

COCKERMOUTH ANGLING ASSOCIATION A.G.M. 2023 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

ANGLING REPORT

- In the past season, on Cockermouth Angling Association Waters 32 salmon were caught on the Derwent, all of these were returned to the water. There were 9 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 | 30 |
| 2020 | 54 | 54 | 8 | 8 |
| 2021 | 14 | 14 | 6 | 6 |

| | | | | |
|------|----|----|----|----|
| 2022 | 26 | 26 | 21 | 21 |
|------|----|----|----|----|

- In July river conditions were good and we had a decent run of salmon. However, from mid-August to the end of September low flows and warm weather meant that few salmon were taken. Things picked up a bit in October when higher flows returned and there were a few decent sized salmon taken. Once again fishing effort was low and it was very rare to see more than one angler on a pool.
- Total Derwent catches were about a third down on 2022, with 267 salmon reported so far compared to 409 last year.
- 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 70 (132 in 2022), Castle Rods 82 (81), Isel Fisheries 5 (7), Keswick 5 (23), Woodhall 13 (18), Redmain 10 (10), Broughton 11 (15), and the Cradles 7 (8).

CASTLE FISHERIES LEASE

Once again Castle Fisheries have agreed to a "rent rebate" on the amount that we should be paying according to the formal lease. In effect we pay them the amount that we get from the sale of Derwent permits. Last year we were able to sell all 40 of the local Derwent permits at £180 each but we only sold 11 of the 15 outside rods which are available at £300.

Just for the record, our Agreement with Castle Fisheries will formally need to be renewed again from January 2026, so we have just 2 more seasons under the present Agreement.

DERWENT BYE-LAWS REVIEW

The local bye-laws covering the Derwent fishery expired in July 2023 and, after public consultation, the Environment Agency submitted revisions to the Defra Minister for approval. The EA proposed to make it mandatory to return all salmon caught but allow the voluntary 100% catch and release to continue for sea trout. They also proposed restrictions on fishing tackle and fishing methods, including a complete ban on worm fishing. Although these proposals were sent in to Defra in January 2023, the Minister has not yet got round to making any decision on them, so in effect we have had no local bye-laws in place on the Derwent since July! We have just continued to operate the voluntary 100% catch and release regime. It is anticipated that the new bye-laws will be approved for the 2024 season. If this happens there will have to be some significant changes to club rules.

RIVER DERWENT SALMON SMOLT TRAPPING AND TRACKING PROJECT

We are still waiting for the publication of Amy Green's Glasgow University Ph.D. thesis giving the results of the 3 year study on the migration of Derwent smolts. However, a couple of research papers have been published which use some of the data from Amy's work and reported on the smolt migration in the Irish Sea. One smolt had migrated approximately 262 km in 10 days after it left the Derwent at Workington. This is the longest tracked migration of an Atlantic salmon smolt migrating from the UK. Four of the

Derwent smolts were also detected in the Kilbrannan Sound, near Arran. This was the site of a proposed Salmon farm, consisting of twelve 120m circumference circular tanks and a feeding barge. The detection of salmon smolts from the Derwent and Bassenthwaite Lake SAC has resulted in NatureScot re-thinking its approval of the fish farm and it has advised Argyll and Bute Planning Department of some additional work that needs to be done before it can go ahead. We have recently learned that planning permission has been granted but, as yet we do not know what conditions have been set.

CONTROL OF FISH EATING BIRDS IN THE DERWENT SYSTEM

The Area Based Bird Control Licence for 2023 /2024 should have been issued by the ed in time by the Natural England Wildlife Licensing Unit for the start of the control period on 1st September. However, it was late yet again and we did not get it until the end of September. we have still not received it. We are permitted to shoot 10 goosanders between September and 15th March and a further 7 male goosanders during the smolt run, from 16th March to 15th May. We are licensed to shoot 26 cormrants in the first period and 25 in the smolt run period. We have supplied Natural England with detailed evidence to show that predation by fish eating birds is having a significant effect on juvenile salmon stocks and have also shown that the numbers of birds we are shooting has no effect on the overall bird population. But despite Atlantic Salmon now being included in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature "red list" and classified as an endangered species, Natural England simply refuse any application for an increase in the goosander and cormorant applications. We keep trying.

