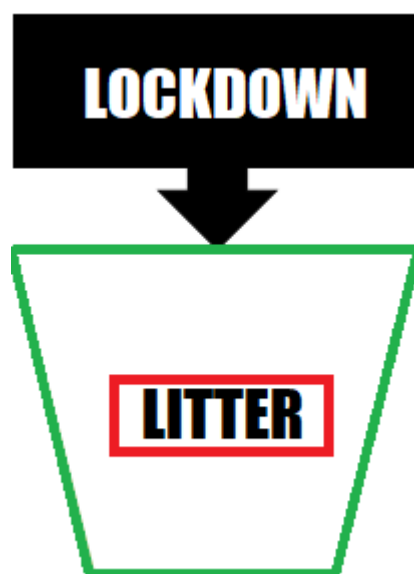


Sandwell fishing policy 2023- Wildlife matters



PREFACE

This response to Sandwell's new angling policy consultation follows nearly three decades of active campaigning by myself and many other nature enthusiasts and wildfowl rescuers.

It should be read in context with work done 20+ years ago where we were challenged by the then councillor in charge of environment- himself an active angler, to provide "evidence" of issues caused by fishing in Sandwell's open spaces.

By the end of that process, where he and others appear to have been in blissful denial about the damage which this activity caused, (and still does), it was fairly clear that policy within Sandwell had to change, based on that direct evidence. This document can be read at the link below.

saveoursandwellcanadageese.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Sandwell-council-fishing-report.pdf

This was an assessment of the then policy calling for change and the ways in which we believed that angling could co-exist with wildlife ecology if the council managed it better. We made numerous observations and recommendations based upon our findings – which were

- **1633 yards of fishing line was collected in just 9 months from Sandwell sites, with 1007 yards of it from Victoria Park Tipton alone!**
- **Multiple instances of illegal sized lead shot were collected as well as barbed and treble hooks which were supposedly "banned" on Sandwell's pools**
- **36 birds had tackle related injuries, 14 of them pigeons**
- **Little regulation and enforcement by Sandwell council with free fishing and alcohol consumption being rife**
- **Fishing on non designated pools was occurring threatening wildfowl that shouldn't have been.**

Following this, SMBC then adopted an angling policy in 2003, alongside a code of conduct. Despite this positive step, it was never matched with the robust enforcement that we had called for, and there is little doubt that it has been a spectacular failure in policy in the intervening years. To demonstrate this, Freedom of Information requests to SMBC asking how much money had been collected from fishing fees were submitted.

[Fishing fees collected - a Freedom of Information request to Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council - WhatDoTheyKnow](#)

[Fishing fees collected 2018-2020 - a Freedom of Information request to Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council - WhatDoTheyKnow](#)

The resulting answers must have made councillors and new officers aware that this was not economically viable to allow the free for all that was occurring to continue. There is little doubt that where there is free fishing, there is no accountability and no rules for enforcement, and this threatens wildlife, and it also gives angling a bad name, which is not what many anglers want to see happen.

This then sets the basis for comment on the new policy, which it can only be hoped does not miss the opportunity to improve Sandwell's Green spaces by excluding those who only think about themselves and do not care about their actions in the context of the wildlife that lives in the environment in which they are a passing damaging participant.

I can and have actively demonstrated direct evidence of the harm which angling is currently doing on Sandwell Council owned waters, but hope that there is now a little more sympathy to the plight of wildfowl being harmed than there was in 2003 by policy makers.



Policy wording and statements.

*“There are often discrepancies and confusion in the understanding of rules and regulations for fishing on these sites.
This policy will remove any previous confusion regarding the rules and regulations and identify what locations angling is permitted.”*

We agree with this statement, but unfortunately, the identified list of sites within this consultation has made this more unclear. We pointed out to the assistant director at an early stage that at Sheepwash Nature Reserve, there are two pools out of five that allow fishing, both of which *do* show “*what locations angling is permitted.*”

These are John’s Lane Pool, and North Pool. The pumphouse pool and pylon and Rose Lane pools do not and have never been designated pools for fishing, based upon the designation of SLINC sites and also with the passing of the site as a Nature Reserve in 2001. Signage on these pools is already clear.

We therefore again in this document call for this to be made clear in the cabinet report which clarifies this position, so in no way this oversight makes it into policy confusion that it is allowed on all pools at Sheepwash.

