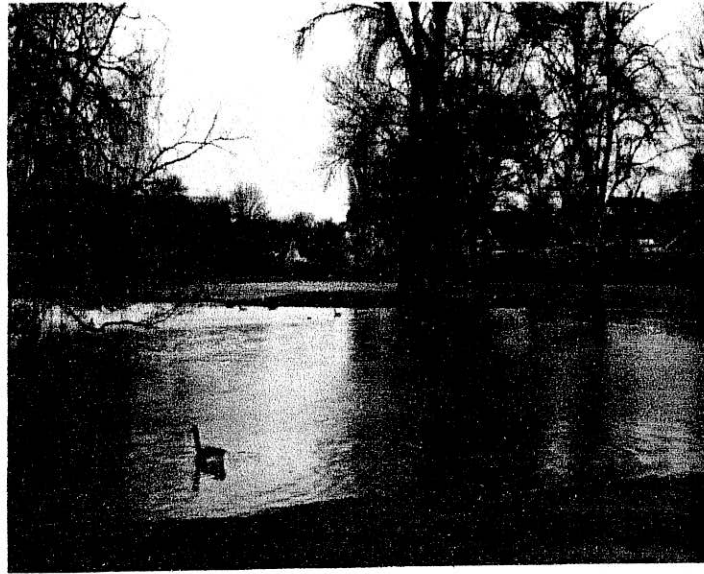


**AN ASSESSMENT OF SANDWELL COUNCIL'S
FISHERIES MANAGEMENT AND ITS EFFECTS ON
WILDLIFE AND THE ENVIRONMENT**



A REPORT AND INVESTIGATION



BY SANDWELL SWANWATCH

Chris

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We would also commend Mr Parkes for his hard work and diligence at Victoria Park.

1 INTRODUCTION

This report entitled "An Assessment of Sandwell Council's Management of it's Fisheries and it's Effects on Wildlife and the Environment" follows the publication in March this year of the Environment Agency's Research and Development project 'The Impact of Lost and Discarded Fishing Line and Tackle on Mute Swans', which "highlighted the magnitude of the danger which angling tackle poses for mute swans"

The E.A study examined data collected by The National Convention for Swans and Wildlife between 1995-2000 who receives reports from swan rescue groups across the country about their work. Analysis of tackle retrieved from injured birds was also undertaken to determine the competence of the anglers who were involved and if there was a particular time of year when incidents occurred most frequently. This analysis concluded that 29.7 % of all rescues were due to tackle problems with a further 3.6 % due to lead poisoning. If their statistics from 1995 and 2001 are added the figure reaches 30% see Appendix A for national swan rescue statistics year by year.

The study only examined tackle from injured swans. It did not seek to look at the all the tackle left behind by anglers. Neither did it look at the many different species that become entangled with angling litter.

We decided to try and quantify the amount of angling litter left behind on Sandwell's pools and also to monitor which species suffered most as a result of this.

1.1 ABOUT THIS STUDY

We looked back at our own rescue records over the last 3 years and identified local angling spots in the Sandwell area where we have rescued birds with line and tackle injuries.

These sites are Dartmouth Park, West Bromwich, Sheepwash Nature Reserve, Tipton, Victoria Park, Tipton, West Smethwick Park, Smethwick, Swan Pool, West Bromwich and Icehouse/Cascade pools, West Bromwich.

We also monitored the Ridgacre canal in West Bromwich, a non-council run fishery where we have never experienced problems with wildfowl and angling.

From January 1st to September 1st 2002 all discarded fishing line and tackle that we found on these sites was collected with a view to showing how much angling litter was being left behind. This substantial haul of some people's selfish laziness will be passed on to the National Convention for Swans And Wildlife and their Environment Agency colleagues to add to their ongoing studies.

From the close monitoring of the above named sites by swan watch members, 36 birds were observed to have angling related injuries. The fact that litter was being regularly collected after fishermen discarded it probably saved many dozen more from needing to be rescued. The species most commonly found to be affected was the pigeon with 14 examples- 38.8% of the total. The worst site is Victoria Park Tipton with 15 recorded incidents 41.7% of the total.

We collected a staggering 1,633 yards of line in the course of our investigation, 1007 of it at Victoria Park alone. We also found examples of illegal lead shot still being used in Sandwell.

Other issues emerged during the course of this investigation which include

- the enormous time, work and money that some individuals put into the care and rehabilitation of injured birds
- the way in which some anglers have produced a community resource through dedication and hard work
- Safety fears for both anglers and wildlife that share Sandwell's pools with those who seek to destroy them
- The complacency of certain individuals within Sandwell Council whose apathy and ignorance of issues raised previously has caused an atmosphere of crime; fear of crime and anti social behaviour to fester on Sandwell's parks and waterways.

We would say directly to these individuals ...

“ WAKE UP TO THE FACTS IN THIS REPORT!”

Apathy and complacency through poor fisheries management is bringing angling into disrepute where it needn't be. Only by combating the ignorant minority of anglers who are creating a bad name for the many good ones will we be able to reclaim our parks and waterways for both wildlife and local people to enjoy.

2 BACKGROUND RESEARCH

2.1 FISHING AND CURRENT LEGISLATION

It is a legal requirement for everyone to have an Environment Agency rod-fishing license for coarse fishing in Sandwell, which currently costs £21.00 for a full season from 1st April 2002- March 31ST 2003. Concessionary licences are available for-

- those aged between 12-16
- the over 65's
- those on long term incapacity benefit or short term incapacity benefit at the higher rate
- those on severe disablement allowance
- those on a war pension which includes unemployability supplement.

ANYONE UNDER THE AGE OF 12 CAN FISH FOR FREE WITHOUT ANY EXPERIENCE OR SUPERVISION.

Failure to produce a valid license to an E. A fisheries bailiff or water bailiff may result in the confiscation of tackle or a maximum fine of £2,500. Such cases are well known in the Sandwell area.

2.2 UNATTENDED RODS

The Environment Agency website states

“It is unlawful to leave a rod and line that is unattended, in the water or over which sufficient control can not be effected.”

2.3 THE ROLE OF THE WATER BAILIFF

We spoke to local water bailiff John Campbell who undertakes work for both the Environment Agency and British Waterways. He told us that his main responsibility was to ensure that people were fishing legally with a valid license and he has the power to ask them to produce this for inspection. His other duties include reporting any pollution incidents, monitoring banks and ensuring that the fisheries provide

“a safe family environment for all to use”.

2.4 LEAD WEIGHTS AND LEAD POISONING

Since 1987 the sale and use of most lead weights by fishermen has been banned. This followed research proving that lead weights used in fishing were responsible for lead poisoning in wildfowl- particularly mute swans. Over this time the angling trade has perfected many alternative non-toxic brands. In the Angler's mail June 3rd 2000, the boss of Anchor Ross Keightley a well-known fishing accessories firm commented

“ The lead ban gave angling the opportunity to design its own products instead of using modified gun pellets. Today's non-toxic shot is consistent and technically engineered. We think our products work equally well and sometimes better than lead.”

The crucial factor of cost however was affected by the ban. Manufacturer Dinsmores' Nigel May stated in the same feature

“ ... Shot is now probably three or four times more expensive than it used to be”.

It would appear that the environmental cost would have been far greater and catastrophic to swan populations had there not been this partial ban.

2.5 ENVIRONMENTAL COST

It is a very popular misconception that all lead weights were banned after 1987. Lead weights of 0.06 grams, or of more than 28.35 grams may still be used.

This equates to legal angling shots of sizes 14- 8 and those of over 1 ounce.

Although swan populations are accepted to be increasing nationally and the incidence rate is not as high as when all sizes of lead weights were legal, lead poisoning is still one of the most significant causes of nervous disease and death in waterfowl.

On the Environment Agency Fish Website under fishing weights it confirms

“While lead dust shot (size 8 and smaller) are legal, they are toxic to birds if ingested. Use spill proof containers for lead dust shot and always dispose of used lead safely at home”.

What method this “safe” disposal should take is not mentioned, but as lead is toxic to all living creatures including man the disposal should presumably be not via any watercourse or drain.

Being environmentally persistent this heavy metal may remain buried in silt and mud in pools and waterways for decades. The continued legality and use of dust shot remains highly controversial with campaigners for a total ban including the National Convention for the welfare of swans and wildlife who ask the question why is it legal to be able to add a toxic substance to a water course when there is a high chance of it being lost in that watercourse, yet if someone was to add a toxic substance to a watercourse other than lead then the Environment Agency would prosecute them?

2.6 PARTICULATE LEAD

The biology of swans and wildfowl require them to swallow a large amount of grit or gravel that grinds down digested food. As swans are bottom feeders and can go up to 1 metre they are more likely to be able to swallow greater quantities of particulate lead which they would mistake for grit on the bottom of the water. Small quantities of this type of lead could be swallowed intermittently whilst feeding or if water levels have dropped significantly the chances of swallowing large doses increase.

A popular misconception is that a liquefied lead source entering water causes the pollution of the water and the subsequent poisoning of the swans and wildfowl.

The Environment Agency may test for the lead content in a watercourse where swans are dying from lead poisoning. The results may reveal a low concentration for lead in the water but to then subsequently claim that 'there are no lead particles in the water and hence no lead problem' ignore the tiny size and nature of particulate lead used in fishing and shooting which can be swallowed in any size.

When the initial results of a study of Swans, geese and ducks caught on the River Avon at Stratford by The National Convention for swans and Wildlife which showed them all to have elevated blood lead levels, the angling press were quick to dismiss the study with even NFA chairman Ken Ball commenting in the Angling Times August 22nd 2001

"I think that angling is being used as a smokescreen to cover the real cause of lead poisoning on our rivers- namely boats.

He continued

"... these things don't run on lead free petrol. They run on diesel which contains a lot of lead."

A letter passed to the swan convention from Milford Haven oil refinery; prove these comments to be completely unfounded, See appendix B.

THERE HAS NEVER BEEN ANY LEAD IN DIESEL AND IT IS A FALLACY.



This lead poisoned cob on the right on the Birmingham canal was rescued by Sandwell Swanwatch and West Midlands Fire service. Note the distinctive kink in his neck compared to the pen's straight neck. He died just a few days after this picture was taken leaving his mate and four cygnets to fend for themselves.

2.7 OUR OWN EXPERIENCES OF LEAD POISONING

Having rescued many lead poisoned swans ourselves including some from Sandwell we have first hand knowledge of the disastrous consequences for wildfowl after ingesting angler's lead weights, from which there can be no other source.

One example came last April on Victoria Park Tipton when the resident female swan died of lead poisoning leaving her mate behind as the only swan left in the town. As a nesting pen she could have had no contact with any other water source containing particulate lead. Neither is Victoria Park a place where shotgun pellets may have entered the water system.

For the best evidence of the harm that lead and lead poisoning can do to swans we sought evidence from Mrs Jan Harrigan of Droitwich Swan Rescue.

2.8 THE ROLE OF SWAN RESCUE

Jan Harrigan founded Droitwich Swan Rescue based on a family farm at Wychbold some 28 years ago. In this time Jan has become one of the most respected swan carers in the country and has passed on her knowledge to many other individuals and groups including our own. Catering for between 400-500 swans and other wildfowl a year, she rehabilitates birds from West Midlands, Worcestershire, Warwickshire and even Wales.

Jan's main focus in recent years has been in her work on lead and its effects on birds. Every bird brought into the centre is blood tested on arrival so that its blood lead level can be determined. Samples are sent to the veterinary investigations laboratory that test the blood and fax back the lead level. This helps in assessing the birds internal state of health and the course of treatment it will need as well as providing evidence to prove to the authorities that lead poisoning did not end with the partial ban of lead weights in 1987.

Mrs Harrigan told us that a normal healthy adult swan could live with 0.25 parts per million ppm in its system, which are the units, she uses in her study. She told us

“the veterinary investigation laboratory have proven as a fact that one number 8 dust shot is death to a 10 kilo swan. This gives a blood lead level reading of 6 parts per million.”

The scale of the poisoning problem was very alarming in that

“80% of my intake have elevated blood lead levels. The dust shot is more lethal to a swan because it has a smaller surface area and is therefore ground down by the acids in the swan's system more quickly than large chunks. By the time a swan is X-rayed there may not be that much particulate lead present in the gizzard because it has already dissolved into the blood stream”.

