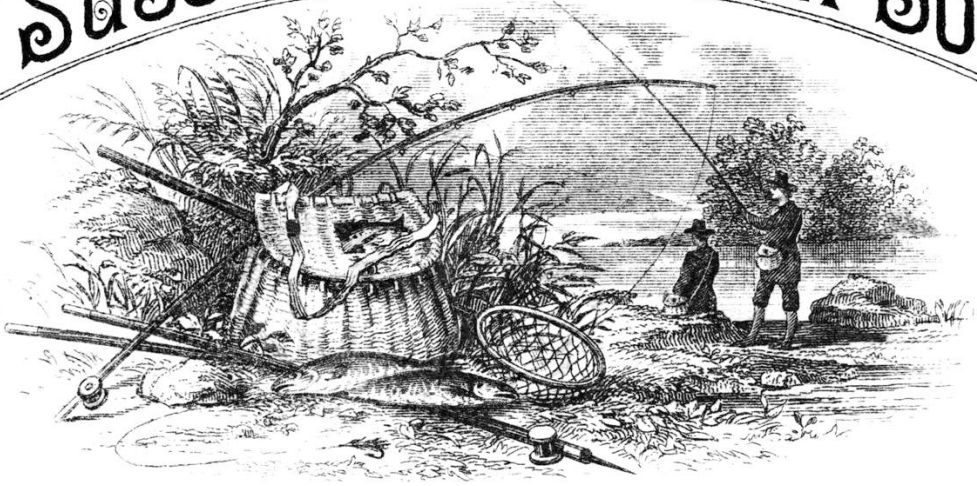


The Sussex Piscatorial Society.



Founded 1891

Sussex Piscator

Annual Magazine of
Sussex Piscatorial Society Ltd.

Issue XIII, Summer 2022



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SPS Archive: Meeting Minutes 1891-2012

As noted in previous issues, John Harris has been conducting research completed in recent years at the East Sussex Record Office. The text of his work chronicling the SPS Committee Meeting Minutes 1891-2012 is now available to any interested member. The hard-copy book version was on display when we met at the 2019 Autumn Social, immediately prior to the pandemic, and John will bring it along to the 2022 Autumn Social -- assuming we're meeting in person again.

The text is a pdf. file and very large so any member interested in a copy should email John at johnandgeliharris@gmail.com in order to request a copy. Any member placing a request should be aware that the file is subject to copyright protection (©John Harris, 2020). Several members have already requested and received copies. Thank you, once again, John for all your work here!

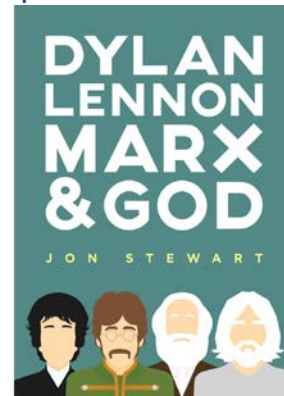
Welcome to Sussex Piscator 2022, Issue XIII, Jon Stewart

Apologies for the late arrival of Sussex Piscator 2022, Issue 13. This is due to extensive work commitments that have kept me away from fishing and away from completing this year's magazine. I'll be back on schedule for the next edition.

It's certainly been a couple of challenging years what with the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and the worrying international situation in Ukraine ... so I hope that you and your family are doing OK under the circumstances. On the rare occasions when I have managed to cast a fly over the last 12 months, it's been a blessed moment of respite from everything else that's going on. Sussex Piscatorial Society has to be the best fishing club in the UK and I'll be forever grateful for finding it. I haven't been to Possingworth for over ten years but a recent trip there was like I'd never been away, and I'd encourage any Trout Section member who's not yet visited one of the most beautiful fly fishing venues in the country to give it a try.

Sussex Piscator XIII's contributions include another fascinating account of the outstanding fishing opportunities in Europe from former Treasurer John Parsons; a personal note from our former Secretary Julian Millerchip; a statistician's analysis of the last five year's Trout Section catch return data by Colin Duffy; and the conclusion of a two-part essay on fishing tips from Andy Payne. Now we're a digital publication it's easy to include images – so all pictures past and present are welcome. Many thanks to Danny Minnikin for his evocative shot of Plashett Park and Tom Griffin for his beautiful kingfisher portraits. Sorry for the wait, gentlemen, and thank you for your contributions.

If you'll forgive the self-promotion, one of the distractions that kept me from completing this issue has been the publication of my book *Dylan, Lennon, Marx & God* (Cambridge University Press). The first dual biography of Bob Dylan and John Lennon, it looks at their politics, their heritage and their beliefs ... and may interest members who are fans of popular music and pop culture.



So, as a newly published author, I thought I'd finish the issue off with a review of the most important fishing-related book I've read in the last few years. If you've not already heard about the environmental disaster caused by the introduction of Asian Carp into the Mississippi River I'd suggest a quick [YouTube](#) search on the subject. It's a terrifying example of how precious natural resources can be devastated by the law of unintended consequences. Andrew Reeves' *Overrun* is an un-put-downable account of how this horrendous situation transpired. Essential reading for any angler.

