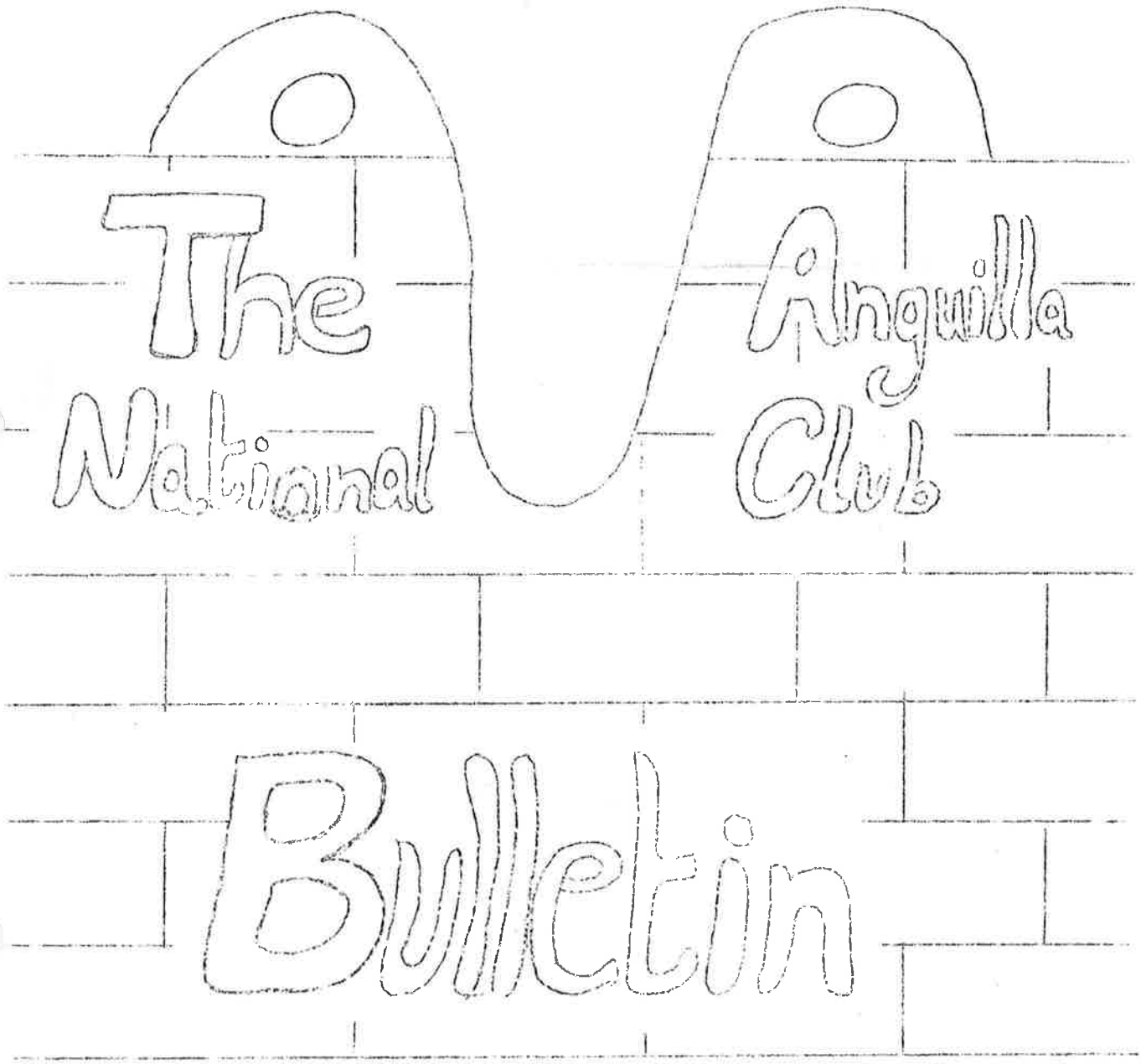
WOT, NO EELS!



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EDITORIAL

I have decided that most of this country's three million or so anglers are schizophrenic. You may well wonder as to how I have arrived at this somewhat strange conclusion. Now, with the arrival of the close season, the opportunity arrives for us to do all those little tasks that our angling activities preclude us from doing. The most, dare I say, popular activity seems to be painting. But we also profess to make use of the break to repair and prepare, for the coming season, our tackle. Above all else, however, we look forward with great anticipation to June 16th - the glorious sixteenth. For what would fishing be without the first day of the season?

Alas, we are not satisfied with that. When the close season is almost upon us, the question goes round: "Where is there any close season fishing?" Hands delve deep into empty pockets to fork out the necessary loot for the highly coveted close season ticket (I confess to be guilty of this mal-practice.).

