

COCKERMOUTH ANGLING ASSOCIATION A.G.M. 2021 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

ANGLING REPORT

- In the past season, on Cockermouth Angling Association Waters 14 salmon were caught on the Derwent, all of these were returned to the water. There were only 6 sea trout caught on the Derwent and all of these were also 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
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	3
2020	54	54	8	8

- CAA total fishing effort on the Derwent was much lower than usual this season and there was a high proportion of Derwent anglers who did not fish the river at all . After a rather better year in 2020, this year catches were much reduced and 2021 was the worst year for Cockermouth AA in the last 20 years. This was not surprising given the weather pattern, with record low water levels up to the end of September, followed by very high water levels throughout October.
- Overall, on the Derwent catches were also significantly lower this year, on average 2021 catches were only about 30 – 35% of the 2020 catches. So far, I have had reports of 205 Derwent salmon being caught, compared with the 633 last year. Catch and return rates were again close to 100%. 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 72 (246), Castle Rods 43 (154), Isel Fisheries 5 (31), Keswick 2 (6), Woodhall 6 (30), Fitz Beat 35 (21), Redmain 8 (20), Broughton 8 (12), Bob Smeaton 11 (16) and the Cradles 1 (18).

CASTLE FISHERIES LEASE

I reported last year that neither Cockermouth AA nor Workington AA had received invoices for the Derwent fishing that we lease from Castle Fisheries. Consequently, we had not paid any rent last year. This was despite several phone calls, e-mails etc to Charles Baker of Savilles (Lord Egremont's Land Agents). I had previously informed Charles and Lord Egremont that we expected to only take about £9,300 from the sale of annual Derwent salmon fishing permits and that, realistically, this was the sort of figure we could afford to pay Castle Fisheries for the annual rental. According to the terms of our Agreement, which we renewed from January 2006, we should have been paying £14,900 in annual rent. Lord Egremont was sympathetic to the arguments put forward by both Cockermouth AA and Workington AA and had agreed to a "rent rebate" which reflected the current true market value of the fishing. However, neither Cockermouth AA nor Workington AA had received any invoice from Castle Fisheries for 2020 or 2021. So in May of this year, both angling associations decided to take the initiative and just send Castle Fisheries cheques to cover what we thought we could afford to pay for the fishing. So our 2021 accounts will show that we paid Castle Fisheries 2 x £9,300 = £18,600 for the lease of our fishing for 2020 and 2021. We have subsequently had an acknowledgement of payment.

Just for the record, our Agreement with Castle Fisheries will formally need to be renewed again from January 2026, so we have just 4 more seasons under the present Agreement.

AVAILABILITY OF FURTHER FISHING ON THE DERWENT

In February 2021 the Committee was made aware of some Derwent fishing, owned by the family of David Hodgkiss which was for sale in 2 lots. Lot 1 was the left hand bank at Whinnah Dub, extending down below the Papcastle Road Bridge. It was advertised as 500m of salmon fishing plus 7.15 acres of amenity / pasture land and had a guide price of £60,000. Lot 2 was the left hand bank of Flat Dub, down to the start of Stoddart pot. This was advertised as 235 m of salmon fishing plus 3.81 acres of woodland. The

Committee carefully considered our available resources and what we might be able to get in increased permit fees etc if we owned this fishing. I also checked that Castle Fisheries were not interested in buying this fishing. I wrote to William Bashall, agents for the Hodgkiss family, offering £30,000 for the Whinnah Dub fishing, but that we were not interested in buying the land. I also indicated that we would be willing to pay the guide price of £20,000 for the Flat Dub fishing. Neither offer was accepted and that fishing was sold to a local syndicate that already had an interest in it.