We have a separate Licence for control of the cormorants at Cogra Moss which Adrian Mills manages superbly.

RIVER BANK MAINTENANCE

I would like to record the Association's thanks to members who have helped with river bank maintenance work throughout the year, particularly John Smith, Robert Parks, Mark Hastings, Neil Barcock and Derek Wright. The response to requests for volunteers for working parties has not been good however and we need to have a rethink on the best way of organizing such bank maintenance work The Cocker fishing is very overgrown in some places and requires a lot of work and this should not be left to the "willing few",

John has once again completed the grass cutting programme on the Derwent and deserves our grateful thanks for doing this.

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). The RCG is supported by donations from DOA members and grants from EA, mainly from Fisheries Improvement Project funding which comes directly from licence sales.

Project of particular interest to Cocker mouth AA are the repairs carried out to Barn Dub, Lancaster Flat and Wood Bottom. This work was necessary after further damage to the river bank caused by floods.

Mike Farrell is the EA Project Manager who plays a very significant part in getting habitat improvement works organized and completed on the Derwent system. To recognize everything Mike does on the Derwent system we invited him to become an honorary Derwent rod and member of CAA.

COCKER FISHING

I am pleased to report that CAA has regained the right to fish Mick Beebe on the River Cocker. We fished this stretch, which is upstream of Narrow Waters, between Low

Lorton and Rogerscale, many years ago when the fishing was owned by Willy and Mary Wallace. When they gave up farming and took over Hundith Hill the fishing was sold to Sammy Romano of the Trout Hotel. Sammy allowed CAA to continue to fish Mick Beebe until he sold it to a Mr. Peter Naylor from Yorkshire, who set up a six man syndicate to fish the water. CAA were contacted by Mr. Michael Weatherhead, who is the son of one of the 6 man syndicate, Mr. A.P. Weatherhead (who is now in a care home). Michael Weatherhead was sorting out his father's affairs and he has assigned his rights to fish the water to CAA. This entitles us to have two rods on the water and we have a formal agreement in place to support this. The other members of the syndicate have not fished the water for many years and Mr. Weatherhead has not been able to trace them. Nevertheless, we have said that we will respect their rights if they chose to exercise them in the future.

You may have seen that the fishing on the left bank of the Cocker between Southwaite Bridge and the Turkey Farm at Simonscales Lane was up for sale by public auction recently. The Committee discussed this and we expressed an interest in buying the fishing. However, Mitchells' Auction had advised the vendors to put a reserve price of £20,000 on the fishing. This was far beyond what we thought it was worth. In the end, the highest bid on the day was £17,000. At this stage, we do not know who that bidder was or whether the fishing was sold.

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.

EA have appointed Chris Bishop as the new Head of Fisheries Operations and Enforcement. He has a military background and is new to EA. He attended the DOA Meeting in November and shared some of his ideas for tackling poaching and illegal fishing. These included the use of drone technology, using social media to highlight issues and successes and closer liaison with the new Rural and Wildlife Crime Unit in Cumbria. This certainly "talked a good talk" and we wait to see whether or not he gets results!

COGRA MOSS

Cogra Moss has fished well all season apart from the period of hot weather in mid-summer. Plan to open Cogra Moss earlier in 2024 and to amend the stocking programme to cut out a mid-summer stocking. Terry Barnes will be presenting a report later in the meeting. Anglers seem to be well satisfied with the quality of the fish stocked at Cogra.

The on-line booking system, devised by John Smith has worked well and has allowed day and week tickets to be ordered and paid for easily and at times when the Inglenook Caravan site office is not open. The combination lock has been a success, in spite of a few people failing to grasp the instructions printed on notices displayed on both sides of the gate!

As mentioned earlier, Adrian Mills (assisted by Geoff Roberts) 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 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 and our Treasurer John Smith.
- 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 2024.

Jack Abernethy
Chairman, Cockermouth Angling Association
13th December 2023