

BOARD REPORT February 2007

Your board met on 16th February and was presented with the customary lengthy agenda dealing with all manner of items likely to impact the river from Apache Oil drilling in the shallow waters of the Moray Firth to yet more wind farms (Aultmore, Kildrummy) planned for the upper reaches of the catchment. We as yet have no word of the result of the Clashindarroch inquiry, but, with a local MSP choosing a wind turbine as the backdrop for a photo shoot, the omens do not look good.

However, two other major threats have been identified much closer to home, and about which all of us can do something to help. The first is the inexplicable urge to dredge and canalise our burns. Despite stringent new regulations expressly forbidding this activity, it still persists on a routine basis throughout the catchment. It may be that the rules themselves are too complex for people to understand or their administration too remote for the general public to access. However, I would encourage all of you to keep an eye out for this highly damaging activity and, where possible, try and engage in a constructive discussion with the perpetrators and explain the harm they are doing. Otherwise, please contact me directly or any member or employee of the Board or Trust.

The second area of concern is the proliferation throughout the catchment of new ponds. While many of these have been spawned by the new agri-environmental grants which have replaced production subsidies for farmers, and while the intended aim of promoting biodiversity is to be applauded, the end result, in practice, has proved to be far from desirable. This is because many ponds are routinely stocked with a voracious, alien predator, the rainbow trout. Where these are stocked in the context of a properly supervised commercial fishery with all the accompanying safeguards, there is simply not a problem.

However, the damage caused to our wild fish population by escapees from less secure premises cannot be underestimated. Indeed, the threat from these and other alien species is now considered so great that a separate and distinct part of the new Water Framework Directive is being hurriedly drawn up to deal with the issue.

Rainbow trout are now caught throughout our system, and I will be writing to FWAG, the SAC and other prominent farming advisory groups to ask them to promulgate a policy of stocking such ponds only with

native species that will not harm our existing indigenous wildlife.

On the subject of the river's health in general, it, according to SEPA, is "good" with only nine pressure points identified (out of a total of 109 on 59 north east water bodies), ranging from a mix of diffuse pollution sources from farming, forestry and urban development to specific morphological alterations. These are all under investigation as we speak.

However, there are many of us who believe that SEPA's analysis does not go nearly far enough and that the obsession with bureaucratic record keeping diverts attention away from the reality of what is happening today. SEPA's benchmark for good status is the condition of the river today. Yes, it is not badly polluted, yes, most activities up and down its banks are not currently causing that much damage. However, as fishermen and wildlife observers, we all know that the decline in our river's fish populations and invertebrate life has been little short of disastrous over the past several decades. Rather than sitting here smugly saying how "good" we are against today's unambitious and misleading benchmarks, we should be striving to restore the river to its former glory.

On this note, Andy Walker's excellent survey of our system, conducted under the generous auspices of the Wild Trout Society, identified silt loading, both past and present, as a major issue affecting our sea trout. The filling up of pools and the consequent loss of deep water habitat and alteration of flow regimes, not just in the river itself, but also throughout its tributaries, have been major features of recent years and merit further investigation.

In addition, our retained adviser, Colin Carnie, points to detailed work completed on the Tweed catchment. Over the past several decades, the catchment has lost nearly a third of the total land area which used to be classified as land that holds water as opposed to ground that releases it. The cumulative effects of generations of forestry and farm drainage, road building and improvements have resulted in massive silt deposition and significantly altered flows.

While this may well be a contributory factor in declining fish stocks, it will, by no means be the only one, and we are all only too well aware of the major problems at sea. Professor Chris Todd of the University of St Andrews gave a chilling talk at the recent Rivers & Fisheries Trusts' conference on the extremely close correlation between numbers of undersized, poor condition grilse returning to Scottish rivers and the gradual rise in surface temperatures of the Norwegian Sea, where the majority of our one sea-winter fish feed. Indeed, he himself is so alarmed by the drop in condition of these fish that he feels spawning success will inevitably be compromised. As a result, he is urging fishermen to return all hen fish caught, even grilse.



