has been raging in Anglers Mail. In my humble opinion, the debate should have started in the Bulletin since both parties are (or were at the time) members of this Club.

It's always nice to find new members contributing to the Bulletin and Tony Hollerbach, one of the latest recruits, has provided us with no less than three articles which will, hopefully, raise a response. His ideas on groundbaiting tie in with what Alan has to say on senses. He also continues our series "My season" and comments on Steve Hope's Netting.

So, sit back and get reading. I hope there's something to satisfy everyone. And remember, in a few weeks time - at Easter, in fact - yours truly will be out there after the eels: by the next issue, I may even have caught one.

DAVID SMITH.

EEL SENSE

by Alan Hawkins.

Surprisingly enough, the common eel is the subject of quite intensive scientific research. Much of the work is of little direct concern to us, being occupied with details of physiology and metabolism. But some of it deals with behaviour, tackling questions that were largely unresolved when Bertin prepared his classic book (1), and giving a fascinating insight into a creature of such strangeness that science fiction writers would do well to study the eel as a source of inspiration.

A lot of this work is buried deep in obscure scientific journals, not easily obtained without specialised library facilities. I thought, therefore, that I would attempt to summarise the more interesting of the recent research - at least, those bits of it that I have encountered so far. It does not necessarily give us direct clues on how to improve our angling. But it may provide food for thought in the dead part of the year and should also engender respect for a creature whose ways of experiencing the world are completely alien to human senses.

Let us begin with the point at which eels begin to be of interest to us; the transformation of the leptocephalus larva into an elver and subsequent migration from the sea into freshwater. As Bertin rightly says, this transformation begins well out to sea, before the larvae cross the continental shelf around our coasts. The drifting, leaf-shaped larvae progressively change into the cylindrical form of the freshwater eel, becoming much more active, and losing up to 90% of their body weight (most of this loss is water). According to Bertin, these elvers show several responses to their surroundings. They respond to light by ascending to the surface at night, and retreating towards the bottom during the day. They respond to freshwater, being attracted towards regions where the sea is diluted by river outfalls. They respond to solid objects, developing a tendency to bury themselves in the bottom (the free-floating larvae show no such trend). And, finally, they may respond to temperature, making their river ascent when the difference between sea and river temperatures is at a minimum.

The attraction towards freshwater was thought to be the means whereby elvers find their way to river estuaries, although it was not at all clear whether they were responding to changes in salinity, or to some chemical substance introduced by the freshwater outfall. But whatever the stimulus was, the elvers were thought to start swimming inshore as soon as they came across it.

A few years after Bertin's book, however, a scientist named Creutzberg showed that the tides had a crucial role to play in this process (2,3). He started off with trawl net experiments in the Dutch Madden Sea (an estuarine region with a big elver run). He compared catches made at different depths, and at different stages of the tide and he found that on the incoming tide the elvers moved up near the surface, but on the outgoing tide the elvers dived to the bottom. Further, he was able to demonstrate that the young eels were not swimming actively inshore at all, but were simply being drifted in by the incoming tide, and clinging to the bottom to prevent being washed back out to sea on the ebb. He did this by comparing catches made first with the boat running

against the tide, and then with the boat moving in the same direction as the tide (the boat moved at the same speed relative to the water in each case) If the elvers were swimming actively, he should have caught more by trawling against the tide; this was not so and hence he deduced passive movement.

But, of course, this up and down movement in response to tide in not enough in itself - otherwise elvers would be washed ashore all round the coast regardless of whether there was a river estuary nearby or not. This is where the freshwater stimulus comes in; only when freshwater is sensed do elvers behave in the up and down way. Again, it was Creutzberg who made the vital discoveries. He constructed an aquarium in the shape of a ring, and used a pump to push water round and round to imitate a current. Starting with normal sea water, he found that the elvers dived to the bottom and clung on as soon as he started to add freshwater (so diluting the sea water and imitating an ebb tide near a river estuary). But when he reversed the process, adding more sea water to make his aquarium more salty, the elvers rose from the bottom to drift with the current.

Hence, the elvers have a neat and economical way of getting ashore in the right place. They drift round the coast with the general ocean currents until the influence of freshwater nearby is felt. They then behave in such a way that the tides carry them inshore to the right place.

Now let us return to the question of what it is that the elvers recognise about freshwater. Creutzburg found that his aquarium experiment only worked when he used natural freshwater, taken direct from a lake or stream. Tap water, filtered and purified, was no good at all. So this rules out changes of salinity (salt-content) as being the cause, because any sort of freshwater should work if this were true. Hence the elvers are responding to some chemical substance carried into the sea from the freshwater outlet; a substance that is removed during normal filtration processes.

No one knows what this attractant substance is. It may, indeed, be a whole range of things. We must leave a gap still to be filled here, and move on to the next stage where the elver has reached the river mouth and has begun its struggle upstream. We know, from many records, that elvers generally keep close to the edge of the rivers, ascending every branch (unless grossly polluted) and penetrating many of the still waters of the river basin. But why? Why don't they all settle down in the lower reaches? Or all press on to the headwaters so that the inland waters are crowded, and the lower reaches left empty? How do the elvers achieve a reasonable distribution throughout all the different waterways making up each river system?

The upstream urge, or rheotaxis as it is called, is not enough to explain this by itself. Recently, a Canadian scientist named Miles (4) has found a possible answer - at least for the American eel, which may or may not be the same species as ours. Like Creutzberg, Miles found that freshwater contained a natural attractant for elvers; a chemical substance that was stable to heat, did not evaporate from the water, but which could be broken down by living organisms. But he also found that freshwater containing other elvers was less attractive, whereas water containing large (yellow) eels was more attractive. Thus, given a choice, elvers would tend to disperse to reduce the scent of other elvers, but would be positively attracted towards areas already supporting an eel population. Biologically, this makes excellent sense. By getting as far away as possible from other elvers, each young eel obtains the maximum feeding area for itself. And by moving towards areas already supporting eels, the elvers stand a better chance of finding a good place for eels to live - otherwise the big eels would not be there!

This work by Miles (4) may thus explain how eels distribute themselves through our waterways. Taken together, the general upstream movement, repulsion between elvers, and attraction towards big eels make an efficient mechanism for obtaining an optimum distribution. Once again, the elvers do it all by smell; indeed, the eel's world is very largely one of smell (see later). Mind you, the same thing has yet to be shown for our European eel, and there may yet be further subtle mechanisms at work of which we are yet ignorant.

Speaking personally, I am sufficiently convinced by this work to try and put it to practical use. Last Summer, eels of 1 - 3 lbs have quietly been introduced into many of the brand new gravel pits which keep springing up around my home. Not many, no more than half a dozen to each pit (I don't catch that many eels!). But I am hoping that nature will now take over, and that the presence of these bigger eels will attract a run of elvers from the nearby rivers next Spring. It may work, and it is the best I can do. It is an experiment we may all take part in - though we would be best advised to stick to new waters; old waters without eels may be just unsuitable, or too far from an elver run, otherwise the eels would have found them by now.

Running through this article so far has been the importance of smell to an eel. So how good is an eel at smelling things? The answer, it appears, is quite astonishing, if the figures of Teichman (5) can be believed. He found that young eels could detect simple organic chemicals at concentrations as low as one part in a billion million (10^{-18}); about equivalent to half a teaspoonful in a lake 50 times the size of lake Constance. (Lake Constance is about 20 miles long by 5 miles wide). In other words, they knew the substance was present when only 3 or 4 molecules had entered their olfactory rosette (smell organ),

Such sensitivity gives the eel the potential to detect practically everything in its environment by smell. For example, the scent of a single lobworm mixed throughout the waters of Lake Bala should be obvious to every eel in the water. But, of course, the situation is unlikely to be quite as simple as this.

Let us take a human analogy. Our chief sense organs are our eyes (except when eel fishing!). Now imagine yourself at the top of a tall building in the centre of town on a busy Saturday morning. The number of individual things you can see is quite astronomical; the people in the streets (or in their bedrooms if you are a voyeur), the traffic, the weather, the buildings, and so on. So much information, in fact, that it could quite easily swamp us completely unless we practised selection, and concentrated on one or two items to the exclusion of others. An angler, therefore, might look out of the window to see the state of the weather, and quite overlook his neighbour's wife being raped in the street, or the house opposite burning down. So, too, must an eel practice some form of selection to avoid being swamped by all the scents it is potentially capable of detecting.

