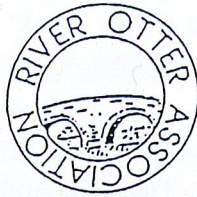


RIVER OTTER ASSOCIATION

SECRETARY : ALAN KNIGHTS

COTTARSON FARM AWLISCOMBE HONITON EX14 3NR



NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2005

MORE WORK ON TIPTON WEIR - NOVEMBER 2004



When Otterton Weir fish pass was built in 1999 members will recall that 5 or six salmon were taken out of the weirpool and moved up above the weir. If they spawned their progeny could have returned in 2004 and the fish pictured on the back page attempting Tipton Weir could have been one of those fish. Fanciful? Maybe, but we have to show confidence in our salmon action plan and our aim to restore the River Otter to a full migratory salmonid river as with the other 17 rivers in the SW region. I suggest that the picture is one of the first salmon to return to the upper river in our generation. The picture was taken by Colin Nice on 20 December 2004 showing the fish marooned on the upper sill beside the new channel built in November. The above photo was taken in November at the conclusion of the work to rebuild the pools leading to the new channel and thus over the crest of the weir. Clearly the fish easily made it up to the lower end of the sill but perversely attempted to go over the shallow part of the crest rather than the new cut.

We are grateful to the Environment Agency for a significant effort on this barrier. There is more to do on the alternative route on the LH side passage. Original plans were for this work in 2004 but with Boscastle Agency staff were on emergency operations and Tipton was deferred. When Philip Ashcroft was at SWW I well remember him saying "we may not achieve everything at once but if we creep forward with our plan each year we will be making progress". Thus it is and it will be for others in the years ahead to continue to move the action plan forward.

SALMON ACTION PLAN FOR THE RIVER OTTER

It is perhaps time to set down our strategy for returning salmon and other migratory fish to the River Otter. Firstly we set out the major obstacles that we faced :-

- **BARRIERS TO MIGRATION** - The first and main obstacle was Otterton Weir which had been impassable for 100 years except in a major flood. Apart from Otterton four other weirs presented major difficulties - Tipton - Head Weir OSM - Tracey - Langford. On tributaries Marles Weir on the Wolf - Dragons Tooth on the Gissage and Knackers Hole on the upper river.
- **WATER QUALITY** - Water treatment works discharging into the river are consented to 1.4mgd. Urban towns in the catchment have grown considerably - Honiton has doubled in size and OSM has had significant expansion.
- **WATER QUANTITY** - Groundwater abstraction in the catchment is substantial and now acknowledged to exceed sustainable environmental limits.
- **LACK OF VIABLE SALMON POPULATION** - Although there have always been a few salmon remaining below Otterton Weir the number was not sufficient to regenerate the numbers necessary to restore the river.

THE ACTION PLAN

- **BARRIERS** - This has to be our first priority. Unless we can overcome migration problems no plan can succeed. The major difficulty was Otterton. In 1999 a formal fish ladder was built and is now passable at all heights of water. Other less formal but mainly effective "passes" have been built - 1994 Head Weir OSM - 1996 a sub weir at Knackers Hole Churchinford - 1997 Tracey Weir Honiton - 2001 Langford Weir Honiton (second revision) - 2004 Tipton Weir (third revision and ongoing). Marles Weir on R. Wolf is under consideration. Dragons Tooth has no plans.
- **WATER QUALITY** - Major improvements to Honiton waste water treatment works have been carried out by SWW. OSM two works are still on old poor quality discharge consents and must be operating close to volume limits. These discharges will have to be reviewed under WFD currently ongoing.
- **WATER QUANTITY** - Recent CAMS review concluded that current abstraction licences exceeded sustainable limits. Review will continue under the WFD. Our concern is the lack of adequate dilution of effluent , particularly those chemicals that mimic oestrogen and affect the sexual orientation of fish.
- **RESTORATION OF SALMON STOCKS** - Our plan has two objectives. Firstly we have identified a section of the main river and certain tributaries that are most likely to be successful long term spawning and rearing areas. The main area is Churchinford , the Churchinford Stream , Luxton Stream and Watchford Stream. SWW moved the outfall of their stw 700m downstream so we have 2km of unpolluted water. Here we set up our egg box in 2002 and reared 3000 + fry released in 2003. In 2004 2000 fingerlings were reared by the EA and planted out. Our plan is to continue the programme for a five year cycle. To those who say our programme is too small to succeed we draw a comparison with horticulture. A plant casting 3000 seeds in a 1m area will see few grow. The same seeds planted out in thin rows will see a hundredfold increase. This is our plan in planting out our fry 1 for each m of river.