The gradual rise in surface temperatures of the Norwegian Sea where the majority of our one sea-winter fish feed is contributing to undersized, poor conditioned grilse.

Many Deveron fishermen reported catching small, emaciated grilse this past year, and even though our own season was relatively good, we must be aware of the poor state of salmon populations overall and the pernicious effects of poor quality fish returning to our river, even if the actual numbers seem reasonably healthy.

A second talk about the Shieldaig sea trout restoration project on the West coast focused on the huge losses suffered by sea trout from piscivorous birds when at their most vulnerable stage, just as they prepare to go to sea. Your Board is resolute in its determination to continue to press for a sensible cull of these birds within our own fishery.

The conference also underlined, once again, the continuing threat posed by Gyrodactylus Salaris and the alarming absence of practical precautionary measures being instigated by the authorities to prevent entry of a disease capable of completely wiping out our wild fish stocks. Once again, it is down to all of us collectively to ensure all visiting fishermen are educated about the risks of importing and using fishing tackle from other countries.

While the pendulum on the hatchery debate continues to swing back and forth, I heard enough at this conference to convince me, if I ever needed convincing, that hatcheries will play an increasingly important role in preserving stocks of salmon and sea trout in our rivers for a long time to come. In our case, special thanks is due to Jimmy Minty for the tremendous effort he personally has put in at our own hatchery over recent months. We look forward to reaping the benefit of his hard work in years to come.

Finally, I would also like to convey our heart felt thanks to Robert McConnell for his sterling and hugely successful work in increasing the numbers of regular donors to our Trust. The Deveron, Bogie & Isla Rivers Charitable Trust has a hugely important program of much needed habitat work to undertake, and your continuing contributions will play a vital part in ensuring its success.

Malcom Hay, Chairman to the Board

www.deveron.org



• **Looking to the year ahead**
the Trust's great plans inside

• **New appointment**
Meet our hatchery manager
• **Board report**
Working on your behalf inside

THE DEVERON FLYER

The Deveron, Bogie and Isla Rivers Charitable Trust

Newsletter 11, Spring 2007

Welcome to the eleventh newsletter of the Deveron, Bogie & Isla Rivers Charitable Trust.
The Trust's objectives are to 'conserve, protect and rehabilitate salmon, sea trout and trout and other indigenous species of animal, bird, insect and plant life and more generally to promote the ecological cycle for the benefit of the inhabitants of the Deveron'

Recording improvements

We were delighted to record salmon passing through our fish ladder on the River Isla at Strathisla Distillery in Keith. We also recorded otters and kelts in December and January.

The fish ladder has a fish counter installed in the upper section with a CCTV camera placed overhead. We only recorded 12 fish but suitable water levels for upstream migration were brief.

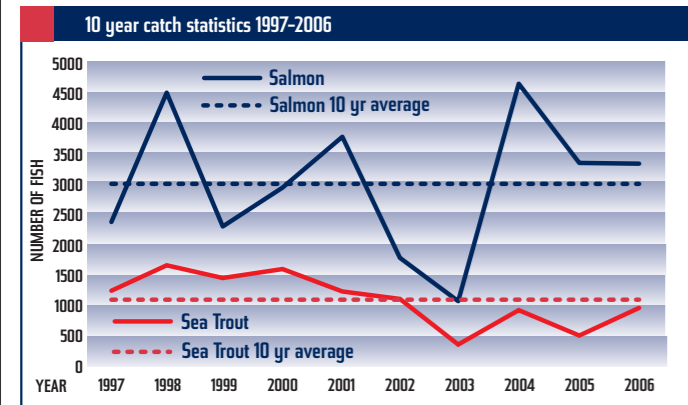
Nearby, the waterfall at the Linn Pot – just 300m downstream – is a difficult barrier for many fish. Our juvenile electro-fishing surveys suggest that spawning in the Upper Isla is low and production would be substantially improved with the removal of the barrier.

