

WHAT IS ANGLING?

Angling – or fishing – is a 'sport' that involves using a baited hook on the end of a line to catch fish, who are then reeled in by a rod. Far from being – as it is made out to be – a gentle pastime that connects people to nature and encourages conservation of rivers and lakes, it causes suffering not only to individual fish, but also to birds and other wildlife.



There are three types of angling, 'coarse', 'game' and 'sea'.



Coarse angling

Coarse angling is the capture of freshwater fish from rivers and streams, such as pike, bream, rudd and tench. These fish are inedible, so they are caught just for 'fun' and will often be thrown back into the water. However, this does not mean that they do not suffer, and a large number die during or shortly after being caught, from stress or injury. Coarse anglers have to buy a rod licence, and, as it is cheaper than game fishing and easier to hook a fish in a river or lake, it is the most popular form of the sport.

Game angling

Game angling involves the capturing and killing of fish who are considered edible, such as sea trout, salmon and grayling. Game anglers pay large amounts of money for a licence to practise their 'sport'. This gives them access to game fisheries, which are rivers or lakes that are purposely kept stocked with fish. Birds such as cormorants, herons, owls and kingfishers, and mammals, such as,

otters, who are natural predators of the fish, are ruthlessly killed in order to preserve the fish for the anglers.

Sea angling

Sea angling requires no licence and takes place on beaches, rocks, piers and boats. As with game angling, most fish caught in this way are killed and then eaten. Examples of sea fish include eel, shark, bass and plaice.

Can fish feel pain?

It is a common myth that fish can't feel pain, but there is plenty of research proving that they can! The government advisory body, the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), acknowledges that fish experience fear, stress and pain when removed from water, and that the physiological mechanisms in fish for experiencing pain are very similar to those in mammals. An RSPCA-sponsored report concluded that all vertebrates – including fish – experience similar sensations in response to painful stimuli. In pain sensitivity experiments performed at Edinburgh's Roslin Institute, fish had toxin and acid injected into their lips. They exhibited 'rocking' motion, similar to the way higher vertebrates – such as people – rock to comfort themselves. They also rubbed their lips against the tank walls and gravel, and took three times longer than normal to resume feeding.

'Anatomically, physiologically and biologically the pain system in fish is virtually the same as in birds and animals.' *Dr Donald Broom, a scientific advisor to the British government*

Nor do fish only have three-second memories! Fish can perform complex mental tasks, such as mapping out obstacles in their tanks. And in other tests, spotted rainbowfish remembered how to escape from a net in their tank 11 months after initially working it out.



HOW CAN I HELP?

- Write to your local newspaper informing people about the cruelty of angling. Animal Aid can give you tips and advice.
- Have a look at the 'Pisces' website (the youth section of the Campaign for the Abolition of Angling) at www.pisces.demon.co.uk. Perhaps you could distribute their angling leaflets at school or put one of their posters up in your local library?
- Join Animal Aid's youth group, Youth4Animals, and help campaign against angling.
- Order our anti-angling poster and stickers.

What's wrong with catching fish and then throwing them back in the water?

Imagine biting into a delicious apple, and then feeling your lip being pierced by a hook. The hook pulls on your lip and all of a sudden you're yanked violently forward and dragged along the ground. This is similar to what happens when anglers catch fish! When hooked fish are dragged out of the water into the air, they cannot breathe, and they begin to suffocate – just as you would if you were dragged underwater and held there. The hooks are often covered in little spikes called barbs. Sometimes fish swallow the hook entirely, and the barbs can cause serious injury to their internal organs, usually resulting in a painful death.

Fish have a mucous layer over their scales to keep them waterproof and protect them from infection. When they are handled, this layer is damaged and they are left highly susceptible to disease when they are put back into the water. So they may not die immediately, but there is a high chance that they will soon afterwards. Coarse anglers who do not intend to eat the fish that they have caught will remove the hook from the fish's mouth and then put the fish in a keepnet. This net keeps them captive under the water until the angler has counted his catch at the end of the fishing session. Keepnets are often a cause of disease, distress and death because of overcrowding and lack of oxygen in the water within the net. Researchers at the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation found that up to 43% of fish released after being caught died within six days.

A 'close' season (when anglers should not go fishing) runs from 15 March to 15 June, although regulations vary in different regions of the country. The close season is supposed to be a time to allow fish a break during their spawning season, though it has been scrapped on all still waters (ponds, lakes and reservoirs) since 1995.

Live-baiting

Live maggots skewered onto the hook are the commonest form of bait, although small fish are sometimes used to catch larger fish. This is known as 'live-baiting'. The small fish are impaled live onto the hook. They swim around until they are eaten by a

FISH FACTS

Fish are cold-blooded, salt or freshwater-dwelling animals. They have a brain, a backbone, a skeleton, a nervous system and pain receptors all over their bodies. They breathe oxygen from the water through their gills. Fish are cold-blooded because, unlike mammals, their blood temperature fluctuates with the temperature of the surrounding water. This allows them to survive as the temperature of the water changes with the seasons.

predator (the bigger fish the angler is interested in catching) or until they die from their injuries.

Killing wildlife

The nylon line used for angling is non-biodegradable, which means it does not rot away. Often it becomes tangled in trees or other vegetation, so it is cut and left on riverbanks, where it is a great threat to wildlife. Birds and ducks in particular are at risk and frequently become fatally trapped in the discarded line. Many swans have been found with anglers' hooks embedded in their throats and stomachs from swallowing discarded lines with hooks still attached.

Things anglers say:

'People who go fishing help to conserve the fish and their habitats.' It is true that there are some anglers who monitor the quality of the rivers, and clear up after themselves. Sadly, however, they are outnumbered by those who don't bother to get involved in conservation, and who leave litter around that is hazardous to wildlife. And how can you argue you are 'conserving' fish if your hobby involves killing them?

'We should be encouraging young people to take up fishing as it helps to teach them about nature.'

By going fishing, young people are hardly learning to appreciate nature. Rather, they are learning that it is OK to kill defenceless animals for fun! There are lots of other outdoor hobbies and pursuits that can be followed instead, such as bird spotting, visiting nature reserves, helping at an animal sanctuary, or getting involved in practical conservation work with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV). See www.btcv.org or phone 01302 572244.