



scalereadings

July 2001

The newsletter of The Atlantic Salmon Trust

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Welcome

In a year marred by the affliction of the Foot and Mouth epidemic, there are encouraging signs of improving returns. Catch information is inevitably distorted by restrictions on access, but a number of rivers around the UK are reporting better runs. At the time of writing in June, grilse are beginning to show well, and there have been particularly heartening reports from Ireland. As was the case last year, there are signs that there has been better smolt survival at sea.

Matters are moving in the field of salmon management, but the picture is mixed. This Newsletter describes the generally encouraging official response to the forward-looking Review of Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries in England & Wales. It outlines the mixed developments north of the Border, where the generally beneficial Salmon Conservation Act has been followed by the controversial provisions of the first draft of the Land Reform Bill, countered somewhat by constructive input from the "Angling for Change" group in discussions on the wider issues of the management of fisheries for all freshwater species.

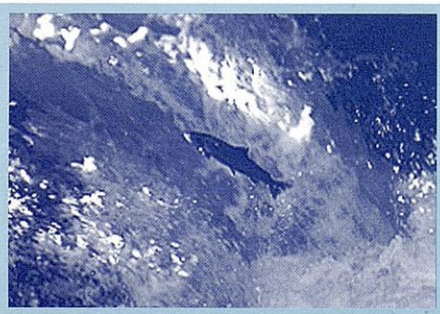
The impact of aquaculture for salmon and other species remains a major problem. The Trust remains convinced of the value of a collaborative approach by farming and wild fishery interests, but this must be backed up by effective regulation. We have represented this strongly in the current Government consultations. We would welcome better informed public discussion and examination

of the issues, but a formal enquiry must not be seen as an excuse for delaying action.

In a series of most encouraging developments, the concept of joint public and private funding to speed up the ending of mixed stock fisheries is gaining ever wider acceptance. After the initial proposal of this concept to the Review Group by the Atlantic Salmon Trust and the North Atlantic Salmon Fund (UK), UK Government support has set the ball rolling to good effect.

Finally the Trust has undertaken a review of its constitution. It was set up by its founders as a Limited Company with charitable status, for the furtherance of practical wild salmon and sea trout research. The increased scope of the Trust's work, including the need to encourage effective management of salmon and sea trout stocks, has led it to make proposals to the Charity Commissioners for broadening its declared aims and objectives. We are seeking to link the support of research with the development and promotion of good salmon management, and to establish a formal Board structure for the direction of our activities. Subject to the agreement of the Commissioners, these proposals will be put up for formal adoption this autumn, and will be described in detail in the Winter Report.

H.F.O. Bewsher
CHAIRMAN



Funding the Trust — how you can help

- By a single donation – cash or cheque.
- By regular contributions through a Banker's Order.
- If you sign a Gift Aid declaration, your donation will be worth almost a third more to us at no extra cost to you – for every £1 you donate, we can claim an additional 28p from the Inland Revenue. (We can only reclaim tax if you are a UK tax payer.)
- By gifting stocks and shares to the Trust. You will receive relief on Capital Gains Tax and personal income tax for the value of the gift.
- By remembering the Trust in your Will. A bequest to charity is free of Inheritance Tax.

Please contact us on 01796 473439 for more information on any of these points. The Trust has no official funding and is financed entirely by private contributions, so you can be sure that your support is needed and will be greatly appreciated.

In the public eye

Because of the Foot and Mouth epidemic, the show programme for the Trust's display caravan has had to be rescheduled. At the end of June it is as follows:

27-29 July	CLA Game Fair, now at Shuttleworth, Bedfordshire
19 August	Spey Salmon Day, Fochabers
22-23 September	Game Conservancy Scottish Fair, Scone
20-21 October	Chatsworth Angling Fair

A presence at these shows gives an opportunity for supporters of the Trust to get up-to-date information on our work and for the wider public to learn about the Atlantic Salmon Trust. A stock of our publications and posters is available, as are some videos, and also AST ties and glasses engraved with our logo. Visitors are always welcome.

