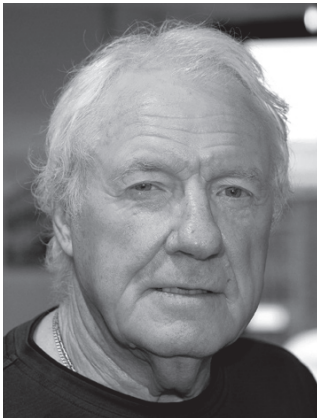


EDITOR TIM PAISLEY'S CARP LEADER

WITH CONTRIBUTION FROM JOHN WILSON MBE



Predation: The Rape of East Anglia – and Beyond

I'm trying to leave the predation issue alone for the moment and move on to other things, but the issue is too big and too important to be ignored. Quite simply, it is not going to go away. If you think back to the spread of otters highlighted in the 2010 Otter Survey and my Carp Leader a couple of issues back, and project that spread forward a few years, then the combined impact of signal crayfish, cormorants and otters on the fish stocks and fishing in this country is going to be increasingly devastating, and eventually irreversible.

In the second section of this Leader the first part of John Wilson's case study of the impact of predation on East Anglian waterways appears. It is a heartbreaking document, which is why it appears here. But not only is it hard fact, it is verifiable because the sources of the information appear in the study. We have a second case study from John which will be used on the website with the material that appears here. John is keen to gather more of these case studies from different parts of the country so we can continue to build a case against the predators and in defence of angling. We can all quote individual cases of clubs and syndicates suffering at the hands of cormorants and otters, but it is important that we build an overall national picture in support of our case that predators need controlling **now**, not when it is too late.

"I'm still receiving two reminders, and then two licences, in a total of four separate envelopes, which in terms of wastefulness is probably fairly small-scale as government departments go"

Let's address the issue that, as anglers, we are the poor relations when it comes to birds and the powerful RSPB, and otters when it comes to Natural England and other pro-furry organisations and lobbies. First, why are we the poor relations? A couple of years ago, with the help of the indefatigable Ruth Lockwood and the Angling Trust, we researched licences and licence income. At the time it was because I wanted to make a point about carp anglers being the poor relations, despite the fact that we buy two licences and contribute heavily to the licence pot. (I'm still receiving two reminders, and then two licences, in a total of four separate envelopes, which in terms of wastefulness is probably fairly small-scale as government departments go, but I'm going to move on from that and return to it at a future date.) What I want to highlight here is the fact that based on the annual increase shown from 2003 onwards, the likely licence income from anglers for the year 2011-12 will be of the order of £25,000,000.



ABOVE Recent cuttings from the weeklies highlighting the extent of our 'poor relation' status with regard to predation.

BELOW Fishing licence income in recent years, now of the order of £25,000,000 per year. Why are we considered the poor relations of the naturalist organisations?

£25,000,000. Twenty-five million pounds. Now here are a couple of interesting facts. One is reflected in a recent cutting from one of the weeklies, reproduced here. Two years ago Bungay and Cherry Tree Angling Club was forced to give up one of its prized waters due to otter predation. They have been saved by a Lottery grant of £10,000. We contribute £25,000,000 to the EA pot and a stricken angling club has to apply for a Lottery grant? And the well-researched report makes it clear that Cherry Tree were not

alone in making such a successful application. Fencing? Bring up otter predation and you will be condescendingly told that there are grants available for anti-otter fencing. In fact there is £100,000 available for the country as a whole to fence their waters against otter predation. That sum wouldn't even start to fence the stricken waters John highlights in the report that follows, and there are literally thousands of carp waters in this country that are unfenceable, either because of their size or because of the surrounding topography.

I'm limited for space here because I want John's case study to take centre stage this month, but I do want to answer a point that my old friend Kevin Nash brought up. I'm now the chairman of the PAG and ECHO. Why do we need the two groups, or committees? Kev asks, quite reasonably. Well, they have a slightly different remit, and there is so much expertise and research to be brought to the table by the personnel involved that to make an attempt to merge the two bodies at this stage would be unwieldy, and probably unworkable. ECHO is an import control carp organisation inspired by Ian Chillcott; the PAG is a predation-study specialist group inspired by John Wilson and his nephew Martin Bowler. I'm involved with the PAG because John's convinced that the carp lobby is vital to the funding and impact of the PAG, and because carp stocks are as much at risk as the stocks of other species. But when you read John's report you will realise that there is an important area in which the work of the two groups overlaps. ECHO's main remit is to control the import of carp.