By way of history, the following piece appeared in 1991

12 EVENING MAIL, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 1991

ANGLER BAN TO AID PARK WILDLIFE

UNAUTHORISED anglers have been blamed for injuring birds, and destroying trees at a reclaimed park in Sandwell.

Fishing, swimming and other water-based activities have now been banned from Sheepwash Urban Park at

By TONY COLLINS

Great Bridge.

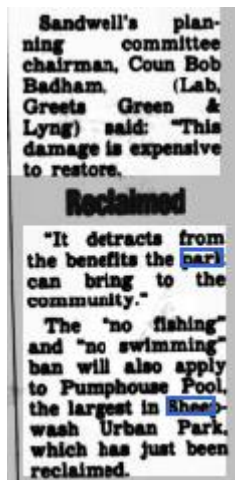
Families are also being circulated with a newsletter advising them not to fish at the reclaimed former rubbish tip.

Sandwell Council spokeswoman Philippa Smith said: “Unauthorised fishing activi-

ties on St John’s Lane pool have brought major disturbances to the pool.

“Injuries to birds have been reported, breeding successes have dropped dramatically and poolside vegetation has been trampled and pulled out.

“In addition, makeshift platforms have been constructed by destroying young trees.”



Published: Wednesday 11 September 1991

Newspaper: [Sandwell Evening Mail](#)

This demonstrates that even before we came on the scene, the council were aware of what was occurring at this site and took appropriate action at that time.

As a nature reserve, we question if fishing should continue there, but accept that if it does, then it should not be encouraged. **We will talk more about Sheepwash further on in this document.**

“Angling has been a popular pastime within Sandwell’s Green Spaces for many years. This policy will look to balance this, whilst also ensuring future use, other Park users, wildlife and ecology flourish.”

It has, but there has not been enough political support to protect wildlife and wildlife habitats from being damaged through uncontrolled and illegal fishing. We only hope that this will change and there will be a commitment at the highest level to make this policy work.

“Angling Locations

The following sites listed below are where angling is permitted

- 1 West Smethwick Park boating pool, Smethwick*
- 2 Victoria Park Pool, Tipton*
- 3 Dartmouth Park Boating Pool, West Bromwich*
- 4 Dartmouth Park Fishing Pond, West Bromwich*
- 5 Warrens Hall Nature Reserve, Rowley Regis*
- 6 Swan Pool, Sandwell Valley, West Bromwich*
- 7 Hydes Road Pool, Wednesbury*
- 8 Sheepwash Nature Reserve, Tipton*

.Fishing is not permitted at any other location or waterbody that is not identified in the list above.”

As previously stated Sheepwash Nature reserve should read

*“Sheepwash Nature Reserve John’s Lane Pool, Tipton
Sheepwash Nature Reserve North Pool Tipton”*

This then makes it clear as to which pools cannot be fished by elimination. Current notice boards at every entrance to the site clearly already identify this and name the pools, as do the water orientation boards. There is scope to add more of these boards between Pumphouse pool and North pool to eliminate any possible “confusion” further. We have raised this matter numerous times with walkabouts with SMBC officers and councillors, indeed Evan Hughes took geo locations which were forwarded to parks officers. We have yet to see this acted upon.

In terms of Sheepwash, we would prefer fishing to be phased out of the site altogether given its designation. This could be done by continuing to not manage North Pool and John’s Lane pool by not cutting back vegetation to allow tents to be erected. These pools should certainly not be restocked, given the level of poaching and illegal transfer which we will look at further on.

As for the other locations, we get issues with West Smethwick Park and Victoria Park Tipton the most. Hydes Road is becoming over fished, and swan pool has competing uses which is making it difficult to see this site as a nature reserve area given the level of human activity taking place.

There needs to be clear signage and identification of which pools CANNOT be fished which are

**Victoria Park Smethwick
Smethwick Hall Park Smethwick
Icehouse/cascade/cypress pools West Bromwich.
West Smethwick Park, Top pool
Sheepwash Nature Reserve, Pumphouse pool/pylon pool/Rose Lane pools
Tipton
Haden Hill Park Top and Bottom Pools, Cradley Heath
Redhouse Park, Top and Bottom pools, Great Barr
Ridgeacre Canal Basin West Bromwich
Forge Mill Lake, West Bromwich
Millpool (The Milky) West Bromwich**

“Fees & Charges”

We have no interest in ever fishing so do not care about the rate which the council sets and make no comment, other than it should investigate what other local authorities charge for angling. We only care that these charges **ARE** collected and that it does not become an ad hoc passing collection which gives way to eventual abandonment of charges. This is our biggest fear with this policy based on previous experience.