We set out our plan for others to judge whether we got it right. One thing is certain , if we did nothing it will never recover. If we got it 50% right at least we have made a start for others to build on. Our first salmon are due to return in 2006 !!

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The AGM sees the passing of my first year as Chairman of the Association. This task has been made extremely easy thanks to previous work as Chairman by Richard Marker over 14 years which has seen the Association go from strength to strength. It goes without saying that the superb work carried out by Alan Knights as Secretary makes our lives much easier !

2004/2005 has seen further continued work to improve water quality and fish stocks which will hopefully result in increasing numbers of migratory fish using the river

The Newsletter fully explains the work to date and in progress. The South West Rivers Association and West Country Rivers Trust are proving to be very important organisations which deserve our full support and should grow into bodies with considerable influence both locally, nationally and internationally.

New members are the lifeblood of the Association providing valuable funding and support. It is incumbent upon all of us to try and encourage new members to join in order to ensure the future of the Association. Lastly lets all hope for a good fishing season this year and thank to all of you for your continued support.

ANDREW LUXTON

AUCTION OF FISHING DAYS

TO TAKE PLACE AFTER THE AGM ON 23 MARCH 2005

LOT	LOCATION	FISHING	SUGGESTED MIN BID
			£
1	DEER PARK	A DAY ON THE DEER PARK WATER	15
2	OTTERY FLY FISHERS	TWO DAY TICKETS ON THE CLUB WATERS	10 -
3	COMBE ESTATE WATER	ONE DAY - BELOW WESTON BRIDGE	10
4	GOSFORD FISHING	A DAY ON PRIME BEAT BELOW GOSFORD Br	10 ✓
5	COLAFORD SYNDICATE	A DAY ON THE PRIME UPPER BEAT	10
6	DEER PARK	A DAY ON DEER PARK WATER	15
7	GOSFORD	A DAY ABOVE GOSFORD Br AT WOODFORD BT	10 - 2
8	OTTERY FLY FISHERS	TWO DAY TICKETS ON THE CLUB WATERS	10 ✓
9	COTTARSON FARM	ONE DAY - ALL WILD FISH	10 ✓
10	AN ESCORTED NIGHTS SEA TROUT FISHING WITH COLIN NICE		20 ✓
11	COLAFORD SYNDICATE	A DAY ON THE LOWER BEAT	10
12	RIVER TALE	A DAY ON ESCOT WATER	10
13	DEER PARK	A DAY ON THE DEER PARK WATER	15

Auction will take place after the AGM. Postal bids may be made if you are unable to attend the AGM and should be sent to Alan Knights Cottarson Farm Awliscombe Honiton EX14 3NR. Successful bidders will be put in touch with riparian owners to make arrangements for their fishing.

AGM ON WEDNESDAY 23 MARCH DEER PARK HOTEL WESTON HONITON 7.30 pm
SPEAKER : Dr MIKE LADLE ON "FLY FISHING WITH A PINCH OF SALT"
SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE AND REMAIN AT £10 PER MEMBER

FROM DAVE BROGDEN - ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

I was extremely pleased this year to be able to support the ROA in its excellent efforts to improve the salmon stocks on the River Otter. We were able to provide approximately 2000 fingerlings for direct release into the Otter. I will await with great interest to see numbers of returning fish from this release, hopefully it will prove very successful. These fish came from a very successful year we had on the River Axe in 2003 in which we managed to collect almost 16000 ova for rearing at our hatchery in Dolgellau. We decided we were able to help the ROA, but this is unlikely to be repeated in the future.

As I am sure all members are aware the weir at Marles Farm remains an obstacle to fish passage. The first stage of the program is being undertaken, which is a survey of the present structure. The findings of this will determine what is achievable for the long term. Improvements were to Tipton weir fish passage, with Andy Locke providing good support for the project which although it was delivered later than we would have liked proved to be beneficial with good fish movement being observed.