ROD LICENCE INCOME	
YEAR	INCOME
2003-4	£17,990,149
2004-5	£18,905,940
2005-6	£20,292,629
2006-7	£20,504,768
2007-8	£21,662,806
2008-9	£22,834,340
2009-10	Not yet available

John's findings bring home the fact that otter predation must provoke a big temptation to resort to the illegal import of carp solely to replace irreplaceable big fish. Elsewhere you will find a page devoted to highlighting the work of ECHO and the PAG, and we will continue to bang the drum on behalf of these two essential committees in future issues. Carp farming already plays a large part in the legal stocking of lakes in this country, but how do you replace the loss of a 30lb+ carp? Worse still, how do you replace a number of such losses? The Mangrove and Birch now have their own fish farm. The two main pools are unfenceable and the stocks are high risk because there are otters in the area. Andy Ilton's syndicate on Cole Mere has recently been badly hit by otters involving the loss of huge, mature, natural carp. Rob Hughes lost his biggest carp from his syndicate lake to an otter this winter. Rob Hales had to close one of his waters a few years ago because of otter predation. Every area populated by otters will have similar losses to report.

I'm a member of the RSPB because I'm a bird lover. I find their stance on cormorants bizarre because as I understand it otters in some areas are becoming so desperate for food that they are preying on birdlife – because of the impact cormorants have had, and are having, on the natural food source of otters. The balance of nature has changed and there are too many heads thrust firmly in the sand over that point. Across the board the attitude seems to be that if it's furry or feathery then it needs protecting; if it's scaly then it doesn't. Bluntly, otters were hunted to near-extinction in this country because they are a menace. The Otter Survey published last year tells us that 59 otters have been reared in captivity and introduced into the wild. How many?! How do you snort in print? I don't know how the EA came up with that statistic but I simply don't believe it. If it's true, then they must breed like rabbits and spread like the black plague. John Wilson is right. The reintroduction of otters in this country has been done irresponsibly, and it continues. We need to fight for the right to protect carp stocks from predators on a level playing field with the rights farmers have to protect their stock. To be honest, having that right won't help enormously because otters are secretive, elusive creatures, but it's probably as much as we can ask for and to my mind it is a reasonable objective, otherwise I wouldn't be involved in the campaign. Over to John...



Report from John Wilson MBE

This is part of a case study detailing consequences of worsening, and now devastated, angling/leisure activity along the River Wensum Valley upstream from Norwich in the relatively short stretch between the villages of Taverham and Elsing, (though the entire 30 miles of the river between Norwich and Fakenham have been similarly afflicted), solely due to cormorant and otter predation. This has meant a substantial reduction in business to local pubs, shops, post offices, supermarkets, a golf course/fishery, hotel accommodation, guest houses and numerous, once prolific, coarse fisheries. This situation is now rife throughout Norfolk and Suffolk's major upper river systems, including the Yare, Bure and Waveney, plus their tributaries. All of which prompts the following question: Why is it within the law for a farmer to shoot someone's dog that is worrying his sheep, yet fish farmers, fishery owners and angling clubs, etc. are not freely allowed to control predators such as cormorants and otters which decimate their stocks of fish? It all beggars belief.

Why is This So?

When reintroduced by Tony Blair's administration in conjunction with Natural England throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, no consideration whatsoever was given to the impact on fish stocks needed to sustain an apex predator such as the otter. Were anglers even consulted about the consequences? Was there any kind of feasibility study done about the release of a major predator into river systems already raped of their silver shoal species by cormorants? Were riparian owners of the riverbanks consulted about their once 'valuable' salmon, chub, bream and barbel fisheries being turned into veritable wastelands for fish? Were angling clubs, whose members have put in much hard work over the years in constructing and maintaining valuable stillwater fisheries, ever consulted? Were private fishery owners who have actually built their own fisheries (such as me), ever told they would start losing expensive fish as otters started to devour, maim and disfigure them, once the larder in the rivers became bare? Sadly, the answer to all these questions is a resounding 'NO'.

