

River Ythan SLA Report March/April/May/June 2024

1. Introduction

The Don DFSB have been contracted to carry out fisheries protection, predator surveys, spawning surveys and habitat restoration activities across the river Ythan catchment throughout 2024/25 by the Ythan DSFB under a Service Level Agreement. Each activity is allocated a set number of man-days/patrols to accommodate the requirements of the annually agreed SLA. Activities are defined following consultation with the Ythan DSFB.

Any incidents relating to pollution and policing will be recorded and shared with the Clerk. Information from predator surveys will be collated and shared with the Clerk directly following the survey period. Information on spawning surveys will be collated and reported upon in a summary report following the end of the spawning period. Any seals reported above Logie Buchan Bridge will be reported to the Clerk as soon as possible.

All activities will be covered by the Don DSFB health and safety policies, as stated in the service level agreement.

2. Reporting

A log of all patrols and activities will be sent to the Clerk monthly.

SLA Activities/ Piscivorous Bird Count/March, April, May

Table 1. Spring Piscivorous Bird Surveys 2024.

Spring Piscivorous Bird Surveys 2024	Number of Goosanders	Number of Cormorants	Number of Mergansers
River Ythan Bird Count, Date 26 th of March.	22	6	0
River Ythan Bird Count, Date 29 th of April.	13	2	0
River Ythan Bird Count, Date 31 st of May.	11	3	0

Location of Birds

On the 26th of March, a total of 22 goosanders were identified along with 6 cormorants. This was higher than average for the Ythan and coincided with the Dee and the Don running at very high levels due to heavy rain on this date. It is possible birds have moved off adjacent catchments to search for rivers to feed that had not gone into flood.

Between Blairfowl and Methlick Bridge 3 goosanders were seen, Methlick bridge down to Methlick (Lovie) quarry, a further 2 Goosanders were identified. From Tangleford Bridge to Ythan Bank 1 goosander was recorded. From Ythan bank to the Meadows 2 goosanders were recorded. At Newburgh Estuary 6 goosanders and 8 cormorants were counted. On Sand Loch 4 goosanders were noted, Ardlethen pond accounted for 2 goosanders.

The bird count on the 29th of April saw a reduced number of birds of, where 13 Goosander were recorded in total. Locations are as follows, 4 goosanders between Blairfowl and Methlick Bridge, Methlick Bridge downstream to Methlick (Lovie) quarry 2 goosanders, Ythanbank down to Ellon 5 goosanders in a group just below the railway viaduct. At Newburgh Estuary 2 cormorants were recorded and 2 goosanders at Ardlethan Pond. Total for count 13 goosanders and 2 cormorants.

The 31st of May was the last bird count for the spring period, 11 goosanders and 3 cormorants were recorded during this count. Location are as follows, Blairfowl to Methlick Bridge 2 goosanders, Methlick Bridge to Methlick (Lovie) quarry a further 2 goosanders were recorded, just below Tangleford Bridge a single goosander was recorded, a further 2 goosanders were noted feeding beside Ellon Bridge, at Newburgh Estuary, 3 goosanders along with 3 cormorants were counted and 1 goosander on Ardlethen Pond. Total as above of 11 Goosanders and 3 Cormorants.

Table 2. SLA Activities/ checking for possible obstacles to Smolt migration.

Date	Tributary /River Section Surveyed	Time	Notes
10/4/2024	Ebrie Burn. Fyvie Estate.	9am to 5pm 2 Staff = 2days	Numerous fallen trees on the Fyvie Estate water, some debris was removed that might of caused problems later. On the Ebrie water another large conifer has bridged the stream, trailing branches were removed along with debris material. All sections passable for smolt migration.
22/4/2024	Fourdon Burn.	9am to 1pm 2 staff = 1 day	Fourdon Burn upstream of Rothie Vale, a collection of old pallets and other small debris was removed from the channel. Fourdon Burn now passable for smolt migration.

SLA Activities/ Table 3. June, SLA Activity/Policing Patrol allocation of shifts

Date	Patrol Area	Time of Patrol	Notes/Incidents
12/6/24	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary	14.30pm to 18.30pm 2 staff = 1 day	River quite today
18/6/24	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary	14.30pm to 18.30pm 2 staff = 1 day	2 suspicious persons seen at the waterside behind Methlick church, from a distance by Fisheries Officers staff. Suspects fled the scene.
19/6/24	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary	14.30pm to 18.30pm 2 staff = 1 day	A few rods today fishing the Estuary, all permits checked.
25/6/24	Ardlethan to Newburgh Estuary	15.30pm to 19.30pm 2 staff = 1 day	Very few anglers on the river this afternoon.

27/6/24	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary	15.00pm to 19.00pm 2 staff = 1 day	All beats checked, very few rods out fishing this afternoon.
---------	------------------------------	---------------------------------------	--

Most of the angling effort has been concentrated at Newburgh estuary as expected at this time of the year. Policing foot patrols at the Estuary have been undertaken throughout the month and all anglers have had their permits checked as a matter of course.

Some nice sea trout have been landed, but with the mixed weather condition during June angling has been a challenge.

Two males were seen acting suspiciously at the waters edge behind Methlick church. Fisheries Officers spotted the men looking downstream from Methlick bridge, when the suspects observed the Fisheries Officers, they quickly fled the scene. When the Fishery Officers arrived at the site to confront the 2 individuals, they had disappeared. A search was carried out but no evidence of any illegal activity was recorded.

Forthcoming SLA Activities

Habitat improvement

Ranunculus weed cutting commences on the Ebrie burn during the second week of July.

The removal and thinning of aquatic weed such as Ranunculus when targeted at key points within the catchment can help improve the availability of key habitat types, such as spawning substrate and fry habitat.

The Ythan catchment as a whole and in particularly the Ebrie Burn suffer from an excessive build-up of fine sediments trapped by the Ranunculus which smoothers the substrates present in the tributary. Coupled with historical canalisation, this results in a very uniform channel with limited habitat diversity and poses problems for suitable spawning and fry substates.

The approach is to use a combination of hand clearing of the weed in targeted areas then to use a leaf blower to mobilise these fine sediments and in effect 'clean' the gravels. This worked very well last year, where spawning was found to take place on newly available habitat in areas that had been cleared of Ranunculus.

Jim Kerr

Jim Kerr

Senior Fisheries Officer

Acting on behalf of the Ythan DSFB