

Monthly Report – September & October 2021

National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland

Board staff completed sampling of the 30 National Electrofishing Programme for Scotland (NEPS) sites across the catchment in September. Sites were located on the Conon, Allt Graad, Alness and Balnagown rivers. Early indications are that the rivers are in a healthy state. The data will be analysed and reported by Marine Scotland Science (MSS) with the expectation that they will provide a complementary approach to the adult-based river grading system in due course.

Tissue samples were taken from a selection of salmon parr during the NEPS work to investigate the impact of escaped farmed salmon on wild populations (genetic introgression). A report was published by MSS in October¹ with results of an analysis carried out on the 2018 and 2019 genetic samples collected under NEPS. The genetic integrity of juvenile salmon populations observed across the country was not uniform. Signs of introgression were concentrated in areas of marine aquaculture production and freshwater smolt rearing, typically on the west coast of Scotland. Outside these areas, little to no genetic changes were detected.

Peffery Restoration Project

The project to re-meander the River Peffery was put on hold for 2021. However, baseline electrofishing surveys were carried out in September to allow the impact of future habitat improvement works to be assessed. High abundances of juvenile trout were detected in the river, but juvenile salmon abundances were low. It is hoped that re-meandering will create the diversity in habitat required to support better numbers of juvenile salmon.

River Temperature Monitoring

Board staff downloaded river temperature loggers that were deployed across the Conon catchment in May. The loggers form part of the Scotland River Temperature Monitoring Network (SRTMN) and aim to identify areas at risk of warming across the catchment. Worryingly, maximum summer river temperatures of up to 27°C were recorded in the upper Conon. Useful outputs from the project will include identifying areas where tree planting can provide shade and reduce river temperatures during summer.

Loch na Croic Adult Fish Trap

The Loch na Croic adult fish trap was opened on 18th October, one week earlier than in 2020 and approximately three weeks earlier than previous years. A total of 265 adult salmon were captured by the end of October. Over the preceding five years, the average number of adults caught by the end of December is less than 800. Stripping of fish for the long-term mitigation stocking programme will commence in mid-November.

¹ Gilbey, *et al.* (2021). [A national assessment of the influence of farmed salmon escapes on the genetic integrity of wild Scottish Atlantic salmon populations](#). *Scottish Marine and Freshwater Science* Vol 12 No 12

Balnagown Log Jam

A large, natural obstruction on the Balnagown River was removed in October with the help of Meddat Farm. Several trees had fallen into the river following a bank collapse, and the obstruction acted as a barrier to salmon and sea trout moving upstream.



Balnagown obstruction before.



Balnagown obstruction removed.

Bailiff Report

At the beginning of September, Board staff attended a two-day conflict resolution training course alongside staff from the River Ness DSFB. Training was received to improve de-escalation techniques, the use of handcuffs, and restraint techniques.

Board staff continued with fishery protection patrols across the district throughout September and October. Five incidents were dealt with and a total of seven persons were spoken to regarding fishing without permission. A further two incidents were attended after reports of persons suspected of fishing without permission were received.

Regular checks, where safe to do so, were made on fish passes. These checks are carried out to ensure fish have free passage during upstream migration to their spawning areas.