

**COCKERMOUTH ANGLING ASSOCIATION A.G.M. 2018
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

ANGLING REPORT

- In the past season, on Cockermouth Angling Association Waters 17 salmon were caught on the Derwent, all of these were returned to the water. There were 23 sea trout caught on the Derwent and all of these were also 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
2017	79	69	22	0

- CAA total fishing effort on the Derwent was about 334 (650 last year), so, on average, on the Derwent it takes about 20 sessions per salmon!
- Overall, it has been a much poorer season than 2017 because of, among other things, the drought conditions and high-water temperatures in the summer. Even when the water came in autumn, the salmon didn't! So far, I have had reports of 242 salmon and 101 seatrout being caught on the Derwent. Catch and return rates were 99.2% for salmon and 100% for sea trout. (590 salmon and 164 sea trout in 2017).

- 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 78 (130 in 2017), Castle Rods 48 (100), Isel Fisheries 29 (56), Keswick 2 (15), Woodhall 10 (17), Fitz Beat 25 (89), Redmain 13 (37) and the Cradles 0 (14).

CASTLE FISHERIES LEASE

I reported last year, that I had been able to negotiate with Castle Fisheries so that the rent we paid to them for the Derwent fishing in 2017 remained frozen at the 2011 figure instead of it being increased by the retail price index as stated in the lease. Despite this, a fall in demand for our outside Derwent Rods meant that we received about £2,000 less in permit fees than we paid out to Castle Fisheries in rent! I have met with Charles Baker, Lord Egremont's land agent, and Lord Egremont during the year and I am pleased to announce that I have negotiated a £2,000 rent rebate for the 2019 season. The Committee propose to use this rebate to reduce both local and outside rod permits by 10% for the 2019 season. There will be more detail on this later in the meeting.

I also discussed with Lord Egremont, the possibility of returning the Howthwaite fishing to Cockermouth AA at no increased cost. During these discussions at Cockermouth Castle, Lord Egremont was amenable to this with the proviso that he and Lady Egremont would be able to continue to fish that beat, alongside our members, when they were in residence. I said that there would be no problem with this and I reported this to our Committees in September. Regrettably, in late October, Charles Baker rang me to say that Lord Egremont had subsequently decided that the family would like to keep Howthwaite for its exclusive use after all. His advice was to take this up with Lord Egremont at a future date to see if there was any possibility of CAA being allowed to fish Howthwaite when the family was not doing so.

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY CONSULTATION ON MANAGING SALMON FISHERIES IN ENGLAND AND ON THE BORDER ESK

This time last year, EA had published a Consultation Paper, 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 16th 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.

Based upon the 2016 catch returns, the Derwent had been classed as being "at risk" of failing to maintain self-sustaining salmon population because it continued to fail to meet its conservation limit for egg deposition. Therefore, EA had proposed that we should have a mandatory 100% catch and release rate. It had been the EA intention that this would be introduced during the 2018 season. However, for various reasons, including the very large numbers of objections to the proposed bye-laws, their introduction was delayed. EA then had to recalculate the status of rivers based upon the improved catch returns from the 2017 salmon season. This changed the categorisation of the Derwent from "at risk" to "probably at risk" and this, automatically, removed the river from the Schedule of rivers subject to the 100% mandatory catch and release regime. "Probably at risk" rivers were expected to meet catch and return rates of at least 90%, but this would be on a voluntary basis and we were already just about doing this on the Derwent

already. One further development was that, because the Derwent is a SAC river and has failed to meet its conservation limit, in 4 years out of 5, EA informed us that we would be expected to reach catch and return rates of "approaching 100%" on a voluntary basis. If we failed to do this, EA could reconsider the Derwent and bring in bye-laws to make it mandatory.

At the Derwent Owners' Association meeting in September 2018, all members agreed to operate to a 100% catch and release for salmon on a voluntary basis. I am pleased to be able to report that, from the catch figures reported to me, we have practically achieved that this season with only 2 fish being killed from the 260 or so caught. Lord Egremont has indicated that 100% catch and release will be a condition on all waters controlled by Castle Fisheries. Of course, the advantage of having a voluntary system is that, if stocks show signs of recovery, we could relax the 100% catch and release much more readily than would be the case if EA had introduced bye-laws.

On the other Consultation proposals,

- The 100% catch and release of salmon caught before 16th June was renewed, as expected
- EA has now decided not to introduce bye-laws to place further controls of fishing methods and is allowing anglers to use common sense, best practice and club rules etc. to use methods which do not harm fish and ensure that we can return them unharmed.

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 a Reporting Conference was held in our area last January. I think that the overall view of those attending was that we were completely overwhelmed with progress being made. The Conference mainly centered upon the bye-law proposals to reduce the effects of angling and netmen. There were some references to the problems of agricultural pollution of rivers. Probably, the most interesting presentation was on some research on smolt tracking off Scottish east coast rivers.

But overall, I don't think we can expect anything in the short term from this "5 Point Plan" which will help to restore our salmon stocks!

