

YTHAN DISTRICT FISHERY BOARD

Annual Report of the Clerk for 2020 Fishing Season

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1. State of the River

For yet another year low water levels through much of the season kept anglers away from all but the lower beats until fairly late in the season when heavy rainfall returned river levels to more normal condition. Ranunculus remains a problem particularly from the Ebrie downstream.

2. Predators

Although we were once again granted a licence to shoot seals upstream of Logie Buchan bridge this has proved difficult to make proper use of because seals travel at night and appear within Ellon town water where such lethal control cannot be used. Consequently when the Ugie District Salmon Fishery Board offered to lease their seal scarer boat we jumped at the chance. This boar was launched and deployed at Boatie Tom’s just upstream of the by-pass bridge. Seals turned around and went back downstream when the acoustic seal scarer was turned on and for the salmon season no seals passed in to the town waters. We have booked the boat for the 2021 season (subject to Board approval). This is probably just in time as the regulations around control of seals has changed and, at present, there is no application system for a licence to use lethal control.

No Mink have been caught this season but vigilance continues.

Cormorants, Merganzers and Goosanders have been surveyed and counted by the Bailiffing team from Gight to Newburgh. Due to Covid regulations applicable from March 2020 (and likely to apply until early summer of 2021) most of the surveys had to be undertaken on foot. A summary of the count over 3 years appear below. This, we consider, is sufficient to apply for a licence to control their numbers and is currently being applied for to Nature Scot (which has replaced SNH).

	Goosander			Cormorant		
	2020	2019	2018	2020	2019	2018
March*	17*	15	19	1*	0	2
April*	11*	11	11	7*	7	7
May	5	7	3	0	2	2
September	66	7	58	8	6	4
October	31	11	44	8	4	36
November	39	18	33	5	12	6

Table 2. Ythan DSFB Piscivorous Bird Count Data 20018 – 2020

*Denotes average value due to Covid-19 lockdown (2018 – 2019).

3. Coastal Nets

The Scottish Government ban on net fishing remains in place and will not be removed.

This section of the report will not appear in future.

4. Nets in the River

No netting has taken place so far as we are aware.

5. 2020 Season

Although it seems unlikely from the overall statistics compiled by the Board this has been a much better season for anglers than any salmon season in the last 7 years and for sea trout for six years. 160 salmon and grilse were caught and returned and 1,670 sea trout and finnock of which 83% were returned. Unlikely due to the restrictions place on all of us from the Covid lockdown from late March which prevented nearly all fishing until June.

Catches of salmon were common to all beats but restricted to the later months (September and October) above Ellon. Sea trout were found in greater abundance in the Estuary and upstream. Finnock fishing throughout the river was exceptionally good – the overall catch being 1,001. The catch statistics table is shown below.

Catch Statistics 2020	Total R & L	Returned	% Returned	Total Incl. nets	% Returned
Salmon & Grilse	160	160	100	160	100
Sea trout & Finnock	1,670	1,450	83	1,670	83

Catch Statistics previous years

Year	Salmon & Grilse	Sea Trout	Ret. G&G	Ret. ST&F	% S&G Ret	% ST&F Ret	All S&G	All ST&F	% S&G Ret	% ST&F Ret
2019	67	795	67	666	100	84	67	815	100	84
2018	127	1185	127	980	100	83	127	1224	100	80
2017	129	1525	111	1263	86	83	129	1539	86	82
2016	58	1315	44	1060	76	80	58	1329	76	80
2015	130	1268	89	890	68	70	130	1288	68	69
2014	141	1821	85	1288	61	71	266	1865	32	69
2013	215	1228	124	882	57	72	488	1236	25	71
2012	419	2078	261	1560	62	75	603	2121	43	74
2011	337	2122	215	1606	64	76	523	2139	41	75
2010	537	2337	352	1604	66	69	744	2411	47	67

10yrs	2160	15674	1475	11799			3135	15967		
Av.	216	1567	148	1180	69	75	314	1597	47	74
5yrs	511	6088	438	4859	430	400	511	6195		
Av.	102	1218	88	972	86	80	102	1239	88	78

2010 - 2019

2015 - 2019

6. Spawning

The 2019 – 2020 Redd count of 1km long sections of water course undertaken by the bailiffs with the following results:

