

COCKERMOUTH ANGLING ASSOCIATION A.G.M. 2020 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The 2020 fishing season has taken place against the background of the Covid 19 pandemic. However, we were able to resume fishing on 13th May, following advice from The Angling Trust and by and large, the fishing has continued without interruption since then.

Restrictions on meetings mean that we will be unable to hold our AGM in December but we will be circulating the audited accounts and I will try to summarise what has been going on this season.

The committee and officers of the Association have indicated their willingness to continue, so I would suggest that we hold over any elections until next year. If anyone else would like to get involved with the Committee, or any of our work, please let me know.

ANGLING REPORT

- In the past season, on Cockermonth Angling Association Waters 52 salmon were caught on the Derwent, all of these were returned to the water. There were only 8 sea trout caught on the Derwent and all of these were also returned.
- For comparison figures for Cockermonth 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
2019	37	37	30	30

- CAA total fishing effort on the Derwent was about 410 sessions (388 last year), so, on average, on the Derwent it takes about 8 sessions per salmon! 2020 was one of the best salmon seasons for Cockermouth AA in the past 10 years. Let's hope the trend continues.
- Overall, on the Derwent catches were also significantly better this year. So far, I have had reports of 627 Derwent salmon being caught and catch and return rates were 98.9 %. In addition to these "Derwent" salmon, Workington AA reported catching 47 farmed salmon which had escaped from cages during the winter storms. These were all removed from the river following advice from the Environment Agency.. The bulk of these were caught below Yearl weir. Sea trout catches were low because hardly anybody fished for them. I do not yet have any definitive figures available
- 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 246 + 47 farmed salmon (55 in 2019), Castle Rods 154 (52), Isel Fisheries 31 (29), Keswick 6 (15), Woodhall 30 (13), Fitz Beat 21 (12), Redmain 20 (13), Broughton 12 (9), D Hodgkiss 10 (3), Bob Smeaton 16 (19) and the Cradles 18 (5).

CASTLE FISHERIES LEASE

At the end of the 2019 season, I spoke to Charles Baker of Savilles (Lord Egremont's Land Agents) about what we could afford to pay for the lease in the 2020 season. I told him that I expected that we would take somewhere between £9,000 and £9,500 from the sale of Derwent permits and that was, therefore, what we could afford to pay for the lease. Charles said that he would take advice from Lord Egremont and the main office at Petworth and would get back to me.

We should pay the rental before the end of January. I contacted Charles Baker by telephone and by e mail several times in early 2020 to chase up the issue of the invoice. In spite of this, no invoice has been issued. We have no idea what we are expected to pay. You will see from the audited accounts that we have still not paid anything to Castle Fisheries for the rental in 2020. You will also note that we collected £9,300 from the sale of Derwent permits, in line with my estimates provided to Charles Baker at the end of the 2019 season. I expect that we will, eventually, receive an invoice from Petworth and we will pay it when we do.

Workington AA are in a similar position to us. They have not received an invoice for 2020 and have not paid any rent.

From talking to Charles Baker, I understand that the Petworth office has been in virtual total lock down because of the Covid restrictions and this is probably why we have not heard anything from there.

We did manage to sell all 40 of our local Derwent Permits at £180, but only managed to sell 7 of the 15 "Outside Rods", even though we had reduced the price to £300. Perhaps, the better returns this year will help us to sell more permits in 2021.

We will be keeping permit prices fixed for next season.

ELECTRO-FISHING SURVEYS OF THE DERWENT SYSTEM

In spite of the Covid 19 restrictions, Ruth Mackay and her team from the West Cumbria Rivers Trust completed the annual "semi-quantitative" electro-fishing survey 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, no volunteers could be used and the survey work was entirely by "in house" team of 5 people. 162 sites were surveyed. We have not had the detailed results but Ruth tells me that the numbers of juveniles recorded are likely to be lower than last year. This is because we had very dry weather in April and May, followed by high flows in June and July, making the surveying work quite tricky.

This was the 6th consecutive year we have carried out these surveys and the general findings are that, in spite of the significantly reduced numbers of adult salmon returning to the Derwent, there are 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 are 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.

CAA has continued to make a financial contribution to this survey work and we have also provided volunteers to help carry out the survey in previous years.