No one was ever consulted as Natural England, fired by Blair's administration, ran roughshod over East Anglia, introducing otters everywhere. And remember, most stretches of East Anglia's upper rivers had already been decimated of silver shoal fish by cormorants, with a much reduced stock of eels (said to be

the preferred food of otters) which all the interested parties knew about. Very many superb angling fisheries, in both still and running water, have quite literally been turned into an Armageddon for fish.

The Result

Devastating predation has occurred, and is constantly occurring, to both river and lake species, including dace, roach, perch, tench, bream, chub, carp,



ABOVE John with his personal best 16lb 6oz barbel from the Wensum. The fish is no longer with us; yet another otter victim, along with numerous other specimen fish.

pike and barbel. Already, the youngsters of the River Valley have no accessible spots in flowing water to pursue the art of fishing, where they stand much of a chance of catching anything, whilst lifelong anglers whose interest lay with specimen-sized fish, are having their heritage and much hard work destroyed at an alarming rate. Barbel especially are easy meat to otters, as I experienced when scuba diving local rivers back in the 1970s; it was easy to come up alongside any sized barbel as long as you approached it from a downstream, or across river, direction. They would lie there and allow this 13-stone diver to twiddle their whiskers and stroke their bellies. They are by nature the most friendly and trusting of freshwater fish, whereas all other species will move away if you approach too close. To otters, adult barbel, specimens somewhere between 15-25 years of age, are literally 'easy meat.' And all the otter ever eats from a 10-15lb fish is around one pound of flesh from its throat or stomach, before leaving the carcass for a fox to sniff out and carry off; a sad end to such magnificent specimens.

Implications

Together with heavy cormorant predation upon silver shoal fish still occurring (a national cormorant cull is surely now imperative – it's not rocket science) there is no way these otter-ravaged rivers can continue as healthy fisheries and provide leisure for future generations. We are talking about tens and tens of thousands of anglers here (in East Anglia alone), all of whom have purchased a fishing licence in good faith from the Environment Agency whose mandate by the law of the land is to protect freshwater fisheries, be they still or running water. They are clearly not protecting fish! The anglers of East Anglia and the rest of the country have been let down badly. And it is a worsening situation.

Among those who are suffering along a comparatively short stretch of just the River Wensum:

Taverham Mills Lake and River Wensum Fishery

Tel. manager Simon Wrigglesworth on 01603 861014; email: simonwrigg@yahoo.co.uk
Comprising a 24-acre lake and one mile of the River Wensum owned and controlled by Anglian Water, this fishery was once the pride of its East Anglian holdings. A 16lb 6oz barbel, caught here by Steve Keer in 1998, actually held the British record. So the fishery was acclaimed nationally. In recent years, however, the entire fishery has been decimated.

The lake, though now fully fenced electrically, still suffers heavy otter predation each winter,

particularly in high water levels. In the 2009/2010 season alone, 24 big carp of up to 32lb in weight (at an average retail cost of at least £1,000 apiece) were destroyed by otters. In the river there is but a handful of barbel left. And of course it is impossible to fence in a river. The once prolific roach are virtually non-existent (mostly through cormorant predation), whilst adult chub, again through otter predation, have been drastically reduced.

The fishery's self-catering, on-site angling accommodation and adjacent tackle shop used to once provide a valuable source of income, but it now produces less than half the income it did back in 2006, such has been the devastation suffered, mainly through otter predation. Ten years back, the allocation of 35 'season permits' to fish the river only was always fully subscribed. In 2009 only 18 anglers had rejoined. The fishery used to contribute commercial value to many local businesses, its guests visiting local pubs, restaurants, shops, and even other fisheries, etc. This has now all but ceased.

Lenwade Post Office

Proprietor for 11 years is Alan Patrick, tel. 01603 872237

There has been a noticeable reduction in anglers, both local and on holiday, visiting the shop for food or bait. These past four years have seen a steady decline.

