

PARTNER PROFILE: DOM LONGLEY

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY SENIOR ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING OFFICER

I remember being told by my ten-year old school friends “You’re so obsessed with fish – you’ll probably marry one”. They were right that I thought about little other than fish and fishing, but wrong (thankfully) about my marital future.

I think there are two things about fish of all kinds that were always at the heart of my obsession: firstly, they’re so utterly free: they move in three dimensions more effortlessly than any other creature and glide through life, unencumbered by claws, hands, feet or beaks; secondly, there’s a kind of primal jealousy that they can live, breathe and disappear underwater. For those reasons, I just can’t get enough of working in and around all kinds of waterscapes, trying to unravel the mysteries of fish.



I didn’t go to university until my late twenties and, having led a fairly nomadic existence till then, was ready to give the Environmental Protection degree my absolute all. Summers had to be spent on work placement and I landed a job as a “summer fish survey assistant” with the Environment Agency in Dorset – they had to repeat the job description to me a couple of times before I’d believe that travelling all over Wessex catching fish actually constituted a job. Just as my third summer placement was coming to an end, a permanent job came up with the Hampshire “Fisheries, Ecology & Recreation Team” and twenty years later, I’m still effectively in a similar post. My job title now is “Senior Environmental Monitoring Officer”, which reflects the fact that I’ve done so many thousands of fish surveys and sifted through so much fish data that I’ve inevitably gained a bit of knowledge on the subject, although I love to do aquatic plant surveys too. For the past five years, I’ve managed our salmon counters on the Test and Itchen, which is fascinating and a real privilege.

I’ve left the EA to broaden my horizons on two occasions: once to spend a year with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust radio-tracking trout on Dorset chalk streams and Welsh mountain rivers and, later, to work in commercial consultancy for a couple of years as Senior Consultant for a river restoration company.

Having grown up in Bournemouth, I’ve been familiar with the New Forest from a young age but twenty years of monitoring its fish populations have shown me so much that I would never have otherwise seen. At the heart of this relationship are sea trout – an enigmatic species that ebbs and flows between the gravelly Forest headwaters, the estuaries and the open sea, connecting them all. It’s important to me that sea trout continue to thrive in Forest streams not only because they’ve become a touchstone in my own life but because they represent the essential continuum between all the terrestrial and submerged landscapes that lie within their range: from mire to saltmarsh; woodland to kelp forest. Because of this, I

find them especially life-affirming.

At no time in my career have I felt more like part of a collective when it comes to protecting the wetlands and watercourses of the New Forest – I am troubled by signs of stress in Forest fish populations but it's good to know that alliances between partner organisations are strong.

Dom Longley, Senior Environmental Monitoring Officer, Environment Agency

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