

RECENT FISH LOSSES

It has taken a while to get this together, but we wanted to give you the best info available rather than rumours and un-informed guesswork. Hopefully the weather change has got rid of the problem...but no one can know for sure, so please keep a look out for fish in trouble. Thanks.

Sadly we have, as in most springs/early summers, recently (beginning of June) experienced some fish deaths. Usually bream form the majority of the victims, but this time it was carp. At least one has been found in Lodge, a couple in Tear Drops, a few in Furzton, and perhaps up to 20 in Willen (plus a couple of perch and a tench).

That said, the biomass of fish still swimming around in Willen south is probably as large as it has ever been, if not larger.

In some cases spawning stress, sometimes combined with stress of rapidly changing temperatures stresses, is part of the cause, along, in some localised areas, with rapid 'blooms' and die-offs of algae which can dramatically suck up oxygen and suffocate any fish in the area at the time. But there are other factors, particularly in relation to Willen.

The city's balancing lakes are fed by urban rainwater run-off and are nutrient rich, making them great fisheries but adding complexity. In waters such as Furzton, and especially Willen, the natural nutrient inflow, coupled with the sheer mass of fish and volume of waterfowl/other wildlife – all producing faeces, and even more nutrients when they die and decompose – exacerbate the situation. Willen South in particular is seen as a real nutrient-rich 'soup'.

Algal samples tested by the rod-licence funded EA (which has been very supportive) have shown a real cauldron of microscopic life, which is hardly surprising. **All the types found are common to most stillwaters across the region...**but one which seems to have had a population explosion (bloom) in parts of the lake is a silica-based diatom organism called Synedra which thrives on sunlight.

Seen under a microscope it apparently resembles tiny shards of glass and has the capacity to irritate a fish's gills, rendering them ineffective – leading to suffocation and, potentially, death...no matter how much dissolved oxygen there is in the water at the time. It can also produce a poison capable of in extreme cases killing fish by itself.

The samples also contained various algae including traces of one blue-green variety. They show no residual evidence of what we would normally term 'pollution', and dissolved oxygen levels have been found to be good whenever they have been measured.

Some have expressed concern over Parks Trust use of blue vegetable dye to inhibit weed and algae growth: but they have used below the recommended dose at appropriate times (mid-March) – and the technique is used on a great many other waters, nationally, without problems, and was used last year and the year before on Willen.

The EA verdict is that Willen in particular is suffering from a SERIES of natural events unfortunately coinciding to produce the fish deaths evidenced.

They also say artificial oxygenation is unlikely to help because of the sheer size of the lake (that size is in itself likely to help ensure that there will be some 'safe' zones somewhere in the lake when things are bad in others) – and oxygen levels are generally good anyway.

Stopping angling for the duration would be unlikely to help because, in the EA's view, distressed and suffocating fish are unlikely to feed and be hooked...and if they aren't affected by the conditions outlined above, then there is no real reason not to fish for them. That said,

retaining them in the margins where conditions could (only could) be worse could on occasion expose them to danger.

Overall their opinion is that the only really viable option is to 'sit it out' until conditions in the lake change. The current changeable weather is probably already helping that happen, reducing algae/diatom blooms and providing a cooler, 'friendlier' environment for fish. Significant areas of the lake will likely remain unaffected, so significant portions of the fish stocks should be at little risk.

Weekly water samples are being taken by the Parks Trust for EA testing to monitor the situation, and dissolved oxygen testing will continue.

What anglers can DO is keep their eyes open for dead and distressed fish and, if they see any, report times, dates and details immediately to the EA on 0800 80 70 60. Waffling on on facebook or leaving messages for individuals in the EA (who may not even be at work) is not a viable substitute. **PLEASE stick to 0800 80 70 60.**

Naturally MKAA's committee and bailiffs are working with both the Parks Trust and the Environment Agency during this difficult time, and we thank both for their co-operation.

Trevor Johnson

Chairman, MKAA

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