

Kyle News

Issue No: 7

Kyle of Sutherland District Salmon Fishery Board
Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust

Spring 2015

Welcome to the seventh and last edition of the Kyle News combining the interests of the Kyle of Sutherland District Salmon Fisheries Board and the Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust.

Chairman of Kyle Fisheries

Outwith our catchment the big news in 2014 was the Scottish Government's Wild Fisheries Review chaired by Andrew Thin. The review was carried out in a positive and transparent way which enabled all stakeholders to be involved. Kyle Fisheries engaged fully in the process and we were able to have a one to one meeting with Andrew Thin which allowed us to discuss the issues most pressing for our area. The outcomes will mean a significant change to the way in which we operate but I am confident that the recent changes that we have made to our structure and management have put us in a strong position.

Within our catchment the season was dominated by a lack of water but much more worrying was the lack of fish. MSW fish were late arriving and limited in numbers. This was replicated with the grilse run which is increasingly becoming a cause for concern. Across Scotland the picture was just as bleak with catches falling by 50% or more on most major rivers. Theory and counter theory have been flying back and forth but what seems to be clear is that we have a major issue out at sea with salmon survival. With the increase in catch & release and the continuing efforts of riparian owners to improve habitat and access, the question is whether it is netting at sea, coastal netting, predation by an increasing seal population, the long term effects of the Aquaculture industry, a shift in the traditional feeding areas, climate change or increased sea temperatures as one of the plethora of possible causes for the decline in salmon numbers. ASFB & RAFTS are taking these issues to the Scottish Government but progress is slow.

2014 has seen the completion of our own restructuring and rebranding. The Kyle Board and Trust now operate under the banner of Kyle Fisheries and work out of our fabulous new office in Ardgay – please drop in if you are passing as the team would be happy to show you round and what they are up to. Getting to this position has been a lengthy process but it has been worth the work. Under the leadership of our new Director, Keith Williams, all our effort and energy is now focused on improving the salmon population in our catchment.

The netting buyout appeal is close to finalising the purchase of the netting station at Bonar Bridge and a number of the other historic projects are still on-going which Keith will touch on in his report overleaf. The Board and Trustees look forward to developing these and other projects with Keith and his team in 2015.

Robbie Douglas Miller, Chairman

The Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust seeks to protect, conserve, improve and enhance all native fish species and their habitats, to advance education, training and research initiatives and to provide a communications resource to all interested parties.

Director's Report

Firstly, I would like to say how delighted I am to become the Director of the Kyle of Sutherland District Salmon Fishery Board and Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust. Having lived in this area for many years it is a privilege to be able to work within a catchment for which I have a particular affinity. Since my appointment in April of 2014 the process of undertaking a thorough review of all the activities of both the Board and the Trust has commenced. Considerable progress has been made although more work is required to complete the process. The purchase by the Trust of a new office represents a significant step forward in bringing staff together and acting as a focal point for the fisheries in the district.

The 2014 season will be remembered in fishery management circles for two things. Firstly, rod catches of salmon were worryingly low. Indeed, initial indications suggest that the Kyle of Sutherland District salmon catches will be the lowest since 1976. Examination of the catches using the NASCO rod catch tool results in failure in respect of the summer and autumn components of the stock. As such we would ask for maximum restraint within the fishery in terms of the number of fish killed. The Board will be keeping a close eye on catches for the 2015 season. Secondly, the Wild Fisheries Review has occupied many of us in organising responses, attending meetings and making appropriate representations to the review panel. While the present situation is one of an uncertain future, it is important that both the Board and Trust in this district are as well placed as possible to meet the challenges ahead.

A number of practical and research projects have continued during the year. I would particularly highlight the Pearls in Peril Project which is now starting to successfully deliver changes to forestry, peatland restoration and an education programme to the Evelix and the Oykel. Initiatives aimed at improving the status of the salmon stocks in Loch Shin tributaries continues as does assessment of a potential barrier to fish migration on a Carron tributary. Project development, particularly for the Trust will be a key aim for 2015.

