

## Adverse effects of angling at St.George Park



St. George Park in Bristol is a well used park with a variety of facilities for users. It has recently been updated with a new children's playground and a café. The park has a small lake which has had little care and attention in the last twenty years despite being used as an angling lake by many anglers through the summer period.

There are no signs provided by the council and no bailiff or ranger, such as private fishing clubs in Bristol have, to police angling or to educate on good practice or behaviour.

There have been numerous problems over the years and now many park users and local residents have asked for fishing to be banned at the lake. The councils Green Space strategy survey asked for local opinion on the matter and 66% of respondents agreed with a ban on angling at the lake.

There are several reasons why people have requested a ban.

- **Impact on wildlife**, discarded fishing tackle is a death trap to wildlife. Birds are routinely caught in line and can suffer an agonising death hanging from trees. There is a *no fishing* area around the island to limit line becoming caught in overhanging trees but this is ignored almost everyday.
- **Health and safety issues**, rods and fishing kit block pathways around the lake preventing access for other users. Fishing tackle and bait are left unguarded and accessible to dogs and children. Rods are left unattended. Hazardous litter such as sharp spam cans are left behind. Casting line backwards without due regard to passers by.
- **Anti-social behaviour**, excessive alcohol is a common problem. Abusive behaviour to other park users, using trees and bushes as a toilet, in full view. Anglers are often seen camping overnight. The wall around the lake has been vandalised for use by the anglers.

In 2010, friends of St.George Park published a report entitled [The real cost of angling at Bristol City Council Parks](#). The report details numerous accounts of wildlife casualties with photographs and asked whether the cost to wildlife and the cost that is incurred by rescue organisations are too much to bear?



Discarded fishing tackle found at the lake



A pigeon is tangled in fishing line and caught in branches around island



Rescuers cut line from bird's feet

Corpses in trees

Four of the seven cygnets raised last year were injured or died because of fishing incidents. This year there have been several corpses hung in trees. We have also lost four of this year's cygnets – the most recent on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> June was caught on the end of an angler's fishing line. The angler cut the fishing line and the young swan having become tangled up either strangled or drowned and the dead body was removed by anglers in view of witnesses. The RSPCA has also been called out to help rescue a live bird that was hanging from a tree. From experiences in the past few years, this is just the beginning as the warmer weather brings more anglers to the lake.

Anglers blatantly set up around the island in the *no fishing* zone. In 2010 meetings were held with the friends of St. George Park, the council and anglers who wanted to continue fishing at the lake. Commitments were made by the anglers to self police the lake. Promises were made to ensure people would not fish around the restricted zone, that tackle would be removed and that others would be educated in good practice. For a short time there were some improvements, the regulars stayed in the fishing areas but occasional users used the *no fishing* zone. They were not educated by the regular anglers and were often abusive to other park users and park keeper who commented on the restriction. Fishing line has continued to get caught up and left behind and no self policing.

We now have the situation where because there are no penalties, anglers regularly fish around the island. Local PCSO's have been asked to patrol the area and have agreed to move people along. Anglers move until police/ council have gone and are normally back within 15 mins. The busiest times are at the weekend when most problems occur; this is also when council officers and the police are not available. <sup>1</sup>

The Friends of St. George Park group has been given statements by park users detailing some of their experiences regarding angling at the lake.<sup>2</sup> It is clear that many people feel that the lake is a no go zone. Some said they feel intimidated by large crowds of drinking anglers and would rather avoid the area. Comments from parents that were disgusted at seeing anglers urinating near the children's playground and children upset at the sight of hanging birds, again near the playground. The anglers treat the lake as **their fishing lake** with little regard for other park users.

The lake is in a poor condition. Every summer blue green algae affects the water quality. Unfortunately anglers have not heeded suggestions to avoid the lake at this time because of toxic fumes. Fish and wildfowl are particularly vulnerable at this time and are under a lot of pressure to survive. The friends of St. George Park group have commissioned a survey by ecologists from Slimbridge Waterfowl Trust. It is hoped that the lake can be improved to provide a more natural, cleaner ecosystem and therefore a safer place for people to go to.