What this all means, I think, is that we should be less concerned about the quantity of scent given off by our baits - the merest drop should be enough. But we should spend more time thinking about the quality of the smell; something that will attract the eel's attention amidst all the other smells in its surroundings, and set it off up the scent trail to the bait. There is, I think, considerable scope yet for experimentation with different bait additives.

Also, I think, we should spend rather more time thinking about how the scent disperses itself through the water. Members who fish slowly flowing, rather uniform stretches of water will know that it is often the downstream rod which cops for all the sport. Why? because like other fish the eel works upstream in search of food and has such an efficient sense of smell that it nearly always finds the first bait along its path. In a river, laying a scent trail is no problem, but in a lake it can be much more difficult. In completely still water, smell moves by diffusion - a very slow process, measured in inches per hour. But a lake is never completely still, currents are set up by small temperature differences, or by the wind. An obvious thing to do is to try and work out how these currents flow in any lake we choose to fish, and then place the bait within such currents so that the scent covers the maximum area.

For example, a few Bulletins ago I wrote a piece on gravel pit hot spots. One thing the features listed all have in common is that they are places where turbulence and currents are likely to occur in a large pit; the fact that they also produce eels is probably more than coincidence. Then again, the famous 'Holliman Hot Spot' of Lake Bala was eventually discovered to have a steady current to the right; so much so that quite a lot of lead was needed to keep the bait in place. Less productive spots nearby had no such current.

Enough, then, of the sense of smell; perhaps we can now consider another aspect of eel behaviour - whether the fish has a definite sense of 'home'. F.W. Tesch did some interesting release experiments with tagged eels (6,7) using 1,057 fish altogether. In the first experiment he moved eels from one estuary to another some five miles away; of the eels subsequently recaptured (12% and 3% in two experiments) eight out of ten had returned to their original location. In other experiments involving distances of up to 40 miles, eels still returned 'home', though in these cases rather few fish were recaptured after release. Tesch also showed that the sense of smell had little to do with the homing process; he found no difference between eels with blocked and unblocked nostrils, and eels managed to find their way back from waters where the home water scent could not possibly reach.

On the face of it, Tesch's figures are not all that convincing; the number of eels recaptured were rather small. More work needs to be done to show how good this homing instinct really is. And in any case, as anglers, we are not perhaps too interested in whether an eel can recognise its home water. Of more concern is whether it recognises a particular spot within the water, the old 'hot spot' affair. Clearly there is scope for much research here; with the new policy of returning eels, how about an Anguilla Club tagging project? We could issue tags to all members, and note the number and location of each tag used on the appropriate session report. A few items in the Press could get co-operation from other anglers (and also publicity); properly run it might be a most interesting project.

(It could also tell us something about the actual numbers of eels in the waters we fish. A standard method for doing this is by tagging and then estimating the proportion of tagged eels subsequently recaptured)

Finally, the most bizzare aspect of all. Russian workers (8,9) have discovered that young eels can orientate themselves in relation to the earth's magnetic field! Their work suggests they only use magnetism as a last resort, in the absence of other stimuli, and that they may have

a specific magnetism sense organ. Perhaps the most convincing part of the Russian work was the fact that these young (5 yr old) eels could be induced to face different ways by moving powerful magnets around the aquaria.

If anyone can think of a significant application of this for angling, I should be pleased to hear about it.

I can also supply nice, plastic coated, bar magnets for anyone who wants them; they should fit well on about a size four hook.

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* English translation of lengthy russian title

**No title available, reference unseen.

GROUNDBAIT - One angler's experience

By Tony Hollerbach.

For some years now, I have been engrossed in eels and eel angling, and for quite a while I've been interested the use of groundbait designed for catching, or should I say, attracting eels.

At first I used the conventional methods such as cloud groundbait, breadpaste etc., but apart from wasting money it was hardly effective at all, except for attracting bleak, gudgeon, small perch and dace: so I started to experiment.

My first successful groundbait was a small tin of cat food (don't laugh), mixed with breadcrumbs. Without a doubt, this attracted eels. Then came a mixture of raw eggs, more cat food and bran; again moderately successful: and thirdly, I managed to acquire some fresh frozen blood (ugh!) which, when mixed with the other ingredients, proved to be the best eel attractant of them all. Alas, a shortage of easily obtainable blood prevented full use of this groundbait last season.

Now comes another point. To use groundbait effectively you have to get it near, or fairly close to, the hook bait. As I fish mostly in a river - the Ouse - it is difficult to be spot on because of the current, so I came up with an idea similar to swim feeders. It is a small plastic mesh bag, like a bird feeding bag - you know, those bags filled with nuts, etc. This is filled with the mixture and attached just above the trace on a swivel to the main line. The groundbait is slowly washed downstream by the current.

By using the filled bag in place of a lead, I can still cast fair distances and the rig is more sensitive than when a lead is used because the bait is almost freelined - once the groundbait has dissolved away, there is very little weight and resistance to a taking eel. However, the bait does drift a bit sometimes, and I have found, once or twice, that eels have attacked the bag and not the bait.

But what do other members think of this? Good or bad? I should like to know other peoples' views.

INTERESTING TOPICS

By Brian Crawford.

On reading through our last few Bulletins, I realised there were several articles that interested me. At least they deserve some comment (a real liberty, you may think). However, they did inspire me to think.

Setting the hook, by Graham Booth, NAC Bulletin, 11.3, page 41.

This I found particularly interesting as I suffered this same problem all the last season on my local pits - very dense weed. The weed, in fact, often caused me to pull for a break - which I did - with 20lb line. I lost at least one set of terminal tackle each session, on average. I was using whole bleak and spratts.

Part of the way through the season I changed to eel steaks one to two inches in length. This helped to remedy the situation. In fact, when I changed waters in August, I chatted to a chap who had landed several 4lb+ eels from the new water and he said that he was most successful using roach heads. This ties in with Graham's theory concerning the release of body fluids. This new water, which I hope to feature in a Bulletin article soon, has fantastic potential, containing big fish of most species, but, because of its dense weed and depths

to 55 feet, it is fished very little. I only managed eight sessions there last season, but aim to really hammer it this season. Members will be made very welcome if they wish to join me anytime.

As you can guess, I will be using roach or bleak or sprat heads all the time. The weed just does not allow for waiting for runs to develop. I hope to be building two new rods of about 11½ feet in length soon, to cope with pulling eels out of the weed. Incidently, the water is just ten minutes from my home, mainly along a dual carriageway. I can park at the water's edge and there is a pub and chip shop just down the road. Write now to book your session!

Actually, his article deserves much more support than for the reason given above. The important point is that with a quick strike, the eel is usually hooked in its mouth - a vital consideration in the interests of eel conservation. I aim to return all my eels over 2lb if possible. I certainly do not intend fishing any waters out.

After discussing this point with Alan Hawkins, he will be producing an article on our growth rate studies from the otoliths in stock. We have a great collection of these, many of which are not yet read. At this time, therefore, there is no need to kill eels to obtain them. If at some time in the future, we feel the need to continue, the implications can be discussed. In fact, I hope it may be the subject of further articles by members. Obviously, if we cease killing eels, unless unavoidable, we will also be ceasing to study stomach contents and sexing. Actually, with seven years' information on these, much still to be analysed, we may not be acheiving anything new by our efforts. As the premier specimen group, I feel we ought to be having a continual turnover of investigations. This will both help to keep enthusiasm going and help to keep a perspective of our objectives.

This being the case, I know several members are interested in stepping up reporting of water temperature and air temperature & pressure. So far, we have not analysed these for influence on eel catches in much detail for some time. I would also like to include depth and distance from the bank. We may also consider several other items as will be revealed when the water questionairres are analysed, ie. size of water, height above sea level, distance from the sea and all the other questions asked. Obviously, the more we have of these, the more accurate and informative will be the results, so I respectfully ask you to make one out for <u>every</u> water you fish; even if only for one session. This build up of dossiers on waters is important. The information obtained can be matched against eel catches from each water.

