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20th August 2020. Site Visit to Middlesborough Angling club Hutton Rudby Ponds.

Dear All.

Thank you for your time this morning. On first arrival when I realised there is no car park, I thought I was going to view another neglected club water in the middle of a field! How wrong I was!

The pools are generally in very good condition and the club clearly do lots of maintenance to keep the grass and grounds clean and tidy. Cutting the evergreens down between the pools has created better light and airflow between them and this will have a positive impact on the water quality.

Many venues I visit have a lack of marginal vegetation or they have unsuitable plants that have encroached too far and are causing issues. Your ponds have a little of both going on. Whilst the smaller pool has an abundance of Glyceria and Variegated sedge, as I pointed out, it creates its own platform so fish can easily take refuge underneath it. This has its benefits to some degree as they can hide from predation, but left unmanaged it makes angling tricky and slows down movement of the water.

The larger pool has a few areas of dense vegetation and large baron areas where the banks are eroding.
Erosion of margins must be stopped as it causes huge disruption eventually if left unmanaged. Trees are all too often planted too close to the water's edge and end up leaning then falling in, collapsing the bank and causing lots of damage. You have a couple of narrow paths between the pool and your boundary so you can't afford to lose more ground due to erosion.

You can just crop and utilise the plants you already have. Create a neat margin all around the pools ideally prepped with a small digger. This would take away the undercut banks, remove old swims and get everything ready for transferring the plants.

The right plants will utilise phosphorous and nitrogen which algae feed on, so they really help in so many ways, from protecting the margins, providing habitat and improving water quality and aesthetics.
I know some members will not understand this, and just want more fish to be stocked. But the truth is you probably already have too many.

When the biomass is high in shallow lakes, during the warmer months the dissolved oxygen can deplete leaving the fish with short windows of opportunity to feed. The more fish you have, irrelevant of size, the more oxygen demand there is, so adding more fish when you are not catching is often the worst thing you can do. Many clubs find this out to their expense, as we often survey waters after a high rate mortality only to learn they stocked fish recently.
An understanding of habitat and environmental factors directly affecting fish is far more useful than just buying more.

Creating movement is key for the fish. The more the stock is held up under snags or in weed/vegetation they are more likely to pick up a heavy parasitic load. We try to keep the fish moving by creating equal managed vegetation around the margins.

Both pools have a high biomass (total weight of fish) and this is apparent due to the turbidity and fish activity I witnessed. They are shallow, which has advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side they will warm up faster so the fish can potentially feed more and convert food to energy when water temperature is above around 15 degrees.

However, it can mean that winter fishing is slower as the fish switch off and conserve energy when the water gets cold, which happens faster on shallow lakes.

The application of calcium carbonate would help on both lakes. The benefits of this are twofold. With annual applications you would notice a reduction in silt and improvements in water quality over a 3-5-year period. One tonne per year split 70%-30% between the pools is totally safe, and inexpensive. It is supplied in 25kg bags and is simply applied either by boat or walking the margins.

A fish population survey would uncover current factual information about the stocks in both lakes, and gives you the chance to move fish between the pools. We could do this in the winter as discussed.

The dissolved oxygen today was absolutely fine, with 6.5mg/l in the big pool and 5..4mg/l in the smaller pool (anything over 4mg/l at this time of year is fine) the water temperature was 18.1 degrees this morning. The Oxygen meter I use is called a HANDY POLARIS OXYGUARD. You can buy one from Ben at BPmilling.co.uk.

It is possible that juvenile fish could migrate through the pipe in winter. This is more common than people realise because the smaller fish always seek refuge in the colder months. A survey would reveal if this is the case.

If we owned the lakes, here is a plan of what we would do in the coming months:

1.Continue tree work, on the island and margins. Remove any that are leaning too far or damaging the bank.
2.Consider using machinery to work on the swims. It saves so much labour and time to get a digger, grade the banks back, remove the old swims, and prep for planting. I understand access is an issue, but we would definitely get a 3-tonne machine in and do the work in one go. You can decide how to build the swims, but ideally, they want to be simple, strong and not stick out from the bank. Some match anglers prefer platforms but they are not suitable where it's so important to protect your margins due to the lack of space within your boundary.
3.We would widen the access gate to allow for machinery in future.
4.Crop the large beds of plants on the small lake (its mostly a mix of Bur-reed, Glyceria and iris) between swims and where its encroached in the corner, use what you need on the other lake and dispose of the rest. I would take the beds back to only a meter at the most. It will grow, but it's a basic part of fishery management, and as with all these jobs, it will help improve the fishing catch rates and water quality.
5.Stock assessment in winter to monitor/adjust fish stocks.
6.Calcium Carbonate application before spring.

I would also remove the barrels in the large lake. If you concentrate on managing the plants and improving the swims, the fish will be more active and by increasing the marginal habitat you would see greater recruitment survival.

We can help with any of the works, should you need assistance in future.
There are lots of clips of us carrying out every aspect of the works discussed, on my Facebook page. Its linked from my website. Flick through the clips until you find one that's of interest!

There is very little wrong with the pools, it feels more like a private fishery than a club water. I hope that we can help you develop the existing stock. Whereas most anglers want continual restocking in the belief that if the catches are

poor, its due to lack of stock, more often than not this is not the case at all! There are usually too many fish causing issues.

Regards

Andrew Ellis.

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