I am pleased to say that two Environment Officers are being trained to enable support in relation to fishery duties on the Otter, namely Derek Carter and Andrew Sweetapple. They are both long serving and Knowledgeable Officers who are both keen on fisheries work and I am sure will be a good asset to call on.

Environment Officers have been working hard on pollution prevention within the catchment once again this year. For example Derek has been involved in the Oil Storage campaign in Otterton for domestic heating which is producing good improvements that should protect surface and groundwaters.

I would welcome comment from members on how they see the Agency performing and what we can do better, I am aware that there is some perception that the level of service has fallen. This is a position I am keen to address. Once again I would like to remind people of the Agency pollution hotline, 0800 807060 and to let us know of any concerns that you may have as soon as you see them so that we may act quickly to resolve problems and hence minimise impact.

OTTER VALLEY WILDLIFE

The rich heritage of our wildlife continues to prosper despite increasing urban intrusions. A pair of otters swam through Cottarson water just after Christmas - kingfishers have been constant residents throughout the year - greater spotted, lesser spotted and green woodpeckers have all been present - 12 herons on the display field last February fewer than usual but may have missed a larger display - swallows & house martins prolific - up to fifty on telephone wires most days - no sand martins as habitat suffered erosion - deer from time to time - white egrets - wrens - many varieties wagtails - moorhens - dippers very scarce - pheasants plentiful - fieldfare large flock in January - dragonflies and damsel flies in large numbers - invertebrate plentiful at headwaters - large numbers of shrimp including the scarce fairy shrimp - eels in fair numbers - minnows & bullheads plentiful - jays & buzzards always present - starlings breeding as usual - blue tits and a scarcer small flock of long tailed tits paid a short visit. Sadly no barn owls or indeed other owls which were once present have been seen.

RAINFALL

Rainfall in mid catchment for 2003/2004 amounted to 957mm. We use the seasonal year from Oct 1 to the following 30 September so we get a whole winter followed by the succeeding summer thus one full winter with one full summer. The total was amongst the lowest in the past decade and resulted in periods of very low flow in the summer. In fact the total summer rainfall was only 401mm despite a few moderate spates. Comments from riverside landowners was that the river hardly came over the banks all year. We need good rainfall this winter to refill GW reservoirs and recharge wetland in the headwaters. So far rainfall has been modest in the first part of the winter

RIVER NEWS

We are very grateful for news we receive from members and the general public on their observations on the river and tributaries. We need more. If you see fish moving or spawning or interesting wildlife do let us know.

SPAWNING RUN 2004

We always say that each year is unique and none more so than 2004. A number of early summer spates undoubtedly brought sea trout into the river but then a long dry spell meant that fish were unable to progress upstream. It was not until Oct 23 that we had the first autumn spate that gave fish a chance to move. On that day at Tipton Weir 24 attempts were seen of which 6 were seen to be successful. Monitoring was limited to 2 hrs so it is likely that the number of fish moving up that day would have been six times the observed numbers. Fish tried both RH and LH routes but we had at that time not carried out the planned improvements. There was a long wait for the next spate but on Dec 19 it came following over 50m of rain the night before. On the 19 the river was bank high and Tipton Weir was a roaring flood. No fish were seen on that day. On Dec 20 an hours watching produced 12 attempts from fish up to 5 lbs. Although some work had then been done on the RH route no successful attempts were seen. The best fish seen at Tipton was estimated at 12 lbs and was thought to be a cock salmon.

Four visits to Langford Weir identified 8 attempts from fish up to a pound and a half of which 6 were successful. Langford now seems easily passable.

At Knackers Hole Churchinford Desmond Divers saw a number of small fish go over. In mid November two groups of fish were seen spawning. This is very early. The fish were in the pound to pound and a half range and one group could have been sea trout.

In mid December three groups of sea trout were seen spawning. The first group of fish about three pounds were opposite the tennis courts just inside Tipton playing fields. The second group of similar size were about 50m upstream and a further group just below the junction with the Metcombe Brook. It shows how careful we have to be if any work is done on erosion in this section of river.