Fishing permit locations

These are fine, but the emphasis appears to be on the individual to buy these, and not what happens if they do not comply or bother to in the first place. This already has led to most individuals not bothering- as reflected in the dire fees collected.

Questions for scrutiny

How are you going to make people pay who do not want to, and how are you going to deal with those who do not?

If people approached fishing do not have a permit, are you going to give them a concessionary chance to do so, or as you should, if they refuse to pay there and then, remove them off the site? There is very little chance that people will bother in this case to buy any permits if they are let off and play ignorant.

It means that you need to install all signage advertising charges in advance of enforcement, and ensure that this signage is not defaced or removed by those not wanting to pay.

“Future Pools and Waterbody Development

We will undertake the following to maintain good fishing practices and seek to encourage new participants to use to these sites by committing to the following:
Maintaining clear access to identified fishing locations

Partially agree, but not for Sheepwash, as already stated.

Identify and mark suitable fishing locations where practically possible

Agreed, but not for the erection of tents or bivvys.

Work with community groups and other organisations to develop strategies and projects for improved facilities including Fish stock, infrastructure, ecology, wildlife and partnership arrangements

Difficult to see this working given the lack of interest in clubs running fishing in the past. The credibility of some of these clubs were highly questionable, and they should not be preferred ahead of uniformed, insured and protected EPO officers.

Work with community groups and other organisations in hosting events and activities that encourage Angling on our Waterbodies Work with organisations and community groups to develop volunteer lead activities and events to improve the ecology, waterbody and green space aesthetics.

Not interested in this concept. We are not in favour of encouraging angling.

Erect signage around fishing pools highlighting the rules and regulations of the fishing policy (Appendix A)

Make this policy available for download via theSandwell website

Identify any improvements or highlight works that will improve Angling as part of the wider programme of works for Green Spaces. As per the following website:<https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/parks-green-spaces/green-spaces>”

Agreed, but how are you going to enforce this?

“Enforcement

Enforcement and periodic permit checks will be undertaken via various Council Officers, including but not limited to the following:

- 1 Green space officers
- 2Countryside Rangers
- 3Environmental Protection Officers
- 4Green Service Operatives and Officers
- 5Neighbourhood Officers
- 6Private Security (when procured for spot checks)

Do not agree with “periodic checks”, as this implies that it will probably be avoided by these staff due to potential confrontations which they will seek to avoid. What do you mean by “periodic”? Is this every day, once a week or ad hoc, in which case I doubt if they will be done.

In the case of the countryside rangers, I do not see how two officers, who are not usually on duty together could cover all the sites. If it is left to these staff to “police” the nature reserve sites, then I see that not being done at all. You also have to consider that policing will need to be done in the areas where fishing is not allowed. This list of council owned sites is as already stated

Victoria Park Smethwick
Smethwick Hall Park Smethwick
Icehouse/cascade/cypress pools West Bromwich.
West Smethwick Park, Top pool
Sheepwash Nature Reserve, Pumphouse pool/pylon pool/Rose Lane pools
Tipton
Haden Hill Park Top and Bottom Pools, Cradeley Heath
Redhouse Park, Top and Bottom pools, Great Barr
Ridgeacre Canal Basin West Bromwich
Forge Mill Lake, West Bromwich
Millpool (The Milky) West Bromwich

I would favour two EPO's being tasked with leading the bailiffing operation with support from other staff. This would be a daily operation visiting all sites as part of duties, or responding to reports of asb or rule breaking where appropriate. They would also be better placed to liaise with the EA enforcement officers and police, particularly when equipped with bodycam footage evidence.

“Enforcement or requests for the sight of permits from members of the public, Friends groups or other community groups / clubs is not permitted. Any suspected breach of rules identified in Appendix A should be reported via the mysandwell portal.

Any breaking of the law or local byelaws should be reported to the Police, ASB team or Environment Agency.”

Unfortunately, this has failed over the course of the last 20 years. I have diligently reported matters, only for multiple buck passing between the EA, council and the police on ASB matters. I don't believe that this aspect of the policy is well thought out as to how it will operate. What “local bye laws” are being referred to here, given that many sites like Sheepwash do not currently have any? How can they therefore be enforced without them?

