

River Ythan Spawning Summary 2021/22



Compiled by Martin Webster

Don DSFB

Summary

The annual monitoring of ten 1km spawning sites across the Ythan catchment commenced on the first week of November. All sites were surveyed (water conditions permitting) on a weekly basis until spawning ceased. High coloured water hampered viewing over the first couple of weeks but once conditions improved a mix of salmon, sea trout and brown trout were observed, some already paired up on the gravel. These fish immediately took full advantage of the improved conditions and redds began to appear over the coming weeks in variable numbers on most sites. The peak of sea trout spawning activity occurred around the third week of November, whereupon completion fish moved quickly off the gravel and headed back down stream.

Over the last week of November a few clean salmon appeared in the main river and again began utilising suitable gravel areas prompting an increase in redds over a few sites. Due to the severe storms and subsequent poor weather conditions December began and remained a month of hampered visits which at times prevented full surveying over all sites, however on more settled days a few late salmon appeared and redds were witnessed in small numbers. As the year ended, spent dead salmon and sea trout kelts were found washed up on the riverbanks, some falling to natural causes other to otter predation. Surveys resumed in the new year bringing settled water levels and clarity for viewing, earlier redds were found flattened and covered however no new spawning activity was observed over all sites and no adult fish were seen. Encouragingly several silvery finnock were observed in the pools around the Fyvie area over the final week of surveys.

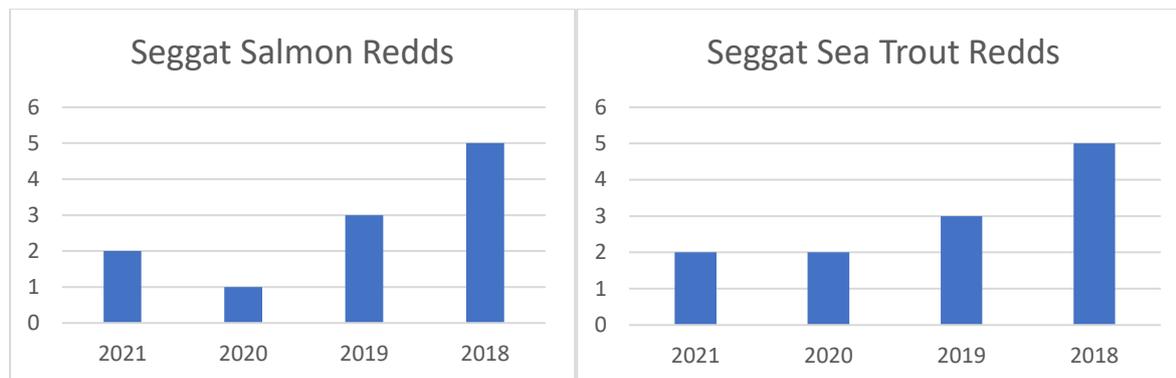
Variable findings have been collated over the weeks, a few sites have shown an increase most notably on the Ebrie site where salmon, sea trout and brown trout made good use of the cleared ranunculus and gravel washed sections carried out earlier in the year. Both Little Water sites improved for salmon redds and visible fish on the previous year. Fordoun Rothienorman, Fyvie and Bronie decreased slightly but the remaining sites were on a par with previous years.

Note that each chart has a different values on the X axis.

Monitoring concluded on 14th of January 2022.