In April 2021, we were contacted again by William Bashall to inform us that another stretch of fishing owned by the Hodgkiss family was for sale by private treaty. This was the right hand bank of Crossa and was advertised as 336 m of salmon fishing and we were told that it was expected to be sold for in excess of £60,000. There was no land associated with this fishing and the expected sale price seemed to be way above the valuation placed on the earlier Lots 1 and 2. I again checked whether or not Castle Fisheries were interested in buying this fishing which would have joined up two stretches already owned by them. I was informed that they would not be bidding at this stage but had asked the agents not to agree any final sale without informing them. Cockermouth AA then offered a more realistic £20,000 for this fishing. As far as we know, no other offers were received but the fishing has not yet been sold. Charles Baker has told me that Castle Fisheries had heard nothing more about this fishing, although they were aware of our offer. We have heard nothing more since making the offer.

ELECTRO-FISHING SURVEYS OF THE DERWENT SYSTEM

We have continued to support the electro-fishing and habitat surveys carried out by the West Cumbria Rivers Trust, both financially and by providing volunteers when the Covid restrictions have allowed this. Ruth MacKay and her team surveyed 122 sites in 2021. This is fewer than previous years because the very low water conditions throughout the summer meant that the survey sites had to be restricted to the main rivers as there was simply not enough water in many of the tributaries to carry out the electro-fishing. Ruth will be publishing the results on the WCRT web-site shortly. However, preliminary analysis has confirmed the pattern seen in earlier years i.e. that there is no shortage of juvenile salmon and trout in the Derwent system as long as the habitat is suitable for them.

These results have also been confirmed by the EA's own electro-fishing surveys. We have been carrying out these semi-quantitative electro-fishing and habitat surveys since 2015 and all the annual reports are on the WCRT web-site.

SALMON FRY RELOCATION IN THE DERWENT SYSTEM

Phil Ramsden, EA Fisheries Technical Officer, investigated the possibility of "trans-locating" salmon fry from St. Johns Beck, which has a "surplus", into other nearby areas of the system which had previously been shown to have very poor numbers of fry. Co-operating with Phil, I had applied for the necessary fish movement licences and all the arrangements were in place to move some salmon

fry from St. Johns Beck into the upper stretches of the Glenderamackin and Barrow Beck.

Before the fry movement was undertaken EA carried out some electro-fishing surveys to measure the fry numbers in the proposed "recipient sites". The good news was that all the sites surveyed already had natural salmon fry present. The Glenderamackin upstream of Mungrisdale had "excellent" numbers of salmon fry and salmon parr were also found at sites further up the Glenderamackin system. Salmon fry were also found at sites in Barrow Beck, although some water quality issues were identified and investigated.

Previous surveys had shown that the upper Glenderamackin and Barrow Beck had been devoid of salmon fry, but some habitat improvement work and barrier removal had been carried out.. The EA electro-fishing results showed that this work had paid dividends and both areas were now re-populating with salmon fry naturally. As a result it was decided that there was no need to carry out any salmon fry relocation from St. Johns Beck this year.

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 £1247.91 were again paid out in 2021, and Keswick AA had enquired about the usual donation of £800 from Derwent Owners' Association towards meeting this cost. The Chairman had informed Keswick AA that DOA only had £582.84 remaining in the hatchery fund and no new donations had been received for this purpose since 2019. The remaining funds were handed over to Keswick AA. It was pointed out that since 2009, running costs of over £14,000 had been paid with absolutely no benefit to the river system. It is understood that Keswick AA is looking at the benefits of the continued maintenance of the hatchery.

RIVER DERWENT SALMON SMOLT TRAPPING AND TRACKING PROJECT

Glasgow University completed the second year of a 3-year salmon smolt trapping and tracking project on the Derwent and a presentation of the preliminary results was given to Derwent Owners' Association by Ph.D. student Amy Green and Professor Colin Adams at Hundith Hill on 11th November. 150 salmon smolts and 15 sea trout smolts were fitted with small acoustic tags, each of which emitted a unique signal, enabling the journey of each smolt to be tracked down the Derwent by an array of receivers at carefully selected locations. Further tracking could also be undertaken using multiple deep-sea arrays throughout the Irish Sea. All the smolts were trapped and tagged in St Johns Beck. All of the sea trout smolts and 93 of the 150 salmon smolts were released back into St Johns Beck. The remaining 57 salmon smolts were transported in oxygenated tanks and were then released into the Derwent at Isel.