We have reports of fish seen spawning in the Metcombe Brook. Also John Vinnicombe reported seeing a bow wave from a large fish at Alfington and other fish close to Gosford Bridge.

In all the results of the spawning season appear encouraging. It is likely that other members have seen spawning activity not reported and we do urge all who see any signs to let us know.

WORK ON THE RIVER

We had big plans to tackle the major remaining barriers to migration on the river. Members will remember that at the AGM we exhibited a model of the LH blockstone route over Tipton Weir and offered various solutions. Andy Locke and I had a very positive meeting with John Sargent who fully supported plans to improve fish passage over Tipton. The EA fish passes representative came down from Wales to offer advice and Dave Brogden came to see the problem for himself. We successfully researched the possibility of a prefabricated concrete route up from the mid stream pool on the LH route and we were all ready to go before the spawning run began. Then the plan stagnated. It does seem difficult to mobilise the different disciplines at the EA to come together to carry out actual work. Just when we were hopeful of action Boscastle came along and all other work was delayed. Eventually it was November before work was able to start and this was on the RH side only. Nevertheless the EA put up a first class works team lead by Andy Locke and made a very effective improvement to this route. To our astonishment fish were still attempting to run the weir on the next spate on 20 Dec but perversely none tried the new passage through. Fish are slow to recognise new features and seem programmed to follow previously used routes.

Hopefully we plan to carry out further work at Tipton in 2005.

Work on Marles Weir on the R. Wolf made little progress. A further survey of the weir is proposed in 2005. It is difficult for the EA to do other than a major engineering solution although sometimes there is a need to be pragmatic and seek the simple answer of packing under the existing weir with a sub weir to lift the pool below.

One further area of need is at Knackers Hole.

One of the twin culverts carrying the river under the ford has collapsed blocking the flow and building up debris. The situation is potentially dangerous as heavy farm vehicles cross this ford with the roadway unsupported on the D/S side. We reported the problem some months ago but little seems to have been done. It does need very careful repair to ensure that fish passage through the culverts up to our identified spawning grounds is maintained.

THE SEASON

Good in parts I suppose would sum it up. At Cottarson we had a very good season overall. The range of size of fish was excellent - from 4 ozs up to a number of pound or above. The best fish came from a number of different pools and all were in superb condition. Fly life was average - early olives continue to be scarce - the mayfly season was extended with scattered hatches over four or five weeks. Sedges were less than usual particularly in the closing weeks. In April there were signs of possible sea trout going through with one or two clear leaps out of the water. A few days later a 2lb fish believed to be a sea trout was caught at Tracey. Higher up at Monkton there was a fair head of wild brown trout reported with some above average size.

Deer Park fishing tailed off badly at the end of the season with few fish caught but fair numbers of small wild fish were reported. Ottery St Mary to Tipton is mixed stocked and wild fish. Fly life at times was good with fish rising well. At Gosford a couple of large fish believed to be sea trout were seen but failed to be impressed by the tempting flies offered.

Lower river suffered most in low water conditions. With flow most vulnerable to abstraction and maximum impact from effluent discharges water conditions were poor at times. A review of the quality of discharge consents is long overdue in the middle and lower river.

Sea trout have been caught in the middle and lower reaches. A number were seen in the deep gravel pools above Tipton bridge but proved difficult to catch. The recorded sea trout catch for 2003 was 118 according to EA licence returns of which almost 80% were returned. The actual catch would have been higher as some fail to send in returns and the odd fish would have been caught whilst brown trout fishing. Well done all those who returned so many sea trout to maintain and improve our stocks.

There have been no reports of any salmon caught this year. Please do let us know of any notable catches of brown trout, sea trout or indeed salmon. It is on the basis of information supplied by members that the committee formulates policy for ongoing plans.

SOUTH WEST RIVERS ASSN and WEST COUNTRY RIVERS TRUST

Members may have noticed in the New Years Honours that Michael Charleston has been awarded an OBE. Michaels contribution as secretary of SWRA over recent years has been outstanding. He spearheaded our submissions to the Fisheries Review Group. He has made a massive contribution nationally and internationally to the preservation of salmon stocks working closely with our patron Orri Vigfusson. No one is more deserving of recognition than Michael.

