

# COCKERMOUTH ANGLING ASSOCIATION A.G.M. 2022 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

## PETER LAWS

Sadly, our vice chairman Peter Laws died last month. Peter had been a stalwart of this Association, a real country man and a true gentleman. He will be sadly missed.

## ANGLING REPORT

- In the past season, on Cockermouth Angling Association Waters 26 salmon were caught on the Derwent, all of these were returned to the water. There were 21 sea trout caught on the Derwent and all of these were also returned.
- 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
2016	34	31	35	0
2017	79	69	22	0
2018	17	17	23	3

2019	37	37	30	30
2020	54	54	8	8
2021	14	14	6	6

- CAA total fishing effort on the Derwent was, once again, lower than usual this season and there was a high proportion of Derwent anglers who did not fish the river at all. Water levels were low throughout the summer and early autumn with only a few salmon being taken after any slight rise. We had decent water levels in October and there was a decent run of salmon. Sea trout catches were better than recent seasons.
- Overall, on the Derwent catches were about 50 – 60 % higher than 2021. So far, I have had reports of 344 Derwent salmon being caught and, looking at last year's figures for the beats that have not yet reported, I estimate that there will probably be about another 75 to add to that total. So this will give a Derwent total of about 419 compared with 227 last year. Catch and return rates were again close to 100%.
- 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 132 (72 in 2021), Castle Rods 81 (43), Isel Fisheries 7 (5), Keswick 23 (2), Woodhall 18 (6), Redmain 18 (8), Broughton 15 (8), and the Cradles 8 (1).

### **CASTLE FISHERIES LEASE**

Once again Castle Fisheries have agreed to a "rent rebate" on the amount that we should be paying according to the formal lease. In effect we pay them the amount that we get from the sale of Derwent permits. Last year we were able to sell all 40 of the local Derwent permits at £180 each but we only sold 12 of the 15 outside rods which are available.

Just for the record, our Agreement with Castle Fisheries will formally need to be renewed again from January 2026, so we have just 3 more seasons under the present Agreement.

### **DERWENT BYE-LAWS REVIEW**

The local bye-laws covering the Derwent fishery are due to expire in July 2023 and have been reviewed by the Environment Agency. EA proposes to make it mandatory to return all salmon caught but allow the voluntary 100% catch and release to continue for sea trout. They also propose restrictions on fishing tackle and fishing methods, including a complete ban on worm fishing. These proposals were subject to a public consultation process. 104 respondents sent comments sent in to the EA during the consultation period and these are presently being analysed by Phil Ramsden. A Response Document will be published early in the New Year which will explain EA's reaction to comments and give people a chance to withdraw any objections if they want to. The final package of EA's proposals, all comments received etc. will then be sent to the DEFRA Fisheries Team. The final decision will then be taken by the Minister in time for any new bye-laws to be in place before July.

From what I have heard, the majority of respondents supported 100% catch and release for both salmon and sea trout but would prefer this to be on a voluntary basis than being made mandatory. Everyone agreed, including EA, that legitimate anglers were not the cause of the decline in Derwent salmon numbers and that the proposed bye-law changes, on their own, would make absolutely no difference to stock levels. It had been suggested to EA that we needed to get on with tackling the real causes of the decline in salmon numbers rather than tinkering about with bye-laws.

## **ELECTRO-FISHING SURVEYS OF THE DERWENT SYSTEM**

We have continued to support the electro-fishing and habitat surveys carried out by the West Cumbria Rivers Trust, both financially and by providing volunteers. Ruth MacKay and her team surveyed 185 sites in 2022, including 27 "full quantitative depletion" surveys for calibration purposes. Overall, there was a slight dip in trout numbers but this was still the second best result in the 8 years the surveys have been carried out. 2765 trout fry and 444 parr were caught. Salmon fry numbers dropped a fair bit from 2021 but numbers were still 4<sup>th</sup> highest in the 8 years of surveying. 1443 salmon fry and 328 parr were caught. Ruth will be publishing the results on the WCRT web-site shortly. However, preliminary analysis has confirmed the pattern seen in earlier years i.e. that there is no significant shortage of juvenile salmon and trout in the Derwent system as long as the habitat is suitable for them.

## **RIVER DERWENT SALMON SMOLT TRAPPING AND TRACKING PROJECT**

Glasgow University completed the third and final of the salmon smolt trapping and tracking project on the Derwent but we have not yet seen any of the preliminary results. We have been promised a briefing note on the 2022 results in the near future. Amy Green will then be completing her Ph.D. thesis and we look forward to the analysis of the last three years results.

Anglers believe that predation by fish eating birds is a significant contributor to the losses of salmon smolts on their journey to the Solway.

## **CONTROL OF FISH EATING BIRDS IN THE DERWENT SYSTEM**

The Area Based Bird Control Licence for 2022 /2023 should have been issued by the ed in time by the Natural England Wildlife Licensing Unit for the start of the control period on 1<sup>st</sup> September. However, we have still not received it. Initially, delays were caused by NE wanting to evaluate the effects of avian bird flu and it is now believed that most Area Based licences have now been issued. We have had the Licence for control of the cormorants at Cogra Moss but there is still no sign of the Area Based Licences for the Derwent or the Eden. We think that this is down to the local NE team and the situation is completely unsatisfactory. I have been in contact with the Angling Trust and Fish Legal to try to get some progress made.

