

YTHAN DISTRICT FISHERY BOARD

Annual Report of the Clerk for 2019 Fishing Season

Clerk: M H T Andrew FRICS, FAAV
Estate Office
Mains of Haddo
TARVES
Ellon
Aberdeenshire

Telephone: 01651 – 851664
Mobile: 07799 334973
Fax: 01651 - 851838
clerk@ythan.co.uk

Board Members

R Dey (Chairman)
C Buchan
V Leeming

A Paterson
C Wolrige Gordon
J Pirie
E Ritchie
R Coutts
M Stewart

www.ythan.co.uk

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1. State of the River

Once again low water levels through much of the season kept anglers away from all but the lower beats until fairly late in the season when river levels returned to more 'normal'. There were still few anglers as all North East rivers were in the same state. Those who did venture out were often successful with more reasonable numbers of fish both seen and caught. Ranunculus is a problem from the Ebrie downstream and was very prominent around Kinharrachie.

2. Predators

We were granted a license to shoot seals above the Logie Buchan Bridge and although seals have occasionally swum up river, none have been shot this year. The Bailiffing team are recording seal sightings to the Marksman and have scared away seals from places where it would not be possible to shoot them. The seals have taken to swimming up river at night and remaining in the Ellon water where lethal control is not practical. No mink have been caught this season but vigilance continues.

Cormorants, merganzers and gooseanders are again being surveyed and counted by the Bailiffing team from Gight to Newburgh throughout the year. This information will greatly assist us in making a successful application to SNH to control numbers if these are having an adverse impact on the juvenile salmonid populations.

3. Costal Nets

Scottish Government has extended the three year ban now in its fourth year on netting in the sea and therefore no nets were operated at Port Errol during the season. It is likely that we will see this ban continue to ensure Scottish Government complies with international treaties on netting anadromous species.

4. Nets on the River

USAN did not operate a net and coble system during the season. Auchmacoy estate operated a net once and had the best bag seen for many years most of which (including a grilse) was put back.

5. 2019 Season

River catches of salmon have been better this season with most upstream fishings recording catches for both salmon and sea trout where angling took place. The Club waters did better than last year. Catches of sea trout in the estuary and in the lower waters were poor but this was influenced by there being fewer anglers . Reasonable finnock fishing was enjoyed at the beginning of the season by those who braved the very cold weather. All were returned.

6. Spawning

Despite the low water conditions through most of the year the spawning season appears to be reasonably good for both salmon and sea trout but this is continuing as this report is being written. The Bailiffs are carrying out surveys of 9 sites (of 1km length each) on the main stem and major tributaries including Fordoun, Ebrie Littlewater and Bronie. Indications are generally good that spawning is taking place in most if not all sites. We should have a better picture for the January meeting.

7. Electrofishing Survey

The Board undertook the arrangements to survey a further 16 random sites within the catchment at the request of Marine Scotland as part of a nationwide 10 year study of the salmon population which has been grant aided. We engaged the Deveron Bogie and Isla Rivers Trust to carry out the work for us as they have the experienced staff available for such work. They also carried out the surveys within the Ugie (with whom we are twinned for the purpose of this study) and the River Deveron (60 sites in all).

Trout were found in all 16 sites on the river and salmon at 11 of them which does once again demonstrate the water quality in the district is generally good.

8. Stocking

No stocking took place during the year.

9. Board Staff and Honorary Bailiffs

The work of bailiffing the river has been conducted by a team from The River Don District Salmon Fishery Board. All reports of illegal fishing have been followed up by the team and in some cases anglers warned off.

The bailiffs have also been carrying out redd surveys over recent weeks, bird counts (both on foot and in a canoe) throughout the year and follow up on reports of seals swimming upstream. They have also investigated reports of illegal or incorrect in watercourse works to SEPA.

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. The incidents have all arisen in the upper industrial estate at Balmacassie or the mid-east industrial estate (JRD etc.). The upper industrial estate settlement pond has been emptied and cleaned up. The clerk has been in regular contact with SEPA staff to advise of any changes in water conditions which have certainly improved over the year.

The obstruction at the new housing development at Pitmedden which had been discussed at length with SEPA, led to the developers carrying out works to alleviate the obstruction and ensure that fish can travel up this small burn which is a tributary of the Bronie burn. Unfortunately the quality of the work was not as good as it should have been and SEPA have insisted that the developer carries out further remedial work to improve the bed of the burn.

SEPA are proposing to carry out work within the Bronie burn at Scottisley, (Esslemont) to remove a former weir which is a partial obstruction to the upstream passage of fish during 2020.

The Scottish Water sewer which obstructs the Fordoun burn at Bridge of Lewes in Fyvie is to be removed by Scottish water. There are a number of technical matters to be agreed both with SEPA and Aberdeenshire Council regarding the re-forming of the burn but all parties agree that it is the best way forward for this long running problem. Judging by the success of the electro fishing surveys above Fyvie, fish have been able to ascend the river past this obstruction but this may only be possible during high water conditions.

12. River Ythan Trust

We wish to congratulate all those concerned for their work for the Ythan Trust, with special thanks to Alec Paterson for all the work he does in particular. The report from the Trust is attached as an annex to this report. The important work of removing invasive species (such as Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed) has been enormously successful but must continue to ensure full eradication.

13. 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.

14. Complaints Handling

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

15. Members' Interests

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

16. Activities for 2020

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 2019 SEPA have been carrying out individual inspections of all farms in the catchment from Ellon westwards (Those to the East of Ellon have already been surveyed). The work in the catchment has not yet been completed and further surveys will be undertaken in 2020. 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 most 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 2020 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 SNH 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.

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