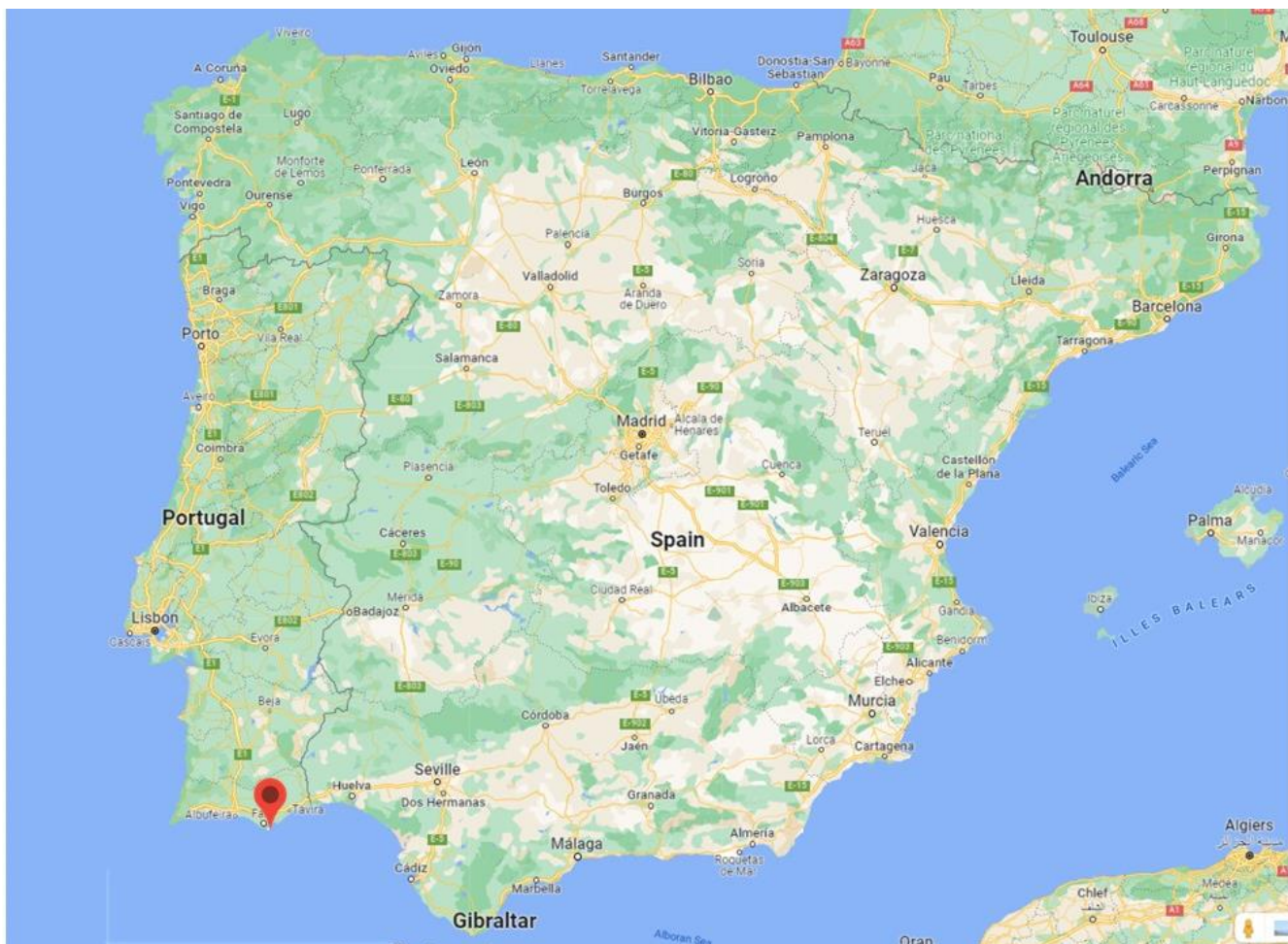
As usual I'd like to close by thanking the Committee Members, Waterkeepers and other officers of the club who have kept things running over the last twelve months. Tight lines everyone..!

Jon Stewart jonsleeper@btopenworld.com

Black Bass, Barbel and Baila, John Parsons

When Christmas and New Year are over and you are feeling overfed and low during the short January days, why not try something different? You could, for example, jump on a plane and take a sunny week in the Portuguese Algarve and do some fishing with a difference. In January 2022, when I went, the prices were really low. Accommodation and car hire totalled just under £200 when split two ways with my chum Robin. The flight was just £100 and eating out cheaper than home. And I had set myself the challenge of catching some new (to me) species – all beginning with the letter B. These were Black Bass, Barbel (4 varieties) and Baila.

Black Bass, aka American Large Mouth Bass, are not native to Europe. But they made it over here and are now firmly established in Southern Europe - although not over here in the UK as far as I know. As I recall there was an attempt to stock them at Pond Lye alongside land-locked salmon that didn't go well. If you are unfamiliar with them, think of black bass as a perch with a green mottled flanks and sizes averaging one to two pounds – although they can and do grow much bigger.



We hired the services of local guide Mark and his nifty boat and headed inland. About 100km from our base in Olhao we drove down a steep and winding track to a huge lake. Mark's boat has a fishfinder which he used to track down shoals of bait fish. We then cast crayfish type lures and waggle tailed jobs in and around the bait. In spring and summer fly fishing is favoured and we did have a go. But Mark's advice for early January was to stick with plastic or rubber or whatever the damn things are made of. And they certainly work well. We shared a haul of 19 bass, several of which were around two pounds. On Mark's previous session they'd been double that size and there is the potential to double that again. It was a good start. I had my first B sorted and it was time to hunt for a barbel.



Largemouth Bass / Black Bass



I have never caught a barbel in the UK (or anywhere else). It is a species that I have long intended to have a crack at but never managed to organise. Mark took us to a favourite spot on the tidal stretch of one of his favourite rivers. Mark assured us, there were Black Bass, Carp and two species of barbel available. The more prolific is the smaller, two-tone Gypsy Barbel that grow to ten pounds or so. But there was also a chance to hook a Cozimo Barbel. These go to over forty pounds so you can imagine our excitement levels. Especially when, as it turned out, my first hook up was to a huge Cozimo.

Mark prefers to fly or lure fish. For those able to go out in the spring and early summer, dry fly barbel fishing can be very exciting. But in deep winter (19 degrees, unbroken sun and blue skies) the quiver tip and sweetcorn gave us a better chance. Mark provided all the tackle plus hemp and groundbait. Joined by another friend, Neil, we had about twenty barbel between us. I landed a Cozimo, which turned out to be a sprat of around 5 pounds and I had a cracking Gypsy of about 7 pounds. They, including the lost and unseen GIANT, all took corn although Robin had one on a lure. That was another B dusted.



5lbs Cozimo Barbel (above), 7lbs Gypsy Barbel (below)



In the remainder of our week we caught a few more black bass but concentrated on sea bass and the as yet still illusive Baila – the last B on the target list. We were very unlucky with untypical strong Easterlies that spoiled our chances. The sea bass here average two to three pounds but giants are caught every year. Up to twenty pounds. For visitors who go early summer onwards giant Corvina or Meagre reaching up to one hundred pounds can be targeted from the shore.

The night before going home was a boozy one for me. I'd given up on my Baila. But Robin hadn't. He'd very kindly avoided the vino tinto to give me a last chance chuck. At 5 minutes to midnight (exactly, literally...) of our last day, I lifted into a Baila. Also known as the spotted bass, these beautiful creatures max out at around four pounds. But what they lack in size they make up for in looks, fighting power and eating quality. Our Baila was returned with thanks. All the Bs done. I'll start on the Cs next winter. Including flyfishing for wild predatory carp.

