

**COCKERMOUTH ANGLING ASSOCIATION A.G.M. 2016  
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

**ANGLING REPORT**

- In the past season, on Cockermouth Angling Association Waters 34 salmon were caught on the Derwent, 31 of these were returned to the water. There were 35 sea trout caught on the Derwent and all of these were returned. On the Cocker no salmon or sea trout were reported and angling effort was very light.
- For comparison figures for Cockermouth Angling Association for earlier years are as follows:

Season	Derwent Total Salmon	Derwent Salmon Returned	Derwent Sea Trout	Cocker Total Salmon
2002	58	?	?	3
2003	20	?	?	0
2004	93	30	26	8
2005	55	33	10	6
2006	61	27	17	7
2007	121	53	4	22
2008	64	23	1	25
2009	82	44	14	11
2010	72	38	27	11
2011	55	19	13	13
2012	44	22	10	5
2013	34	17	6	15
2014	24	20	46	15
2015	31	25	28	0

- CAA total fishing effort on the Derwent was about 520 sessions (486 last year) and for the Cocker it was about 12 sessions (40 last year), so, on average, on the Derwent it takes about 15 sessions per salmon!
- Overall, it has been a slightly better season than 2015 and so far I have had reports of 302 salmon and 218 seatrout being caught on the Derwent. Catch and return rates were 85.4% for salmon and 93.6% for sea trout. (229 salmon and 279 sea trout last year).
- For interest the other figures I have for other Derwent beats so far is as follows (with last year's figures in brackets) are Workington AA 150 (80 in 2015), Castle

Rods 25 (58), Isel Fisheries 25 (15), Keswick 7 (10), Woodhall 5 (10), Cauldron 2 (0) and the Cradles 4 (4).

- Fishing effort on both the Castle Waters and Woodhall was significantly reduced this year due to low take up of permits. Perhaps understandably, anglers were not willing to visit the river when there were no signs of fish moving. The Castle has also been in a transition year as decisions were being taken about how it would be operated in future years. It has now been confirmed that Mr David Hill has leased the lower stretches of the Derwent (from Stakes Top to Camerton) and the Castle Fisheries will retain the stretches from Howthwaite to Armathwaite. In practice, David Payne will continue to manage and take bookings for both stretches.
- Up until the last week in August, the salmon run on the Derwent seemed to be a bit improved over that of the last few years. However, from then onwards few salmon moved up the river until almost the last week of the season when there seemed to be a late run. This pattern seems to have been replicated on most other salmon rivers in the North West.

### **DECEMBER 2015 FLOODS**

Last year's AGM was held shortly after the devastating floods in December 2015 as a result of Storm Desmond. The Derwent system was significantly altered by those floods and we were worried about the effects of this, particularly on salmon and trout stocks and all the habitat improvement work that had been carried out.

During 2016 juvenile fish stocks have been monitored, not only by EA, but also by the Semi-Quantitative Electrofishing and Catchment Characterisation work carried out by the West Cumbria Rivers Trust. The full report of this will not be available until February 2017. However, preliminary findings show that although overall numbers of juveniles have shown a reduction, juvenile fish are still found throughout the river system. Salmon fry numbers seem to be better in the main rivers than in the tributaries, and the reverse seems to be true for trout. EA operated a salmon smolt trap on St Johns Beck and counted over a 1,000 smolts. A full report of this exercise is still awaited. However, it would seem that contrary to the worries of some anglers, while overall numbers of juvenile have been affected by Storm Desmond there has not been a "total wipe out" of juvenile fish.

The Rivers Corridor Group has revisited all the habitat improvement work it has carried out over the last 10 years and has produced a report on the effects of Storm Desmond. Much river bank fencing was lost but most of this has since been replaced, with farmers and landowners being able to claim Flood Recovery Grants. Most of the "log and Christmas tree" river bank re-enforcement work stood up well to the flooding. On our own stretches, there was only minor damage to some of the interlocking stone work on Wood Bottom and this has been repaired using grants from DOA, EA and the Rivers Corridor Group.

A few of the logs at Barn Dub have been undercut and this has left deep and dangerous trenches behind the logs in a few places. These are currently roped off and plans are afoot to carry out repairs in February 2017.

The work on the left bank of Iron Bridge and at Lancaster Flat were largely unaffected by the floods. We are looking at the right bank of Iron Bridge, in conjunction with EA

West Cumbria Rivers Trust, the Rivers Corridor Group and Mr Roger Pope in order to see if further improvement work can be carried out there.

**THE NATIONAL PICTURE ON SALMON STOCKS**

After the "Salmon Summit", held in November 2015, the Environment Agency launched a "5-Point Approach for Restoring Salmon in England". This aims to address pressures at different life stages of salmon and is seen as a vital part of restoring and maintaining England's salmon population.

The 5 points are:

1. Improve marine survival
2. Further reduce exploitation by nets and rods
3. Remove barriers to migration and enhance habitat
4. Safeguard sufficient water flows in rivers
5. Maximize spawning success by improving water quality

An 18 month initiative has been launched, built up on a partnership approach, involving a number of government, angling and environmental organizations including the Angling Trust, the Rivers Trust, Defra, Salmon and Trout Conservation UK, Atlantic Salmon Trust and the Wild Trout Trust.