Improved communication will be a cornerstone of the ethos of both the Board and Trust going forward. To this end a regular short newsletter, *Kyle Lines*, has been produced and has been well received to date. It is anticipated that this will be the last *Kyle News* to be published with a replacement comprehensive annual report being produced in its stead. It is also hoped that the website will be further developed in the future.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the staff at both the Board and Trust, Board Members, Trustees and individual proprietors for making my first months as director a pleasurable experience.

Dr Keith Williams, Director



The new Kyle Fisheries Office in Ardgay

Netting Buyout Appeal - Update

When the Board set out in 2010 to acquire the various netting rights in the Kyle we were faced with raising almost £600,000, a seriously daunting task. To achieve the target we asked river proprietors to contribute three times their individual annual KSDSFB assessment. In addition a number of tenants and other fishers also very kindly made contributions.



Netting for scientific purposes in the Kyle - August 2014

I have been enormously impressed by the way that so many individual proprietors have managed to meet the Board's request, some indeed contributing more than was asked of them. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the proprietors who have dug deeply, ensuring that most of the money was raised.

A small number of proprietors have kindly pledged to pay three times their assessment over the next couple of years. However a very small number of proprietors have yet to contribute, or have only part paid, so we currently have a shortfall of about £40,000. Can I please use this opportunity to ask proprietors who have not yet contributed, or are due to make a payment, to do so now. Our final payment to the vendor is due by September this year.

Given the current fragility of salmon stocks it makes great sense for the Board to protect our fish by the acquisition and closure of salmon netting. Please see below for details of how to make payment.

Richard Sankey, Kyle Board

Contributions to the Appeal can be made payable to Kyle of Sutherland Netting Buyout Appeal, and sent to Kyle of Sutherland District Salmon Fishery Board, Bank House, Ardgay, IV24 3BG. Or by bank transfer to Bank of Scotland, Sort-code 80-22-60. Account 10214369. A brochure with further information and maps can be downloaded from our website www.kylefisheries.org

MORAY FIRTH TROUT INITIATIVE

The diversity of trout, *salmo trutta*, and what their scales can tell us.

Trout (*Salmo Trutta*) exist in many different forms in Scotland's rivers, lochs and coastal seas; each form has adapted to fulfil an ecological niche within the diverse and productive environment in Scotland. We tend to refer to these different life strategies by using distinct names such as brown trout, sea trout, ferox and slob, - but their actual behaviour is probably not as distinct as our classification would suggest. Each form will likely exhibit a whole range of behaviours from simple resident brown trout to full marine migrating sea trout, and indeed, slob trout are really just a halfway adaptation between the two, feeding in the estuary but not migrating fully to sea. These different varieties of trout often exist together in any given catchment, each fulfilling an important role in the environment and each as valuable as the next. Due to their migratory nature and ability to adapt to different environments, especially in their appearance or camouflage, it is often difficult to distinguish between them on appearance alone. In fact, I have had many a fish be labelled a sea trout at the riverside by both biologists and anglers only to be proven as a brown trout in the lab by scale reading and vice versa. Through reading the scales of these fish we can not only count how old they are but also determine whether they have been to sea, if they have spawned and even work out how fast they were growing which will give some inference of on what and where they have been feeding. Scale reading is one method for determining if an individual fish is a brown trout or a sea trout and also helps us understand the behaviour of a whole population. This information is very important in helping us improve our management to protect these local trout populations and their habitats.



A brown trout being returned

What is a scale and how do we read it?

