

**COCKERMOUTH ANGLING ASSOCIATION A.G.M. 2017  
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

**ANGLING REPORT**

- In the past season, on Cockermouth Angling Association Waters 79 salmon were caught on the Derwent, 69 of these were returned to the water. There were 22 sea trout caught on the Derwent and all of these were returned. On the Cocker no salmon or sea trout were reported, and angling effort was very light.
- 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
2013	34	17	6	15
2014	24	20	46	15
2015	31	25	28	0
2016	34	31	35	0

- CAA total fishing effort on the Derwent was about 650 (520 last year) and for the Cocker it was about 12 sessions (12 last year), so, on average, on the Derwent it takes about 10 sessions per salmon!
- Overall, it has been a slightly better season than 2016 and so far, I have had reports of 578 salmon and 186 seatrout being caught on the Derwent. Catch and return rates were 89.4% for salmon and 98.4% for sea trout. (350 salmon and 255 sea trout in 2016).
- For interest the other figures I have for other Derwent beats so far is as follows (with last year's figures in brackets) are Workington AA 130 (150 in 2016), Castle

Rods 100 (25), Isel Fisheries 56 (25), Keswick 15 (7), Woodhall 17 (5), Fitz Beat 89 (50), Redmain 37 (17) and the Cradles 14 (4).

- So, on the Derwent, the pattern seems to be that there were more salmon caught on most beats this year, apart from on Workington AA. In June, July and early August there seemed to be better runs of salmon, mainly multi-winter sea fish rather than grilse. In September and early October, any salmon caught had, in the main, been in the river a while. There then seemed to be a very late run.
- The lower beats on the Castle waters, which have been leased by David Hill, were fished significantly more than last year. The Castle beats above Cockermouth, however, were only very lightly fished.
- The Cocker did not replicate the improvement shown on the Derwent and up to the end of November, very few salmon have been seen in the river.

### **CASTLE FISHERIES LEASE**

The fishing on the Derwent which we lease from Castle Fisheries is covered by a 20-year lease which was renewed in 2006. Under the terms of that lease, the rental increase by the change in retail price index every 5 years. So, it was increased in 2011 and should have been increased again at the start of the 2016 season. For various reasons, this did not happen, and we have continued to pay at the 2011 rates. Our calculations show that, if the lease had been properly applied, we should now be paying about 20% more on our Derwent Permits. Charles Baker of Savills, the Castle's land agents, queried this underpayment at the start of this year but then agreed that, because permit fees had already been set on the 2011 rent, that there would be no increase for 2016. I have been in touch with Charles Baker throughout this year and I am pleased to report that Castle Fisheries has also agreed that there will be no increase again in 2017. However, we will review the situation at the end of the 2017 season.

I have also continued to pursue the idea of increasing the fishing available to us, with no increase in rent, as compensation for the decreased value of the fishing. However, at this stage, no changes are proposed.

### **ENVIRONMENT AGENCY "INFORMAL" CONSULTATION ON MANAGING SALMON FISHERIES IN ENGLAND AND ON THE BORDER ESK**

All salmon licence holders should have received a copy of the EA Consultation Paper which was seeking views on proposed changes to net licensing and management of rod & line fishing for salmon. As far as rod angling is concerned, there were three areas of consultation. In brief, these were:

- The renewal of the national bye-law requiring 100% catch and release of any salmon caught before 16<sup>th</sup> June. (This is likely to happen as a matter of course.)
- Proposals to increase catch and release rates, either by the introduction of bye-laws or by voluntary means.
- Proposals for further controls on fishing methods to increase the chances of salmon being returned to the water un-harmed, again either by bye-laws or by voluntary means.

The Derwent is classed as being "at risk" of failing to maintain self-sustaining salmon population because it continues to fail to meet its conservation limit for egg deposition.

Therefore, EA is proposing that we should have a 100% catch and release rate. The Angling Trust has lobbied hard to suggest that, in the first instance, this should be on a voluntary basis. I have responded to the consultation on behalf of both Cockermouth AA and Derwent Owners' Association, to support this voluntary approach and have presented detailed arguments and evidence to support this.

Likewise, I have suggested that the changes in fishing methods should be on voluntary basis rather than through bye-laws. In fact, we already follow most of the proposals through our club rules.

We will hear the results of this consultation in the next few weeks and, if there are to be any changes to bye-laws, there will need to be a second consultation on these changes.

The most significant thing is that we will be operating a 100% catch and release regime for salmon from the start of the 2018 salmon season, one way or another. Members please note!

## **THE NATIONAL PICTURE ON SALMON STOCKS**

After the "Salmon Summit", held in November 2015, the Environment Agency launched a "5-Point Approach for Restoring Salmon in England". This aims to address pressures at different life stages of salmon and is a vital part of restoring and maintaining England's salmon population.

