

**COCKERMOUTH ANGLING ASSOCIATION A.G.M. 2019
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

Before getting on to the formal business report, I will note the sad loss of some real stalwarts of this Association. During the past year two of our former chairmen, Basil Sedgwick and Bill Hobson have died. John Moses, another Derwent veteran and campaigner also passed away. They all made significant contributions to this Association and these are fully recognised.

ANGLING REPORT

- In the past season, on Cockermouth Angling Association Waters 37 salmon were caught on the Derwent, all of these were returned to the water. There were 30 sea trout caught on the Derwent and all of these were also returned. On the Cocker 3 salmon were reported, but 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
2018	17	17	23	3

- CAA total fishing effort on the Derwent was about 388 (334 last year), so, on average, on the Derwent it takes about 12 sessions per salmon! Quite a few Derwent rods did not fish at all this season, probably because of reports that there were very few fish about. However, CAA did rather better in 2019 than we did in 2018.
- Overall, on the Derwent catches were also rather better this year than last and pessimistic predictions that this was going to be "the worst on record" with "the Derwent being devoid of fish" have been shown to be incorrect. It could not be described as a "good" season but it was an improvement on last year! So far, I have had reports of 270 salmon and 196 sea trout being caught on the Derwent. Catch and return rates were 98.5% for salmon and 100% for sea trout. We are operating a voluntary 100% catch and release regime for both species, but unfortunately I have had 4 salmon kills reported (none on our water). It is very important that we do stick to the 100% voluntary C & R while stocks continue to be low, otherwise we may end up with a mandatory bye-law.
- 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 55 (78 in 2018), Castle Rods 52 (48), Isel Fisheries 29 (29), Keswick 15 (2), Woodhall 13 (10), Fitz Beat 12 (25), Redmain 13 (13), Broughton 9 (4), D Hodgkiss 3 (7), Bob Smeaton 19 and the Cradles 5 (0).

CASTLE FISHERIES LEASE

In spite of the 10% reduction in permit fees for both local and outside rods, the sale of permits meant that we were unable to recover the cost of the rental we paid Castle Fisheries for the Derwent Fishing. We paid out £13,000 in rent to the Castle but only recouped £9,800 in permit sales. I have again spoken with Charles Baker of Savilles (Lord Egremont's Land Agents) about this and have suggested a further reduction in rent.

The main problem with permit sales is the lack of demand for outside rods and the Committee has tabled a Notice of Motion proposing that the price of these is reduced to £300 to bring them into line with the cost of the Workington AA outside rod permit.

ELECTRO-FISHING SURVEYS OF THE DERWENT SYSTEM

For the past 5 years we have contributed to an annual "semi-quantitative electro-fishing" survey carried out throughout the Derwent catchment by West Cumbria Rivers Trust. This is aimed at giving us information about the distribution of juvenile salmon and trout and linking this to the habitat. This year,

- 161 sites had been surveyed in the Derwent catchment despite a challenging season due to lots of rain in August and September leading to some very high flows.
- We caught 2687 trout and 2475 salmon, (2175 trout fry, 512 trout parr; 2155 salmon fry, 320 salmon parr).
- 130 sites had trout fry present; 78 sites had salmon fry present.
- Like last year most of the salmon were caught in the main river and usual well known "good" places.

- The Marron catchment was particularly poor for salmon numbers this year compared to previous years which was concerning.
- We found salmon at sites we haven't before such as upper Glenderamackin above Mungrisdale village and on Tongue Gill in Borrowdale. This is excellent news and is largely down to good flows in Autumn allowing them to get to these upper catchment areas and habitat improvement/ fish easement works.
- Lots more salmon parr caught particularly in Borrowdale following last year's bumper crop of fry.
- St. Johns Beck had produced good numbers of salmon fry, although not as many as last year. This may have been because the survey was carried out late in the season and flows had been higher.

2019 had been the last year of the initial 5-year programme planned for this work. However, it was hoped that further funding could be raised to allow it to be continued further. We were building an excellent database to give us a picture of what was happening with juvenile salmonid stocks in the Derwent system. This showed that, in spite of the significantly reduced numbers of adult salmon returning to the Derwent, there were still many spawning sites in the main rivers system and the better spawning tributaries, which could be ranked as "excellent" or "good" on the national standard. We were also collecting evidence to show the benefits of habitat improvement work, in terms of increased juvenile numbers. Further, "problem areas" where juvenile stocks were poor could be identified and the underlying causes examined.

SALMON FRY RELOCATION IN THE DERWENT SYSTEM

The vast majority of wild salmon fry do not survive to become parr because of competition for food, predation etc. Dr. Kyle Young had advocated that some of this so called "doomed majority" could be re-located to low or non-productive sections of the same river where suitable habitat was present, in an effort to potentially boost the overall production of native wild salmon populations. He had said "This approach may minimise the unintended negative consequences of more conventional salmon stocking programmes where wild salmon brood stock are taken from spawning areas and eggs fertilised in the hatchery." Dr. Young's proposal of re-locating salmon fry had subsequently been followed by fisheries in Ireland and EA had said that it was prepared to trial fry relocation on the Derwent.

