

Monthly Report – May 2021

Smolt Counts and Tagging

Smolt counts at the end of May were 2337 at the Achanalt trap and 3195 at the River Meig rotary screw traps. The current totals are lower than last year. This was expected however, as electrofishing results from 2019 and 2020 detected low numbers of salmon parr across the upper catchment, translating to low smolt production this year. The weather was particularly cold between February and May, and the expectation was that the smolt run could be severely delayed. The Meig traps will remain in situ until end of June to determine if this is the case.

Approximately 2700 Meig smolts were PIT-tagged to investigate the impact of night-time release on survival. A further 1000 smolts caught at Achanalt were PIT-tagged to determine marine survival rates. An additional 100 smolts were acoustically tagged as part of the Missing Salmon Project to investigate in-river survival during migration.

National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland

Planning for the 2021 National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS) took place in May. The NEPS work provides an assessment of the status of juvenile salmon and trout stocks in Scotland and offers a complementary approach to the adult-based Conservation Limits and river gradings. Board staff were involved in identifying areas in the district that can be surveyed by electrofishing and should be included in the 2021 design. A total of 30 sites will be surveyed across the Cromarty district between July and September.

River Temperature Monitoring

Board staff installed 20 dataloggers across the Conon catchment to monitor river temperatures. The loggers are part of the Scotland River Temperature Monitoring Network (SRTMN). SRTMN aims to identify areas at risk of warming that will impact on salmon populations. The Conon will provide essential information on the effects of water storage and hydropower on river temperatures. Outputs from the STRMN project include interactive maps to identify appropriate tree planting locations to reduce river temperatures.



Scottish Invasive Species Initiative

The Cromarty Firth Fishery Board is an active member of the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI) that is managed by NatureScot. Several areas in the Cromarty region were treated for the invasive plant species giant hogweed to prevent flowering and further spread of the plant. New areas within the catchment were also identified containing skunk cabbage. Skunk cabbage out-competes smaller plants due to its shading effects and can cause extensive damage to native flora including plants and mosses. The seeds disperse via river flow, allowing plants to establish downstream. It is important to tackle the upstream source of the plants to prevent further spreading.



The network of volunteers checking mink rafts and traps is vital to controlling the spread of the species. Mink migration typically occurs between late July and September, and most sightings of the animal occur in these months. However, resident mink are present in low numbers across the district and an adult mink was trapped and humanely dispatched in May.

Bailiff Report

At the beginning of May, Board staff were joined by an officer from Police Scotland to patrol the catchment. The purpose of the patrol was to visit areas of concern where illegal fishing for both freshwater and migratory fish occurs. Board staff have an excellent working relationship with Police Scotland and would like to thank them for their assistance and ongoing support.

Patrols by foot and canoe of the rivers and coast across the district continued throughout the month at varying times. Several reports of suspicious activity were received and all were responded to. Board staff appreciate anglers and members of the public taking time to report issues of concern.