You can contact our guide, Mark Privett, via his website <https://www.fishingportugal.com/> if interested. If you prefer to come in March and April you'll have loads more options than we did in January. Best of luck if you go....



Baila

Fishy Statistics: Trout Section Catch Data Analysed, Colin Duffy

If you're a member of the Trout Section of SPS you'll know that every month we get a catch report from our esteemed membership secretary. I glance at it and think, "that's interesting" and promptly forget about it. But during lockdown I thought that taking a closer look at our catch returns might be a bit more interesting than sorting out the sock drawer.

When I found that I had to get the data from 64 pdfs manually into a single spreadsheet before I could even start, I looked longingly again at the sock drawer. But lockdown lasted forever, so I got to do both. Anyhoo, here's some "gee-whiz, well fancy that" data from my lockdown musings.

64 months in summary:

	Colin G's	Buddington	Possingworth	Wiston	Totals
Total Visits	1,400	2,353	1,238	1,068	6,059
Total Catch	2,697	3,394	3,093	1,512	10,696
Catch Rate	73%	65%	73%	59%	68%
Blank Rate	27%	35%	27%	41%	32%
Rainbows	69%	79%	70%	75%	73%
Browns	31%	20%	30%	25%	26%
Catch per Angler visit	1.9	1.4	2.5	1.4	1.8

So, if Mr Average Angler went fishing in all our lakes over the last 5 years:

- overall, he averaged almost 2 fish each visit...
- ... but a third of the time he blanked
- on average he caught one more fish at Possingworth than at Wiston or Buddington
- three quarters of the fish he caught were rainbows

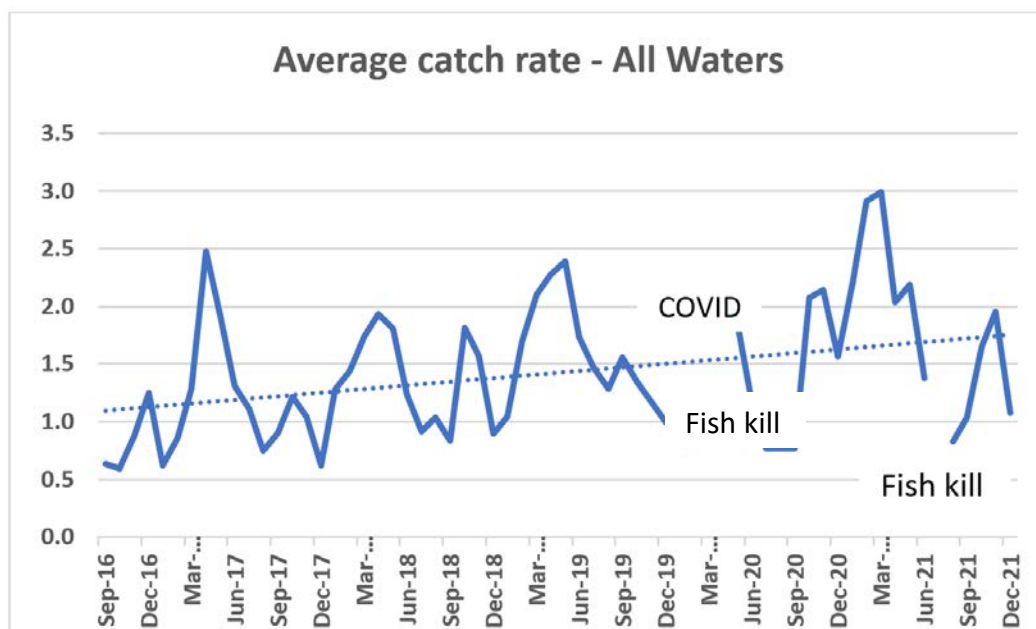
And between us all we landed just under 12 imperial tons of fish.

But of course, averages hide as much as they reveal. I don't know what you do, but if I make a trip to Possingworth it's generally a serious day out with a packed lunch and

a “don’t wait up for me note” to the wife, but I’ll often nip out to Steyning just for a couple of hours here and there when I can. The analysis doesn’t really tell us how much angling effort is put in; for that we need to know angling hours, not angling visits, and it would require another full lockdown for me to pull all that data from the individual daily catch returns rather than the monthly summaries. I’m not *that* interested.

My takeaway from the overall numbers is that I shouldn’t expect to catch a fish on every visit but mostly I will, and if I catch a few it’s a good day. Of course, occasionally I might catch six but that won’t happen very often. Our fishing isn’t easy but it’s not hard either – it’s a good balance.

The good news is that catch rates are increasing over time.



There’s a clear improving trend here from about 1.1 fish per visit in 2016 to 1.8 in 2021.

I’d like to say that this is because we’re all learning to be better anglers, but it’s more likely that our hard-working keepers are getting very clever at looking after our fish. They feed the fish throughout the year now, this keeps them in good condition and allows more to survive for longer, increasing the number of fish available - and in a mood - to be caught.

Our best chance of catching a fish (and also catching several) is early Spring where catch rates more than double. I’d love to say that this is due to some kind of collective angling instinct returning with the opening of the wild trout season. But as it’s almost as good in October I’m afraid I have to accept that it’s because that’s

when Tony Fox, our inestimable Trout Curator, puts the fish in. So that's when we mostly pull them out.

High summer is, of course, a low point where fish seem to go to sleep. Sadly, it looks like global warming is affecting our waters; the fluke weather conditions leading to fish kills due to oxygen depletion in 2021 being a devastating indicator. It seems that this situation will only worsen but the Society has plans to mitigate the problem with solar powered oxygenation equipment. I'm sure we'll hear more on that in the future.

What about flies? The summarised catch returns provide some information on which patterns caught (but not for which didn't – i.e. almost all of mine). Irrespective of the month, the flies that appear all the time in the monthly reports are damsel nymphs, buzzers, GRHEs and PTNs.

Occasionally a few outsiders crop up in the returns; Diawl Bach, Daddy, and the odd dry fly - often a Klinkhammer. I've seen one sugar cube, a couple of blood worms and a snail, but that's about it. Considering the tens of thousands of flies available that's a very poor show chaps, we must try harder.

For what it's worth, my most successful dry fly at Lower Buddington is a concoction called the Found Link, tied only because I liked the name. It's a big, scraggy, deer-hair mayfly that looks daft sat there on the water absent of any real mayflies; but it catches fish, usually with a big, fat, undignified belly-flop of a rise. The fish's rise is so indelicate I'm usually too shocked to actually strike. I've never written it in the book and I never will because it's a secret. You're welcome.