St George Park Lake should be for everyone to enjoy without detriment to other users or animals and wildlife. Many people get a great deal of pleasure from simply feeding the ducks or sitting and watching a small piece of nature in an ever increasing city sprawl.

It is vital that if angling is permitted by the council at the lake then basic rules and regulations must be enforced. Investment must be made in education and signage and fines should be given to those breaking the rules. A trained bailiff should be employed to work at the lake and donations given to wildlife rescue organisations to pay for veterinary and rescue costs. If the council is not prepared to do all of this then the correct option is to ban angling at St.George Park.

Contact [park.wildlifehelp@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:park.wildlifehelp@yahoo.co.uk)



## Appendix

1. Anglers in the *no fishing* zone (May 2011)
2. Comments from park users.



# 1 Anglers in NO FISHING zone

Photos taken May 2011







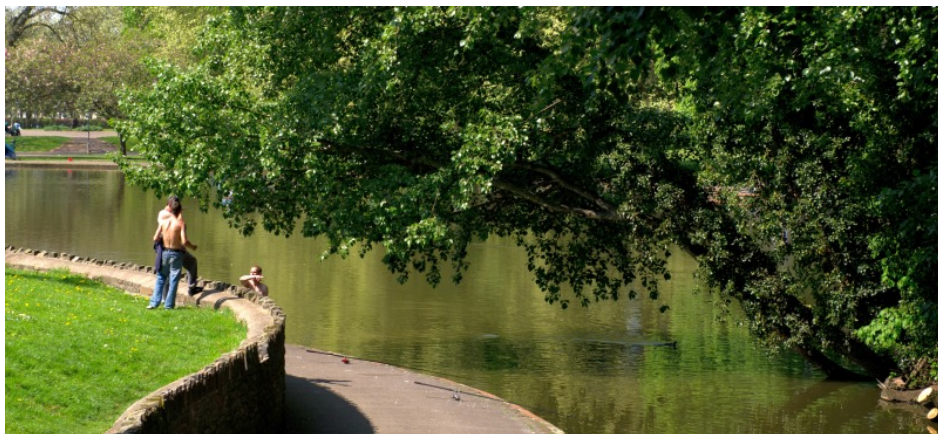




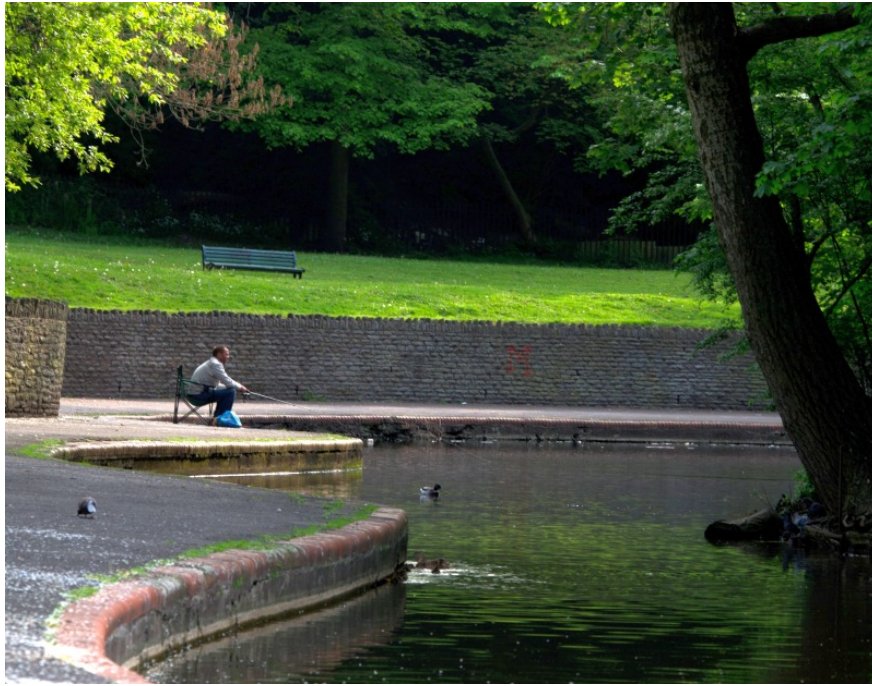




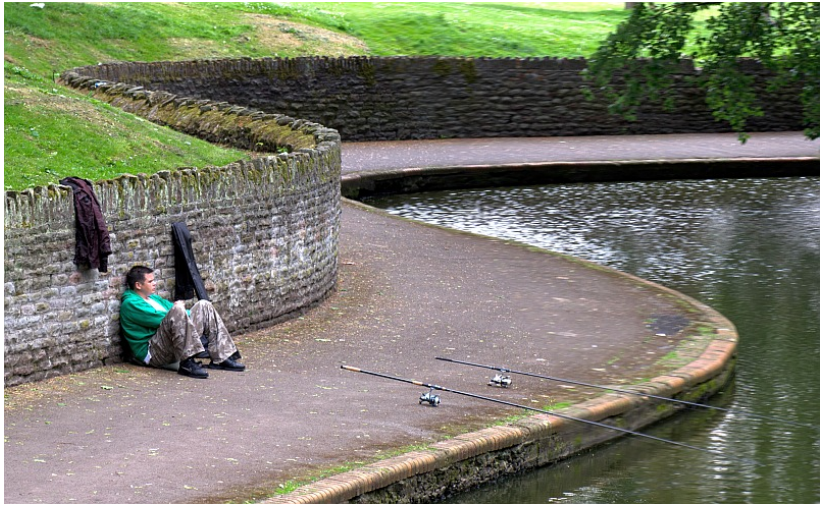














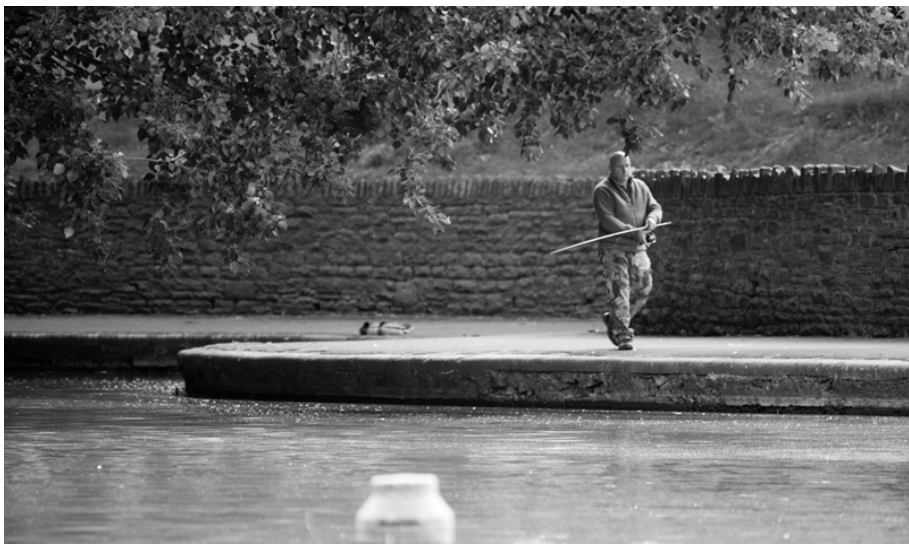


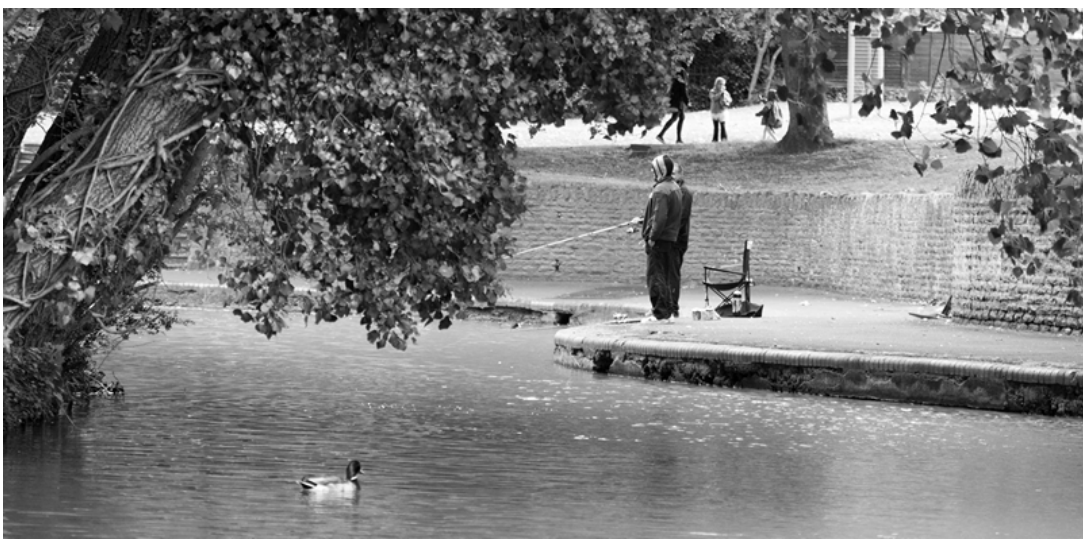




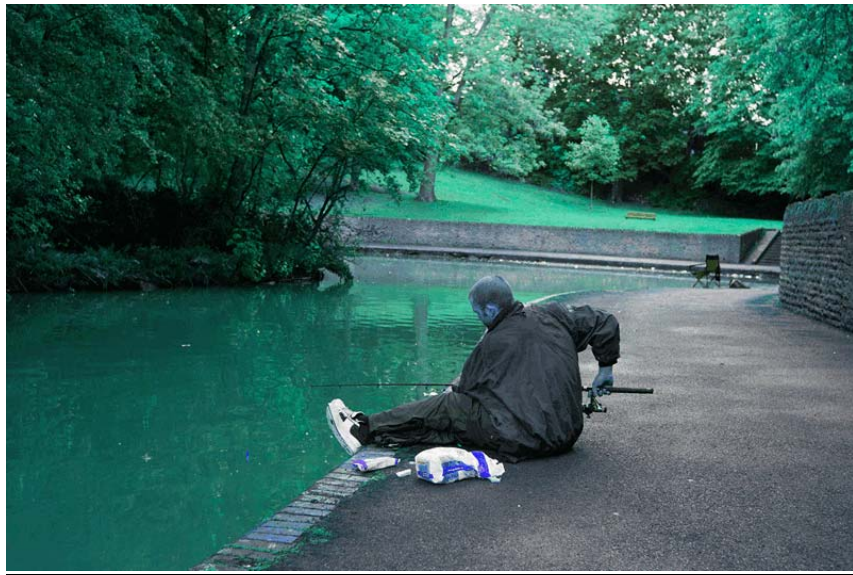












## 2 Comments from park users.

NB. I have removed full names to protect individuals. These are available for further investigation.