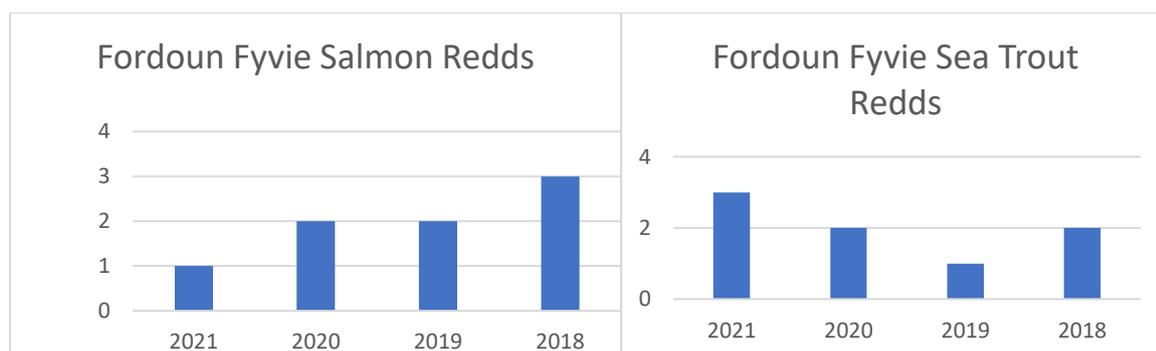
Chapel of Seggat

Sea trout began to appear on the gravel beds early November and fresh redds were found on 11/11/21, these paired fish moved off after spawning and no other sea trout redds were found over remaining visits. The first salmon redd was seen on 25/11/21, single salmon redds were then found on the following dates 03/12/21 and 17/12/21. No redds were found in January. This site holds plenty of suitable spawning gravel and could easily accommodate more redds. A few sections of bank erosion are appearing throughout the site.



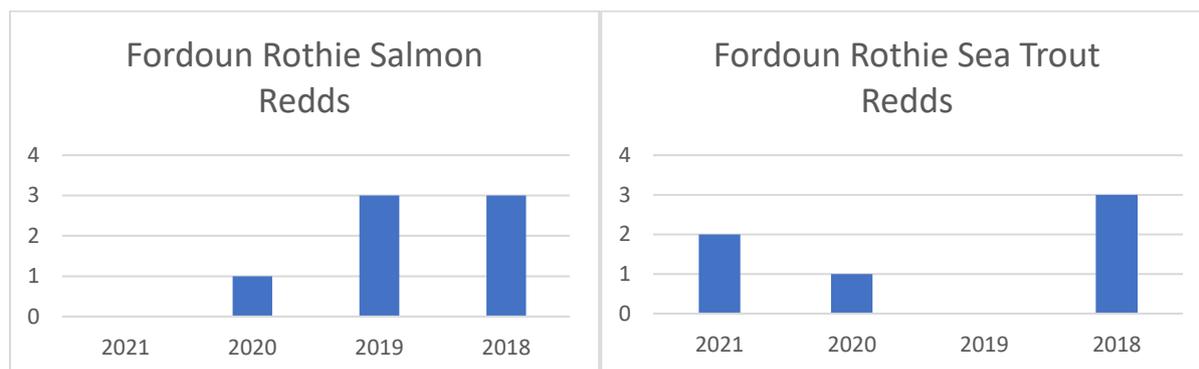
Fordoun Fyvie

Sea trout were first seen spawning on 11/11/21, fish around 3lbs were spotted in the burn with further fresh spawning activity appearing on 18/11/21. One large salmon redd appeared on 25/11/21 with a male fish seen guarding the redd. Poor instream conditions prevented a few following visits but another fresh cut salmon redd was found on 17/12/21. With limited gravel available redds were found on the same sections of gravel as in previous years. Only sea trout redds were found above Rootie Lin falls.



