



EAST LOTHIAN ANGLING ASSOCIATION

2009 Newsletter

January 2010

2009 Season Review

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For most of us 2009 has been a season we would probably want to forget. There were too many cold days, too many windy days, too much water, or too little water and very little in between. Catch returns are well down, partly due to the poor conditions making for poor fishing and precisely because the conditions were so poor, most of us simply spent less time on the river than in previous years.

Committee member log books for the season most reported a 50% drop compared to last year. There were no reports of sea trout or salmon being caught, though plenty of smolts were seen in April and May and salmon in September. Best fish reported were around the 1^{1/2}lb mark, with one of 1-7lb from the Linn Pool

2009 catch returns show: permits sold 569, returned 60 (10.5%)
Catches: brown trout 1322, sea trout 25 (18 returned) salmon nil
Median weight 1lb, 7 brown trout over 2lb. Otter sightings 2, mink 2.

The issues that have figured most prominently in committee meetings over the past season have been the new stocking policy and the creation of a wild fishery upstream from Haddington, weirs and fish passes, poaching and the appointment of a river watcher, the Five-year Plan and the ongoing physical habitat survey - particularly in relation to the proposed opencast coalmine at Cousland, close to the headwaters of the Tyne.

AGM

2010

Monday

January 18th

7:30 PM

**The Town House
Haddington**



Unfortunately fish like this fine brownie of about 1lb were not a common sight in 2009!



Electro-fishing survey

In October 2007 the Clyde River Foundation conducted electro-fishing surveys at several sites throughout the Tyne catchment. I went along as an interested bystander and when the suggestion was made by the Foundation's Senior Biologist, Willie Yeomans, that a member of the ELAA to be trained to assist in future surveys, I was volunteered. I attended a three-day residential course at Barony College in Spring 2008 where, amongst other things, the dangers of mixing electricity and water were impressed upon me.

Meanwhile, the Association had secured funding from the Awards for All Lottery Fund for a complete river survey and the date was set for early June of this year. Around thirty sites were surveyed in little over a week so we had to average five or six sites per day. Generators, back packs, nets, and associated equipment were carried from the van to each of the sites before the electro-fishing could commence and Willie's forced absence during much of the week meant that I was soon immersed knee-deep in the practical side of my continuing training.

My memories of the week

The absence of aquatic life in the Vogrie burn is a worry, but on a far more positive note, the discovery of salmon parr at several sites much further up the Tyne than most of us would have thought possible was good news. In future years we'll be back to see if the presence of breeding salmon was a fluke resulting from the very wet Summer and Autumn of 2008 or whether they regularly get this far upriver annually.

Being involved with the team over the course of the week helped me gain some insight into the practicalities of a survey of this kind and I have to thank Davie McColl and Caroline McGillivray in particular for putting up with my presence. I take my hat off to them – it's pretty hard work doing that for eight hours a day, five days a week. **Tony Jones**

Background to the Electro-fishing project

In 2008, ELAA secured £10,000 lottery funding for a comprehensive electro-fishing survey of the river. Due to high water levels in 2008, work was delayed and the full survey, including 30 sites, was completed this summer by the Clyde River Foundation. The survey covered the headwaters, the lower Tyne, and tributaries. A number of interesting findings were made: much wider salmon distribution than previously thought and good numbers of juvenile trout in the upper river, as well as identifying a small number of poorer sites where fish numbers are low. This survey is incredibly helpful in allowing a much greater understanding of the fish populations, distribution and population structure in the Tyne and will serve as a baseline for future surveys. **Brian Davidson**



Dr Willie Yeomans of the Clyde River Foundation will be giving a presentation on the electro-fishing survey at the AGM on January 18th 2010 7:30 PM Town House Haddington

