

Spawning Fish Factsheet

for Guides, Leaders and Coaches

What is fish spawning?

Essentially, the process by which fish reproduce. Healthy fish populations are dependent on many factors including: water quality, good habitat, adequate supply of food and the correct conditions to spawn successfully every year. Different fish species spawn at different times of year and along the whole course of a river. It is important that coaches and other waterway users are aware of when and where fish may be spawning so as not to damage or disturb the spawning adults and the eggs they may have laid.

FISH SPECIES UK fish species can be categorised into Coarse fish (Cyprinids) and Game fish (Salmonids).

Coarse Fish

Common species include: barbel, bream, carp, chub, dace, eels, perch and pike.

Coarse fish are generally spring/summer spawners, therefore the fishing close season is March 15th to June 15th inclusive. These species are typically found in middle reaches and lowland rivers.

Anglers can fish for coarse fish all year round on canals and lakes but not on rivers and streams.

Shad and lamprey are conservation species that have international protection. These are spring/summer spawners in some rivers, e.g. River Wye.

Game Fish

Common species include Atlantic salmon, sea trout, brown trout, rainbow trout, char (and grayling).

Game fish are predominantly winter spawners, therefore the fishing close season for Salmonids is between Nov – Feb (may be regional variations). Grayling spawn in spring. These species are typically found in upland rivers, but some migrate to and from the sea. Grayling are the exception as they spawn in spring so anglers will be allowed to catch them in the coarse fishing open season only. These species are typically found in upland and middle reaches of rivers, but some migrate to and from the sea.



What does all this mean for coaches?

Please be aware and take extra care when different fish species are spawning. When they aren't spawning then it will be likely that there will be anglers out and about enjoying their sport, so again be aware and share the space.

SPAWNING SITES

All sites are important. Species that are at most risk of disturbance are gravel spawners, this includes the spawning fish and their eggs and newly hatched alevins. These may reside within the gravels for some time during incubation and after hatching.

Fish such as salmon have declined dramatically over the years so they need all the help they can to reproduce and increase in numbers once again.

POTENTIAL DISTURBANCES

River paddlers should be aware of fish spawning times and how we can avoid interference.

Under Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975, it is a criminal offence for anyone to wilfully disturb spawn or spawning fish on any bed bank or shallow where there are spawning fish. During this time contact with gravel riverbeds where spawning may be taking place should be avoided.

When paddling you should be particularly careful around gravel river beds, especially when you are getting in or out of your boat. You can avoid causing any problems in the spawning season by:

- Not standing in the water where there is a gravel river bed;
- Being aware of the increased risk of making contact with the gravel river bed in times of low water;
- Avoiding contact between your paddle and the gravel river bed, especially when getting in and out of your boat;
- Avoiding contact with your boat and the gravel river bed, especially by not dipping the stern or cartwheeling when there is insufficient depth of water;
- The use of a pole to propel an open canoe should be done with caution at this time of year; reverting to a paddle on sections of river with a gravel bed;
- Following any local guidance in terms of preferred places to launch or climb out;
- Remembering the sensitive time of year for fish spawning.