The 5 points are:

1. Improve marine survival
2. Further reduce exploitation by nets and rods
3. Remove barriers to migration and enhance habitat
4. Safeguard sufficient water flows in rivers
5. Maximize spawning success by improving water quality

National level working groups were set up to progress each of these points and we were promised a report on how they were doing by the end of 2017. However, the Reporting Conference in our area has now been postponed until January 2018.

## **LOCAL IMPROVEMENT PLANS**

It is believed that the biggest single factor affecting the status of salmon populations has been declining marine survival, which has nearly halved over the last 20 years. Up to 95% of salmon smolts are dying at sea in their first year. In the 1970s there were estimated to be around 7 million salmon in the North Atlantic, nowadays there are less than half that number, near 3 million.

There is virtually nothing that local angling associations can do about marine survival rates and we look to EA and Government to act at national and international level on this issue.

Locally, we can influence the numbers of smolts which migrate from our rivers. The Derwent Owners Association, working with the EA and Natural England, has put

together a River Derwent Conservation Action Plan, which is aimed at halting the decline and then improving the salmon numbers on the Derwent. I have previously reported on this multi-pronged approach and have stressed that no single element on its own can solve the problem. We need to keep acting on all these fronts. I will give a very brief up date of progress to date.

- **Increasing catches and release rates.** We have made considerable progress in this area already and, as I have already indicated, we will have a 100% catch and release rate for salmon on the Derwent from the start of next season.
- **Decreasing predation by fish eating birds.** I continue to be the "Principle Licence Holder" for a catchment wide bird control licence for the Derwent. This time last year, I reported that we were being refused permission by the National Trust to use a non-lethal green laser to scare the large roosting colony of cormorants from the island on Derwent Water. I can now report, that after much negotiation and consultation, and reams of paperwork, we managed to persuade National Trust (with the help of the Angling Trust) to allow that scaring to take place. It went ahead, without incident or any adverse comments, and reduced the roosting population on Derwent Water back to the "normal" levels of about 40 birds. In the light of this, National Trust have agreed that this operation can be repeated in 2018. However, we have had further difficulties with the Area Control Licence from Natural England this year. When the licence was issued in September 2017, Natural England had reduced the numbers of goosanders we could shoot and had put a complete ban on killing goosanders on the lower 10 km of river, roughly from Whinnah Dub to Workington. The reasons they gave were based upon dodgy bird counts of goosanders in the new Solway Firth Special Protection Area, flawed science and an extreme interpretation of the pre-cautionary principle. The Eden was also affected in a similar way. I prepared a technical paper which rubbished the approach taken by Natural England. We have had meetings with them and have involved Fish Legal, who have told Natural England that they have acted illegally by not considering the need to protect the salmon. Natural England have already promised to revise the bird control licence to protect the smolt run. We await further developments.

Adrian Mills will be organising another count of goosanders and cormorants on the river in March and it is vital that we continue to gather crucial information on what is happening with bird numbers. Please help in this survey if you can spare an hour or so one Sunday morning. Anyone interested in helping should give contact details to Adrian.

- **Doing more habitat improvement work.** CAA has supported the DOA's involvement with habitat improvement work over many years. This is carried out through the Rivers Corridor Group, which I also chair. During 2017 to date, a further 23 habitat improvement projects have been completed through the Rivers Corridor Group. These have included work on:
  - The Main River Derwent at Isel, Grange Borrowdale, Portinscale, above Bassenthwaite Lake, Birchholme Island, Barn Dub, Stakes Top, Marron Foot and Prospect Hall Farm
  - Newlands Beck
  - Trout Beck
  - Glenderamackin

- River Marron at Ullock and Greysouthen
- Chapel Beck
- Barrow Beck
- Lair Beck and Derwent Water near Applethwaite

The work has included:

- Fencing of water courses to create substantial riparian strips or buffer zones and wildlife corridors
- Insertion of woody debris to provide shelter for young fish
- Tree planting to provide bank stabilization and create dappled shade
- Willow planting along river bank to stabilize bank and "slow the flow"
- Protection of ancient woodlands
- Enhancement of spawning areas by management of gravel beds
- Repairs to habitat improvement projects damaged in the December 2015 floods
- Protection of river banks by willow spiling, log and Christmas trees etc.
- Tree management work
- Natural Flood Defense work by bank re-profiling, "making space for water" etc.

The total cost of this work in 2017 to 21<sup>st</sup> October 2017 was £47,726.85, the Environment Agency had contributed £17,360.24 and DOA had contributed £9,964.37.

Further habitat improvement projects are in hand at:

- Trout Beck
- Main River Derwent at Motestock, Camerton Church and Portinscale
- Sandy Beck
- River Cocker

In addition, walkover surveys are planned this winter for Lostrigg Beck, Broughton Beck, Tom Rudd Beck and Barrow Beck. Reports had been commissioned from WCRT and the Wild Trout Trust to identify and prioritize further habitat improvement opportunities.