18 month EA assignments have been put in place to deliver this 5 point approach and a work program is currently in development. Work stream groups have been set up and relevant members from the wider partnership are being invited onto these groups.

I have recently met with our local MP Sue Hayman, who now has Shadow Cabinet responsibility for floods, fishing etc. I pointed out that much of this new "5 point approach" was not new at all and was very similar to plan the EA announced in 2008 which were in their "Better Sea Trout and Salmon Fisheries – Our Strategy for 2008 -2021". Sue has agreed to press the EA at national level for progress reports on the EA's implementation of these plans.

### **LOCAL IMPROVEMENT PLANS**

It is believed that the biggest single factor affecting the status of salmon populations has been declining marine survival, which has nearly halved over the last 20 years. Up to 95% of salmon smolts are dying at sea in their first year. In the 1970s there were estimated to be around 7 million salmon in the North Atlantic, nowadays there are less than half that number, near 3 million.

There is virtually nothing that local angling associations can do about marine survival rates and we look to EA and Government to take action at national and international level on this issue.

Locally, we can influence the numbers of smolts which migrate from our rivers. The Derwent Owners Association, working with the EA and Natural England, has put together a River Derwent Conservation Action Plan, which is aimed at halting the decline and then improving the salmon numbers on the Derwent. I have previously reported on this multi-pronged approach and have stressed that no single element on its own can solve the problem. We need to keep taking action on all these fronts. I will give a very brief up date of progress to date.

- **Increasing catches and release rates.** We have made significant progress in this area, through a combination of voluntary restrictions, imposed permit conditions and new bye-laws. Catch & return rates for salmon have been around the 85 -90% rates for the last couple of years and for sea trout it is virtually 100%. EA are thinking of introducing a mandatory 100% catch and release rate on all rivers, other than those classified as being "Not at Risk". In 2014, 38 of England's 42 principal salmon rivers

were assessed as being "At Risk" or "Probably at Risk". The Angling Trust is strongly against the introduction of mandatory measures.

- **Decreasing predation by fish eating birds.** I continue to be the "Principle Licence Holder" for a catchment wide bird control licence for the Derwent. We have 6 "Specific Site" Licence Holders and each can nominate up to 6 additional guns for control purposes. However, the total numbers of birds we are licensed to kill is only 20 goosanders and 20 cormorants before 15<sup>th</sup> March and a further 20 goosanders and 15 cormorants between 16<sup>th</sup> March and 15<sup>th</sup> May to protect the smolt run. Additionally we use "non-lethal" scaring tactics. Powerful green lasers proved to be very effective in moving on the majority of a 400 strong roosting colony of cormorants in March 2015 but we have, so far, been refused permission by the National Trust to repeat this exercise. We have recently had discussions with NT, with help from the Angling Trust, about this and are hopeful that we can persuade NT to change its mind.

Adrian Mills has organised a count of goosanders and cormorants on the river in November and this will be repeated again in March. We would appreciate additional help to make this as comprehensive a survey as possible. Anyone interested in helping should give contact details to Adrian.

- **Doing more habitat improvement work.** CAA has supported the DOA's involvement with habitat improvement work over many years. This year DOA / Rivers Corridor Group were awarded the Wilds Trout Trust Conservation Award in the "Large Catchment Enhancement" category. This gave national recognition to the work we have done locally over the last 10 years.

Annually, CAA gives a donation of £500 towards the DOA's habitat improvement work. We also have paid additional sums to carry out improvements at Barn Dub, Lancaster Flat, Wood Bottom and Iron Bridge. However, members should note that we have received contributions towards this work totalling £35,853 from a combination of DOA, EA and the Rivers Corridor Group. Hopefully, members will recognise that our continued support of DOA's Habitat Improvement work and the policy of co-operating with EA, Natural England, West Cumbria Rivers Trust and other Rivers Corridor Group partners pays dividends!

- **Enhancement of Juvenile Fish Stocks.** CAA has donated £500 per year towards the Semi-Quantitative Electrofishing / Catchment Characterisation Programme carried out on the Derwent Catchment by West Cumbria Rivers Trust. This is an initial 5 year research project which is providing additional information on the populations of juvenile salmon and trout throughout the river system. The total annual cost of the programme is about £12,000, with additional donations being given by other angling clubs, riparian owners, particularly Lord Egremont, and the Rivers Corridor Group. DOA has voted in favour of a proposal put forward by its Hatchery Sub-Group to help fund the Keswick AA hatchery and to make the case to EA for the operation of that hatchery, for an initial 3 year period, to help to remedy lost stocks of juvenile salmon using "Scotty boxes". It is hoped that this case will be submitted to EA in the very near future.
- **Control of Poaching and Illegal Fishing.** This year, I have heard no reports of illegal netting etc. taking place on the Derwent but there have been several reports of people fishing on private water without a permit. This has been a particular problem in the Clifton / Camerton/ Marron Foot area. Such instances of illegal fishing

are theft of fishing rights offences and have a crime number of 116/11 and should be reported to Cumbria Police, not the EA.