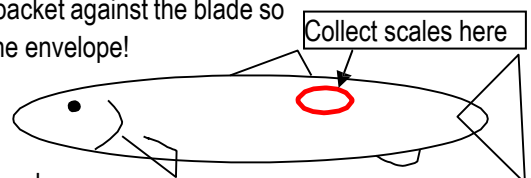
Trout have scales all over their skin for protection; these protein plates overlaid with calcium are embedded in the skin and some can be easily removed without causing lasting damage to the fish. When viewed under a microscope the scales reveal series of concentric rings not dissimilar to rings on a tree. However, unlike a tree, the rings are not laid down annually but continually. The rings will be laid down further apart when a fish is growing faster and closer together during periods of slow growth. Typically, there is more food and faster growth in the summer but winter rings are closer together as growth slows; these marks are called "winter checks". Winter checks can be counted to reveal how old a trout is. Similarly, when a trout goes to sea there is far more food available and it grows faster and the rings are distinctly further apart and this is called "marine growth". The rigours of spawning can result in a trout having to dig into its nutrient reserves leading to erosion of the scale which leaves incomplete or cut over rings on the scale that are read as "spawning marks". Read under a microscope by a professional, the scale can reveal a huge amount of information about that trout: smolt age, sea age, total age spawning marks and growth rate. If enough samples are collected, this can all be combined together to not only work out the life history of an individual trout but also the characteristics of that entire population.

What you can do to help.... collect scales!

We are looking for scales from all forms of trout: sea, brown, ferox, slob and even finnock – just no rainbows! Although the trophy fish can tell the most interesting story, we need to collect scales from a whole range of sizes so that we have data on the entire population.

If you are interested in taking part, please contact Marcus Walters for your scale collection pack then follow the instructions below. Collecting scales causes no lasting harm to the fish - the scales will be replaced.

1. Please handle and release fish according to the RAFTS / ASFB Catch & Release Guide.
2. Collect scales from the area shown in the diagram. If they are missing take them from the other side
3. Remove excess mucus from the area using the back of a knife.
4. Run the blade of the knife gently back against the scales to lift and remove +/- 10 scales.
5. Insert the blade into a **scale envelope** (not plastic bag) and pinch the packet against the blade so the scales are left in the packet as the blade is withdrawn. Don't seal the envelope!
6. Clean the blade between samples.
7. Record the details on the outside of the packet (where caught, length, weight, condition etc)
8. Please store all packets in a warm place to dry and return all sea trout scale samples to: Marcus Walters, c/o Kyle Fisheries, Bank House, Ardgay, Sutherland, IV24 3BG.



Once your scale envelopes reach us they will be compiled with other collections and sent to a professional scale reader. The results from your own collections will then be returned to you. It can take a few months after the end of the season to get all the scales read so if you have a particularly interesting fish please send it directly to me and I will do my best to get it read quickly. The results from all scales will then be compiled and can be compared with historical collections and collections from other catchments.

Marcus Walters, Project Officer

Tel:07500 602216 Email: marcus@morayfirthtrout.org Web: www.morayfirthtrout.org

Gillies Eye View

Downie, River Carron

As was the case with most other beats, the 2014 season at Downie was a difficult one. The season started well enough, with many Highland rivers offering excellent early spring conditions following a very open winter. And some fish were caught, lulling us all into what proved to be a false sense of optimism. Following a few early February fish, March results were disappointing pretty well everywhere, despite perfect water conditions. By April, the writing was on the wall; the spring season for 2014 would be a disappointment. And so it proved for many, but not all. Some beats fared better than others, with early running fish pushing on up river, without halting on the lower beats.

A very dry June and July only served to make things even more difficult for visiting anglers, many of whom decided to while away a few hours playing golf instead. However, those that were prepared to try the river early in the morning, when the water temperature was at its lowest, were often rewarded for their efforts. Nobody can argue that conditions were difficult and that there was a general shortage of fish. The problem appeared to be nationwide, with reports of very few fish from all the major salmon rivers in the country. So what's going wrong?

Well, put quite simply, there is something called the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO). It is based on a differential in the atmospheric pressure that occurs during the winter months between the Icelandic Low and the Azores High. The NAO Index is said to be high when this difference is great, and low when it is small. During the 1960's and 1970's - a period of prolific salmon runs - the NAO Index was consistently low. So what does this mean for modern day salmon? Since the 1980's, the NAO Index has been increasing, with coastal water temperatures around western Europe being much higher than usual, while waters further north - especially off Greenland and the north Norwegian sea - are now much cooler than they were in the 1960's. Increased rainfall in northern Europe combined with polar icecap melt and subsequent reduced salinity have all taken their toll, shifting and reducing in width the Norwegian Coastal Current. This is very important to salmon as warming has pushed the southernmost feeding limit northwards, while cooling around Greenland and the Norwegian seas has pushed the northerly limit southward, further reducing the feeding area.