Also on the topic of eel conservation, several members have already written to me to indicate their keen attitude to assist in the project of eel tagging. I hope to get some support when we discuss this at the SGM. If anyone has ideas on this, or where to obtain suitable tags from alternatively, how to make and label our own, please let me know.

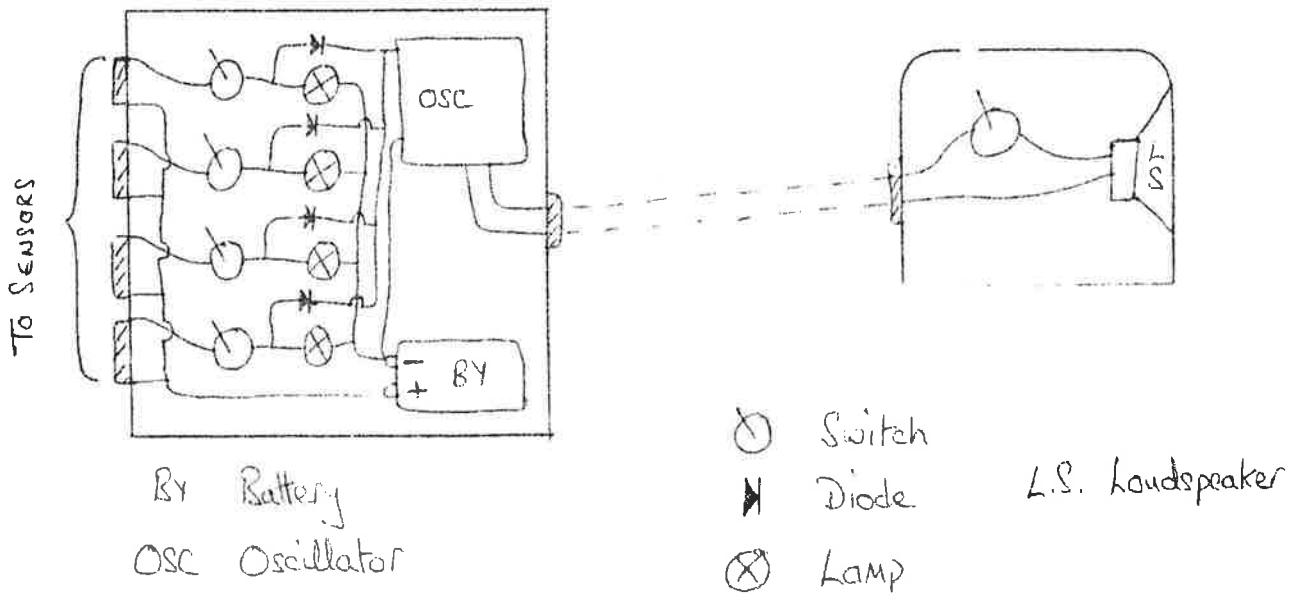
Whilst on the subject of discussions for the SGM, please try to consider waters you consider suitable for Spring and Summer outings. I know Ernie Orme would be more than pleased to see us all again back at Bala, indeed, I know several of our members have already indicated their intention of joining him for the odd session. If you have any ideas on where to go, please inform Arthur Sutton.

How far should we go, by Arthur Sutton, NAC Bulletin, 12.1.

This was another that made me think - it brought back memories of beautiful dreams being disturbed by the buzzer sounding off; tripping over countless wires and upsetting all my tackle: you know the sort of thing. I, too, considered ways of overcoming the problem: I even discussed the same idea of

remote control with Geoff Swailes but decided it was too expensive, so I will be interested to see Arthur's project and its price.

In an effort to simplify my own problems, I have now arranged my sensors in pairs and have one set of wires running back to my buzzer unit. At one stage I had a double self supporting buzzer unit complete with lights by the rods, but with a double wire running back to my brolley with an extension speaker plus on/off switch. This enabled me to be "woke", turn off the buzzer, have only one set off wires to negotiate outside the brolley, but at the rods there was a control box with a light still on to indicate which rod had the bite.



I am very pleased that several of our members and past members have had mentions in the press lately. Dave Ball with his pike and carp, Arthur Smith and John Harris with pike. Several others have also been in the news. I hope it just illustrates the quality of our membership. John Watson has also been having a few good days with pike.

For the benefit of our newer members, I would just like to mention the names of some other well known ex-members of the NAC: Fred Wagstaffe, Bob Reynolds, Bob Church, Jim Gibbinson, Trevor Housby and Rian Tingay - most of these are well known in the fields of carp, pike, trout and sea angling. There are, of course, a good many more such quality anglers, but who never sought publicity. The long serving members will know of those I refer to. There are one or two others in the Ray Brown category, of Coventry Circus fame - now eel trapper. I must admit, he contributed to the latest revolution in pike tactics in the Chris (Apache) Binion class. At the very least, Ray showed that he was a thinking angler - this he also demonstrated several times while an active club member.

I believe this is what separates the NAC from ordinary Specimen Groups. The very fact that we specialise in a most unusual fish - unique of course - to be at all successful, we have to think about methods and tactics constantly.

Therefore, gentlemen, prove me right. Let us see what you think. Don't be shy.... Remember, the bulk of most Bulletins is written by members of long standing in the Club. A new approach, a different view, may provide us with a new concept in aims and achelvements.

One thing that amazes me is the usual total lack of response to many of the articles in the Bulletin. There is the odd comment from the Editor, or one or two others, but in the main there is nothing. It must be very disturbing for the Editor to prepare Bulletins time after time with seemingly interesting articles and have no response at all. I often get an urge to comment on an article, even if it is only to write to the author of it. Actually, it would be better to send comments to the Editor, even if it is only one line agreeing with a particular article.

Come on, chaps. I am sure you all read the Bulletins and even look forward to their arrival. Perhaps you don't think you can write an article - have you tried? Have you attempted to write to the Editor about any article outlining your view? This is what the Bulletin is all about. Let's have some arguments or counter-proposals.

I do know that all of you have something to say - you have demonstrated it time and again on Club outings and at Meetings: especially after a few drinks, can't shut you up sometimes! Perhaps, if you have a few beers then, get down to writing to Dave.....

THE EEL LENGTH vs WEIGHT CONTROVERSY

By Alan Hawkins.

Introduction

There has been considerable debate within the letters page of Anglers Mail over the use of length-for-weight (LW) to assess the potential of eel waters. Essentially the debate boils down to this: members of the South Staffordshire Specimen Group (S.S.S.G.) believe that LW is a valid and useful criterion, whereas I do not. Again, reducing the argument to its bare bones, my case against LW comprises:-

1. LW is highly variable and one would require a large number of eels to draw a meaningful curve for any water.
2. There are exceptions to the rule "the fatter the better". The Grand Union C Canal and Greystones Lake are examples of outstanding eel waters which produce long thin fish.
3. LW is an abstraction from the quantity of real interest, ie. weight alone. The average angler would do far better to simply use the weight of the eels caught as a direct and straightforward guide to water quality.

Despite these objections, the S.S.S.G. have persisted in their claims, and are now offering their LW charts, together with their interpretation of them, free to all interested anglers. Being an interested angler, I was delighted to receive one of their handouts the other day. The S.S.S.G. are obviously keen to spread their gospel, and I am sure they, too, will be delighted to see the whole of their handout reprinted verbatim within the pages of this Bulletin. Immediately following, therefore, is the S.S.S.G. material; it forms the basis for the following discussion and readers are requested to study it.

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24-1-75.

DEAR HENRY,

FIRSTLY, PLEASE EXCUSE THE DELAY IN REPLYING TO YOUR REQUE FOR DETAILS OF OUR EEL LENGTH - WEIGHT GRAPH. DUE TO THE UNEXPECTED DEMAND WE HAVE HAD DIFFICULTIES IN OBTAINING SUF ICIENT NUMBERS OF COPIES. HOWEVER, PLEASE FIND TWO GRAPHS WHI FORMED PART OF A REPORT THAT WE DID SOMETIME AGO FOR THE DEPT. OF THE ENVIRONMENT REGARDING THE NIGHT FISHING POTENTIAL OF CERTAIN LOCAL WATERS. ALSO INCLUDED IS PART OF THE REPORT HICH GIVES FURTHER EXPLANATION OF THE GRAPHS.