Lenwade Newsagents

Proprietor for five years is Mr Steve Austin, tel. 01603 872307, who is only too well aware of the local predatory problems due to large carp and tench being taken by otters from the lake at the rear of his property. This lake, once a gravel pit, like most of the 27 beautifully matured lakes around Lenwade now stocked with large carp, was excavated during the Second World War for the aggregates to build local airfields. It has been estimated that the water-owning residents of Lenwade have spent somewhere in the region of £70,000-80,000 on fencing in their properties trying to keep wanton killers, such as the otter, out.

Lenwade Mill Pool Residences, River Wensum

John Smith (tel. 01603 308092; lenwademill@aol.com) came to live here 10 years ago when the old Mill House was renovated and turned into luxury accommodation. He bought the property mainly for the wonderful fishing in the mill pool with its two sluices, and heavy stocks of bream and chub, plus small groups of barbel and roach, a status quo that sadly no longer exists. Until 2007, fishing in the pool was still good, but from 2008 the decline has been unbelievably rapid, through both cormorant and otter predation. Only last (2009/2010)

"It's as though the fishing isn't worth the effort any more, which is not so far from reality!"

Mrs Yvonne Todd, Foxwood Guest House, Taverham

winter, the worst for many years, due to many local stillwaters being frozen over, cormorants and otters plundered the pool and the river above to devastating effect. For instance, within a week of the Environment Agency stocking 250 young barbel into the river immediately below the Mill House, on every day thereafter there were up to 19 cormorants gorging upon them and what few other small fish that were left. Today there are no concentrations of young fish from which adults will ever emerge and a mere handful of adult fish left. The Mill Pool as a fishery is dead.

Mr A. P. Morrish (tel. 01603 870453; email moatthemill@aol.com) lives – and has done for 10 years – in The Granary complex, being part of Lenwade Mill Pool Fishery, and also has a partnership in The Bridge public house (across the road), which comprises a six-lake fishery and 600yds of the River Wensum, once famous for producing barbel to nearly 20lb. In January and February 2007 Mr Morrish found 13 barbel dead and part-eaten by otters. All these irreplaceable fish weighed in excess of 13lb. Two of these fish were found along the edge of the Mill Pool, the rest along the pub stretch, two of which Mr Morrish actually recognised (through scale and body deformities) as fish he had caught the previous autumn at 16lb 2oz and 16lb 6oz. Moreover, severe cormorant predation above the mill pool, combined with a river depth that has dropped from five feet to under four feet in the time he has lived here (due to silting up and poor management of the sluices by the Environment Agency), have ruined what was considered by many to be the finest roach fishing on the entire upper River Wensum. It was, in fact, the very reason he came to live here 10 years ago.

Mr John Seamons (tel. 01603 879437; email jseamons07@aol.com) lives in The Granary complex at Lenwade Mill Pool and has done so for 10 years since he first bought the property because of the prolific roach fishing. Due to advice (wrongly in everyone's opinion) from Natural England to the Environment Agency of not cutting a channel down the middle of the river so anglers can fish, and for improving summer flow, fishing has been virtually impossible during the past few years. And what with massive predation from cormorants during the winter months, float fishing for roach and dace (the Wensum's indigenous species, both mentioned in the Parson Woodford diaries of the 1700s) immediately above the mill pool is now largely a waste of time. In the words of Mr Seamons, who was so excited about the fishing when he first purchased his idyllic spot, "The fishing during these past few years has now

LEFT How many specimen fish victims have otters claimed? Thousands. Trying to count the financial cost to fisheries is impossible, and we have to apply to the Lottery for grants to soften the damage! That is scandalous.

completely gone down the pan." All because of an alien, non-indigenous (to our inland waterways) immigrant seabird and otters being introduced without any casebook study being done as to what these apex predators are going to eat in a river system already badly ravaged by 'the black death'.

Three Hall Walk Lakes, Lenwade

Tel. Mr A. P. Morrish 01603 870453: These previously well-stocked fisheries have, like all other waters close by, suffered devastating predation by otters upon the carp which once weighed up to 39lb. Dozens of extremely valuable and costly fish have been found part-eaten by otters these past few years. A fence at a cost to the owners of £25,000.00 has now been erected.