The majority of other rescue centres in the country do not test the blood lead levels of every swan that is admitted, and so the real scale of the problem may be underestimated significantly where only swans showing the obvious clinical signs of lead poisoning may receive the correct treatment.

She informed us however that

“The Environment Agency have now accepted that there is a national problem in this country with lead levels. When a swan grinds down lead in the gizzard it enters the blood stream. After about three days its brain doesn't work properly and the nervous system is attacked. Its movement is restricted and they stop eating. So unless gets treatment quickly then it will die.”

“I can spot a leaded swan a mile away without having to wait for the result to come through because it has a type of vagueness present in the eyes, that's the best way I can describe it. By the time a swan gets a kink in it's neck and stops eating which is what everyone thinks are early signs then it is usually too late”.

She also told us that the birds' elevated lead levels might cause other common forms of wildfowl fatality. She stated

“ A swans judgement is greatly impaired when it has a high lead level, especially during flight. Many swans that I treat for crash landing or power line strikes I find to have high blood lead levels. Those that die as a result of these injuries would be recorded by people who find them as having died as a result of misadventure but the cause and their real killer is lead”.

2.9 THE TREATMENT OF LEAD POISONED BIRDS AND ITS COST

Treating lead poisoned birds is extremely laborious and time consuming. Sodium Calciumdate is administered by injection, which chelates the heavy metal quite effectively.

Jan revealed

“The treatment is long and hard and many birds just give up the fight. Some birds can tolerate much more lead than others before they start to show serious symptoms. I once had a cob from Cheltenham brought in with a lead level of 127 parts per million. The RSPCA inspector had to keep stopping on the way down to see that he was still alive. Against all the odds we got him through it. Other swans have had much lower levels, which are still severe but have died. “

The cost of treating a lead poisoned bird, which could take months, is also quite staggering. Jan added

“I've calculated that it costs me between £120- 150 to treat a bird with lead poisoning. This includes treatment, medication, feeding, medical supplies, disinfectant, electricity and heating, bedding. I also have to pay insurance for my volunteers on the farm and electric fencing to keep out foxes who are incredibly persistent. Then there is the water bill, which I have to pay for cleaning out the pond and hosing down the outdoor pens. It just goes on and on....”

Taking the conservative figure of £120 and calculating that she receives an average of 450 swans per annum, 80% who are suffering from lead poisoning i.e. 80% of 450 = 360 birds x 120

The cost for treating lead poisoned birds at Droitwich swan rescue must amount to around £43,200 per annum!

Bearing in mind that there are many other rescue centres dotted around the country the real financial cost that lead poisoning puts on swan carers must be astronomical and all as a result of other people's leisure. A typical packet of lead dust shot weights costs around £1. 60.



An outdoor pen at Droitwich Swan Rescue

2.10 VOLUNTEERS AND MEDIA PRESENTATION

All rescue groups such as Sandwell Swanwatch, and Droitwich Swan Rescue do their activities on a purely voluntary basis. The time cost is incalculable. It may take days to successfully catch an elusive wild creature who fears predators and whose survival instinct tells it that it must avoid being caught at all costs.

Transport is the main cost to the volunteer. If swan watch receive a report of an injured swan we firstly have to get to the site in question. A trip to Droitwich from Sandwell is 25 miles down the M5.

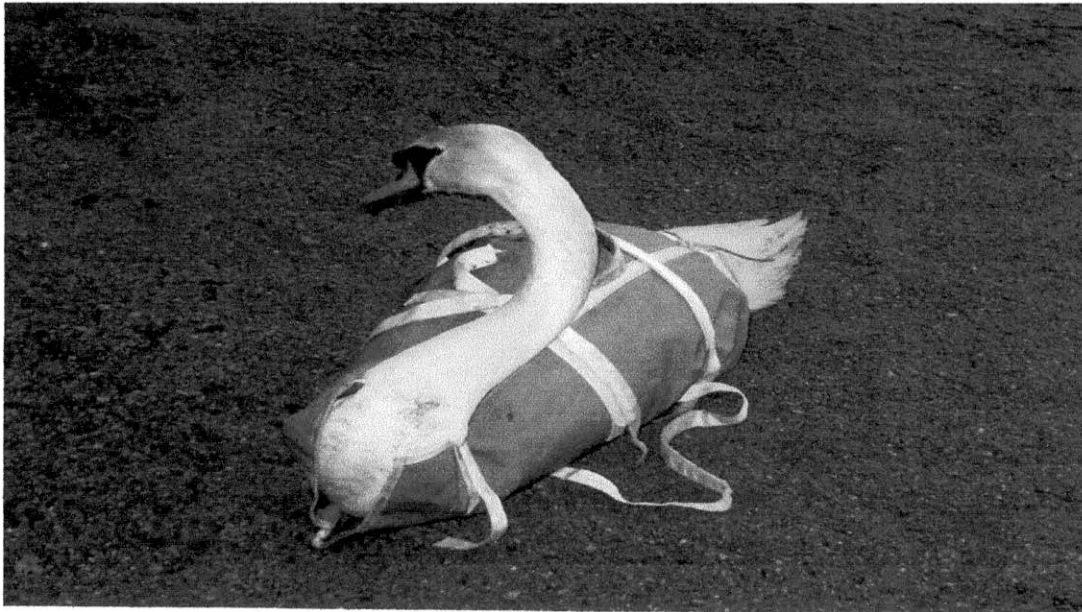
A swan bag, which is used for transporting the swans in costs £41.12 .The catching kit, which includes a swan hook, net and extensions, costs £139.95. This cost comes out of the voluntary sector's pocket.

As a registered charity Swan Rescue raises its money from kind donations, car boot sales, auctions, raffles e.t.c. There is no Government Funding or media awareness that the multi million pound Environment Agency receive for the promotion of angling.

Jan also revealed to us that the RSPCA who account for the majority of her intake pay some vet's bills but non-wildlife centres such as Barnes Hill in Birmingham do not have facilities to care for the long-term avian patient. Of programmes such as Animal hospital and Pet Rescue she stated

“ it all looks too easy on television the way that it is edited. Vans and cars are not left filthy and dirty from blood and poo and things that take months to treat are shown to be released too quickly. It gives the wrong message about what swan rescue is all about. It is not quick and easy and people can't realise this unless they have lived it”.

Baring all of this substantial evidence for the total banning of lead weights used in angling and what we have discovered as evidence of lead being left on pools in Sandwell (see results section), **We recommend the banning of all lead dust shot weights used for angling on Sandwell's pools, as there are non-toxic alternatives clearly available which reduce the risk of lead poisoning to swans and other wildfowl.**



A recovered swan ready for release

2.11 TACKLE INJURY - Hooks and line

These are the most common form of angling related injury to swans and wildfowl. (See year on year summary of swan rescue records- Appendix A). Between 1995-2001 they accounted for an average of 30.1 % of birds admitted according to the NCWSW records.

Birds can often pick up discarded tackle by feeding, whereby vegetation tangled with the line is swallowed. A build up of line in the oesophagus may combine with food to form a large bulge, which gets bigger until the bird is unable to eat.

In such cases an X ray will be taken whereby the veterinary surgeon may detect the presence of any hooks. Surgery under local anaesthetic is inevitable. This is not always without risk due to the stress factor captivity can have on some wild birds as we can testify.

2.12 OUR EXPERIENCES

A swan which had to be rescued by the RSPCA on the Birmingham canal at Tipton 2 years ago with a line and float hanging from its mouth died under anaesthetic during the removal of the foreign body. On talking to anglers the following day it was discovered that a husband and wife had been fishing on the canal when the swan took the hook, this after bait had been thrown when the swan was in the vicinity. The female angler had hooked the swan and admitted to it but instead of informing someone they had done nothing at all. On seeing the same couple once we had found out about the death of the swan and telling them what had happened they also said nothing. Such a needless waste of life as a result of poor angling practice and those who do nothing when a mistake has been made is a sad but common experience.

The Manual of Raptors, Pigeons and Waterfowl edited by P.H. Benyon, N.A. Forbes and N.H. Harcourt-Brown also explain the further dangers of discarded metal hooks

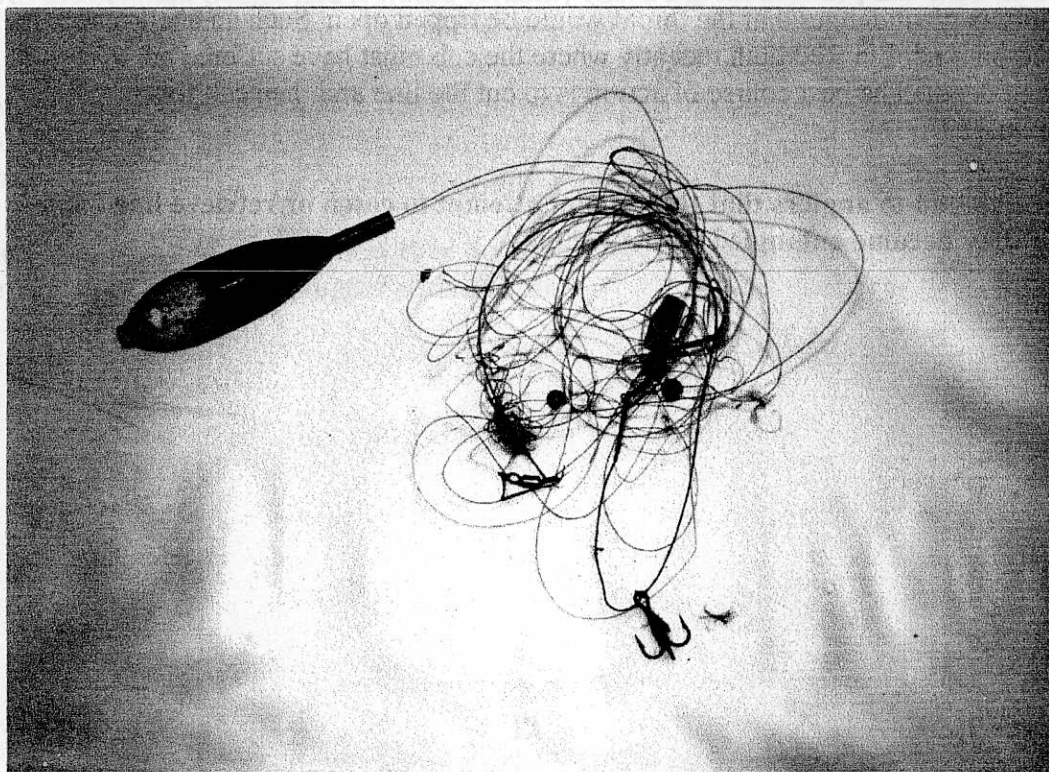
“Waterfowl occasionally develop peritonitis due to perforation of the gastrointestinal tract following ingestion of a sharp foreign body”.

Birds can also receive injuries in any part of the body as a result of hooks and line. Wing and eye injuries have been known. A common injury particularly in Canada geese is when line becomes wrapped around a leg and over time it gets gradually tighter and tighter until it cuts into the flesh and eventually the bone. Causing gangrene to set in the untreated limb will inevitably drop off. We know of several geese in the Sandwell Valley who have suffered from this affliction, which may not cause severe problems for agile geese in the wild, but a swan unlucky enough to suffer the same fate would almost certainly have to be humanely destroyed.

2.13 Barbed hooks and treble hooks

The design of these type of hooks may be well suited to catching fish but they produce the worst type of tackle injury to wildfowl should they become entangled. Jan Harrigan told us that she received a high proportion of barbed hook tackle injuries at Droitwich.

The recent removal of a treble barbed hook from a cygnet on the Icehouse Pool, this on a pool where fishing is not even permitted, required a great deal of difficulty. Hooked by one of the barbs just above the knee it could not just be pulled out because the barb would dig deeper into the flesh. Cutting the barb and then feeding the hook fragment through was the only course of action.



Float, line and treble hook retrieved from cygnet on Icehouse pool

2.14 Inappropriate tackle

There is evidence that children and inexperienced anglers are commonly using plugs or spinners. On the Rocket pools in Wolverhampton recently, Sandwell Swanwatch rescued a spinner hooked on two barbs between a young goose's neck and wing. Children admitted to loosing the spinner the day previous.