SALMON FRY RELATION IN THE DERWENT SYSTEM

I reported last year that, as a trial, 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 physical barrier that prevents the migration of adult salmon. It had been planned to resurvey the Liza in late September / October but high water flows and lack of time had prevented this. Ruth Mackay resurveyed Liza Beck in the 2020 survey but no salmon fry or parr were recorded above the barrier. Trout fry and parr numbers were also low. This was attributed to the low flows in April and May. The landowner and a NT ranger reported seeing lots of fry in a drainage ditch /

gutter that feeds into Liza Beck and it is possible that they were taking refuge in this smaller, more sheltered channel. Further surveys will be carried out in 2021.

It is also hoped that we can make more progress with the transference of salmon fry from other areas where they are abundant, re-siting them into other river areas with healthy habitat where fry numbers are, however, lower.

KESWICK HATCHERY

There has been no progress with the reopening of Keswick Hatchery which has now not been operated since 2009. There seems to be no prospect of EA granting a licence to operate the hatchery. Annual overheads of £1212.80 were paid out again in 2020, with Derwent Owners' Association contributing £800, the remainder being paid by Keswick AA. Cockermouth AA has not paid anything towards the costs of the hatchery this year. .

RIVER DERWENT SALMON SMOLT TRAPPING AND TRACKING PROJECT

Glasgow University completed the first year of a 3-year salmon smolt trapping and tracking project after getting special permission from the Scottish Government to carry out the project during the period of Covid 19 restrictions.

A brief summary of main achievements in 2020 is as follows:

- 27 receivers were deployed in the river and Bassenthwaite in March 2020. 3 of these were placed between St Johns Beck and the inlet of the Derwent into Bass Lake, 9 were placed in the Lake, 5 were in the Main Derwent between Ouse Bridge and Coops weir, and the remainder were deployed upstream and downstream of the Coops and Yearl weirs. The receivers had a detection range of about 350m.
- 100 salmon smolts from St Johns Beck were successfully trapped and tagged in May by inserting coded acoustic transmitters into the peritoneal cavities of the smolts. The smolts were then allowed to recover and were released into St Johns Beck
- 68 of the smolts were lost before they reached Bassenthwaite Lake
- The remaining 32 entered the lake, but 17 of these were lost in the lake and only 15 entered the Derwent at Ouse Bridge.
- There was some strong evidence of predation by birds
- Only 9 of the tagged smolts successfully migrated to sea
- 3 of these have since been detected in the Irish sea on the COMPASS and Sea Monitor array, roughly between Stranraer and Northern Ireland

Considerable further analysis is needed to be able to disentangle some of the interesting migration patterns of salmon smolts seen along the Derwent river in 2020. However, it may be of some significance that river levels were very low in May and we were unable to carry out any bird scaring operations during this year's smolt run because of Covid 19 restrictions. The trial will continue in 2021 and 2022. DOA has now contributed £4.000 towards this Glasgow University Ph.D. project and we have committed a further £2.000 next year.

CONTROL OF FISH EATING BIRDS IN THE DERWENT SYSTEM

The Area Based Bird Control Licence for 2020 /2021 should have been received before 1st September. However, in spite of much chasing up of NE, nothing was forthcoming until 5th October. NE then issued the Cormorant part of the licence, which was unchanged from last year. NE still has not issued the Goosander part of the licence as I write this, towards the end of November. The Area Based Licence for the Eden has also not been issued for control of Goosanders.

DOA and the River Eden Fisheries Association have involved The Angling Trust and Fish Legal, and have raised a formal complaint to Natural England. It seems that NE's concerns centre around an apparent decline in the numbers of Goosanders counted in the Solway proposed Special Protected Area. NE and their Scottish equivalents have produced a document, called a Habitat Regulations Assessment, which they claim supports their concern. However, they have not let us see that document, claiming that it is not yet in a form that could be released to the public!

The latest position is that NE have indicated that they will be in a position to issue the Goosander parts of the Derwent and Eden Area Based Bird Control Licences "within a matter of weeks" but that these are likely to have reduced allocations of birds. We are still trying to make progress.

Chris Taylor, a member of Cockermouth AA, has had many year's experience in fisheries management working for the National Rivers Authority and the Environment Agency. Chris is now retired and has a very keen interest in the potential damage caused to fish stocks in the Derwent system caused by predation by birds. He has embarked upon an ambitious project to raise £35,000, through "Gofundme" in order to carry out an independent, comprehensive avian predation survey on the Cumbrian Derwent system in 2022.