THE INFORMATION SHOULD BE TAKEN PURELY AS A GUIDE AND APPLI ONLY TO WATERS THAT WE HAVE EXAMINED. WE HAVE SIMILAR CUR FOR SEVERAL OTHER MIDLAND WATERS WHICH FOLLOW SIMILAR PATTERNS. DU 1975 WE ARE GOING TO LOOK AT THREE OR FOUR NEW WATERS AND SEE HOW THEY FIT IN THE GRAPH BEFORE WE MAKE ANY FINAL CONCLUSIONS. THESE WILL BE WATERS IN COMPLETELY NEW AREAS TO US. IF ANY FURTHER QUERIES ARISE WE WOULD BE PLEASED TO HEAR FROM YOU.

Mike Brown

SSSG.

P.S. Please forgive the figures quoted in Kelvins original article. They were published without being checked. I had been working on the graph and Kelvin had quoted from memory without consulting me - hence the error!

SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE SPECIMEN GROUP

LENGTH FOR WEIGHT SCALE

For some time now, we have been working on a length for weight scale for freshwater eels. This type of scale is available for all other freshwater fish but as far as is known no-one has been concerned with establishing a scale for eels. ~~We have sufficient data for eels under [redacted] pounds in weight but the rare larger fish are not so easily come by in sufficient numbers to complete the scale range. The [redacted] eels which were caught i... [redacted] have been helpful for us to improve the upper portion of our scale.~~

(Except N.A.C.

When plotting a graph of length v weight for all the eels that we had previously measured and weighed, we found the points to be very scattered and concluded that any scale we laid down could be regarded as no more than a guide for eels in average condition. See graph A.

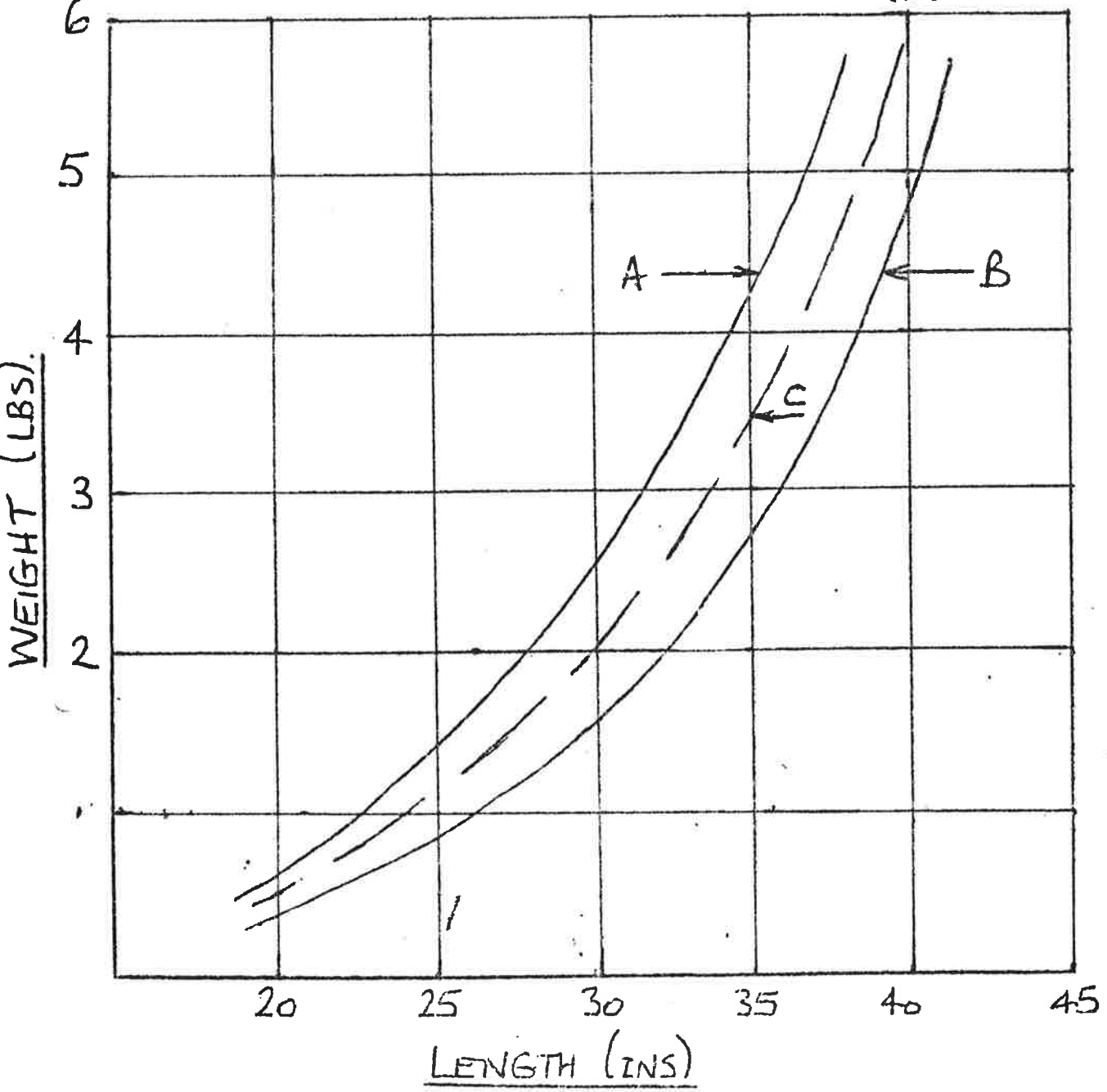
The next step taken was to join all points on the graph of fish caught from the same lake. (See graph B) To simplify matters we used information from 3 waters only. As expected this produced 3 very smooth curves, each curve running fairly parrallel to the others. It was concluded that the length/weight ratio varied from one water to another and the actual value was dependant upon the growth rate which was determined by many factors. These could be the quality and quantity of food available for instance which is a reflection of the fertility of the water.

Another important factor could be the number of eels in the water which could easily offset the first factor mentioned as the food may be of high quality but not in sufficient quantity for a large number of eels to attain a good growth rate. The following facts regarding waters A B and C may help in the understanding of the findings.

	WATER A	WATER B	WATER C
SIZE OF WATER	LARGE	MEDIUM	SMALL
EASE OF EEL ACCESS	VERY EASY.	NOT TOO EASY	DIFFICULT
NUMBERS OF EELS SUSPECTED	VAST QUANTITIES	A REASONABLE QUANTITY	VERY FEW

