

## Monthly Report – April 2021

### Smolt Tagging, Tracking and Survival

Board staff deployed two rotary screw traps on the River Meig in April as part of the mitigation strategy to improve poor survival rates of smolts associated with dam passage. The traps are checked daily and smolts are transported by vehicle around Meig dam and released below Tor Achilty. To date, 900 smolts were captured migrating through the traps. Board staff wish to thank Strathconon Estate for their help installing the traps.



The Cromarty Firth Fishery Board, SSE, and the University of Glasgow are involved in a programme of work for 2021 to identify the potential benefits of releasing smolts at night to reduce predation. A holding cage was built and deployed to allow tagged smolts to be automatically released at varying times during the night. The survival rates of tagged smolts returning as adults will be compared for day and night releases, and the results from this study will be used to inform smolt trapping and trap-and-transport operations across Scotland. Although the results will not be known until autumn 2022 at the earliest, half of the 100 smolts acoustically tagged as part of the Missing Salmon Project will be released using the automatic release cage, providing an early indication of the potential benefits of releasing smolts at night.



### Salmon Recaptures

The second salmon caught in the Cromarty district in 2021 was an adipose-clipped fish. Adipose fins are removed from smolts that are PIT-tagged by Board staff at the Achanalt and Meig traps. PIT-tags provide an insight into the survival rates of salmon at sea, and individual fish surviving from smolt to adult are identified during upstream migration through Tor Achilty dam. The salmon caught on the River Conon was tagged in April 2019 at Achanalt, measuring just 12cm. During the two years it spent at sea, it grew to over 70 cm in length and approximately 10lb in weight. Anglers are reminded to report catches of fin-clipped fish to the Board.

### **Scottish Invasive Species Initiative**

Interviews were held in April for a 5-month Seasonal Project Officer post as part of the Nature Scot funded Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI). Board staff will be joined by Deirdre Mitchell to tackle invasive non-native plant and animal species across the Cromarty district this summer. Deirdre will build on the mink volunteer network that is critical to detecting and controlling the spread of American mink. Areas of invasive plants including Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam will be mapped during the summer and treated or removed. With the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, it is hoped that groups of volunteers can be recruited to assist with these tasks, creating a legacy of volunteers to keep invasive species under control in the district when funding for the SISI project ends in 2022.

### **Bailiff Report**

With the first salmon of the 2021 season caught at the start of April, Board staff increased fishery protection patrols across the district. A group of anglers fishing with spinning rods in the tidal reaches of the River Alness were removed. Several other reports of suspicious persons / activity near the River Conon were received and staff attended on each occasion. None of these reports were found to be related to illegal fishing, but Board staff would like to thank those who do take the time and effort to report observations.

Continued dialogue with Police Scotland was maintained during the month with discussions held on the potential for conducting joint patrols in May. Close contact was also maintained with Bailiffs on neighbouring rivers in April, and these discussions provide a useful exchange of relevant information.