## **RIVER BANK MAINTENANCE**

I would like to record the Association's thanks to members who have helped with river bank maintenance work throughout the year, particularly John Smith. John has once again completed the grass cutting programme. John and Neil Barcock carried out some emergency repair work to the steps down to Wood Bottom after they were wrecked by rampant cattle! John, Adrian Mills and Robert Parks also cleaned up the access along the riverbank at Redkirk which had become quite overgrown.

## **HABITAT IMPROVEMENT WORK ON THE RIVER DERWENT**

We continue to give an annual donation to the DOA and actively support habitat improvement work on the Derwent system, mainly through our involvement with

the River Derwent Rivers Corridor Group (RCG). In the period 2021/22 the RCG has planned, funded and completed a further 15 habitat improvement projects. Total cost of this work was about £45,000, which was split RCG 13%, EA, 61% and DOA / riparian owners 26%. The majority of EA contribution comes from Fisheries Improvement Project funding which is directly from the sale of fishing licences.

One project of particular interest to Cockermouth AA is the on-going work to repair the flood damage on the left bank of the Derwent at Barn Dub. I reported last year that the 80m upstream stretch had been repaired by re-profiling it, filling in gaps with rocks, re-fitting of Christmas trees to minimize erosion by high water flows and planting willow trees behind the logs.

The down-stream 40m section was more of a problem because some of the logs have been lost completely and the water is significantly deeper. EA required an Environmental Permit to be prepared before it would give permission for this work. This also involved the preparation of Environmental Risk Assessments, Method Statements, Operating Plans etc. and everything was in place to carry out the work, when conditions were right. I am pleased to report that this work has also been completed. This involved replacing some of the logs, repositioning others and placing "rock rolls" behind the logs before reprofiling the bank. Christmas trees were re-fitted, willows were planted and the whole area was reseeded.

The total cost of the repairs to Barn Dub was almost £19,000 to which CAA contributed just less than £2,000. The rest of the funding was provided by EA, RCG and DOA.

We are aware that there has been some undercutting of the logs used to repair the riverbank at Lancaster Flat. This is similar, but not so severe, as the problem at Barn Dub. We will be looking at options to repair this next year.

## **DERWENT SALMON CONSERVATION MEETING WITH EA**

Mark Hastings had been chairing a sub-group of the DOA which was called the Derwent Salmon Conservation Sub-Group. This had superseded the Hatchery sub-group and was taking a wider look at what could be done, in cooperation with EA and NE, to address the wider issues of salmon conservation on the Derwent. After several exchanges of letters with EA, Mark Hastings and Phil Ramsden of EA had organized a joint meeting to try to agree a set of actions to bring about some improvements. Mark and I attended to put the case on behalf of anglers and there were 7 representatives of EA and NE at the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> October.

EA had said that the Derwent was now consistently failing to meet its Salmon Conservation Limit and, based on its modelling and the last 3 years catch

returns, we would need about an additional 347 hen salmon returning to the Derwent each year to remedy this. There had been a wide ranging discussion of the issues and a jointly agreed Note for the Record, including actions to be taken, had been published. Mark would be following this up through the Derwent Salmon Conservation Sub-Group and we would keep people informed of progress.

### **POACHING / ILLEGAL FISHING**

There have again been a number of reports of poaching / illegal fishing on the Derwent throughout the year. All such incidents should be reported to the EA hotline on 0800 807060 and to the Rural and Wildlife Crime Officer on the Cumbria Police Non-Emergency Number of 101. You may not get any immediate response but unless these incidents are officially logged we will not be allocated the resources needed to deal with them.

### **COGRA MOSS**

Cogra Moss has fished well all season and Terry Barnes will be presenting a report later in the meeting. Anglers seem to be well satisfied with the quality of the fish stocked at Cogra. There have been a few problems with a small minority of dog walkers failing to keep animals under control. We have put notices up to remind everyone of this and for anglers and walkers to be aware of each other when passing behind casting anglers.

The on-line booking system, devised by John Smith has worked well and has allows day and week tickets to be ordered and paid for easily and at times when the Inglenook Caravan site office is not open. The combination lock has been a success, in spite of a few people failing to grasp the instructions printed on notices displayed on both sides of the gate!

Adrian Mills has quietly carried out his normal Cormorant control work at Cogra Moss. Our thanks are also due to Terry Barnes, John Smith and other helpers for all the work done in organising and carrying out stocking and the general management, maintenance etc. carried out at Cogra Moss.

### **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)

## **FINALLY, THANKS ARE DUE TO**

- Our Secretary Steve Moore and our Treasurer John Smith.
- Terry Barnes, together with Steven Black and John Smith and others for their excellent work at Cogra Moss.
- John Smith and colleagues for organising and carrying out river bank maintenance work and grass cutting 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 our members, for generally fishing in a sporting manner, looking after new comers and giving the committee very few problems!

STAY SAFE AND TIGHT LINES IN 2023.

Jack Abernethy  
Chairman, Cockermouth Angling Association  
13<sup>th</sup> December 2022