

Monthly Report – May 2024

Smolt Tagging and Transport

Despite the low water throughout May, the rock bags we installed at the start of the season kept the rotary screw traps on the Meig turning and our total catch was 6,385 smolts. This is above the previous 5 year average of 5,927.

In total, 1,000 fish were PIT tagged as part of the smolt guidance system trial and released in loch Meig. It is hoped that the smolt guidance system will increase smolt survival through lochs, directing them to the exit quickly thereby reducing predation pressure. We will be analysing the data through June to ascertain whether the system was effective.

The smolt run from the Bran was significantly better than last year with 1,926 smolts transported below Tor Achilty. The catch is slightly below the previous 5 year average of 2,122 but far more encouraging than the 1,077 fish caught in 2023.

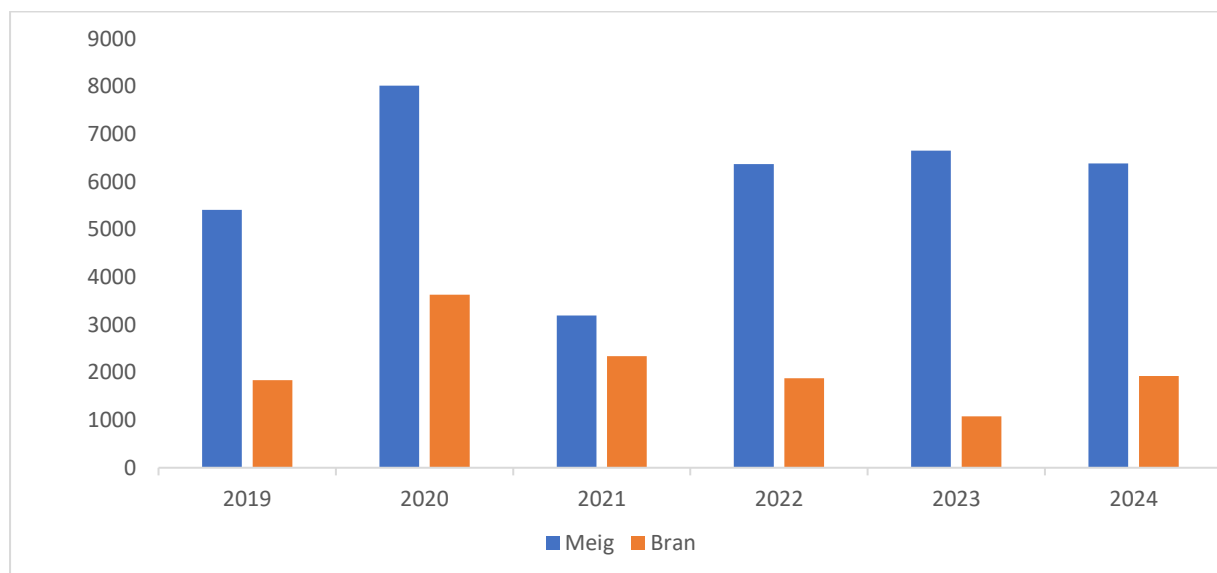


Figure 1: Number of smolts caught in rotary screw traps and wolf traps at the Meig and Bran, respectively (2019-2024).

Bird Counts

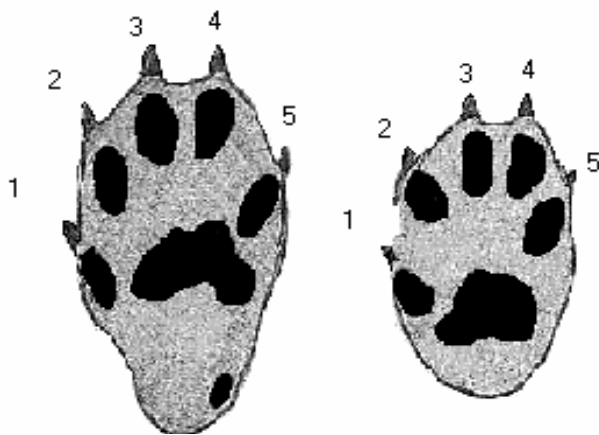
The team have continued to undertake regular bird counts on both the Conon and Alness during the smolt run. Numbers remain relatively low on the rivers, but some large groups of Goosanders have been spotted in the tidal areas around the river mouths, especially on the Alness.

Shooting as an aid to scare has been employed on both the Conon and Alness throughout April and May with assistance from upper river ghillies. This licenced control measure disrupts their feeding and may help minimise their impact on the fishery especially whilst carried out at dusk and dawn.

Mink Movements

We have received several reports of mink sighted around the district in recent weeks indicating that animals are now back out and looking to feed. Our staff will react and deploy traps or arrange for a volunteer to trap when a mink is sighted.

Please keep an eye out when on the river for any signs of mink, the best thing to look out for are their prints in sand/mud on the riverbank. If you see or hear of any signs of mink, please contact Trudi Clarke, our INNS officer, who will arrange to deploy traps. Email: Trudi.Clarke@Cromartyboard.com



Mink (or polecat)



Left: Mink prints to look out for on river sediment. No bigger than a 50 pence piece. Only black parts usually visible. **Right:** James spraying a stand of Giant hogweed at Kilmuir Bay

Invasive Non-Native Plants

Trudi and the rest of the team have been out spraying all known American skunk cabbage and Giant hogweed throughout May with initial treatment now complete. Again, if you see either of these plants, please report them immediately to Trudi and we will arrange to get them treated.

Bailiff Report

Board staff continued with regular patrols across the district during May. Coastal patrols have resumed, and all fish passes are now under regular surveillance. As ever, if you see anything suspicious or any illegal activity, please call one of our team of dedicated water bailiffs.