Bronie Burn	-	3 salmon redds, 1 trout red
Ebrie Burn	-	5 salmon, 3 sea trout redds (Ranunculus)
Keithfield	-	1 trout
Ythan, Methlick	-	1 trout
Little Water 1	-	3 salmon (Ranunculus)
Little Water 2	-	3 salmon
Ythan, Fyvie	-	6 salmon
Fordoun, Fyvie	-	2 salmon, 1 sea trout
Fordoun, Rothienorman	-	4 salmon
Ythan, Chapel of Seggat	-	3 salmon, 3 sea trout

These are slightly down on most counts from 2018 and may be a sign of a continued worrying trend of low stock numbers of breeding adult fish. A number of surveys were called off due to water conditions – both high and discoloured – which made surveying impossible to undertake but the overall pattern is a small decline.

The Bailiffs removed obstructions which could affect fish in the Fordoun Burn at the Rootie Linn and at Chapel of Seggat. They have also removed the dense Ranunculus growth from 3 sections of

the Ebrie Burn which fall within the redd survey area. The average size of the area cleared is 73m (each section is approximately 25m long). Two of the three sites cleared had been used by sea trout by the end of November, one with two redds and the second with one new redd and spawning taking place during the survey. This is very encouraging for the future and more clearing of gravel will be undertaken in 2021 when possible.

7. Electrofishing Survey

The Scottish Government Marine Science survey of 16 sites was cancelled for the year due to Coronavirus and the difficulties that that imposed on all aspects of the survey

However, we did not consider that the Covid restrictions should prevent at least part of the survey taking place and asked the Deveron Bogie and Isla Rivers Trust to carry out the usual annual survey of the 4 sites which have been surveyed since 2018 and should be surveyed under the Marine Science survey for another 8 years. The four sites contained both salmon fry and parr and trout fry and parr in all 4 locations and a summary of the data over the last 3 years is set out below. (Note the numbers present are graded from A (excellent) to F (absent)).

Passes	Year	Area M2	Salmon Fry	Salmon Parr	Trout Fry	Trout Parr	Location
3	2018	102.0	58 B	6 C	18 B	7 C	Locham Pot Methlick
3	2019	103.8	57 B	16 B	3 D	11 C	Locham Pot Methlick
3	2020	103.8	17 D	9 C	34 B	18 B	Locham Pot Methlick
1	2018	105.0	26 C	3 D	5 D	6 C	Slaties pot opposite Ardlogie
1	2019	105.0	4 E	1 E	5 D	2 D	Slaties pot opposite Ardlogie
1	2020	112	2 E	1 E	7 D	22 A	Slaties pot opposite Ardlogie
1	2018	106.0	0 F	0 F	36 B	15 B	Mains of Towie
1	2019	112.0	7 E	0 F	87 A	9 C	Mains of Towie
1	2020	114	1 E	1 E	14 C	10 C	Mains of Towie
3	2018	112.0	7 E	10 B	97 A	11 C	Fordoun Craig-an-Gobhair wood, Fyvie Est
3	2019	104.8	21 D	5 C	58 A	18 B	Fordoun Craig-an-Gobhair wood, Fyvie Est
3	2020	117.6	70 B	10 B	42 A	15 B	Fordoun Craig-an-Gobhair wood, Fyvie Est

8. Stocking

No stocking took place during the year.

FMS and Scottish Government Marine Science does not support introducing any stock fish from a hatchery save in exceptional circumstances. This remains an area of huge debate not only in the UK but also now in the USA and Canada particularly in regard to Pacific salmon species which have been heavily re-stocked for many years possibly at the expense of natural stocking.

9. Board staff / Bailiffing

The work of bailiffing the river has been conducted by a team from the River Don DSFB. All reports of illegal fishing have been followed up by the team and in some cases anglers warned off. As detailed above the bailiffs' time has been increasingly spent on non-policing activities including piscivorous bird surveys, redd counts, clearing obstructions and clearing ranunculus from spawning areas. These non-policing activities are likely to continue to occupy more of the bailiffs' time in the future as stock recovery is of paramount importance to the Board.

10. Sea Poaching

There have been no reports of poaching on the coast of the Ythan during the season.

11. Pollution / Obstructions

There have been a number of pollution incidents in the Broomies Burn during the year which have all been investigated by SEPA.

Once incident during the summer which caused the death of around 50 trout parr on the lowest section of the burn (as it passes through the houses at Waterton (was probably caused by grass clippings being deposited in the burn by householders when water levels were low and water temperature was high (grass clippings absorb oxygen in the water causing fish to suffocate). The householders were all warned by SEPA not to dispose of grass clippings close to a water course.