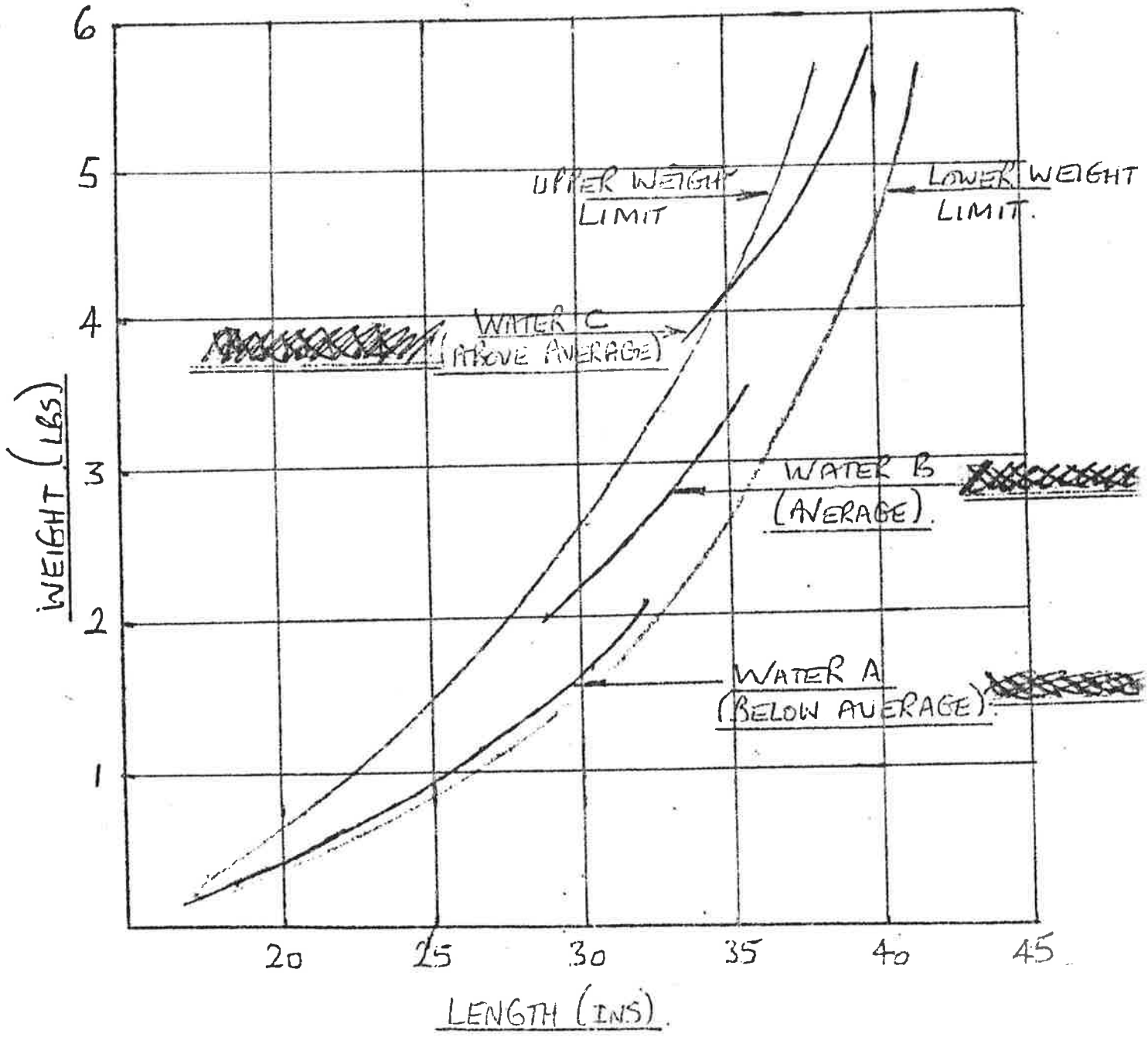
SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE SPECIMEN GROUP

GRAPH A. SHOWING VARIATION IN LENGTH/WEIGHT RATIO. CURVES A & B ARE UPPER & LOWER LIMITS FOR THE THREE WATERS EXAMINED. CURVE C ATTEMPTS TO DETERMINE AN AVERAGE LENGTH/WEIGHT SCALE.



SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE SPECIMEN GROUP

GRAPH B. SHOWING GROWTH RATES FOR EELS IN A POOR, AN AVERAGE, AND AN ABOVE AVERAGE WATER WITH RESPECT TO THE RANGE BAND SHOWN IN GRAPH A.



SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE SPECIMEN GROUP

NUMBER OF HRS. PER EEL CAUGHT	1	8	20
AVERAGE WEIGHT	14oz	2lb	4lb 4oz

It would be unwise to draw firm conclusions from the limited data available but it should be noted that the majority of the eels caught in any of the 3 waters fall into a weight range band. The higher the average weight the smaller the quantity of eels in the water. Up until now we have not mentioned the age of the fish and this is probably the only true way of determining growth potential but as we are purely anglers and not biologists or scientists we feel it is unneccessary to cut up every eel we catch and carry out microscopic inspection of the operculum to determine the age of the eels we are catching. Looking at the results in a purely speculative manner we have made the following conclusion. Assuming that most eels spend a similar length of time in fresh water it is possible that in each water we caught fish of a similar age range. We feel that if smaller eels (i.e. younger eels) were in the waters we would have caught them more easily than the big ones. It is not unreasonable to suspect that the eels in water A took the same amount of time to reach 2lb as the ones in water C took to reach 5lb. The facts available certainly point to this sort of difference in potential of growth. We now give a length [illegible] to denote its potential.

The lower the index the higher the [illegible]

These are our initial conclusions but are subject to further improvement as we proceed with our project next year.

Discussion

The S.S.S.G. introductory letter is fair enough, in all conscience; a guarded statement that more data are needed before final conclusions can be made. But the footnote is, to say the least of it, interesting. Apparently, the lengthy table of figures which formed the basis of the original article, which was used to support a great castle of airborne theory, and which, to any experienced eel angler was obviously wrong, was drawn entirely from one individual's faulty memory.

Is it not irresponsible to publish unchecked figures when the precious fishing time of innocent anglers is at stake?

Clearly, the S.S.S.G. have now corrected the faulty data published in Anglers Mail on Nov. 6th, 1974. Their first graph (A) is quite similar to the Anguilla Club graph; remarkably so, in fact, when one considers that the S.S.S.G. have only three waters to go on, whereas we now have nearly a hundred. Graph B, however, is a different kettle of fish, and quite frankly I don't understand it at all. In the accompanying text we are informed that "when plotting a graph of length v. weight..... we found the points to be very scattered.....see graph A." Fair enough, this is what one would expect. But the text then continues saying that by plotting each of the three waters individually they "produced three very smooth curves."

This is a nonsense, for the following reason. On graph B the three curves for the seperate waters scarcely overlap at all. We are also told that the upper and lower limit lines, representing the range of variation observed, are the same for each graph. Both graph A and B contain data from the same three waters. It follows, therefore, that the limit lines near the bottom of the graph must nearly all be derived from water C, the limit lines in the middle must come mainly from water B, and those at the top must be derived <u>entirely</u> from A, since eels from water A do not overlap the others at all. So how can the points for water A simultaneously produce considerable scatter and yet give a smooth curve with no scatter? Either there is scatter, or there is not!

Perhaps, then, the S.S.S.G. curves on graph B are some form of average. Perhaps they have sufficient data to average the lengths of several eels for each weight class. Unfortunately, this cannot be true either. A feature of any form of average is that it lies within the range of the observations (range, unless defined otherwise, means the extreme upper and lower limits of the measurements). But the smooth curve for water A <u>actually crosses</u> the line marked as showing the upper limit for the weight distribution! Something must be wrong here!

The fact that the curves for the three waters on graph B do not overlap leads to the most serious criticism of this work. It is quite unsound to compare LW between the waters shown, because one cannot compare like with like. At best, all one could say is that the <u>small</u> eels of water C are thinner, proportionately, than the <u>big</u> eels of water A. We cannot rule out the possibility that small eels in A might be as thin as those in C; equally, it is possible that any big eels in C might be as fat as those in A.

What graph B does show (if it shows anything at all) is that there is a substantial difference in weight of the eels caught from these three waters. This much must have been obvious to the S.S.S.G. all along; it would be entirely reasonable to say 'I prefer water A because the eels I catch are heavier.' So why fiddle around with spurious LW comparisons when the obvious conclusion is staring one in the face all the time? This is a good example of point 3 in my introductory remarks.

Finally, the discussion at the end of the piece. It is a brave angler who would generalise on data from just three waters and it is not surprising that their conclusions do not accord with more broadly based experience within the Anguilla Club. Anguilla Club records do not, in fact, indicate that very slow waters necessarily produce the biggest eels; rate of catch and size of fish caught are essentially independant of one another (2). Data from otolith reading goes against the suggestion that eels from waters with easy access tend to be the same age as those from waters with difficult access. In fact, eels from accessible waters tend to be younger - hence, possibly, explaining why they are also smaller (1).

What, then, does this S.S.S.G. package amount to? In my opinion, little of value, and something of harm. I doubt whether officials of the Dept. of the Environment would be greatly impressed with this as an example of the specimen hunting fraternity. Worse, though, is the possibility that keen anglers, not familiar with eel fishing, might be led sadly astray by this, and waste time fishing the wrong waters. The National Anguilla Club, and possibly the NASG also, should feel rightly indignant that ill informed and hastily construed opinion is being passed off as the last word in angling expertise.

References

1. Hawkins, A.F., and Swailes, G. (1973) National Anguilla Club Bulletin 10 (1) 17-27.

2. Hawkins, A.F. (1973) National Anguilla Club Bulletin 10 (5) 68-77

SO! YOU WANT A NET

By Arthur Sutton.