FISHING AND ASB

Over the course of the last 20 plus years, the observations related to this activity, which have been evidenced, provided and reported to officers and other bodies include

- Illegal poaching and setting of fish traps
- Illegal transfer of fish risking population diseases spreading
- Unregulated cutting down of trees and vegetation to fish in locations not permitted
- Use of drugs and alcohol
- Night fishing
- Unattended rods
- Fishing from boats and islands
- Fires and barbeques and eating caught fish
- Litter left everywhere but no penalty for doing so
- Defecating in wooded areas
- Abuse and threats of violence for challenging this behaviour
- Targetting birds with catapults and air weapons that they bring along

The tolerance of all of this over a long period, despite having policy in place to deal with it disgraces the council.

Liaison with the police and the Environment Agency has always been very poor, and must improve if you are going to make this work- indeed the role of each body and who is responsible for what needs to be discussed urgently.

Poaching and weapons

I had occasion to ring the police on seeing individuals fishing on a non designated pool brandishing axes. They were smoking drugs also, and yet the police were not interested in talking to them, citing pathetic and untruthful reasons for not doing so. The following appeared in The Sunday Mercury.

SUNDAY MERCURY, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2016

NEWS

POACHING 'TREATED LIKE JOKE' AS POLICE CRITICISED

Force denies accusation police refused to jump over a 3-foot fence for 'health and safety reasons' in hunt for vandals

Questions over police body cams after Villa star's death

A "COMPLETE lack of consistency" among police forces in the deployment of body cameras to officers armed with Tasers has been revealed in a new survey.

Despite some top officers describing the technology as "effective" and "vital" to 21st century policing, many forces have not completed a full roll-out and at least one has said it has no current plan to adopt the cameras, which record what happens during incidents.

A survey by the Press Association of the UK's 45 territorial forces has revealed a disjointed approach to equipping officers with body-worn video (BWV).

The issue has been highlighted following the death of former football star Dalian Atkinson after he was Tasered in Telford, Shropshire, on August 15.

A criminal investigation is under way, but

the 48-year-old's death it emerged, from West Mercia Police, had not been equipped with BWV.

Mr Atkinson's family has since called for all Taser-equipped officers to be issued with bodycams as standard.

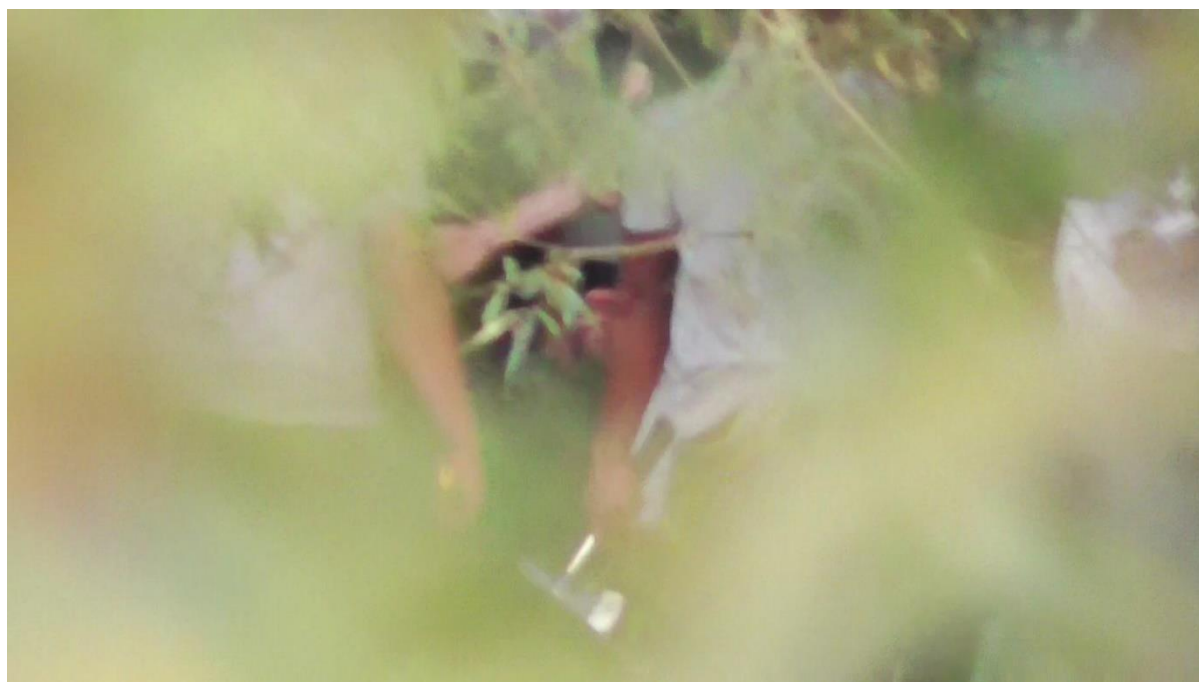
Fabian Atkinson, nephew of the ex-Aston Villa player, said: "If they have a weapon and they're going to discharge that weapon, then they need a camera to record that."

