

September 2019

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## Spey River Catch Returns Report

### Salmon & Grilse

The River Spey's Salmon & Grilse catch from February to June 2019 amounted to 2,011 fish, which is almost double the 1,080 that were caught for the same period last year. It is still below the five- and ten-year averages of 2,478 and 2,511 respectively, but angler effort was noticeably lower in some areas this year and this almost certainly impacted upon the catch. Furthermore, the Catch & Release rate has remained at 98%, which is a resounding success for the Board's Conservation Policy and we are grateful to all of our ghillies and anglers for their continued support.

### Sea Trout

The Sea Trout catch for the early part of the season has amounted to 640, slightly below the 673 caught for the same period last year and 24% below the 5-year and 10-year averages of 843 and 840 respectively. Here too, though, anglers have continued to support the Board's Conservation Policy for Sea Trout, returning 87% of the fish caught, which is up another 6% on the release rate for this period last year. Thank you again for your continued support.



*Stevie Grant with a recaptured tagged fish. This fish was originally tagged at Easter Elchies on 27 May before Stevie caught it four days later in Aberlour.*

### Adult salmon tagging project 2019 Interim report to end of July

From when the first fish was tagged in early March to the end of July 2019, at least 606 adult salmon have been tagged. This is a much higher number than tagged in any individual year during the earlier recapture study (2000 to 2002) when 859 fish were tagged over three years.

By the end of July 16 recaptured tagged fish were reported, 2.64% of the total tagged. This is lower than for the same period in the earlier study. The length of time between original tagging and recapture varied from 4 to 58 days, and the distance travelled from -6 to 39km. The results suggest that once in the river the fish do not move particularly quickly. The average length of time between tagging and recapture has been 28 days and the average distance travelled between captures has been 8km. Several fish were recaptured downstream of the original tagging location, sometimes within the same beat. To date no fish has been recaptured more than once.

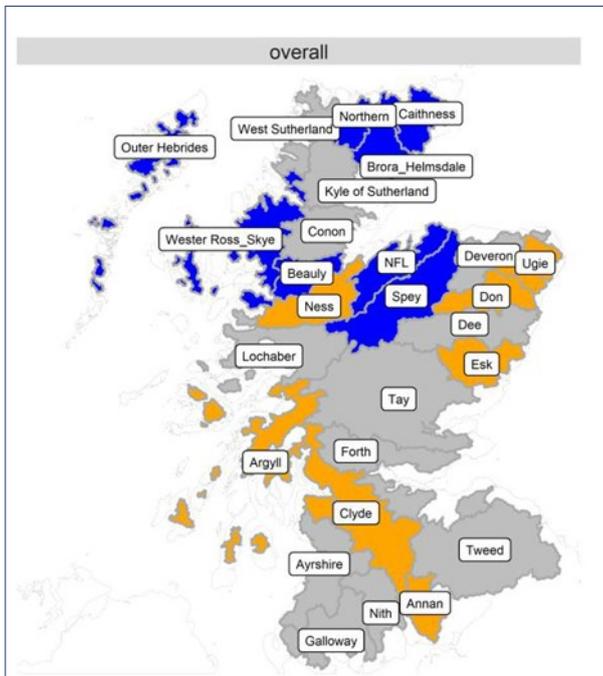
Initially all the tags were white but from late June onwards new tags, in a range of colours were issued; yellow for the lower river beats, green for the middle and pink for the upper beats. All anglers are asked to keep an eye out for tags and to report any recaptures to the ghillie or the Spey Fishery Board.

# BRIEFING

## National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS)

In 2018 the fishery boards and trusts around the country worked with Marine Scotland Science to deliver the first Scotland-wide National Electrofishing Programme (NEPS). The good news is that for 2018 the Spey was categorised as a Category One river for juvenile salmon, for both fry and parr. There were eight Category One areas in Scotland and the Spey was one of only two Category One areas south of the Great Glen.

