

February 2016

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HIGH HOPES FOR A SUCCESSFUL SEASON!

The River Spey opened on the 11th February with refreshing optimism for another successful season following a 70% rise in catches last year. 2015 saw the best grilse rod catch since 2010 and the prospects are good for the 2016 spring/summer salmon run.

The 2016 season got underway with the Annual Opening Day Ceremony at Penny Bridge, Alice Littler Park in Aberlour. Guest speaker, Jimmy Gray MBE, former SFB Superintendent from 1978 until 2001 gave an entertaining speech and then opened the river with the traditional pouring of whisky into the river.



The Spey Anniversary Quaich was awarded to Graham Ritchie, who not only caught the first salmon on the day but also went on to land the second fresh fish, which was the heaviest salmon caught on Opening Day weighing 8 lbs. Both fish were caught at Delfur with attending ghillie, Rory Paterson.



Above & Top Right:
Jimmy Gray MBE
(Courtesy of Alex Mitchell)
Left: Graham Ritchie with his 1st Fish caught at Broom, Delfur (Courtesy of Rory Paterson)
Right: SFB Chairman Brian Doran presents prizes to Graham Ritchie and Delfur Ghillie, Rory Paterson (Courtesy of Alex Mitchell)

All those involved with the Spey Fishery Board are very grateful to the Aberlour Distillery and Walkers Shortbread for their continued sponsorship, to Le Petit Gourmand for providing hot drinks and for the £200 Voucher raffle prize kindly donated by Fishpal with proceeds to the Spey Foundation.

SPEY FISHERY BOARD RESEARCH OFFICE

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BRIEFING - February 2016

2015 SEASON REPORT

Salmon & Grilse

The declared salmon and grilse rod catch for 2015 amounted to 7,728 fish. This is 3,165 more – an increase of almost 70% - than the 4,563 fish caught in 2014. The most surprising aspect of the 2015 rod catch was the relatively good run of grilse, which was the best for five years; 2,732 grilse were caught in 2015, in comparison to 1,024 last year.

Catches during 2015, particularly during the spring, were also more evenly-spread throughout the river from as far as Kinchurdy down to Spey Bay than in recent years, which had tended to favour beats in the lower river.

Sea Trout

The declared sea trout rod catch for 2015 amounted to 2,175, slightly down on the 2,511 caught in 2014, but was significantly better than the 1,194 caught in 2013. In common with many previous years (with the exception of 2014), monthly catches during 2015 showed that

June was the month when the most Sea Trout had been caught in any one month. 855 Sea Trout were caught in June 2015 which accounted for 39.3% of the annual catch. July was once again the second highest month, with 662 caught (30.4%). Overall therefore, almost 70% of Sea Trout caught were recorded in these two months.

Conservation Policy

The Spey Fishery Board are very grateful for the continued support from Proprietors, Ghillies and Anglers who have continued to respond positively to the voluntary policies that are in place on the river by returning even more fish than ever before. Throughout the season, 94% of all salmon and grilse caught were released, an increase on the 92% returned for the same period last year. With regard to sea trout, 81% of all sea trout caught during 2015 were released, which is the same as the percentage released last year.



Spey Conservation Policy 2016

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Scottish legislation requires that all salmon caught before the 1st April must be released. In order to protect the integrity of the Spey stock and to maximise their spawning potential, the Spey Fishery Board's policy is that all fish caught up to and including the 31st May should be released alive. From the 1st June the policy set out below will apply.

SEA TROUT



Release all finnock of 16oz / 35cm / 14" or less



Release all Sea Trout of 3lb / 50cm / 20" or above



Retain only 1 Sea Trout of takeable size per calendar day. Anglers are also encouraged to release their first fish and keep the second that is of takeable size



Release all stale or coloured fish



Release all unseasonable fish (smolts, kelts, over-wintered finnock)

SALMON



Each angler must return the 1st, 3rd, 5th etc... cock fish caught



All hen salmon and hen grilse must be released



Throughout the season all stale or unseasonable fish must be released e.g. gravid, kelts



Escaped farmed salmon must be retained

Best Spawning in Years

Each year we try to do redd counts in selected areas. These may be to answer specific questions, for example fish access upstream of a fish pass, a restoration project, or just as another measure of the stock status. Field work in the short and often dark days of late autumn, as well as the weather, can be a challenge and in 2015 redd counting was curtailed from the 2nd December due to the onset of high flows across the catchment. Despite this we managed to complete counts in a number of tributaries. The counts from most sites were good; indeed the 2015 spawning was the best for a number of years.