Lakeside Fishery, Lake House, Lenwade

Tel. John Wilson MBE on 01603 872336; email Kazan@river-productions.fsnet.co.uk These two small man-made lakes have been ravaged by otters for several years now (despite an otter fence being erected along the riverbank-only at a cost of £6,500.00; the banking is too steep around the rest of the fishery), with over 50 carp and grass carp to over 20lb being killed, together with 20 catfish to 25lb. What's more, during the severe winter of 2009/2010, dozens and dozens of carp were so stressed out after being repeatedly chased by otters (a distinct white 'stress' cast could be seen along their backs) that many died a slow death afterwards as a result. This is simply not acceptable.

Woodpecker Lakes, Old Hall Farm, Elsing

Tel. Mrs Jones 01362 688694: These two small lakes of two and three acres respectively, once prolific carp fisheries, lying adjacent to the River Wensum, have suffered drastically from otter predation during recent years. Specimens that would cost at least £2,000.00 apiece to replace have been ravaged.

Foxwood Guest House, Taverham

Proprietor Mrs Yvonne Todd, tel. 01603 868474: During the past four or five years bookings with anglers visiting this area and staying at Foxwood have certainly crashed. It's as though the fishing isn't worth the effort any more, which is not so far from reality!

Layfields Lakes, Lenwade

Proprietor Darren Layfield, tel. 01493 842231; email darren.layfield@hotmail.co.uk Comprising a short stretch of the River Wensum, plus four syndicate and day ticket carp and general fishing lakes. Due to uneven ground between and surrounding the lakes, not all of the fishery can be fenced in, although the owner has invested thousands of pounds endeavouring to protect much of the fishery, but it still suffers severe winter otter predation, at outlandish costs.

The Bridge PH, River Wensum Fishery

Tel. 01603 872248: Has suffered a



noticeable decline in the number of both local and visiting anglers wanting to stay at the pub and fish their stretch of river where the otters have reduced levels of specimen-sized barbel and chub to an all-time low. In the bar of the pub is a stuffed 16lb barbel (far larger than the once national record) which was found one morning part eaten beside the Wensum. This stretch produced monster barbel to almost 20lb a couple of years ago, individual fish that were merely a pound away from establishing a new British record, but now, most have been eaten by otters. This creature single-handedly has destroyed a unique and irreplaceable angling phenomenon.

Three Bridges Farm Lakes and River Fishery

Tel. owner David Baker on 01362 637883: Periodically suffers otter attacks, especially during these past four years, resulting in lower syndicate membership of anglers joining their fishery. Not exactly how the owners envisaged the running of a modern coarse fishery.

Wensum Fisheries, Costessey

Secretary Cyril Wigg, tel. 01603 423 625: This lakeland (three well-established pits) and river complex just downstream from Taverham Mill has suffered badly in recent years from both otter and cormorant predation, resulting in the Norwich and District AA, who control the fishing, issuing fewer and fewer permits each year, and having to subsidise those they do issue. Roach in the River Wensum here, once the pride and joy of the association, are now a rarity; chub are nowhere as thick on the ground as they once were, while carp, pike and tench in the lakes are regularly plundered by otters.

Dereham and District AA

Secretary John Mills, tel. 07876 563378, which has several hundred members on its books, controls stretches of the Wensum and various local pits between Lyng and Swanton Morley, open (for the modest price of a ticket) to all. Their waters are constantly suffering devastating otter attacks, diminishing all the hard work in stocking and quality, which in turn has a negative impact on the promotion of their fisheries to both local and visiting anglers alike.

Catch 22 Fishery, Lyng, Easthaugh

Manager David Wilby, tel. 01603 872948, email: info@catch22fishing.co.uk These two famous carp lakes (renowned throughout angling circles for the high-average sized carp they produce (including specimens to over 40lb) have periodically suffered costly carp deaths from otters which enter the complex via the adjacent River Wensum. As this is a big-carp fishery, the cost of regularly replacing those specimens ravaged by otters becomes an escalating, economic problem for the management. For instance, a 35lb carp, if obtainable, now costs up to £3,000.00. At today's prices this fishery contains £1¼ million in stock fish, and caters for 5,000 anglers annually, including a party from Ireland who come over purely for the wonderful carp fishing. Due to the boggy marshland boundary with the River Wensum, effectively fencing in the entire fishery is sadly not an option. The fishery at present is in the process of



LEFT 'Shylock' about to have his pound of barbel flesh. (Our thanks to Martin Bowler for allowing us to reproduce this graphic drawing by Gareth Fareham from Martin's lovely book *A Fish for All Seasons*.)

developing its own fish farm. Is it to lose still more fish to the wanton killing by otters?