The autumnal floods of 2020 will have caused new obstructions to the river and its tributaries. Only a few of these will affect the upstream passage of fish but if you see an obstruction that you consider impassable please advise the Clerk and a survey will be carried out.

SEPA has confirmed that a project to remove the weir from the Bronie Burn at Scottisley will be undertaken during 2021 thanks to the work of Alec Patterson and the River Ythan Trust.

Scottish Water have intimated their intention to remove the obstruction on the Fordoun Burn at Bridge of Lewes in Fyvie. This will be a large project and SEPA have insisted on careful design of the replacement channel which has yet to be agreed.

12. River Ythan Trust

A huge amount of work has been undertaken by Alec Paterson on 'Mapping pressures on wild Atlantic salmon'.

The Trust has again arranged for and supported the Ythan Biodiversity Volunteers to undertake the control of invasive species (plants) that remain in the catchment. Despite Covid regulations it has been possible for the annual spraying of Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed to take place within the river Ythan with assistance from the SISI project. SISI has also controlled Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam within the water of Cruden / Laeca and Slains burn.

A copy of Alec Paterson's Ythan Trust Report for 2020 is attached as an appendix to this report.

13. New Website

The Board and trust have combined to create a new website at www.riverythan.org with designers from Doric Design from Balmedie. This has taken some time to put together and we are very grateful to everyone that has contributed to it. If you have not seen it we recommend you do so as it covers a great deal more than just the fish in the river.

14. Conservation Policy

The Board has adopted a conservation policy since 2008. This has been updated annually and places restrictions on the numbers of fish that can be caught and kept. The river has remained in Category 3 which requires all salmon to be returned to the river. There will be an opportunity to discuss the number of sea trout that can be taken – if any.

15. Complaints Handling

The Board has adopted a Complaints Handling Procedure which is available from the Clerk.

16. Members' Interests

The Clerk will keep a register of financial interests of all members of the Board and any person associated with the Board.

17. Activities for 2021

The Ythan is vulnerable to diffuse pollution from the agricultural activities in the District and to accidental pollution from farms, industrial estates, development and housing. Previous incidents have been numerous and led to significant fish kills.

The Board will continue to monitor the river for pollution and to support SEPA with any subsequent action.

During 2020 SEPA ceased carrying out individual inspections of all farms in the catchment area from Ellon westwards (those to the East of Ellon have already been surveyed) because of Covid restrictions. The work in the catchment has still not yet been completed and further surveys will be undertaken when possible in 2021. Each farmer will be given a list of unacceptable practices or installations found on their farm and will be given an opportunity to discuss with SEPA a timetable for action. Those that fail to keep up with the agreed timetable may face further action from SEPA who now have enormous experience of farm inspections having already completed surveys of all of the other catchments in the North East.

The Board will ensure anglers abide by the Conservation Policy and will ensure compliance with the 100% catch and release policy on salmon that has been imposed on the river during 2021 season.

The Board will commission electro fishing surveys as requested by Marine Scotland of sites allocated by Marine Scotland over the Ythan and Ugie catchments.

The Board will support Aberdeen University and Nature Scot in monitoring and surveying seals within Forvie NNR. This includes work to establish the proportion of salmonids in the diet of seals. Scottish Government has been unwilling to provide financial support for this work.

The Board will continue to work with SEPA in all cases of pollution or CAR licensing failures.

The bailiffs will continue to monitor the river for poaching or angling without a permit, to carry out coastal patrols and to work with Police Scotland to protect the river against illegal activity.

The bailiffs will continue to carry out surveys to count the numbers of piscivorous birds and to assess the numbers of salmon and sea trout redds within the catchment by undertaking sample surveys and to undertake restoration projects to improve the quality and quantity of habitats for juvenile and breeding salmonids.

The Board will continue to collect catch data from anglers and proprietors.

17. Bob Dey

Our Chairman and long service Board member sadly died following a massive stroke on 3rd January, 2020. Bob was a Board member of the Ythan and River Don on behalf of the Aberdeen and District Angling Association, of which he was the President for 13 years. Bob was a keen salmon, sea trout and finnock fisherman and had huge knowledge of fish, fishing, rules, regulations and the enjoyment of angling. He is greatly missed.