### **Bristol Water Fishery Report 2023**

Well, what a season 2023 has been for all of us at Bristol water!

With some great fishing, competitions, family days, lake records and a busy year at the fish farm!

This year has flown by, with bank fishing and the boats all finished for the year, the season draws to a close.

It's at this time of year us anglers often take stock of what was our best catches, that winning fly and what needs to be sorted over the winter.

Let's go back to early 2023 when both the fish farm and boat sheds where a hive of activity with rangers preparing for the spring.

One of the biggest annual tasks is our boat maintenance project, which sees every boat from Chew and Blagdon removed from the water and transported to our workshops to be cleaned, checked, and repaired. In total, over 60 boats are restored over the winter for the new season!

An equally extensive task is the fish netting and grading which commences at the start the stocking program in late February. Our ranger team grade every single one of our trout by hand prior to stocking, checking for any signs of disease and also classing according to weight and size. It's this attention to detail we believe keeps our stocking quality so high.

The first anglers were welcomed back onto Chew for the 2023 February pike trials. February is a month that often throws up some very special fish and this year was no exception with an incredible number of pike landed. We lost count of the number of 20lb+ fish, with around twenty fish over the 30lb mark and two colossal 40lb+ fish being caught. Amongst these was a new Chew Valley Lake record of 44lb 7oz caught by Nick Gahagan.

Much like last year, we saw some unpredictable and extreme weather this season with hail, snow, ice, flooding, high winds and over 30-degree heat in the summer!

In fact, our opening day started with inches of snow on the ground! The cold snap ended after a few days and was closely followed by storm Mathis rumbling down the valley. We all hoped this wasn't an omen for the season ahead!

By March the team had stocked over 24,000 of our own fish from the Blagdon farm with 10,700 going into Chew, 8500 into Blagdon and over 5000 into the barrow tanks!

The early season catch returns where amazing, with our anglers being spoilt in both quantity and quality!

As always, Bristol water has stuck to its usual high stocking standards. That coupled with many over wintered fish on all our lakes, made our early season sport second to none! 2023 produced plenty of notable catches with both double figure Browns and even multiple double figure Rainbows for some of our regulars!

Our fly-fishing season opened on the Barrows first, with our season ticket holders being able to wet a line on the 27th of February. The season opened for non-season ticket holders on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March at the Barrows with Chew and Blagdon opening their doors shortly after on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of March respectively.

Our competition calendar was very busy with over 20 events over 28 days ranging from our own evening leagues, multi-species events and one of the biggest competitions in the fly-fishing calendar 'The Cortlands'. 2024 is shaping up to be even busier with some interesting new additions so watch this space!

We also had to plan and host another family fun day in cooperation with the BRFFA this summer after the success of the same event in 2022!

A special thank you for all that made it possible by giving up your time.



We saw temps reaching over 30 degrees this summer which coincided with the tail end of the summer stocking from the lagoons. With the lagoons empty, it was the perfect opportunity to carry out some maintenance on them with the ranger team cleaning them via pressure washing and getting them ready for the transfer of the fast-growing fish from the raceways.

Despite the high temperatures of the summer, water levels stayed up for most of the season meaning our bank anglers had plenty of space and there were few challenges for boats with the water levels not dropping much below 75%, a very different situation to last year when the False Island was clear above the water!

# **2023 Competition Results**

Celtic League at Chew 26<sup>th</sup> March – 40 anglers fishing and a total catch of 170 fish.

Top Rod - 11 fish - A Clarke

Average - 4.25 Fish Per Angler

Catch & Release Competition

Garafit at Chew on 2<sup>nd</sup> April – 72 anglers with a total catch of 366 fish

Top Rod - 36lb 5oz P Golding

Average Fish Per Angler – 5.08

Best Fish - 5lb 11oz

Airflo Open at Chew on 8<sup>th</sup> April – 60 anglers with a total catch of 540 fish

Top Rod – 42lb 6oz D Burgess

Average - 9 Fish Per Angler

Best Fish - 5lb 11oz

Greys Pairs at Chew 16<sup>th</sup> April – 32 anglers with a total catch of 66 fish

Top pair -51lb 16 fish - Trevor davies & Janes Rice

Average 4.125 Per Pair

Best Fish 5lb 8oz

ATEFF at Blagdon on 23<sup>rd</sup> April – 28 Anglers caught 114 Fish.