Review of salmon and freshwater fisheries in England and Wales

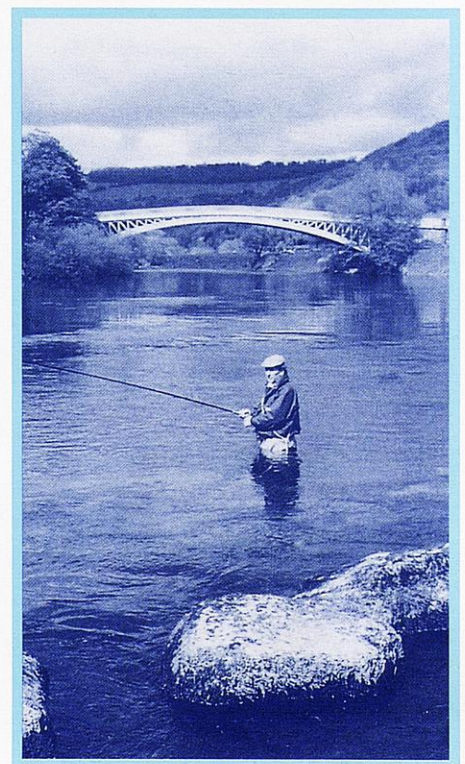
After the welcome announcement before Christmas that the Government would provide financial support for ending mixed stock interceptory netting, the full response to the Review Group's report was published in January. All but five of the 195 recommendations were accepted in full or in part. However, much was left unanswered as regards funding. Nothing has been done to restore the cut in Grant in Aid to the Environment Agency (EA) imposed for 2001/2002, and although there is to be a substantial increase from 2003 onwards, the additional £3 million still leaves a very real gap between the cost of the EA's aspirations for executing its fisheries policy, and what it will actually receive. It is none the less encouraging that "conservation and restoration of salmon stocks" is included as one of the Government's priority areas.

It was also welcome that the Government recognised the objectives of fisheries legislation and re-affirmed the EA's duty to maintain, improve and develop fisheries. Approaches to the management of fish habitats, including the control of pollutants (especially sheep dip), the effects of agricultural support policy and the use of riparian buffer strips, and the impact of forestry were all well stated. The needs for impact assessments for abstraction applications, and for the maintenance of acceptable flow regimes, were recognised.

Important issues which remain unresolved include:

- the establishment of a single statutory body with responsibility for water quality
- easier procedures for licensing applications for the control of fish-eating birds
- realistic funding for research and development
- investigation of carcass tagging to control poaching
- the control of fish farms in salmon and sea trout rivers

In principle, our concerns over the regulation of fishing have been accepted, including the importance of a real understanding of salmon population dynamics, the proper use of net limitation orders, and, of course, the phasing out of mixed stock fisheries. We hope that Elliot Morley, who retains the Fisheries portfolio in the newly created Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, will give vigorous leadership to the implementation of the Review Group's recommendations. (For a full analysis of the Government response, see our website at www.atlanticsalmontrust.org)



The River Wye at Bigsweir

Progress in ending mixed stock netting

Since the Government announced its intention of committing £750,000 to support compensation for the surrender of North East drift net licences, the North Atlantic Salmon Fund (UK) has been conducting negotiations with representatives of the netsmen. The Environment Agency and MAFF (now part of the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) have been helping to facilitate these negotiations. NASF(UK) reports that the atmosphere is encouraging, but that the details of a scheme acceptable to both sides are having to be carefully worked out and the final price has yet to be agreed. At the time of writing, the next meeting with the netsmen is due in July. While this is going on, NASF(UK) is developing its fund-raising organisation and has set up local groups in the areas which will benefit most from the net closure. Letters and briefings to Salmon Boards, Fisheries Associations and Angling Clubs are being supplemented by public meetings. At the same time, appeals to individual anglers, seeking a target donation of £50 per rod, have gone out to all members of the Salmon & Trout Association, and (through the Environment Agency) will go to every holder of a migratory fish licence in England & Wales. The tempo of the appeal will increase as negotiations reach a conclusion.