LOCAL IMPROVEMENT PLANS

Locally, we have continued to try to maximise the numbers of smolts which successfully migrate from the Derwent. 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.** As previously reported, we are now operating at virtually 100% catch and release rates for both salmon and sea trout.
- **Decreasing predation by fish eating birds.** I continue to be the "Principle Licence Holder" / "Primary Contact" for a catchment wide bird control licence for the Derwent. This involves me making the case for the licence to Natural England each year, allocating the numbers of birds we are licenced to shoot to each of the 6 "Specific Site" licence holders who look after specific stretches of the Derwent, making sure that we do not exceed the total allocation and then reporting back to NE on all actions taken, including the use of non-lethal control methods. Last year we were allocated a total of 35 cormorants and 33 goosanders for the whole of the Derwent. These are supposedly about 20% of the Derwent cormorant population and about 10% of the goosander population. In May 2018, I reported that we had shot that full allocation and I requested 3 changes to this year's licence
 - A modest increase in the total allocations of both species, on the grounds that we had shot the full allocation last year and we were still having problems with declining salmon numbers. This was refused because NE said that we had not provided any evidence that bird populations were increasing on the Derwent.
 - An abolition of the restriction on shooting goosanders in the lower 10km of river between September and March. NE had introduced this because it said this area was "functionally linked" to the proposed Solway Firth Special Protection Area and that goosander numbers were decreasing. NE decreased the restricted area to 7.5 km.
 - St. Johns Beck to be included in the Specific Site Area controlled by Keswick AA on the grounds that both species had been seen fishing there in increased numbers and this was a prime spawning area. I did not apply for any increase in total birds allocated to allow St Johns Beck to be added. This addition of St Johns Beck was refused by NE on the grounds that, as it was an extension to the area covered by the Area Based Licence, I would need to provide a detailed justification or it!

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 and hopefully convince NE that these are increasing. 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. Notable projects completed in our immediate area this year have been jobs at Sandy Beck and at Isel Bridge. We have also contributed to electro-fishing and catchment characterisation work carried out by West Cumbria Rivers Trust. This has shown

that there are healthy numbers of juvenile salmon and trout in the Derwent system. The low water conditions enabled stretches of the main Derwent to be surveyed this year and these revealed good numbers of juvenile salmon. A full report will be available early next year. Both the habitat improvement work and the electro-fishing work need the help of volunteers and I would like to thank those of you who helped in this. More help is always welcome and if you are interested please let me know.

- **Enhancement of Juvenile Fish Stocks.** The Stocking Programme to support the re-opening of Keswick Hatchery, which had been prepared by the DOA Hatchery Sub Group which is chaired by Mark Hastings, was formally submitted to EA in January 2018. The intention had been to begin placing eggs in the hatchery this year. However, progress has been very slow. We have involved Trudy Harrison, MP for Keswick, in these discussions about the hatchery. She organised a top-level meeting with EA's Head of Fisheries at Westminster in July. As a result, EA has said that it would licence the Keswick Hatchery for use if salmon stocks on the Derwent approached "an extinction point". Some research on what constituted "approaching an extinction point" had been commissioned by Natural Resources Wales and we have asked to see that work. Also, as a result of the meetings with Trudy Harrison EA has come up with some new proposals to try to preserve and enhance Derwent Salmon stocks. We will be getting a presentation on this at the DOA meeting on 10th December, but two proposals of particular interest are:
 - Plans to relocate juvenile salmon from areas where they are "abundant" in the system to other areas which should be suitable but juvenile stocks are low. The belief is that we should get an overall increase in numbers surviving to the smolt stage.
 - Plans to operate the smolt trap in St Johns Beck and introduce a smolt tagging and monitoring programme to get information on the numbers of smolts which manage to migrate to sea.
- **Control of Poaching and Illegal Fishing.** This continue to be an area of concern to anglers on the Derwent. The EA rely upon an "intelligence led" approach, deploying the bailiff team to those spots where they have good intelligence. 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?**
- **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 are still being progressed to remove some major barriers (like Yearl Weir and the Coops weir).

MAINTENANCE / BANK REPAIR WORK ON CAA WATERS

I would like the Association to recognise the work done by John Smith and others in strimming river banks, removing fallen trees when necessary and trying to keep the river banks in reasonable repair. We recognise that more could be done in some areas and we need a Committee member to take over the responsibility for organising working parties, which is the sort of work John Moses used to do on our behalf. So please bear this in mind when we elect the Committee later in the meeting. If you are interested and willing to become involved, please stand for election to the Committee.

AMERICAN SIGNAL CRAYFISH IN THE MAIN DERWENT

EA and West Cumbria Rivers Trust have been trapping and monitoring the presence of American Signal Crayfish in St John's Beck for several years and over 350 were found in the past 12 months. Working in conjunction with EA and WCRT, we have been surveying stretches of the Main Derwent between Redkirk and Iron Bridge, using basket traps and hand searching. Between the end of July and end of October 2018, we have found a total of 17 adult crayfish, 14 in the traps and 3 by hand searching. Thanks to John Smith and Derek Wright for checking the traps on a regular basis. We plan further surveys, mainly by hand searching, starting in Spring 2019 to monitor the extent of these populations. We would be grateful to hear of any confirmed sightings of American Signal Crayfish from members.

COGRA MOSS

The engineering work around the dam area at Cogra Moss has been carried out in fits and starts throughout the season but has had virtually no impact on the fishing. It is now expected to be completed before the start of next season.

Cogra Moss has fished well this year. 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.

ATTRACTING YOUNGSTERS TO TAKE UP FISHING

Our Association is reflecting a national trend in having an aging membership with very few younger members joining it. We have participated in schemes involving presentations on angling, fly tying and related matters in local schools. We have provided opportunities for youngsters to try fly fishing at Cogra Moss and on the River Derwent. We also have junior members schemes at Cogra Moss and on the Derwent and Cocker. However, the Committee has wondered if there was anything else, we could do to encourage youngsters to take up fishing. One possibility may be to introduce a further young members scheme and provide opportunities of fishing on the Cocker and say, Castle Pool (which is very lightly fished by our members at present). I would be interested in hearing preliminary views of this tonight. If there is enough interest in following through on this, I would welcome a Committee member to take over responsibility for working through the encouragement of youngsters to take up fishing. Again, if you are interested, please put your name forward in the Committee elections.

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. This year's Dinner Dance will be at the same venue on Saturday 2nd March 2019 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, 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.
- 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, Cockermouth Angling Association, 3rd December 2018