

Fish Survey on the River Stort

Have you ever wondered how many fish there are in the river? Or maybe, how many different type of fish there are? Who studies such things? And will it make a difference? Well read on and all will be revealed.....

Every summer the Sampling and Collection team, from the Environment Agency (EA) Thames North-East Region, carry out fish surveys on all of the rivers in their catchment. I went along to one of their surveys on the River Stort in Bishop's Stortford, to find out how it all works.

Each survey is carried out over a 100 metre stretch of river. Each end of the survey site is blocked off with a net, stopping any fish from escaping. Once all the equipment is in place and the sediment settles, making the water clear, the survey can begin. Three surveyors walk the 100 metre stretch with anodes passing an electric current through the water. This current stuns the fish slightly which will bring them to the surface. This does not harm the fish in any way, it just temporarily immobilises them. Two other surveyors carry wooden nets to catch the fish and place them into a water tank. Another lucky surveyor gets the honour of pulling the boat along with all of the equipment in it.

This process is carried out three times, after which the fish are counted, measured and recorded. A scale is taken from the larger fish to allow the EA to note how old they are. This will give them an idea of how healthy the fish populations are, which in turn reflects the quality of habitat.

Once the survey is complete the fish are released into their natural habitat and left for another year.

On visiting the survey in Bishop's Stortford, I discovered there are large numbers of smaller fish such as minnows, bullheads and sticklebacks, along with the bigger coarse fish such as dace. There are a few brown trout in that particular stretch of the river too, as they favour a gravel river bed. A real treat for a novice fisherwoman!!!



Surveying with anodes sending an electric current through the water.



A hand full of this years brown trout.



Measuring a brown trout before taking a scale sample.



An example of the size of dace they caught on the survey.



The two that got the easy job of recording the days results!