

**COCKERMOUTH ANGLING ASSOCIATION A.G.M. 2013
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

ANGLING REPORT

- In the past season, on Cockermouth Angling Association Waters 34 salmon were caught on the Derwent, 17 of these were returned to the water. There were 6 sea trout caught on the Derwent and all of these were returned. On the Cocker there were 15 salmon taken, 10 of which were returned.
- For comparison figures for Cockermouth Angling Association for earlier years are as follows:

Season	Derwent Total Salmon	Derwent Salmon Returned	Derwent Sea Trout	Cocker Total Salmon
2002	58	?	?	3
2003	20	?	?	0
2004	93	30	26	8
2005	55	33	10	6
2006	61	27	17	7
2007	121	53	4	22
2008	64	23	1	25
2009	82	44	14	11
2010	72	38	27	11
2011	55	19	13	13
2012	44	22	10	5

- CAA total fishing effort on the Derwent was about 623 sessions and for the Cocker it was about 126 sessions, so, on average, on the Derwent it takes 18 sessions per salmon and on the Cocker it's about 8 – 9 sessions per salmon.
- We had hoped to see an increase in the numbers of salmon caught on the Derwent this year after the very poor results of 2012. However, from the preliminary figures I have received to date, it now looks like the 2013 figures will not be much different to the 2012 catch. The salmon catch figures I have to date (with last year's figures in brackets) are Workington AA 226 (202 in 2012), Castle Rods 207 (102), Isel Fisheries 49 (74), The Fitz 108 (much better than the 16 of last year), Keswick 5 (18), Woodhall 37 (40), Cauldron 12 (20) and the Cradles 10 (15).
- The reduction in salmon numbers returning to the Derwent is a reflection of a general overall trend in many British and Irish rivers, although one or two of the east coast rivers have shown better results. The best information we have from the Environment Agency is that the main reason for the decline is much reduced survival rates at sea, rather than any river specific problems. We have been told that in the peak years in the 1960s / 1970s, about 40% of smolts going to sea survived to return to the rivers as grilse. By the 1980s, this survival rate had fallen to about 20% and currently it is somewhere between 1 – 5%. It is believed that salmon smolts travelling to their traditional feeding grounds off Norway are now being out competed for food by mackerel, herring etc. Consequently, the smolts are travelling further afield towards Greenland, staying at sea for longer, gaining weight more

slowly, before returning to their native rivers as "Multi-Sea Wintered" salmon rather than as grilse.

- You may have heard reports or seen the recent Countryfile programme which suggested that that smolts migrating to the feeding grounds may be affected by sea lice from salmon farms along the west coast of Scotland and this is also being put forward as a major contributor to the decline in salmon returning to west coast rivers. The EA view is that sea lice from fish farms are known to have a significant effect on sea trout, which feed in coastal waters and therefore spend more time in closer contact with the salmon farms in the Scottish sea lochs. However, it is believed that migrating salmon smolts move quickly out of coastal waters onto the continental shelf and are therefore less prone to damage from sea lice from fish farms.
- There is virtually nothing that local angling associations can do about marine survival rates. This will take action at national and international level. However, we can influence the numbers of smolts which migrate from our rivers and we are working with the EA and Natural England, through the Derwent Owners' Association, to try to work out a package of measures to halt the decline in salmon numbers on the Derwent. EA currently estimates that, at present, only about 1% of salmon eggs survive to become migrating smolts. EA have also told us that, although the Derwent is continuing to meet its "Conservation Level" of egg deposition, over the last four or five years, there has been a downward trend with egg deposition rates falling by about 300,000 eggs per year. To halt this decline, it would mean that we need to have another 50 – 60 female salmon surviving to spawn each year.
- We believe that significant pressure on migratory fish stocks is predation by fish eating birds. We have seen huge increases in numbers of goosanders and cormorants on the Derwent in recent years. We repeated the survey of goosanders on the River Derwent in March 2013 and again counted large numbers of birds present. We have again been granted a licence by Natural England to shoot small numbers of both goosanders and cormorants as an aid to scaring them from our stretches of water. Workington AA, Isel Fishings and Keswick AA have also been granted similar licences. However, the current licencing controls are ineffective as they merely move birds from one section of river to another and have no effect at all on overall numbers. I have recently written to the DEFRA Secretary of State, Owen Patterson, to emphasise the real damage that goosanders are causing on the Derwent, and to seek his support for a proper culling programme on the Derwent. Sir Tony Cunningham has also written to support us in this. Mark Hastings has been very actively involved with the Angling Trust in getting our case for action across, and I am indebted to Mark for his valuable input. Locally, the EA are now "peer reviewing" figures produced by David Calvert (West Cumbria Rivers Trust) which show that, based on the numbers of goosanders we have counted on the Derwent in annual surveys organised by Adrian Mills, goosanders remove juvenile salmon from the Derwent, which if they survived would give us the equivalent of between 2000 and 4800 additional adult fish returning to the river each year!
- I reported last year that David Hackley had found a dead American Signal crayfish at Iron Bridge. We worked with the EA to carry out a trapping programme at Iron Bridge in May / June of this year and we found another live crayfish. This was followed up by the removal of a further 7 crayfish by hand searching in the river just below Redkirk! We have no idea where these have come from but it is inconceivable

