

New feature



The Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society

**BASS
ANGLER**

Are the bass you catch getting smaller?

Steve Pitts looks at the society's catch records, which stretch back 40 years, and reveals that the size of the bass being hooked is declining, yet there seems to be fish enough for everyone

Is it my imagination or were the summers of yesteryear always one long heatwave? Were we able to get a round of drinks for less than a fiver, or fill the car with fuel without going into shock?

That's the thing with getting older, you remember all the good bits and tend to forget the bad. Recalling memories like these is good - they act as reference points to what is happening today.

For example, is our imagination playing tricks or are we really catching fewer and smaller fish than we used to?

B.A.S.S has been archiving members' voluntary catch reports for nearly 40 years, and probably has the most detailed record of bass captures. Looking back over the records, the average size of our bass has decreased.

I vividly remember the first bass I ever caught; it weighed just over 6lb. In the following five years I would regularly catch several each year of around this weight, including four 8lb fish one evening on bait and an 11lb 6oz fish on a plug. By comparison I haven't caught a bass over 5lb in the past 12 years.

At the start of the 1990s the beginning of the decline in catches was noticeable. A 6lb bass became a noteworthy fish. Bass had become a 'culinary experience' in swanky restaurants and commercial bass fishing was really taking off.

Over the years I've met hundreds of bass anglers through B.A.S.S, and those that have fished for long enough all agree that there are far fewer big bass around than 20 years ago.



More about B.A.S.S

To find out more about the society go to www.ukbass.com

Will young anglers like Sophia Taylor ever enjoy bass fishing like it was in the 'good old days'?

The new 'culinary experience' saw commercial bass fishing take off

Big bass aren't everything

Even a schoolie gives a spirited fight on spinning tackle or fly gear and they are just as plucky and indignant as their bigger relatives when you try to unhook one.

What is apparent when I chat with anglers who are new to sea fishing or have a new-found interest in bass is that they assume the size of a good bass is a couple of pounds - a far cry from the five to six-pounders that many of 'my generation' used to average 30 years ago.

This phenomenon was described by Professor John Waldman, who worked for 20 years on the successful striped bass restoration programme in the USA: "With each ensuing generation, environmental degradation generally increases, but each generation takes that degraded condition as the new normal."

It isn't just anglers' expectations that

are being eroded. Prof Waldman wrote of fisheries managers: "Resource managers settle for less and less as their vision becomes further removed from original pristine conditions."

So, can the downward spiral be reversed before it is too late? Well, it could be if we had a robust bass management plan like our counterparts in the States, but it is difficult to see how this can happen when they are netted in such huge numbers when they are at their most vulnerable as they shoal up offshore prior to spawning, while inshore they can be legally taken before they are big enough to breed.

I wonder if Sophia Taylor, one of the junior members of B.A.S.S, will ever enjoy bass fishing like it was in the 'good old days'? If we don't do something to halt the decline soon, the answer is no. **SA**