However, the College of Policing said there was "no specific guidance" for issuing armed officers with bodycams, although it did issue advice in 2014.

The Independent Police Complaints Commission said two West Mercia officers are "under criminal investigation", having been suspended and issued with gross misconduct notices.

Above: Vandals and poachers at Sheepwash Nature Reserve have been caught on camera

Ex Villa star



MIKE LOCKLEY

Staff Reporter
mike.lockley@trinitymirror.com

POACHERS at a Black Country beauty spot made good their escape after police officers refused to clamber a three-foot fence on health and safety grounds, an eye-witness claims.

Ian Carroll, a volunteer at Tipton's Sheepwash Nature Reserve, alleges two constables declined to climb the wire fence because it could activate a Taser.

The weapons, capable of delivering a 50,000-volt shock, have made recent headlines after former Villa star Dalian Atkinson died after being tasered.

But West Midlands Police refuted Mr Carroll's allegations and stressed they did not tally with the force's procedure surrounding the weapons.

There is no reason why a Taser would go off while shimmying a fence, a spokesman pointed out.

One of the officers has provided a detailed response to the claims – and refuted them.

"At no stage did either man mention there was a health and safety issue around tasers," a spokesman stressed.

The police officers did, however, decline Mr Carroll's call to scramble down a steep embank-

ment and trudge through thick undergrowth in torrential rain.

That, they felt, would have been unsafe. But, by then, they had already carried out a search of the area.

And a log of the incident, last Saturday afternoon, simply records officers failed to locate the culprits.

That cuts little ice with Mr Carroll, who has tended the reserve for 18 years. He said: "You could've lifted the wire and gone underneath it."

It is not the first time the 41-year-old has accused authorities – both council, Environment Agency and police – of failing to robustly tackle poaching and vandalism at the site.

Saturday's incident took the biscuit, he told The Mercury.

"They came out incredibly quickly," Mr Carroll said. "It was pouring with rain. The poachers were there for night-time fishing. They had put up a tent and I could see three with axes, there may have been another in the tent."

He claimed: "They were only yards away, but you had to climb the fence and it was pouring with rain."

"The officers told me they couldn't climb over because there was a health and safety issue. They had Tasers and they might go off."

"Frankly, I was gob-smacked, I'd never heard anything like it."

"That fence is one metre high and you can get under it."

"I've spoken to both the council and police about the situation at the reserve and nothing has been done. The place is being left to rot."

Mr Carroll claimed the green oasis has been plagued by poachers, vandals and drug users for over five years.

In a strongly worded letter to the neighbourhood police, Mr Carroll described the incident as a farce.

He stated: "The response by both police and council to this incident and several others is absolute rubbish."

"Time and time again I have made calls, given evidence and it is treated like a joke."

But West Midlands police said a thorough search of the area was made and no poachers found.

They insisted no fence was encountered during that search.

After scouring the area, Mr Carroll urged them to scramble down a quagmire bank which was deemed dangerous.

And they pointed out only one of the officers carried a Taser, covered because of the weather.

One policeman told The Mercury: "That means there were no health and safety issues – as stated by Mr Carroll – over the other officer climbing the fence."

Poaching in area canals

In reply to G Harper from Oldbury, (Express & Star, letters, August 29) regarding the fish taken from canals, it's heartbreaking to see this happening on our canals and lakes.

It happens an awful lot on the canal in Tipton and at Sheepwash nature reserve. I have found fixed lines in the water purposefully left there to catch fish (which I remove and report to local police and council). They also take geese and ducks.