Now, you may say, and you would be right in saying, that this does not show symptoms of Schizophrenia. It does show symptoms of an overdose of hypocrisy, for I know many a man who holds the 16th to be some form of pagan religous festival, demanding an unofficial bank holiday; yet this same man will travel many a mile in order to avoid the statutory close season. But Schizophrenia is displayed. The angler has two distinct and opposing personalities. The one revels and delights in the break; it goes out of its way to phone or visit fellow anglers to tell that it is pleased that the season is over, yet is still itching to cast out again on that sacred day: the other is the black side of the angler. This personality is hidden in the nether regions of the mind for most of the year, yet between the months of March and June it comes to the fore, growing stronger with every passing day. It lusts and craves for a rod in the hand; it is fed by the desire for fish, and the longer it is deprived of its piscine meal, the stronger it becomes so that by the beginning of June it often succeeds in persuading its owner to go out and poach. In some weak willed individuals this ghoul comes to the fore, and its appetite is satiated by the purchase of the close season ticket.

In our highly technological and urban society, the everyday pressures upon us are so great that we tend to lose the ability to cope with the darker side of our fishing mind. I propose that we are all miniature Dr Jeckylls all week, going about our daily routine; but come the weekend, we turn into Mr Hide, seeking new and exciting ways by which we can catch fish in the close season.

DAVID SMITH

TACKLE TIPS

By Brian Crawford.

Over the years I have picked up the odd tip here and there, the idea being to make life a little easier or more comfortable. I find that most shop bought items do not conform to my requirements and hence I tend to adapt them to suit myself, as do many other anglers.

I think it would be a good idea to put mine and other anglers' ideas into print in the Bulletin, to give, I hope, inspiration to other members and to encourage them to print theirs, and by so doing make a regular feature in the Bulletin. I feel sure every member has at least one tip or idea to put forward (an article is not needed) and the editor can fit them in anywhere in each publication.

1. Brolly Tent

There are shop bought lengths of material or polythene ready made to convert a brolly into a tent. These are usually very highly priced and, from what I have seen, inadequate. The alternatives are to either use a tarp of either polythene or canvas, or to construct one's own. The former case should be very simple, and a tarp is easy to get from a haulage firm for about a pound: the possible dissadvantage is the weight and bulk to be carried. For the latter, I found it simple to construct from the following: I bought a blue polythene sheet of pool liner from Woolworths, nine feet square, costing about 80 - 90p. This was cut into two to form two sheets 9ft x 4½ft. These were joined together using 1½" PVC adhesive tape from Woolworths, giving one sheet 18ft x 4½ft.

The next step was to whip on to the brolly rib, two inches from its tip, half inch curtain rings, and then to buy a packet of Swish nylon curtain rings, or a similar type. These are inserted into holes in the polythene sheet along one side at correct measured lengths, the holes being reinforced with more adhesive tape. This, when erected, will give a strong circualar tent, but whose shape can be adjusted to suit by adjusting the hooking on to the rings. The bottom edge can be pegged down to give extra firm anchorage, and more adhesive tape along the bottom would prove advantageous.

I have used a tent of this type for three years and found it excellent; it folds up very compact and is light to carry. The only real snag is the job of folding it. This can be tricky at times, but is easily done by two people.

2. Brolly Storm Cover.

To really make the brolly tent stormproof here is an idea I borrowed from Alan Hawkins at Fawsley Lake in 1971. He used a sheet of polythene tailored to go over the top of his brolly, with a hole in its middle for the brolly pole and guy lines to poke through. It is fixed to tips of the brolly ribs by stout rubber bands secured to the sheet, again reinforced with adhesive tape. This two has given excellent service for two seasons. It is light and folds compact.

3. Eel Measure.

When a good eel is captured, the fun of measuring it begins: trying to keep it still and in a straight line for

measuring poses some problems. Arthur Smith had a very good solution for this, as I saw again at Fawsley. He used a length of PVC guttering, blocked off at one end, and with a PVC tape measure stuck inside the bottom and varnished over. This does the job admirably, and is an ingenious idea.

4. Trace Holder.

Another good idea of Arthur's I saw is useful to those who like to fish using a long trace. He had extended a shop bought trace holder by sawing it in half and then joining it together again, but with a piece of wood inserted between the halves. To anyone contemplating this idea, I would suggest they contact Arthur for the correct details.

5. Night Lights.

I always carry a couple of night lights, bought from Woolworths, with me on my night sessions. I find them very handy for when I indulge in my frequent midnight cooking sessions. They give a good, but not too bright light, are stable and take up little room.