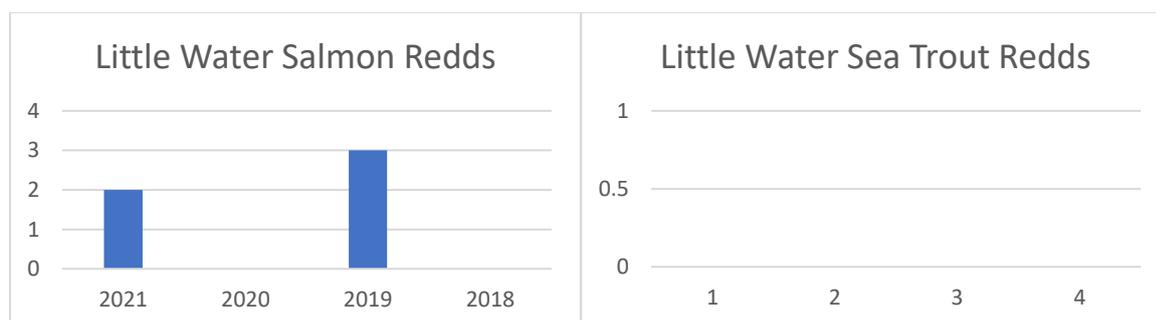
Fordoun Rothienorman

The first signs of redds were found on 18/11/21, trout were seen cutting on suitable gravel and fresh sea trout redds then appeared the following week on 25/11/21. After this initial activity no further trout redds were found. No salmon redds were seen over visits however grilse sized fish were spotted moving through upstream. Suitable sections of spawning gravel remained untouched, and this site could accommodate more redds. Storm Arwen flattened a large area at Cranna Wood with fallen mature trees found over the site thankfully the majority fell clear of the burn and have now been cleared. One blockage was found just down from Cranna Lodge and will require removal.



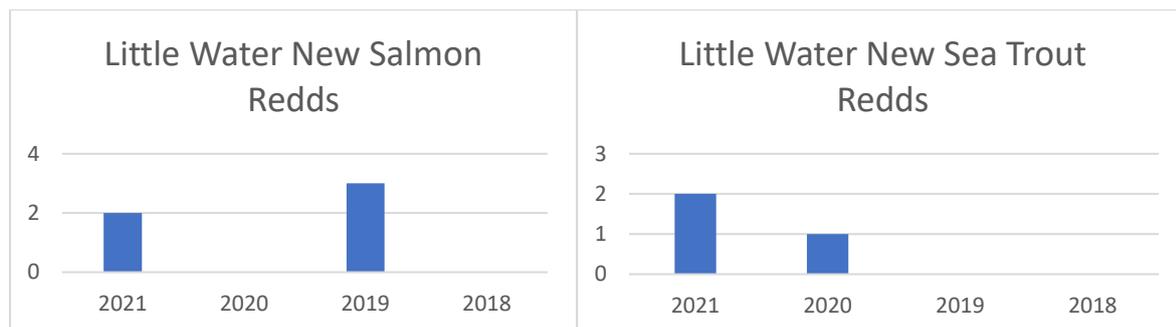
Little Water 1

Despite a large amount of ranunculus covering the bed of the burn salmon were seen instream on 11/11/21 and a fresh salmon redd was found close by. No further spawning activity occurred until 03/12/21 when another single salmon redd was seen. Poor water conditions throughout the remaining weeks of the year hindered walkovers but it was hoped the higher flows would have attracted more fish upstream, however once conditions improved no further redds or fish were seen in the new year. Another season without any sea trout redds appearing although an improvement on the previous year's salmon tally was noteworthy after a poor season in 2020 with zero redds recorded.



