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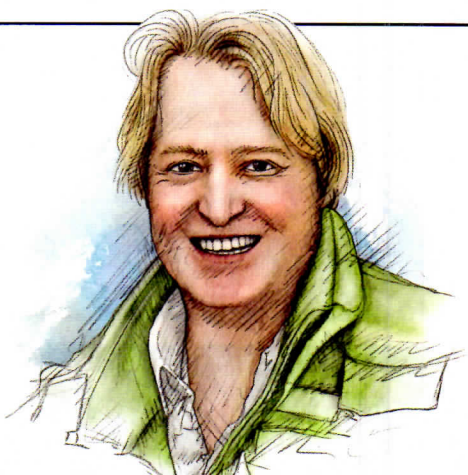
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CHALK TALK

Rule No.4

Simon Cooper recalls harsh times for grayling

CLEARING OUT A LONG-FORGOTTEN drawer in a fishing hut the other day I came across an old catch-return card from one of the first River Test beats I managed. It was printed on thin card and the keeper would hand it to you at the start of each day. Somewhere close to your point of departure there would be a crude letterbox into which you were instructed to return your completed card at the end of the day along with "anything else". No coincidence that the card was roughly the same size as a £10 note...

Flipping it over I read the fishery rules on the rear. No.4 caught my eye:

"All grayling **MUST** be killed."

The capitalisation and the underlining are not mine. That is how it was printed on the card. Make no mistake, back then grayling were considered vermin. And when I say "back then" we are not talking so long ago. These rules were in operation during the 1990s.

It is extraordinary how things have changed, but I can't pretend I was entirely innocent in the persecution of *Thymallus thymallus*. In those days the Environment Agency electro-fished the Test and Itchen in the autumn on our behalf to remove huge numbers of grayling. The children of Romsey would have a heyday as the tank reversed up to the pond in the Memorial Park.

Which got me wondering why we felt that way? I think to start with our mindset was evolving. Catch-and-release was by no means commonplace. That same catch card required anglers to catch-and-kill four fish each day, with only fish under 12in to be released. And then there was pseudo-science. Grayling were considered the enemy of trout, competing for habitat and, worst of all, massive consumers of trout eggs. We now know both "facts" are bunkum. There was also this sense that catching a grayling was a disappointment. The waste of a good cast and fly that would be better deployed on a trout. Old-school fly-fishers would complain vociferously that they had been short-changed as if the fault lay with the river keeper.

When and why this hatred for grayling arose, I do not know. Ignorance has many manifestations. I was struck the

other day by the subtitle of Frederic Halford's 1886 *Floating Flies and How to Dress Them*, which reads "Fly Tying and Hints on Fly Fishing for Trout and Grayling".

I don't think the great man would have dedicated large sections of his seminal work to the grayling unless he thought it worthy of capture. Bearing in mind how influential he was and that he didn't die until just before the outbreak of WWI, with his legions of disciples keeping his torch alight for many decades after that, it seems to me that the nadir for the grayling must have been in the second half of the 20th century. Opinion began to change around the time of the advent of The Grayling Society in 1977 but it was really not until the new millennium that views had truly turned around. Happily, today nobody truly disputes its status as the fourth game fish.

Hatching this month

Hatching insects are synonymous with warmth but if, like me, you are beside a river every day of the year, you'll know this is not the case - I've seen clouds of tiny olives clustering above newly fallen snow. All it usually takes is a little uptick in the temperature or a burst of wintry sunshine or a drop in the wind. My sole caution is to keep in mind that old adage: "Only the foolish angler sallies forth when the wind is from the north." It is undoubtedly true, chilling a thin layer of surface water that sends emerging nymphs back down below to try another day.

Autumn hatches largely revolve around olives and midges. A Kite's Imperial is the classic pattern for the former and a Knotted Midge for the latter.

The guide's fly

Despite his youth, Andy Buckley already has plenty of guiding air miles under his belt with stints in New Zealand, the Seychelles and Slovenia. But for all that, Derbyshire is home and he is back building an enviable reputation on the rivers Derwent, Dove and Wye.

Going on the river with Andy is like being accompanied by a walking tackle store; he likes to take out five or six rigs. His favourite for grayling is the French Leader set-up. You'll need a long, light rod, 10ft-12ft, one- to four-weight. This is an up-close technique, mostly within four or five rod-lengths of the fish. The 40ft monofilament French Leader tapers from about 40lb to 8lb with a fluorescent strike indicator held above the water. Below that is your tippet with two droppers and a heavy point fly to get your team to the bottom.

Don't expect to catch a fish on the point fly. Fished almost Czech-nymph style, it is the dropper flies that will do the damage. Andy picks out three: pink or red jig flies; the Duracell; and his Baby Pink, a caddis grub with a pale-pink tungsten bead that excites both him and the grayling. **T&S**



Andy Buckley's Baby Pink.

■ Simon Cooper is managing director of Fishing Breaks (fishingbreaks.co.uk), leading chalkstream fishing specialists. He is author of the best-selling *Life of a Chalkstream* and *The Otters' Tale*. Andy Buckley can be found at derbyshirefishingguide.co.uk