The Environment Agency Golden Rules leaflet on angling and wildlife recommends only using barbless hooks or reduced-barb hooks where necessary. Many clubs in Sandwell state that 'no barbed hooks' should be used but there is little evidence that this is ever enforced and that anglers are reprimanded for breaking the code. We go much further with our recommendation.

We recommend the total ban of all barbed hooks and treble hooks on Sandwell's pools. The confiscation of all such implements being used and a barring from the pool and all other pools in Sandwell for those who continuously flout it.

2.15 The wrong course of action

If an angler hooks a bird and attempts to reel it in to free it this can be disastrous. Birds are sentient beings and it would certainly cause a great deal of pain to be pulled by the side of the face or leg. If a swan were to swallow the line and the angler pulled on it there is great danger that the throat would be ripped open. Such an occurrence occurred on a pool in Redditch recently where the cob must have suffered an agonising death. The best course of action is to cut the line and then call for assistance.

We recommend to anglers that they do not attempt to catch or retrieve line from birds if they become entangled whilst fishing.

3 METHODS

In order to determine the impact of lost and discarded tackle and wildlife on Sandwell's fisheries we had to consider how best to base this. We knew that at the start of the year there would be very little angling activity and therefore not much data available to analyse. It was therefore imperative that the study took place over a given period of time, that we considered being 8 months when angling reached its peak in the summer months.

As with the R and D report we thought that it would be best to define angling seasons to show if there was a pattern to lost and discarded tackle and the frequency of injured birds.

These were January 1st - March 14th

March 15th - June 15th (the old coarse fish close season on rivers retained by other local boroughs)

And June 16th - September 1st.

Whereas the R and D report confined its analysis to mute swans, we were of the opinion that the effect of lost tackle on wildlife on Sandwell's fisheries harms many more species. We listed individual species separately to determine this.

The seven sites looked at were

Sheepwash Nature Reserve- Pumphouse Pool and John's Lane Pool

Dartmouth Park Pools

Icehouse and Cascade Pools

West Smethwick Park Pool

Victoria Park Tipton

Swan Pool

and The Ridgacre Fishery- Ridgacre canal.

These sites were chosen because of previous angling related incidents involving wildfowl and represent most of the angling venues owned by Sandwell council. The Ridgacre Fishery is the exception to this rule in that it is controlled by The Friends of Ridgacre and is a site where we had yet to find a tackled bird.

Of these sites Pumphouse Pool at Sheepwash and the Ice house and Cascade Pools are designated as no fishing pools.

This offered a range of pools and habitats where we could confidently draw some conclusions about the impact of lost and discarded tackle as well as an assessment of how well Sandwell council maintained its fisheries.

Explanation and rationale of scoring these sites.

Each of the seven sites was given a start score of 1000 points at January 1st 2002.

From this date any single piece of line or tackle found on these sites was collected.

Each individual piece of line and tackle was individually assessed.

This included line found in the water, on the bank side, amongst vegetation, on pathways and also on over hanging vegetation on islands. For every piece of line less than 1' found, 1 penalty point was deducted from the start total. A length of line over 1' had a deduction of 2 points. A float on the line resulted in a deduction of 3 points.

For every barbless hook found still attached to line 5 points were deducted. If this hook was found to be barbed 10 points were deducted. Treble hooks carried a tariff of 25 deducted points.

Any lead weights found both in micro (dust) shot form and those in illegal sizes carried a deduction of 25 points, for each individual particle found.

Split shot found was tested physically by attempting to cut it with a sharp penknife and also by rubbing it on white paper to determine whether it was lead or a non-toxic shot. Lead shot can be identified in this way as it is easier to cut a groove in the metal and leaves a grey mark on paper when rubbed.

Penalty points for hooks, floats and lead found were given in addition to the length of line they were attached to e.g. a barbless hook on line of under 1' would result in a loss of 5 points for the hook and 1 point for the line making a loss of 6 points overall. If hooked birds were found or had line attached 25 points were deducted in addition to counting the foreign materials on them. If the article had been swallowed making it impossible to know what they had swallowed then the length of line seen was recorded in addition to the loss of 25 points.

If a bird was found to be suffering from lead poisoning then 50 points were deducted.

This simple scoring system reflected the increasingly serious nature that discarded line and tackle can have, from throwing away unwanted strands of line to the most serious incidents of discarding toxic lead shot.

The tackle from John's Lane pool and Pumphouse Pool were kept separate. The tackle from Icehouse and Cascade Pools were combined to give a total as their close proximity gives rise to anglers moving from one pool to the other by a dividing pathway. It would be impossible to determine on which of the pools they had been fishing at the time when the item was discarded (even though they are not supposed to fish on either of them).

Each individual piece of line over 1' and all other tackle were individually stored in a separate plastic bag. All line under 1' was recorded on a tally chart and was then incinerated as it was of little use for further analysis once it had been scored.

Line over 1' was painstakingly unravelled to determine its total length to provide an overall estimate to the length of line being discarded on Sandwell's fisheries.

To summarise

Item

Line under 1' = 1 penalty point
Line over 1' = 2 penalty points
Float = 3 penalty points
Barbless hook = 5 penalty points
Barbed hook = 10 penalty points
Treble hook = 25 penalty points
Lead shot = 25 penalty points
A tackled bird = 25 points
A leaded bird = 50 points

4 RESULTS

4.1 DARTMOUTH PARK

4.1.2 GEOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION AND STATUS

There are two pools on Dartmouth Park both of which can be fished all year round. The smaller duck pool has recognisable pegs, islands and fencing to deter birds from getting onto the pool. The larger pool is well populated by Canada geese, mallards coots and other wildfowl.

Table 1a Tackle recorded birds by species/season and points deducted

SPECIES	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15th- June 15 th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Totals	Points deducted
Canada goose	0	1	1	2	50
Pigeon	1	0	0	1	25
Totals	1	1	1	3	75

Both geese were line on leg injuries resolved in situ. The second young goose had a darvic red ring number TAX.

Table 1b summary of tackle and line retrieved

ITEM	Penalty point tariff	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total recovered	Penalty points deducted	% Points lost for tackle
Line under 1'	1	10	23	22	55	55	30.6
Line over 1'	2	9	23	11	43	86	47.8
Floats	3	1	0	2	3	9	5.0
Barbless hooks	5	0	1	1	2	10	5.6
Barbed hooks	10	0	0	2	1	20	11
Treble hooks	25	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lead shot	25	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total points Deducted	-	31	74	75		<u>180</u>	100%

The figures appear to show double the amount of line/ tackle found between March 15th-June 15th and June 16th- Sept 1st compared to Jan 1st- March 14th.

Table 1c Summary of points lost for Dartmouth Park Start total 1000 POINTS

Reason for points loss	Jan 1 st - March 14 th	March 15- June 15 th	June 16 th - Sept 1 st	Total points lost	% Of points lost
Hooked birds total points	25	25	25	75	29.4%
Line/tackle total points	31	74	75	180	70.6%
<u>SURVEY</u>	56	99	100	<u>255</u>	100%
<u>GRAND TOTALS</u>					

FINISH TOTAL 745

Estimated length of line = 75 YARDS

The figures show very little difference between the old recognised close season and the summer season, indicating that there is no evidence to show that there is more line being left behind in the summer months when children are off school.

4.1.2 KEY PROBLEMS

The duck pool is in a very poor condition with the green netting around the fencing torn down in several places- an additional danger to wildfowl. In the past we have caught geese on here that have had severe leg injuries caused by fishing line digging into the flesh and eventually causing the loss of the foot.

There is a degree of conflict between those who feed the birds on the pool and fishermen.

Much of the litter is collected around the big pool, though to the back of the duck pool there appears to be less attention paid.

4.1.3 OUR VERDICT

We believe that some of the problems here are preventable. There are no recognised pegs on the main pool. It would be best to divide the pool into fishing and no fishing zones to minimize conflicts between anglers and those who feed the wildfowl.

The banks are quite steep in some places and when accessed by anglers the potential for subsidence is increased.

4.2 SHEEPWASH NATURE RESERVE

GEOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION AND STATUS

Sheepwash Nature Reserve is located between Great Bridge and West Bromwich and is the second largest countryside site in Sandwell and has the third largest pool. It has two pools which can legally be fished (John's Lane Pool) and The North Pool (nearest to Sheepwash Lane.)

On the main Pumphouse pool no fishing is allowed.

RESULTS

Table 2a Tackle recorded birds by species/season and points deducted

SPECIES	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15th- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Totals	Points deducted
Canada goose	0	1	2	3	75
Mallard	0	0	1	1	25
Magpie	1	1	0	2	50
Wood pigeon	1	0	0	1	25
Totals	2	2	3	7	175

These results are from both pools combined, as it is impossible to know from which pool the birds had become entangled.

The 2 magpies, which we assume to be different birds due to them showing different line attachments and the wood pigeon were unable to be rescued. In all but one case of a Canada goose in July the line or tackle was wrapped around the legs of the birds. The other goose had swallowed line with no hook, which was removed. All birds were dealt with in situ.

Table 2b A summary of tackle and line retrieved

ITEM	Penalty point tariff	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total recovered	Penalty points deducted	% Points lost for tackle
Line under 1'	1	20	37	32	89	89	11.8
Line over 1'	2	26	35	68	129	258	34.1
Floats	3	0	1	2	3	9	1.2
Barbless hooks	5	1	4	5	10	50	6.6

Barbed hooks	10	5	8	7	20	200	26.5
Treble hooks	25	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lead shot	25	2	2	2	6	150	19.8
Total points deducted	-	177	260	319	257	<u>756</u>	100%

These are combined figures for the Pumphouse pool and John's Lane pool. See Appendix C tables 2b(i), 2b(ii) to give separate scores.

Table 2c Summary of points lost for Sheepwash Nature Reserve Start total 1000 POINTS

Reason for points loss	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total points lost	% Of points lost
Hooked birds total points	50	50	75	175	18.8%
Line/tackle total points	177	260	319	756	81.2%
<u>SURVEY</u>	227	310	394	<u>931</u>	100%
<u>GRAND TOTALS</u>					

FINISH TOTAL 69 POINTS Estimated length of line= 385 YARDS

This is a shocking final total and reflects concerns that we knew existed. The data shows a gradual worsening of line and tackle problems through the seasons which peak at 319 points between June 16th - Sept 1st. The total points lost for this season 394 accounts for 42.3% of the total loss of points for line and tackle.

The piece of line found at 107' 8" on the Pumphouse Pool was the longest measured single piece of line found during our survey.

KEY PROBLEMS

As part of The Friends of Sheepwash we have major concerns about the way that the pools have been controlled by Sandwell council and have voiced them through meetings and in letter to several officers and councillors to no avail.

The policy on the fishing rites to the two pools have in recent years been to lease them, with a lease agreement asking clubs to bailiff the pools themselves and collect litter. It was up to the club to collect money from day tickets as well as organising a nominal amount of matches per year.

Three fishing clubs have leased the pools in this time these being:

Farley Park Angling Club

Tipton Angling Club

Oldbury United Angling club.

It is a fact that the last two clubs failed to complete their yearlong lease. The Friends of Sheepwash expressed major concern about the condition of the pools when it was apparent that no one was collecting litter or bailiffing the pools. To their credit Oldbury United A.C installed new peg platforms on the John's Lane pool, but these are seldom used.

It was around the time that they abandoned the pools that some individuals took it upon themselves to start fishing on the Pumphouse Pool illegally. This resulted in a massive build up of both angling tackle and other litter being left by fishermen. It inevitably led birds, particularly Canada geese to be hooked.

In addition to this many on the poolside drank lager all day and abuse was levelled at passing dog walkers and other park users. These individuals mostly from the Denbigh estate became increasingly verbally abusive when members of the group informed them that there was no fishing on the pumphouse pool.

This situation has now been continuing for the last two years with this summer once again seeing the return of the irresponsible anglers fishing illegally.

We spoke to a member of The Tividale Birding Group who produce annual reports of breeding and visiting species on the park and surrounding area who believes things have got out of control.

