

## RIVER RESTORATION PROJECT

With significant funding provided by the Speyburn Distillery, topped-up with funds from Scottish Natural Heritage, the Spey Fishery Board are pleased to report exciting progress with a river restoration project being delivered by the Spey Catchment Initiative. This project has been implemented as part of Speyburn Distillery's programme of "Opening up Spey Burns to Wildlife."

Having successfully reconnected a backwater channel on the Spey at Aviemore a couple of years ago, it is now time to tackle another artificially dis-connected channel further down the catchment at Delagyle, just upstream of Aberlour.

After historic alterations to the river bank around 50 years ago, this channel was cut off from the main river and now only becomes watered when the river is in spate and over-tops the bank. So under normal conditions it becomes overgrown and much smaller and shallower than it would have been originally. By re-connecting the channel at the upstream end, the flow through the channel will be restored providing valuable habitat for Salmon and Trout, along with the rare and threatened Freshwater Pearl Mussel.

Over 200m of new habitats will be created and it will be particularly useful as a refuge for juvenile fish when the water is running high in the main river. This will also provide shelter for any pearl mussels washed into the backwater during floods. The project is also another significant step forward in restoring the natural function of the river system and the movement of sediment within it, all good news for increasing the variety and quality of habitats for fish and other wildlife.

Local contractors Rattrays moved in with the diggers on 16th April and despite the challenges of high flows from snow-melt, works progressed well although final rewatering will not occur until later this summer. Disruption to the surrounding environment, fishermen and other river users have been kept to a minimum, and with the start of the growing season upon us the area is set to green over rapidly, returning this attractive reach of the river to it's natural appearance.

A close eye will be kept on the site to monitor recolonization of the channel and it's use by fish and pearl mussels in the future.

We are particularly grateful to Speyburn Distillery and Scottish National Heritage for their generous funding to make this project possible.



*Local contractors Rattrays*



*Works in progress at Delagyle (above & below)*



## SMOLT TRAPS 2018

By mid May the smolt trapping season is normally coming to an end but the smolt run this year has been a late one. In 2018 the Spey Fishery Board operated three traps, in the Tommore Burn, River Dulnain and upper River Fiddich.

2018 was the fourth year of operation for the Tommore Burn trap. This is a “Wolf trap”, a fixed trap named after its inventor Philip Wolf, who developed this style of trap for monitoring stocked burns in Sweden. This type of trap uses dewatering screens to separate the water from the fish, and anything else which is unable to pass through the 8mm screens. When working effectively a Wolf trap captures the entire smolt run. Operating conditions in 2018 were good and the fin-clipped smolt count was the highest achieved since the start of the Tommore Burn project. The smolt run in small burns such as the Tommore tends to occur early with the fish taking advantage of any increases in water level. As of the 15<sup>th</sup> May the total catch in the Tommore Burn was 531 fin-clipped smolts with 138 trout smolts.

In the Dulnain the run was still strong in mid May with over two thirds of the total catch of occurring in May. This was the second year of operation in the Dulnain. The number of fish trapped in the Dulnain is similar to 2017 although the median date (the date when 50% of the smolts were captured) is 8 days later this year, at least, compared to last. This is nothing new. When the smolts traps were deployed in the River Tromie the median date varied by 21 days over the period 2009 to 2013. The rotary screw trap deployed in the Dulnain only captures a proportion of the run. Capture efficiency is assessed throughout the run using mark and recapture techniques. The total run estimate will be calculated once the trap has been removed. As of the 15<sup>th</sup> May, 3237 salmon smolts had been captured. An interim assessment suggests that the Dulnain trap catches 1 in 7 of the run. In the Fiddich the smolt run has also been relatively late, but the catch to date is on par with previous years.