Well, these are just a few of the tips I know, and hope they may be of use to one or two of you. I look forward to reading about some of yours in the future.

A COMPARISON BETWEEN ABBERTON RESERVOIR AND STANLEY PARK LAKE

By Alan Hawkins.

Eel fishing being what it is, it is quite rare for members to catch more than a handful of eels from their project water in a single season. Very often October arrives with no more than about ten fish in the bag; we have probably spent many long hours catching them, and we want this small sample to tell us as much as it can about the future potential for the water in question. But small samples are quite limited in what they can do. We can prepare tables such as those shown on the pages of this Bulletin, and, if we have taken otoliths, we may be able to reinforce our estimates based on the weights ofthe fish by considerations of growth rate. Never-the-less, with numbers of about ten there is quite a good chance of being wrong.

Sometimes, however, members turn in such catches of eels that the Club analyst is no longer in the cramped world of small numbers. Large numbers open up new and exciting fields for study, and, I believe, when they occur we should spotlight them so we can all learn some new ideas about eel fishing.

Last summer, three members contributed to catches of this sort. Two of our newer members, Chris Davy and Terry Jefferson extracted no fewer than 73 eels from Abberton reservoir, while, even more remarkably, John Watson took 72 fish in an almost non-stop blitz on Stanley Park during the first two months of the season. Thus, although I have not prepared the general report on the 1972 results yet, I have singled these two waters out for special study in this article. Naturally, the conclusions will be of special interest to the

three members concerned - this is only right in view of their exceptional efforts in getting the data - but I believe it will also be of interest to us all.

Perhaps the first thing to say is that both Abberton and Stanley Park were known to the Anguilla Club before 1972. From Abberton, a tally of 111 eels has accumulated over the years, while the previous total for the park lake was 24. Unfortunately, the details of these fish are still held by the previous chairman; hence, the past medians and quartiles appear in the lists on these pages, but I am unable to go further and add last years results to the earlier ones.

Never-the-less, we can compare medians and quartiles of the pre-1972 catch with those of the fish taken last summer. This is set out in table 1, below.

TABLE 1. Old and new results; all baits.

	ABBERTON		STANLEY PARK	
	1967-71	1972	1967-71	1972
LQ	2:6	2:2	0:12	1:3
Median	2:14	2:11	1:1	1:9
UQ	3:4	3:4	1:7	2:7

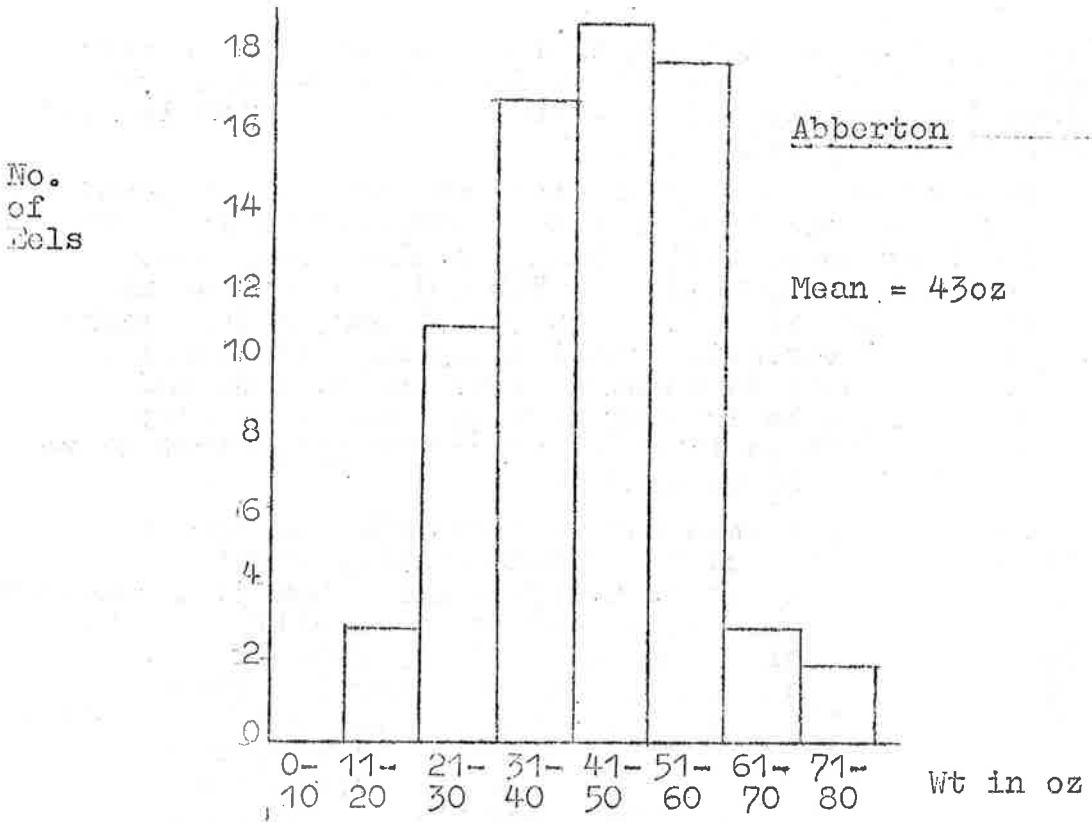
At Abberton res., it looks as if Chris and Terry fared much the same, or very slightly worse, than previous Anguilla Club members. Every single one of the 1967-71 fish was taken on worm and so were all but two of the latest batch, therefore the results are strictly comparable. The reservoir appears to be fishing in a consistent way from year to year, and in terms of medians or quartiles is second only to Greystones as a big eel water.

