

DEVON ANGLING REVIEW

The Newsletter of the Devon Angling Association

Hon. Secretary Comments - The Devon Year 2020:

15th March saw the start of fishing on Glenquey Reservoir and on the River Devon. Little did we know what was going to happen very shortly thereafter?

On 23rd March came a national lockdown because of the Coronavirus pandemic and an end to many things including fishing. The river re-opened on 29th May and Glenquey did the same on 3rd June. Restricted travel remained in place and very few ticket outlets were open. Not since the Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2001 had there been such disruption to the fishing. However, restrictions on movement resulted in some benefit for the DAA as considerable numbers of anglers went out and purchased permits. Some of these anglers had not fished their local river for years but there were few options if they wanted to fish at all. The net effect was that our membership for the season was 518, including 69 juniors. These figures were the highest on both counts for some years.

Turning to other matters, members should note that as from 1st April 2021, the Forth District Salmon Fishery Board (FDSFB) will be managing the fishing currently owned by the Crown Estate (Scotland). The fact that the DAA's lease for its salmon fishing is due for renewal in 2021 is of significance but it is not yet known how FDSFB are going to manage salmon leases, indications are however that they will be sticking closely to the current arrangements that have been applied by Crown Estates. It is also of note that the Scottish Government has instructed all assessors that non-domestic rates should be assessed every three years, not every five years as at present. For those who are not aware, the DAA is required to pay rates for the salmon fishing on the River Devon. This is effectively a levy which goes to FDSFB. Last year, playing catch up the assessors (we have to pay both Clackmannanshire and Perth & Kinross Councils) increased our annual payment by 100 percent. What will they do this year?



Annual General Meeting delayed:

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic restrictions it has also been necessary to delay the Devon Angling Association AGM that would normally have been held in early January. Likewise and for similar reasons the audit of the annual accounts has been delayed. The Committee do however record their thanks to Eileen Armstrong for her professional preparation of the accounts that have now been lodged with the auditors. The auditors note however that in accord with due diligence the audit will be carried out prior to the AGM once a meeting date can be scheduled.

On a lighter note:

An excellent book entitled *'If Rivers Could Sing'* A Scottish River Wildlife Journey written by Keith Broomfield has been published recently. Keith is a DAA Committee member also a Trustee of the Forth Rivers Trust. His book reminds us and demonstrates that the River Devon is a special place and that without rivers our lives would be much impoverished. Its wonderful diversity of wildlife is a complex ecological web with each species depending on one another either directly or indirectly. If you have not read this book then we encourage you to do so, it can be purchased from www.tippermuirbooks.co.uk

River Devon and Glenquey fishing 2020 season:

As far as the fishing itself goes, reports indicate that excellent fishing was to be had in both locations provided the weather was favourable. Glenquey maintained a very high level for most of the season and it was difficult to fish much of the north bank. There were several spates on the river, most notably in February but two in August were helpful in bringing salmon into the river in time for our late season fishing. The migratory fish returns to Marine Scotland and the Crown Estate were 26 salmon and 13 sea trout caught and released.

Beavers in the River Devon: by Keith Broomfield (a personal perspective)

When on the Devon, some anglers may have noticed signs of beavers, such as gnawed tree trunks and branches. These fascinating creatures have been colonising the river in recent times and there are increasing signs of their presence with each passing year. They are native animals to Scotland but were hunted to extinction by the 16th century. Escaped or introduced animals were recorded in the Tay and Earn in the early 2000s, where numbers have rapidly increased, and which are presumably the origin of the Devon beavers. In 2019, legislation was passed by the Scottish Government to give beavers protected status.



Naturally, some anglers will be concerned that beaver activity may have a negative impact upon migratory salmon and trout. My own view is that this is unlikely and there is every reason to suppose the opposite will be case, with beavers bringing tangible ecological benefits to the Devon. Beaver-felled trees in the river create new habitat for invertebrates, which in turn provides food for fish, and also places to shelter, much in the same way as how a rocky reef in the sea is rich in marine life. Felled trees often coppice abundantly or sucker from their roots. Channels created by beavers also create new habitat for fish, invertebrates and other wildlife, as do ponds created by damming activities.

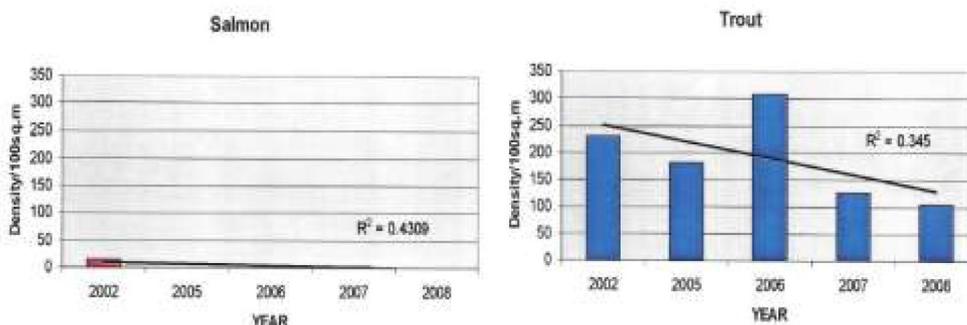
Beavers would never dam the main river, but rather concentrate their efforts on side ditches and burns. Furthermore, they don't always build dams, and only do so when they feel the need to control the water level to maintain access to their underwater burrows. Dams constantly release water, and fish can often find ways over, round or through them. Dams may also help prevent siltation in the river, which could prove beneficial to gravelly fish spawning beds.

Surprisingly, there has been little research in Europe on the impact of beavers on trout and salmon, with most studies carried out in North America. But the work that has been carried out suggests the impact on salmonids is negligible. After-all, fish have co-existed happily with beavers for millennia and have evolved together. Of course, there is always the possibility of there being localised fishery management issues with beavers on the Devon in the future, but in such instances, there is scope for pragmatic mitigation measures carried out in consultation with ScotNature (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage). As anglers, we also need to remember that rivers belong to everyone rather than just one section of the community, and as such, recognise the public support that exists behind the return of the beaver to Scotland.

For me, the joy of angling is not just about catching fish, it also provides the opportunity to witness the wonderful nature around us – and the arrival of the beaver takes that to a whole new level.

Concerns about the Dollar Water Race & the Fish Pass:

Dollar Burn is of significant size and contributes substantially to the recruitment of trout and salmon. The old water race that was built to protect the old railway bridge (now the Devon Way recreational path) was beyond repair and required reconstruction, this was undertaken in 2015. It was and remains an obstruction to fish passage, in particular salmon to the upper burn. Electrofishing is currently carried out in the burn above and downstream of the Water Race confirming that this situation remains in the upper burn. It is interesting to note that electrofishing carried out in the past showed a similar situation (See the charts below recording results for 2002 and 2005 through to 2008). It is understood that the height of the Larinier fish pass upper step might require adjustment.



However, further investigation of the hydrology is needed to properly understand the effects of the shallow depth, slope of the burn and flow rate above the Water Race under average flow conditions. This will be carried out before any modification to the fish pass is undertaken.