

# Tonbridge & District Angling & Fish Preservation Society 'The Old Ballast Pit'



Since purchasing the 'Old Ballast Pit' on the Haysden Country Park in Tonbridge, the Society decided it was time to tidy the place up and re-stock the lake with some quality fish. The bulk of the work to be carried out, was at the far end of the lake, known as the lagoon. It was mainly heavy clearing, from the lake and dry land, where fallen trees had laid undisturbed for the best part of thirty years. Most of them were Oak and were to be used to strengthen the banks and create passing points, which for many years, had not been easily accessible. After the first week of clearing, the transformation was really starting to take shape. There was a mass of daylight now beaming down on a once dark, damp and dingy area, now giving it the chance to dry out.

As we moved into week two, the big machine arrived and made light work of removing the fallen trees laying in the water. As it had a reach of nine metres and was capable of lifting anything in its path, the three week period we set ourselves was looking a realistic target.



The lagoon appeared to be growing every day due to all the debris being cleared and we soon got to the area which was going to become an island. As this area had already shaped itself over the years with flash flooding from the surrounding fields, it didn't take a lot of digging to get our end result. The island was supported by lengths of fallen Oak, staked into place and the existing trees and shrubs were cut back to allow new growth.

We entered week three with continued good weather and progressed nicely, re-shaping and strengthening the banks, clearing small bits of fallen tree and removing



any hanging branches that looked like they might come down in the coming strong winds that had been forecast. We also put in place twenty metres of twelve inch drainage pipe, which would make use of any flood water coming from the surrounding fields. The Pit has always suffered with fluctuating water levels and sometimes has flooded so badly that we have lost quality fish into the River Medway. The drainage has now been sorted so the outflow from the Pit will work correctly, thus giving the Pit a nice constant level.

By the end of week four, the work was virtually complete and the lagoon had certainly come to life. There was more light, making it a more inviting to all visitors, be it anglers or wildlife, and the access to the railway bank was now so much easier for anglers. The work has created approximately three quarters of an acre of open fishable water and about fifteen extra pegs. I don't think it's just the anglers that will benefit from this change, I think we have created a wonderful new environment for the fish and visiting wildlife. There were early signs of this as the resident Coots showed early interest to the newly formed island and we frequently had a pair of Kingfishers working the railway bankside. I'm sure it won't be long before we have a pair of Swans returning and competing for the safe nesting on the island.

Once we get into Spring I'm sure with a bit of grass seed and some marginal planting, the 'Old Ballast Pit' will be totally transformed.



## Re-Stocking Programme

Whilst the Society knew that this work was needed to attract new members, we also realised that we had to improve the fishing, so it was decided that a stocking programme would be essential.

The last time new stock were introduced to the Pit was in April 1995, consisting of 25 carp in the 2-5lb bracket. The 'Old Ballast Pit' had long been labelled as a carp water, even though specimen fish of various species had been caught from there. It was decided that a mixture of species were to be introduced, so the first consignment in February 2009 was made up of 250 barbel, 100 chub, 500 - 10" tench and 250 - 12" crucians.

Society members voiced their concerns over the size of fish being introduced, worried that they may just be Cormorant fodder, but finding farmed fish of any decent size was almost impossible. I decided to make some new enquiries into fish suppliers and came across a company called 'Coarsefish UK', who have been excellent in supplying quality large fish. Aaron Standing, one of the partners, informed me that they had got some quality tench, crucians and F1's available, so it was put to Committee and we ordered 1,650 tench, 300 crucians and 150 F1