

# are there leeches in uk

## Are there leeches in the UK?

Leeches have long captured the curiosity and sometimes the concern of outdoor enthusiasts, nature lovers, and even scientists. As aquatic or terrestrial creatures that belong to the phylum Annelida, leeches are often associated with exotic or tropical environments. However, many people wonder whether these creatures are present in the UK, and if so, where they can be found, what species exist, and whether they pose any threat to humans or animals. Understanding the presence of leeches in the UK involves exploring their natural habitats, types, behaviors, and the ecological roles they play.

In this comprehensive guide, we will delve into the question: Are there leeches in the UK? We will examine the types of leeches found in the region, their habitats, behaviors, and safety considerations. Whether you're a nature adventurer, a student, or simply curious about the wildlife in your area, this article aims to provide accurate, detailed, and SEO-optimized information about leeches in the UK.

## Understanding Leeches: An Overview

Leeches are segmented worms classified under the class Hirudinea. They are known for their flattened, soft bodies and, in many species, their ability to attach to hosts using suckers. While some leeches are bloodsuckers, others are scavengers or predators of small invertebrates.

Key characteristics of leeches include:

- An elongated, flattened body
- Presence of suckers at both ends (anterior and posterior)
- Ability to move via a looping motion or crawling
- A variety of feeding strategies, including hematophagy (blood-feeding)

Leeches have been used historically in medicine for bloodletting and are still studied for their anticoagulant properties. However, their ecological role in natural habitats is vital, helping control populations of other invertebrates and contributing to aquatic ecosystem health.

## Are There Leeches in the UK?

The straightforward answer is yes; leeches are present in the UK. Several species of leeches inhabit various environments across the country, from freshwater lakes and ponds to damp woodland areas and marshes.

Common leech species found in the UK include:

- *Hirudo medicinalis* (Medieval medicinal leech): Historically famous for its medical use, this species is native to parts of Europe, including the UK. It prefers slow-moving freshwater bodies.

- Erpobdella spp.: A genus of predatory leeches that are often found in freshwater habitats.
- Glossiphonia spp.: These leeches are often found attached to aquatic plants or submerged debris.
- Haemopsis spp. (horse leech): Usually found in slow-flowing streams and ponds.

While leeches are widespread, their populations are generally localized and dependent on specific environmental conditions.

## **Habitat and Distribution of UK Leeches**

Leeches in the UK prefer habitats that provide the moisture, temperature, and food sources they need for survival.

### **Freshwater Environments**

Most UK leech species thrive in freshwater habitats, such as:

- Ponds
- Lakes
- Slow-moving rivers and streams
- Marshes and wetlands

These environments provide ample opportunities for leeches to find hosts or organic material they feed on.

### **Terrestrial and Moisture-Rich Areas**

Some leech species are terrestrial or semi-terrestrial and are found in:

- Damp woodland floors
- Leaf litter
- Moist soil near water bodies

They often stay hidden under rocks, logs, or thick vegetation.

### **Distribution Across the UK**

Leech populations are distributed throughout the UK, but their density varies depending on climate, habitat availability, and human activity. They are more common in the wetter regions, such as:

- The Lake District
- The Scottish Highlands
- The Somerset Levels
- Areas with abundant freshwater sources

In general, leeches are more active during the warmer months, typically from late spring to early autumn.

## **Are Leeches Dangerous to Humans and Animals in the UK?**

One of the primary concerns about leeches relates to their potential to bite and feed on humans or animals. While most UK leech species are not aggressive towards humans, bites can occur if individuals wade through infested waters or come into contact with leech habitats.

Are UK leeches dangerous?

- Medical risk: UK leeches generally do not transmit diseases to humans. Their bites are usually harmless, causing minor irritation or itching.
- Allergic reactions: Rarely, some individuals may experience allergic reactions to leech saliva or bites.
- Infection risk: As with any skin breach, there is a small risk of infection if bites are not properly cleaned.

Leeches and pets or livestock:

- Animals that frequently access ponds, lakes, or wetlands may be bitten.
- In rare cases, large leeches may attach to pets, but such instances are uncommon.