Michaels successor as secretary to SWRA is Roger Furniss. Such is the work associated with the job that the council agreed that Roger should receive an honorarium of £5000 pa of which we will gladly bear our share. With a really professional approach and management under chairman Humphrey Wood we are steadily moving towards a time when we shall be ready to take complete charge of the management of the regions rivers.

The second string to our bow is the West Country Rivers Trust. David Haines reported great progress to the last SWRA council eg :-

- A new hons degree in river basin management is planned for 2005
- WCRT is leading an international project to genetically finger print the origin of all Atlantic salmon stocks world over.
- To date 500K metres of bankside fencing and 400 drinking points have been installed on farms covering 480K hectares.
- The Angling 2000 project providing angling opportunities for visitors and others produced a turnover of £25K in 2004
- 1500 children participated in Angling week in August

These are but a few of the initiatives under the management of WCRT. It now has world-wide recognition and respect and works closely with the Environment Agency and other bodies.

The SWRA meets EA management on a regular basis. One difficult area currently under review is the ability of landowners with riverside land to protect and improve their property. We seek a pragmatic approach where regular bank protection can be carried out.



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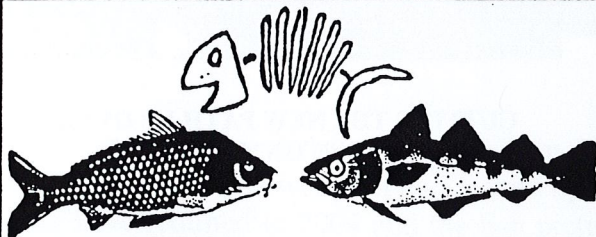
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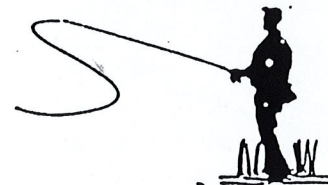
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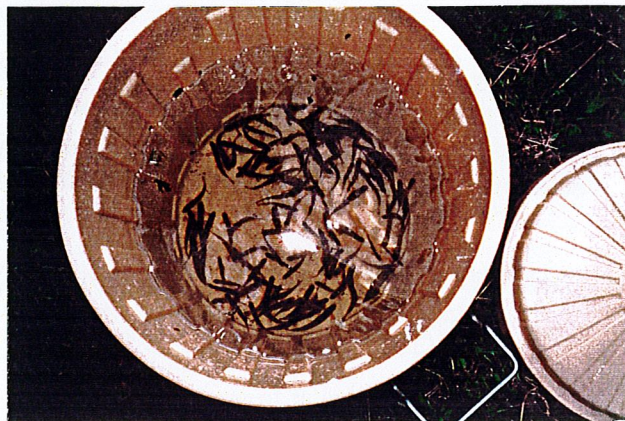
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ACTION ON THE "ACTION PLAN" IN 2004



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DISTRIBUTING SALMON FINGERLINGS**



**SALMON FINGERLINGS
FROM EA HATCHERY 2004**



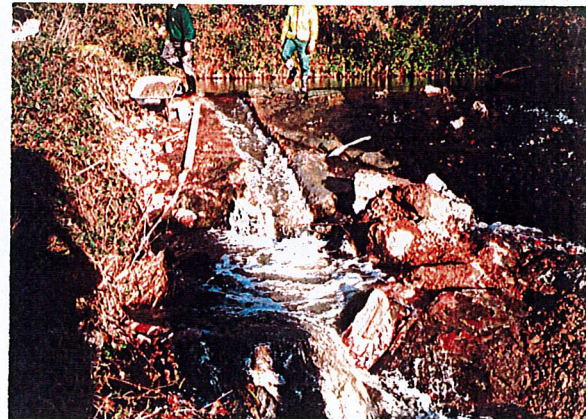
**IMPROVING TIPTON WEIR
RIGHT HAND PASS NOVEMBER 2004**



**CUTTING THE NEW PATH UP OVER
TIPTON WEIR**



**MAYBE A 5 lb SALMON ?
TIPTON WEIR 20 DECEMBER 2004**



**FIRST TEST OF NEW CUTTING
NOVEMBER 2004**