He told us

"I have been coming over here since about 1983 and things have just got worse over here. This is an important site for wildlife in Sandwell. There have been breeding common terns on the pumphouse pool for the last five years which we are extremely lucky to have".

A wader scrape project was also carried out three years ago in an attempt to encourage wintering passage birds which feed on shallow mud flat areas.

Despite this the spokesman told us

"I have seen anglers fishing on this many times. We dug the area out to provide a migration area for waders such as wintering snipe. The scrape attracts invertebrates which the birds feed on. How can we attract wildlife if there are people fishing on their habitat? The close season should never have been stopped in Sandwell. There is too much human pressure on this park through fishermen and dog walkers and it has lost its wildness.

The North Pool and John's Lane pool attract breeding reed warblers, children just run wild here, and they don't care where they fish. On the August bank holiday I went over by the pumphouse building and the area was filled with fishermen. We are never going to attract breeding little ringed plover and lapwing which is what this park was designed for if this is allowed to continue."



The only fishermen that belong on the pumphouse pool - Natural ones, Grey heron and cormorant.

OUR VERDICT

Having attracted to date over 181 different species it is clear that Sheepwash should be in Paul Slater's words "identified, protected and managed" as one of the most important sites for nature conservation in Sandwell.

It is blatantly clear that fishermen are both disturbing and destroying the wildlife habitat on the Pumphouse Pool by fishing there. We have seen people digging on the wader scrape area for fishing bait. Fishermen to gain access to the poolside have destroyed fences and the litter they leave behind is clear to see. No other single park user group create and dispose of as much litter as those who go fishing, an activity, which they are not even, supposed to be doing.

With fishing signs put up by the Friends of Sheepwash being destroyed or defaced on the pumphouse pool, it is clear that these do not provide a deterrent for those who wish to fish on this pool illegally.

When we pointed out that the clubs had lost interest in the pools to the council, that was the time when they should have taken action. They chose not to and ignored the problems, and this is why there is a problem today.

Anyone who states that fishing is not destroying the wildlife habitat on this pool must have their eyes closed and their ears glued tight. The evidence is both clear and damning and if council officers continue to refuse to accept responsibility for this site then they should be forced to resign. **Urgent attention is needed to address illegal fishing on the pumphouse pool at Sheepwash Nature reserve and to actively prosecute those who continue to flout the by-law of no fishing.**



Youths illegally fishing on the Pumphouse Pool.



A NO FISHING sign on the Pumphouse Pool wall supplied by Sandwell council, destroyed by those ignorant to its rules.

4.3 SWAN POOL

4.3.1 GEOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION AND STATUS

Swan pool in the middle of The Sandwell Valley is the largest area of water that can be fished in Sandwell, and is the second largest pool in the borough.

Rare species such as the Slavonian and Black necked Grebe have visited the pool, which is also a spot for commoner wildfowl.

Table 3a Tackle recorded birds by species/season and points deducted

SPECIES	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15th- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Totals	Points deducted
Canada goose	1	0	1	2	50
Totals	1	0	1	2	50

Both geese had line around their legs which were removed. The second was a juvenile.

Table 3b A summary of tackle and line retrieved

ITEM	Penalty point tariff	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total recovered	Penalty points deducted	%Points lost for tackle/line
Line under 1'	1	5	13	22	40	40	25.2%
Line over 1'	2	5	8	10	23	46	28.9%
Floats	3	0	1	0	1	3	1.9%
Barbless hooks	5	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Barbed hooks	10	0	1	1	2	20	12.6%
Treble hooks	25	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Lead shot	25	0	0	2	2	50	31.4%
Total points deducted	-	15	42	102	68	<u>159</u>	100%

The most disturbing items found here were the two pieces of illegal sized lead shot found in the water. Both left clear grey marks on a piece of white paper. Their appearance looked quite old and so it may be that these had been dropped from a tackle box. This does not diminish the threat that they pose to wildfowl.

Table 3c Summary of points lost for Swan Pool Start total 1000 POINTS

Reason for points loss	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15 th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total points lost	% Of points lost
Hooked birds total points	25	0	25	50	22%
Line/tackle total points	15	42	102	177	78%
<u>SURVEY</u> <u>GRAND</u> <u>TOTALS</u>	40	42	127	<u>227</u>	100%

FINISH TOTAL 773 POINTS Estimated length of line= 39 YARDS

The results appear to suggest that problems are occurring in the summer months on this pool with regard to the frequency of line/ tackle being left.

4.3.2 KEY PROBLEMS

This pool offers the most potential conflict in Sandwell as both water sports users as well as anglers use it. There are no by- laws presented on the site, neither are there any bins on the poolside. The quality of the pegs is quite poor.

4.3.3 OUR VERDICT

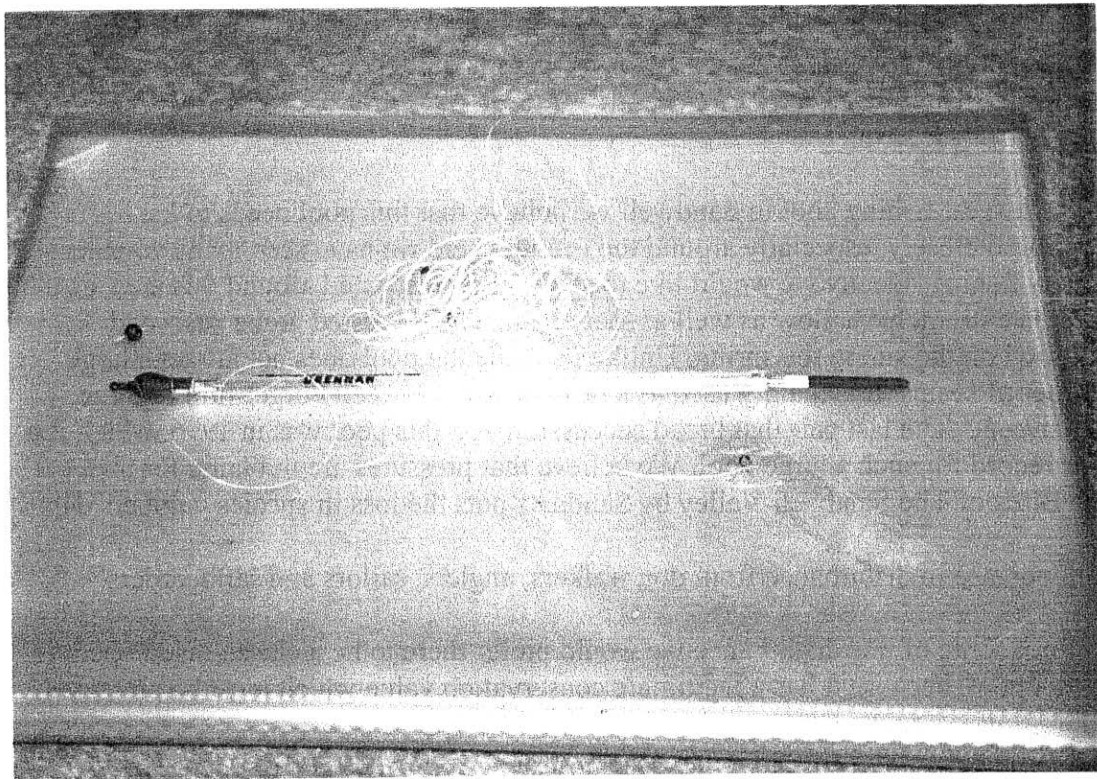
As the largest fishing pool in Sandwell we believe that this pool needs to be monitored closely, especially around the island where we have seen many younger anglers fishing. Ideally we would like to see angling restricted around this area, as the water is extremely shallow as well as there being Great crested grebe nests and wildfowl on the site in the spring. Unlike its name the pool does not attract a large number of swans. It is mainly used as a drop in pool between ForgeMill Lake and Sheepwash. The last pair that bred successfully on this pool was in 1996, which is a poor record for such a large pool. We believe that pressures are to blame for this. The Birds of The Sandwell Valley by Sandnats puts the loss in species numbers down to

“an increase in disturbance from dog walkers, anglers, sailors and sailboarders”

To limit some of this disturbance we would prefer there to be a close season operating on this pool, because it has a legitimate conservation value which must be protected.



A one legged Canada goose surveys Swan Pool, its injury a legacy of the careless angler.



A hook, line and float found on Swan Pool during our survey.

4.4 ICEHOUSE/CASCADE POOLS

4.4.1 GEOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION AND STATUS

These two pools at the heart of the Sandwell Valley are no fishing pools. Despite this some people insist on fishing here as an alternative to Dartmouth Park and swan pool. The islands on the icehouse pool are important breeding sites for grey heron in Sandwell and swans also breed in most years

Table 4 a Tackle recorded birds by species/season and points deducted

SPECIES	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15th-June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Totals	Points deducted
Mute swan	0	0	1	1	25
Mallard	0	0	1	1	25
Totals	0	0	2	2	50

The only recorded incident of a swan becoming entangled occurred on 10/8/02 when a cygnet on the icehouse pool was seen to have a hook and line tied around one of its legs. On capture this proved to be a treble barbed hook, with one barb puncturing the leg. 16' 6" of line of high breaking strength was also wrapped around the leg and underneath the belly making movement in the water difficult. A float was also present. Such a foreign body meant that if it had not been removed the young bird would have become increasingly entangled and been more vulnerable to predation.

Table 4b A summary of tackle and line retrieved

ITEM	Penalty point tariff	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total recovered	Penalty points deducted	%Points lost for tackle/line
Line under 1'	1	3	7	12	19	19	18.3%
Line over 1'	2	0	6	7	13	26	25%
Floats	3	0	0	2	2	6	5.8%
Barbless hooks	5	0	1	0	1	5	4.8%
Barbed hooks	10	0	0	2	2	20	19.2%
Treble hooks	25	0	0	1	1	25	24%
Lead shot	25	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Total points deducted		3	24	77	38	<u>104</u>	100%

The increase in litter on this pool appear to show that it is in the summer period that the main problems are occurring; 60.6% of the loss of points for tackle and line were found in this period.

Table 4c Summary of points lost for Icehouse/Cascade pools Start total 1000 POINTS

Reason for points loss	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total points lost	% Of points lost
Hooked birds total points	0	0	50	50	32.5%
Line/tackle total points	3	24	77	104	67.5%
<u>SURVEY GRAND TOTALS</u>	3	24	127	<u>154</u>	100%

FINISH TOTAL 846 POINTS

Estimated length of line= 30 YARDS

4.4.2 KEY PROBLEMS

There is only one problem with these pools in that they are being illegally fished. Having some secluded spots covered by trees and vegetation around the pools they are attractive to the night fisherman. During the 8-month period monitored we saw several anglers on these pools, ranging from young children to adults.

4.4.3 OUR VERDICT

The score on this site should have been 1000 points at the start of September. The fact that this site saw the only hook/line injury of a swan in our study is quite ironic. The type of tackle being used here was completely inappropriate even had it been on a pool where fishing is allowed in Sandwell. That these items are being found and used on pools that are of significant conservation value is unacceptable in any form. There are no signs however to state that these pools are not to be fished. Neither are there any bins on the poolside. We believe that Sandwell council **must** stop illegal fishing on these pools, particularly increasing patrols in the summer months, when as our study prove, the most damage is being done.

4.5 WEST SMETHWICK PARK

4.5.1 GEOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION AND STATUS

This park has two pools, both of which are fished. There are breeding great crested grebe, coot, moorhen on the bigger pool which is dominated by an island in its centre.

Table 5a Tackle recorded birds by species/season and points deducted

SPECIES	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15th - June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Totals	Points deducted
Canada goose	0	1	1	2	50
Coot	0	1	0	1	25
Pigeon	1	1	1	3	75
Totals	1	3	2	6	150

In all cases line was wrapped around the legs of birds. The one goose in July had a barbless hook in its leg which was removed. Two of the pigeons were not caught.