However, observation during the autumn run confirmed that it was the smaller fish, especially trout, which were hitting the high section and failing to progress upstream. With this in mind, our plan is to reduce the height of the waterfall at the base which is a man-made concrete structure. By doing so we hope that fish of all sizes will be able to ascend.



The CCTV camera at the Linn Pot waterfall captured a local man worm fishing without permission from the distillery owners. The camera was later illegally removed. Although the man was captured on film, there was not sufficient evidence to prosecute. 'We knew that the area was being targeted, which was why the camera was there in the first place' said Robin Vasey from the Trust. 'Now we've installed a new camera out of harm's way, which will also record fish ascending the waterfall'.

The replacement camera has been in place since February 2007.





Looking to the year ahead

As the fishing season kicks off the Trust is geared up to begin its various projects. This year's plans include fencing, ford modifications, weeding and willow spilling. Although most of the work depends on hard graft some is dependent on Lottery money – which we have now successfully secured

IRISH FORD ON THE GARREL BURN

We have submitted plans to Moray Council and SEPA to modify an Irish ford on the Garrel burn at the Glen of Newmill. This bridge is preventing trout and sea trout from utilising approximately 500 metres upstream.

The two centre pipes will be replaced with a one metre pipe which will be buried to half its height and the concrete apron will be removed. Similar Irish Ford modifications on the Lag burn carried out in 2002 have proved very successful as can be seen from annual electro-fishing surveys. See Figure 1

WILLOW SPILLING AND CATTLE WATERING PROJECT

We have successfully applied to the Lottery Awards For All Fund to install a method of 'soft engineering' using live willow to protect banks from further erosion. Isla and Bogie sites will be used to demonstrate alternative methods to protect adjacent land without using a digger! We also propose to fence off two stretches of the Bogie and place hard core in cattle watering areas to prevent soil erosion and the subsequent siltation of the river bed. The section is approximately 800 metres. We have secured £7,900 of Lottery money to put towards this project.



Figure 1: 2002-2006 Electro-fishing results

TROUT PER SQUARE METRE					
Site ref	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002
Lag 10	8.23	4.91	0.13	0.62	0.44
Lag 13	3.22	2.65	1.44	0.37	1.08

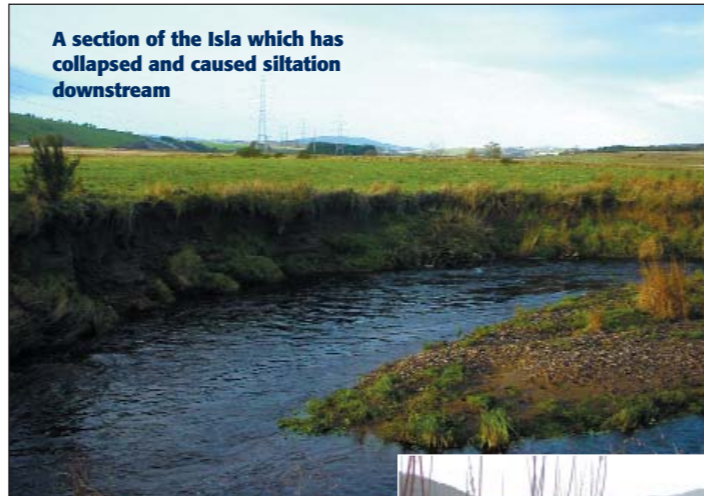
SALMON PER SQUARE METRE					
Site ref	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002
Lag 10	0.56	0.04	0.17	1.4	0
Lag 13	1.66	0.08	0.13	0.82	0



Eradicating alien species

HOGWEED CONTROL

An application has been submitted to SNH for 50% funding to control the Giant Hogweed on the Bogie. This will help to continue the good work by Colin Grant and the Huntly Fishings for the next three years. A similar application has been submitted to the Esmee Fairburn Fund to control Giant Hogweed on the Isla. This is a small part of an environmental project to eradicate alien species across Scotland. The Rivers and Fisheries Trust (RAFTS) is co-ordinating this major funding programme with projects ranging from hogweed and Japanese Knotweed



A section of the Isla which has collapsed and caused siltation downstream

RIGHT: Plans to fence stretches of the Bogie will prevent soil erosion



eradication to American Signal Crayfish control. There are individual projects across Scotland from 17 Trusts which highlights the increasing problem of alien species which are damaging our own native species and habitats.