<https://www.johnkreft.com/mayfly-fly-patterns/galloups-found-link/>



There's probably a mine of information in the individual daily catch returns – best flies, best lines, best day of the week, water levels, weather etc etc, but it would take a lot of effort to get it into a state where it could be used. It would also take another pandemic – let's hope I never get to produce it.



Once home to funny cat videos, the ice-bucket challenge, and content too crap for telly, YouTube has now grown into the world's biggest media company. It is the second most visited website, beaten only by Google, and has over a billion monthly viewers. It's banned in China, so that statistic equates to a significant percentage of current global internet users. There's still plenty of awful content on YouTube for sure, but many channels are worthy of attention – including several superb fishing sites. Some are funny, some informative, some nostalgic. It's also a great way to learn about how others enjoy our sport around the world. What channels do you watch? Please let me know and I'll review them here. Meantime, these are a couple of my all-time favourites: two solo operators who built a large audience with just a rod, a go pro, and an infectious enthusiasm for fishing. Both are careful not to reveal their locations, like all responsible anglers, although occasionally it's possible to identify some of their more productive spots if you have a sufficient free time to browse Google Maps...

The Ginger Fisherman <https://www.youtube.com/user/chrisnsamfishing>

91,000 subscribers. Derbyshire, UK. Coarse and trout fishing in local canals and rivers.

Chris Bartle, "The Ginger Fisherman", is an outstanding pike angler who is also adept at capturing large river chub and canal carp. I've learned a lot from his videos, mostly how to work with unusual baits and how to spot and catch fish in waters that I grew up alongside but never mastered. Chris can read the water extremely well, has an open-minded roving approach to fishing, and is active all year round -- which leads to some spectacular predator fishing in the winter months. There are several good places to start on his channel, but the 20lb urban canal pike he catches using a [dead rat](#) is worth ten minutes of anyone's time.

618 Fishing <https://www.youtube.com/c/618Fishing>

545,000 subscribers. Illinois, USA. American freshwater fish in unusual locations.

Nick Calcara is not an expert fisherman, far from it, but he's certainly an enthusiastic amateur. His unwavering positivity and passion for the sport has driven this niche channel to a massive viewership edging on half a million subscribers. Nick lives in Hamel near St. Louis and is willing to try any and every form of angling from micro-fishing puddles to tempting massive Mississippi River catfish on unfeasibly large baits such as entire chicken legs or pork loin steaks. His specialism is spillway fishing, a common pastime on USA river systems where fish congregate in the pools beneath dam walls. Here he'll chase a wide range of species: some familiar such as largemouth bass or catfish; others less well-known such as the bizarre [bowfin](#) and [paddlefish](#) -- two unusually shaped prehistoric "relics" from the age of the dinosaurs. Like many Midwesterners Nick won't swear, not even relatively mild curse words, no matter how painful his frustration, and there are plenty of those. Listen for his exasperated cries of "Dang!" (rather than "Damn!") when losing a big fish or casting into a tree by mistake.

The Ginger Fisherman wades in to free a 10lb+ wild canal carp wrapped around a tree root



618 Fishing with a personal best 10lb bowfin, caught from a shallow concrete spillway



“Because of what you do... (Part 2)” Andy Payne

The harder I work the luckier I get!

I do hope that you enjoyed reading Part 1 ("Because of What You Do: Baiting strategies for bigger hits of fish", *Sussex Piscator X111*, 2021) and that its contents helped you to put more fish on the bank. In such a short piece I can only ever put a tiny scratch on the surface of the angling knowledge that our predecessors have developed over centuries, I can hopefully though pass on what I know to work in the hope that it will enhance the angling success of those who choose to apply it.

One of the giants of modern sports coaching, Dave Brailsford coined the phrase “Aggregation of marginal gains”. To sum up his philosophy of taking everything into consideration and leaving nothing to chance, we can take this mindset into our fishing if we so desire. If it matches what we want from our hobby we can choose to be “clinical” or on another day we might want to snuggle-up in the romance of just being there, it’s good to have the power to choose!

When aiming for a better than average fishing session I like to consider all of the variables that the day could bring, some you can control others you cannot. Swing things in your favour by controlling all of the factors over which you have mastery and minimising the vagaries of chance.

By adding any new strategies given in Part 1 of this discourse to your existing angling repertoire I’m confident that you will have

mastery over more factors and that you will be catching “because of what you do”.

So, what more could you do to increase your chances of “Going Catching” in our day fishing only waters?

One significant factor is the use of good quality bait; the HNV (High Nutritional Value) bait debate that started in the 1970s still smoulders on in big fish angling circles and successful match anglers still insist on the freshest and cleanest maggots and casters. I’m eager to copy the angling practices of the most successful and, if you’ve read my previous articles you’ll be aware that I’m an advocate of HNV baits which emit aminos into the water.



To my mind there are a couple of reasons for using top quality bait. Firstly it could well be more attractive to our quarry than a poor quality alternative and secondly I feel that we owe it to the fish to give them the best source of nutrition that we can (quid pro quo if you will) in return for catching them.

Once you have chosen the bait or baits that you are going to use it is worth considering how to best apply them. Bait application begins before you place anything on your hook or hair. Prebaiting, where allowed is an effective way of maximizing your catch. Putting a little bit in evening and morning for a few days before you intend to fish or laying down a bed of bait in the evening & fishing over it the next morning are both effective approaches which I employ.

If I find that I cannot gain access to a water before a session however I will employ a "Bait & Wait" strategy. This involves arriving at the venue, selecting a swim, putting your loose feed or groundbait in then going off for a walk for at least an hour. With food in the swim and no discouraging disturbance the fish will feed with confidence and, we hope begin to compete for the diminishing food reserves; an ideal angling situation if ever there was one!

Once you begin to actually fish your swim be mindful of the peanuts and monkeys analogy and moderate your feeding to the number of bites that you get, more bites, more feed.

I recommend the use of a variety of feed and hook baits during any session, this gives both you and the fickle fish a choice. Stick with a bait that works and change when bites dry-up. I like a micro-mass approach to loose feeding be that hemp, caster & corn, a mixture of pellets or any other combination of small food items. This will attract and hold fish in your swim as they seek out those tasty morsels.