that they have migrated from the population known to be in St. John's Beck. We can only conclude that they have been deliberately introduced by someone close to the points where they have been discovered. Once they establish themselves in a river it is virtually impossible to eradicate them. So far, they do not appear to be thriving in the Derwent. If anyone comes across any further evidence of crayfish it is important that this is reported to a committee member and we will inform Chris Addy at the EA

FURTHER CONSERVATION MEASURES AND BYE LAW CHANGES.

- You will be aware that, finally, the bye-law for the Derwent system for a 2 salmon per day bag limit and a requirement that all hen fish to be returned in October has been introduced on the Derwent by the EA. Within the Derwent Owners' Association, we will be discussing whether any additional conservation measures may be required in the short term to help to stem the decline of salmon numbers on the Derwent.
- Keswick AA applied to the EA for permission to restart operation of their hatchery with a view to stock it with 50,000 eggs from between 10 and 12 hen fish and then release the parr raised from these into the Glenderamackin between Threlkeld Bridge and the Mill Inn. The KAA application was refused by EA who concluded that it would not be prepared to authorize the taking of brood stock for the low returns suggested by EA figures, and there would be no apparent benefit over allowing the fish to spawn naturally. EA also said that this was "particularly relevant given that studies have shown that the poor performance of hatchery fish in the wild is passed on to their offspring if they do manage to breed successfully".
- In November 2013, an international conference, entitled "Boosting Salmon Numbers – Is Stocking the Answer?" was organized by The Atlantic Salmon Trust and held in Glasgow. Feedback on the presentations made at the 2 day conference suggests that there was nothing said that would lead to any change in the national EA policy on stocking and there are particular difficulties in trying to establish stocking programs on rivers with SAC status, like the Derwent. Never-the-less, EA has agreed to re-examine whether or not a case can be made for having some sort of stocking program on the Derwent as part of an overall "salmon stock recovery plan."

HABITAT IMPROVEMENT AND RIVER BANK REPAIR WORK

- We have continued to be involved in the habitat improvement work through our membership of the Derwent Owners' Association. Work has continued on the fencing off stretches of river to regenerate vegetation to minimise erosion through stock grazing etc. The Rivers Corridor Group of BLRP has also organised the completion of 3 major river bank repair jobs during 2013 at High Stocks Bridge above Bass Lake, at Portinscale and at Wood Bottom. CAA has again made our normal annual contribution of £500 to support this work.
- I am particularly pleased to be able to report that the major repair work to the riverbank at Wood Bottom was successfully completed during the summer of 2013. The work was done by O'Malley's Construction. Our thanks are due to John Moses for the day to day liaison with them during the construction phase and for

organising seeding and sorting out some drainage problems etc. Some further work is needed on tree management and planting during the winter and I have no doubt that John will be organising further working parties. This repair work cost £43,875 with contributions coming from CAA (£21,000), DOA (£6,000), EA (£2,000) and the Rivers Corridor Group of BLRP (£14,875). Feedback from members suggests that this has been money well spent and the work represents a major and significant improvement to our fishing.