The approach taken to this survey was different in that all the sites were selected at random, although only targeting smaller burns and rivers, so-called Order 2 to 4 streams. To put this into context, the River Fiddich downstream of Dufftown is an Order 5 stream (and therefore excluded), but the upper Fiddich and the Dullan Water, upstream of the confluence, are Order 4 and part of the survey area. Clearly, the majority of the salmon producing areas of the catchment i.e. the larger tributaries and the mainstem, are excluded from the survey but this is an attempt to characterise the salmon population around the country in a consistent manner.



Large and small salmon parr from the upper River Dulnain, Aug 2019.

Overall (fry and parr combined) NEPS classification for 2018. Blue signifies Category 1, grey Category 2 and orange Category 3.



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# BRIEFING

## The Missing Salmon Project

The Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST) launched an ambitious tracking project this spring to try to provide answers about why the numbers of salmon returning to our rivers have declined so much. The “Missing Salmon Project” is centred on the Moray Firth with seven participating rivers, including the Spey. The Moray Firth is one of the major salmon producing areas of the country and is a fitting location for this significant project.

During the smolt run this spring, 850 large salmon smolts (130mm+) from the seven Moray Firth rivers were fitted with acoustic tags, 150 of these in the Spey, at Ballindalloch. In addition, 50 sea trout smolts were also tagged, 20 of those in the Spey. In order to monitor the progress of the tagged smolts downstream, listening devices were positioned in the river at regular intervals, all the way to the sea. Arrays of listening devices were placed across the inner Moray Firth to try to determine migration routes and survival as the smolts headed to sea. The acoustic tags emit a unique coded “ping” every thirty seconds or so. The listening devices record the passage of each tagged smolt as they come within range. Once all the data has been retrieved, from the hundreds of listening devices deployed, we will be a lot better informed about the smolt migration, both down river, and into the Moray Firth.

The Missing Salmon Project is scheduled to run over three years. The results from the 850 smolts tagged this year should provide some indication for research priorities in years two and three.

We would like to congratulate the AST team for coordinating, and delivering, this ambitious project. The project generated a huge amount of media interest and the Board team were kept extremely busy over the period. The Spey Fishery Board would also like to thank the many individuals, proprietors and organisations for the generous financial and other support provided, which enabled our participation in this exciting project.



*The AST smolt tagging team at Ballindalloch during a visit from the AST Presidents Club.*

*Filming on the smolts traps at Ballindalloch Castle for BBC Springwatch.*



# BRIEFING

## Spey Catchment Initiative Update - Penny Lawson



*First phase planted in April 2018 showing good recovery of vegetation and the beginnings of natural tree regeneration*

The Spey Catchment Initiative project to restore and enhance the west bank of the Spey between Boat of Garten and Aviemore has been progressing well and is now nearing completion.

The banks were badly eroded by livestock in places, with areas of bare ground creating a risk of sediment polluting the river, and the sparse remaining trees and vegetation were in poor condition due to grazing pressure. The rapid recovery which can happen once livestock are fenced out is now clearly visible, with a healthy layer of vegetation established in the area which was tackled last spring, and some encouraging signs of trees regenerating to add to the planted trees which are coming-up nicely. The contrast with the final phase, which was grazed until recently, is clear to see.

In total the riparian strip of low density, naturally distributed woodland will extend to about 7.5 km long, linking with existing woodland at each end.



*Second phase planted in spring 2019 showing bare ground revegetating well*

Around 2650 native broadleaf trees will have been planted. As well as protecting water quality, as the trees mature they will provide shading to help mitigate the increasing risk of high water temperatures, stabilise banks with their roots to prevent excessive erosion in flood conditions and create cover for fish, increase nutrient input and insect food sources for fish, and of course form a continuous habitat corridor for other wildlife.

The beats along this stretch should become even more attractive for fishing, with dappled shade and landscape enhancement, while easy access and plenty of more open areas will remain. The project has been made possible through support from Reidhaven Estate, Cairngorms National Park Authority and the Woodland Trust.

SCI is currently assessing riparian zones in other parts of the catchment where fencing out livestock, tree planting and/or natural regeneration of trees and shrubs could make a real difference, improving conditions both in and beside the river and helping to future-proof the catchment against the threats posed by climate change.

### Dates for the Diary

#### Spey Fishery Board Meeting

To be held on Friday 22nd November 2019 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](mailto:admin@speyfisheryboard.com)

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