Initially it had been proposed to relocate some salmon fry from St. Johns Beck into suitable tributaries in the upper Derwent but these plans had to be altered after some concerns raised by Keswick AA. As an alternative, the relocation of salmon fry from the River Cocker into sections of Liza Beck, upstream of the barrier which prevented migration of salmon, had been successfully completed on 2nd August 2019. A total of 444 salmon fry had been caught by electrofishing the Cocker a short distance downstream of the Hope Beck confluence. These had been transferred into an oxygenated tank before being released into stretches of

the Liza Beck, at various locations upstream of the barrier. The operations had been completed within a few hours and there had not been a single mortality. It had been planned to resurvey the Liza in late September / October but high water flows and lack of time had prevented this. It was now planned to carry out the resurvey in spring 2020.

KESWICK HATCHERY

We have been making a regular annual donation to Keswick AA towards the maintenance of the Keswick hatchery. The EA has not granted a licence to operate the hatchery since 2009..

- Annual overheads, in terms of rental, electricity, maintenance, abstraction and discharge licences etc. had therefore been paid for the past 10 years, say about a total of £13,000, without the Derwent seeing any benefit from the hatchery.
- The Derwent Owners' Association submitted an application to EA to reopen the hatchery, prepared by the Hatchery Subgroup, in January 2018.
- There had been no progress with this application, in spite of meetings with the EA and the involvement of both local MPs and politicians up to ministerial level. The position remained that the EA would only consider approving the re-opening of Keswick hatchery as a last resort and where there was evidence that the Derwent salmon population was "nearing extinction" (as per the national Stocking Guidance.)
- DOA had sought clarification on what was meant by "nearing extinction" and papers were supposed to have been prepared by National Resources Wales on this matter. However, in spite of repeatedly pressing for copies of these papers, again including the involvement of local MPs, this had not happened.
- During the recent Local Enquiry into the Welsh Byelaws, the Planning Inspector had considered the issue of the reintroduction into Wales of fish hatcheries as a means of restocking rivers in lieu of, or to complement, the proposed byelaws. Having considered all the evidence, he concluded that:
 - "there was a dearth of any substantive technical evidence from objectors to contradict the latest technical evidence provided by NRW against the reintroduction into Wales of fish hatcheries."
 - "the evidence suggests there is an increasing consensus that hatcheries are not the solution to falling stock numbers whilst there is still viable wild stock."
- This very recent statement, albeit about the Welsh situation, would seem to suggest that there was no likelihood of EA of changing national policy or giving permission to re-open Keswick Hatchery in the foreseeable future.
- In spite of declining rod catches, the numbers of juvenile salmon in the Derwent is still healthy. So low numbers of juveniles does not appear to

- be the cause of reduced adult salmon returns. Even if EA ever accepted that the Derwent salmon stocks were “approaching extinction” it is unlikely that Keswick Hatchery has the capacity to “kick start” the regeneration of salmon stocks in the Derwent system. In these dire circumstances EA would have to consider alternatives such as the use of spare capacity at the Kielder Hatchery or something similar.
- In the light of this current situation regarding Keswick Hatchery, DOA members are being asked if they wish to reconsider the open-ended commitment to provide financial assistance to supporting the hatchery.

RIVER DERWENT SALMON SMOLT TRAPPING AND TRACKING PROJECT

EA has carried out salmon smolt trapping surveys in the River Derwent system in the past and it has been shown, for example, that St. Johns Beck has produced over 1200 healthy salmon smolts per year. However, up until now, we have absolutely no idea about how many smolts make the journey down to the sea. This is to be rectified by the River Derwent Atlantic Salmon Smolt Trapping and Tracking Project, which is starting in 2020. This is a University of Glasgow project which focusses on salmon smolt movements and survival in the Derwent catchment, and the Irish Sea. It is planned to use acoustic tagging and trapping technology to monitor smolts on their journey through the Derwent system. The data produced will show patterns of fish movement around structures, through the Bassenthwaite Lake, their speed, direction and crucially their survival rates from reach through to catchment scale. This data can then be used to make key management decisions to improve survival of smolts and generate more potential returning adults.

A bonus was that this project will couple with a concurrent EU funded project “SeaMonitor” which is deploying static and mobile receivers into the Irish Sea between 2020 and 2022. The aim is to monitor smolt movements on their marine journey.