Orams Fishery, River Wensum, Ringland

Tel. W. Oram on 01603 867317: This winding, once chub-prolific stretch of the River Wensum has greatly deteriorated in recent years through predation from otters and cormorants. It now has nowhere near as many adult chub and pike available to the small amount of syndicate members who still fish there hoping for things to change. I once caught 21 chub of between 3-4½lb here in a single session, my best-ever chub haul from the upper Wensum. Twenty years ago this stretch (like so much of the upper Wensum) contained shoals of big roach and large dace, both of which, due to heavy cormorant predation, are a thing of the past. Yet first and foremost the River Wensum is actually considered a lowland roach river. Now it's like a once-congested motorway without any cars.

Kingfisher Lakes and Apartments

Tel. fishing director John Bailey on 01263 712444: This four-lake complex, bordered by the adjacent River Wensum, like all local fisheries has regularly suffered its large carp being found wantonly killed and part-eaten by otters, whilst the once roach-prolific River Wensum (the envy of roach anglers up and down the country back in the last millennium), is now sadly but a shadow of its former self.

Wensum Valley Hotel and Fishery

Tel. owner Basil Todd on 01603 261012; email: enqs@wensumvalleyhotel.co.uk This fishery comprises nearly two miles of the once roach- and chub-prolific River Wensum, plus several wetland lagoons skirting the bottom of the golf course. Roach and dace are now almost non-existent due to cormorants, whilst otters predate

heavily on the specimen-sized chub, trout and pike. The owner has, on several occasions, found part-eaten big chub in the middle of the fairways, where a fox has carted off an otter-mauled corpse and been disturbed by early-morning golfers. This has resulted in fewer anglers staying in the hotel in order to fish this particular part of the river.

Lenwade Pike Club Lake

Owner Mrs S. Acloque, tel. 01603 872392; email acloque@btinternet.com This fishery has now been partly fenced in along the riverbank, at quite some cost, having been heavily ravaged by otters. Time will tell whether this continues. Much of the work has been done by the members. Numerous cormorants gather along the adjacent river, particularly in winter, and add to the predation.

The Lawns, Lenwade

Owner Mr C. Arthurton, tel. 01603 879888: Another specimen carp lake in Lenwade that is periodically ravaged by otters, at great cost to the owners in replacing stock. It has been part-fenced along the riverbank, but still 50 carp have been found part-eaten during the past five years.

The Station Lake, Lenwade

Owner Mr J. Woodhouse, tel. 01603 879421: A famous big-carp lake that has thrilled local and visiting anglers alike with the size of its carp for more than 40 years. But it too, in recent years, has suffered chronic predation from the release of otters, with numerous carp to 30lb being found part-eaten, along with a pair of large grass carp. The cost to the owner of replacing these adult carp is astronomical. It has now been partly fenced, but like so many of the mature lakes (ex-gravel workings) in Lenwade, the banks are extremely steep and uneven.

Conclusion

You'll see from John's revealing case study that we are not simply dealing with the impact of predation on angling here, but the impact on people's lives. We need more such studies dealing in hard facts, not in rumours. Winter carping pioneer and member of the Golden Scale Club, Mike Winter of Devon, has been in touch with supportive comments about our work on predation and he is currently collating information on the impact of predation in Devon. If you think you can help, then look at the advert on the page opposite and get in touch, but no time-wasters, please. None of the committee members receives remuneration for their work on behalf of ECHO or the PAG, and we are all dependent on colleagues doing what they set out to do. So we need as much help as possible, but if you do come on board don't underestimate the frustrating and thankless task that lies ahead.

Enjoy your fishing. See you next month. **TP**