Table 5b summary of tackle and line retrieved

ITEM	Penalty point tariff	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total recovered	Penalty points deducted	%Points lost for tackle/line
Line under 1'	1	9	10	14	33	33	23.2%
Line over 1'	2	5	7	7	19	38	26.8%
Floats	3	0	1	1	2	6	4.2%
Barbless hooks	5	1	0	1	2	10	7%
Barbed hooks	10	0	1	2	3	30	21.1%
Treble hooks	25	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Lead shot	25	0	0	1	1	25	17.6%
Total points deducted	-	24	37	81	60	<u>142</u>	99.9%

**Table 5c Summary of points lost for West Smethwick Park Start total 1000
POINTS**

Reason for points loss	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total points lost	% Of points lost
Hooked birds total points	25	75	50	150	51.4%
Line/tackle total points	24	37	81	142	48.6%
<u>SURVEY</u>	49	112	131	<u>292</u>	100%
<u>GRAND TOTALS</u>					

FINISH TOTAL 708 POINTS Estimated length of line= 65 yards

4.5.2 KEY PROBLEMS

There is once again a conflict between those who feed the wildfowl on the pool and those who fish. The fencing around some of the pool does nothing for the wildlife except box them in. The island is in a poor state of repair as are the pathways which are potholed. The vegetation around some sections of the pool may cause snagging entanglements if anglers persist on fishing in these areas.

Last year we took off a swan with a large barbed hook stuck on the outside of its throat which was removed at Swan Rescue.

4.5.3 VERDICT

We asked two anglers at the park about fishing on the pool.

One replied in answer to our question do you have to pay to fish on here?

“ I don’t think so, no one has ever asked me for money..... you just pack up quick if anyone comes round”

Asked if a club ran the pool another replied

“No it’s a council run water, the rangers are supposed to collect the money, but they never do. The fishing isn’t much good on here but it’s just coming on”.

If these individuals were typical angling members of the public it is clear that there appears to be both confusion and indifference as to who is responsible for the monitoring of this site. There are no signs to state where or how much it is to fish, nor are there any rules about what may or may not take place. Generally the pool is in a poor condition.

Recently it was reported that there is to be a large cash injection into this park, which would include the dredging of the pool. We believe that there must be great care taken here, because there may be damage done to both the fish and wildlife in the pool. We are particularly concerned about the time of year when this will take place. It must be outside of the breeding and nesting season to avoid as little disturbance as possible. Also dredging significantly introduces the possibility of lead poisoning occurring if deposits of shot are scooped up from the bottom of the silt.

An example of this occurred on a canal in Stourbridge recently where British Waterways had dredged a section of canal where swans were nesting. Both parents and the 3 cygnets ended up with lead poisoning and had to be rescued. Two of the cygnets did not survive, and it took 3 months for the adults to recover from their life threatening blood lead levels.

Nonetheless if money is to be put into upgrading the pool, it is an opportunity not to be missed to make it one of the showcase pools in the borough. This should include clearly defined angling areas and pegs, separated by clearly defined feeding areas. Interpretation signs are needed to better inform both anglers and other users of the dos and don'ts.

This initiative would hopefully go a long way to solving the problems of entanglements, if the pool is closely monitored by the rangers.



A chance for improvements at West Smethwick park pool.

4.6 VICTORIA PARK –TIPTON

4.6.1 GEOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION AND STATUS

Located on The Park Estate in Tipton, this small pool has two islands. Free fishing takes place here. It is home to a large number of wildfowl per size of pool

Table 6 a Tackle recorded birds by species/season and points deducted

SPECIES	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15th- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Totals	Points deducted
Canada goose	0	1	1	2	50
Mistle thrush	0	1	0	1	25
Moorhen	0	1	0	1	25
Pigeon	3	3	4	10	250
Mallard	0	1	0	1	25
Totals	3	7	5	15	375

This is a shocking tally of birds, particularly pigeons. All birds were caught except the mistle thrush. In one case of a mallard where it had to have a hook removed from its mouth, 30 feet of line was attached!

Table 6 b A summary of tackle and line retrieved

ITEM	Penalty point tariff	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total recovered	Penalty points deducted	%Points lost for tackle/line
Line under 1'	1	12	34	23	69	69	7%
Line over 1'	2	22	54	59	135	270	27.5%
Floats	3	2	3	3	8	24	2.4%
Barbless hooks	5	1	3	6	10	50	5.1%
Barbed hooks	10	2	13	17	32	320	32.6%

Treble hooks	25	0	1	1	2	50	5.1%
Lead shot	25	2	1	5	8	200	20.3%
Total points deducted	-	<u>137</u>	<u>346</u>	<u>500</u>	257	<u>983</u>	100%

Table 6c Summary of points lost for Victoria Park Start total 1000 points

Reason for points loss	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total points lost	% Of points lost
Hooked birds total points	75	175	125	375	27.6%
Line/tackle total points	137	346	500	983	72.4%
<u>SURVEY GRAND TOTALS</u>	212	521	625	<u>1358</u>	100%

FINISH TOTAL -358 POINTS Estimated length of line = 1007 yards.

A dossier of shocking figures.

4.6.2 KEY PROBLEMS

We spoke to Mr Alva Parkes a local resident and bird lover who is also a keen salmon angler. He told us

“I started fishing on Victoria Park and have been fishing all my life, nearly 65 years. Nylon line being left around is a big problem on this park. In a normal year I catch around 30-40 pigeons that have line around their legs. Many have stainless steel hooks as well to put up with. ”

From his fishing knowledge he told us

The line strains vary from 2lbs to 20 lb breaking strain. This is just ridiculous when there are only carp perch and tench in here. They shouldn't be using anything more than 5 or 6lb line.

Why are people using treble hooks for these fish? They can only be doing them damage.”

He told us that he had presented bags full of line and discarded tackle to both Ken Duffle – Heritage officer responsible for waterways for Sandwell and also John Satchwell- Senior parks officer.

At a meeting of The Park Estate Tenants and Residents association in April from which we have seen the minutes, the line was presented to Mr Satchwell who showed great concern about what had been found.

The minutes state "Mr Satchwell explained that the park pool was classed as an ornamental pool and ideally fishing should not take place there."

Mr Parkes also stated that tins of luncheon meat and even cat food were often found on the site, disposed by anglers fishing there. He had monitored at the most 15 anglers at a peak period and an average of between 6-8 a day in the summer months. Mostly adults, some had obtained a permit to bring cars onto the site where they claimed disability.

4.6.3 OUR VERDICT

It is quite evident from these shocking results that this pool has a major problem with both fishing line being left behind and its impact on the unfortunate birds living there who are becoming entangled.

The amount of line collected completely surprised even us and shows with what little regard the anglers of this pool fish. This amount is so vast for such a small pool, the smallest area of water on our investigation, that we do not accept that it is a minority of anglers who are leaving all of this behind. It must be accepted that there are a significant amount of anglers on this pool who are irresponsible, but we believe this is not a strong enough term to put it in. "Criminally irresponsible" and "incompetent" are what we call these individuals who pay nothing to fish this pool and leave it looking like a tip. Floats dangle from the island vegetation like an all year round Christmas festival.

Fishermen are known to have blocked up the overflow with bread and plastic bags in order to raise the water levels which makes for better fishing. The park ranger service is fully aware of this.

They are also aware of youths who have been seen hitting both geese and swans on the pool with objects whilst fishing.

We have also been informed that at the beginning of the year RSPCA inspectors were called out to rescue a seagull caught up in line on one of the islands. This required the breaking of the ice before they could get a boat out.

It is our opinion that this is indeed an "ornamental pool" as a prominent council officer has stated publically. We do not believe it should continue to be an angling pool in addition. It is too small and over fished. Being the favourite haunt of the irresponsible fishermen we say to Sandwell council

"THIS POOL IS A DISGRACE. YOU AND YOUR OFFICERS ARE FULLY AWARE OF THE PROBLEMS. DO NOT CONTINUE TO IGNORE THEM"

The best way to achieve a cessation of fishing on this pool would be to net the pool and remove all the fish. Keeping fishing on this pool can only do the image of angling and Sandwell council further harm.

We find Victoria Park Tipton to be the worst place for angling related incidents in the past and for the amount of line that fishermen are still leaving behind. We believe that the fish should be removed from this pool and fishing should be phased out by the end of this year.

4.7 RIDGACRE CANAL

4.7.1 GEOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION AND STATUS

The Ridgacre Canal in West Bromwich cuts through the Hateley Heath Area of the town. It is a popular fishery with local people leased by British Waterways to The Friends of Ridgacre. It is a well-used public walkway. Coots, moorhen and tufted duck breed on the main canal. Kingfisher also make appearances from time to time.

Table 7a Tackle recorded birds by species/season and points deducted

SPECIES	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15th- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Totals	Points deducted
Canada goose	0	1	0	1	25
Totals	0	1	0	1	25

This gosling was found to have swallowed line. It was later found dead, probably as a result of vandalism.

Table 7b A summary of tackle and line retrieved

ITEM	Penalty point tariff	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total recovered	Penalty points deducted	%Points lost for tackle/line
Line under 1'	1	3	10	4	17	17	25%
Line over 1'	2	2	7	6	15	30	44.1%
Floats	3	0	1	1	2	6	8.8%
Barbless hooks	5	0	0	1	1	5	7.4%
Barbed hooks	10	0	0	1	1	10	14.7%
Treble hooks	25	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Lead shot	25	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Total points deducted		6	28	34	36	<u>68</u>	100%

These are the only tackle/ line results that are less than 100 points.
It only saw 2 hooks being found and also had the least amount of line found.

Table 7 c Summary of points lost for Ridgacre Canal Start total =1000 POINTS

Reason for points loss	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 15 th - Sept 1st	Total points lost	% Of points lost
Hooked birds total points	0	25	0	25	26.9%
Line/tackle total points	6	28	34	68	73.1%
<u>SURVEY</u>	6	53	34	<u>93</u>	100%
<u>GRAND TOTALS</u>					

FINISH TOTAL 907 POINTS Estimated length of line = 32 yards 1'.

These results are the only total score below 100 points. Virtually no line was recorded for the first part of the year and even at the peak of 34 points being lost this was far lower than the other sites surveyed during this same period, even the ones where fishing is supposedly banned.

4.7.2 KEY PROBLEMS

The area around where the Ridgacre is situated is a notorious juvenile crime hotspot. We spoke to Ridgacre fisheries bailiff Frank Smith about the work that the group had done on the canal in context with this.

He told us

"In Christmas 2000 we had £4,500 worth of equipment stolen. This included pumps, outboard motors and a lawnmower. We were devastated."

He also confirmed that the group had stopped night fishing on the canal after they had discovered that some youths were using the activity as a cover whilst breaking into nearby factory units.

Other problems had included fly tipping and people destroying some of the disabled pegs put in by the group.

4.7.3 OUR VERDICT

It is quite evident that the Ridgacre canal and fishery is a well-enjoyed, well-organised local facility at the heart of a tough neighbourhood. It provides a local forum for many user groups as well as being an angling venue due to the fact that it is fairly well maintained over the course of the year. Fishing on here is only £1 a day with 80p concessions and 50p for children.

From our survey and past knowledge it is evident that The Friends of Ridgacre are a committed, hard working team of local people who have utilised the knowledge and skills they have to create a working enterprise. Under the mentorship of Groundwork Black Country this seven-year-old lottery funded project has grown from strength to strength despite many setbacks.

The one gosling that we found was the first bird that we know of that had been injured due to line and tackle problems, a record which no other fishing venue in the area can boast.

Frank Smith believes that the key to running a successful fishery is

“Keeping it clean and well stocked”.

We share this view in relation to the many untidy venues that we have seen under Sandwell Council’s management. An untidy area creates problems for wildlife and leads to a negative image for fishing.

Contrary to this The Friends have installed nesting rafts on the canal and have taken a number of schools over the site realising that it is a local educational resource.

One passer by a Mr Murdoch commented

“I walk along here now with my dog every day. Years ago I couldn’t have taken him up here, the canal was full of rubbish.”

From the example set by The Friends of Ridgacre it is clear that some areas can be reclaimed for people and wildlife if a little effort is put in. The council run waters of Sandwell are the antithesis of this project, with their piles of rubbish and yards of line. We commend the group for their work and hope it continues in the future.

