

The Flydressers Guild Sussex Branch



Newsletter January 2024

Published by the Sussex Branch of the
Flydressers Guild

Chair: Peter Winder 07732024857
Acting Secretary: Alan Wells 07795523608
Treasurer: Bill Black 01323 763807
Membership: Andy Wood 07445274967
Newsletter: Simon Rickard 07799484166

Visit our web site
Sussexflydressers.org.uk

or on Facebook @
Sussex Flydressers Guild

or on Youtube
Sussex Flydressers Guild

AGM

The AGM took place on the 7th December 2023 at Clayton Village Hall. It was attended by 12 members. We would have liked a few more to have attended. Full details of the meeting will be available shortly. There were no changes to the club officers, and Tony Woolnough was presented with a certificate for his services to the club plus a 4 fish ticket at an event in the new year. Bill Black, our Treasurer, was presented with a

trophy for all his efforts in sorting out our banking and financial matters. Our thanks goes out to Noaki for organising the food which I have to say was exceptional.

2024 Fly Tying Evenings Dates 7pm to 9pm

January 4th & 18th

February 1st & 15th

March 7th & 21st

April 4th

Albury Estate Report

Almost another year has passed on the fishery, and it certainly has not been without its challenges. However, as we move into December, things are looking much brighter with the fishing returning to its best, largely aided by much cooler weather and lots of rain which has helped replenish the aquifers.

We now have large volumes of water running through Weston fishery, as well as the River Tillingbourne, which feeds all the other fisheries. With this cooler weather, we have been able to stock some really nice spartic trout (Arctic Char, brook trout cross), which are always popular with our anglers and provide a lovely bit of variety to the beautifully conditioned rainbow and brown trout from our own fish farm.

2024 Events

We have organized a couple of events in January 2024, starting with drop-in sessions by Peter Cockwill. This will be at Weston fishery, and all anglers are welcome to drop in throughout the day and pick the brains of the best in the business. The day will be a combination of in-lodge activities, such as fly-tying, knots, and leader construction, among others, as well as on-the-bank casting demos.

A date for this event will be announced shortly through the website and social media.

The other event is a tour of our very own fish farm by farm manager Richard King. This will take place on Wednesday, 10th January at 10:30 am, and it is a free event. To book a place, please email cameron.craigs@alburyestatefisheries.co.uk.

On the bank

In the winter months, a lot of our time is spent working on improving our stretches of the River Tillingbourne. We have approximately 1.5 miles of river to manage, most of which are only available to the Albury Park syndicate. The Tillingbourne is one of the few rivers in Surrey to contain a population of wild brown trout, and most of the work is done is trying to improve the habitat for these wild fish.

This year, we have been working on areas that have suffered from siltation deposits, which accumulate in areas of slow flow, often where the river has suffered erosion and become wider. There are several methods to help increase the flow, which include hinging trees into the river margins and the installation of in-stream features to narrow the river and increase flow, such as willow deflectors.

We use willow sourced from the estate, as once cut and installed, it will re-root and grow, creating a living feature. Positioned correctly, these installations will increase the flow and scour out the silt to expose the original gravel bed, which is vital for wild trout spawning. It will also promote weed growth and increase invertebrate numbers, which the trout feed on. These willow installations also provide excellent cover for juvenile fish from predators.

We have seen good numbers of trout redds on the river this year, a positive sign for the future generations of wild Tillingbourne trout. Anybody interested in joining the syndicate should contact Fishery Manager Cameron Craigs.

Tactics

Tactics-wise for the coming months, I can't emphasize enough to focus on your leader set up. I see a lot of anglers fishing leaders that are way too short. Quite often, they are 4ft to 6ft, while leaders ideally want to be 9ft to 12ft, longer if you think you can manage it. Also, cover the water in front of you effectively, not just putting the fly in the same spot all the time. It's also important to cover as much water as you can, not just staying and fishing the same spot all day. There is so much good advice online now and some great videos on YouTube on Smallwater fly fishing, not to mention the magazines.

Fish Farm News from Richard King:

WoW, what a year 2023 has been!

- Summer Water temperatures have increased to 20°C on the lower farm (trout stops feeding at 20°C) water supply has diminished by 50% creating very challenging conditions for rearing trout.
- My reliable source of eggs and fry of over 20 years will cease trading next year.
- At the same time, fish food has passed €2000 per ton!
- Dawn Fresh, the biggest trout producers in the UK entered administration.

Next year the fish farm will undergo major dredging works to help mitigate warm weather and improve the farm's longevity. This will be a logistical challenge that will see an increase in large fish being stocked into the fisheries over the next 5 months. In addition to seeing more 4kg brown trout, I have a 1000 1kg browns ready for lake stocking and over 3000 brown fingerlings initially available for river stocking.

In the future, I think trout fishing will become a high-value premium sport. Currently, many fisheries are turning to sourcing their fish from table trout farms with dubious quality, to keep costs down. I suspect as costs rise, more

farms will close. All the time Albury Estate Fisheries have the farm to subsidize the fish, the fishing prices here will be very favorable for the angler. Importantly, the low stocking densities on the farm are critical to producing the best quality fish.

Lodge News

Just to remind all anglers, the lodge cafe will remain open through the winter, Tuesday to Friday, 8:30 am-3 pm, perfect to take shelter from any adverse weather and enjoy some hot food and drink. Also, available in the lodge, we have a selection of fly fishing tackle and flies for sale, should you need to top up on essentials. The fishery will be open every day, except the 25th December, over the festive period. However, the cafe will only be open on the 28th and 29th December.