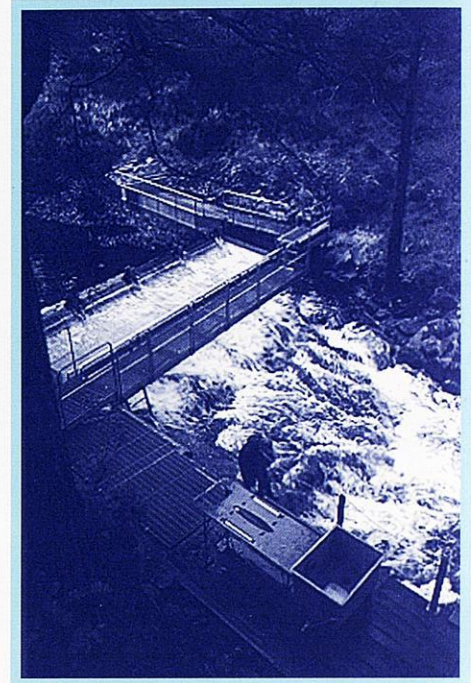
From Northern Ireland has come the very welcome news that the Executive has offered £1.5 million towards a compensation agreement for ending commercial netting. In the Republic, matters are also moving and Orri Vigfusson has held a number of meetings on the West Coast. The Salmon Commission has recommended that the option of buying out the netsmen should be considered by the Government. This is a major step and there must now be real hopes that the target of ending the remaining coastal mixed stock fisheries is not too far from being achieved.

West Highland developments

The encouraging news of the work of the Tripartite Working Group (set up to develop collaborative action by Government, fish farmers and wild fishery interests, to address the problems caused by salmon farming) is that a total of five Area Management Agreements have now been signed and work is progressing in a number of other areas. Most notably, an "umbrella agreement" for the very complex Lochaber district (including Linnhe, Lorne and the Sound of Mull) has been signed with Marine Harvest and Hydro Seafoods and work is going on to achieve individual subsidiary agreements, especially in the Linnhe/Lorne production area. In general, these agreements provide for co-ordinated fallowing and stocking to break the pattern of lice infestation and co-ordinated treatments at the appropriate time in the production cycle. Progress is being slowed by the time that it takes to ensure the safety of clearances for the newest and most effective in-feed treatment – one which offers a real chance of eliminating egg-bearing female lice at the time of the smolt run.

The Trust emphasises that these agreements are in no way a substitute for effective regulation of the establishment and operation of fish farms, but they have offered a way of making worthwhile progress without waiting for the possibility of legislation. However, the Scottish Executive has been carrying out a consultation on improvements in the regulatory system and the Trust has responded with firm proposals for pulling together the current disjointed system and providing for the enforcement of compliance with effective codes of practice. We await the response. Despite the impression given in a television documentary, the Executive has formally accepted the problem posed to wild fish by sea lice levels in farms, although the question of a full enquiry into salmon farming and its effects, for which there is widespread support, remains unresolved at the time of writing. The Trust stands ready to give evidence to whatever enquiry eventually transpires.

Work continues to prepare support for salmon and sea trout stock restoration, once conditions for wild fish have improved. A detailed study on the feasibility of a central supportive breeding facility is nearing completion, and a system for providing advice and technical support for local restoration projects will be developed.



Sea trout stocks are investigated at the Shildaig research trap (photo by David Hay)

NASCO 2001

This year's annual meeting of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation took place in Galicia in north west Spain, at the extreme southerly limit of the Atlantic salmon's range. Spain is devoting considerable effort and resources to the preservation and restoration of its severely depleted stocks. The presence of the NASCO Council was a tribute to this work and, fittingly, it was a productive meeting in many respects.