4.8 OVERALL RESULTS

Table 8 Summary of birds found to be caught in line or tackle and time of year

SPECIES	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15th- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Totals	Points deducted	%Species total
Pigeon	5	3	6	14	350	38.8
Canada goose	1	5	6	12	300	33.3
Mallard	0	2	1	3	75	8.3
Magpie	1	1	0	2	50	5.6
Coot	0	1	0	1	25	2.8
Mistle thrush	0	1	0	1	25	2.8
Moorhen	0	1	0	1	25	2.8
Mute swan	0	0	1	1	25	2.8
Wood pigeon	1	0	0	1	25	2.8
Totals	8	14	14	36	900	100%

Out of a start score of 7000 points, 900 were lost due to tackle/line injured birds - 12.9%.

Seasonal injuries confirm that line and tackle injuries occur more frequently when there is an increase in angling i.e. during the summer months. Young or inexperienced anglers and the fact that there are more hours of daylight to fish in again probably cause this.

We were surprised by the number of passerine species affected by line and tackle - particularly the high number of pigeons. As these birds do not go on the water their contact and entanglement must be attributed to lost or discarded line, and not by swimming through it as is commonly found to be the case with waterfowl.

Table 9 Comparison of tackle and line injuries site-by-site and time of year when occurred.

Site	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15 th -June 15th	June 16 th -Sept 1st	Total no birds	Total number of points	% of total birds
Victoria park Tipton	3	6	6	15	375	41.7
Sheepwash Nature Reserve	2	2	3	7	175	19.4
West Smethwick Park	1	3	2	6	150	16.7
Dartmouth park	1	1	1	3	75	8.3
Swan Pool	1	0	1	2	50	5.6
Icehouse/cascade pools	0	1	1	2	50	5.6
Ridgacre canal	0	1	0	1	25	2.8
Totals	8	14	14	36	900	100.1

There is little doubt that Victoria Park Tipton is the worst place in Sandwell for line and tackle injured birds. To lose 375 points (37.5%) from a 1000 start is quite staggering.

The Ridgacre canal at the other end of the scale accounted for just 2.8% of the total. Is there any doubt that the management of these two waters are at opposite ends of the spectrum?

Table 10 A Comparison of points lost for line/tackle found site by site and time of year when found

Site location	Points lost Jan 1 st - March 14th	Points lost March 15- June 15th	Points lost June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total Penalty points deducted	% Points deducted from all site totals	Total items recovered	%Total of items found for all site totals
Victoria Park	137	346	500	983	41.1%	264	31.9%
Sheepwash Nature Reserve	177	260	319	756	31.6%	257	31.1%
Dartmouth Park	31	74	75	180	7.5%	104	12.6%
Swan Pool	15	42	102	159	6.7%	68	8.2%
West Smethwick Park	24	37	81	142	5.9	60	7.3%
Icehouse/cascade Pools	3	24	77	104	4.3%	38	4.6%
Ridgacre canal	6	28	34	68	2.8%	36	4.4%
TOTALS	393	811	1188	<u>2392</u>	99.9%	<u>827</u>	100.1

Once again Victoria Park's results are shown in stark contrast with the other sites, though Sheepwash is not far behind when it came to the number of items found. When combined these two Tipton parks come to 72.7% of the total. All results show a definite trend to there being an increase through the 3 periods of line and tackle found. 49.7% of line/tackle points lost came between June 16th-Sept 1st. The early part of the year accounted for 16.4%, and the old close season period made up the remaining 33.9%.

See appendix Table 10 B for number of items found for all sites

TABLE 10C FINAL SCORES FOR ALL SITES

Site	POINTS LOST FOR TACKLED BIRDS	POINTS LOST FOR LOST TACKLE/LINE	FINAL TOTAL	% TOTAL POINTS LOST FROM ALL SITES
Victoria Park	375	983	1358	41.3%
Sheepwash Nature Reserve	175	756	931	28.3%
West Smethwick Park	150	142	292	8.9%
Dartmouth Park	75	180	255	7.7%
Swan Pool	50	159	209	6.3%
Icehouse/cascade Pools	50	104	154	4.7%
Ridgacre canal	25	68	93	2.8%
TOTALS	900	2392	<u>3292</u>	100%

Out of a start score of 7000 points the seven sites finished with 3708 points, losing 3292 points. This is 47% of the total.

West Smethwick Park's total is increased because we found more hooked birds on this site, though the amount of line and tackle found was less than at Dartmouth Park and Swan pool.

Of the total estimated line found= 1,633 yards, 1007 of it was found at Victoria Park. This is 61.7%, more than all the other sites combined totals!

The Ridgacre canal at just 2.8 %, a private run fishery stands in stark contrast to the council run sites.

We believe that this is probably the only site that has come out of this survey with any credit, though at the loss of a gosling it has to be tempered.



4.9 THE EFFECT OF ANGLING ON MUTE SWANS IN CONTEXT

Only 1 cygnet was found to have a tackle/line problem, this on a pool where fishing is supposedly not allowed. It would be extremely naïve however to suggest that there is no evidence that on sites where angling is allowed and where swans gather that there is no problem.

The observations that we have made and the data are governed by

- (i) Swan populations in Sandwell
- (ii) The pattern of swan movements
- (iii) Breeding success
- (iv) time of year and coincidence of swans on pools where angling is taking place.

Firstly there is no large flock of swans which gather in Sandwell. Some birds are resident on the canals and do not leave their nesting areas. Non breeding and juvenile birds often join large herds in Birmingham and Chasewater and so move out of the Sandwell area altogether.

In the summer months the main herd site in Sandwell is Forge mill Lake, where no angling is allowed, so no angling injuries should be found on this site in any case.

In the winter months most swans commute between the Sandwell Valley and the Sheepwash area. At this time of year angling is in decline and so there offers less chance of tackle and line injuries occurring.

Though in the R and D report it states that 'the mute swan population nationally has increased significantly since 1987', the breeding successes of pairs in Sandwell are of concern.

Table 11 Breeding success of Sandwell swans 2000-2002

Year	Number of cygnets hatched in Sandwell area	No of breeding pairs from which they came
2000	41	9
2001	47	8
2002	33	6

This table shows that the number of pairs breeding successfully is declining. Part of this is due to egg theft. This year saw 2 pairs have all their eggs stolen and one pair 3 eggs stolen. An estimated total of 15 eggs were stolen, which means 15 less swans in Sandwell.

Survival of cygnets is often poor. For instance a pair in 2001 on the Birmingham Canal at Tipton lost all 8 (17% of the Sandwell total) due to diesel pollution from Masfield Epsom Ltd.

It is also a fact that no pairs breed on any of the pools where fishing is allowed in Sandwell. This is a phenomenon, which mirrored 2001. Could it be that swans choose not to nest on Sandwell's angling sites or is it that angling is having an impact on their breeding chances by increased disturbance and pressure?

In the case of Victoria Park Tipton, we know that the latter is the case. In 2001, the female swan suffering from lead poisoning hatched no eggs. Birds nesting at the time of poisoning will produce dud eggs. The previous year had seen a staggering 8 cygnets produced, 17% of Sandwell's total. Two of these cygnets were caught with line/hook problems and both parent birds had to be caught due to hook/line entanglements.

In 1999 where 2 cygnets had been produced 1 of the cygnets had to be caught on 4 separate occasions due to line/tackle problems. One of these included the presence of a night float still attached.

The last pair to breed at Sheepwash had to be rescued in 2000 due to the female and a cygnet being hit in a vandalism attack. The female was found to be suffering from lead poisoning in addition and was lucky to survive.

See tables 11a-11g for monthly maxima of mute swans seen at the monitored sites in Appendix E

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 ENFORCING CORRECT ANGLING PRACTICE AND POLICY ON SANDWELL'S FISHERIES

On 1/1/02 the start of our study The Express and Star carried an article under the headline "tough line on nature reserves." It stated

"By-laws covering nature reserves and open spaces across Sandwell will be enforced more vigorously to ensure bans on fishing and grazing horses are not infringed."

Whereby there have been high profile cases involving the removal of tethered horses from open spaces in Sandwell this year the removal of illegal fishermen has **not** been enforced.

The article continued

"Environmental chiefs have confirmed councillors have the power to call in the police if by-laws are broken."

The enforcement of by-laws currently falls to Sandwell's ranger service which is split into two departments. The countryside rangers deal with countryside sites such as the Sandwell Valley, Sheepwash Nature Reserve, and Warrens Hall Nature Reserve and the urban rangers are responsible for parks, cemeteries e.t.c such as the two Victoria parks.

Currently there are just four countryside rangers employed in Sandwell who are based at the Sandwell valley full time. Not all of these however are on duty at any one time, meaning that resources are extremely limited if there are problems at two sites at the same time. It is part of a ranger's duty to regularly patrol their areas and it is difficult to see how they manage to do this. In fact we believe they cannot possibly with such under staffing.

The urban rangers appear to be much more mobile around the borough parks with more vehicles to be able to provide a more effective service that is of value to the taxpayer.

5.2 CONCERN FOR CONSERVATION?

For the last 4 years Sandwell council has been without a conservation officer. This position down graded to part time was taken on by the senior countryside ranger who has also now retired. Without a replacement we seriously believe that the council is not taking conservation issues as seriously as they should be when they have a wealth of countryside sites available for educational purposes as well as an abundance of wildlife and flora within them.

On 21/9/01 Mr Paul Slater Head of Leisure Direct was quoted in The Express and Star as stating

“Nature conservation depends upon the survival of habitats in which animals and plants live and it is essential that the most important sites are identified, protected and managed.”

When we asked the question at a Tipton Town committee

“How can he justify these comments when officers are failing to “protect and manage” identified “no fishing” pools at Sheepwash Nature Reserve from anglers who are destroying the wildlife habitat by fishing on them?”

his written response was that there

“... was no evidence that fishing was destroying the wildlife habitat.”

We contend that just by being there that anglers are destroying the wildlife habitat. Surely this is common sense that anyone could grasp! We would also refer Mr Slater and those other officers who have ignored our concerns to the results section for Sheepwash Nature Reserve and the substantial evidence that anglers **are** destroying the wildlife habitat.

We would also like to know why it took the head of Sandwell Direct 7 months to reply to a letter about our concerns; this following 4 follow up calls and a copy of the letter being submitted again at a Tipton Town meeting. Is it Sandwell council's policy to reply to letters within 10 days or is it not?

For a comparison of fisheries management we looked at two neighbouring authorities in Dudley and Birmingham to see how they compared with Sandwell when it comes to conservation/management and its protection from angling.

5.2.1 Birmingham City council

Birmingham council charge for fishing on their pools and operate a closed season policy between March 15th- June 15th on sites which are considered to be of high conservation significance. Some pools remain open all year, those which are considered to be of lower conservation significance.

There are individual park wardens on sites who collect money from anglers by issuing day tickets or season permits. Sutton Park has 3 pools which may be fished under strict rules as it is also classed as a National Nature Reserve. These include a ban on night fishing and the erection of shelters.

5.2.2 Dudley council

Dudley council have both rangers and wardens on their sites, sometimes referred to as 'park leaders'. They also operate a close season policy on their nature reserves on those such as Buckpool and Fenspool. The location of this site is in an area which has similar wider social problems to those around Sheepwash. From what we have seen however the policy appears to work, though there are 3 rangers there compared with Sheepwash's none.

A park leader at Himley Hall showed us part of his job brief which stated part of his job involved

"monitoring, issuing of tickets and collecting fees for fishing."

And also

"monitoring the parks wildlife and appraising the senior warden of anything unusual"

The Dudley countryside management project has produced newsletters and guided walks in the borough since spring 1989. Having a Green Umbrella, which incorporates all of the sites, they additionally have an Environmental Awareness team.

Having seen how these councils manage their fisheries we believe that Sandwell's system is inferior, amateurish, unorganised and in need of radical overhaul.

The countryside ranger service is inadequate to cover all the countryside sites in Sandwell. It should be scrapped and merged with the urban rangers, with rangers being assigned to individual parks to deal and report on specific incidents and to collect angler's money as it done in neighbouring authorities.

In addition to this we believe that Sandwell council cannot possibly implement conservation issues or "identify, protect and manage the most important sites" without a conservation officer in place.

A full time conservation officer for Sandwell should be appointed immediately followed by a wildlife and conservation policy being drawn up to "identify", "protect" and "manage" our local countryside and urban sites.

6 THE WAY FORWARD

6.1 THE CONSOLIDATION OF ANGLING ON SANDWELL'S POOLS

We spoke to fisheries bailiff John Campbell and asked him "what do you think is a responsible angler?"