I pay my rod licence to fish on the canal and I know those responsible for the fish taking don't! If this is allowed to continue unchecked then we will have no fish or wildlife left!

S Barsby
Tipton

The "Eastern European angler"

This form of angler we are meant to believe steals fish and eats them, or at least that is what English anglers claim. I am not sure of some of these reports, as I have seen illegal transfer of fish taking place by the same anglers who claim it is those from other countries. Regardless of this, with European free movement occurring some 20 plus years ago, if those fishing are not aware of the rules by now then this is not an excuse to avoid punishment. Indeed, putting signage in multiple languages is a waste of money, and the council should not tolerate pathetic excuses from anyone about not knowing rules. **THEY JUST NEED TO BE ENFORCED EQUALLY TO ALL.**

Fish traps found at Sheepwash nature reserve.

Many of these are placed on the end of rope submerged below the waterline, making it a trap to wild birds also if entangled. Some are homemade, including out of plastic bottles, some large rolled up wire cages, and some fyke traps.





Fyke traps attached on lines.



Camp fires



Unattended rods and tents Victoria Park Tipton



Illegal fishing on pumphouse pool. Again in tent



Rubbish left behind by these individuals on that occasion.



Litter left behind by anglers on North Pool Sheepwash, with more camp fires



Angling litter, don't just take it from me



45 25/11/03

Anger at threat to wildlife



Pauline Hodgetts and Alva Parks of Victoria Park Steering Group who are angry about the fishing line that has been left near the pool in the park

Anglers are being urged to clear up their fishing line and respect the wildlife in and around the pool at a Tipton park.

Members of Victoria Park Steering Group want anglers to "show a bit of responsibility" by making sure they leave none of their kit behind them. They say that since April, they have rescued more than 100 birds which have been tangled in fishing line or had hooks in their mouths. They also collected a large bundle of line from the park.

Group chairman Pauline Hodgetts said: "We are asking the fishermen to collect up their line and take it with them. We don't

Report by Kathryn Cecil

want them to stop fishing the pool, but we just want them to have a bit of consideration for the wildlife and show a bit of responsibility."

She said members make regular patrols of the pool and the park to clear up. The group was set up to encourage more people to make use of the facilities and to work alongside Sandwell Council's Groundcare team to maintain the upkeep of the park.

For information on joining the group call Carole Calloway on 0121 569 3440.

Barbed treble hooks- absolutely barbaric



Cygnets swan pool trapped and attached to island vegetation



This was on its leg, cotton line which is sometimes seen used by some anglers.

Dead heron hanging by wing from line attached to trees on island at Victoria Park Tipton



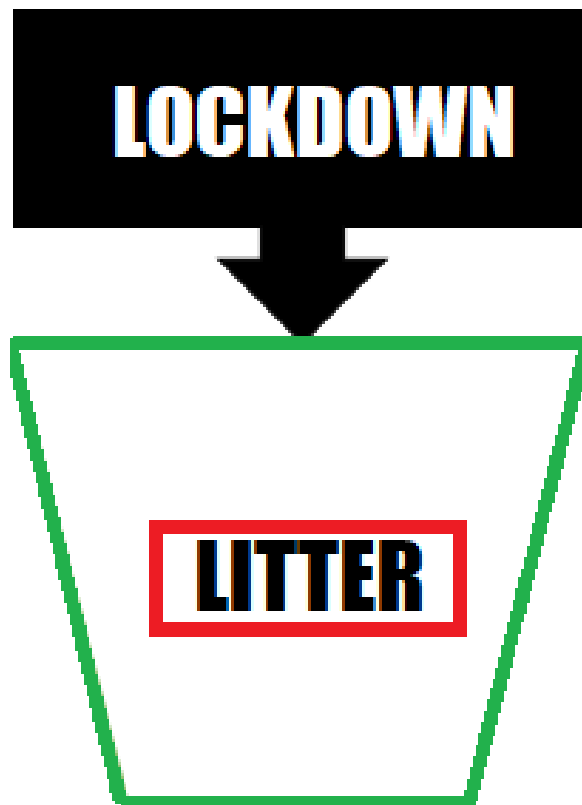
Sheepwash- John's Lane pool



A dead Herring gull drowned by line at West Smethwick Park



LOCKDOWN LITTER CAMPAIGN



As part of a campaign to highlight the issues surrounding this issue, swanwatch and Scared Animal Wildlife Rescue produced a leaflet which can be read below.