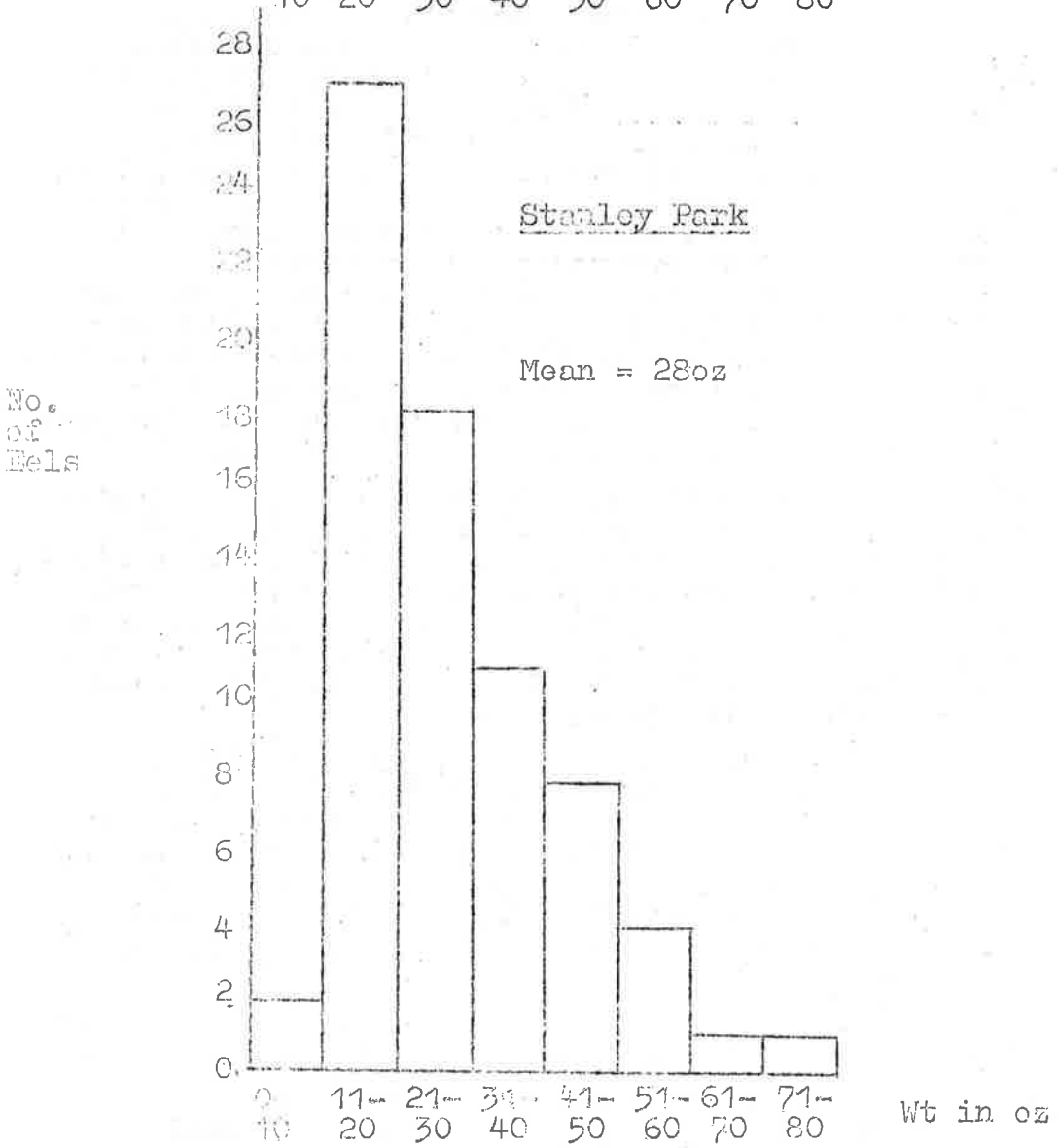
John Watson, however, has improved on past results quite substantially. Although he caught rather more fish on dead-bait than in previous years, this difference in bait usage does not seem to explain the better results, as I shall show at the end of the article. The difference may just be a difference between seasons, but it could also reflect the skill and experience of the angler concerned. Certainly, from his Bulletin article (Sept. 1972, 25-27) we can see that John has made a detailed study of the lake, and tried a number of new ideas last season.

