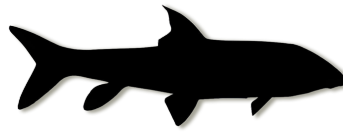


THE KENNET HATCHERY



FIRST YEAR REPORT, FEBRUARY 2025

It only seems like yesterday that we were drawing up plans to build a coarse fish hatchery for our beloved River Kennet. Our aims were twofold: to counter the damaging effects of siltation from the canal and other sources; and to limit the damage caused by the invasive signal crayfish, which has had a catastrophic impact on gravel spawning species such as barbel, chub and dace, fish which once lived in abundance in the crystal clear waters of this iconic chalkstream. In fact, it was back in 2021 that we began work on securing the planning and environmental consents and not until December 2022 that construction began on the site at Beenham. This was generously provided to us by the Englefield Estate and the initial funding came from a Thames Water Enforcement Undertaking matched with a similar direct investment from Reading & District AA.

After much blood, sweat and tears, Del Shackleford and his team of volunteers completed the 100 sq metre building by September 2023 and began installing the power, water and hatchery equipment. By January 2024 the tests had been completed, CEFAS and EA approval was secured and the hatchery was fully operational in time for the planned opening the following month by Lord Richard Benyon.



ANGLERS AND CONSERVATIONISTS COME TOGETHER TO GIVE THE KENNET A FISHING FUTURE

Even before DEFRA Minister Richard Benyon officially opened our groundbreaking new coarse fish hatchery on February 16th last year, the response from local anglers and angling clubs had been magnificent. With running costs for feed, power and replacement parts now coming in at £6000-7000 per year it was obviously vital that the hatchery established a secure financial base.

With support of the Kennet Valley Fisheries Association an appeal was sent out for project partners and donors; and nearly all the angling clubs and fisheries along the Kennet Valley, including Newbury AA, Civil Service AS, Red Spinners AS, CALPAC, Thatcham AA, Reading Fishing Club and ARK, came enthusiastically on board with much needed contributions. This has recently been augmented by generous donations from Thomas Turner Ltd and the charity Fish in Need.



Individual donations from anglers have continued to flow in and this year Reading & District AA have included an optional donation form to the hatchery for members renewing their annual permits. This has proved successful and we hope some of our partner clubs might like to consider this option too on top of their very welcome annual donations. It really has been inspiring to see anglers, angling clubs and conservation groups coming together in this way.

HOW WE OPERATE

The hatchery is run as a not-for-profit enterprise led by RDAA in collaboration with all the partner clubs. It is managed by the Association's fisheries manager, Del Shackelford, with advice and support from experienced coarse fish specialists together with the Environment Agency's facility at Calverton and the Institute of Fisheries Management. Local volunteers assist with the day to day running as required.



The hatchery began operating in March 2024 and will eventually mimic the breeding cycles of coarse fish in the wild, starting with dace, followed by roach, chub and barbel. Only brood fish from the Kennet will be used. The plan is for these fish to be temporarily removed from the river at the point of spawning and their eggs harvested and mixed with milt from the males. The resulting fry are then nurtured in the hatchery until they are big enough to survive in the wild, when around 70% will be reintroduced to the river at known spawning locations. The remaining 30% are kept at the hatchery for longer, to be released later as mature fish.



PROGRESS SO FAR

The plan was always to start slowly, learning as we go. In the first year we operated at around 20% of capacity in part due to missing the earlier spawning cycle of the dace and because the high spring flows made access to the river difficult.

- On 6th June, with invaluable help from the EA fisheries team, we removed four barbel and seven chub from the lower river.
- On 7th June we stripped all fish of their spawn. Unfortunately, it appeared we had missed the main barbel spawning by a couple of weeks as we were only able to strip one female of a limited amount of eggs. However, the chub were in prime spawning fettle so we were able to start proceedings.
- By 11th June the eggs had started to hatch and a week later we began to see free-swimming fry. At this point we started feeding Artemia (a brine shrimp fish food) before slowly weaning them onto a specialist powdered feed.
- For the next six weeks we continued to grow them on in the tanks watching excitedly as they became fully formed and identifiable 'mini-fish'.



OUR FIRST FISH RELEASE

On 23rd July we were proud to make an announcement – *New Hatchery Provides Welcome Boost for Kennet Chub Stocks* – and we released around 10,000 chub fry bred in our new coarse fish hatchery.

The first two release sites, selected for their proximity to natural spawning grounds in the river, were on the Civil Service water at Hambridge below Newbury and on the CALPAC stretch above Padworth Bridge. Both sites are upstream of waters controlled by Newbury AA, Red Spinners and RDAA. The remaining 500 chub and 500 barbel are being kept 'in house' to grow on for a further introduction in the summer of 2025 as mature fish.



LESSONS LEARNED

Lots of lessons were learnt during this first year. We are experimenting with troughs as well as tanks to see if the embryo survival rates can be improved. We are learning about the importance of temperature control and feeding regimes at different stages in the life cycles. There have inevitably been some losses but 'every day is a school day' at the hatchery and mistakes we make in year one will help us in subsequent years. We document everything each day, whether good, bad or indifferent so we can keep improving.

Based on first our experiences we have altered a few things, bought in some additional equipment and are confident enough to be able to predict a much better yield in 2025.

We are aiming to introduce upwards of 50,000 fish back into the Kennet later this year and will be starting to produce dace at the end of February, roach in early May and chub and barbel in late May/early June. If all goes to plan we are hoping to hit 150,000 by year three which is a really exciting prospect!



THANKS FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT

We hope you agree that the Kennet Hatchery has had a good first year and that the future signs are encouraging. We know from our previous stockings of that most delicate of all fish – the grayling – that young coarse fish fry can survive and grow on in the river below Newbury if they can get past the biological block of crayfish predation. That's why we wait until our young fish are fully able to swim up in the water column before we consider releasing them.

We hope that all our partner clubs will continue to support the hatchery financially. If anglers want to make an individual donation please complete the form below.

SIGN UP AS A SUPPORTER OF THE KENNET HATCHERY

NAME

ADDRESS

EMAIL

PHONE

MAKE A ONE-OFF OR REGULAR DONATION

TSB BANK

A/C NAME: KENNET VALLEY FISHERY ASSOCIATION

A/C NUMBER: 07062216

SORT CODE: 30-94-46

REF: HATCHERY

PLEASE RETURN FORM OR EMAIL DETAILS TO KENNETHATCHERY@GMAIL.COM