Understandably, local anglers get very frustrated about the absence of teams of EA warranted bailiffs. However, it is quite clear that this cannot happen because of continued cuts in Government "Grant in Aid" to the Environment Agency. Can I again emphasise the importance of reporting any intelligence or even suspicion of illegal activity on the river to the Emergency Helpline Number on your licence **0800 80 70 60**. I have issued lists of Grid References for key points on the river system and those for CAA waters are given on our website.

Darren Bedworth of the EA Fisheries Operations Team has organised a couple of joint patrols between his bailiffs and Cumbria police officers along the Derwent this year.

- **Removal of Barriers to Fish Migration.** This is an area where the West Cumbria Rivers Trust is taking the lead and working with EA, UU and others. Plans have been progressed to remove some major barriers (like Yearl Weir and the Coops weir) but these are at an early stage of development. However, more immediately work is in hand to improve fish passage by removing blockages caused by fallen trees and piped "culverts".

### **WORK OF THE DERWENT OWNERS' ASSOCIATION & THE RIVERS CORRIDOR GROUP**

In addition to my work as Chairman of CAA, I also chair both the Derwent Owners' Association and the Rivers Corridor Group and I have briefly mentioned some of the work carried out by these groups, in partnership with local EA, NE, WCRT, National Trust, Woodland Trust, Lake District National park Authority etc. I believe that this partnership approach has paid dividends and we can still criticise our partners when we do not fully agree with their actions or in-actions.

However, this partnership approach has been criticised by one or two DOA members. Workington AA, and in particular, Mr David Heckles, firmly believe that the demise of salmon in the Derwent is not part of a national or international problem, but can be firmly attributed to the EA failing to carry out its statutory duties in a number of areas. To try to prove this, they have asked EA for a vast amount of information under the Freedom of Information Act and have considered taking legal action against EA.

Currently they plan to ask Jamie Reed MP to ask a series of Parliamentary Questions "on various aspects of EA policy which are having a major negative impact on the survival of the salmon species on the Cumbrian Derwent". As yet, these questions have not been defined.

Another Workington AA member, Mr Stan Edmondson has put forward his own 3 point plan for the Derwent which is to immediately stop all habitat improvement work, start to operate the Keswick Hatchery and to appoint a QC to pursue EA through the courts. Mr Edmondson firmly supports "the more robust approach" advocated by David Heckles etc. and has said that he believes that this would also be supported by "99% of all Derwent Owners".

At the request of David Heckles and Workington AA, I have circulated all the information they have supplied to all DOA members, including the CAA Committee. Workington AA has been advised that if it believes that it can show that EA has been negligent in

carrying out its statutory duties, then in the first instance it should take the evidence to Fish Legal, which is the legal arm of the Angling Trust.

I have asked other DOA members for their views on the way DOA is presently being run and whether or not they would support the approach being advocated by Workington AA members. I would welcome the views of CAA on this, and the CAA Committee view was that I should ask this AGM for this.

### **COGRA MOSS**

United Utilities still intend to carry out the engineering work needed on the pipework associated with the dam at Cogra Moss but we have not yet been given any firm timescales for this. The work will mean a temporary lowering of the reservoir level. We have said that we will co-operate with United Utilities to ensure that the work has minimum impact on the fishing at Cogra Moss.

Terry Barnes and John Smith have continued to manage Cogra Moss on our behalf and a full report will be given later in the meeting.

### **WEB-SITE**

John Smith has continued to maintain the Cockermouth Angling Society web-site and I would encourage members to visit it at [cockermouthanglingassociation.co.uk](http://cockermouthanglingassociation.co.uk)

### **ANNUAL DINNER**

Held again at Hundith Hill last February with a good attendance. This year's Dinner Dance will be at the same venue on Saturday 25th February 2017 and details will be sent out in the New Year. It's a good night out so please try and support it again this year.

### **FINALLY, THANKS**

Are due to

- Our Secretary Sue Moses who has carried out these duties with great efficiency. Sue told us last year that after over 10 years' service as secretary she would be stepping down after this year's AGM. Sue has been ably assisted by husband John. Thanks for everything you have done on our behalf Sue.
- Our Treasurer John Smith and to Vice Chairman Peter Laws.
- Terry Barnes, together with Steven Black and John Smith and others for their excellent work at Cogra Moss.
- John Moses, John Smith, Sean Wilson and Frank Hope for organising and carrying out river bank maintenance work throughout the season.
- The wardens at Ingle Nook Caravan Park for selling day permits for Cogra Moss on our behalf.
- David Coulthard and Michael Cleeland for running the guest schemes.
- The whole of the Committee which has worked very well as a team, not only in meetings but also when it comes to getting things done on the river bank.
- All of our members, for generally fishing in a sporting manner, looking after new comers and giving the committee very few problems!

Jack Abernethy, Chairman, Cockermouth Angling Association, 7<sup>th</sup> December 2016