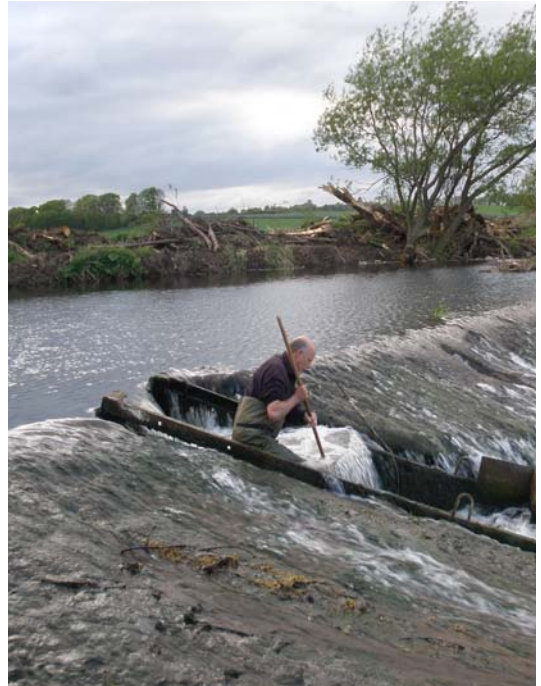


Weir and fish pass update

Funding was secured from the SEPA restoration fund by the Forth Fisheries Trust and this has been made available to undertake a series of professional engineering reports on each weir on the Tyne. The appointed contractor, Mike Beach, an eminent fish pass expert, undertook the site visits to each weir and is in the process of producing a report on each weir together with the best solution for fish passage. It is hoped to have the finalised reports early in 2010. The next stage will be to

consider the reports, and take forward the recommendations for fish passes. There is further SEPA funding available for the second phase of this project, which is the installation of new passes where required. Even though funding is available for the works, some matching funding will be required and this may take some time to secure. ELAA is indebted to the Forth Fisheries trust for facilitating the SEPA grant funding which has benefitted the Tyne.

Brian Davidson



Do you recognise this man who was seen trying to hoe the fish pass at the Knowes Weir!!

Physical Habitat Survey

This has been on the cards for at least two or three years now, though progress is rather slow due to pressure of time on the Vice President (usual excuse: very busy family commitments). The plan has been (and still is!) to record the physical nature of the river and its riparian margins along the major part of its course, so that we understand better the river's character and identify matters requiring attention. These might include poaching by cattle, point sources of pollution, areas where there is heavy silt ingress and areas with too much overgrowth inhibiting light.

The data will provide the platform for further studies. For example, the ELAA is hoping to initiate studies of

invertebrate populations to add to the information recently acquired by the electro-fishing survey undertaken on ELAA's behalf by Dr Willie Yeomans and his team from the Clyde Foundation. These base data will provide the ELAA with much better knowledge of the river and this will help when we come to bid for grant monies to support our fishery management work.

A database has been built to hold the data and the plan is that the data should be accessible through a geographical information system (GIS). A GIS can be used not only to interrogate the data, but also keep data current and also to generate maps displaying the location and extent of the various attributes recorded in the database.

Some stretches have already been surveyed by our President, John Proctor, but much remains to be done. As ever with such endeavours, it requires the efforts of volunteers, most of whom are already people busy with other ELAA committee tasks as well as their jobs, etc! A training day was held at the beginning of the season, though cold, inclement weather curtailed useful practice. Another training day is to be held, but has not yet been scheduled. The survey will take time to complete, but it is seen as a major task that will benefit the river in the long term. If you are interested in getting involved, please let the ELAA Secretary know. **Chris Thomas**



Five-year Plan

The Five-year Plan came about as the result of an advisory visit by the Wild Trout Trust in July 2004. The Plan covers the period 2005-2010 and its aims are to:

1. develop the potential of the River Tyne as a high quality fishery
2. maintain and improve river and bankside habitat to encourage ecological diversity and a thriving population of wild trout
3. secure responsible long-term access to angling in East Lothian for the local community and visitors



The Association has identified three main areas of work

1. Securing long-term access
2. Improving our information about what is happening in the river
3. Maintaining and improving habitat



Targets achieved in 2009

- Negotiated long term leases – including a 10-year lease
- Completed electro-fishing survey of 30 sites on the main river and spawning burns
- Investigated potential external funding for remedial work on Tyne weirs.
- Review and make decisions on stocking before the start of the 2009 season.

One of the aims of the Five-year Plan is to maintain and improve the river and bankside habitat to encourage ecological diversity and a thriving population of wild trout.





110 years of the ELAA

Secretary Geoff Cusden has been looking through the ELAA archives to produce a potted history of the Association. We've had to edit this fascinating article considerably to fit this newsletter, but you can find Geoff's full version on the website.