Happy New Year

In my fishing record book I usually write up a summary of the year ended and my wish list/plans for the next year's fishing. With my Secretary and Events Co-ordinator hats on, I thought it might be a good thing to do in the newsletter. Although committee members do some background explanation of their decisions at the AGM, some people don't hear that so I thought it would be good to clarify them background to some changes. By the way these are **my** thoughts and beliefs and may not be shared entirely by everyone on the committee.

The biggest change this year has obviously been the drop to 2 nights a month fly tying sessions. For those who have been with the club some time, this seemed a retrograde step but less than 20% of the branches around the country have once a week sessions and quite a few are only once a month. It was also necessary to reduce the major financial leakage from venue hire, as other income sources have dwindled. We have lost the substantial income derived from our auctions in the past. Having been involved in the lead

up to the last one, I came to appreciate even more the huge time commitment put in by **Roy Gurney** and particularly **Tony Harrison** over the years, which sadly no-one is willing to emulate. However, the change does not seem to have put off new members, as we have had more signing up this year than for the last 5 years at least. It does create some issues of the instructors having insufficient time to teach the skills required to reach Bronze Level in a year. This is particularly so if we have interruptions to the schedule but I believe that most who join us are more concerned with gaining the skills, rather than achieving "certification" over a set time scale. It is also interesting that the majority of our new members came to us via our revamped branch website. For most people interested in particular clubs/societies today, a web search is the first port of call. So although it comes with a cost, it is I believe one we have to bear for our continued survival. Thanks must go to our "webmaster" **Mike Guest** who has given his time freely to the club and created a far more easily navigated site.

The rise in subscriptions is, I believe, less controversial despite it being a substantial percentage rise. This was the first rise in prices for at least 10 years, probably more and is still in my view very good value for money compared to other clubs and societies and indeed other branches of the Guild.

Where fishing events are concerned it may also seem we are on a downward path, with only about **six** competitions planned this year. Some look back to the halcyon days when we had **10 events** in the year and I can remember 25 turning up to fish the Brass Monkeys competition at Hazel Copse on a very chilly February day. Nowadays we are fortunate if we get into double figures for attendance, with a few exceptions. There are several contributing factors here, not least of which is cost to our members. Most fisheries have been forced to raise their prices substantially due to increased energy and stocking costs. Even those who have their own attached fish farms have seen feed costs rise astronomically.

There are a few who have endeavoured to keep their prices at a reasonable level, Brick Farm, Coltsford Mill & Chalybeate being some but when transport costs are added, it can become quite an expensive day out. The narrow margins for the fisheries mean they are also less willing to give us "extras" such as free bacon rolls as inducements, unless we can get substantial numbers involved. With this in mind I hold the somewhat contentious view that we should use our not insubstantial financial reserves to subsidise these events. In my opinion it is largely the current membership who "earned" this money and hence they should receive the benefits from it. What are we holding on to it for?

The upshot of this is that we decided to limit outings to one a month as we thought this was more manageable financially. Then it's deciding upon which ones. Some seemed more popular and should stay e.g. Lakedown, Trophy Day and the Xmas outing. Where Moorhen was concerned several factors played against it for this year at least. As Wendy and Mark are selling up, the new ownership and pricing are a somewhat unknown commodity. Added to this the long journey puts some members off, so we are going with Coltsford Mill for the Chairman's Day instead. I was asked to sound out the idea of trying to re-instate the Charity Pairs boat competition on Bewl. I did some research and most members and other clubs who *might* be involved favoured a mid-week, spring timing. However, again we struggle for numbers on boat fishing, struggling to get beyond 3 boats whenever we have a Bewl day. What about Powdermill I here you shout? I love Powdermill but sadly our previous competition against Hastings FF has foundered upon lack of interest from both clubs in recent years and as a replacement for Bewl it is difficult due to the lack of engines on the boats. Hence I am trying to repeat the combined club event with EDFFC and OVFSF at Bewl in May. So for those who love a boat fishing outing, count me in, we can combine our Frank Darrah Pairs, a competition against

EDFFC and for those who are also members of Ouse Valley, entry in their boat competition. When we reviewed fishing events at Committee someone pointed out the lack of an outing in September, so I am hoping to get a return to Hazel Copse. Reasonable prices and C & R options are popular here, the only potential fly in the ointment (excuse the pun) being recent high temperatures in September. Where carp on the fly is concerned we have moved away from Passies due to dubious water quality and poor customer service. The alternative venue at Springbarn in Kingston, organised by Tony Woolough, proved very popular last year.

This has proved a rather lengthy musing but I hope it helps to understand how we have got to where we are.

Here's to Tight Lines in 2024
Alan

Xmas Treat.

Although it is quite expensive (£55 for 3 fish), as I had a fish which could be carried over from a previous visit I decided to give Duncton a whirl. The weather forecast excluded the rain which seems to have been incessant in November and early December, which was another bonus.



The day did not start well. My fishing car (or the smelly car as my wife calls it) decided to have no power steering and I had to transfer all of my gear to the other car. Of course I forgot to transfer my landing net but Dan the bailiff saved the day arriving with a spare net just as I hooked into my first fish on the second

cast. Dan informed me that recent anglers had said the fish were up for a chase, so I changed over to an intermediate with a Devine Dancer pulled through quite quickly. The impact was immediate with several hits and eventually another rainbow "on the hang". I spent the next hour moving around Birch Lake (there was no-one else to impede movement) with various encouraging knocks and my third fish came from the west bank. Finally on my last cast before I planned to stop for lunch, a heavy hit and a stubborn fight produced the beauty above – 3lb 14 oz of brownie in cracking condition. You do have to say that Dan produces lovely fish at Duncton, with every one of my catches being fully finned and having spade like tails, which helps them to fight vigourously. So a happy end to a day which had not begun well.

AW