Top Rod – M. Burgess – 24lb 9oz

Average 4.01

Average Weight - 3.7lb

BRFFA Spring Shield at Chew 29th April - 36 Anglers in Boats - 11 Anglers on the Bank

A Total of 287 Fish Caught

6.6 Rod Average for Boats, 4.45 for the Bank

Top Rod Boats – J. Harris

Top Rod Bank – P. Bessel

Ospreys FF at Chew on 30<sup>th</sup> April – 26 Anglers caught 133 Fish 2.2lb Average.

Blagdon Fly Fishers on Chew 21st May- 251 fish 10 boats rod average of 6.25 per

Top Rod - 16 fish Dale Burgess

2nd Alex Johnston with 16 fish

3rd Steve Pope also with 16 fish

Angling Trust England Qualifier on Chew 28th May -

Top Rod - Alex Johnstone 10 fish for 24lb 7oz

Rod average- 4.94

Average weight - 3lbs 2ozs

The Evening League on Chew 30th May 14 anglers

Largest Fish Ron Howard 9 lb 5oz

Top Rod - John Gumbleton 20 fish

Rod average of 8 (4hours match)

Airflo Celtic league (4) on Chew total of 146 fish caught, rod average of 3.8.

Top rod - Paul Morris

Tony Donnelly Memorial Shield on Chew 4<sup>th</sup> June.

Blagdon Fly Fishers top rod Mark Stevens 28 fish

BRFFA top rod Graham Currie top rod 19 fish

Blagdon Fly Fishers Team total- total of 174 fish

BRFFA's Team total- 161 fish.

### **Cortland Team Championships**

'The Cortland' as they have been nicknamed by many is an event that has quite some pedigree, running for 22 years sponsored by Cortland and Turrall and hosted by John Horsey. 16 teams comprising 96 anglers battled it out across Chew and Blagdon over two days making it one of, if not the biggest, event of its kind.

On day one (Saturday) the display of angling was phenomenal with the top four teams catching over 60 fish and nine teams landing over 100lb of fish! The FNF Nymphomaniacs took the combined lead by less than 2lb over Team Airflo with Team Snowbee just over 2lb behind!

The slightly overcast conditions seemed very favourable with a mixture of methods producing fish with washing line and Tip Lines taking the lions share on both Chew and Blagdon; Dries picked off the odd fish on Chew but were more effective on Blagdon, especially in the first few hours.

Day two saw brighter conditions and a rise in atmospheric pressure. The pressure was also on for our anglers, with the top of the table being so close, everything was to play for! With flat calm conditions we saw a split on Chew with half the boats starting at The Cages and half heading to the stones at Nunnery and the Mouth of Herons Bay.

Whilst at Blagdon the Dam, Cheddar Water and the mouth of Butcombe seemed to be the favoured areas.

In comparison the fishing was slower on the Sunday, perhaps the two practice days and first competition day were starting to take their toll on both the competitors and the fish!

Rod average for Saturday tallied up 7.92 and 5.54 on Sunday which was to be expected but not to be sniffed at just showing the class of both the fishing and anglers.

Before long Sunday's results were in with the FNF Nymphomaniacs retaining their combined lead and taking first place. Team Airflo took second and Team Elinor climbed the ranks to push team Snowbee off the podium!

Average fish weight was 2lb 3oz on Blagdon and 2lb 5oz on Chew. Best fish on Chew fell to Bob Cooper at 5lb 4oz and 5lb 2oz on Blagdon for Keith Lawrence.

A huge well done to all that competed with us over the weekend!

