

THE FISH OF LOUGH CARRA

Chris Huxley

Updated December 2011

The following is a brief outline account of the fish of Lough Carra, based on various unpublished reports and information sources. Little systematic work has been conducted on the fish populations, but some further, more detailed data are available from the original sources (see references below). In addition, there is also some information in the main section of this website “Angling”.

Seven species of fish have been recorded in Lough Carra and its feeder streams. Of these, just four species are considered to be indigenous to the catchment, the other three being regarded as introductions.

The indigenous fish species:

Brown trout *Salmo trutta*

Lough Carra has been known for many years as one of Ireland’s premier wild brown trout fisheries, although its carrying capacity for this species is relatively low with maximum stock densities in the period 1978-1980 being 15.9 kg/ha (O’Grady, 1986). Although a natural wild brown trout water, the lake was stocked with farmed brown trout in the 1970s and 1980s. This practice was then discontinued and the current trout population can be considered truly “wild”.

The Carra trout spawn in several of the feeder streams, especially Annie’s River, the Ballyglass River (Carrowkileen) and the Ballintubber Stream. The first two of these have been severely modified by drainage schemes, reducing their value to the trout population, but stream enhancement work is gradually remedying this situation.

The Carra trout have a very distinctive coloration and spotting, being much lighter in colour and more heavily spotted than the trout from downstream Lough Mask. They are found throughout the lake, but are noticeably less abundant in those areas of very shallow water (i.e. 1 m or less).

Eel *Anguilla anguilla*

Eels are present in Lough Carra in relatively low numbers. Some commercial fishing for this species has occurred but, since there has been no study of the species in Carra it is not known whether the population is naturally sparse, overexploited or in decline in parallel with most other waters in Europe.

Three-spined stickleback *Gasterosteus aculeatus*

This species is widespread and common in the lake and in the streams throughout the catchment.

Brook lamprey

Lampetra branchialis

This species was recorded in both Annies River and the Ballyglass River (the two main feeder streams entering the eastern side of the Lough) during the survey work carried out by McCarthy and Glass of the Fisheries Research Centre in 1981 and 1982.

The introduced fish species:

Pike

Esox lucius

Lough Carra holds a good population of pike which are thought to have been introduced centuries ago. Because of the lake's importance for wild brown trout angling, and because research has suggested that reduction of pike numbers results in an increase in the trout population, the pike population has been systematically culled each year (by Western Regional Fisheries Board using gill nets and by a local angling club using rod and line). Further information on this can be found elsewhere on this website.

Perch

Perca fluviatilis

Perch are widely distributed in the lake and throughout the catchment. Numbers fluctuate greatly from year to year and, although large specimens were recorded in the 1970s and 1980s, the current population appears to comprise mostly shoals of small fish with a few mature individuals.

Roach

Rutilus rutilus

This species is certainly not native to the Carra/Mask/Corrib system, but has become well-established in Loughs Corrib and Mask for many years. There were confirmed records of roach in Carra in 2008 (several seen near Castle Carra in August 2008), as well as reports from the Annie's River/Cloondaver area of the lake. It is now highly probable that they have bred successfully as Tom Byrne reported seeing a shoal of "hundreds" between three and five inches long in the vicinity of Church Island in September 2011. It now remains to be seen whether the established roach population of Carra undergoes a big increase, or struggles to survive in the very different ecological conditions to the other western lakes where they have thrived.

REFERENCES

Central Fisheries Board. 1996. A Fish Stock Survey Report for Loughs Corrib, Mask and Carra and Future Management Options for this Fishery Resource. Unpublished report, Central Fisheries Board, Dublin.

McCarthy, D.T. and B. Glass. 1982. Environmental Impact Statement Lough Carra East. Hydrobiology. Unpublished report, Department of Fisheries and Forestry, Dublin.

O'Grady, M. 1986. Lough Carra – a Review of the Fish Stock Monitoring Programme (1978 – 1986) and Longterm Management Proposals