In a nutshell, coastal salmon feed in waters with a surface temperature range of 3°C to 8°C where krill, microscopic crustaceans and fish fry proliferate. Oceanic scientists have calculated that in March 1969 the area available for feeding within this temperature range was some 35,500 square miles (92,000 square kilometres). They repeated their calculations for March 1984 and found that the potential feeding for salmon was only 2300 square miles (6,000 square kilometres). This continued reduction in oceanic feeding habitat for salmon has been blamed as the primary cause of the collapse of multi-sea-winter salmon since the 1960's.

Will things improve? Well, that's anyone's guess. Salmon are a remarkably resilient species, quick to colonise available systems. They are tough and durable and have been around for thousands of years. But right at this moment they need a little help from us, their custodians. Always the optimist, I personally expect 2015 to be a much better season than 2014.

Kim Sawyer, Head Ghillie



Max Hunter with his first fish - 2014

Braelangwell, River Carron

Like everywhere Braelangwell had a frustrating season. It started off slowly but by the end of May, we had 42 spring fish. During this time, it was very infuriating as we were seeing fish but they just would not take. After the start of June it became apparent that the fish just were not there. We ended the season with 63 Salmon and 16 Grilse, our third worst year on record since 1962 (1976 - 73 and 1984 - 56) and about 35% of our 5 year average.



There was a huge spate in August which caused a great deal of damage to the beat and according to SEPA was just 2cm off the highest recorded flood. The small gravel was washed out of the top beat leaving boulders and rocks where shingle had been but by far the greatest damage was on the bottom beat. Kennel run, Judges, Gardner's Run, Gardners and the Rock pools all filled in. Fortunately, the winter floods have played their part and they have now been dug out again. Once the spring run was over it became apparent that, like everywhere there was a distinct lack of fish. The season total for the river was likely to be just over 450. Considering the 5-year average to 2013 is 986 this is well down.

Finlay McCulloch, Braelangwell

Ghillies Eye View (cont...)

Oykel

Salmon fishing throughout Scotland in 2014 will unfortunately be remembered as one of the toughest in many years. The north highlands had an unseasonably mild winter with very little snow and several extremely windy spells. Rainfall was surprisingly low in comparison to the southern half of the UK.

The 19th of February was a very special day for one regular angler who visited us for a cast as he was in the area on business. He landed 3 beautiful fresh springers. Two in Langwell and one in the Washer Woman, all took a Black & Yellow tube. The last time one man caught 3 in a day in February was in the early seventies.

The spring fish were in excellent condition but the general lack of numbers was quite a worry. It was not completely unexpected, as the previous year almost everywhere experienced reduced grilse numbers. The best spring week produced 20 and were mostly caught on beat 1. For some reason the fish were ascending the system at an alarming rate. By the end of May we had caught 89. These low catch figures were experienced before, around 30 years ago but it was put down to unusual weather rather than the numbers of fish. Only 1 spring fish was killed due to hook damage so again the catch & release program worked very well indeed. It would have been reassuring to see more spring fish in the system but I do feel we have enough to restock the higher areas of the catchment where the spring fish generally spawn.

We are now at the end of the second year of scale sampling and again such interesting results keep appearing. We had several grilse weighing 7- 8 lbs this year which is pretty unusual. We also had a 6 year old fish weighing 9lbs and a 4 year old fish weighing 20lbs. We have been lucky enough to have been given some historic scale samples gathered in 1976. Grilse were regularly 7-8 lbs and often up to 11lbs which could mean some feeding grounds have changed in some way over time.