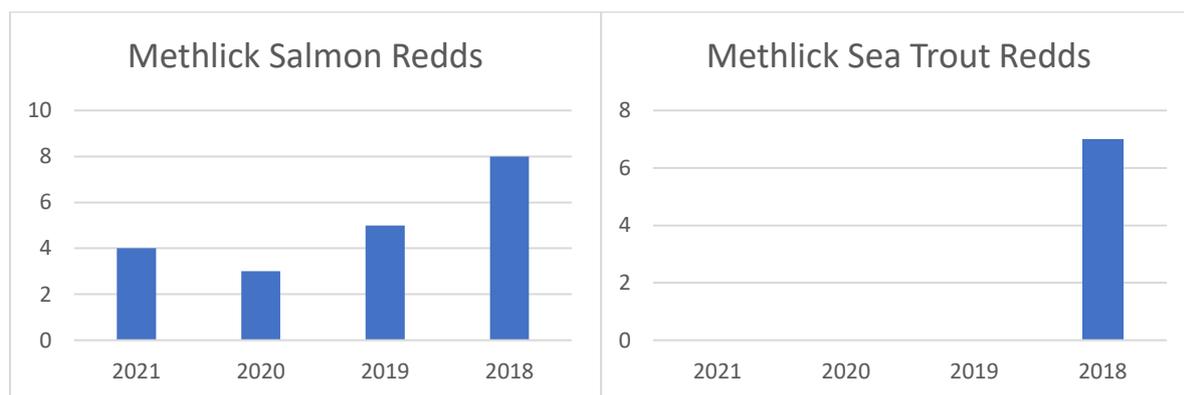
Little Water 2

As seen on site 1 thick ranunculus was observed on the bed and no redds were found over the first few weeks. Suitable water levels on 18/11/21 brought a burst of activity upon which salmon, sea trout and brown trout were seen in pairs cutting redds. Small areas of accessible gravel were utilised by spawning fish with redds found alongside one another. These fish had moved on by the following visit and no forthcoming fish or redds were seen over remaining weeks. This year's redds were an improvement on the previous year for all species and could possibly be improved further by removal of the heavily weeded sections. This would possibly entice more fish to stop off as they move upstream and prevent overcutting in one area.



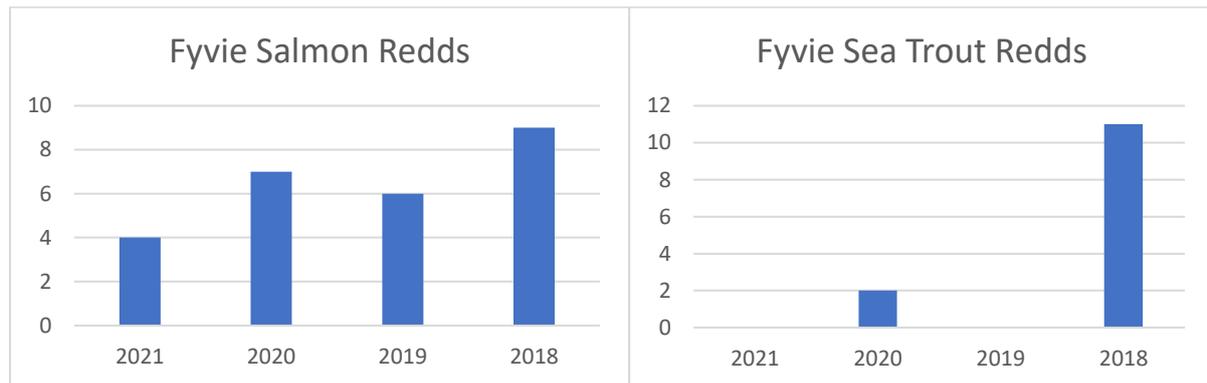
Methlick

The main river sites endured high coloured water over several visits during November and December. This made viewing the bed of the river impossible at times however conditions did improve on 18/11/21 to allow a full walkover of the site and revealed 4 fresh salmon redds around Polesburn Wood. The area of gravel washing work carried out failed to entice any spawning fish and went untouched over the weeks. Further visits during December and January found no new spawning activity had occurred. A slight increase seen on the past year, but a lack of visible fish was evident.