[lockdown litter leaflet](#)

We wrote to all the then Black Country Authority Leaders, but the response from Sandwell was not very enthusiastic to put it mildly. I see no reason why these signs cannot appear with your blessing in notice boards, in parks and open spaces where it is designated as some in Dudley and Wolverhampton have been placed there.

HELP US TO PROTECT THE WILDLIFE ON OUR WATERWAYS

LOCKDOWN



Every year, hundreds of wild birds become tangled in discarded fishing line and other associated with this activity. Though many anglers take their line home, there are clearly a large number who don't plan for the time and expense left behind. This costs rescuers and rehabilitators a great deal of time and expense, and can cause serious injury or death to the birds themselves.

**PLEASE HELP BY PICKING UP ALL ANGLING RELATED
LITTER, WHICH YOU SEE, EVEN IF YOU DIDN'T LEAVE
IT THERE YOURSELF.**



YOU CAN ALSO HELP BY PICKING UP DISCARDED FISHING RODS AND BRING CANS

PLEASE FOLLOW THE LOCAL FISHERY RULES FOR ANGLING AND [FISHING CODES OF PRACTICE](#)



LOST GANESIDE
HOOKS ONLY



DO NOT USE
FEEDING
BAITS, WHICH
WILL ATTRACT
FEEDING
WILDLIFE.



NEVER LEAVE
FEED
UNATTENDED
ON THE
GANESIDE
OR BANK

LOCKDOWN LITTER



REMOVE OR REPORT LOST TACKLE, PARTICULARLY ON
TREES, ISLANDS OR GANESIDE VEGETATION TO THE
LOCAL AUTHORITY OR WATER OWNER AND HELP US TO
LOCKDOWN LITTER SO THAT IT NEVER HARMS WILDLIFE.

THIS LEAFLET HAS BEEN PRODUCED AND SUPPORTED BY



THE BOTTOM LINE ON ANGLING.

In 2020, the following piece reveals that the situation nationally is only becoming grimmer as the Daily Mail article shows, reporting RSPCA rescue statistics for the last five years.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8388209/Shocking-photos-wildlife-caught-rubbish-RSPCA-appeals-Brits-pick-trash.html?fbclid=IwAR0xZ6AiwDjWq8pJKCinHINjExpfOG0WPtyDJUVOjL-W3T9tWx8IdsWvezc>

“15,183 reports relating to animals injured by or caught in angling litter”.

NB these are just the RSPCA reports and do not cover the work of volunteer organisations who attend far more incidents than the RSPCA combined.

The main problem in our experience of sites, including ones that you are responsible for managing, is that free fishing, and night fishing, which attracts antisocial behaviour and the type of people who do not care what they leave behind correlates directly with increased incidents of birds being tackled. Relevant legislation such as The Environmental Protection Act may well be being employed in your town centres and even parks, but for some reason appears to escape those sitting around the waterside. Licences, supposedly a legal requirement are seldom checked by anyone, and so the situation is left to deteriorate. It has to be asked as to why fishing is free, when you are losing money from this activity, yet other sports require payment, and some kind of rules, with threat of ejection or banning if people do not abide by them? Would football teams for example be allowed to continue to leave rubbish behind on the pitch, without the council taking action if they did so? Why should a few anglers be any different?

The antisocial behaviour is further compounded by the use of “bivvy’s” - or tents where individuals squat for sometimes days with alcohol and illegal drugs. They also conceal offensive weapons like axes and knives and cause criminal damage to aquatic vegetation, fences and trees. Illegal theft of fish and poaching is absolutely rife across the region, and fishing on pools not designated for fishing is also increasing, to the destruction of natural habitat and biodiversity. The areas left behind are festooned with plastic litter, and accented by line and hooks snagged up in trees and in the water. **Why is this tolerated?** If these were illegal traveller infringements, or someone went around dropping litter in a town centre, presumably action would be taken, so why are people allowed to camp out whilst breaking the law, and a blind eye is turned?

In Sandwell the main sites of concern are Sheepwash Nature Reserve, Hydes Road, West Smethwick Park , Victoria park Tipton and Warrens Hall Park. This includes illegal fishing, illegal use of traps and several hooked birds.

The evidence is clear and overwhelming, and you cannot deny that it exists. .

