

THE FISHES OF THE FLEET

M Ladle
F.B.A. River Laboratory
East Stoke, Wareham, Dorset

At least 23 species of fish have been recorded from the Fleet. The most abundant forms are probably euryhaline species, tolerant of a wide range of salinity conditions. These include, the eel Anguilla anguilla L. a catadromous species which migrates to the sea for spawning purposes. In a similar category are the flounder Pleuronectes flesus (L.)*, the thick lipped grey mullet Crenimugil labrosus (Risso) and the bass Dicentrarchus labrax (L.)*. Adult bass are said to occur in the lower part of the Fleet between the Bridging Camp and Ferry Bridge with large fish present in the Narrows in July and August. There is also a report of supposed spawning of large numbers in the upper reaches of the Fleet from Herbury to Langton Herring in about mid March (Cook W.C.). This is not consistent with the observations of Kennedy & Fitzmaurice (1972) on the coast of Ireland where the main spawning is in May near river mouths or areas of coastal "shoal water".

Cook mentions the occurrence, presumably in the lower Fleet, of three species of wrasse Labrus bergylta Ascanius*, Crenilabrus melops (L.)* and Crenilabrus rupestris (L.), also the sticklebacks Gasterosteus aculeatus L. and Spinachia spinachia (L.)*, the sand smelt Atherina presbyter Val.*, pipe fishes Syngnathus acus L.*, Syngnathus rostellatus Nilsson and Entelurus aequoreus (L.), butterflyfish Pholis gunnellus (L.), Blennius pholis L.*, a goby, presumably Pomatoschistus microps (Krøyer) and a "cottus", probably Taurulus bubalis (Euphrasen).

In addition to the above there are records, from the Ferrybridge region, of pollack Pollachius pollachius (L.)*, black bream Spondyliosoma cantharus (L.)*, conger Conger conger (L.), dragonet Callionymus lyra L.* and sand eels probably Ammodytes tobianus L. which is abundant in Weymouth Bay. Species marked with an asterisk have been confirmed in the Fleet by the author since 1970.

It is probable that a number of other fish species also occur in the Fleet and, in particular, that large numbers of fry and young fish may occupy the shallow areas in the summer months.