Once I have baited a swim I need to choose how to fish around my baited area or feature. When fishing to feature such as a lily patch or set of snags it is wise to fish as closely as you safely can to that feature, bearing in mind that you must be able to safely land a hooked fish. Things require a little more thought though when fishing a baited area in open water as you might for bream.

It is tempting to place your baited hook I'm the middle of the bait patch where the greatest density of fish are likely to be feeding. I would avoid this because any hooked fish would need to be played back through the shoal, a sure recipe for panic and the shoal's rapid departure. I recommend that you place your baited hook on the near side of the baited patch and gently ease hooked fish away from the shoal.

Angling lore also predicts that larger specimens tend to hang back from a shoal's feeding frenzy to begin with so placing your baited hook at the edge of the baited area might also bring you prize catch early in your session, always a good motivator.

In conclusion then, the marginal gains that we can bring together to up our catch rate in pursuit of bigger hits of fish are about location, timing, bait and feeding. If we apply these wisely in terms of venue and season we will be catching "because of what we do".

Right, where's my fishing diary, I want to know what worked where this time last year...

Julian Millerchip, *The Grin*

Of course, to the angler, every Salmon caught is special. My daughter Becca, a professional artist, has beautifully captured such a moment in her painting of me. The wide grin on my face says everything. In fact, it was a moment with added poignancy, as I shall explain.

The scene was one of my favourite pools on Boleside, middle Tweed. The occasion, September 2020. We were all in the middle of the Covid19 pandemic. Little in our everyday lives seemed normal. Fortunately my long - anticipated annual trip was possible, albeit with restrictions.

We no longer had the use of Boleside's characterful fishing hut - for safety reasons. Nigel the ghillie was permanently masked - even outdoors, in the fresh air of the Scottish Borders. Meeting up with my fellow anglers on the Monday morning to draw for our first allotted beat, anticipation seemed more acute than ever. I nervously took my own pick of the straw, and then revealed my number.

"Ha, number two - isn't that 'Garden Back'?" (Regarded as a particularly productive stretch)

"Yes, lucky so-and-so" someone muttered.

With the usual parting blessing of "tight lines" we all went our separate ways. I savoured the walk to my part of the fishery

perhaps more than usual in this most unusual of times. I took in the landscape beauty of the surroundings with almost childlike awe. Fishing gives you a purpose in the outdoors. A reason to be part of the natural scene. For weeks, nay months, I had feared all of this could be denied me, because of our reaction to the devastating virus that is Covid19.

On arrival at the pool I sat a while to absorb the look of the river, its flow over stones and pebbles. The clarity of the water, the chaotic swirl of its currents. The flight of a Dipper and then its slightly comical stance on a chosen rock took my attention. It then casually stepped downwards, as they do, to disappear under the water's surface. Suddenly there was a loud splash, caught on the edge of my line of sight. A fish had thrown itself up into the air, quivered and dropped back. "Salmo - the leaper", as Hugh Falkus would have it.

Clearly this was my cue to approach the water's edge and, releasing my chosen fly from the rod, begin to fish. I lengthened line with each successive cast; the satisfying rhythm and timed smoothness of the spey cast focussing all of my attention. Subconsciously I suppose I was grateful that, although I hadn't used the double-handed fly rod for a year, the sweet action and feel of it remained strong in muscle memory.



Having now waded out the distance from the shoreline necessary to properly cover the water, I worked my way gradually downstream. Suddenly the miracle happened! I felt the unmistakable heavy thump of a fish hitting the fly.

I imagine that most salmon anglers spend, what, ninety-nine point something percent of their fishing time NOT physically attached to their quarry? Crazy! Yet still we do it. We persuade ourselves the effort is worth it. Just for those few brief minutes of physical encounter with a creature whose life story is so wonderful. And nowadays we are further encouraged to practise "catch and release". So, not even a wild fish for the pot! Farmed salmon instead. Crazier still...

Back to this encounter: After a couple of attempts - when I seriously mis-judged this Salmon's readiness for the net - finally I had him, in the shallows, and safely netted. Then, the strangest sound (not of the natural world, this) - applause. Yes, behind me, up the bank someone was clapping. I had a spectator!

"Well done laddie. Nice fish! Salmon?"

"Yes." And, struggling to contain my excitement, now buzzing with the inevitable adrenalin rush: "No matter how many you've caught each one is a special moment."

"Do you fish?" I asked.

"Aye but not these days. Ha. I used to as a laddie - but not legally!"

We both chuckle.

An idea occurs to me, as I complete the unhooking process. The salmon, a cock fish of around nine to ten pounds is lively in the net as I try to "keep it wet".

"Any chance of a favour?" I ask. "Could you take a picture of me with the fish, please?"

"Well, OK but I don't..."

"Oh, sure - use my phone" But I had cut his reply short too quickly. As I tried to hand him the phone - at arm's reach out of respect for social distancing, he completed his explanation.

"It's ok. I don't have Covid, but I have Parkinsons" and he took the phone controlling the tremor in his hand.

"I'll try, but I cannae promise."

The situation was bizarre. There I was trying to control this lively fish and prepare my pose over the net, its rim lapped by the shallow water. Above me on the bank my helpful stranger - trying to control his own involuntary hand movements sufficiently to press the shutter button. I could see he had probably managed to find the thing once or twice. Hitting the target, as it were. Me shouting encouragement. The salmon sensing that escape was now a near possibility, renewed its efforts.



"Take a few, if you can. Thank you so much. It's really good of you."
"Oh, hang on. It's gone to selfie!" He shouted back.

A few more jabs at the screen and we both agreed that there was probably a suitable shot there somewhere.

He watched as I returned the fish to the river and it swam off. I repeated my gratitude and apologised profusely for not being able at least to shake hands, as we would have done in more normal times. No, beyond that, I would have given this helpful stranger a hug. He had willingly

accepted my challenge to record one of my special moments, despite difficulties that I could only imagine.

We exchanged names, but I shall keep you anonymous, my friend. You had an interesting episode on your morning walk by the Tweed. I had my picture and can still hear the echo of your spontaneous, surprising applause.

More surprisingly, in the shot that I chose to submit for portraiture my spectator had captured that wide grin that said so much. And that fleeting moment is why we follow this crazy pastime!