The earliest ELAA Committee minutes date back to 25th October 1919. However, twenty years earlier, on March 3rd 1899, a local paper called for anglers to attend a meeting to form the East Lothian Angling Association. “,,,,, **to put down illegal fishing on the Tyne.**” The following week the paper reported: “,,,,, **a meeting was held for the purpose of forming an association to promote and protect the interests of trout fishers.**” It continued: “.....**to use its influence to have the existing laws against illegal fishing duly enforced.**”

On 9th March 1900 an AGM was held and the Association appears in the 1904 Haddington Register and Almanac. In the earliest minutes, from October 1919, the Committee agreed to write again to riparian owners for permission to fish the River Tyne and tributaries. In 1920 non-member permits were 1/- per day, 2/6 per week and 5/- per month. Also in 1920 the committee agreed to buy Loch Leven trout for £30 and in March 15,000 fry and 1,000 yearlings were released. A fish pass was installed in Amisfield Cauld, and a River Watcher was employed at East Linton (by 1935 there were eight).

Otters, cormorants and roach were discussed at the 1924 AGM, but no action was taken against the otters, as there was an Otter Hunt in East Lothian. In 1929 5/- was paid for each cormorant shot. Mink first appeared on the river in 1971.

In 1940 members of HM forces (but not the Home Guard!) were allowed free fishing and for several years the police were also given free permits. They held a competition on the Tyne in 1979 - “the off-duty policemen often checking other anglers for permits and a few poachers were caught or chased away.”

In 1952 the Association set up a hatchery in Haddington, with eggs stripped from Donnelly Reservoir trout. The fry were kept at Yester for a year then released into the river. In 1954 42,000 ova were hatched. Fry were also sold or given to Edinburgh Zoo, Coldingham Loch and Hopes Reservoir, in return for a day's fishing at reduced rates. The hatchery ran until 1982.

In 1969, 639 adult season tickets, 129 youth season tickets, 473 boys season tickets and 337 day tickets were sold (compared with 407 in total for 2008.) In 1970 a river watcher failed to hand over £39.10/- permit takings, having hidden the money in an old chair - his wife had cleaned out the attic and burnt the chair!

Over the years the Association has presented its views on the River Purification Board, Torness Power Station, the Freshwater and Salmon Fisheries (Scotland) Bill, the Scottish Anglers Trust Act 1980, and the proposed open cast mine at Cousland in 2009. It produced its first newsletter in 2000, a web site in 2003 and a five year plan in 2004.



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110 years of the ELAA continued

Pollution has been an ongoing problem. Claims were made against the Ormiston Coal Co, Coal Board, the Gas Works and in 1978 the Association lost a case against the Burgh Council, incurring expenses of £2298.93.

In 1986 the Association produced a juvenile package containing permit, badge and booklet. It also held youth fly-casting and fly tying classes and a juvenile competition. In 1981 a young, enthusiastic R Hawkins joined the committee. That same Tony Hawkins is still on the committee today!

Stocking policy has varied from being out of favour to stocking with fry, or yearlings, even rainbows. In 2009 no fish were stocked further upstream than the West Mill, Haddington. Unfortunately poaching is still a problem, and in 1982 housewives were warned not to buy fish from poachers as there had been a major poisoning incident involving cyanide! The Knowes Weir fish ladder was repaired in 2003 and a fish ladder built at the Cascades Weir. The Association has obtained grant monies and other funding for restocking, surveying fish species and surveying the weirs.

In essence the activities of the Association have changed little over the past 110 years. Cormorants, mink and poachers are still a problem; the threat of pollution is ever present; working parties are still organized to clear overgrown sections of the river; stocking policy and the price of permits still cause much discussion at committee meetings. The objectives set out at that first meeting in 1899 are still sound and are still being pursued today. **Geoff Cusden**

If you have any ELAA memorabilia – permits, badges, day tickets or other items of interest please get in touch with Geoff via the website

Poaching and Wildlife Crime

Between September 08 and September 09 twenty-five nets were seized and destroyed. One person was charged and pled guilty to 8 offences relating to poaching 13 sea trout. He was fined £500 and has since moved out of the area.

Lothian and Borders Police work closely with Forth District Salmon Fisheries Board to eradicate illegal netting on the Tyne. Constable **Gavin Ross** at **Dunbar Police Station** is the Division's Wildlife Officer and regularly liaises with Superintendent **Bill Cunningham** who is the **Head Bailiff** for the Forth district. Anglers are the eyes and ears of the river. If you find any nets or have any intelligence about poaching or wildlife crime, please contact the nearest police station as soon as you can: **Dunbar 01368 8627180, Haddington 01620 824101** or contact **Bill Cunningham 07887 835549**. Calls can be made in confidence.

Thank you to all those who supported angling and conservation on the River Tyne by buying a permit in 2009. We wish you tight lines in 2010!