The main point of this article, though, is to show that we can go a bit further than medians and quartiles when we have 70 odd eels to play with. Let us start by thinking about the relative numbers of eels of different weights in the two waters. To make life easier, I have divided the eels up into 10oz weight classes, and plotted the numbers in each 10oz group in the block-diagrams of Fig. 1. Thus, for Abberton, Fig. 1. shows that no eels were caught in the 0 - 10oz group, three were taken from 11 - 20oz, eleven from 21 - 30oz, and so on.

You will notice that the overall shape of the graphs for the two waters is quite different. At Abberton, the numbers rise to a peak in the middle at the 41-50 group, and drop off sharply either side. But at Stanley Park, the numbers rise to a peak close to the start of the graph, in the 11-20oz group, and then taper off very slowly as we climb up the weight

Fig. 1 Weight Distribution of eels in Abberton & Stanley Park





scale. Clearly, the average run of fish at Abberton is much better than that at Stanley Park; in fact, the average (as distinct from the median) weight of the reservoir fish is 2:11 while at Stanley it is only 1:10.

But what about 4lb plus fish? Or five or six pound plus? Well, the 73 eels from Abberton contained no less than five eels of 4lb or more, while Stanley yielded only two. Neither water granted our anglers a 5lb eel, so we have no figures to go on. But if we look at the shapes of the graphs in Fig.1, a rather interesting possibility suggests itself. As we said, the decrease in numbers as we ascend into the realms of really big eels is much more gradual at Stanley than Abberton. So when we think of eels over 5lb, might there not be a better chance at Stanley Park?

At first sight this may seem absurd. Of course Abberton is a better big eel water than Stanley Park! Fortunately, however, we can do a little more than just speculate about this; we can go some way to putting this silly idea to the test by making use of the statisticians' friend, the Normal distribution. As you may remember from the first otolith article, this is a mathematical formula which describes a 'bell shaped' curve of a particular type - a type which fits a large number of natural distributions such as the heights of men or, as I shall show, the weights of eels. I don't want to explain in this detail: the arithmetic alone takes an hour or so on an electronic calculator. So let me say simply that we use our data to calculate appropriate values for our formula; we then see if our formula works by back calculating values and comparing them with the actual ones. If the correspondence is good, we can have confidence in our formula and use it to calculate expected numbers of eels outside our actual observations, in this case, the most likely frequency of 5 and 6lb eels. Of course, we can't go too far with this, because the further we stray from our actual measurements, the more uncertain our predictions become. It would be absurd, for instance, to try and predict the numbers of 10lb eels from a sample which only just creeps over 4lb. In any case, there may well not be any eels that big!

All right. From Fig.1, Abberton eels follow a nice bell shaped curve, so we can use our formula straight away. Stanley Park eels don't, but we can make them do so by a simple, and perfectly legitimate process of transforming the actual weights into a thing called logarithms. Again, without going into unnecessary details, we can see that this works by looking at Fig.2, where the transformed values for Stanley Park now show a nice symmetrical distribution.

So far, so good, I hope. Now let us see if the method is any use by looking at tables 2 and 3. In these I have set out the actual percentage of eels above or below a given weight, and compared these figures with the percentages our formula says there ought to be. As you can see, the correspondence between the actual and predicted frequencies is quite remarkably good; in no case do they differ by more than a few percent.

Since the formula seems to fit the data, let us try and predict the most likely numbers of bigger eels. For these the results came out as:-

At Abberton, one 5lb fish in every 750 landed
one 6lb fish in every 50,000 landed

Fig. 2 Transformed weights for Stanley Park.

