

Salmon Season Opening Day

The Spey Fishery Board were delighted to welcome Andrew Flitcroft, Editor of the renowned game fishing magazine "Trout & Salmon", as their Guest of Honour to officially open the 2020 Salmon Fishing Season for the River Spey on Tuesday 11th February.

As keen anglers and visitors gathered at the Alice Littler Park in Aberlour for the Opening Ceremony, a prayer and blessing were given by Rev. Geoffrey McKee. Andrew Flitcroft then gave a short address before accompanying last year's winner of the Anniversary Quaich, Stuart Martin, onto the footbridge and pouring a bottle of 12-year-old Aberlour Single Malt Scotch Whisky into the River Spey, accompanied by Piper Allan Sinclair. The gesture marks a toast to the elusive Spring Salmon and aims to bring luck to all those in pursuit of them.

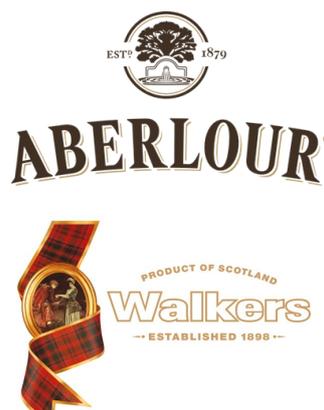
The first fresh fish of the 2020 season, one of 11lbs, was subsequently caught at Laggan by the Ghillie there, Mike Murdoch. Mike was awarded the 'Anniversary Quaich' as a result, together with a fine bottle of Aberlour 20-Year-Old Single Malt and a large hamper of Walkers Shortbread. He had been assisted by his partner, Nicola Kennell, who netted the fish and was subsequently awarded the prize for the "Ghillie in Attendance" – receiving a bottle of 16-year-old Aberlour single malt whisky and another fine hamper of Walkers Shortbread as a result.

The prize for the heaviest Salmon was subsequently awarded to visiting angler Ronnie McCuaig. It was his first ever salmon, caught on his first ever day's salmon fishing! He caught his fish at Otter Pool at Delfur and collected a fine bottle of Aberlour 20-Year-Old Single Malt Whisky and a large hamper of Walkers Shortbread as a reward for his success. The ghillie in attendance, Davie McIntosh, also received a bottle of Aberlour 16-Year-Old Single Malt Whisky and a Walkers Shortbread hamper.

The Spey Fishery Board are very grateful to Walkers Shortbread and the Aberlour Distillery for their continued generous support of this event and also to Aberlour Bespoke Catering, for the welcome provision of hot drinks and pastries at the ceremony.



Winner of the Anniversary Quaich 2020, Mike Murdoch, with his 11lb salmon at Laggan, Carron



Winner of the Anniversary Quaich 2020, Mike Murdoch, with ghillie and partner, Nicola Kennell

BRIEFING

Salmon Summit at the Scottish Parliament, Holyrood

Fisheries Management Scotland (FMS) hosted a round table event and evening reception in the Scottish Parliament on Tuesday 7th January 2020, to raise awareness of the plight of the Atlantic salmon. The event was chaired by Michelle Ballantyne MSP, as the Scottish Parliament's Species Champion for Atlantic salmon. Entitled "Making Salmon Conservation a National Priority", the event was opened by Cabinet Secretary Roseanna Cunningham MSP and attended by 90 people, including about a dozen Members of the Scottish Parliament at any one time.

The main round table discussion was split into two sessions, with the first outlining the plight of the Atlantic Salmon. Presentations were given by FMS, the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) and the Atlantic Salmon Trust. The second session focused on some of the pressures facing salmon, including aquaculture, water quality and quantity and a presentation from SFB Director Roger Knight on predation control.

A summary of the issues and possible solutions was then

provided by Dr John Armstrong, Director of the Marine Scotland Science Laboratory at Pitlochry.

Apart from representatives of the Spey Board, and at the Cabinet Secretary's request, we also took two ghillies with us (Simon Crozier from Seafield Estates and David Buley from Gordon Castle), both of whom spoke passionately and eloquently about the state of salmon and the concerns they had for their own futures.

The crisis in wild salmon stocks was subsequently debated in the Main Chamber of the Scottish Parliament on 16th January 2020, during First Minister's Questions. In response to Peter Chapman MSP's question, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon re-confirmed Roseanna Cunningham's announcement of £750,000 of funding for a project to investigate the migration of wild salmon on the West Coast of Scotland, which would build on the Moray Firth Tracking Project, in which the River Spey is participating. She also re-confirmed the Government's commitment to the development of a Wild Salmon Strategy.