- We are planning to carry out repairs / re-enforcement of the left hand bank at Iron Bridge before the start of next season. The advice we have had from EA is that this could be done by using willow and a similar approach has been used by Isel Fishings at Brock Hole. We will be having a look at this in the next week or so. Billy Malloy is also organising the recovery and repositioning of the metal bridge which has fallen into the stream at Eller Beck at Iron Bridge.
- John Moses and Sean Taylor have already completed some tree management work at Redkirk and we have further tree work to complete at Lancaster Flat and Wood Bottom. John will be organising working parties in due course.
- We have had the usual programme of "bush and sieve cutting" to maintain access to stretches of fishing. The "Guest water" on the Derwent was completed by David Payne and our thanks are due to Frank Hope for most of the work done elsewhere.
- You will also have noticed that, at the request of Allan Brown the farmer, new signs have been fitted by John Moses at key points on the approaches to the guest water to inform people that this is private land with no public right of way.

COGRA MOSS

- Eric will be giving his Cogra Moss report later in the meeting but I want to give recognition to the enormous hard work that he has done on our behalf over many years at Cogra. He always understates his efforts and plays down the problems that he has had to deal with at Cogra. Eric has told the Committee that the time has come for him to retire from this work as Still Waters Secretary but he has agreed to carry on for next season. I am particularly thankful to Eric for this. It gives us some time to work out exactly how the Association can continue to run Cogra Moss when Eric does retire. It will be extremely difficult to find anyone else that can run Cogra as Eric has done and I would be very pleased to hear from anyone who has any interest in taking on any aspect of its running. Ideally, we would like to have someone to work alongside Eric during the season so that he can pass on the benefits of his experience to them.
- I am sure that Eric will mention the inspection and engineering work that is going on with regard to the dam at Cogra Moss. United Utilities are required to undertake statutory annual inspections of the dam and every 4 years these are supplemented by a more detailed independent inspection. This has taken place this year and, as part of this, UU are required to show that, in an emergency, it could draw down the level of the lake to protect the integrity of the dam. Because of the age of the dam and difficulties with the engineering drawings, there have been problems in locating and testing the draw down facilities. Further complications have arisen because NE / EA have discovered a rare pond plant at Cogra which they want to protect and this gives UU problems in temporary reducing the level of the lake. Eric has been in contact with UU's day

to day operations at Cogra and I have been in contact with Paul Phillips, UU's Water Resources Manager. I can confirm that, despite speculation, UU have no plans to return Cogra Moss as a water supply, nor is it presently planned to reduce the level of Cogra Moss on a permanent basis. UU has promised to keep us informed of developments.

CAA WEB-SITE

- John Smith has continued to maintain the Cockermouth Angling Society web-site and I would encourage members to visit it at cockermouthanglingassociation.co.uk

ANNUAL DINNER

- Held again at Hundith Hill last March with a good attendance. This year's Dinner Dance will be at the same venue on Saturday 1st March 2014 and Sue will be sending out details in the New Year. It's a good night out so please try and support it again this year.

THE DOWAGER PAMELA, LADY EGREMONT

- Members will be aware that the Dowager Pamela, Lady Egremont died recently. She was President of the Association and had a long standing keen interest in fishing on the Derwent. Leconfield / Egremont Estates obviously continue to have a very significant role in the Derwent Fishery and, having taken Dave Smith's advice, I would suggest that the meeting may wish to consider inviting Lord Egremont (Max) to become the President of our Association.

FINALLY, THANKS

- Are due to
 - Our Secretary Sue Moses who has carried out these duties with great efficiency during the year, ably assisted by husband John.
 - Our Treasurer John Smith and to Vice Chairman Peter Laws.
 - Eric Brown who has continued to do absolutely Stirling work at Cogra Moss and I do not know how the Association will manage when he finally retires.
 - Mr & Mrs Fazackerley, wardens at Ingle Nook Caravan Park for selling day permits for Cogra Moss on our behalf.
 - David Coulthard and Michael Cleeland for running the guest schemes.
 - The whole of the Committee which has worked very well as a team, not only in meetings but also when it comes to getting things done on the river bank.
 - I'd also like to thank Dave Smith for his on-going help and support and I recognise the difficulties and uncertainties which he is facing in his role as Castle Fisheries Manager.
 - And, finally the members, for generally fishing in a sporting manner, looking after new comers and giving the committee very few problems!

Jack Abernethy
3rd December 2013