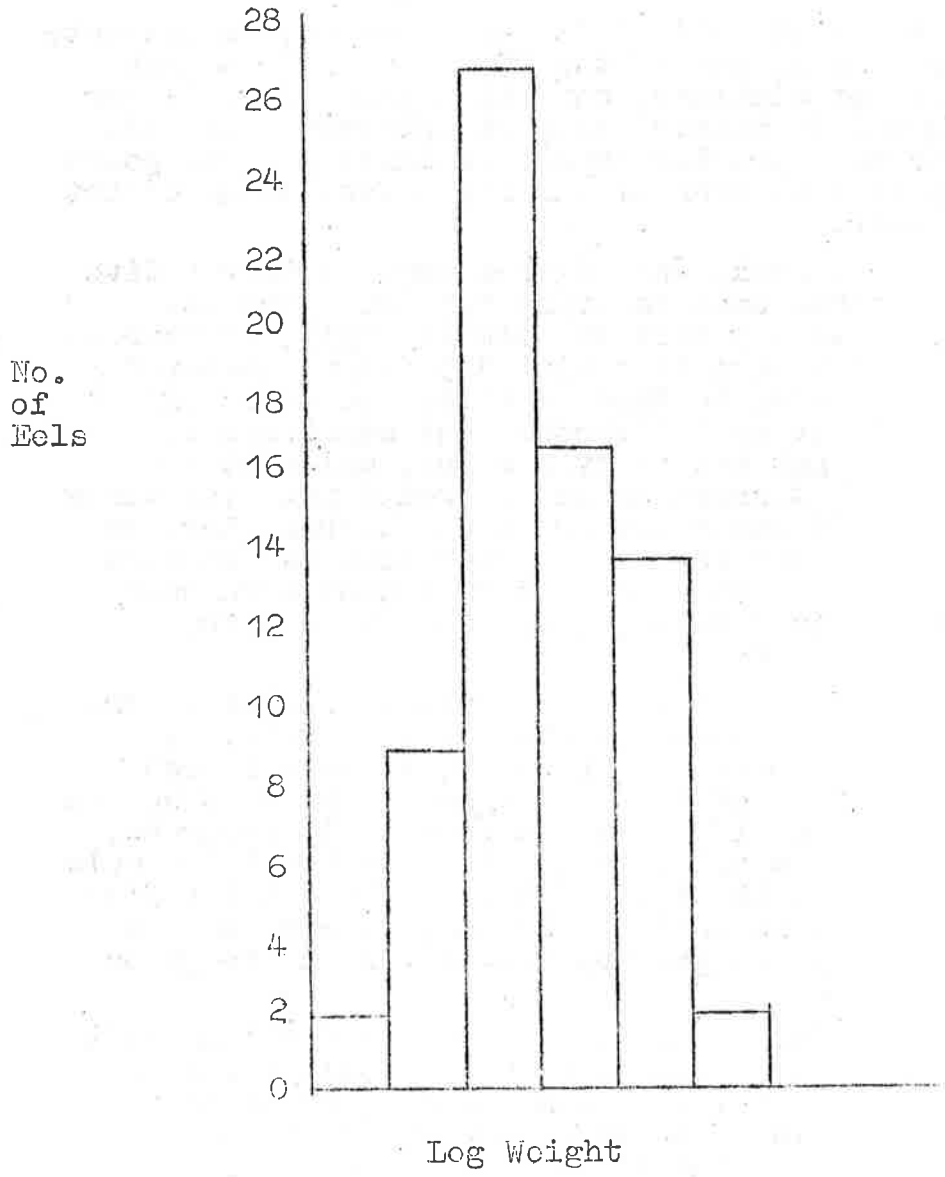


TABLE 2. Observed and calculated values for Abberton.

	% Below (oz)					% Above (oz)			
	1:2	1:9	1:15	2:5	3:1	3:8	3:14	4:4	4:10
Actual	3	6	19	30	37	14	7	3	1
Predicted	2	7	16	31	31	16	7	2	1

TABLE 3. Observed and calculated values for Stanley Park.

	0:6	0:12	1:0	1:4	2:0	2:9	3:4	4:3
Actual	3	7	16	35	30	20	7	1
Predicted	2	7	16	31	31	16	7	2

At Stanley, one 5lb fish in every 125 landed
one 6lb fish in every 400 landed

Thus the best estimate we can provide, an estimate which uses every single one of the 70 odd eels from each water to make its predictions, says that there is a better chance of a big eel in Stanley than at Abberton. Indeed, there appears to be a greater chance of landing a six pound fish from the park lake than of landing a five pound effort from the reservoir.

At Stanley Park, the figures suggest that a five pound eel should occur once in every 125 fish caught. This does not mean to say that it actually will, of course. It is rather like having a dice with 125 sides, numbered 1 - 125, and then trying to throw a five. We would expect to get about one in every 125 throws; but sometimes we would get lucky and get two or even three, while at other times, fortune would dessert us and we would not even throw one. But at least it looks better than Abberton: here the dice has 750 sides! And for a six pound fish the numbers become preposterous, so much so that we cannot have much confidence in the actual value, other than to say the chance is very small indeed.