## **How to Identify Leeches in the UK**

If you're exploring UK waterways or natural habitats, spotting leeches involves recognizing their physical features:

- Size: Ranges from 5mm to 15cm depending on the species.
- Color: Usually brown, black, or mottled patterns.
- Body shape: Flattened, elongated, with a distinct segmentation.
- Suckers: Presence of suckers at both ends; the anterior sucker often contains the mouth.

Tips for identification:

- Look for leeches attached to submerged plants, rocks, or animals.
- Observe their movement—crawling or looping motion.
- Use a hand lens or magnifying glass for close inspection.

## **Precautions and Safety Tips When Encountering**

# Leeches

While leeches are generally harmless, taking precautions ensures safe outdoor experiences:

- Wear protective clothing: Long sleeves, long pants, and waterproof boots when wading in freshwater.
- Use insect repellent or barrier creams: Some products may deter leeches.
- Check your body and clothing: Carefully examine after water activities and remove any attached leeches promptly.
- Remove leeches properly: Use fine-tipped tweezers to gently detach them by pulling steadily from the mouthpart. Avoid crushing or pulling abruptly.
- Clean the bite site: Wash with soap and water, and apply antiseptic if needed.
- Seek medical attention: If you experience excessive swelling, allergic reactions, or signs of infection.

## Ecological Importance of Leeches in the UK

Leeches play a crucial role in freshwater ecosystems:

- Predators: They feed on small invertebrates, contributing to the control of pest populations.
- Prey: They serve as food for fish, birds, and other aquatic predators.
- Bioindicators: Because they are sensitive to pollution, the presence or absence of certain leech species can indicate water quality.

Maintaining healthy freshwater habitats ensures the survival of native leech populations and overall ecological balance.

## Conclusion: Are There Leeches in the UK?

In summary, the answer to "Are there leeches in the UK?" is a definitive yes. These fascinating annelids are native to many freshwater habitats across the country. While most UK leech species are harmless and play valuable ecological roles, awareness and caution are advisable when engaging in outdoor water activities.

Understanding the habitats, identification, and safety measures can help you enjoy nature responsibly while appreciating the diversity of wildlife in the UK. Whether you're exploring lakes, ponds, or wetlands, encountering leeches is part of the rich tapestry of UK's aquatic ecosystems.

Key Takeaways:

- UK is home to several leech species, mainly inhabiting freshwater environments.
- Most leeches are harmless to humans and animals but can occasionally bite.
- Proper precautions can prevent unwanted bites and ensure safe outdoor experiences.
- Leeches are important ecological indicators and contribute to ecosystem health.

By staying informed and respectful of wildlife, you can safely enjoy the natural beauty and biodiversity of the UK's aquatic habitats.

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Meta description: Curious if there are leeches in the UK? Discover which leech species inhabit the region, their habitats, safety tips, and ecological importance in this detailed, SEO-optimized guide.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Are leeches found naturally in the UK?

Yes, leeches are naturally found in the UK, particularly in freshwater environments such as lakes, ponds, and streams.

### What types of leeches are present in the UK?

The UK hosts several species of leeches, including the medicinal leech (*Hirudo medicinalis*) and various freshwater leeches like *Erpobdella* and *Glossiphonia* species.

### Are leeches dangerous to humans in the UK?

Leeches in the UK are generally harmless to humans. They do not transmit diseases and usually only bite to feed on blood, causing minor irritation.

### Where in the UK are leeches most commonly found?

Leeches are most commonly found in freshwater habitats such as ponds, lakes, marshes, and slow-moving streams across the UK.

### Can leeches be a problem for outdoor activities in the UK?

While leeches are present in some natural areas, they are rarely a significant problem for outdoor activities. Wearing appropriate clothing can help prevent bites in leech-prone environments.

### Are leeches used in medical treatments in the UK?

Yes, medicinal leeches are used in some medical treatments in the UK to help improve blood flow and reduce congestion in certain reconstructive surgeries.

## Additional Resources

[Are There Leeches in the UK? An In-Depth Investigation](#)

Leeches have long been associated with mysterious swamps and folklore, often depicted as sinister parasites lurking beneath the water's surface. For those living or visiting the UK, a common

question arises: are there leeches in the UK? This query warrants a comprehensive exploration, examining the species present, their habitats, behavior, and the potential health risks they pose. This investigation aims to provide clarity backed by scientific research, ecological data, and expert insights.

