

The case for the conservation of Crucian Carp as an angling resource.

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The crucian carp *Carassius carassius* is a native British species of fish that was once common throughout much of England. Primarily a still water species, crucian carp are traditionally associated with smaller, shallower still waters, such as ponds, marl pits, some estate lakes and millponds. In recent times, however, crucian carp have fallen onto hard times for a variety variety of reasons, leading to their local extinction in many areas that were once strongholds of the species. Many of the ponds once known to hold them have suffered from drought or habitat deterioration through neglect, while other waters have been lost altogether due to being backfilled in order to develop the land. Above and beyond this, however, the overriding factor behind the decline of the species has been the introduction of closely-related non-native species of fish into traditional crucian habitats, including various strains of king carp *Cyprinus carpio* and Goldfish *Carrasius auratus* with which crucians have been able to freely interbreed resulting in high levels of hybridization occurring, leading to the gradual decline of the genetic integrity of the species resulting in its localized extinction eventually taking place.

Today this situation has become critical putting crucians under such pressure that they are can be considered to be an endangered species. King carp now dominate angling to such an extent that few fisheries are without them and unless angling clubs and fishery managers take proactive steps to conserve crucian carp, it is entirely likely that they will eventually become nationally extinct apart from in a tiny number of fisheries currently being managed as specialist crucian carp fisheries. It is my proposal that serious moves need to be made to extend the number of specialized crucian fishing waters, while efforts must also be made to protect and restore the few remaining natural crucian populations that exist in unmanaged waters which are likely to eventually die out unless special efforts are made to conserve them.

We appear to have reached a situation in angling in the UK where king carp now dominate still-water angling, with no fishery seemingly complete unless it has at least a few carp in it. Indeed virtually every fishery has been stocked to one level or another with varying numbers of king carp in order

to appeal to the requirements of whatever faction of the angling community the fishery seeks to cater for - low stock levels of big carp for the specimen anglers, high stock levels of smaller carp or F1 hybrids for the match anglers and everything in between for the pleasure anglers. While this situation has to some extent been driven by commercial necessity, one cannot escape the fact that other species have often suffered as a consequence, none more so than the humble crucian. While undoubtedly king carp have a place in angling, there is without doubt room for waters that are not dominated by carp, although very few fishery owners seem to be aware of this. That such fisheries can be run on a profitable basis is something that also seems to be largely overlooked. As for stocking with crucian carp, fisheries such as the Godalming Angling Club waters at Marsh Farm and Johnson's Lake in Surrey, where crucian carp are the dominant species, attracting anglers from all over the county, this is a testament to how commercially successful crucial carp fishing can be. More recently Rocklands Mere Fishery in Norfolk has also been successfully turned over to the conservation of crucian carp.

Being one of our smaller species, it is highly unlikely that crucian carp could achieve a fraction of the popularity of king carp, nevertheless there is a strong, if seasonable, interest in fishing for crucian carp which is currently very poorly catered for. Being, shy biting, hard fighting, challenging to catch and one of the prettiest of fish, crucian carp fishing has a charm of it's own that makes it highly attractive to anglers who enjoy using more traditional methods of fishing. Putting king carp and goldfish aside, crucian carp tend to co-exist happily with most other species and are perfect to stock into mixed fisheries to give them extra appeal.

While crucian carp can grow to extra large sizes in large gravel pits, they seldom breed successfully in such places being far better adapted to living in smaller, shallower waters. With the modern trend in angling being in creating small, shallow waters to run as commercial pleasure fisheries, such places could be ideal to run as mixed fisheries with the emphasis on crucian carp. Indeed, in light of so many of these places being stocked with sterile F1 king carp/crucian hybrids in order that that do not overgrow their home, it does not take a huge leap of the imagination to see that true crucian carp might have equally had the potential to fill this niche.

In view of how serious the plight of the crucian carp has become, I feel it is time for the angling community to address the problem and start working to turn it around. The Angling Trust is perfectly placed to

lead such a campaign, preferably in partnership with the Environment Agency, Natural England and DEFRA who would be better placed to undertake the fisheries based work. Where the Trust could lead is by launching an education campaign, possibly by putting together fact sheets that would make its members aware of the problem, while at the same time also providing the facts that would encourage individual members, fishing clubs and commercial fishery owners to get involved in conserving crucians.