At the beginning of the meeting the Non Government Organisations, who attend as observers, showed an admirably united front in making a number of joint statements. These led off with a welcome to the developing trend of joint public/private buyouts in home water mixed stock fisheries. They further suggested that the difficult process of negotiating quotas for the Greenland and Faroes fisheries – with results often unsatisfactory to all parties – could be replaced by similar initiatives.

Although this proposal was not immediately followed up, the Greenland quota was settled on a new and innovative flexible basis.

An initial quota of 28 tons has been set for 2001, but this can be increased in two stages if the rate of catch indicates a high abundance of salmon in the fishery. For a second year running no quota was set for the Faroes. However, the government undertook to use the precautionary approach in managing the fishery responsibly in the light of the scientific advice on the state of salmon stocks. Last year only one boat fished, catching 8 tonnes.

Encouragingly, the Council took forward the proposal for international collaboration in research into the increased mortality of salmon at sea and set up an International Programme in which both national authorities and non government organisations are likely to be involved. The Council also re-affirmed its stance on genetically modified farmed salmon, agreeing once more that GM fish, if farmed at all, should not be kept otherwise than in self-contained land-based facilities.

Cause for concern

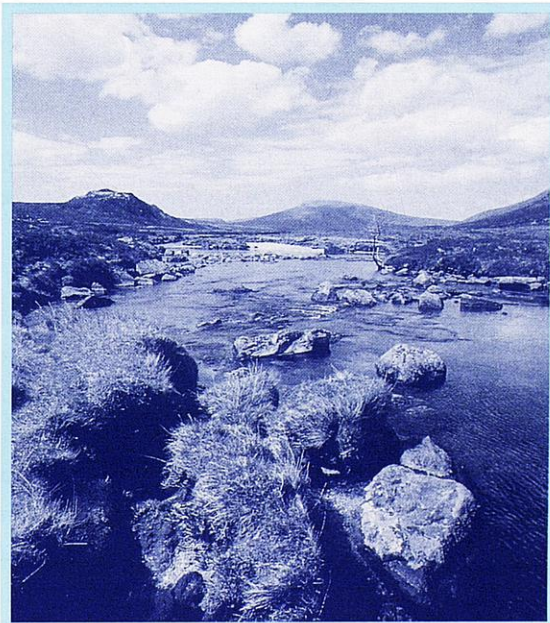
The draft Land Reform Bill, with the accompanying Outdoor Access Code, was published in February. The consultation period – extended to make allowance for the problems caused by the Foot and Mouth outbreak – ended on 30th June. The Bill has raised a number of significant issues for salmon management and salmon fishing, of which the most contentious is the Crofting Community Right to Buy. This would make provision for crofting communities in the counties of Argyll, Inverness, Ross-shire, Caithness, Sutherland and the Western Isles to acquire in the name of the community – by compulsory purchase – not only land, but the salmon fishing rights over water adjoining that land.

The Trust has discussed this proposal, which was inserted without warning after the original consultation on the Bill, with other wild fishery organisations. Like them, we have made strong representations to the Scottish Executive about the potential dangers involved. Effective management of a salmon fishery requires substantial investment in work such as the maintenance and improvement of habitat, as well as to support the expenditure of the District Fishery Board. Over and above this the Fisheries Trusts depend in great measure on voluntary contributions from proprietors. While a crofting community could, with assistance, purchase fishing rights at a low cost, there is no guarantee that it could provide management expertise or fund the investment required. Indeed, its management body would be required to maximise returns for the benefit of the community, which would lead to the risk of over-exploitation by rods and, more significantly, by reactivated netting. The selective acquisition of productive fishings within existing properties could have a serious detrimental effect on the co-ordination of river management. The Trust, in putting these and other concerns to the Scottish Executive, considers that more diverse salmon management must be sustainable and should therefore only be established on an adequately funded "willing seller/willing buyer" basis.