In reply he commented

" A responsible angler is someone who sets his peg out properly in the morning or whenever he fishes, and leaves room either side and behind him. He should be licensed and fish away from powerlines. He should also take his rubbish home and ensure none of it goes in the water. He should also keep an eye out for himself and others and if he spots something then he should speak to the bailiff and tell them about it."

He told us that in around 500 spot checks on adults this year he had only encountered 1 who did not have a valid license. Around 25% of youths he has stopped did not have a valid rod-fishing license. He also told us that he had no legal powers to remove people from certain pools if they had a valid licence such as at Hydes Road where in the last few weeks we have seen fishing taking place. It is up to the local authority to ensure these important wildlife sites are not fished if they are designated 'no fishing pools', as Hydes Road is. He told us that he had informed Sandwell Council what was happening at this site.

On presenting to him two pieces of fishing line found at the pool he confirmed that the first was cheap line probably used by children. The other was good quality 10lb line.

He told us

'I have serious worries about the wildfowl on this site as it is an important breeding site.'

As this report was being typed, a Canada goose with line around its leg was caught on this site, the first that we have encountered in 5 years of monitoring.

We were also made aware that as of March next year, anyone caught without a valid rod fishing license by a fisheries bailiff is liable to a fine, **in addition to the owner of that water also being fined**. Sandwell council should prepare itself for some hefty legal fees if it continues to leave its fisheries unbailiffed.

We have looked at the way angling currently operates on some of Sandwell's pools and waterways and it is quite clear that Sandwell council's management of these fisheries have been extremely poor and they have failed to address nature conservation issues which have led to lawlessness and criminal behaviour in it's parks.

In particular we single out Sheepwash Nature Reserve as being an area where they have failed to act to stem the rise of illegal fishing which sets a precedent for a free for all system that is open to abuse by fraudulent bailiffs taking people's money. It is unacceptable that some people have had to endure intimidation, threats of violence and assault from jobless drunken idiots who contribute nothing to the environment they stain by sitting on the bank side dangling a rod in the water.

They do nothing for the image of angling and neither do a council who are prepared to let them stay there. There should be no tolerance of those who cause crime and fear of crime.

We believe that there should be a ban on the drinking of alcohol at any time in Sandwell's parks.

We believe that having to pay to fish on Sandwell's pools would remove irresponsible anglers and those who cause problems. Crucial to this is the policing of the system which would need to be firm from the outset if it were to work. **We recommend copies of current by-laws be displayed on every site along with Sandwell fisheries rules. The stating of 'fishing' and 'no fishing should be made clear and unambiguous for every pool. These by-laws need to be reinforced with the aid of the police if they are to be of any value.**

For better security on Sandwell's pools it may be best for the council to launch a "Sandwell Angler's Association" whereby anyone who wanted to fish on Sandwell's pools would have to have joined as a member. Having a photograph and address identification in the same manner that bailiffs have to carry, members would be required to produce them for inspection by a water bailiff, officer or ranger on request. Failure to produce such a document should result in prosecution via the by-laws. Members could receive an Angling code of conduct and perhaps a quarterly newsletter focussing on fishing events in the borough.

Such a system would quickly identify those who are persistent trouble makers very easily, as well as giving rangers the ability to get to know who is leaving litter behind and at what time they were at the poolside.

On the spot fines should be given to those who flout the laws whilst angling or leave behind rubbish. Persistent offenders should be banned from every park and open space in the borough if they cause offence, fear and intimidation to other park users whilst angling.

Having spoken to several rangers from other local authorities as well as Mr Campbell, they offer the same opinion that free fishing "encourages misbehaviour". Mr Campbell commented

"I believe that no pool, river or canal should be accessed for free. If there is a minimal charge they will (a) know that they will have to pay up and know that there are rules and (b) once they have paid they will think twice about causing trouble because they know that someone will be there to ensure they don't."

Following the R and D report, E.A fisheries officer Adrian Taylor commented

"The study has shown that a large percentage of the swans that are injured every year are on free council run waters in town centres where young and inexperienced anglers tend to fish".

Our study has appeared to confirm this finding in that the worst sites in Sandwell for both discarded litter and tackle incidents occur on free fishing sites that the council are supposed to manage.

The case for free angling to continue on Sandwell's pools is a case we believe cannot be supported under any circumstances.

We believe that there is a clear link between free all year round fishing and anti social behaviour on park pools. We recommend that Sandwell council ends free fishing on its pools and charges a universal price for day ticket and season angling for members only via a "Sandwell angling association".

6.2 ANGLING RESTRICTIONS

Having also looked at the way in which angling close seasons operate effectively in Dudley and Birmingham and are enforced by the local wardens and rangers we believe that Sandwell must be regarded as the odd man out. When local boroughs are increasingly seeking common goals such as in the implementation of The Biodiversity Action plan for Birmingham and the Black Country, why does Sandwell operate a different policy which creates more problems and anti- social behaviour?

In the introduction to 'Birds of The Sandwell Valley' by Sandnats they comment

There are tremendous pressures on the valley and over the last few years a host of potentially damaging operations have been allowed to take place. These include ... a removal of the close season for fishing..'

They continue

'...we should all be vigilant and keeping records and producing a book such as this will, hopefully ensure that people with the power, and the decision makers, take note and realise what a gem they are responsible for.'

We support these comments completely, and would extend them to other sites in Sandwell which are also losing their natural sparkle through human pressures.

One compromise option would be to limit all year round fishing to just Dartmouth Park, West Smethwick Park and Swan Pool. We believe that the other sites in the borough are of greater conservation value and there should be restrictions via a close season. **We recommend the return of an angling close season to operate on Sandwell's pools between March 15th – June 15th in line the other local authorities.**

Evidence that the most damage done to sites is at night is very clear from our observations. People have been seen both arriving and leaving sites well before dawn and after dusk with fishing equipment. It is likely that these are the times when most illegal fishing activity is carried out such as poaching.

John Campbell told us that any night fishing must have the permission of the fisheries owner for them to be able to do this and they also must not disturb the peace. It is quite clear that those who night fish do not have permission from Sandwell council as fisheries owner to fish on their pools.

We believe that night fishing across the borough must be eradicated as a priority to the attainment of correct angling practice, in partnership with West Midlands police and The Environment Agency.

6.3 STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING THE RISK OF ENTANGLEMENT

The public feeding of wildfowl offers the most potential conflict of interest between those who enjoy the wildfowl in the water and those who fish on the pools. Wildfowl may learn to associate people with food and because anglers are at the poolside for long periods of time with food products, the risk of entanglements become increased. The R and D report recommended that

“Angling be restricted around the major town flocks and other known black-spots for angling related incidents. Those who wish to feed the birds be encouraged to do so only within the restricted area.”

This management option has been seen to significantly reduce incidents of tackle related injuries where it has been trialed. In Sandwell it would be easy to divide fishing pools in this way with a red line painted on the bank side indicating an angling zone, and a green line indicating a feeding zone. These colours connote that anglers are present and are a danger and green symbolizes nature.

It is known that a large number of people from ethnic origins feed birds as part of their culture. This sensitivity is a difficult problem to overcome but we believe that all people must be educated that mouldy food can kill birds and that it also encourages rat infestations. Signs indicating that these feeding and angling zones are in operation must be communicated in different languages relevant to the diversity of cultures in Sandwell if they are to be effective.

We recommend the creation of angling and feeding zones on Dartmouth Park, West Smethwick Park and Swan Pool. Pools could be divided up equally in this way with a green line indicating a feeding zone and a red line indicating an angling zone.

We have highlighted that there are some sites where bins for disposal of rubbish have been vandalised and others that have too few bins. Sheepwash Nature Reserve is the best example of this. It is important not to give people any excuse for dropping or throwing away litter carelessly.

We believe that robust bins must be provided on all fishing sites at the waterside. Immediate priority should be given to Sheepwash Nature reserve- John's Lane pool and North pool.

Unmanaged bank side vegetation acts as a magnet for discarded litter and also discarded tackle. Such shrubs also obstruct correct angling practice from taking place. **We believe that Sandwell council must regularly clear all litter from fishing pegs and all vegetation should be managed and cut back at least two metres either side of a peg and behind them to reduce the chances of snagging and entanglement.**

6.4 Educating young and inexperienced anglers

In compiling this report it has become clear that there is a problem with some anglers who are non competent and are using ridiculously strong line to catch fish of weights that do not require such a high breaking strength.

Victoria Park and John's Lane pool at Sheepwash demonstrate that snagging line and floats on the islands is a common problem. Unattended rods are another common sight with baited hooks in the water a wildlife casualty waiting to happen.

It is also apparent that there are many youngsters that fish in Sandwell who are both inexperienced as anglers and lack a social conscience. Sweet and crisp wrappers in addition to half empty pop bottles often accompany angling litter found on many sites. More disturbing is the way that some are using catapults to deliberately target geese and other birds with bricks and stones. This cannot be tolerated under any circumstances when it is an offence under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

During our monitoring of the sites, minors under the age of 12 were seen fishing in school time when they had no valid excuse for being away from school. The problem is particularly acute on the canal networks which in Sandwell are very expansive. The more secluded pools such as those at Sheepwash and Swan pool offer many dangers to vulnerable young people.

Men exposing themselves have been known on these sites. Children's safety cannot be guaranteed if they are sedentary for more than a couple of hours, especially during dusk. They are also more likely to be targeted by older youths with theft of tackle a greater possibility.

Water safety dangers also apply, as do exposure to the heat during the summer months.

We do not believe that children under 12 years of age are either qualified or safe to go fishing by themselves.

We believe that the under 12's should not be allowed to fish on Sandwell's pools unless they are accompanied by a person with a full rod fishing license.

A better education of young anglers is crucial, both in terms of angling and also in the understanding of the wildlife that live around their activity. Wildlife must be respected and not treated with contempt.

We believe that the best way forward to reduce entanglements with wildfowl and create better young anglers would be for them to be given specialist tuition by responsible organisations such as The National Federation of Anglers combined with talks by RSPB staff or Swan Rescue.

Both children and adults must learn that discarded litter such as broken glass and empty sharp tins can be lethal to wildlife. We have seen many ducks on pools around the West Midlands who have had 'packs of four' drink holders wrapped around their beaks that act like gags. Being unable to feed or drink properly it is impossible for them to survive unless these are removed. Some people may be unaware of the dangers that such 'innocent' items pose to wildlife.

We propose that Sandwell council introduces an angling litter awareness campaign in it's fishing policy promoted in both schools and the community possibly with the title "catch line".

Equally apparent from this study is that some pools in Sandwell **must** remain no fishing pools. Human pressures from housing, an increase in the population and industrial redevelopment are ever increasingly limiting our wild life havens. Reserves should be reserves for wildlife without any reservations for people's sporting pursuits, especially those that pose such a threat to the survival of wildlife in those environments such as the sport of angling.

Jan Harrigan told us that councils have
'a duty of care to protect the wildlife on their pools'.

Now is the moment to exercise that protection.

There should be no open fishing policy on every pool. We believe that there should be no fishing at any time on the following Sandwell pools where wildlife entanglements would be increased by the number of breeding wildfowl on that site.

Sheepwash Nature Reserve- Pumphouse Pool, Rose Lane Pool, Pylon Pool

Redhouse Park Pools

Hydes Road pool

Millpool Colliery

Victoria Park Smethwick

Victoria Park Tipton

Sandwell Valley -Icehouse Pool/ Cascade Pool / Cypress Pool

Forge Mill Lake.

Smethwick Hall Park

Fishing should be allowed to take place on

West Smethwick Park

Swan Pool

Dartmouth Park Pools, Warrens Hall Nature Reserve

Sheepwash Nature reserve- John's Lane Pool, North

6.5 IMPLEMENTING THESE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Environment Agency bailiffs may prosecute those who flout the law using lead weights in illegal sizes but they have no legal remit to prosecute those who use shot of no 8 or smaller. It may be possible for Sandwell Council to pass a By- law to cover a total ban on lead weights so that council rangers and officials may conduct spot checks to see what anglers are using. Those who flout the rules could be initially warned, given a written warning if they are caught for a second time and in persistent cases banned from the site or given spot fines should they not comply. A similar rule should apply for those using barbed or treble hooks.