I was away from home, attending a four day Conference on Angling. This was a strange part of the country to me and, to while away the time between the Conference sessions, I went window shopping around the local town. After sampling much of the local hostelry, I decided to see if I could find a decent tackle shop. Not one could I find, but on enquiry I was told of a fishing section of a large department store. I soon found the said store and entered, searching for the display of brand new and expensive rods. After a couple of enquiries I found the store in the basement. I entered through glass swing doors bearing a mellowed advertisement for I.C.I. Luron - the Wonder Line (or so it said).

My display of badges on my lapel was scanned by an elderly gent who immediately summoned an assistant to deal with the person he had been

serving and made a bee line for me.

"A very good morning, sir," said the gent, staring intently at my badges. "Can I assist you?"

"Yes," I replied. "I am looking for a large, carp type, landing net." It was the only item of tackle I could think of. I had brought some tackle along in the hope of sampling the local angling facilities, but had forgotten my big net.

"So! You want a net," said the gent. "We will find them on our other counter."

"You have two counters?"

"Yes," said the gent proudly. "We have the finest and best stocked angling department south of John O'Groats. Kindly walk this way."

I did try, but found it a little difficult as his legs formed an almost perfect ellipse. We arrived at the other counter, over which was a large glass case, wherein reposed a "Salmon, 37lbs. caught 1826" - or so the gold lettering stated. Actually, it was a sea trout and about 9½lbs in weight. Further back, adorning the wall at the rear, was the most moth eaten assortment of landing nets and warped frames I had ever laid eyes on.

"What kind of net, sir?" asked the gent.

"A medium carp net," said I, whereupon the gent produced a net, description of which defies me.

"That's a trout net," I said

"But how did you know that, sir?" asked the gent. I was on the point of saying it was because the frame was bent to the shape of a trout, but refrained from doing so.

"Do you belong to a club, sir?" he asked.

I replied: "Yes. The National Anguilla Club."

Hesitation plus a look of bewilderment, then: "And do they sometimes go out fishing, these Anguillae of yours?" A pause, then:"Among their many other well known activities?"

I said that they did, very occassionally, venture out fishing.

"Those badges, sir," he said in admiration. "I see that you are a baliff. Rotten job that."

"What is?"

"Why, being a baliff. Having to evict people from their homes and taking away their furniture and televisions."

"There are worse jobs," I said, shrugging off his statement. "For instance, my friend castrates camels for a living."

"He's a qualified man, your friend?"

"Not at all," I continued. "He was a window cleaner until a few months ago, and now he travels around from zoo to zoo with his little bag containing two house bricks."

"Two house bricks?" asked the gent, obviously mystified. "How does he perform that delicate operation with two house bricks?"

I described how my friend stood behind the camel with its legs stretched wide and, holding the bricks about twelve inches apart, brought them smartly together with a crunch.

"Oh, my God," said the startled gent. "Doesn't that hurt?"

"Not if he keeps his thumbs outside," I replied. The gent coughed awkwardly.

I offered to buy a long pole with hooks all the way down it, on which hung a variety of items, saying how it would make a good weed rake.

"Any pilchard oil?" I asked.

A diligent searching among the many unmarked cardboard boxes on the shelves, then: "We have some very good reel oil, sir. At the old price, too."

I hastily replied that I particularly wanted pilchard oil.

"Yes," came the considered reply, "I should have known you were going sea fishing. Hence the big net." I had to refrain from saying that I was not going sea fishing and that the big net was for collecting butterflies.

Then followed a period of idle chatter during which I asked if there was any worthwhile fishing in the area. After a period of deliberation he replied: "I do not fish myself, sir, but they do say that the sport has dropped off a little since the big colliery opened up. You see, sir, the water is a little murky."

Murky! One chap, just outside of town, claimed to have struck oil while digging in his rear garden. Turned out to be a seepage from the river!

"What species of fish does the river hold?" I asked.

"Well, sir, my grandfather used to tell of....." I stopped him short, saying that the fish of his grandfather's day were undoubtedly past their best and that I was only interested in the present time. He continued: "There was a good sized codling found dead by the jetty some three years back...."

"Aye, and some dead cats aswell," ventured a passing assistant.

"Well, sir, the local club does hold a match on alternate Sundays," he continued after a stony silence. I later discovered that the local club, now only four members strong, were, in 1974, still fishing the 1936 Knockout Competition, for since that time they had not had a result. All the same, I did find their list of members quite impressive, if somewhat small. Two of them were local Conservators, one was the Head Fisheries Officer and the fourth was the area representative of the Pure Rivers Society!

Still in the shop, but anxious to leave, I asked: "Do you have any number two plit shot?"

"Yes, sir. Indeed yes. Which size number two split shot did you require?"

In desperation, I said: "The largest you have."

I gladly took the offered package which contained a miscellany of lead varying from swan shot to half inch drilled bullets! I paid for same and turned, making for the exit.

"Thankyou for your custom, sir," came the voice, now behind me. "Do tell your friends, and pop in any time you require a net."

MY SEASON - 1974

By Tony Hollerbach.

Being a non member last season, I participated in none of the Club's activities, but my experiences may be of interest to others.

The season started in April. I was close season fishing on the River Nene, at Wellingborough, with a size 2/0 hook as the River Authority demands for close season eel fishing. I was sat there at peace with the world, minding my own business, when along came an official looking chap of about sixty years of age, who introduced himself as a club baliff.

"WHat the 'ell are you doing?" he asked, and I, feeling a bit put out by his manner, explained that I was fishing. Well, if you could have seen his face... Bright red it was, and glowing in the semi darkness of dusk.

"I can see you're b..... fishing, cheeky young b....." he said. "Don't you know its the close season."

By now, my hackles were up, so I retorted: "Of course, I know its the close season, but I'm not fishing for fish, I'm fishing for eels." He looked as if he was going to have a fit.

"Fish is fish and eels are b..... eels," he said, "and I'm going to have your b..... name and address. So stop fishing and give it to me now."

I too was getting madder and madder.

"Look here," I said, pulling out the Nene licence. "Look here, it says:'Fishing for eels is allowed in the Nene area providing that the hook gape is not less than half an inch'."

"Do it?" he said. "Let me see." With that he pulled it from my hand and peered at it closely. "So it does say that, but let's have a look at your hook."

I reeled in to oblige, and he pounced on the hook, tearing off the four poor lobworms. Then he amazed me by whipping out a tape measure - which made me think he had known all along - and measured the gape.

"Ugh, only just. Anyway, don't let me catch you catching anything else, or else....." and with that he strutted off. Needless to say, that session was a complete blank.

Nothing else funny - like that, anyway - happened after that throughout the season.

The next incident I should like to mention is the capture of my best ever eel in July of last year. This happened on the River Ouse at Bletsoe - my favourite spot at that time, due to lack of transport. During the sessions spent at this spot, I had caught a lot of eels between two and three and a half pounds, and even a carp of seven and a half pounds and plenty of bream to five and a half.

I arrived at the water at 21.00 hours, one hour before dusk, and set up a bait rod and caught some baits - mostly three inch bleak. I got myself comfortable erected my umberella, baited up and cast out.

The first run came at 23.00 and resulted in an eel of 2:7. Then followed a long lull with me just half awake. At 02.00 I was woken by the sound of my, somewhat primitive, alarm. I struck, connected with something, stood up and promptly went down again: straight down the bank into the water, which covered

my wellington boots! I picked myself and the rod up and reeled in to find nothing on the end.

I then settled down to a cup of tea in the hope that there may be the "cup of tea" bite, but no such luck. Later, I fell asleep having had another two cups of tea and landed a bream and another eel of two pounds. I was woken by a rattling sound, at about 4.30 - just as dawn was coming up.

On awaking, I found that my buzzer had packed up and that the rattling, which was quite loud, was being caused by the rod bouncing up and down in the rests. The fish had taken about twenty yards of line. I struck and there then followed the most arm aching, line twanging battle I have ever had which lasted fully fifteen minutes. Finally I landed my best ever eel. A specimen of 5:4.

Needless to say, I look forward to many such captures in the company of the great bunch of common aim chaps in the National Anguilla Club.

BRA LAKE - PETERBOROUGH

By Brian Crawford.