		11-0	HEW &	BLA	GDON L	IRES
	Match Statistics:	96				
	Anglers: Total fish caught:	1064				
	Rod average:	5.54			BOB COOPER SCOTT GRAHAM	
		2 lb	4 oz 4 oz 10 oz			
	Largest fish:	5 lb 46 lb				
	Best Total Bag with bonus:				SCOTT	SKAHAM
		Ter	ım Resul	ts		
			F	ish	Total We	ght
	FNF NYMPHOMANIACS			101	204	7
	TEAM AIRFLO			87	175	15
	ELINOR			85	174	5
	TEAM SNOWBEE			81	166	9
	BLAGDON FF			74	155	12
	NORTHERN DRIFTERS			73	155	0
	TEAM VISION			73	154	4
	BRFFA			67	137	3
	RED LION CARPETS			62	136	10
	STOCKS FALCONS			61	126	7
1	WELSH WIZARDS			61	125	14
	WEST COUNTRY RAIDERS			56	121	14
8	WALTHAMSTOW WULFFS			55	113	1
	MERLINS FF			47	95	4
	NORTHUMBRIAN BADGERS			42	87	4
	WEALD OF BATH			39	78	13

Congratulations to FNF Nymphomaniacs on the win and a big thanks to John Horsey for organising and hosting the event with us and to Cortland for their sponsorship.



# **Fluff Chuckers Multi Species**

Anglers came from all around the country for the Fluff Chuckers multi species event on Chew Valley Lake.

This competition is quite different to others in our calendar and generates a lot of interest!

The aim of the multi species event is to target four species, pike, perch, rainbow trout and brown trout, with a point system that is designed to favour catching different species rather than a lot of one particular species.

This year's event seen some extremely talented anglers including current and veteran British trout team members, British youth loch style trout campion and very respected pike anglers.

The conditions on the morning where a gentle breeze and fair so the playing field looked set for a good match!

The Trout proved difficult, but we saw 18 Rainbows in total to 5lb 5oz landed and one Brown landed by Gary Jarvis.

Unfortunately, despite a lot of effort the perch eluded the competitors.

The Pike where more obliging with 59 caught up to 22lb 8oz.

BEST INDIVIDUAL Roger Truscott

**BEST COMBINED BOAT SCORE Roger Truscott & Chis Wills** 

BEST PIKE. Oliver Cullingford

BEST RAINBOW TROUT Warren Chegwidden

BEST BROWN TROUT Gary Jarvis

BEST PERCH N/A

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## <u>Pike</u>

2023 has been an exceptional year for both trout and pike fishing! We could fill pages and pages with images of pike from Chew and Bladgon but I will do my best to give you an overview.

Our first fishing of 2023 was the February Pike trial, now February always seems to throw up some special fish and 2023 proved no different to previous years!

We lost count of how many 20lb+ Pike that were landed, with around twenty fish over the 30lb mark and two colossal 40lb+ fish being caught! One from boat angler Colin Bryant landing a 42lb specimen on a float fished Bluey just off Denny Island.

The other came from the Woodford bank in the shape of a 44lb 7oz Lake record caught by Nick Gahagan captured on a Sardine. Well done both truly amazing captures!



The pike continued to feed well despite the change in the weather for the second week in February, being mild but with higher pressure many feared it would be the end of the incredible run of fishing!

But some carefully placed rigs with a bit of finesse kept the pike coming as John Sturt proved showing off his 32lb 8oz specimen!



After February we saw good numbers of Pike Fly anglers join us when we opened in March, this sector of the sport really is growing year on year and offers something very different to those willing to put in the time, many assume it only catches the jacks but we can assure you it definitely catches the big pike too!

Dan Walker proved this perfectly catching a fish of a lifetime on the fly. Dan unfortunately wasn't able to get an accurate weight due to his digital scales letting him down, but we think its every bit of 35+ at a reserved guess!

It seems to be a "eureka" moment when people get the hang of it as it allows you to access the Pike that reside in Chew for a much longer period of the year and on some days you can be the only Pike angler on the lake!



The Pike fly isn't Just limited to Chew we offered Pike Fly on Blagdon on 2023 in May and October! This eagerly awaited event didn't disappoint with several 30lb+ fish.

Our resident guru John Horsey guided 3 days on Blagdon bringing 69 pike to the boat and the best at 32:09 for Dave McCormack.



Despite the changeable conditions of torrential rain, cold winds and fluctuating atmospheric pressure the Pike kept coming, whilst Blagdon fished incredibly in May, October seemed more of a struggle, but I suppose that fishing for you!