The Trust has also discussed the question of Access with other organisations, particularly the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards. The Bill and its draft Access Code would give the right of responsible access, for informal recreation, to land and inland water throughout Scotland. The ASFB, with the firm endorsement of the Trust, has represented in detail shortcomings in the proposed provisions which could have a serious effect on the maintenance, management and operation of fisheries and on fish stocks. The Trust has drawn particular attention to the

need to prevent damage to redds and to afford protection to fish at spawning time.

We hope that the widespread concern that has been expressed will lead to re-examination of these ill-considered provisions in the draft Bill. Its Parliamentary progress will need to be followed with close attention.



The River Dionard (photo by David Hay)

6th International Atlantic Salmon Symposium – 15-18 July 2002

Every five years or so, the Atlantic Salmon Trust and the Atlantic Salmon Federation – its North American counterpart – jointly organise an International Symposium on salmon matters. In 2002 this Symposium will return to Edinburgh, where it was last held in 1978. In that year it passed a resolution which resulted in the development of the North Atlantic Convention to regulate salmon fishing outside home waters, and the establishment of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO).

The 2002 Symposium is entitled "Salmon at the edge". It will consider the problems faced by wild Atlantic salmon and sea trout in migrating to sea, in the coastal zone, and in returning to their native rivers. It will seek ways of addressing these problems. An additional session will examine other work offering encouragement for the future of salmon and sea trout stocks. Speakers have already been invited, but poster displays will be welcomed.

The Symposium will run from the morning of Tuesday 16th July (Registration possible pm Monday 15th) until mid-day Thursday 18th. It will be followed by an optional tour – Rivers and Research – which will include the Tay, the Aberdeenshire Dee and the North Esk.

The venue is the William Robertson Building of the University of Edinburgh, at George Square, close to the heart of the city. The building houses a tiered lecture theatre equipped with full audio-visual facilities. Accommodation has been reserved in the University Halls of Residence, about fifteen minutes walk from George Square. Additionally, hotel accommodation at special rates is being arranged by the Edinburgh Convention Bureau, which will handle all bookings.

Full details will be on the registration forms, which will be available in September. To notify interest and obtain a registration form, contact the Trust by mail, telephone or fax, or through the Symposium website www.salmonsymposium.org, which contains fuller details of the programme.

"Angling for Change" in Scotland



Fisheries Minister Rhona Brankin meets the Group by Loch Awe (photo by Alan Ayre)

The passage of the Salmon Conservation Bill was described in our Winter Report. As readers will know, the resulting Act is limited in its scope and primarily extends the scope of fishery management regulations which District Boards can request Ministers to make. Ministers can also make such regulations on their own initiative. Although this has caused disquiet, during the final debate the Fisheries Minister gave encouraging reassurances as to the limited circumstances likely to give rise to such action.

While this was taking place consultation was continuing on "Protecting and Promoting" – the paper covering the management and protection of the whole range of freshwater fish and fisheries in Scotland. The formation of the "Angling for Change" group, representing all river and stillwater fishery and fish conservation groups in Scotland, has previously been described in our reports. This group has eagerly grasped the opportunity to put forward proposals for a comprehensive management and regulatory structure. These proposals have been based on the concept of building on current strengths while filling the gaps that exist in the present system. The "Angling for Change" Group envisages the setting up of a network of Area Fisheries Management Committees, in which existing Salmon Fishery Boards, together with angling clubs and river improvement associations (among other interested organisations) would be represented. These Committees would be charged with compiling and administering an Area Fisheries Management Plan covering all species and types of fishery. This plan would cover aspects such as access to fishing and permitted methods, as well as movements of live fish and eggs and stocking activity, which are currently largely uncoordinated and, in respect of many species other than migratory salmonids, completely unregulated. Contribution and adherence to this Management Plan would entitle proprietors of every type of fishery to legal protection against unauthorised fishing.