We may reasonably ask, of course, whether we are justified in building castles in the air like this. I think we are, for two reasons. Firstly, it is the best estimate we can provide of how we are going and what we are likely to achieve; even if it is not completely accurate, it is unlikely to be totally wrong. (Of the total 184 eels from Abberton, I don't think there has yet been a 5lb fish, confirming the chance is small.) Second, it may suggest ways to improve things in the future, or tell us to go to another water!

The point is, you see, that our predictions will only hold as long as we continue to use exactly the same methods. If we change bait, or time of day, or casting distance - anything, in fact, to change the pattern of eels caught - then our predictions may also change. At Abberton, the results apply strictly to long range worm tactics in the day. Now, there may be plenty of 5 and 6lb eels in this water - I don't know, but perhaps Chris and Derry might like to comment - and if there are, a change in method may favour these bigger eels and so reduce the odds to a more reasonable level. Certainly, if they go on fishing in the same way, it looks a bit unlikely that they will see much increase in the weight of eels in their nets. Mind you, they are quite big enough already, especially when you have as many sour grapes to throw around as me!

For Stanley Park, we do have a few more facts to go on, because John did spend some time using other baits, a combination of conventional dead-baits and the innards of bream - 'slimes', as he so delicately calls them. From the results of five years of session reporting, the Club has accumulated plenty of evidence to show that eels of over about 2lb generally prefer fish baits, while their smaller brethoren prefer worms. So if Stanley does hold a greater number of big eels than the overall data suggest, the fish baits should show a faster rate-of-catch for big eels than the worm baits. At least, so long as Stanley Park eels behave like other eels.

I have summarised the appropriate facts in Table 4, below. Although the number of eels caught on fish, or bits of fish, is rather small to draw hard and fast conclusions, there does not seem to be any evidence that John can improve the quality of the catch by a more selective bait of this type. In fact, all that John has acheived, to date, by changing bait, is to catch less eels!

Table 4, Rate of catch v bait at Stanley Park.

	Total E	Total RH	RH/E	RH/2+	RH/3+
Worm	62	282	4.5	15.6	47
Fish	10	173	17.3	29	86

Of course, this may mean no more than that there is yet a further miracle bait that will unfailingly catch monster eels in this water. Somehow, though, I doubt it.

It is possible, I fear, that all this article will do is put three good anglers off fishing these waters ever again. This would be a great pity, and, in any case, statistics are only there to be proved wrong. What I really want to do is to estimate how things are going now, so that we may come up with ideas for improving things in the future. If, indeed, they need improving, for Chris, Terry and John may be well satisfied with the fish they are catching now. And why not? But, if nothing else, it gives us a new slant on what we may mean when we talk about a good eel water; we all used to think Abberton was a fantastic place, and so it is in most respects, but for <u>really</u> big eels we may not be quite so sure now.

RECIPES

By A Cook.

"Eff me, if it ain't a bleedin' bream!"
So the cry goes round on many an Anguilla Club trip.

"Stamp on the bleeder" is often the reply that issues forth from the dozen or so brollys around. But, gentlemen, here is a much better way of disposing of that unwanted guest..... Yes, eat it. I must confess that I have never indulged in consuming this particular "poison" (that should read poisson), but a Rhodesian friend of mine says that they make good eating. So here are two ways of cooking it.

Grilled Bream

Bream (8oz per person)
2 tablespoons olive oil
Anchovy sauce

Clean, wash and thoroughly dry the bream, but do not scale it. Brush both sides of the fish with oil. Grill under a hot grill, 10 minutes each side until very well cooked and browned. Serve with anchovy sauce.

Bream with sweet and sour sauce

2½ - 3lb bream
3 chopped onions
3 celery stalks
pepper and salt
pinch of garlic salt
hot water for covering the fish

Sauce:

1 tablespoon caster sugar
½ pint fish stock
1 tablespoon chopped onions
juice of one lemon
1 tablespoon flour
2 tablespoon water
1 tablespoon raisins
1 tablespoon sultanas
pepper and salt.

Use either whole fish or fillets. Cut in convenient sizes for serving. Put them in a stewpan with the other ingredients just covered by the hot water. Cover the saucepan and bring to the boil, then simmer gently until the bream is done (about 15 - 20 minutes). When done, lift the fish on to a hot serving dish and keep warm while you prepare the sauce.

Sauce: Put sugar into a strong saucepan and place over a low flame until it melts and becomes golden brown. Slowly add the fish stock, then add chopped onions and lemon juice. Mix the flour smoothly with the water, add to the sauce and bring to the boil, stirring all the time. Now add raisens and sultanas. Season to taste. Simmer gently for another 10 minutes. Pour the sauce over the fish and serve.