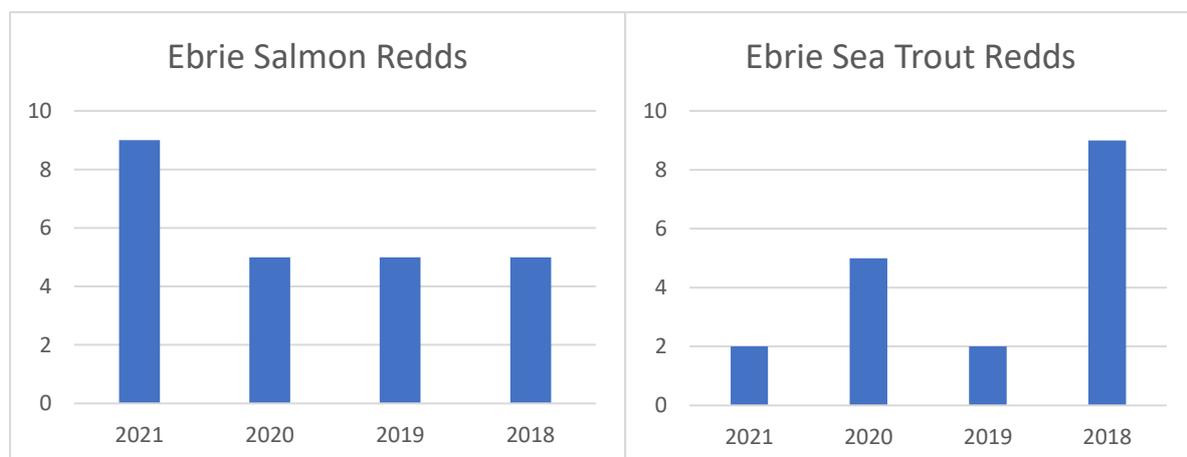
Fyvie

High water levels over the first few visits prevented surveys being carried out, an improvement in conditions on 18/11/21 revealed 2 fresh salmon redds and a further 2 salmon redds were seen on 25/11/21. Surveys were limited thereafter due to poor river conditions. As the year ended no further redds were seen over the section and this remained the same pattern into January. A drop in salmon redds this year and as with the Methlick site a lack of fish was noticeable in the pools compared with past years. Several areas of suitable gravel especially at the tail of pools went untouched. Given the presence of fish, this site can produce a lot more redds, as was apparent in 2018.



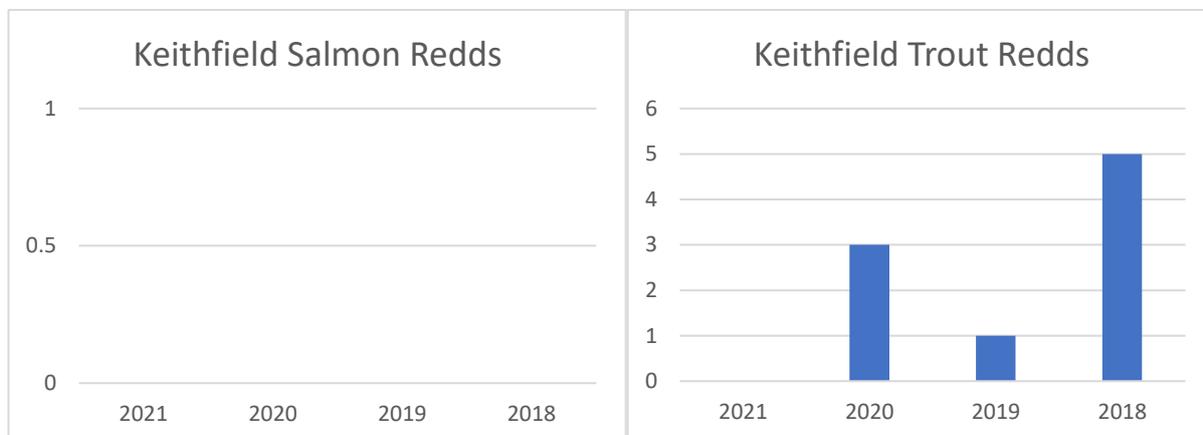
Ebrie

Despite less-than-ideal water conditions salmon and trout were found already paired up and cutting redds on 12/11/21. 4 salmon and 4 trout redds were found over the site and this number increased with a further 5 salmon redds and 6 trout redds on 18/11/21. This peak of activity quickly dropped off as fish fell back downstream off the gravel and a lack of others failed to arrive. Further visits over December and January were limited due to poor instream conditions and no other redds were found. The sections of burn which were cleared of weed and then gravel washed were fully utilised by both salmon and trout and has proved a big success in attracting fish to stop and use the clean gravel. Salmon and trout redds were seen across the site and revealed a marked increase on previous years.



Keithfield

This site failed to produce a single redd this year, disappointingly fish were also absent on visits and sections of suitable spawning gravel went untouched. Storm Arwen caused several disruptions to walkovers throughout Haddo Estate.



Bronie

Two fresh trout redds were found on the gravel on 12/11/21 however following visits over the months failed to produce any further redds or fish in stream. Plenty of water was available to entice fish over the weir but for the first time since 2018 no salmon redds were found above the weir. Sections of bank erosion were observed on a few areas and are being followed up. The mature trees on the lower section have been felled and removed now allowing light onto the burn. A few sections may benefit from gravel washing to attract fish to stop off and spawn.