The aim of this survey is to complement and expand upon existing studies, to provide more scientific data on the numbers of cormorants and goosanders present in the Cumbrian Derwent system throughout the year. It will also provide more data on the birds' diet and analyse the possible effect of this on salmonid numbers.

The Avian Predation Survey 2022 will not be confined just to the smolt run as avian predation will be monitored in the River Derwent's Catchment for a full twelve month period. This is because the loss of pre smolt salmon, particularly Salmon parr, could also be having a significant effect upon returning adult numbers. Limited data on bird populations is available from WEBs surveys carried out by members of the British Ornithological Society. But, presently, we have no comprehensive data on population trends over the year. Data will be gained using a number of methods including high tech photographic techniques as well as additional manual surveys by volunteers.

Natural England has carried out some limited research on the diet of goosanders and cormorants on the Derwent system by the genetic analysis of Goosander and Cormorant faeces, the otolith analysis of Cormorant pellets and the analysis of gut contents. The Avian Predation Survey 2022 will expand upon this to provide additional information.

More details of Chris Taylor's proposal and arrangements for making donations, can be found on the Gofundme website at <https://uk.gofundme.com/f/cumbrian-derwent-avian-predation-survey>

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).

RIVER BANK SAFETY AND IMPROVEMENTS ON CAA WATERS

I reported last year on the safety and condition survey of all our waters on the Derwent which had been carried out by Mark Hastings and Derek Wright. These had 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. We have discussed some possible solutions with Mike Farrell and a contractor, John Pepper, and we hope to start remedial work when river conditions permit in Spring 2021.

Some "routine bank maintenance" / vegetation control have been carried out by John Smith and Mark Hastings during the year. Again, I would like the Association to recognise the work 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.

POACHING / ILLEGAL FISHING

There have been a number of reports of poaching / illegal fishing on the Derwent throughout the year. Some of these have involved threats of violence being made against legitimate anglers. All such incidents should be reported to the EA hotline on 0800 807060 and to the Rural and Wildlife Crime Officer on the Cumbria Police Non-Emergency Number of 101. You may not get any immediate response but unless these incidents are officially logged we will not be allocated the resources needed to deal with them.

COGRA MOSS

The first 2020 stocking of Cogra Moss took place on 18th March with the intention of opening the fishing on 1st April. However, we were unable to start the fishing until 13th May when the Covid 19 restrictions were eased to allow this. There were a number of poaching / illegal fishing incidents during the "lock down" period and these were recorded both by passers by and by cameras we had installed at Cogra Moss. Evidence was supplied to Cumbria police who visited and warned off one local man. Two others, believed to be Polish staff at a Lake District Hotel, could not be positively identified. But as a result of publicity given to the incident, they must have got the message because we didn't see them again. We have put notices on site telling people of video surveillance.

A further 5 stockings were carried out throughout the year. Each of these was about 400 rainbow trout and we also stocked with some larger tiger trout to provide some additional sport.

Fishing was very good throughout the season. From the returns submitted, there were 1528 man days fished, 4915 rainbows were caught and of these, 4005 were returned to the water. Additionally, 127 brown trout and 27 tiger trout were caught and returned. On average, 3.2 fish were caught per rod day. There were no complaints about the quality of the fishing or value for money. We sold 57 Senior Open Permits, which was 13 less than last year. Takings on day and week tickets was £1,610 which is only £200 less than last year, probably as a result of the late opening.

During the year, the walkway over to the dam island was replaced by a contractor. John Smith and Terry Barnes also recycled some of the old scaffolding planks to improve the walkways on the far side of the reservoir. Pot holes in the road were also repaired and further work will take place in Spring.

Further engineering work on the dam has been carried out by contractors working for United Utilities, but this had no impact on the fishing.

Adrian Mills has quietly carried out his normal Cormorant control work at Cogra Moss. Our thanks are also due to Terry Barnes, John Smith and other helpers for all the work done in organising and carrying out stocking and the general management, maintenance, grass cutting etc. carried out at Cogra Moss.

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

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!

STAY SAFE AND TIGHT LINES IN 2021.

Jack Abernethy, Chairman, Cockermouth Angling Association, 3rd December 2018