I suppose the biggest bug-bear with eel fishing is the kamakasi bootlace that, against all odds, manages to impale itself upon a hook with a gape larger than its mouth imbedded in a bait several times its size: you know the type I mean, the layman's six pounder! They are not worth cooking because they are too small. But their days are numbered.

Eel soup

2lb bootlaces
2oz butter
1 dessertspoonful salt
pepper
½oz sugar
1 onion, finely chopped
parsley and bay leaf
1¼ pints water
1oz flour

Clean the eels and cut into 2 inch pieces ½ inch thick, and put them in a stewpan with the butter, salt, pepper, sugar, onion, parsley, bay leaf and ¼ pint of water. Cover and put on a low heat for about 30 minutes without stirring. Then mix the flour with a pint of water. Pour this on to the fish and simmer for about 20 minutes, stirring gently now and then so not to break the pieces of fish. Correct the seasoning, and serve the strained soup with the pieces of fish in it.

ABBERTON RESERVOIR EELS

By Terry Jefferson & Chris Davy.

Former Club member, Jim Gibbinson, once said: "Abberton reservoir must be paved with eels." After three seasons in pursuit of the eels, we feel inclined to agree with him. The average size of the eels we have encountered so far is quite amazing when compared with other well known eel waters in the country. Since we started there, we have taken over 180 eels between us, with the average weight somewhere between 2:8 and 3:0. This season alone, we took half a dozen eels in excess of four pounds, including our biggest eel, to date, which weighed 4:12. About 75% of the total number of eels caught have been in excess of three pounds. This should give you some idea of the tremendous sport we have enjoyed.

One of the strange characteristics of the water that we noticed this season was the failuer of runs to materialise until late morning earlier in the season, but as the season progressed, the runs developed earlier and earlier. The runs experienced are quite something. Those we had early in the morning, late in the season were, without exception, real "screamers", with the line dissappearing off the spool at a tremendous rate of knots; and these runs often proved difficult to hit. As the morning progressed, the runs became less frequent, as may be expected, and they also slowed down considerably; in consequence, they were much easier to hit. As the afternoon wore on, the runs speeded up again until late afternoon and evening, when they were as fast as the early morning runs again.

No night fishing is allowed at Abberton, so we normally arrive shortly before dawn, which is the official time, and, more often than not, at least one of us would get a run within seconds of casting out. You must be sure-footed at this hour of the morning and have your wits about you, as the one-in-five concrete slope can be very greasy because of a very damp atmosphere. Many a comic limbo has been acted out by anglers dissappearing under their rods.

Fishing is allowed only on a little more than a mile of bank, owing to the fact that two-thirds of the reservoir's perimeter is a concrete slope with a gradient of one in three, which is far too dangerous to fish off in any conditions. The rest of the bank is reserved for bird tagging and observation. As you can imagine, on a 1500 acre water, this leaves an absolutely huge area totally unfished. We fish from a road section, or causeway, which divides the reservoir. The two sections are connected by a culvert which runs underneath the road. This is about 15ft wide and twenty feet deep. At the low summer level, the depth of water on either side of the road at 80 yards range varys from 15 - 20ft.

The Essex River Authority have their fish traps situated in this culvert which is the only means the fish have of passing from one part of the reservoir to the other. And if you should be fortunate enough to see the traps raised, the sight of the super specimens in the traps makes a really lasting impression.

We saw an eel in the raised traps one day which had us staring in total disbelief. The traps are approxiamately

five feet by five feet by six feet high, and this particular eel had its head touching one end of the trap and touched the other end of the trap with its tail curled round. Its weight must have been in excess of ten pounds, probably nearer twelve or thirteen, making the present record look almost insignificant and the two and three poun eels in with it like bootlaces in comparison.

We fish almost entirely with lobworms as bait, since live and dead baits are all too readily taken by pike for which Abberton is also well known. But that's another story altogether. In case any members are also keen pike anglers, it may interest them to know that the biggest pike removed from Abberton, to our knowledge, was retained in the fish traps and weighed in at a creditable 55lbs. "Nice one, Cyril. Say n'more."

If any members would like to fish Abberton in the coming season, we would be only too happy to give you the address to write to for tickets which cost 50p per day and each angler is limited to one rod only. The only way to really appreciate Abberton is to see the place for yourself. We feel sure that any members who have had the pleasure of fishing there will agree that it is quite an experience.

In the next issue:

A discussion on Abberton and Stanley Park
Dear Beans Hence - a few extracts from Vol 1, No 1.