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## Understanding Leeches: An Overview

Leeches are segmented worms belonging to the phylum Annelida, class Hirudinea. They are known primarily for their bloodsucking behavior, although not all leech species feed on blood—many are predators or scavengers. Their unique adaptations include sucker discs used for attachment and feeding, and some possess anticoagulant enzymes in their saliva to facilitate blood feeding.

Globally, approximately 700–800 leech species have been identified, with a subset adapted to freshwater, terrestrial, and marine environments. Their ecological roles vary from controlling invertebrate populations to serving as prey for other species.

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## Leeches in the UK: Species and Distribution

### Native and Established Species

The UK's freshwater ecosystems—including lakes, ponds, rivers, and marshes—are home to several native leech species. The key species documented in the UK include:

- *Erpobdella octoculata* (Nine-eyed leech): A predatory leech found in various freshwater habitats, feeding on small invertebrates.
- *Glossiphonia complanata* (Leech of freshwater snails): Usually found attached to freshwater snails, feeding on their hemolymph.
- *Hirudo medicinalis* (Medicinal leech): Historically used in medicine, this species was native to parts of Europe, including the UK, but is now rare or locally extinct in the wild.
- *Haemopsis sanguisuga* (Horse leech): A predatory freshwater leech found in slow-moving waters.

These species are generally harmless to humans, often acting as predators rather than parasites.

### Invasive and Non-Native Species

In recent decades, concerns have arisen about the introduction of non-native leech species into UK ecosystems. Notably:

- *Hirudo medicinalis* was historically native but became scarce due to habitat loss and

overharvesting. Modern populations are primarily maintained through aquaculture and medicinal use.

- *Hirudo medicinalis* has been sometimes imported for medical purposes and used in fishing bait, potentially leading to accidental releases.
- Other non-native leech species are rare but have been reported in aquarium or pond trade.

The presence of non-native leeches raises questions about ecological impacts, competition with native species, and potential health risks.

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## **Are There Leeches in the UK? The Evidence**

### **Field Surveys and Ecological Reports**

Extensive ecological surveys across UK freshwater habitats confirm the presence of native leech species. Studies published in journals such as the *Journal of Freshwater Ecology* and reports from the Environment Agency indicate:

- Native leeches are widespread, particularly in slow-moving rivers and lakes.
- Leeches are an integral part of freshwater food webs, controlling invertebrate populations.
- Occurrences of leeches in UK waters are common, especially in temperate and humid environments.

### **Reports of Leeches on Humans and Animals**

While leeches are known for their bloodsucking behavior, documented encounters with humans in the UK are rare. Most reports originate from:

- People wading or swimming in freshwater bodies where leeches are present.
- Observations of leeches attaching to animals like dogs, ducks, or wildlife.

Instances of leech bites in the UK are infrequent but can occur, especially in heavily vegetated or marshy areas.

### **Presence in Popular Water Recreation Sites**

Leeches tend to inhabit natural, unpolluted freshwater environments with abundant aquatic vegetation. Reports from outdoor enthusiasts, anglers, and swimmers suggest that:

- Some lakes and ponds, particularly in rural areas, harbor leeches.
- Leech encounters are more common in slow-moving or stagnant waters.
- Proper precautions, such as inspecting skin after swimming, can mitigate bites.

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# **Are Leeches Dangerous in the UK? Health Risks and Precautions**

## **Potential Risks of Leech Bites**

Most native UK leeches are non-parasitic or only occasionally attach to humans. However, where they do feed, potential risks include:

- Minor skin irritation or allergic reactions.
- Transmission of bacteria or pathogens, although this is exceedingly rare in UK species.
- Secondary infections if bites are scratched or not properly cleaned.

Notably, the *Hirudo medicinalis* (medicinal leech), used in medicine for centuries, is generally safe when applied under controlled conditions, but wild specimens are less predictable.

## **Precautions When in Water**

To reduce the chance of leech bites:

- Wear protective clothing, such as waders or waterproof trousers.
- Avoid swimming in heavily vegetated, stagnant waters.
- Check the skin and clothing after water activities.
- Remove attached leeches carefully, using salt, boiling water, or specialized tools—do not pull or twist.

