

## **Game Stocking Strategy 2023**

Since 2021, WADAA has re-evaluated its approach to trout stocking in response to a number of factors:

1. Significantly increased cormorant predation, particularly in the winter months. The club has protection/control licenses on some venues, though United Utilities prevent lethal control methods at Ghyll Head and High Newton. Additionally, the size of some venues (such as High Fairbanks) make control virtually impossible
2. Increasing summer temperatures and extended dry spells created very poor water conditions for trout (water temperatures above 20 degrees leads to the fish losing condition quickly, ultimately ended in death if conditions persist)
3. Warmer waters trigger high levels of waterborne algae which create severe oxygen crashes during periods of die-off (which are inevitable)
4. Increasing number of venues offered by the club increases the stocking requirement
5. Poor condition fish leave them susceptible to bacterial attack and fungal growth – transmission between fish is higher when stocking is heavy

As a result of these, the club commenced a series of actions designed to improve sport for members whilst ensuring affordability and taking steps to increase the inherent resilience of venues to withstand these pressures:

1. Installation of mains-powered aeration systems where feasible; Bigland, Hall More and Farletonview
2. Installation of solar powered aeration solution at Capernwray
3. Target stocking densities at 300lb/acre
4. The use of blue dye and barley straw bales to combat algal growth
5. Installation of a large floating island on top of a caged fish refuge at Capernwray
6. Elimination of winter stocking on highly cormorant predated venues
7. Extension of the season at Farletonview
8. Significant facility investments at venues which allow protection measures; Capernwray, Bigland and Hall More
9. Increasing winter fish stock size to between 4 and 5lb to reduce cormorant predation
10. Increasing the number of stockings, with fewer fish stocked each time, to maintain a more even supply of 'fresh fish' and reduce high stock loading which attract predation and increase oxygen pressures
11. Constant water condition monitoring using the latest technology to give an increased lead-time of worsening conditions
12. Increasing the average size of 'stockie' fish from 1.75lb to 2.25lb

These measures have proven very successful and catch returns have shown significantly increased rod averages as a result.

However, the issues described still persist, though on a reduced level:

1. Though we haven't had significant fish deaths in the past 2 very severe summers, the fish have emerged in September in poor condition. It is likely that most trout have not fed (or fed very little) for 3 months. As well as fish being poorly conditioned, this also leads to stress behaviours such as grouping and circling, as seen at Farletonview (without the measures taken, these fish would have died)
2. Despite the aeration measures, some venues have still suffered from periodic low oxygen – these are usually the ones serviced by lower efficiency, solar aeration. The club has supplemented these systems with petrol-driven pumps as required. These are expensive, noisy and take up huge amounts of time and resource to service.
3. Venue closure when conditions (as indicated by the monitors) are at their poorest.

The club spends a lot of time discussing issues and potential solutions with other large specialist organisations such as the Angling Trust, Environment Agency and Institute of Fishery Management. We know that the actions carried out are best-practice and in some cases, at the forefront of management techniques.

Many, many other trout venues across the country have taken a much more drastic course of action in response to these pressures:

1. A fish cull as at the end of the spring season
2. Instigation of a summer close season
3. Setting up processes to manage high numbers of summer fish deaths (as opposed to trying to prevent them)

As a result of the actions already taken, WADAA is not in this position. The club will continue with its efforts to maintain healthy environments through good management practices and timely interventions, in order to provide as high quality of fishing as possible, spending money wisely, whilst maintaining affordability for members.

For 2023, further enhancements will be put in place:

1. A further paddle aerator will be added at Farletonview to create some flow to the rear of the lake.
2. The solar powered aerator at Capernwray will be upgraded to a more efficient design
3. The barley straw programs will be extended across other at-risk venues
4. The stocking of larger fish in winter will be extended over more venues

As well as being significant up-front investments, some of these measures greatly increase ongoing costs. For example, it is anticipated that the costs of mains-powered aeration next year will be over £10k. This is a significant cost and one which didn't exist 2 years ago. Current pressures on the price of electricity compound this. Electricity supply at venues is 'commercial' and therefore doesn't currently benefit from the price cap.

Efforts to protect our stocks probably cost more than the value of the stock themselves. However, the club views it's responsibilities regarding animal welfare and husbandry highly. Failure to carry out

these measures would not only have a catastrophic impact on the reputation of WADAA, but also angling as a whole.

