

Letters to the editor

No protection for fish populations

SIR, For some time now I have been very concerned about the effects of the Forestry Commission's programme of mire and stream restorations in the New Forest and its effects on the resident fish populations.

These streams are home to fish species which are supposed to enjoy the highest levels of statutory protection such as sea trout, European eels, and brook lampreys, for example.

Recently, I have been engaged in correspondence with the Environment Agency (EA) about both the fish rescues carried out in advance of the engineering works and also the effects of the "restorations" on these protected fish.

Despite an initial statement from the EA that sea trout "return to spawn, in most cases during the first year after restoration", when I asked for further details of the EA monitoring in support of this statement, the answer I have just received is: "The evidence we have is anecdotal." In other words, they do not have any evidence to back up this statement which will be used in support of the restoration programme.

Also, even the methods the EA employ in their fish rescues leave fish behind — for example, brook lamprey juveniles burrow in the silt for between two and six years, and the methods the EA used would not remove them from the silt, where they will inevitably die as that portion of the stream is filled in.

Also apparently, the contractors are instructed by the EA to "remove any fish they see during their work" — how are they supposed to do that,

what will they put them in and where will they take them?

I have said before that wild fish should enjoy the same respect for their welfare as any other domesticated animals covered by the Animal Welfare Act, and I am disappointed that the EA does not appear to share my view.

It seems that "statutory protection" does not in fact protect the very creatures it was designed to protect, and unfounded statements become evidence.

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