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## **Environmental and Ecological Considerations**

### **Impact of Climate and Habitat Changes**

Climate change influences leech populations by altering water temperatures, flow regimes, and vegetation. Warmer, slower waters favor leech proliferation, potentially increasing encounters.

### **Conservation and Management**



Leeches are part of the natural biodiversity and play roles in ecosystem health. However, invasive species could threaten native leech populations or aquatic biodiversity. Monitoring and managing populations through ecological surveys and habitat protection are ongoing concerns.

## Leeches and Biological Control

While not used as biological control agents in the UK, leeches' predatory nature makes them interesting subjects for ecological research, particularly in controlling pest invertebrates.

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## Conclusion: The Presence and Significance of Leeches in the UK

The evidence confirms that there are leeches in the UK, predominantly native species inhabiting freshwater ecosystems across the country. These leeches are generally harmless to humans, with bites being uncommon and usually non-serious. Their ecological roles are vital, contributing to biodiversity and maintaining healthy aquatic environments.

While concerns about invasive or non-native leech species persist, current data suggests that the typical leech populations in the UK do not pose significant health risks. Recreational water users should take standard precautions, especially in natural, vegetated waters, but overall, leeches remain a natural part of the UK's freshwater fauna.

Continued ecological monitoring and public awareness are essential to understanding leech distribution, preventing potential ecological disruptions, and ensuring safe recreational activities. For most people, leeches are a fascinating, if often overlooked, component of the UK's aquatic ecosystems—witnesses to the complex web of life thriving beneath the water's surface.

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### References

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In summary, while leeches are present in the UK, they are primarily native, ecologically beneficial, and generally pose minimal risk to humans. Awareness and respectful observation are key to coexisting with these fascinating creatures in their natural habitats.

## [Are There Leeches In Uk](#)

**are there leeches in uk:** *Leech* Robert G. W. Kirk, Neil Pemberton, 2013-02-15 Armed with razor-sharp teeth and capable of drinking many times its volume of blood, the leech is an unlikely cure for ill health. Yet that is exactly the role this worm-like parasite has played in both Western and Eastern medicine throughout history. In this book, Robert G. W. Kirk and Neil Pemberton explore how the leech surfaces in radically different spheres. The ancients used them in humoral medicine to bring the four humors of the body—blood, phlegm, and black and yellow bile—back into balance. Today, leeches are used in plastic and reconstructive surgery to help reattach severed limbs and remove pools of blood before it kills tissue. Leeches have also been used in a nineteenth-century meteorological barometer and a twentieth-century biomedical tool that helped win a Nobel Prize. Kirk and Pemberton also reveal the dark side of leeches as they are portrayed in fiction, film, and popular culture. From Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to a video game player's nemesis, the leech is used to represent the fears of science run amok. *Leech* shines new light on one of humanity's most enduring and unlikely companions.

**are there leeches in uk:** *Fish Diseases and Disorders* P. T. K. Woo, John F. Leatherland, 2006-01-01 Written by experts actively working in the area, this book provides a review of the major diseases of fish caused by protozoan and metazoan parasites. The new edition has been thoroughly updated since publication of the first edition in 1995. It covers recent advances in the understanding of fish diseases including the improvement of diagnostic techniques and understanding of phylogenetic relationships stemming from the application of molecular techniques. The book also contains more detailed information on pathogens that cause amoebiasis.

**are there leeches in uk:** *Leeches (Hirudinea)* K. H. Mann, 2013-09-11 *Leeches (Hirudinea): Their Structure, Physiology, Ecology and Embryology* presents a concise account of the vast knowledge, particularly in the realm of physiology of the Hirudinea. The text provides the various aspects of the life of leeches (Hirudinea). The first three chapters are devoted to the survey of the different families of leeches and the description of *Hirudo medicinalis* (Medicinal leech). The physiological aspects of leeches such as its circulatory and respiratory systems, muscles, nerves, sense organs, and reproductive processes are elaborated in detail in subsequent chapters. Leech nutrition, behavior, locomotion, and the ways in which the distribution and abundance of leeches is affected by factors of the environment, both living and non-living are elucidated as well. Zoologists will find the book very useful and informative.