'While walking around the lake I saw a herring gull was struggling in fishing line just above the surface of the water by the Island. I phoned the RSPCA but they did not have an inspector available and the poor thing was slowly drowning. I had to wade across the lake into chest deep freezing water to save the bird. It was treated by RSPCA vets and later released, but I was angry that the poor bird had suffered and I was very ill after wading through the water which was so cold it had partly iced over'. KH

\*\*\*\*\*

'In 2010, while walking our dog around the lake we saw a coot's nest being destroyed by fishermen casting their lines directly at the nest. This upset us greatly as there were eggs on the nest. The fishermen were not at all bothered by what they were doing and they continued to fish in the prohibited area by the island'. JM

\*\*\*\*\*

'I witnessed an 80 year old lady wade across the lake in deep water to rescue a tiny mallard chick that was caught up in fishing line by the island and very distressed. A crowd of people gathered to watch, but did nothing. The chick would have died had she not acted fast; it was a very brave act'. GK

\*\*\*\*\*

'A swan had a fishing hook caught in its beak and line around its neck. The RSPCA attended and used a boat & swan hook to catch the terrified bird. It took about an hour and three men to catch the terrified bird. The hook was removed and the bird was released'. TP

\*\*\*\*\*

'I was walking around the lake with my 2 year old daughter when I spotted a pigeon tangled in line on a tree on the Island. I had no mobile phone to call the RSPCA and as it was at the weekend there was no park keeper to ask for help. My daughter & I were really upset but we were unable to reach the bird and none of the fishermen present would use their long nets to reach the bird. The bird eventually died after struggling for at least an hour. What was supposed to be a nice day out to feed the ducks turned into a horrible experience and I now refuse to walk my children around the lake'. VS

\*\*\*\*\*



'A fisherman had left bait & hooks spread along the path next to the lake. My friend's dog ate the bait and got the hook caught in its mouth. The fisherman refused to help her remove the barbed hook from the dog's mouth. Eventually a passing member of the public helped to pull the hook and line out of the dog's mouth'. JR

\*\*\*\*\*

'Whilst feeding the ducks, I noticed a group of young fishermen had caught a baby mallards on the end of their line while fishing. They proceeded to laugh & lift their rods and swing the helpless birds around until I intervened and made them release the bird'. GB

\*\*\*\*\*

'I witnessed a seagull hanging by fishing line from a tree on the island last boxing day. The bird was frantically struggling & trying to escape but a hook had gone through it's wing and it was trapped.

The RSPCA were not able to attend so the Fire Brigade came and put ladders across to the lake and cut the bird free. The bird was very distressed and hanging by its wing for several hours before it was cut free'. FP

\*\*\*\*\*

'Yesterday I noticed one of the young cygnets was missing. One of the fishermen told me that it had been caught in fishing line that had been cast by the island where fishing is not permitted. The cygnet became entangled in the line and drowned. The fishermen used a net to remove the cygnet's body and removed it from the park so people wouldn't see the bird had been killed by fishermen'. DR

\*\*\*\*\*

'I was walking my dog around the lake when she suddenly fell over and started to struggle. Her legs had become entangled in a bundle of fishing line that had been left on the path by fishermen. There was also a small hook on the end of the line which had punctured her leg and made it bleed. It took me several minutes to untangle the line from her legs as I had no scissors to cut the line which is very strong. My dog was pretty distressed by what happened and so was I. Since then I make an effort to pick up any litter left around the lake. I often find fishing line, hook, and spam tins that are left with jagged edges'.

\*\*\*\*\*

'I am a pensioner who used to enjoy walking around the lake and feeding the birds. Over the past few years there have been large gangs of men drinking and blocking the pathway around the lake with their fishing gear. When politely asked to move they are often abusive. I no longer feel comfortable walking around the lake'. NJ

\*\*\*\*\*

'I am concerned that a serious injury could occur when anglers cast their line backwards without regard to consequences to children and passers by. There is a possibility of facial injury if a hook catches somebody in the process. This is a matter of health and safety.'

AJ

\*\*\*\*\*

'I have witnessed continual abuse of wildlife by fishing people for years in St George Park. I have lots of letters also emails from councillors, MP and animal protection charities but nothing ever gets done. As the council own the lake and island (which actually means the public own it) I believe they waste loads of time and money on clearing the mess and trouble caused by fishing people that would be saved if fishing was banned. A fine example of negligence was the authorisation of the chopping of healthy trees on the island while nesting birds were in many habitats there. This clearly breaks the 1981 Countryside and Wildlife Act I believe and makes the council liable for the distress and damage caused to innocent creatures and their environment'.