More about Becca's artwork is available here:

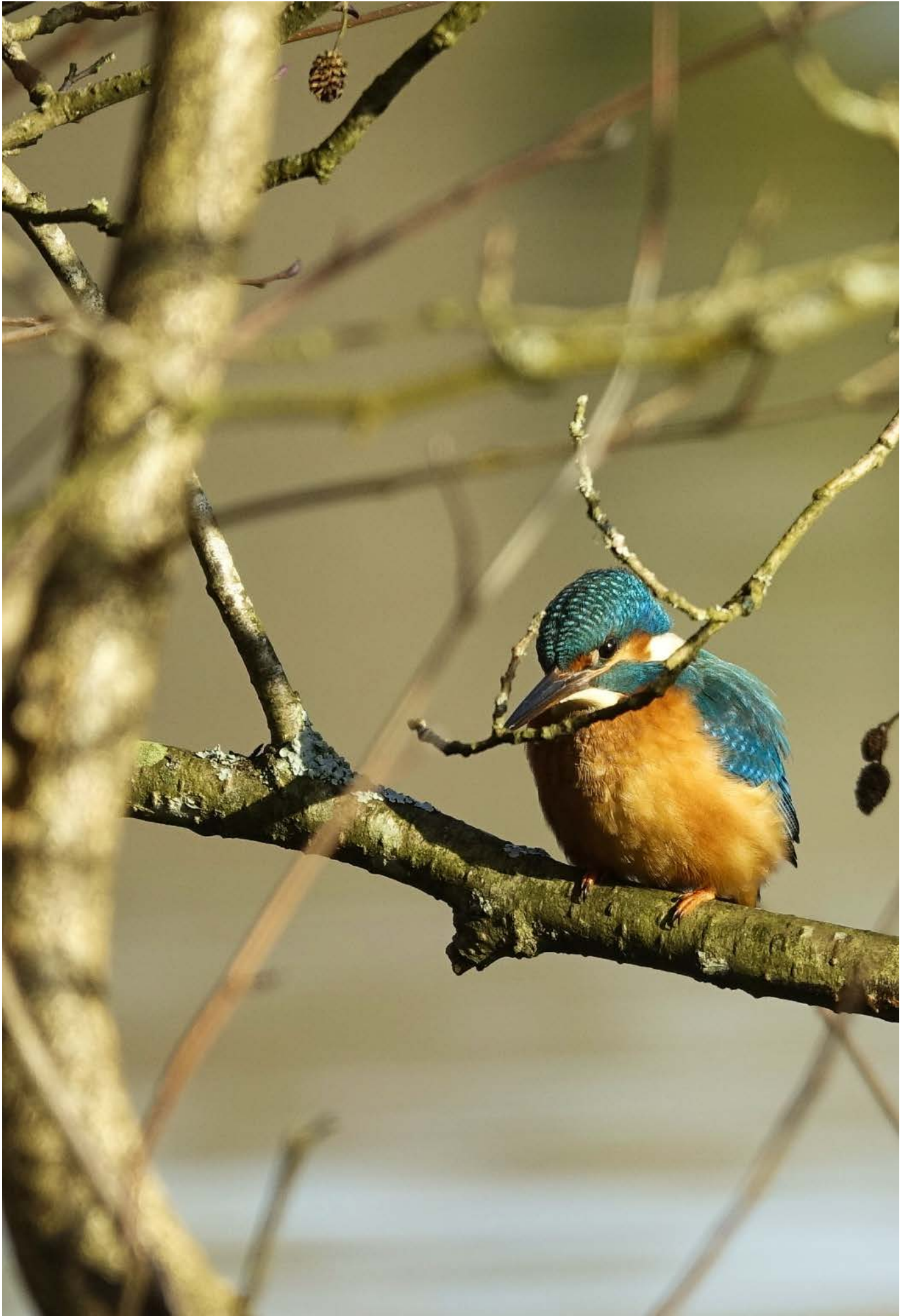
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/beccambtattoo/>

Facebook: [@beccambtattoos](https://www.facebook.com/beccambtattoos)