Preliminary results were as follows.

Of the 93 salmon smolts released back into St. Johns Beck

- 60 successfully entered Bassenthwaite Lake (65%)
- 21 of these were lost in Bassenthwaite Lake, so 39 of the original 93 successfully entered the Derwent at Ouse Bridge (42%).

- Of these, 11 were lost between Ouse Bridge and Coups weir, so only 28 of the original 93 made it past Coups weir (30%).
- Of these 28, a further 10 were lost above Yearl weir, meaning that 18 of the original 93 salmon smolts released into St Johns Beck successfully migrated to sea (19%)
- Of the 57 salmon smolts released at Isel 21 were lost between Isel and Coups weir meaning that 36 of the original 57 successfully made it past Coups weir (63%)
- Of these 36, a further 12 were lost above Yearl weir, meaning that 24 of the original 57 salmon smolts released at Isel successfully migrated to sea (42%)

Other points of interest about the salmon smolts

- 10% of salmon smolts detected above Coups weir took the alternative route via the leats, instead of going over the weir
- 12% of salmon smolts detected above Yearl weir took the route down the Mill Race, instead of going over the weir
- Of the total of 42 salmon smolts which successfully migrated to sea, 18 were later detected in the Irish Sea by the deep sea arrays.
- Key "pinch points" identified for loss of salmon smolts were Bassenthwaite Lake, Coups weir and Yearl weir.

Of the 15 sea trout smolts released back into St. Johns Beck, all apart from 1 successfully migrated into the Solway. None of these were subsequently detected by the deep sea arrays, confirming that sea trout smolts have a different migration path than salmon smolts.

Amy Green will be continuing this work in 2022 and it is hoped that support can be found for further studies after that. DOA has now contributed £6000 towards this Glasgow University Ph.D. project.

CONTROL OF FISH EATING BIRDS IN THE DERWENT SYSTEM

The Area Based Bird Control Licence for 2021 /2022 was received in time for the start of the control period on 1st September. This was issued by the Natural England Wildlife Licensing Unit and further restrictions were placed on the lethal control of goosanders. As a result a total of only 15 goosanders can be shot (8 between 1st September 2021 and 15th March 2022 and 7 between 16th March and 15th May 2022.) There was an increase in the numbers of cormorants that could be shot from 41 to 51 (26 in the first period and 25 in the "smolt" run period). I act as the "Primary Contact" for the Area Site Licence and have to allocate these birds to the 8 "Specific Site Licence" holders on the Derwent system who actually carry out the lethal and non-lethal bird control operations. I also have to prepare reports on all those activities and apply for the licence renewal each year.

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 2020/21 the RCG has planned, funded and completed 27 habitat improvement projects, which is quite remarkable given the Covid 19 restrictions.

One project of particular interest to Cockermouth AA is the on-going work on the left bank of the Derwent at Barn Dub. This 120m stretch has been repaired twice before but has been damaged again by successive floods and holes have appeared behind some of the logs used in the repair, making access unsafe. The upstream 80m has been repaired in 2021, by re-profiling it, filling in gaps with rocks, re-fitting of Christmas trees to minimise erosion by high water flows and planting willow trees behind the logs.

The down-stream 40m section is more of a problem because some of the logs have been lost completely and the water is significantly deeper. EA required an Environmental Permit to be prepared before it would give permission for this work. This also involves the preparation of Environmental Risk Assessments, Method Statements, Operating Plans etc. I have done this on behalf of Cockermouth AA and we now have permission to do the work, when conditions are right, probably after May 1st 2022. We have a contractor lined up to do this work and are presently accumulating materials which are being stored in Alan Brown's field until we need them. I am also pleased to report that the cost to Cockermouth AA in carrying out this work will be very reasonable. We will have to make a small contribution (about 10%) but the bulk of the funding will come from Rivers Corridor Group, Environment Agency and Derwent Owners' Association.