Above: The round table Salmon Summit held in a main Committee Room at the Scottish Parliament on the 7th January

Michelle Ballantyne later questioned the Scottish Government's position on the issuing of licences for the shooting to scare, and shooting of, piscivorous birds. She highlighted the lack of resources available to many District Salmon Boards and called for the development of limited licences that were less resource-intensive to obtain. The Minister, Mairi Gougeon, replied that although SNH had undertaken a review and decided not to include sawbill ducks in General Licences,

the issue was one she would be happy to consider further.

The evening reception was also well attended and it was interesting to note that a number of the MSPs went to speak privately to our two ghillies during this reception. Overall, this was a highly successful event, which has helped raise awareness of the plight of Atlantic salmon amongst Members of the Scottish Parliament.

BRIEFING

The Missing Salmon Project

The numbers of salmon returning to our rivers has declined dramatically in recent years. Now, less than 5 out of every 100 smolts leaving our rivers return as adult fish. Following significant planning and fund-raising over the last two years, 2019 saw the implementation of the Atlantic Salmon Trust's (AST) Missing Salmon Project. The aim of the project was to identify where our salmon smolts are being lost as they migrate down-river and out to sea through the Moray Firth. Once the areas of loss have been identified, the project aims to examine those areas in more detail, to try to establish the cause of the losses and populate the Likely Suspects Framework, so as to inform decisions on potential solutions.

For more information on the above, see: <https://atlanticsalmontrust.org/morayfirthtrackingproject/>.



Above: Rotary Screw Traps at Ballindalloch Castle



Above: Receiver used to track salmon in the Spey

The Moray Firth Tracking Project saw the deployment of some 340 acoustic receivers and, working with 7 District Salmon Fishery Boards (DSFBs), including the SFB, a total of 850 salmon smolts were tagged.

The smolts were trapped in Rotary Screw Traps operated by SFB staff and then had an acoustic “tag” surgically-implanted into them by a team from the AST, before being released back into the river to continue their migration. These tags emit a unique code that was detected as the smolts swam past a network of 12 receivers along the River Spey and many more deployed in arrays out in the Moray Firth.

The SFB's Research Team, led by Senior Biologist Brian Shaw, operated Rotary Screw Traps at Ballindalloch Castle to enable this and the Board is particularly grateful to the estate for their support and help in facilitating it. In total, 149 salmon smolts and 21 sea trout smolts were tagged in the Spey. The SFB's Research Team recovered the receivers from the River Spey in July, whilst those sited in the Moray Firth were recovered by the AST. This resulted in circa 14.7 million data detections being downloaded from all of the riverine and Moray Firth receivers, all of which have then had to be analysed by a team of scientists at Glasgow University.

The results show that 59.1% of the tagged Spey salmon smolts reached the sea, with 46.1% detected at the outer Moray Firth marine array. For those that went missing in the river, the loss rate was steady over the 50 Km to the sea, with no obvious bottlenecks. On average, the time taken for a tagged smolt to travel from Ballindalloch to the sea was 8.1 days. Once in the sea, the rate of movement increased with those detected passing the partial array at Fraserburgh in only 1.8 days. The full results will be published soon and the project will be repeated in 2020 and, we hope, in 2021. We will report more on this in due course.

BRIEFING

Salmon in the classroom

2020 sees another three primary schools participating in the “Salmon in the Classroom” programme: Rothies; Aberlour; and Dufftown. We often receive more requests for this programme than we are able to service and we are particularly grateful to John Trodden, now Chairman of the River Spey Anglers Association, for his assistance in delivering it. John is a retired Head Teacher and his vast educational experience is greatly appreciated by all.

Salmon eggs from our Hatchery at Sandbank in Glenlivet are reared in incubators in the classroom. Once they have hatched, and having been looked-after by the children, they are then stocked into the burns close to where their parent fish had been captured. The children are also taught about the life cycle of the salmon and its importance to the local area.

The Spey Fishery Board and the Spey Foundation are most grateful to Walkers Shortbread for their continued and generous support of the Board’s and Foundation’s educational projects.



Left & Right: John Trodden teaches school children about salmon eggs hatching.



Below right: John Trodden teaching Salmon in the Classroom.



Dates for the Diary

Spey Fishery Board Meeting

To be held on Friday 22nd May 2020 at 9:30 am at the Craigellachie Hotel, Victoria Street, Craigellachie, AB38 9SR .

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

SPEY FISHERY BOARD RESEARCH OFFICE

1 NETHER BORLUM COTTAGE, KNOCKANDO, MORAYSHIRE, AB38 7SD

TEL: 01340 810841 E-MAIL: admin@speyfisheryboard.com

www.facebook.com/SpeyFishery/ [Twitter@SpeyFishery](https://twitter.com/SpeyFishery)