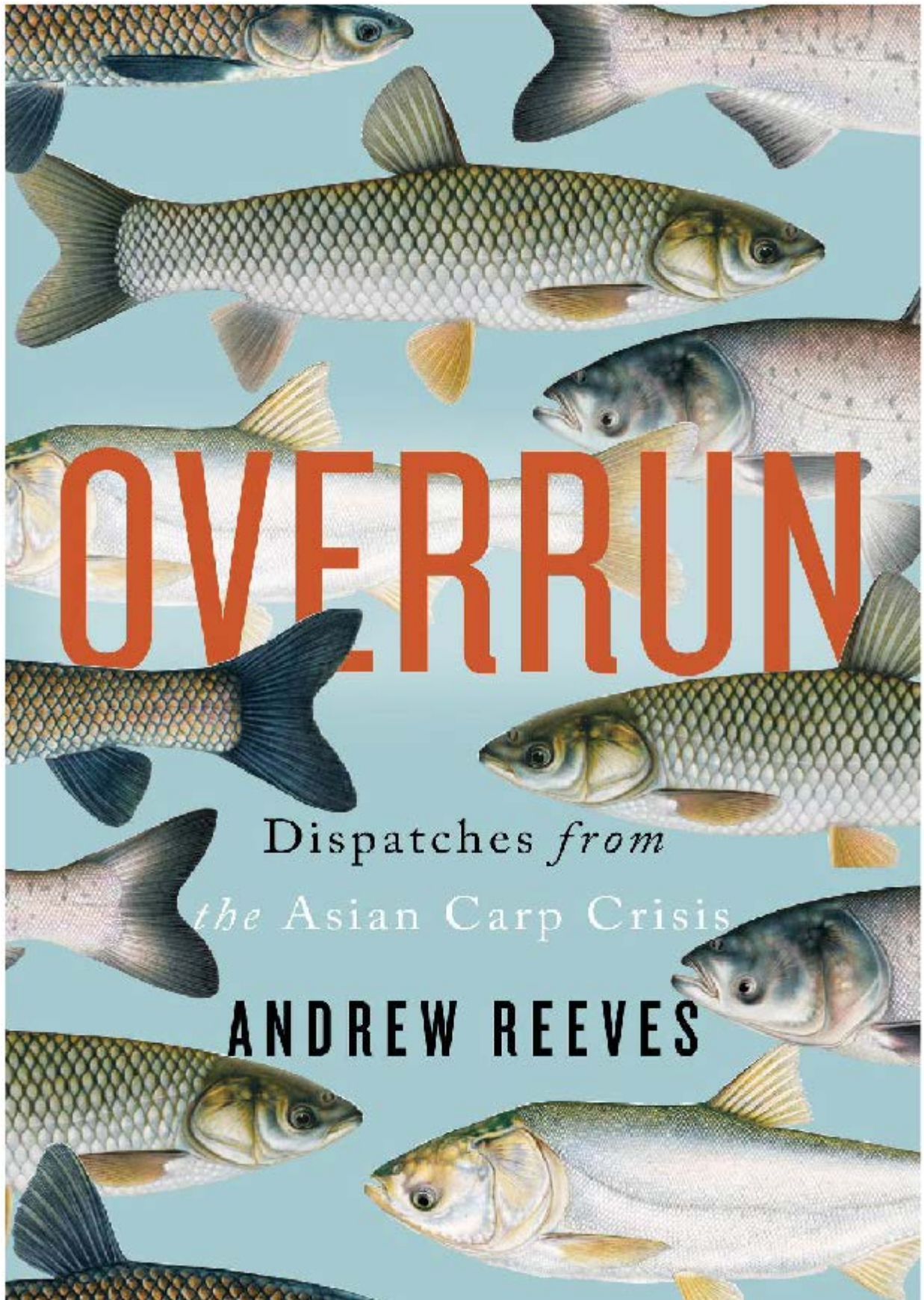
Website: www.thefreakshowtattoos.co.uk



Tom Griffin, Kingfisher



***OVERRUN: Dispatches from the Asian Carp Crisis* (book review)**



Andrew Reeves has written a superb book for anyone already familiar with the underwater environmental disaster currently besieging North America. If that's not something you've heard about yet, then read on..! As a fisherman you can't afford to ignore this issue. It's a timely reminder of what can go wrong and how rapidly changes can occur when well-meaning people introduce new species, in this case a type of *carp*, into an ancient habitat.

We all know about the grey squirrel, and how that has out-competed our own red squirrel in most of the UK - which is a real loss when you think of just how very pretty those animals are. Being anglers I'm sure most of us are also familiar with the signal crayfish* which was imported to the UK in the 1960s. It has decimated our indigenous crayfish populations through competition, predation, and disease. Its burrows are also highly destructive to river and canal banks.



Picture credit © David Pérez (DPC), Wikimedia Commons, License cc-by-sa-4.0

*The signal crayfish. A lobster-like creature reaching around 16cm. Ridge running along the shell above the eyes. Brown or greenish-brown on top, red underneath. Claws have distinctive small turquoise or white blotches on the upper side at the hinge. The native white-clawed crayfish is much smaller (under 12cm) with a brown to olive pitted body. Its claws are usually a dirty-white colour underneath, never red. Once common in English and Welsh rivers, the white-clawed crayfish has suffered a decline of up to 80% in the last decade and is now classified as 'endangered' on the IUCN red list of threatened species, as it is at risk of global extinction

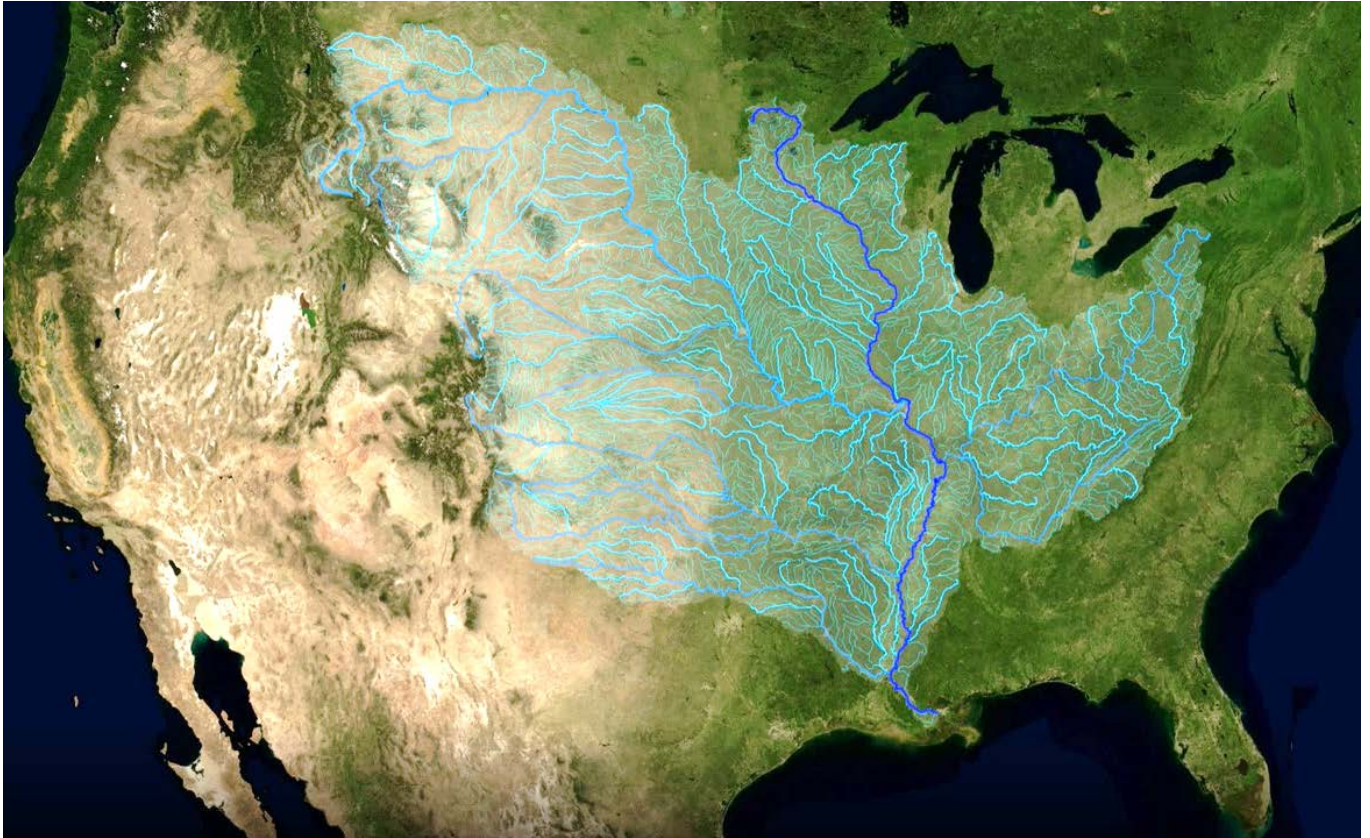
Yet however tragic the plight of the red squirrel and the white-clawed crayfish, as the saying goes, *everything is bigger in America*. The Asian carp crisis that has devastated the entire Mississippi river basin, and now threatens to destroy the aquatic habitat of the Great Lakes and much of Canada's inland waterways, is one of the most significant natural disasters in the history of humanity – which is saying a lot when you think about everything else that has happened since we appeared on the planet.