- **Enhancement of Juvenile Fish Stocks.** Throughout the year the DOA Hatchery Sub Group which is chaired by Mark Hastings, has been putting together a formal application to the Environment Agency to re-open Keswick hatchery, for an initial 3-year period, to help to remedy lost stocks of juvenile salmon using "Scotty boxes". A research element has also been included in the case. At a meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> November, EA gave us further guidance on some of the detail we need to include in the application. The Hatchery Sub Group intend to submit the formal application by the end of January, with a view to operating the hatchery towards the end of the 2018 season. CAA has donated £500 per year towards the Semi-Quantitative Electrofishing / Catchment Characterisation Programme carried out on the Derwent Catchment by West Cumbria Rivers Trust. This is giving more information on the

state of juvenile salmon and trout stocks and will be of use in making the case for the siting of the Scotty boxes.

- **Control of Poaching and Illegal Fishing.** This continues to be an area of concern to anglers on the Derwent. There are only 8 full time warranted bailiffs in the whole of the North-West area, so the days of routine patrols (particularly at night) have gone! The EA rely upon an "intelligence led" approach, deploying the bailiff team to those spots where they have good intelligence (reported on the Hotline **0800 80 70 60**). I have had reports of a successful anti-poaching operation in our area earlier this year, but as far as I know it has not yet come to court.

Understandably, local anglers get very frustrated about the absence of teams of EA warranted bailiffs. However, it is quite clear that this cannot happen because of continued cuts in Government "Grant in Aid" to the Environment Agency. Can I again emphasise the importance of reporting any intelligence or even suspicion of illegal activity on the river to the Emergency Helpline Number on your licence **0800 80 70 60**? I have issued lists of Grid References for key points on the river system and those for CAA waters are given on our website.

- **Removal of Barriers to Fish Migration.** This is an area where the West Cumbria Rivers Trust is taking the lead and working with EA, UU and others. Plans have been progressed to remove some major barriers (like Yearl Weir and the Coops weir) but these are at an early stage of development. However, more immediately work is in hand to improve fish passage by removing blockages caused by fallen trees and piped "culverts".

#### **MAINTENANCE / BANK REPAIR WORK ON CAA WATERS**

The damage caused to the bank at Barn Dub by the 2015 floods was repaired this year. Thanks to John Smith for organising the work and Billy Malloy for helping to procure the materials. This repair cost £2,028 but we only paid 10% of this, with the rest being funded by DOA and EA.

We also had planned to carry out some significant bank repair work at Iron Bridge, coupled with some habitat improvements in Broughton Beck. However, these had to be cancelled after the landowner was let down by a contractor on delivery of materials and withdrew his permission for the work to go ahead. Hopefully, we can get him interested again this next year.

We are aware of the need for further tree removal work etc on the Derwent and many of our beats on the Cocker are badly overgrown and could do with the attention of some working parties.

#### **COGRA MOSS**

We are now aware that the engineering work needed on the pipework associated with the dam at Cogra Moss will be starting in February next year. The main work involves the installation of some new pipework on a syphon system to allow the lowering of the water level in an emergency. We have been told that there should be minimal restriction on fishing during this work although some areas may have restricted access (presumably the dam area) for safety reasons during some phases of the work. The work could last for several months. Some good news is that United Utilities will be improving the access road and will "make it good" at the end of the work. United Utilities have promised to keep us informed of plans as their contractor works up the details of these.

Terry Barnes and John Smith have continued to manage Cogra Moss on our behalf and a full report will be given later in the meeting.

### **RULE BOOK**

During the season, it became apparent that not all members were fully aware of some of the Association's Rules, particularly about the fishing of the "restricted pools". The rules are all on our web-site and members are referred to this on the permit. However, we have decided to issue a copy of the Rule Book to all permit holders when we send out the permits next season.

### **WEB-SITE**

John Smith has continued to maintain the Cockermonth Angling Society web-site and I would encourage members to visit it at [cockermonthanglingassociation.co.uk](http://cockermonthanglingassociation.co.uk)

### **ANNUAL DINNER**

Held again at Hundith Hill last February with a good attendance. This year's Dinner Dance will be at the same venue on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2018 and details will be sent out in the New Year. It's a good night out so please try and support it again this year.

### **FINALLY, THANKS**

Are due to

- Our Secretary Steve Moore, who picked up the reins from Sue Moses who retired after over 10 years' service.
- Our Treasurer John Smith and to Vice Chairman Peter Laws.
- Terry Barnes, together with Steven Black and John Smith and others for their excellent work at Cogra Moss.
- Frank Hope, John Smith and colleagues for organising and carrying out river bank maintenance work and grass cutting throughout the season.
- The 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.
- All our members, for generally fishing in a sporting manner, looking after new comers and giving the committee very few problems!

Jack Abernethy, Chairman, Cockermonth Angling Association, 4<sup>th</sup> December 2017