It was the first year we tried a new format allowing only 10 pike fly boats to share the 440 acres, before we have only offered 5 pike boats alongside Trout anglers. The feedback has been very positive making Blagdon more accessible for pike fly.

# **Blagdon**

Blagdon started with an initial pre-season stocking of 7,500 fish and a top-up of 1,000 fish at the back end of March.

Our season ticket holder's day was a huge success with good numbers of fish being caught despite the less than favourable conditions.

Fish were falling to lures and blobs fished in pairs on intermediates with orange being a key colour. Another popular approach was to use a floating line fishing cormorants with a fab on the point worked with a steady slow retrieve.

Again, the weather stopped play pushing our first day on the boats back to the 15th of March! A full allocation of 20 boats left the jetty as anglers took advantage of the gap in the bad weather! (We had to close boat activities the very next day!).

Bill Pugh and his boat partner experienced a great day's sport despite the testing conditions with 16 fish to the boat. Later this month Blagdon really came alive with Dave Reynolds and his boat partner taking over 40 fish.

Areas of note where Cheddar Water, Home Bay through to Green Lawn and Rainbow Point.

Blagdon was a favourite for our rangers too in the spring with many choosing to drop in for a few hours around shifts and it was easy to see why with rod averages in March being over 8.30 with an average weight over 3lb!

Jeff Hirst has had some cracking fish with us this year including several double figure fish like this 11lb pictured below! A few days apart from Seve Pope landing a 10lb rainbow from the boat.



The Top End at Blagdon was very productive early season, but it didn't take long for the fish to be on the move again as they spread into the bays along the South Shore and into Butcombe.

The usual tactics of Buzzers, Muskins, Crunchers or Daiwl Bachs fished Washing Line style with a FAB or Booby on the point were scoring very well as the hatches started to really come to life.

Cormorant patterns and lures fished on an Intermediate or Di3 starting to come into effect by May with the fish sitting a bit deeper.



Mr S. Bristow with a solid Blagdon Rainbow from the bank at Green Lawn that bottomed out his 7lb scales!

By mid-May the temperatures started to rise with early morning and late evening being key times, 13470 fish were stocked into Blagdon with averages at a more conservative 3.85 for the week commencing the 22nd May.

The fish at Pegs Point and Rugmoor were keeping the bank anglers busy with some impressive catches coming to dry's during rises, Midge, Cull's and Shipman patterns where very productive as was twitching a Foam Daddy.

In the heat of the Summer the fish dropped lower in the water column especially in open water. Deep Washing Line tactics on a fast tip or straight lining Buzzers were the order of the day picking up good numbers of fish across the lake.

Terry Willmott fished with us on the 26<sup>th</sup> May landing this immaculate Rainbow for 8lb 8oz taken on a Diawl Bach.



The highest rod average for August was 6.2 fish for the week commencing 1st. The monthly average was slightly lower at 6 but with an average weight of just under 3lb that is impressive sport for August!

The Ranger Team had been hard at work stocking Blagdon through August, with over 2100 rainbows coming from our Lagoons!

In September fly choice on Blagdon seemed to be "Back to Black" with Flying Ants, Corixa, Snails and the odd Beetle forming the bulk of the trout's diets.

Black Nymphs or Cormorants fished Washing Line style with a Black Booby, Blob or FAB depending on depth.

Dries were still worth using early and late or if the fish were up and moving. Black Bobs Bits, Spiders and Crane Fly/Daddy Long Legs patterns all proved effective.

In September and October both boat and bank anglers where still targeting the deeper areas of the lake such as Cheddar Water across the Dam, Pipe bay and the mouth of Butcombe.

Despite being sat over deep water, the fish where still spending most of their time in the top  $1/3^{rd}$ , favouring the more consistent water temperatures the deeper water offered.

The Last few weeks of the season proved difficult due to the water levels rising making the fish harder to reach. Those willing to wait it out where still rewarded with fish especially on a longer cast.

## **Chew Valley**

The Fisheries team moved 10,000 fish from our farm at Blagdon into Chew, with an additional 700 in March.