Some of these recommendations will be unpopular with anglers. They may argue, "Why should I have to start paying when I haven't before?"

The answer is that they must if angling is to survive in Sandwell. The state of some of the pools is quite disgusting and they must be persuaded that parting with a fee as it is done in every other local borough will help to improve fish stocks and bankside improvements.

The ranger service will have to undertake the majority of this work, a job which other wardens and rangers in neighbouring boroughs carry out on a daily basis. Sandwell rangers should have a close liaison with the police during the initial introduction of charges. They must not be seen to back down to those who refuse to pay. The police should attend and make arrests if by-laws are being broken. Once people have got this message we are confident from the experiences of professionals in other boroughs that irresponsible anglers will quickly disappear.

The other alternative would be to employ professional bailiffs to enforce policy on fisheries or hand them over to E.A control.

We commend the recommendations from our report to the council.

7 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

(a) We recommend the banning of all lead dust shot weights used for angling on Sandwell's pools, as there are non-toxic alternatives clearly available which reduce the risk of lead poisoning to swans and other wildfowl.

(b) We recommend the total ban of all barbed hooks and treble hooks on Sandwell's pools. The confiscation of all such implements being used and a barring from the pool and all other pools in Sandwell for those who continuously flout it.

(c) We recommend to anglers that they do not attempt to catch or retrieve line from birds if they become entangled whilst fishing.

(d) Urgent attention is needed to address illegal fishing on the Pumphouse Pool at Sheepwash Nature reserve and to actively prosecute those who continue to flout the by-law of no fishing.

(e) We find Victoria Park Tipton to be the worst place for angling related incidents in the past and for the amount of line that fishermen are still leaving behind. We believe that the fish should be removed from this pool and fishing should be phased out by the end of this year.

(f) The countryside ranger service is inadequate to cover all the countryside sites in Sandwell. It should be scrapped and merged with the urban rangers, with rangers being assigned to individual parks to deal and report on specific incidents and to collect angler's money as it is done in neighbouring authorities.

(g) A full time conservation officer for Sandwell should be appointed immediately followed by a wildlife and conservation policy being drawn up to 'identify protect and manage' our local countryside and urban sites.

(h) We believe that there should be a ban on the drinking of alcohol at any time in Sandwell's parks.

(i) We recommend copies of current by-laws be displayed on every site along with Sandwell fisheries rules. The stating of 'fishing and 'no fishing should be made clear and unambiguous for every pool. These by-laws need to be reinforced with the aid of the police if they are to be of any value.

(j) On the spot fines should be given to those who flout the laws whilst angling or leave behind rubbish. Persistent offenders should be banned from every park and open space in the borough if they cause offence, fear and intimidation to other park users whilst angling.

(k) We believe that there is a clear link between free all year round fishing and anti social behaviour on park pools. We recommend that Sandwell council ends free fishing on all pools and charges a universal price for day ticket and season angling via members only via a "Sandwell angling association".

(l) We recommend the return of an angling close season to operate on Sandwell's pools between March 15th – June 15th in line ^{with} the other local authorities.

(m) Night fishing across the borough must be ^{eradicated} ~~irradiated~~ as a priority to the attainment of correct angling practice. in partnership with West Midlands police and The Environment Agency

(n) We recommend the creation of angling and feeding zones on certain pools. A green line indicating a feeding zone, a red line indicating an angling zone. Pools could be divided up equally in this way.

(o) We believe that robust bins must be provided on all fishing sites at the waterside. Immediate priority should be given to Sheepwash Nature reserve- John's Lane pool and North pool.

(p) We believe that Sandwell council must regularly clear all litter from fishing pegs and all vegetation should be managed and cut back at least two metres either side of a peg to reduce the chances of snagging and entanglement

(q) We do not believe that children under 12 years of age are either qualified or safe to go fishing by themselves.

We believe that the under 12's should not be allowed to fish on Sandwell's pools unless they are accompanied by a person with a full rod fishing license.

(r) We believe that the best way forward to reduce entanglements with wildfowl and create better young anglers would be for them to be given specialist tuition by responsible organisations such as The National Federation of anglers combined with talks by RSPB staff or Swan Rescue.

(s) We propose that Sandwell council introduces an angling litter awareness campaign in it's fishing policy promoted in both schools and the community possibly with the title "Catch line".

(t) Clear and unambiguous orientation boards are needed on every site to show exactly which pools allow fishing and which do not. This should be reinforced with a high profile publicity campaign, which could promote sensible angling practices in Sandwell.

(u) There should be no open fishing policy on every pool, which will only increase the number of wildlife casualties on those sites. We believe that there should be no fishing at any time on the following Sandwell pools where wildlife entanglements would be increased by the number of breeding wildfowl on that site being harmed.

Sheepwash Nature Reserve-Pumphouse Pool, Rose Lane Pool, Pylon Pool

Redhouse Park Pool

Hyde's Road Pools

Mill pool Colliery

Victoria Park Smethwick

Victoria Park Tipton

Sandwell Valley -Icehouse Pool/ Cascade Pool / Cypress Pool

Forge Mill Lake.

Fishing should be allowed to take place on:

West Smethwick Park

Swan Pool

Dartmouth Park Pools

Warrens Hall Nature Reserve

Sheepwash Nature Reserve- John's Lane Pool, North Pool.

APPENDIX A NATIONAL

Year on Year Summary of Swan Rescue Records.

	1995		1996		1997		1998		1999		2000		2001	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Fishing tackle.	81	32.0	681	30.1	270	21.9	503	36.8	569	30.2	567	33.7	467	26.1
Lead.	8	3.2	122	5.4	38	3.1	117	8.6	95	5.0	87	5.2	82	4.6
Poorly.	33	13.0	192	8.5	165	13.4	152	11.1	210	11.2	141	8.4	201	11.2
Injured.	8	3.2	152	6.7	65	5.3	123	9.0	182	9.7	180	10.7	206	11.5
Grounded/trapped.	42	16.6	321	14.2	145	11.8	127	9.3	255	13.5	170	10.1	136	7.6
Territorial.	7	2.8	229	10.1	153	12.4	103	7.5	148	7.9	128	7.6	158	8.8
Collision.	21	8.3	75	3.3	90	7.3	38	2.8	80	4.2	54	3.2	75	4.2
Cable.	2	0.8					71	5.2	121	6.4	106	6.3	96	5.4
Pollution.	0	0.0	76	3.4	54	4.4	36	2.6	82	4.4	78	4.6	110	6.2
Vandals/shot.	6	2.4	25	1.1	9	0.7	14	1.0	29	1.5	50	3.0	45	2.5
Predation.	4	1.6	13	0.6	14	1.1	17	1.2	31	1.6	26	1.5	32	1.8
Angel wing.	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0	2	0.1	7	0.4	1	0.1	6	0.3
Care.	14	5.5	101	4.5	42	3.4	5	0.4	20	1.1	48	2.8	72	4.0
Other.	1	0.4	80	3.5	50	4.1	13	1.0	7	0.4	5	0.3	23	1.3
Ice			39	1.7	32	2.6	7	0.5	7	0.4	0	0.0	0	0.0
Dead.	26	10.3	160	7.1	105	8.5	37	2.7	42	2.2	42	2.5	79	4.4
	253		2266		1232		1365		1885		1683		1788	

EK.PNM. 13.04.02

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29th August 2001

LEAD in All Fuel

Further to our recent conversation I would like to confirm some of the points in regard to the use of Lead in fuels. Historically Tetra Methyl and Tetra Ethyl Lead was used at very low concentrations in gasoline fuel. This aided the octane rating and reduced the old fashioned "pinking or knocking." However over time it was recognised that the lead emitted from vehicles even at low levels could impact on the central nervous system - particularly the developing brains of children. Consequently the lead level in gasoline was reduced in the mid-eighties and by 1992, lead free petrol became widely available forced by the introduction of the Catalytic Converter.

Further pressure exercised by the European Auto Oil Programme required that all lead be removed from gasoline by the end of 1999. Leaded petrol was therefore replaced by Lead Replacement Petrol (LRP) in late 1999 through the use of a Potassium chemical lubricant, which helps to protect valve seats in older engines. However a small niche supply of leaded gasoline remains available for vintage motor vehicles, but this amounts to a minute fraction of the overall market.

In summary it is fair to say that lead no longer plays any part in gasoline production and certainly has never been present in diesel or kerosine fuels as you suggested. As I speak the redundant lead injection plant at the refinery is in the process of assessment before final dismantling and disposal.

I hope these points have reassured you of the complete lack of potential for road fuels to have any contribution towards the disturbing condition of lead poisoning often found in Swans these days.

Yours sincerely

B.P. Brown, MSc, MRSH, DGSA
Environmental Engineer

APPENDIX C

Table 2b(i) A summary of tackle and line retrieved FROM PUMPHOUSE POOL

ITEM	Penalty point tariff	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total recovered	Penalty points deducted	% Points lost for tackle
Line under 1'	1	3	17	17	37	37	11.1
Line over 1'	2	4	20	49	73	146	43.7
Floats	3	0	0	2	2	6	1.8
Barbless hooks	5	1	2	3	6	30	9
Barbed hooks	10	0	3	6	9	90	26.9
Treble hooks	25	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lead shot	25	0	0	1	1	25	7.5
Total points deducted	-	16	97	221	128	<u>334</u>	100%

Table 2b(ii) A summary of tackle and line retrieved FROM JOHN'S LANE POOL

ITEM	Penalty point tariff	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	Total recovered	Penalty points deducted	% Points lost for tackle
Line under 1'	1	17	20	15	52	52	12.3
Line over 1'	2	22	15	19	56	112	26.5
Floats	3	0	1	0	1	3	.7
Barbless hooks	5	0	2	2	4	20	4.7
Barbed hooks	10	5	5	1	11	110	26.1
Treble hooks	25	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lead shot	25	2	2	1	5	125	29.6
Total points deducted	-	161	163	98	129	<u>422</u>	99.9%

Table 2B (iii) Comparison between John's Lane and Pumphouse Pools

POOL	Jan 1 st - March 14th	March 15- June 15th	June 16 th - Sept 1st	TOTAL	% POINTS LOST
PUMPHOUSE	16	97	221	334	44.2%
JOHN'S LANE	161	163	98	422	55.8%
TOTALS	177	260	319	<u>756</u>	100%

The figures show that angling is declining in the summer months on John's Lane but increasing dramatically on The Pumphouse Pool. This supports the view that the majority of irresponsible anglers on this site during this period are located on this pool, one that they should not be fishing on at all.

APPENDIX D Table 10b items found site by site

ITEM		S	I	T	E	S		Total	%Items found
	Dartmouth Park	Sheepwash Nature Reserve	Swan Pool	Icehouse/ Cascade	West Smethwick Park	Victoria Park	Ridgacre canal		
Line under 1'	55	89	40	19	33	69	17	322	38.9%
Line over 1'	43	129	23	13	19	135	15	377	45.6%
Floats	3	3	1	2	2	8	2	21	2.5%
Barbless hooks	2	10	0	1	2	10	1	26	3.1%
Barbed hooks	1	20	2	2	3	32	1	61	7.4%
Treble hooks	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	3	.4%
Lead shot	0	6	2	0	1	8	0	17	2.1%
Total no items	104	257	68	38	60	264	36	<u>827</u>	
Site%	12.56%	31.08%	8.22%	4.59%	7.26%	31.92%	4.35%	<u>99.98</u>	<u>100%</u>

Appendix E Monthly maxima for mute swans at monitored sites.

11 A DARTMOUTH PARK

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S
2	3	2	2	2	2	0	7	0

11B SHEEPWASH NATURE RESERVE

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S
10	8	3	3	2	2	2	2	0

N.B Between May-July there were no swans recorded in the Pumphouse or Johns Lane pools

11C SWAN POOL

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S
3	7	5	4	2	2	0	8	0

11D ICEHOUSE/CASCADE POOLS

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S
2	2	2	2	9	9	9	9	9

11E WEST SMETHWICK PARK

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S
13	8	9	7	9	2	0	0	0

11F VICTORIA PARK- TIPTON

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S
2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0

11G RIDGACRE CANAL

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S
3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2