As the club increased the number of venues available to members, different stocking plans for each could be developed. This both gives members choice and also allows a tailoring of tactics to venue specifics. This will continue in 2023.

Though the number of members winter fishing is increasing, numbers are significantly less than the high spring/autumn seasons. As such, winter stocking will continue to focus on those venues which are both popular and can be protected from predation. As a result of current inflationary pressures, the cost of trout will increase by about 20% this year. The club estimates that, for example, over £10k worth of stock will be lost to cormorant predation at Ghyll Head and High Newton alone over 5 winter months. Without significant increases in game membership fees, such losses are unsustainable.

## Capernwray

Because of access, facilities and the fact that geographically this venue avoids the worst of the cold weather, Capernwray was extremely popular during winter 2021/2. However, due to its position near the coast, it has historically suffered high cormorant predation.

In winter 2021/2, the club experimented with stocking larger, 4lb fish over the winter months. This proved very popular and will continue for 2023. Stocking will occur regularly throughout winter

## Farletonview

The club will continue to develop Farletonview as its most highly stocked venue, offering the likelihood of the highest rod averages. In order to maintain the target stocking densities, average fish sizes will also be the smallest, with most fish between 1.75lb and 2.25lb.

The venue will continue to close during December and January – this is a condition of the permission to fish. As a result, stocking at this venue will cease in October and recommence in January.

## Hall More

Upon opening, Hall More received the largest fish stocked by WADAA – again this proved very popular and will continue, with significant numbers of 5lb+ fish. Stocking will occur regularly throughout winter

However, large trout are not robust and suffer badly from poor handling by anglers. Members must ensure that they have appropriate tackle for this venue in terms of rod and line strengths and the size of landing nets.

Some of the fishing areas are off higher bank. Though the club has recently installed 8 new water-level casting platforms, long handled nets are a requirement. Anglers must unhook and release these fish in the water and not remove them up the bank or handle them with dry hands.

## Ghyll Head and High Newton

As already described, these United Utilities venues are affected by severe winter cormorant predation which the club cannot control. As such, no stocking will take place over the winter months.

However, the club recognizes the importance of these venues for members. As the club has developed more 'managed' fisheries recently, these are typically more natural 'upland tarns' which appeal to a section of the membership.

As such, and building on the trials from last year, the club will introduce a stocking of large 4-5lb fish for the winter of 2022/3. The effect of this will be monitored and if successful, expanded going forwards.

This monitoring can only be done using the catch return system. The club will take steps next year to increase compliance for their completion.

## High Fairbanks

Conditions witnessed at High Fairbanks this summer have been different from previous years, with a much higher level of summer algae, creating sub-optimal conditions.

Despite seemingly suffering from some cormorant predation, the venue appears to over-winter fish well. However, given it's location and altitude, it receives the least angling pressure of all the WADAA venues.

As such, the twice yearly (autumn and spring) stocking will continue of fish averaging 2.25lb For this year, overall stocking numbers will be increased by 10%.

## Bigland

As a result of the investments made at this venue, Bigland will be one of the key hubs for WADAA.

This venue will contain the highest variety of trout sub-species and also size range.

For 2023, the venue will be stocked with Rainbow, Tiger and Spartic trout in sizes up to 5lb.

These stocking will occur twice-monthly throughout the stocking season (including winter).

## Brown Trout

A general note on brown trout. Whilst we recognize the appeal of browns amongst members, cost are prohibitive, with fish costing about twice as much as rainbow trout. As such, they simply do not reflect value for money – especially in current times. If the club can source some reasonably priced fish, some brown trout stocking may occur.

## Summary

These stocking plans are aimed at building on the work of the last 3 years and making further improvements for member's enjoyment, whilst maintaining a level of affordability.

The stocking plans will continue to develop individual 'venue characteristics' thus appealing to the variety of angling tastes seen amongst the membership.

Trout stocking costs for 2023 will increase by around 25%. This is as a result of inflationary pressures on supply costs and on the club stocking in greater numbers, and of larger average fish, of greater variety.

In doing-so, the club aims to continue to deliver the best possible quality of fishing whilst maintaining affordability and fish health care.

The difficulties regarding weather and predation increase every year and the evolving stocking plan is aimed at mitigating these effects as far as possible.

Please use the catch return system. For those anglers not doing-so, you are undermining your own fishing as well as that of all our members.

Bag-limits will remain the same as 2022. Please remember these were altered from previously to account for the large-size fish stocked.

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