

## Ilkley Angling Association's experience of creating a wild trout fishery

December 2015



The River Wharfe at Ilkley has been home to an angling club for many years and in the past, fish have been routinely stocked.

In 2011, Ilkley Angling Association took a decision to cease stocking brown trout (they never stocked rainbows) – a decision that was partly based on financial reasons and partly because some of its members felt strongly that their stretch of the river should be managed in as ecologically-sensitive a way as possible. Previously, £500 to £1000 was spent annually on stocking and numbers of fish depended on size, which would normally be between 1lb-2 ½ lb in weight.

The club also introduced a rule that all trout over fourteen inches had to be returned to the river. The idea behind this was to protect the breeding stock for the future. Some years previously, a rule had been introduced that no grayling could be taken at any time of the year.

Work was undertaken to improve the river banks, with willows being planted to provide cover for fish and Himalayan Balsam being cleared to minimise bank erosion.

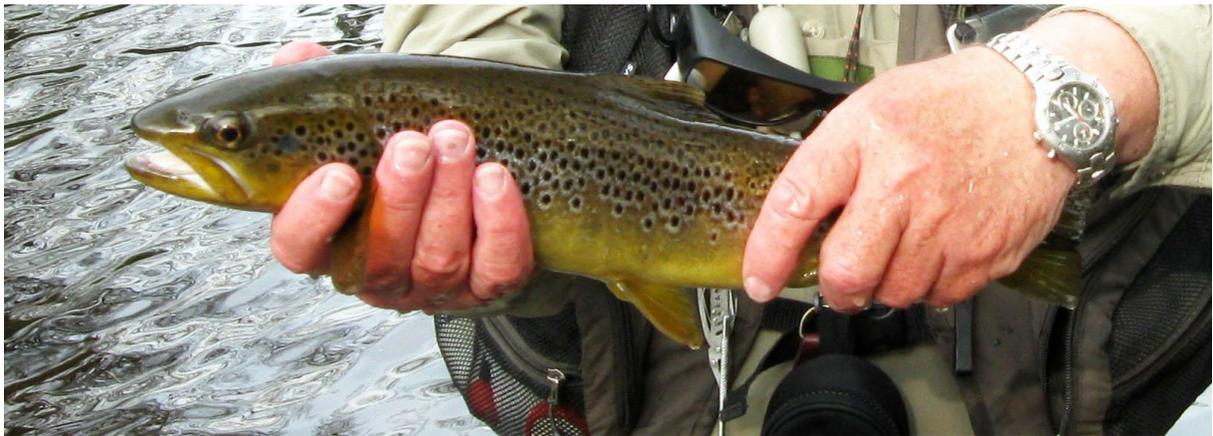
Club President Steve Fairbourn says: “The changes that have happened since then have been very dramatic. Our wild trout - which never seemed to get much bigger than three to four ounces - are now being caught at eight to ten ounces. And the population of trout overall seems to have increased at the same time.

“Our grayling population is also very good. A recent club match on the river at the end of November saw five anglers catch over fifty grayling between them and numerous out-of-season trout to over two pounds. All the trout were released immediately.”

This increase in fish is despite at least one family of otters living on the club's length and a considerable number of goosanders being present on the river.

The club has an active Riverfly Partnership sampling team operating on its length, so can monitor the invertebrates which form an essential part of the food chain for fish – and also provide an indicator of water quality. This has been the case for the past three years.

“When there is a good hatch, the river seems to come alive with rising fish throughout the whole length,” Steve continues. “When we surveyed one of the streams with the Wild Trout Trust, we found good numbers of wild trout to about twelve ounces. We are also looking to make improvements to another stream to boost the trout population.”



“Any money that we can spend on the river in the future will be used to improve the habitat and not on stocking. Going forward, we need to look at why there has been such a dramatic decline in the coarse fish that have always been a natural part of the ecosystem at Ilkley.”

Club membership has increased over the past year and day ticket receipts have been the best on record.