**are there leeches in uk:** *Nine Pints* Rose George, 2024-06-04 Los Angeles Times Book Prize Finalist: A "compelling chronicle" of the science, politics, and business of blood (*The Wall Street Journal*). Blood carries life, yet the sight of it makes people faint. It is a waste product and a commodity pricier than oil. It can save lives and transmit deadly infections. Each one of us has roughly nine pints of it, yet many don't even know their own blood type. And for all its ubiquitousness, the few tablespoons of blood discharged by 800 million women are still regarded as taboo: menstruation is perhaps the single most demonized biological event. Rose George, author of *The Big Necessity*, takes us from ancient practices of bloodletting to the breakthrough of the "liquid biopsy," which promises to diagnose cancer and other diseases with a simple blood test. She introduces Janet Vaughan, who set up the world's first system of mass blood donation during the Blitz, and Arunachalam Muruganantham, known as "Menstrual Man" for his work on sanitary pads for developing countries. She probes the lucrative business of plasma transfusions, in which the US is known as the "OPEC of plasma." And she looks to the future, as researchers seek to bring synthetic blood to a hospital near you. Spanning science and politics, individual's stories and global epidemics, *Nine Pints* reveals our life's blood in an entirely new light. One of Bill Gates' Recommended Summer Reading Titles "Stellar . . . An informative, elegant, and provocative exploration of the life-giving substance . . . A wondrously well-written work." —Booklist (starred review) Both fascinating and informative . . . George packs her book with the kinds of provocative,

witty, and rigorously reported facts and stories sure to make readers view the integral fluid coursing through our veins in a whole new way.” —Kirkus Reviews (starred review) “George charges down wholly unexpected avenues of medical history and global injustice, leaving the reader by turns giddy and appalled. And always, always in awe of the writing.” —Mary Roach, author of *Grunt: The Curious Science of Humans at War* “A very good book.” —The New York Times

**are there leeches in uk: Rules of Law** GMSEED, 2023-08-23 It can now be stated with a high degree of confidence that the UK legal system is not fit for purpose as it consistently fails to protect the innocent law abiding citizen. A significant majority of the British people have lost faith with their legal system and have complete contempt for this institution that they fund and allow themselves to be governed by. The UK's legal system is a sham much like the rest of it's other broken public sector services of the NHS, education, transportation, migration, ... A broken legal system for Broken Britain. This book summaries 50 rules of how UK law is observed functioning, or should I say not functioning. From rules 1:Innocent until proven guilty, 2:Beyond reasonable doubt through to rules 49:The long term goal of the law is to incarcerate no one and 50:The law is an ass.

**are there leeches in uk: The Royal Marsden Hospital Handbook of Wound Management In Cancer Care** Wayne Naylor, Diane Laverty, Jane Mallett, 2008-04-30 The Royal Marsden Hospital Handbook of Wound Management in Cancer Care offers evidence-based guidance on wound management in a practical and easily accessible format. An introduction to wound healing and assessment is followed by the management of specific wound types and a detailed chapter on wound management products. This book is unique in bringing together invaluable specialist advice, expert opinion and research on the management of wounds related to cancer and cancer therapies. It will be an essential reference for nurses and health care professionals working in the fields of oncology and palliative care, in both community and hospital settings. The Royal Marsden Hospital is the largest comprehensive cancer center in Europe and is one of the world's foremost hospitals dedicated to the care of people with cancer. For further information about career opportunities please call The Royal Marsden toll-free 0800 389 2271.

