

Bann Start Fly Fishing School

Bann Start fly fishing school is a new project designed to introduce young people to fly fishing. It is initially aimed at 10 – 14 year olds and is totally FREE to all participants due to the kind and generous sponsorship from Bann System Ltd, The The Honourable Irish Society, Lower Bann Partnership and Loop Tackle. The idea is to teach the pupils various aspects of fly fishing during two days tuition which includes rod set up, knots, invertebrate life, fly tying as well as casting, fishing, playing and landing fish and catch and release. All the children learn these skills in a friendly, safe and informative environment with the main emphasis being ‘ Fishing is Fun ‘.

The project is planned, introduced and administered by Mark Patterson who is a fully qualified GAIA fly fishing instructor and angling guide. Mark is also a representative of Bann System Ltd and has run several projects for them including a Salmon Hatchery in the Classroom Project which was set up in 10 local primary schools and he also organised the Bann Guiding Programme. Mark and the other qualified instructors are all qualified in first aid, risk assessment, child protection, are fully vetted and carry their own insurance. This ensures the children are in safe hands whilst attending the course. The other instructors involved are; - Leslie Holmes owner and proprietor of Stonefalls Specimen Trout Fishery and Fly Fishing School. Leslie is a well known guide for trout, salmon, sea trout as well as bass and mullet and a qualified APGAI instructor; - Mark Duncan who is not only a qualified guide and instructor but is also a highly successful competition angler as well as being secretary of the Roe Anglers; - Ciaran Bradley is also a fully qualified guide and GAIA instructor and specialises in guiding for trout, salmon and dollaghan on the Moyola; - Terry Jackson is well known as Irelands top specimen hunter as well an angling author and one of Irish Anglers ‘Fish Doctors’. Terry is also a fully qualified guide and GAIA instructor.

The venue for the two initial courses was Moorbrook Lodge Trout Fishery, Castlerock owned and run by Steph and William Holmes. Both Steph and William are very experienced anglers who specialise in trout and salmon angling and are able to pass on a wealth of information to their clients. William is also a fully qualified guide and APGAI and AAPGAI instructor and is at present developing his guiding skills in Canada. It is hoped in the future, with suitable sponsorship, that this fly fishing school will be taken much further a field and be made available to as many young anglers as possible. But on this occasion a special thank-you must go to Steph who not only allowed the use of her fishery but ensured that everything was to hand.

The first course took place on Tuesday 12th and Wednesday 13th August and the second on Tuesday 19th and Wednesday 20th August 2008. The courses ran from 10.00am to 4.30pm each day and were well attended by 18 keen young anglers on each occasion. The first day started off with registration with parents completing consent forms followed by a welcome from Mark. This was followed by a short briefing to let the young anglers and their parents know what they would be doing over the next two days. Next we had the serious part where every one was told all the do’s and don’ts with a full safety brief to ensure everything ran smoothly. All the young anglers were then split into small age related groups and commenced the activities of the day. These were classes in - fly tying, entomology, rod set up, knot tying, and basic casting instruction. Each group spent one hour at each activity with short breaks in between. Mark Duncan took charge of the fly tying and had every young angler tying several different flies which they all hoped to catch fish on the next day. Terry explained tackle set up and produced several expert knot tiers by the end of each session. He used high visibility heavy sea line and large hooks with the points and barbs cut off which made demonstrating knot tying much more visual to the children but also made it much easier for them to master the knots. Mark looked after the entomology with the children collecting and identifying the various invertebrate samples. All the participants were amazed at the high numbers and

variety of the 'mini beasts' they found in the water. Mark explained the life cycles of the invertebrates found and how these animals can be used as a pollution indicator in streams, rivers and lakes. One young angler was heard to comment to the others in his group " I thought looking at bugs would be boring but this is really cool." Leslie and Ciaran had the difficult task of teaching the basics of casting to each group but coped very well. They had complete novices roll and over head casting in no time and this was helped by the use of the child friendly outfits supplied by Loop Tackle. These were 9 foot 5 weight Loop Adventure rods set up with matching Loop reels and lines.

The first day concluded with a lesson covering the complete life cycles of trout and salmon followed by a question and answer session. The young anglers enjoyed the day and were looking forward to coming back the next day and to catching fish, even though they were all a bit damp as the weather had not been kind, raining most of the first day.

The second day dawned with the weather gods smiling on us and providing a lovely sunny day. This proved to be the case not only for that day but for both days on the second course apart from one heavy shower in the afternoon on day two. On day two the morning was filled with casting practice on water, a casting accuracy competition, and practical demonstrations of tactics and catch and release. This was followed in the afternoon by a hard core fishing session in which all the young anglers managed to land at least one trout. For many of them this was the first trout they had ever caught. For one extremely keen 9 year old it was a day to remember when she landed a rainbow trout of 12 pounds plus. Her father has since contacted me saying she has not stopped talking about it and has contacted all her friends and family to boast of her fine achievement. This shows us all what a fine fishery Moorbrook Lodge is and it is a credit to Steph and William Holmes.

At the end of the course all the participants were presented with goody bags which were kindly provided by Gary O'Neill and Deirdre O'Connell from the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DECAL). Both Gary and Deirdre took time out from their busy schedule to visit the course and had nothing but praise for not only the course itself but also for the way it was run. The young anglers all received an Award of Excellence Certificate for their participation in the course. All the children thanked the coaches for the course and said they really enjoyed it. It is hard to get feed- back from kids so when one of the fathers, who had stayed most of the day, came to me at the end of the course and said 'I would like to congratulate you and your fellow coaches on a fantastic course which was extremely professionally run', we felt we had got everything just right.

Finally I would like to thank all our sponsors and the coaches without whom the courses could not have taken place. I would also like to thank the children who participated and congratulate them and their parents for the way they behaved throughout the courses. It is hoped that many more of these courses will take place in the future and any bodies or individuals who would like to get involved either as participants or sponsors please contact Mark Patterson, representative of Bann System Ltd, on 07771 892506.