The project will cost about £220k, of which £150k is for equipment and £75k to fund a Ph.D. student for 3 years. Currently, enough money had been raised for the Ph.D. and to purchase the equipment for at least the first year of the project. A Ph.D. had been appointed and has now started to plan the work.. Trapping and tracking of the smolts will therefore begin in 2020 as planned. Initially, about 100 smolts will be fitted with the acoustic tags. The smolts will be trapped in St Johns Beck. There is still a shortfall of about £90k in the funding for the full three years of the project, but bids have been made to Defra for at least part of this. Local businesses had also been contacted asking for support. DOA has also donated £2,000 as the first instalment of a £6,000 contribution towards the project.

The Derwent Atlantic Salmon Smolt Tracking Project is closely aligned to “The Missing Salmon Project” and the “likely Suspects Framework”, organised by The

Atlantic Salmon Trust. This is a way of collecting information on the life cycle of the salmon, working out where and why fish are dying so that the causes can be prioritised, and where possible, pragmatic management solutions put in place.

YEARL WEIR – MILL RACE BY PASS PROJECT

In low flow conditions, migrating salmon smolts can become trapped behind the Yearl weir and become subject to predation by cormorants and goosanders. Longer term, there are plans to either remove the weir or to modify it to ease migration. A short term mitigation project to facilitate migration of salmon smolts was successfully completed in 2019. This was project managed by the Chairman and Ian Creighton of West Cumbria Rivers Trust. In concept the project was very simple but it involved a great deal of negotiations with key stakeholders and formal consents had to be granted by EA, NE and Iggesund, who hold a water abstraction licence for the mill race.

The project involved the use of the mill race, which by-passes the weir and provides an alternative route downstream for smolts which had become trapped behind Yearl weir in low flow conditions. The flow down the millrace had been increased from 3 MI per day up to 37 MI per day by creating a channel behind the weir to provide an “attraction flow” towards the sluice gate, which had then been controlled to give the desired flow. The mill race returns the water to the main Derwent downstream of the road bridge.

Arrangements had been made to inspect the “attraction flow” channel in February and the Direct Operations team of EA will maintain it if needed so that it could be used again for the 2020 smolt run. Details of key stakeholder contacts and all the consents needed had been made available.

CONTROL OF FISH EATING BIRDS IN THE DERWENT SYSTEM

The Area Based Bird Control Licence for 2019 /2020 had been received on 1st September. During the year, this had been amended to include St Johns Beck and a slight increase had been agreed in the number of Cormorants which could be shot in the period of 16th March to 15th May 2020, up from 15 in 2018 to 21. All other conditions remained unchanged.

Cormorant droppings and pellets had been collected from Rampsholme Island, Derwent Water and Scarness Point, Bassenthwaite Lake and had been subject to e-DNA analysis to provide evidence of the bird’s diets.

The Scarness Point samples (3) contained the e-DNA of European eels, chub, 3-spined sticklebacks, ruffe and European perch, (no salmonids). The Rampsholme Island samples (9) showed the presence of e-DNA from European eels, roach, pike, 3-spined sticklebacks, ruffe, European perch, rainbow trout, brown trout, Atlantic salmon and mackerel. The trout, salmon and mackerel only appeared in single samples out of the total of nine. The dominant species in the diets of the Derwent Water cormorants were pike, perch and ruffe.

These results contrasted markedly with those obtained in 2018 from samples of cormorant droppings taken from the Workington Harbour roosts, which were predominantly marine fish.

Samples of goosander droppings were taken from the Workington Harbour roost in January and March 2019 and these showed that these birds were predominantly feeding on herring.

The sample sizes were too small to reach definitive conclusions, however, some patterns in the data were intriguing and some suggestive. The results were consistent with cormorants being opportunistic, non-selective feeders rather than preying on any particular species. It was not surprising that birds from inland roosts had mainly freshwater fish in their diets and those from the Workington Harbour area had mainly marine fish! The birds would take whatever prey was easiest to catch.

Natural England planned to undertake further analysis of sample birds collected during the licenced shooting (currently 4 goosanders and 2 cormorants held in the EA freezer), by both e-DNA and traditional sampling methodologies. Further funding was being sought to continue field sampling in winter 2019/20 and spring 2020.

HABITAT IMPROVEMENT WORK ON THE RIVER DERWENT

We continue to give an annual donation to the DOA and actively support habitat improvement work on the Derwent system, mainly through our involvement with the River Derwent Rivers Corridor Group (RCG). In 2016, the DOA / RCG had been awarded the Wild Trout Trust Annual Conservation Award in the category of "Large Scale Habitat Enhancement Scheme".