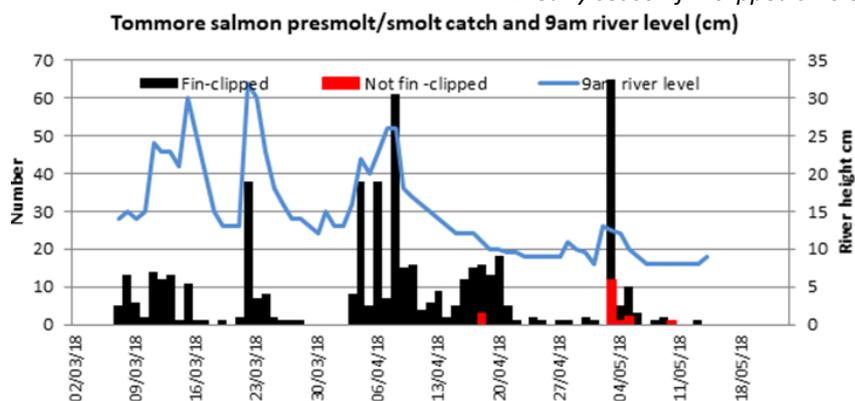
Tommore Smolt Trap



Large salmon smolt from the River Fiddich in May



An early season fin-clipped smolt from the Tommore



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## SISI PROJECT UPDATE

James Symonds is part of the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI), a four-year partnership project in Northern Scotland led by Scottish Natural Heritage and involving many fishery boards and trusts and the University of Aberdeen. SISI is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Scottish Natural Heritage.

Since James' commencement in the post of SISI Project Officer, he has initially been focussing on American Mink Control. James deployed the few remaining rafts and traps from the Scottish Mink Initiative to areas that were known hotspots in the past. Reassuringly, no Mink have been detected so far on the Fiddich, Livet or Avon. There have been, however, reports of a Mink sighted in Aviemore and another despatched on Rothiemurchus estate, which is concerning that they seem to be present so far upstream. Once further rafts are delivered, these will be deployed in the area to ascertain whether there is a breeding population present, or whether these animals were transient males on the hunt for a breeding female. With any females now hunkered down with young, it is likely to be relatively quiet until July/August, when efforts will need to be refocused on these canny invasives.



Above: Mink raft / Below: American Mink prints



Contractors have been appointed and have begun their march down river, treating the Giant hogweed from its source on the Mulben Burn, down to the lower reaches of the Fochabers Association Water. Working alongside the Spey Fishery Board and Ghillies, a big dent will be made in the Giant Hogweed infestation that blights that lower river.



Giant Hogweed & Balsam

James is now turning his attention to appointing contractors to treat the White Butterbur, known locally as the Spey Hyacinth, and Japanese Knotweed. These rhizomatous plants have large interconnected root systems and whilst there has not been a lot of research into effective control of White Butterbur, Japanese knotweed must be treated with a systemic herbicide for successful control. For now the advice on White Butterbur is the same as for knotweed. Should you come across these plants, please do not cut or trim when in leaf as it may assist in its further distribution through the river. James will be trialling various methods to ascertain the most effective control and will report back with results.

### Volunteers Needed

SISI will be looking to recruit and train volunteers with an interest in the practical conservation of riparian habitats. If you would like to get involved in invasive plant controls, monitoring a mink raft, or even report a sighting of an invasive non native species, please get in touch with James ([j.symonds@speyfisheryboard.com](mailto:j.symonds@speyfisheryboard.com)).



# BRIEFING

## May 2018

### EXHIBITION AT SPEYSIDE VISITOR CENTRE

The Spey Fishery Board have once again set up an informative display at the Speyside Visitor Centre which is located at Broomfield Square, Aberlour, AB38 9QP. They are now open for the season, between the hours of 10.00am - 5.00pm every day, closing on 30th September.

A great deal of positive work is being undertaken by the Spey Catchment Initiative throughout this year. Information detailing the work they carry out and their involvement in improving the habitat for Salmon, Sea Trout and Freshwater Pearl Mussels can be found at the visitor centre.

Posters on the Spey Catchment, as the Spey Conservation Policy and identifying Salmon and Sea Trout are amongst the information on display. Copies of the 2017 Annual report along with the latest briefing are also available to take away to read at your leisure.

We will soon be adding to our display with information on the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative project (SISI), the role within the Spey Fishery Board and their upcoming projects.



### 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 18th May and Friday 23rd November 2018.

To be held at 9.30 am at the Grant Arms Hotel, The Square, Granttown On Spey, PH26 3HF on the following dates:

Friday 17th August 2018

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](mailto:admin@speyfisheryboard.com)

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