

Monthly Report – September 2023

River Restoration

As the electrofishing season drew to a close, Board staff were able to attend a river restoration project meeting on site at Alt Lorgy on the Spey. The Alt Lorgy restoration project was one of the first of its kind in Scotland and represents a gold standard for restoration of a heavily impacted, channelised salmon stream. Representatives from Scottish Fisheries Coordination Centre (SFCC), Fisheries Management Scotland and Working With Rivers trainees met on site with river restoration specialists CBEC to discuss options for river restoration elsewhere. A site visit to the Orrin and Blackwater is planned this winter with CBEC.



Fishery Management Plan

Fisheries Management Scotland have now published the most recent fishery management plans online. A second round of funding has been secured and work on phase two of the management plan is currently ongoing. If you would like to view the current management plan you can find a link to it on our homepage at <https://cromarty.dsfb.org.uk/>.

Electrofishing

Conon Mainstem

As reported in July, the team surveyed 8 sites on the Conon mainstem to ascertain how it was performing in terms of juvenile recruitment. The average fry density across all sites was 0.92 fry/m² which exceeds the benchmark of 0.6 fry/m². Fry were caught at all sites surveyed. For parr, the average density was 0.15 parr/m² which is in line with the benchmark. Parr were caught at all sites bar one. These densities confirm that the Conon mainstem is performing well and that where the habitat is good, natural juvenile recruitment follows suit.

Blackwater Stock Assessment

As only four of our NEPS sites this year fell on stocked sections of the Blackwater an additional six sites were added in order for us to more accurately assess the success of this year's stocking. Fry densities, unsurprisingly, reflected stocking densities with an average of 0.45 fry/m² across the 10 sites. Parr densities averaged 0.15 parr/m². Fry and parr were caught at all sites.

Meig Habitat Survey

The team undertook a number of timed fishing surveys to ascertain the productivity of the upper Meig, above Loch Beannacharain, and to identify potential index sites prior to some potential habitat restoration works. Fish capture rates were reasonable at three of the five sites below Corriefeol fish pass, with all sites producing fry and parr.

In total, six sites were fished above Corriefeol fish pass with all sites producing salmon but in very low numbers. Only one surveyed site was found to be producing fry. This indicates very limited spawning above Corriefeol, it is hoped that the improvements made to the fish pass earlier in the year will improve access and we will see increased fry numbers next season.



SSE Liaison Meeting

At the end of the month, a meeting was held between SSE's specialist scientific advisor, the Clerk to the Board and the Fisheries Manager. The primary topics of discussion revolved around operation and repair of the fish trap at Loch na Croic, Smolt capture and PIT tagging on the Meig and Bran, and restoration of the upper Orrin. These meetings are a vital aspect



of the annual running of the Blackwater hatchery. They further allow us a direct line of communication with SSE allowing specific priorities and issues to be addressed effectively.

SISI Conference

Staff attended the SISI conference in Aviemore, marking the end of phase 1 of the project. There were a variety of excellent speakers from INNS projects around the world and the message was very much “keep going with the good work”.

Within the Cromarty district, we have all known stands of invasive plants under management and plant densities are very much reduced. We do still have relatively high numbers of American mink, particularly along the foreshore of the Firth. This will be an area of expansion over the next 3 years as we aim to reduce mink populations further. If you, or anyone you know of, might be willing to assist in our mink control efforts, please get in touch.

Otter license

Once again, in 2023, a significant number of salmon were taken by an Otter below Tor Achilty dam. After considering possible deterrents and liaising with Scottish experts, we did not manage to identify a suitable method to be deployed on upper Fairburn. We have since deemed relocation to be the most sensible option and have submitted a licence application to Nature Scot to allow us to trap and relocate Otters during the fishing season. We await initial comments and will report back on this in due course.

Bailiff Report

Patrols looking for those fishing illegally continued during September. Following an increase in reports of persons fishing without permission on the River Alness, board staff focussed their time on the river during the middle part of the month.

A total of six persons were removed for fishing without permission on the rivers across the district during September, with one person reported to Police Scotland for an offence under the 2003 Act.