

DDSF B Bailiffs Report 2014/15

The season started with a small run of early spring fish, these were followed in early summer by a similarly small number of grilse that never really came to much. The long warm dry summer that followed stopped a good run of fish from entering the river system with the low flows and high temperatures resulting in a very poor fishing season (there were only 200 fish for the whole of May/June/July). The few grilse that did appear were reported to travel quickly through the lower river, some of these fish were later observed showing off the mouth of the Shirmers burn in mid-late August. The continued warm weather and lack of rain into early autumn meant that the majority of the autumn run did not appear until the season had almost finished. When the rain finally came we saw a large strong short run of fish enter the system over a couple of weeks (266 for October). This late run did in fact make up the fish total number to a similar level as last year, around 550 fish in total.

The Dee was not alone in this pattern, the majority of rivers saw a worryingly poor season overall. Again the average sizes of fish were larger than in recent years and there was an absence of the very small poor conditioned grilse that have been turning up in many systems in recent years, perhaps a result of not so many fish making enough growth to return in the first year and therefore waiting a further season before achieving suitable condition to spawn.

A total of 18 patrols of the river were made throughout the season in conjunction with inspections of the Fish ladder at Tongland and the stretch to the Linn Pool. Coastal netting activities were monitored regularly.

Several poaching incidents were reported and responded to this year but the anglers were coarse fishing and fishing in intertidal waters (for Flatfish and Bass). These reports come from a heightened awareness and co-operation with Tongland community members and affiliates who are happy to report any suspicious activity to the bailiff.

It was also reported that two people were fishing with heavy tackle in the Linn pool but had gone by the time the bailiff had arrived.

The Head Bailiff requests that riparian owners and anglers be vigilant and report any suspicious activity immediately. There has been a rise in the number of reports and cases of commercial poaching for many fish species throughout the country as new markets for fish species previously not targeted open up.

Responses were also made to reports of pollution on the Lower Dee between Tongland Dam and Tongland power station. Heavily coloured water was reported but not observed by myself or the SEPA officer on investigation. It was noted that there is at times heavy silt discharges from the Quarry during rainstorms and that this should be kept an eye on in case of impacts to this sensitive stretch of water. Other persons commented that the river had been occasionally running a different colour than normal but no source or confirmation could be made.

It was again observed during broodstock capture that high numbers of fish are spawning in the Loop pool at Bridge of Dee and in the stretch directly downstream. Fish numbers were so high in this area that ova were again being dug out from their redds by fish trying to cut new redds on top of the existing redds and that both Brown Trout (and possibly other fish species) as well as diving birds and a bevy of swans were taking advantage of this overcutting.

It was noted that large areas of spawning substrate had shifted from last year and that in low water conditions numbers of redds were exposed to the air (see Fig 1.). In reality the Ova were still probably 'underwater' beneath the gravel but a hard freeze might well put paid to them in these low water conditions.

It was also noted that the area around the Loop pool is seeing increased instream weed growth even late in the season (Nov/Dec), it is unclear whether this is due to increased nitrification or changes in silt deposition but the outcome is a loss of clean gravel and a compounding of the siltation problem as the plant life captures and locks in more sediment.

While it is encouraging to see such good spawning in this area it may be wise to consider-

- a. We are losing eggs through overcutting that are very much needed elsewhere to maintain fish numbers and population diversity.
- b. We are at risk from having 'all our eggs in one basket' in regards to i) potential wash-out of these redds during floods. ii) Potential damage from the multiple sewage outlets at this location and the inherent risks from chemicals that mimic oestrogens damaging the developing embryos. iii) The ongoing spread of signal Crayfish which are now confirmed to be breeding downstream of the Glenlocharr Barrage and likely to be present in significant numbers at the Bridge of Dee within the next 5 years or so.
- c. The danger of breeding a population of salmon that only spawn in and run to the lower reaches of the system. This increases the risk to the salmon in the event of pollution incidents and from habitat damage; it also leads to a situation where no one upstream from this location has any fishing.
- d. Historically, data on juvenile populations in this area showed that there was at times an overabundance of fish but of late things have not looked quite that good, so that despite the fact that there should be maximum recruitment in this area for some reason the numbers surviving do not reflect this intense level of spawning (consider that in the floods of 2012/13/14 much of the gravel beds at the tail end of the Loop pool were washed away and redistributed, precisely the area being used this year).
- e. In the long term rising river water temperatures may become detrimental to salmonid egg development and that lowland stretches are far more likely to suffer from extreme events ie. a heatwave in March. Having a healthy upland population of fish may negate the predicted rises in temperature.



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Fig.1 Redds exposed at the Loop pool.

