

Tay Salmon News

from the Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board

More restraint required on grilse catches

While spring 2017 salmon catches were only a little down on a recent good average, last summer and autumn's grilse run was the poorest for many years. Indeed, scarcely any fresh fish entered the river after July. This was not unique to the Tay. It was a pattern common to all rivers that expect late runs.

There are similarities between this event and the type of runs which prevailed between the 1920s and 1950s when grilse were relatively scarce and spring salmon were dominant. However, it is not known whether we are looking at a repeat of that "cycle" or a different type of episode. But what does seem to be the case, is that both events occurred at a time when sea temperature in the North Atlantic rose.

Against this background, the Board considers that its previous recommendation that one fresh run grilse might be kept each day from June onwards is no longer be appropriate. That could in theory result in each angler keeping six grilse in a week. Therefore, in addition to continuing to recommend 100% catch and release until 31 May, the Board now recommends that anglers should take no more than the occasional fresh run male fish thereafter. That is, unless there is a sudden change of fortune and it is obvious by summer that there is an abundant run.

Spring salmon are getting bigger!

In the past, if the Tay was renowned for anything, it was the size of its spring salmon. Unlike most rivers, the early spring catch was mostly composed of 3 sea winter rather than smaller 2 sea winter fish. However, the abundance of 3 sea winter fish declined for decades and reached a low point in the late 1990s by which time the average salmon caught before April weighed under 10 pounds. Everyone thought the big fish were gone for good.

Then, about 2008, sizes started to increase and those first few faltering years appear to have turned into a trend. 2017 saw the biggest fish yet. The average weight of fish caught before April in 2017 was just under 13 pounds. Weights have never been consistently larger than this since the 1950s.

It isn't that fish are growing faster, they are actually growing slower and are staying longer at sea. One theory is that warmer temperatures are forcing fish to have to travel further north to feed. It seems to be the flip side of the problems affecting grilse mentioned opposite. But, while the overall picture is concerning, the silver lining is that if you catch a spring salmon on the Tay, it might well turn out to be a really good one!

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Salmon have returned to the River Garry after 60 years

At the opening of the Tay salmon season on 16 January 2017, SSE announced that work would soon commence to restore flow to the River Garry which had been dry because of hydro works since the 1950s.

The work was duly completed over the summer and on 30 October the flow was officially turned on after a 60 year absence.



In November, a number of adult salmon were seen spawning well up the Garry near Dalnamein and some 30 “redds” were counted. One female salmon kelt was briefly captured on an underwater camera. It is shown below. It will have been one of the first salmon to spawn in the Garry for over 60 years. Hopefully the first of many in the years to come.



Ghillies ensured successful broodstock collection

The most important winter job is catching up new adult broodstock for the kelt reconditioning hatchery programme. Sometimes this is difficult because of weather. To help overcome this, a second set of broodstock electro-fishing equipment was bought with by a generous donation from the Tay Ghillies Association. Members of the TGA also volunteered to assist with broodstock fishing and two teams operated for the first time. They comfortably caught the full licensed allocation of broodstock, meaning that 120 new fish have started the reconditioning process this year. The Board is really grateful to the members of the TGA and others who made this possible

New Board elected

At the triennial election of proprietors held on 12 December, seven proprietors or their representatives were elected to serve on the new Board. These are:

Iain McLaren (Interim Chairman)
Councillor Bob Band
David Godfrey
Lord Mansfield
Claire Mercer Nairne
Jim Perrett
Michael Smith

The next step in the process is the co-option of representatives of salmon anglers. Once completed the new Board will be complete in February and will serve for three years.