The excitement and anticipation within the team during stocking was high knowing they had really pulled it off despite the summer droughts and low water conditions. The proof was in the pudding! Both Chew and Blagdon arguably have one of the best reputations for the quality of fish and this season is no exception.

Our Fly season started off on Chew on the  $6^{\text{th of}}$  March with our season ticket holders opening day.

We saw some very impressive catches with a real mixture of methods and flies producing fish. Woodford and Walley banks seemed to be the hot spots however reports of good catches flooded in from all over the lake!

Peter Holdsworth showed the way on Walley releasing 25 fish by the early afternoon on floating line tactics fishing a weighted nymph on the point. Pete had a great stamp of fish including these three pictured below, all of which were over 5lb.



The 8<sup>th</sup> of March was the general opening day for our bank and boat anglers which coincided with a heavy ground frost overnight and several inches of snow falling in the morning.

Eighteen boats took to the water with large volumes of fish holding along the West bank, the most productive drifts seemed to be from the Dam across to Walley and then Woodford all the way into the entrance of Villice.

Those who braved the snow were rewarded with some amazing catches with several fish over 8lb landed!

Again, much like Blagdon the quality of the stock fish mixed with the many overwintered fish made for some exceptional sport.

Richard Walker was one of our boat anglers on the day pictured below with his eight fish bag.



The weather quickly became milder, bringing strong winds which wreak havoc with the diary as many days were blown off.

The bank seemed to still be producing good numbers of fish, Wick and Herons being very consistent as the fish got on the back of those powerful southerly winds.

Nunnery and Woodford also fished well when the wind allowed anglers to fish effectively.

Pulling lures and brighter coloured blobs early in the day or in the harsher weather then swapping to more subtle tactics when the weather calmed such as Buzzers or Nymphs kept the fish coming.

March was as expected a great month for returns with 1814 Trout caught, with a rod average of 14.23 and average weight of 3.22lb!

April continued in excellent form much like March with some sizeable hatches of buzzer. At times the fishing was a little more challenging but Midge Tips and Intermediate lines were the way forward once again with most fish coming to Buzzers, Crunchers and a few to Lures or Blobs.

Mr M.Russell caught a rainbow estimated to be around 13/14lbs which was certainly a highlight.

The Stocking continued in April with a further 2500 fish.

With the fish spread well possibly helped by the winds Herons Green and Behind Denny Island produced large numbers of fish and showed little sign of slowing down!

North Shore, Woodford Bank, Bobs House and Walley were all producing fish in similar conditions on the same day showing how well the fish had dispersed!

In May the catches continued to roll in with our rod averages from the Week commencing the 15<sup>th</sup> at 7.41.

By the 29<sup>th</sup> of May we saw another introduction of 4000 from our net cages bringing the totals stocked to over 18300 fish. As the spring changed into Summer the fish seemed to be favouring the deeper parts of the lake such as Walley Bank and the Dam with large numbers of fish sitting high over the deeper water.

This coincided with the aerators being switched on which always causes fish to investigate the turbid water.

Teams of buzzers and Nymphs fished with some colour on the point took the lions share of the fish, our very own Fisheries and Recreations Manager fished with venue regular Andy Stones landing 21 fish to the boat on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May.

Other areas producing similar numbers of fish where North Shore and Wick Green. Damsel patterns where arguably as productive fished close to the reedbeds.

Stratford and Villice were producing some quality fish for those willing to wait it out. With the possibility to fish dries when conditions were right.

Tom Hewitt fished with us on the 25th of May and spent his time over at North Shore, landing six fish which were all in great condition resulting in a fantastic average weight of over 3lb.





June, July and August all remined productive for the boats as the higher than usual water levels seemed to be offering the fish some sanctuary from the heat! The cages also seemed to offer some shade as they became a favoured haunt for the fish in the bright warm days.

The week commencing the 24<sup>th</sup> July fish exceptionally well with a staggering rod average of 9.58 for Chew!

The fish seemed to favour the open water all the way up until September with cormorants fished with a booby on the point seeming to be the most productive method.