Early summer catches were hampered due to very warm and dry conditions. That all changed in August after we had the biggest flood for around 10 years. Between 4 & 5 inches of rain fell in 12 hours bringing the river level up approximately 15 feet. Even Langwell suspension bridge was hit by some of the biggest waves. This all happened during daylight hours so it was quite an impressive sight for most anglers who have never witnessed such an event. Unfortunately, it was quite a destructive flood due to the sheer volume and speed of the water. Most of the riverside tracks were damaged but more importantly several fry, parr and pearl mussels were washed out into the fields. Fish have a great ability to recover from these events and it is very unlikely that it will have had a noticeable impact on future stock levels. Parr and fry will cover great distances to find unoccupied areas and will naturally restock any that are under populated. August produced 237 salmon and 38 sea trout which was a very welcome boost to the figures and the moral of the ghillies and anglers alike.

Sea trout were plentiful and noticeably larger this season. Several were over 3lbs and even an odd one over 4lbs which is unusual for the Oykel. They started running about 3 weeks earlier than normal and when the salmon were not in a responsive mood it was a very welcome pull on the line when a large sea trout took the fly. The Lower Oykel ended the season with 448 Salmon which is 50% of our 5 year average. This seems to be the trend throughout Scotland and many rivers did not even make 50% so we are quite content with our result.

Upper Oykel.

The Upper Oykel was a very similar picture, August was very good when they landed 114 which was a large percentage of the total seasons catch of 156. The biggest fish of the season was also the first and it was hooked in the Crask pool on beat 2 on June 12th and weighed 20lbs.

The Upper works program has been very successful over the last year and the new cattle grids we installed proved very popular. This winter, we plan to replace both the Upper & Lower Allt Rugaidh bridges to allow safe access for heavy vehicles. This will aid in repairing and improving the riverside tracks.

Conservation.

We took the decision early in the season, as it became apparent that fish numbers were less than expected, to ask anglers to show great restraint in killing any fish. The Oykel norm is now around 95% returned and we hoped to get as close to 100% as possible for this season. I would personally like to congratulate and thank everybody as no fish were killed unless absolutely necessary due to hook damage. Both the Lower and Upper Oykel fisheries returned 98.2% throughout the year which will help massively to safeguard future stocks.



Lower Farm. Before and during the August flood.

Ghillies eye view (cont...)

Skibo

When we think of carnivorous plants the Venus fly trap usually springs to mind, the more imaginative and maybe slightly more mature mind may think of Triffids or the talking/singing man eating plant in 'Little Shop of Horrors'.

The latter two thank goodness are pure fiction but for smaller species carnivorous plants are another potentially lethal predator to contend with. Most of us assume these predatory plants grow in steamy rainforest in distant lands but did you know we have three types of carnivorous plants in the UK? And at least two of these can be found on our Highland moors.

The Sundew, Butterwort and Bladderwort are all found in the UK. All are quite rare and whilst I have found Sundews and Butterworts I cannot verify that Bladderworts (which are aquatic) exist in the area.

Both plants grow in nutrient lacking waterlogged soil typically found on heath and moorland using the insects they ensnare to supplement their additional nutritional needs. Indeed nitrogen rich soil which is usually essential for most plants growth can be lethal for these species.

The Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) is the most striking and dramatic looking of the two. Scarlet red in colour each spoon shaped leaf is covered in up to 200 tentacles each with a crystal clear droplet of highly adhesive acidic enzyme which not only ensnares the prey but also breaks it down into a type of nutritious soup which can then be absorbed through the leaf into the plant. The tentacles are also movement sensitive and when an unsuspecting ant or midge stumbles on to the leaf it not only becomes ensnared in the sticky enzyme it also gets slowly enveloped as the tentacles and leaf slowly curl in on the pray completely encasing it, sealing it into its sticky tomb. The ensnaring process is not lightning fast like the Venus flytrap and it can take up to 48 hours for the insect to be completely digested. What a way to go!!



Round-leaved Sundew



Common Butterwort

Common Butterwort (*Pinguicula vulgaris*) is slightly less impressive in appearance but no less lethal a predator producing one of the strongest natural glues known. They derive their name from the greasy butter like feel to their leaves. Again the plant traps unsuspecting insects with the very powerful glue they secrete then the leaves slowly roll over their pray encasing them and breaking them down much the same process as the Sundew.