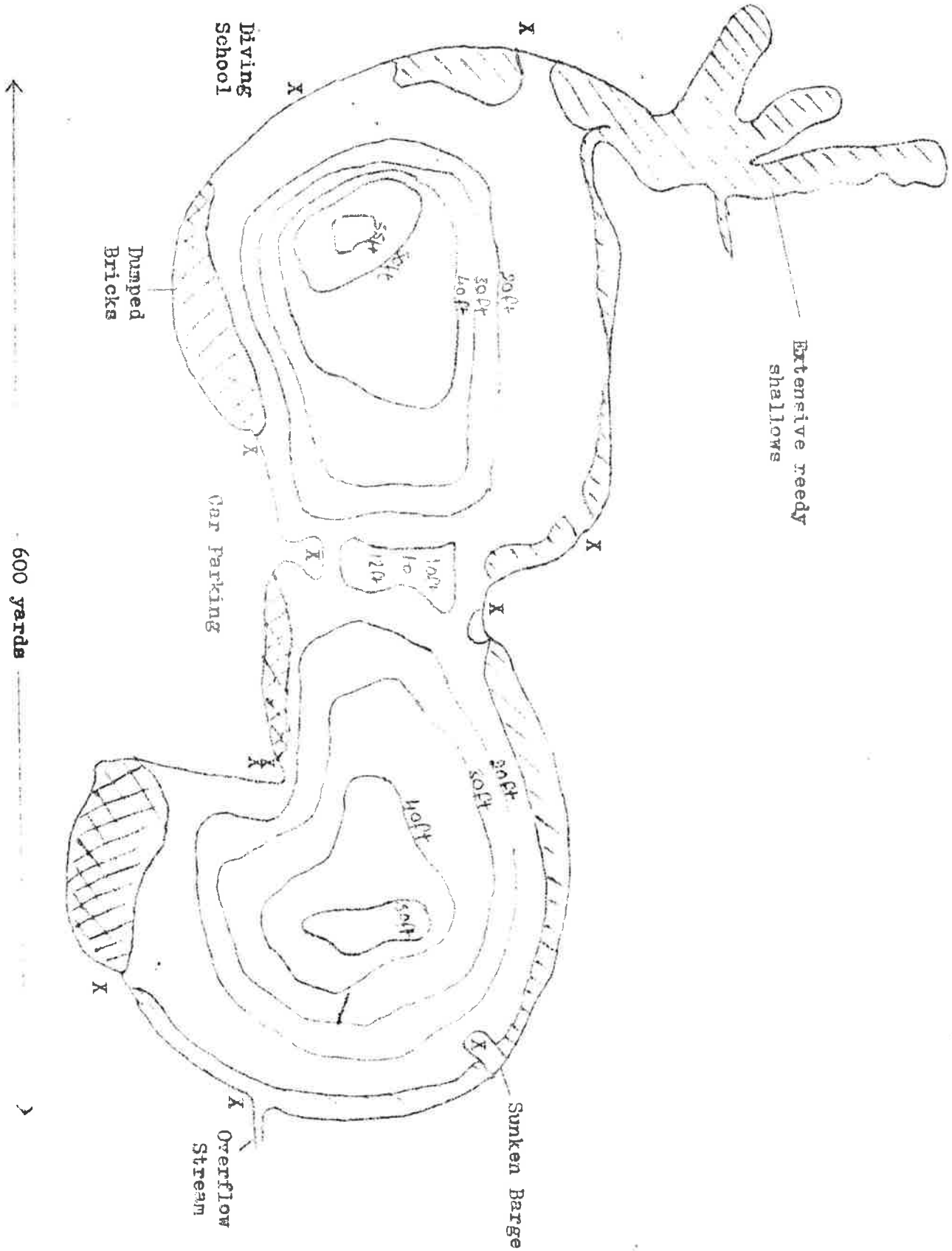
The reason I am presenting this article on what I hope will become my second home this season, is to indicate a few of the peculiarities of this much neglected water.

The funny thing is that I was invited to fish the water by the Baliff who also presented me with a complimentary season ticket for all the London Brick pits. At first, I suspected the worst and never bothered to fish "his" pit, but stuck to my determined aim to fish Butlers. After 15 sessions at Butlers with little to show for them, I decided to give this other pit a try - very reluctantly as it was an unknown pit as far as the Club was concerned.

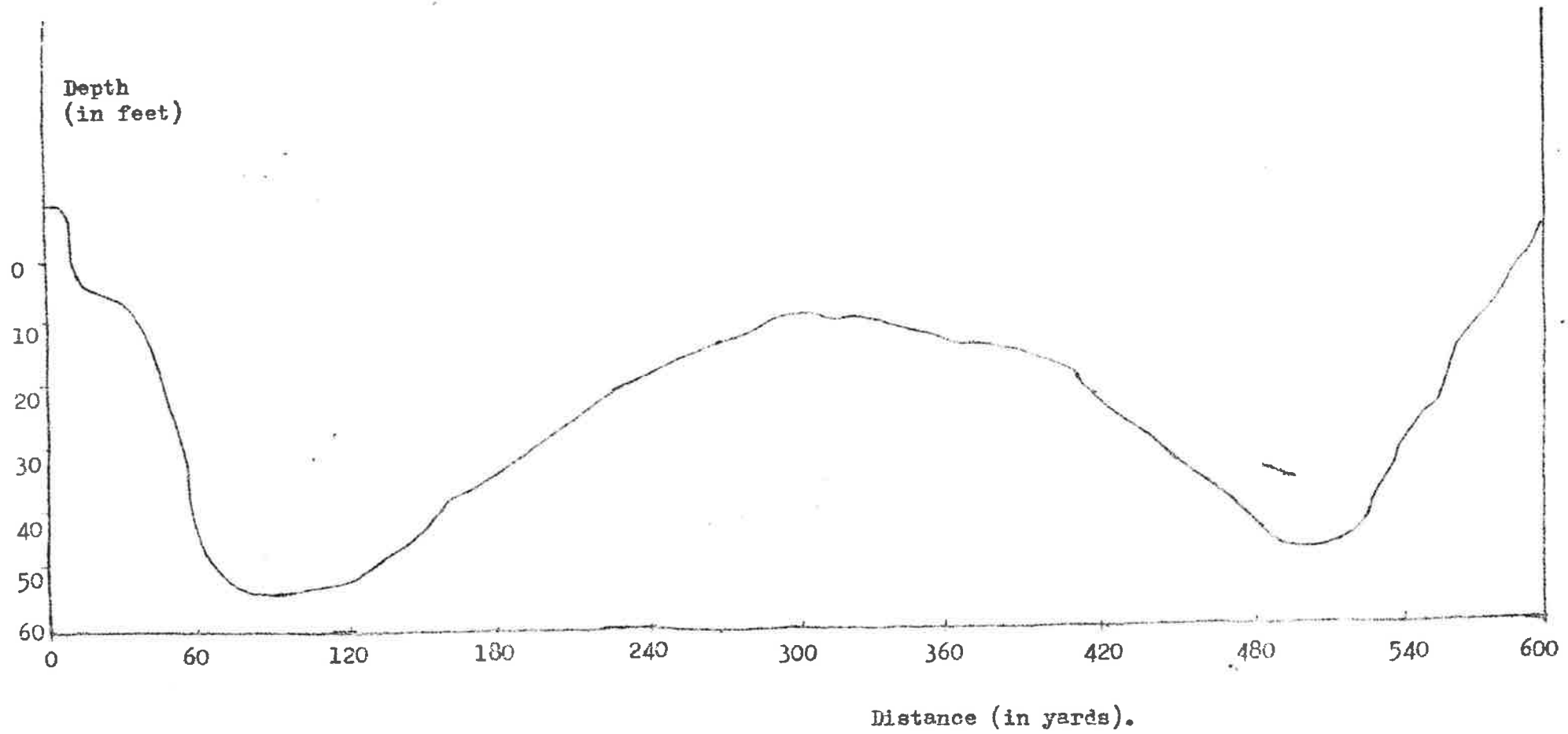
My first session was in the first week of August 1974, just before the Bala trip. During this first session, fishing the submerged ridge, I had about a dozen runs, missing most in the dense weed that plagues all this pit. However, I did land an eel of 2lb plus, and another of the same quality the next session.