We started to see a swap over to fry feeding with everything from white and black blobs, Rutland sparklers to snakes taking fish. Walley, Woodford Nunnery and around the cages seemed to be the best spots to pick up these fry feeders!



At the tail end of the season bank fishing from Walley bank and Woodford often produces some excellent sport for our bank anglers with a chance of some larger fish making an appearance.

Fishing lures at pace, white or black seeming to be the two best colours presented on a fast intermediate or DI3 is the order of the day to effectively target these larger fry feeding Trout!

Pictured below are Bill Tovey and Martin Downtown with an example of the larger fry feeding fish we have seem this November these two are 8 and 10lb respectively.



### **Barrow Tanks**

The Tanks saw the busiest opening weeks for many years with a high number of anglers taking advantage of the earlier start. 27<sup>th</sup> of February was our season ticket holders' day and our "Tanks" anglers lined up for a chance of an early season fish.

We saw a great mixture of over-wintered and hard fighting stock fish.

Our initial pre-season stocking consisted of 4,000 fish, further topped up with an additional 1,000 in mid-March.

We welcomed the Ospreys to the tanks on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March with 22 anglers taking part landing a total of 76 Fish.

The quality of the fish has been exceptional with reports of numerous fish over 5lb, two over 7lb. The rainbow pictured below showing signs of overwintering caught by Peter Holdsworth on a floating line fishing a team of nymphs.



On the 12<sup>th</sup> April 500 Fish were stocked into Tank 3, 200 into Tank 2 and 200 into Tank 1.

We also had a special report from Jack Michell who sent in this image of a beautiful rainbow measuring over 26 inches in length, witnessed by local tanks angler Bryan Taylor. This cracking capture was made on a sinking line and mouse pattern.

Reports of a very large fish captured at Tank 1 on the 27th of March - said to have been weighed at 13lb 2oz

Small Black Lures and Mouse tactics on Intermediate or Sinking lines were the main methods used early in the season before buzzers started to emerge where straight lining a team of three in the wind or inflow pipes seemed to be very productive.

As late spring pushed through Damsel patterns where hard to beat, as where small dries during the early morning and late evening rises which the tanks are famous for!



All 3 of the Tanks at Barrow have been producing fish recently to a variety of methods. Teams of buzzers fished static or very slowly, Gold Head Damsels and Humongous patterns have been producing. The far side of Tank 3 seems to be the best spot at present along with the inlet on Tank 2.

The "Tanks" saw another healthy stocking of 200 fish into tank 3 and another 100 into 1&2 on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May to keep the catch report flowing in!

Buzzers fished straight are still producing well or a team of three with a Blob or Booby on the point to add a bit of colour and disturbance.

Small black lures fish deep can score well in the bright conditions.

Large numbers of Damsels have been reaching the banks again so olive lures and damsel imitations are scoring.

The Evenings have been the time to target any fish moving in the surface layers with many anglers holding on to the last hour of light to capitalise on any evening hatches!

Thomas Di Leone enjoyed recent success with several fish topped off with this lovely 4lb8oz rainbow.



Much like all of Bristol waters lake, the tanks offer some amazing end of season sport!

The fish in Barrow tanks often switch from the last few hatches to feeding almost exclusively on the fry and Sticklebacks that live in the tanks with a fast intermediate or Di3 fished in conjunction with lures producing plenty of action.

Boobys, Blobs, Cats whiskers, Minkies and Humungous all produced fish on their day but the Olive snake was hard to beat as Ian Shanahan proved recently landing one of the largest bags we have heard of from Tank 3! Ian landed 14 fish with only two under 3lb! Well Done Ian!



We would like to take the opportunity to thank all of our Season ticket holders, Members, Deadbait and Lure Anglers, Birdwatchers, Wardens, Volunteers and anyone who has visited us this year!

Lastly a massive pat on the back to Alan our Operations manager and Luke our Fisheries and Recreations Manager for keeping the cogs turning all season and producing the amazing quality fishing and Trout Bristol water is so well known for!

We are already making preparations for the 2024, the calendar is filling with competitions and events and we cant wait to get going again!

Tight lines from all at Bristol Water for 2023, have a wonderful Christmas we will see you in the New Year!