Since then, the work of the RCG on the Derwent has continued and the projects delivered since 2016 include:

- The RCG funded and had overseen the completion of a further 38 habitat improvement projects.
- Erection of a further 16km of river bank fencing, ensuring stock exclusion and reductions in sediment and nutrient input into the river
- Planting of willow spiling and hurdles to reduce sediment input
- Planting of native broad-leaf trees within fenced off riparian areas to allow the bank to stabilise and provide shade and an effective buffer to adjacent farmland. This also creates wild-life corridors along the entire length of the river system.
- Addition of large woody debris into the channel to improve the habitat for fish and prevent bankside erosion through flow deflection
- Provision of spawning gravels to small tributaries.
- Leading demonstration days and guided walks to increase stakeholder participation and support for the projects.
- Contributing to the funding and delivery of invasive non-native species control, including trial releases of Himalayan Balsam rust inoculum and trapping and removing American signal crayfish.
- Increasing Catch and Release rates, which in the 2018 season saw anglers on the Derwent returning effectively 100% of all salmon, sea trout and brown trout caught.

- Completion of another 3 years of the 5 year "Catchment Characterisation / Semi-Quantitative Electrofishing Project". This WCRT project is funded by RCG, DOA, local angling clubs and riparian owners.
- Completion of the Yearl Weir Mill Race salmon smolt bypass project to mitigate against losses from predation by smolts becoming trapped behind the weir in low flows.
- Investigation of salmon fry relocation from areas of abundance to tributaries where there is a deficit of salmon fry, aiming to increase overall smolt production.
- Some of the projects completed contribute to flood resilience / protection eg by re-profiling river banks to facilitate connection to the natural flood plain.
- Encouraging community engagement in habitat improvement work etc. In 2018, RCG organised approximately 6,000 man-hours of voluntary activities in the River Derwent catchment, which was costed at about £150,000 worth of voluntary effort.

On the basis of this more recent work, another application was made to the Wild Trout Trust Annual Conservation Award in the Category of "Outstanding Habitat Improvement Project". The 2019 award was won by the Environment Agency for a river restoration project on the Rivers Test and Itchen. However, the work of the RCG was shortlisted, presented at the WTT Awards Ceremony on 16th October and had been highly commended. The WTT had said:

"All of this activity tops-up the extraordinary work of RCG in its previous seven years of existence since 2009. Surveys indicate improvements in the juvenile salmonid populations of the Derwent and many other plants and animals associated with RCG's improvement works. WTT judges were impressed by the value for money of RCG's work, the sheer number of the outputs from volunteers contributing to the project, their geographical reach, the planned approach to improvement projects and the undoubted open partnership of the group."

RIVER BANK SAFETY AND IMPROVEMENTS ON CAA WATERS

Mark Hastings and Derek Wright have completed a safety inspection and condition survey of all of our waters on the Derwent. These have highlighted some areas of concern. For example in some areas such as Barn Dub, Lancaster Flat and Iron Bridge, the river has undermined some of the logs we installed for erosion control and this has left some deep holes behind the logs which can be dangerous for the unwary. Please take care in these areas, especially when the vegetation has grown because this can hide the holes in the bank. Temporarily, we have filled some of the holes with branches, stones etc. and have marked the problem areas. This season we will be taking more permanent action to deal with the problem.

Mark and Derek have produced a detailed table showing the results of their surveys, risk assessments, access issues etc. and have categorized the work needed to bring about improvements. Some of these are quite simple things which can be called "routine bank maintenance" / vegetation control. Some will necessitate us getting some working parties together, while others will need contractors or else should be the responsibility of Castle Fisheries.

More detailed planning is being done and we will keep members informed of what is happening. I would like the Association to recognise the work already being 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.

BIOLOGICAL CONTROL OF HIMALAYAN BALSAM ON THE DERWENT

Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed continue to be a significant problem along the banks of the Derwent. Control operations are co-ordinated by West Cumbria Rivers Trust and the usual hand pulling, spaying and strimming operations have been used. In addition, DOA has co-operated with EA in trialling the use of a rust fungus which attacks Himalayan Balsam, weakening plants and reducing the risk of a "mono-culture" developing. We have carried out three releases of a specially selected rust fungus, which has been shown to be effective against the particular strain of Himalayan Balsam we have. Initial indications are encouraging and we know that plants in the small test area above Bassenthwaite Lake have been infected by the fungus. We are now waiting until next Spring to see how the fungus has survived the winter months. Hopefully, it will re-infect new plants as they start to grow.

COGRA MOSS

The engineering work around the dam area at Cogra Moss was completed with virtually no impact on the fishing. Construction of an improved "footpath" going round Cogra Moss has been started by contractors working for the Lake District National Parks but was halted by bad weather. We have been promised that any damage to the car park area etc. will be made good.

Cogra Moss has fished well this year. 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.

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

The 2019 Dinner Dance had to be cancelled due to a lack of support. As an alternative, it has been suggested that we hold a less formal evening in Cockermouth Conservative Club, with a "finger buffet" and entertainment. Cost would be about £15 per head and an initial date of Saturday 25th April 2020 has been pencilled in. I would like to hear members' views on this suggestion.

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