These proposals have been formally submitted to the Scottish Executive. In April, the "Angling for Change" Group had the opportunity to make a presentation to Rhona Brankin, the Fisheries Minister. This took place at Loch Awe, where there is already a very effective relationship between the Loch Awe Improvement Association and the Awe District Salmon Fishery Board, both of whom were represented at the meeting. The Group believes that its united approach created a strong impression, and its members are looking forward in hope to the publication in the autumn of the Green Paper containing the Scottish Executive's response to the representations received during the consultation period.

What the Trust does

The Atlantic Salmon Trust is a voluntary organisation whose primary aim is to help ensure that stocks of wild salmon and sea trout are maintained and improved within the North Atlantic Ocean for the benefit of the adjacent communities.

It seeks to support the improvement and integration of management methods and scientific knowledge, and works for positive action affecting salmon and sea trout to be taken, both at public and private levels, on the basis of the best available information.

To achieve this, the Trust:

- advises Government Departments, Members of the Parliaments and Assemblies, and fishery authorities
- promotes and sponsors practical research
- organises workshops to investigate specific problems
- issues regular and special reports and publishes the results of its work.

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Field and Research Biologist: John Webb

Support of Research

The following work is receiving support in the years 2000 and 2001. They illustrate our involvement in practical research to improve the management of wild salmon and sea trout.

PROJECTS

Lifetime fitness of spring salmon – the Baddoch project £25,000

This is the Trust's major research project. It involves the DNA identification of individual "families" of fish in an upland stream over five years, to investigate and compare their productivity and survival in fresh and salt water; in relation to their habitat. Ongoing analysis will result in an AST Blue Book, to give guidance on a range of issues involved in sustainable salmon management, including the increase of smolt production. The sum quoted is provided annually by the Trust for the support of our biologist on this project and other work.

River Eden – Effect of water temperature on spawning dates £1,000

This aims to examine how water temperature can affect the time at which salmon spawn and should help to assess the effects of water abstraction. Work has been delayed by excessive water flows at spawning time in 2000.

Spawning flow requirements in upland streams £5,250

This project examined how varying flow rates in different stream formations affect the timing and location of salmon spawning. A generic model may result for regulating water abstraction and compensation flows and assessing the justification of habitat enhancement to improve spawning.

Effects of climate change on the decline of spring salmon £4,000

This project was examining the possibility that warmer water in upper tributaries may have caused earlier smolt runs, affecting their survival at sea. A new analysis technique may prove the key to establishing the association, and the consequent ability to identify likely survival trends.

Influence of environmental factors on the production and survival of juvenile salmon in the River Bush £2,000

This grant helps to support a study which is examining how environmental conditions on the River Bush in Northern Ireland have affected survival from egg to smolt, and seeking to determine the possibility of predicting future smolt production from observed conditions.

Predation and scavenging along spawning streams in Scotland £4,000

This is primarily investigating the extent of predation by otters, especially at spawning time, and its significance in affecting spawning success, and the subsequent population levels.

Application of Continuous Plankton Recorder data to the interpretation of UK catch statistics £6,000

Following the 1998 AST workshop on the Ocean Life of Salmon, this seeks correlation between data on plankton distribution and downward trends in catches and home water abundance. We hope this will help to explain increased salmon mortality at sea.

The use of DNA to identify salmonid material in seal scats £4,000

This is aimed at validating DNA analysis techniques in identifying soft remains from salmon and sea trout in seal faeces. This could give a more representative indication than looking for otoliths (small bones in the head), with better quantitative assessments of seal predation.

WORKSHOP

The significance and value of catch data

This invited workshop will be held at the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, Lowestoft, in November 2001. It will examine how rod catch figures can best be collected and interpreted in assessing salmon and sea trout stock levels.

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