So the next time you happen to be on the high ground keep an eye out for these rare predatory plants, they are easily overlooked being only a few centimetres across.

Michael Gallon, Skibo

Kyle of Sutherland Angling Association

Salmon rod catches on the Kyle waters improved slightly on 2013 although given the dry conditions in July and early August, which typically suit our fishings, better catches would have been expected. Sea trout catches were perhaps a little disappointing given that neighbouring catchments saw very good totals on the whole. However, it must be remembered that the Kyle sea trout catches have remained at consistently high levels over the last five years or so.

Some of the recommendations of the Wild Fisheries Review are a concern for the Association and, I suspect, many similar organisations throughout the Highlands and beyond. A close eye will have to be kept on the process going forward in order to ensure that organisations aiming to provide good quality fishing at low cost to the public can remain financially viable. It is clear that angling



associations face many challenges, not least the increasing age profile and declining membership that are features of many of these type of organisations.

This will be my last report to *Kyle News* as chairman of the Kyle of Sutherland Angling Association. I have very much enjoyed the interaction with both the Kyle Board and the Kyle Trust. I wish my successor the very best of luck and trust that he will maintain the best traditions of the Association.

Dr Keith Williams, MIFM

Could you please encourage whatever appropriate contacts you may have to maintain interest and financial support for the Trust.

As members of the Trust and participants in the enjoyment of recreational fishing within the Kyle of Sutherland, that's really the most important contribution you can make.

Kyle of Sutherland District Salmon Fisheries Board
Conservation Policy
"Kyle fisheries – you hold the future"

By law, in Scotland, it is now illegal to retain Salmon caught before 1st April.

All salmon must be returned before this date, including fatally damaged fish.

Salmon. Aim to achieve:

- A 100% release rate catchment wide over the season.
- Definition; fish 65 cm (approximately 7 lbs) and over, measuring from nose to the fork of the tail .

Grilse. Aim to achieve:

- All fish released before 15th June.
- A minimum of 80% release rate catchment wide over the season.

Sea Trout. Aim to achieve:

- All fish released before the 15th of June.
- All fish 50 cm (approximately 3 lbs) and over released, measuring from nose to the fork of the tail.
- A minimum of 80% release rate catchment wide over the season.

Method.

- Fly only by statutory instrument.
- Treble hooks prohibited.
- Barbless hooks should be used as best practice.

Kyle of Sutherland District Salmon Fishery Board
Bank House
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IV24 3BG

Board Members:
Robbie Douglas Miller (Ch.)
Nicky Griffiths, John Green, Gary Gruber, Michael Hasson
Alex Hunter, Alistair Mathers, Willie Paterson
George Skinner, Richard Sankey

Director: Dr Keith L Williams MIFM
Administration: Audrey Campbell

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SPONSORS



Membership and Gift Aid Declaration

A. Gift Aid Declaration:

Title: _____ Forename: _____ Surname: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Email: _____

I would like the Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust (Charity No: SC030207) to treat this as a Gift Aid Donation and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify the Trust otherwise.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Notes:

- You must be a UK tax payer to make a gift eligible for Gift Aid. The total of income tax and capital gains tax payable by you in each year must be equal to the tax recoverable on all your gifts.
- For every £1 donated under Gift Aid the Trust can recover a further 25p.
- Higher rate tax relief can be claimed by you on Gift Aid Donations
- A Declaration can be cancelled at any time by notifying us. It must cease if you no longer pay tax.

B. Cash donation: Cheque enclosed made payable to Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust: £ _____

C. To make regular donations for future years please complete the Standing Order form below.

Standing Order

To: The Manager Bank: _____ Sort Code: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Please pay to Royal Bank of Scotland, 19 High Street, Tain. IV19 1AD for the credit of:

Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust - Account No: 00209852 - Sort Code: 83-27-35 the sum of £ _____

On _____ (date) and annually until otherwise instructed.

No. of account to be debited: _____

Account name: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

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Please tick this box if you **do NOT** want to receive mail, email or newsletters from the Kyle Trust.

Please return completed form to Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust, Bank House, Ardgay, IV24 3BG