Nothing remarkable, perhaps, but I spent some time chatting to a few local lads and a very interesting picture emerged. I changed my swim and found a very productive one just as the season was drawing to a close. Not before I had contacted a large fish that strained my tackle to the limit - and eventually past it. It was a struggle to hold it with my 3lb test curve rod, 386 reel and 20lb line. I had on a twelve inch trace of the Black Seal nylon covered wire to a size one stainless steel hook, baited with dead bleak. After managing to get it almost to the bank on two occassions, all went slack: my line had been bitten through above the swivel. Almost one hour later a similar fish was on, only this time, the result was a shed hook. I suspected pike possibly, as the water did produce one of 31lb a year or so ago, and there are several doubles caught each season.

BRA LAKE


Diving School
Dumped Bricks
Car Parking
Extensive reedy shallows
Sunken Barge
Overflow Stream
600 yards

BRA LAKE - Cross Section



Other fish witnessed are: bream to 10lb, tench 7-8lb, carp 20-30lb, roach 2-3lb, chub 5lb, perch 4lb, rudd 3lb, and eels to 5:12 (best landed in recent years).

In fact, Bra Lake does seem to be the ideal specimen hunter's water. The baliff is a very keen angler, and he and several of his friends got together when a few of the brick pits were filled in, and netted out the better specimens. Other local waters were tapped and creamed off. The result? Well, the list above is certainly interesting. There have been some fantastic catches from this water and a chat with the Baliff, Gerald Green, will work any of you up, and its all true.

There are one or two snags to the water though - literally. The water is about sixty years old and like all local brick pits is a veritable jungle of thick bottom weed. It is easy enough to get bites, but few fish are landed, particulaly eels and tench. However, one or two swims are productive and a forty pound bag of bream and tench to five pound is not exceptional. The point is that with all the rivers locally, the Nene, Welland and all the drains, most local anglers are matchmen. The only other bodies one sees at this pit are the odd one or two other night anglers after the big bream and tench and, occassionally a few teenagers.

It is a very difficult water to fish and requires the strongest of tackle. I need not tell you that I hope to put in quite a bit of time there. It takes me about ten minutes from my home to get there so it is quite handy. Baits are very hard to catch there, but they are present in large numbers. However, with the Nene - bursting with bleak - also ten minutes away, that's no problem. I have already begun to build up a stock of baits in my fridge. And, as I have said before, I agree with the approach suggested by Graham Booth for weedy waters, and will use sections of fish and instant strike rigs. This, of course, should lead to my being able to return many of the eels I catch. Perhaps this year I will be able to overcome the BRA - Brian's Record Anguilla

Any other members of the Club are, as always, welcome to join me in a session or two. It gets a bit lonely on one's own at a water all the time. Dick Barrett has indicated that he will be joining me for a few sessions as he has no decent waters near him. So, perhaps we might meet on the bank.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Concerning AJS' transmitter type bite alarm - How far should we go, Bull. 12.1. I have contemplated this type of system myself for a long while, but it seems to have one serious disadvantage; the receiver must be left on permanently in the hope that the detector unit may transmit at some stage during the proceedings This may be tolerable on an active night, but it might be just the last straw on the more customary blank. Not only have you caught no eels, but you have a flat battery to replace as well. Batteries are not cheap these days; in fact, they are downright expensive.

Has Arthur any way round this problem?

Yours,
Alan Hawkins,
Winnersh, BERKS.

EEL TRAPPING AND CONSERVATION

By Tony Hollerbach.

Having read Steve Hope's article on netting I have been prompted to contribute to this subject. First and foremost, let me stress that we, the National Anguilla Club, must, as a group, do something to stop the menace of trapping. Not only does trapping take eels out of the water for good, but it also upsets the balance of nature in our ponds and rivers. We are, of course, all aware of this, but it does not hurt to remind ourselves now and then.

To start with, I have never met an eel trapper or found any net belonging to same, but I have, on three occassions, in this area (Northants) alone, come across a similar, but different, kind of menace to the netsman: the "night-liner". This fellow has a rig made up as follows: thin cord or 30 to 40lb braided sea line. Attached to this are some 20 or 30 hooks set some twelve inches apart. The hooks are baited up and the whole thing tied securely to a tree on the bank and strung across the river.

I found one of these lines strung across the River Ouse to which were attached 27 hooks. On these hooks were seven eels, some perch and bream. They were all in a terrible condition; indeed, two of the eels had gorged the hooks - they were all trebles - right down and were badly ripped and bleeding and had to be killed. A bream was already dead. The rest of the fish were released from the treble hooks, and swam off in a pitiful state.

Since that chance finding I now always, when on an eel session, walk up the bank looking to see if I can find more of these things. So far I have found two more of these particularly vicious set ups. I have never caught a "Nightliner" in person, although I would dearly love to.

I have an idea for tracing and clobbering these fellows. It is that each member should enquire and look around in his own area and send any information to a central point, eg. our Secretary or Chairman. Once we have the evidence, we, as a Club, can get stuck in to do something to stop the menace. Apart from that, all members should take a good look about when on an eel trip to see if there are any of these insidious devices - from experience I can tell you that they are usually very well hidden - and put them out of action.

Now on to something else that may assist in conservation and make the eels' lot a little easier. How does the idea of barbless hooks appeal to you? They do work and they are much more humane. Let me explain.

You cannot always prevent the eel from swallowing the bait fairly deeply and it is quite a job to try to remove the hook without damaging the poor thing. My method is to file the barb almost flat so that the hook can be removed with the minimu of fuss. There is not too much danger of eels being lost using this type of hook. When playing an eel you cannot afford to give it any slack line, can you? You know what happens, I am sure, if you do so. Anyway, the eel seldom runs straight at you, but normally pulls straight back all the time; so there is little danger of a barbless hook being slipped.

As I said, this method works OK for me, and if others are willing to try it, we will find out if it is as good a hook as the normal barbed hook. I'm all for anything that will make poor Anguilla's lot better.

This idea may have already been suggested by a member before now, but if it has not, here you are. I should like to know what people think.

To conclude this piece on conservation - not only of eels, but of Nature as a whole - I should like to use a poem.

Will It Go Away

Concrete jungles, stones of woe,
Where did all the riverbanks go.
The conservationist - he lies at rest.
He was alone - he did his best.
The multitude of men they saw
In their destruction not a flaw.
The willow fronds and the reeds,
Some are gone now - for the matchman's needs?
When did it happen? Was it you, or was it me?
Why did we ignore the conservationists plea?
I hear you say: "It's not like that."
Look around my friend, it's not old hat!
You'll see the changes, though subtle they be;
They're not meant to be seen, at the moment, by thee.
But look and think, it's not quite the end.
We must start to act and not pretend.
To fight these men who walk in the dark,
From destroying the country and park.
The choice is our's to do or die;
It's a thing where we can all act - or at least try.
Don't leave it too long or it'll be too late
To save our heritage from this avoidable fate,
And walk together in hope that we can mend,
Or else this poem's beginning will become its end.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I am, or used to be, a man of few words. So, please excuse yet another letter from the "Sec".

With reference to the Bulletin 12.1 (January 1975), how delightful and satisfying it was to see the action our Chairman - Brian Crawford - had taken in offering the Presidency of the Anguilla Club to our ex Chairman, Alan Hawkins. Alan has surely served the Club well. Undoubtedly so in his office as Chairmen, but no less so as an ordinary angler seeking large eels. His influence is felt in some way by us all, and the ability to do so is only given to really great men. Dr. Alan Hawkins has been successful in furthering the work done earlier by Dr. Terence Coulson and will, I trust, continue to give us all the benefit of his profound thinking. I offer Alan my congratulations and add to them those expressed to me, as Secretary, by several other members.

Before leaving the subject, it was good to see the way Brian acted as Chairman. Who can doubt that he will be, and already is, an excellent successor to Alan.

One other subject, Mr. Editor, I have been asked to make available the schematic drawing of my bite alarm, so that members can carry out any work necessary. I know that some members have suffered from fractured cables, and

the drawing should assist them should they wish to replace the cables. Incidentally, I would sooner replace the cables as a matter of course every year than suffer the inconvenience of much larger cables which are, although of longer life, a damned nuisance at times.

Congratulations are due to you, Mr. Editor, for the renewed lease of life and regular appearance of our Bulletin.

Yours sincerely,
Arthur J Sutton,
(General Secretary)
15, Westoe Road,
London, N9 OSH

Please see schematic diagram overleaf.