

# RIVER OTTER ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER MARCH 2009

## Return of the Salmon



Caught by Colin Nice in October and weighing 8lb. The Association's aim to aid the passage of migratory fish in the River Otter is starting to bear fruit.

### WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE – PREPARE TO RESPOND

Contained within the newsletter is an email received from Roger Furniss, Secretary of the South West Rivers Association concerning the water framework directive which was published on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2008. The public consultation period lasts until the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2009 and it is therefore important that representation is made now. As a committee we will be keeping in close contact with Roger Furniss during this consultation period but if any member wishes to comment then please either pass this on directly or through the committee.

## CHAIRMANS REPORT

The Annual General Meeting in 2009 will have seen a few changes to the Association following the retirement of our long standing secretary, Alan Knights. The new committee structure is bedding in well and efforts will be made during 2009 to improve the passage of information between the Association and its members and a drive to increase membership numbers.

It has always been an ambition of mine to create a register of all riparian owners and/or details of those with permission to fish on the river throughout its entire length. At the Annual General Meeting and for those not present, it will be sent to you, will be a number of maps and I would be grateful for any assistance in providing information in compiling this register.

2009 also sees another retirement with Sir John Palmer relinquishing his position as treasurer. It has been Sir John's wish to stand down for at least 2 years and I would certainly recommend to the membership his proposed replacement, Neil Loomes. May I personally take this opportunity on behalf of myself and the Association to thank Sir John for all his hardwork over a number of years and am pleased that he still wishes to remain on the committee.

I would also like to confirm that if any of you become aware of information that you feel may be interesting and relevant to the Association regarding the river or the immediate catchment area then please feel free to send this through to either myself or Tim Lamb our secretary at any time.

## RAINFALL

Rainfall for the year to the 30<sup>th</sup> December 2008 was 1,146 mm. Although undoubtedly a wet year, still not as high as 2000/01 at 1,365 mm. Winter level was 546 mm, about average but, as you would expect the rainfall for the summer period April/September was 600 mm, the highest for a number of years. For example in the year 2002/03 the summer rainfall totaled 270 mm. As a result, the river was never short of water and much of the fishing season in 2008 proved difficult. Lets hope for a dryer summer this year.

## WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE – PREPARE TO RESPOND

The draft River Basin Management Plan for the South West (Hampshire Avon westwards) was published on 22 December 2008 for public consultation which lasts until 22 June 2009. Members of the advisory Panel which helped the Environment Agency produce it are not endorsing it as a Plan, but we are supporting its publication for consultation. This leaves us free to continue to press for changes in both strategy and detail. A draft Plan and annexes can be accessed at [www.environment-agency.gov.uk/wfd](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/wfd)

At a national meeting of stakeholders in December the newly appointed EA Director of Operations, David Jordan, signalled a last minute shift of attitude, including an acceptance that the draft Plans lacked ambition; were too centrally driven; and failed to look beyond 2015. This shift was confirmed at a high level meeting between environmental bodies, Defra and the Environment Agency in January. The message seems to be 'please press us to improve the plans'.

The published draft Plan will only deliver an improvement in Good Ecological Status of South West rivers from 24% now to 33% by 2015. The two main factors preventing Good Ecological Status are phosphate levels, primarily arising from agriculture and domestic

sewage, and low fish populations. It is hoped that the shift in attitude will allow considerable changes to be made to the final Plans, so there is still opportunity for national and local lobbying to achieve improvements.

At the regional and local level I am happy to assist any River Association with its response if so wished. Roger Furniss Secretary, South West Rivers Association.

### THE DEER PARK SEASON 2008

The season started with rain and a rising river. Who was to know that the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2008 was to set the trend for the next 10 months and as I write is still ongoing.

After breakfast at the Deer Park Hotel several anglers chanced their arm but only John Dawson caught fish, 2 browns the biggest being 1lb 5oz. March started slowly even if there was a good hatch of March Browns.

April arrived with plenty of March Browns and Hawthorns about, but most fish that were being caught were coming to nymphs and the odd fish started to take the dry fly. Yet again, like clock work, along came the rainbows for the third year running. The only difference was these fish were pan sized compared to previous seasons. The largest fish caught went to Tim Lamb on the 3<sup>rd</sup> April, just before the Otter Associations AGM.

The end of April fish well with browns and rainbows being caught in good numbers with the rainbows being removed. The amount of wild browns from 4oz up to 12oz was really encouraging and in my opinion proved the river was in good condition.

May arrived along with the may fly. There was plenty of fly life through the river with all types of fly patterns catching but fish were coming to the dry fly more frequently. The hatch of the may fly was one of the best for many years and continued into July.

June arrived and so did the winds which made casting the dry fly very awkward. The may fly was still in abundance along with other species of fly.

The largest fish caught was a brown of 2lb ½ oz by Constance Hiller at Basin Pool, Colhayes Farm. The river continued to fish well for the rest of the season with two fish over 2lb coming to Neil Loomes and Marc Megilley. The highlight of the season was a brown of over 3lb coming to Alex Harrison. Again all the larger fish are coming from Colhayes. Beats 1, 2 and 3 behind the Hotel produced lots of fish over the lb size but only one fish over the magic 2lb.

In summary, the 2008 season was not as good as 2007 in terms of numbers of fish caught but, 2008 was very much in the hands of the weather. The total number of fish caught was 430 recorded in the record book. I do however, believe there was more caught than recorded on the return cards or record book. Something we must tighten up for the 2009 season!.

The mystery of the season was that one grayling was caught. In previous seasons, grayling had been caught by reputable anglers. There was several salmon parr caught early in the season. Salmon was seen going up the weirs after the season had finished. A good run of sea trout traveled the river, when conditions were right, but sadly none were caught on the Deer Park fishery in the 2008 season.

### ARE THERE BEAVERS ON THE RIVER OTTER?

Many of you would have seen in the national press and television, reports with regards to the proposal to reintroduce the Beaver into the wild in the UK. Following a recent meeting with the Environment Agency it became clear that they would offer approval for the release of European Beavers in some locations. The committee will be discussing this further with the Environment Agency but generally are very concerned with regards to the impact any release may have on the ecology of our rivers. A photograph recently taken by the Chairman on the River Otter below the Deer Park at Weston would suggest that Beavers are already amongst us!, and one can only assume have escaped. Any evidence that you may come across which supports this would be greatly appreciated and should be sent to the committee. It is our understanding that currently they are not protected but, there is a move to amend the Countryside and Wildlife Act to give them some protection. Any evidence that members come across or representation that you wish to make then please let the committee know.



### THE OTTER ROD AND LINE FISHERIES BY LAWS

Following a recent committee meeting it was apparent that we were not entirely sure as to the bylaws that affect the River Otter. We now have copies of the Environment Agency South West Region Bylaws affecting all rivers and if anybody would like a copy then please contact the committee.



### FINE TUNING OF TIPTON WEIR

Recent changes to Tipton Weir by the EA have produced a greater volume/height of water in the pool (right) thus reducing the height any fish is required to jump. Reports are suggesting a far greater 1st/2nd attempt success rate of fish using this route.