OTHER ALIEN SPECIES

We are encountering quite a few rainbow trout in the system. The photograph shows a rainbow trout caught below the Fergie burn last summer which was one of many. We also had a report of rainbows caught in the Upper region near the Markie burn.



ABOVE: Example of 'soft engineering' in the form of live willow which we hope to protect the banks of the Bogie and Isla



RAINBOW TROUT CAUGHT AT NETHERDALE LAST SUMMER

If any anglers catch rainbow trout would they first, kill it and secondly, inform the Trust or Board so we can investigate the source.

BRIEFLY...

Gyrodactylus salaris



This parasite could cause catastrophic damage to our rivers if we are not vigilant. Would all anglers who have fished overseas ensure that they have disinfected all their equipment or placed it in a freezer for 24 hours. Some owners might be providing a disinfectant bath at the river – please use it. We hope that this will become standard practice throughout the UK as this disease would be disastrous if it entered our rivers. Sign the anglers' declaration form available from the owner or from our website.

Members drive

Thanks to Robert McConnell 2006 saw an exercise to recruit members to the Trust to establish a core of supporters who have a direct interest in our rivers. As a result membership is up four-fold. Generous donations has produced over £5,500 which will provide funding towards this year's work.

• Special thanks are due to Jimmy Minty, Ronnie Mair, Harvey Grant, Bob Parkin, Evelyn Pirie and Stuart Cockersoll for the tremendous effort they have personally put into our hatchery which is currently rearing over 300,000 alevins.



Save our spring fish

We will be giving away a side of smoked salmon to anyone who catches and releases spring fish this season – but you will have to prove it.

Our river catches are approximately 100 spring fish a year. Unsurprisingly many of these fine fat fish are knocked on the head for the pot. But this year the Trust has come up with a ruse to encourage you to release these catches thus encouraging them to carry on up the river to the redds to spawn. Simply take a photo of your catch, note the weight, size and your beat and send your details to the Trust HQ – a side of smoked salmon will be yours. (Catch stats overleaf)



We always need photographs for our newsletters – please send us your happy snaps and we will publish them

New hatchery manager appointed

We are delighted to welcome Richard Miller (pictured below) who has been appointed as our new Hatchery Manager/Catchment Biologist. Richard, originally from an agricultural background in Orkney, comes to us highly qualified in Aquaculture and Fisheries Management. He has worked on a lobster conservation programme, cod hatchery, commercial salmon/trout farm and latterly worked as the Bladnoch project officer/ Hatchery manager for the Galloway Fisheries Trust.

Richard will become involved in all aspects of the Trust's work such as habitat enhancement, juvenile electro-fishing surveys and broodstock collection. Much of the initial hatchery work will concentrate on the rearing of trout (S. trutta), which have been stripped from adult sea trout. This should help to compensate for the decline in sea trout numbers in recent years. Salmon will be reared also to kick-start the burns where barriers have been removed such as the Towie burn. Careful attention will be placed on keeping the salmon sub-stocks from each part of the Deveron catchment separate during the hatchery programme.



For further information please contact The Project Officer at The Offices, Avochie, Rothiemay, Huntly, Aberdeenshire AB54 7YY Telephone/fax: 01466 711388; email: robinvasey@deveron.org or visit the Trust's website www.deveron.org The Deveron, Bogie and Isla Rivers Charitable Trust is a registered charity. No. SC 032131