

# River Alness – Update

## Summer 2020

### **‘Red Skin Disease’ 2019 & 2020**

During the late spring and summer of 2019 the Fish Health Inspectorate received a number of reports of moribund adult wild Atlantic salmon being observed in Scottish rivers. Clinical signs of disease included skin damage, such as petechial haemorrhaging on the ventral surface and ulcer like lesions. Fungal-like infections were also reported in addition to inflamed red vents. Similar reports were also being made in Norway and Ireland.

A number of fish exhibiting signs of ‘red skin disease’ have been removed from the River Alness in 2020 and one live fish was transported to Fish Health Inspectors, who took a range of diagnostic samples. The actual cause of this disease is still unknown.

In addition to the River Alness, fish displaying similar clinical signs of disease in other rivers have been reported to Fish Health Inspectorate and Fishery Management Scotland. Not all rivers in Scotland are affected.

The signs of disease seem to be abating in the River Alness and there are good numbers of fish moving up the river from the lower pools. This disease seems to show as soon as the fish enter the river with secondary fungal infection being evident.

Scientists from the Disease Diagnostic Group, which acts as the Scottish National Reference Laboratory for fish diseases, have been liaising with colleagues across the north Atlantic region to try to identify the causative factor(s) behind ‘red skin disease’. Clinical, diagnostic and epidemiological data will be shared across various laboratories and a clinical case definition will be established.

### **Stock numbers**

‘Red skin disease’ is still being investigated but we do know that the River Alness has a very healthy population of juvenile fish. This can be seen from the annual surveys undertaken by the Fishery Board and the National Electrofishing surveys carried out on behalf of the Scottish Government. There is no immediate worry about lack of recruitment for juvenile fish, although it is more important than ever to get as many smolts out to sea as possible to compensate for the poor sea survival that all Atlantic salmon are facing.

### **Dalmore Weir**

Dalmore Distillery have been taking the responsibility of maintaining fish passage over the weir seriously and have invested heavily in the improvement of the weir for fish passage this year. The weir has just had its fish pass extended by 4 meters so that the entrance is always in the water, even at low flows. This will assist fish passage over the weir. On top of the fish pass, the ‘step’ along the leading edge of the weir is being filled in so that fish can migrate up and over the face of the weir in higher flows.

During the very low flows of the summer the work being carried out on the weir has helped the fish migrate over the weir significantly. This was achieved by directing the water flow

down one part of the weir during the works which helped fish traverse the weir, when normally they would not have been able to do so. This resulted in fish passage all through the summer. However, going forward it is hoped the extension to the fish pass and filling in of the step will ensure that even at low flows fish can get over the weir.

Work on the weir is expected to be completed by the middle of September 2020.

### **Water levels**

It has been a very dry period during the summer and the River Alness has received very little rain. Water from Loch Morie was managed to assist with fish passage over the weir prior to the work on the weir starting, and water has continued to be released to maintain a higher level in the river than would otherwise have occurred. However, the water available is finite. The water continually being released from Loch Morie has raised the level at times by 2 inches, sufficient to aid fish passage but not to a degree that would be particularly obvious to the naked eye.

Rain will be gladly received when it comes, but fish are still moving through the system and none are stuck in pools.

### **Cessation of fishing**

During parts of August the water temperature reached 18°C, along with low flow conditions. The Alness Angling Club took the decision to cease fishing below the weir to the A9 Bridge, as those pools are particularly affected by low water (not as a result of the weir) and there was a welfare concern with fish in the river or coming into the river. Fishing is expected to recommence from the 28<sup>th</sup> of August.

Fishing above the weir has been unaffected and the distillery pool has acted as a deep holding pool in the warmer weather.



**Alness Angling  
Club**