Yet perhaps because it's occurring underwater, this been largely ignored outside North America. It's barely known among the UK angling community, which is a real surprise given the biblical nature of the threat to the recreational fishing in much of the United States right now. You may have seen clips from regional news sources on YouTube, or the occasional PBS and BBC nature programme, maybe an online lecture from a biology seminar at some midwestern university ... but that's about the full extent of the coverage. Certainly no Netflix documentary series or blockbuster movie has tackled the issue. Not yet, anyway.

All of which makes [OVERRUN](#) so very important. As far as I know it's the only serious attempt to tell the story of an event that has permanently altered the natural history of the United States. Like most of history's great mistakes, the introduction of four new Asian carp species seemed a good idea at the time. Common carp have been present in the

USA since 1831 and are largely viewed as a 'trash fish' but not a destructive one. (Apologies to Coarse Section members for the use of that phrase about the venerable *Cyprinus Carpio*.) As the environmental damage caused by agricultural chemicals became apparent in the early 1970s, the idea that some Asian carp species might offer a natural, non-toxic means to clear algae and weed from catfish farms and other commercial waters became understandably appealing. Grass carp are voracious consumers of pondweed and will be familiar to many SPS Trout Section members as they've been stocked in some of our waters over the years for exactly the same purpose. Some have since grown on to around 30lb in size. You'll know if you've ever latched into one, it's like trying to play a foul-hooked National Express coach.

However, it was the introduction of two other Asian species, the silver carp and the bighead carp, that have caused so many problems 'across the pond'. Silver and bighead carp are very effective filter feeders and were brought to the United States in 1973 to help fish farms in Arkansas control phytoplankton. So efficient are these creatures that they were even used to clean out sewage ponds at one point, with the idea that once they'd grown on in size they could be sold for human consumption – although, not surprisingly, the thought of eating a fish reared on toilet waste did not prove appealing to midwestern palates.



The Mississippi River basin and it's link to the Great Lakes ©NASA



Silver Carp

© Kate Gardiner, Flickr.com CC BY-NC 2.0

Perhaps inevitably, some of these fish escaped into the Mississippi, probably due to flooding. Here began their immediate and prolific spread through that river's enormous watershed, including almost all its tributary rivers. By the early twenty-first century biologists were beginning to become concerned that things were getting out of control. Today it's estimated that in certain stretches these two species now comprise ninety-seven percent of the Mississippi River's biomass.

Yes, you read it right: *ninety-seven percent*. Havana, Illinois, a small town on the Illinois River, a tributary of the Mississippi that stretches towards Chicago, recently became the nation's hotspot for silver carp when their stretch of river was found to contain more of silver carp per square mile than anywhere else on the planet.

Silver and bighead carp are, it transpires, are capable of reproducing in huge exponential numbers. Females can mature at two years old and lay around 300,000 eggs *four times per year*. I follow one YouTube channel, *618 Fishing*, a young guy who tries his luck for catfish, largemouth bass and gar on quiet sections of the Illinois River near St Louis ... and have seen him stumble across channels of water so thick with juvenile Asian carp that you could almost walk across them. (I looked up some of the spots shown in his videos using Google Maps and, amazingly, the juvenile fish are so prolific and so dense in the water that the black shadows of their tightly packed shoals are

even visible in these satellite images ... which were, of course, taken from space.)

The same reason for their introduction in the first place is also the reason that is now causing issues for native species, because silver and bighead carp are such efficient filter feeders they can eat upwards of 100 percent of their body weight each day. This is especially worrying given that these fish routinely grow to between forty and eighty pounds. As a consequence, they strip the water of plankton, the main food source for almost all existing juvenile freshwater fish in the United States. Handily, once the silver and bighead carp have cleared all the available plankton out of the water they can pivot to other food supplies to survive. Of course most of the native young freshwater fish have not evolved that capability, so when their food supplies are eaten away they simply starve.

The enormous pressure this is putting on the existing freshwater fish species in the Mississippi and its tributaries is extremely worrying, but what's even worse is the carnage that silver and bighead carp will wreak on the Great Lakes should they manage to pass through the twenty eight mile Chicago Ship Canal, a manmade water that links the Illinois river network with Lake Michigan. This could devastate a \$7 billion dollar recreational fishing industry and, as you can imagine, desperate measures (such as several massive underwater electric fences) are being put in place to try and prevent this.



Invasive silver carp jumping at Barkley Dam, 2019. ©Kentucky Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Resources

The book is impeccably researched, the author having spent six years travelling around interviewing concerned biologists, fishermen, and local government officials. Despite their desperate situation it is not without a few moments of dark humour. One derives from the fact that silver carp have the impressive habit of leaping several feet from the water when they are threatened, and a common way for entire shoals to be triggered is the outboard motor on a passing boat.

If you've not seen it try searching on YouTube. You won't believe your eyes. The scenes can be comical, although the broken noses and other injuries less so. Of course, as irony would have it, the first recorded instance of an American being struck and knocked to the ground by a leaping Asian carp occurred in Auburn, Alabama, when the son of America's leading fish scientist Homer Swingle was flattened as a fish cleared the lip of his seine net.

Sadly, the author concludes that the carp invasion cannot be reversed or erased — it will only ever be managed, limited, and endured. This, if nothing else, offers sobering lesson in the fragility of North America's freshwater ecosystem. Available in print or as an audiobook *Overrun* is a very well-written text. Informative and entertaining, it's even funny in parts ... yet this is also the stuff of nightmares for environmentally conscious anglers. Highly recommended, I couldn't put it down.

Jon Stewart



Plashett Park top lake under moonlight

Last night I was treated to this moonlit marvel at Plashett Park. This was taken at 11 pm, no filter of special gizmos, just nature being lit by Luna. Lots of confused birds were chirping and chattering away, I dare say they'll be feeling rather groggy today after experiencing a disrupted night on the roost! (Danny Minnikin, April 2021)