One difficulty with redd counting is differentiating between those created by salmon and sea trout, particularly in the Spey where both species are often spawning in the same areas, and there is an overlap in fish size. In 2015 we made a determined effort to identify the type of each redd. Some of the 2015 counts are shown in the table below. The average counts from the various stretches between 1993 and 2014 are shown in the first column, with the 2015 counts split between salmon and sea trout.

River	Average 1993 to 2014	Salmon 2015	Sea trout 2015
Batten Burn: mouth to railway	24.2	35	36
Lorgy: Lethendrychule to bridge	17	17	9
Livet: Allanreid-Crombie Mouth	46	82	47
Livet: Footbridge-Allanreid	69	69	65
Burn of Loin: ford to tributary	96	67	21
Broad Burn: above fish pass	5	0	22
Fiddich: Bridgehaugh to Auchendoun	35	139	49
Fiddich: Craigellachie to upper railway bridge	36	66	2

The Burn of Loin (*small upper Avon tributary*) count in 2015 was pleasing, and it stands up well to the recent average. However, the Spey is blessed with a wealth of archive material, including hand written spawning books covering the period 1940 to 1965. In 1962, for example, the Loin count was 545 redds!

It is hard to imagine nowadays, although it has to be said that recent counts in some areas compare well with the historic counts. For example the full 1962 Livet count was 690, yet in the two short sections shown above (*27% of the entire Livet*) we counted a total of 263 redds in 2015.

Spey salmon spawning in 2015, note the small female on the right!



River Spey Catchment Management Plan Review



The River Spey Catchment Management Plan (CMP) was originally published in 2003 and set out a strategic framework for the wise and sustainable use of the water resource as well as for the protection and enhancement of water quality and natural heritage within the River Spey catchment. Since 2003 much has happened within the river environment

and it has now been deemed an appropriate time to take stock, review the progress that has been made to date and look to what needs to be achieved in the future.

The Spey Catchment Initiative is currently coordinating a multi-agency review of progress against the actions laid down in the original 2003 plan. A summary document, which will also highlight future priorities, will be published in the Spring and be available to download from the Spey Fishery Board website.

Following the review, Spey Catchment Initiative Project Officer, Liz Henderson, will lead on the development of a new Spey Catchment Management Plan. Following a Stakeholder Consultation in the summer, it is hoped to launch the 2016 Catchment Management Plan in September.

Tomintoul and Glenlivet

Landscape Partnership (TGLP)

During autumn 2015 a consultancy company undertook a feasibility study into restoration and resilience-building options for the water environment within the TGLP area, focusing specifically on the River Avon, downstream of Delnabo. Three barriers to fish passage were identified and outline designs for their easement have been developed. This could increase accessible watercourses for salmon in the upper Avon catchment by over 10km.

The results of the study are now being considered, such that some of the options will be put forward for funding by the Heritage lottery. If successful, improvement works could take place between 2017 and 2020.

Reconnecting disconnected channels

Following on from the dissertation work from one of our Master's students last summer, the Spey Catchment Initiative submitted an application to the Pearls in Peril project to fund habitat improvement works and to reintroduce a flow into 500m of blocked off backwater of the Spey, near Aviemore. A similar project by the Spey Foundation is planned for a side channel at Delagyle. These were successful and in late 2015 a contractor was selected to undertake the design and build work required to deliver the Aviemore project. Work has been delayed due to the impact of the recent winter storms, but it is hoped to recommence once water levels have dropped.



Dates for the Diary

Spey Fishery Board Meetings

To be held at 9:30 am at the Craigellachie Hotel, Victoria Street, Craigellachie, AB38 9SR on the following dates:

Friday 13th May and Friday 18th November 2016. August meeting date to be confirmed.

Members of the public are invited to attend as observers, but are requested to give notice to the Board's Administrator, Sally Gross, by telephone on 01340-810841, or by email at admin@speyfisheryboard.com

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