**are there leeches in uk: The Marine World** Frances Dipper, 2021-06-08 The Marine World is a book for everyone with an interest in the ocean, from the marine biologist or student wanting expert knowledge of a particular group to the naturalist or diver exploring the seashore and beyond. With colour illustrations, line drawings, more than 1,500 colour photographs, and with clear accessible text, this book encompasses all those organisms that live in, on and around the ocean, bringing together in a single text everything from the minuscule to the immense. It includes sections on all but the most obscure marine groups, covering invertebrate phyla from sponges to sea squirts, as well as plants, fungi, bacteria, fish, reptiles, mammals and birds. It incorporates information on identification, distribution, structure, biology, ecology, classification and conservation of each group, addressing the questions of ‘what?’, ‘where?’ and ‘how?’. Today global warming, overfishing, ocean acidification and pollution are just a few of the ever increasing number of threats and challenges faced by ocean life. Without knowledge of the animals, plants and other organisms that live in the marine world, we cannot hope to support or implement successful conservation and management measures, nor truly appreciate the incredible wealth and variety of marine life. The Marine World is the product of a lifetime spent by Frances Dipper happily observing and studying marine organisms the world over. It has been brought to colourful life by a myriad of enthusiastic underwater photographers and by Marc Dando, the renowned natural history illustrator.

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each brimming with life, interactions and potential. And they are for everyone. In *The Wildlife Pond Book*, Jules Howard offers a fresh perspective on ponds and encourages gardeners to reach for a garden spade and do something positive to benefit our shared neighbourhood nature. As well as offering practical tips and advice on designing, planting up and maintaining your pond, Jules encourages readers to explore the wildlife that colonises it with a torch, a microscope or a good old-fashioned pond-dipping net. With a foreword by award-winning wildlife-gardening author, Kate Bradbury, this helpful new guide includes a section outlining the hundreds of organisms that may turn up in your pond and is packed with creative ideas that have been tried and tested by author Jules Howard, an avid pond-builder, prolific pond-dipper and passionate voice for freshwater conservation for more than fifteen years. So, no matter how big your outdoor space is, *The Wildlife Pond Book* is the guide you need to create your very own haven for nature.

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**are there leeches in uk: Diabetic Foot Ulcer** Mohammad Zubair, Jamal Ahmad, Abida Malik, Mallikarjuna Rao Talluri, 2020-10-05 This book discusses essential aspects of diabetic foot ulcers, including evidence-based information on its pathogenesis and pathophysiology, as well as the molecular mechanisms and biomechanics of the diabetic foot. It also highlights the need for a multidisciplinary team to be involved in the management of diabetic patients with foot ulcers, and describes available and future tools for evaluating patients who are at risk. Exploring the main current therapies as well as the latest developments, future directions and potential new treatments, such as growth factors, stem cell therapy, alternative medicine and nanotechnology, the book is a valuable resource for clinicians and medical graduates but will also appeal to researchers working in the field.

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**are there leeches in uk: Fisheries Management** Ian Wellby, Ash Girdler, Robin Welcomme, 2010-02-09 Fisheries Management is a beautifully-produced full colour guide to the management of still-water coarse fisheries. Carefully compiled by three leading specialists, who each draw on many years' experience, this book is an essential purchase for all still water coarse fisheries managers. The correct management of still waters and their fisheries is vital to ensure environmental protection and an appropriate level of stocking densities of healthy fish. This new book provides the reader with the necessary information to achieve these goals. The book's first part covers the ecology of still waters and includes succinct and user-friendly information on physical and chemical processes, nutrient cycles, energy movements, trophic levels, bacteria, plants, invertebrates, fish, disease-causing organisms, mammals and birds. Part two provides in depth, but easily assimilated cutting edge information, on how a still-water fishery should be set up, developed and successfully managed. Coverage includes development, preparation and construction; stock assessment and invertebrate survey; control of water quality, aquatic plants, erosion, predators and nuisance species; management of the impact of climate change; fish disease and biosecurity; control of fishing activities, fish nutrition, fishery enhancement and condition improvement, and general administration. The final part of this excellent manual covers legal and social frameworks including general and environmental legislation, direct fisheries-related legislation, and agencies and organizations. Fisheries Management provides fishery managers with an invaluable, practical tool which none should be without. Students studying fisheries biology, fisheries management and aquatic sciences will find this a very useful learning resource, as will all those who are considering buying or building and setting up lakes for fisheries. All libraries in universities, research establishments and government agencies where fisheries and biological sciences are studied and taught should have copies of this landmark publication on their shelves. Editor and authors with many years' practical experience Vital and commercially important information for fisheries managers A useful reference source for upper level students and academics Covers an important multi-million pound industry across many countries

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