JS

\*\*\*\*\*

'Despite the claims made at the meeting of fisher folk policing themselves, i can't say I've seen any evidence of this.

Maybe there's a bit of a code between the guys who know each other well (although this doesn't include some of them avoiding fishing around the lake!) but they clearly don't police others.

There's a float hanging from a tree on the island this evening i asked one of them where they thought the hook was - they ventured that it was probably hanging down from the hook caught on the branch and that in all likelihood it was the young kids who had been fishing there this afternoon.

No mention of anyone having spoken to them or asking them to move, just a resignation that as it's the holidays there will be more kids doing the same.

I've given up trying to reason with people fishing inside the lines because they generally get abusive and they don't move anyway.

Anecdotally, I'm given to understand that there are fights amongst the fishing community fairly regularly. No doubt the amount of drink ingested has a major part to play.

Despite the meetings, and problems with last years batch of cygnets I don't really think all that much has changed round the lake (the same individuals seem to look out for the wildlife as before).

Perhaps less line is abandoned and more of the rubbish is binned, but it is still litter strewn at times and stinks of urine. Not always easy to walk around the lake for rods across the path.

i would argue that unless there is actual enforcement re codes of conduct and a fishing zone not much will change'.

S

\*\*\*\*\*



'I have lived in the local neighbourhood and have been a frequent visitor of St. George Park for over 15 years. Therefore, it upsets me to feel that my overall enjoyment of the park has been taken away by those who fish around the lake.

Some days, there can be several groups of people fishing, these groups are often loud and intimidating! Drunken behaviour is not uncommon and where there is a lot of drinking going on this inevitably leads to many of them urinating just about anywhere! Some don't even try to hide the fact they are urinating in a public place and right next to the childrens play area!

I am also sick of seeing so many of the birds injured with fishing line. It saddens me that too many, after being caught up in the vast amount of discarded fishing line, are left to suffer the most traumatic and sometimes very slow death that follows. Dead birds are frequently seen hanging from the trees surrounding the lake. The sight of these poor birds is very distressing, particularly for children.

Walking around the lake is often spoiled by the numerous rods and equipment being used by some of the people fishing, spreading themselves right across the path and then becoming abusive when asked politely to move. It can be very difficult to get by them with a baby in a buggy or for anyone in a wheelchair.

Unfortunately I have personally been affected by abusive and threatening behaviour from some of the fishermen. I have been subjected to being shouted and sworn at, while trying to help one of the ducks that had fishing line wrapped around its legs, I was extremely upset and shaken by the incident and have stayed away from St. George Park until quite recently. Now when I visit, I tend not to go near my favourite part of the park - the lake.

I have talked with other park users in relation to the problems surrounding the lake, many, along with myself believe that only a total ban on fishing will end the unnecessary suffering to the wildlife and birds caused by discarded fishing line and hooks and will go a long way towards stopping the problems and damage caused by Anti-Social Behaviour in St. George Park'.

A L

\*\*\*\*\*

'On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2011 a regular angler (who was fishing in the NO FISHING ZONE) initiated a conversation with me within which I mentioned two anglers with very large rods I was talking to, one evening earlier in the week, and they told me they usually fished at Vassels. The angler then informed me, "They can't fish there because it's not allowed at the moment – out of season look", I responded, "Exactly and what does that say about those who fish here because there were boards on that wall (indication to visible markings) which clearly related the times fishing was not allowed here but the glass was smashed and the notices burnt". These boards were on both sides of the lake and identified the NO FISHING ZONE and the expected codes of conduct for anglers.'

JS



For further information contact [park.wildlifehelp@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:park.wildlifehelp@yahoo.co.uk)

Produced by members of The Friends of St. George Park.