RIVER BANK HEALTH AND SAFETY

The importance of Angling Associations having full regard to health and safety requirements has been further highlighted this year in a court case in which Birmingham AA was prosecuted by for a breach of the Health and Safety Act.

A working party of anglers from Birmingham AA was carrying out routine bank maintenance work, part of which involved the trimming of trees using a chain saw. During these operations a large tree branch fell and hit one of the party on the head, causing injuries which resulted in his death. Birmingham AA were prosecuted for a number of breaches of the Health and Safety Act and was fined £65,000.

Our Committee is presently reviewing and revising the Cockermouth AA Health and Safety Policy. Mark Hastings is our Safety Officer and is being assisted by Robert Park.

We have been told that the terms of our Insurance Policy will probably be altered when we renew it next. On 12th January 2022 the Angling Trust has organised an on line seminar on Health and Safety issues, including the Construction, Design and Maintenance Regulations.. Anyone receiving funding from EA now has to be able to demonstrate compliance with CDM.

POACHING / ILLEGAL FISHING

There have again been a number of reports of poaching / illegal fishing on the Derwent throughout the year. 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.

I have organised a meeting on December 17th with David Lees, who leads on these matters for the Angling Trust. Jonathan Turner, who is in charge of fishing enforcement for EA in our area and Sam O'Key, Cumbria Police Rural Crime and Wildlife Officer to discuss these matters.

COGRA MOSS

Cogra Moss has fished well all season and Terry Barnes will be presenting a report later in the meeting. The road was repaired before the start of the season.

Plans are already in place for the 2022 season at Cogra and we intend to replace the lock with a combination lock. John Smith has also devised an on-line booking system which allows day and week tickets to be ordered and paid for. This will help during the times when Inglenook Caravan site office is not open.

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.

COCKERMOUTH ANGLING ASSOCIATION CUPS

Cockermouth Angling Association used to award these cups to members who had caught the "best" or earliest salmon or sea trout in the various categories. Members would weigh in their fish at a central point during the season, usually Ian Nicholson's Gun Shop on Jubilee Bridge, or latterly Cleeland's Furniture Store on Main Street. Awards would then be made at the Association's Annual General Meeting in December. Obviously, the fish had to be killed in order to be weighed in. However, from the 1990s onwards anglers were encouraged to engage in "catch and release" fishing methods in order to conserve the declining numbers of salmon and sea trout in our rivers. Hence, the practice of awarding these cups stopped and they have not been presented this century.

For interest these Cups were:

- The Dowager Lady Egremont Cup for the first salmon caught on the Derwent
- Cockermouth Angling Association Trophy for the heaviest Derwent salmon
- Charles Bateman Memorial Cup for the heaviest Derwent salmon caught on fly
- Lt. W. H. Fennell Memorial Cup for the first Derwent salmon caught by an angler over 60
- Charles Bateman Cup for the heaviest Derwent salmon caught by an angler over 60
- JA & A Boyd Fairfield Restaurant Trophy for the heaviest Derwent sea trout

- Horace Kennon Memorial Cup for the first salmon caught on the Cocker
- Joe Marsh Memorial Trophy for the heaviest Cocker salmon
- Jennings Brothers. Challenge Shield for the heaviest trout caught at Cogra Moss.

These cups had just been stored in Sue Moses' loft since her time as Secretary, so the Committee decided to donate them to the Cockermouth Heritage Group and at some time in the future they will be displayed at an exhibition in the Kirkgate Centre.

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 2022.

Jack Abernethy, Chairman, Cockermouth Angling Association, 13th December 2021