

## **1. State of the River and Tributaries**

Water Crowfoot (*Ranunculus*) is causing a problem within the river system, particularly from the Ebrie burn downstream to the Boat of Fechel including the Bronie burn up to Udney Green. It seems the only way to get rid of the weed is to remove it by hand and it is recommended that Proprietors affected should get together and organise a weekend to remove the weed. If this is done, it should minimize the likelihood of rafts of weed going downstream and causing problems to anglers and riparian owners in the downstream sections. During 2008 there were problems caused from upstream Proprietor(s). Anglers fishing at the Meadows were put off fishing and, in one instance, an angler was nearly knocked off his feet by a raft of weed coming downstream. On another occasion, a Proprietor had to stop his anglers fishing on a Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday because of the amount of weed that had been removed by an upstream Proprietor on the Sunday which had been allowed to run down the river. No attempt had been made to remove the weed. This is wholly unacceptable and will have encouraged the spread of weed in future years as the seed will have been spread. It should be noted that weed removal has been banned in the Spey for this reason.

Upstream of the Ebrie the state of the river is reasonably good. Haddo and Schivas fishings have benefitted by anglers helping to cut and remove a different form of weed from the river as part of their bank maintenance.

It should be noted that the *Ranunculus* problem at Ellon on the Auchmacoy side was dealt with, cut and removed by anglers with little or no impact on the river. Other burns are not affected by much weed at all.

The River Superintendent takes samples of water from various sources of the catchment on a monthly basis as part of a continuation of the Ythan Project. These are delivered to the Macauley Institute at Aberdeen for analysis (SEPA have ceased to provide the function). Samples are taken in other locations by members of the Ythan Project volunteers. The intention of the sampling is to create a long term record of the state of the river and its tributaries and to determine whether there are improvements in water quality in the long term.

## **2. Coastal Nets**

The Nets and Netting Station at Cruden Bay were sold by the Cruden Salmon Fishing Company and are now operated by Gavin Thain from Peterhead. The Clerk and Superintendent have met with him and he has been operating one bag net at the mouth of Cruden Bay harbour. He has caught some salmon but has had a lot of problems with seals causing damage to fish. He has carried out his activities in a professional manner, all within the regulations set by statute. Some problems did occur with bad weather but the nets were set in the correct position as and when the weather abated. It should be noted that several anglers were warned by the River Superintendent for fishing from the harbour wall and catching sea trout which they were made to return.

### 3. **Fish Eating Birds**

The usual Cormorants, Merganzers and Gooseanders were present in the estuary where no shooting is allowed.

Further up the river we carried out a scaring policy that is working but is time consuming. It is, however, perverse that wildfowlers are allowed to shoot within the Nature Reserve but we are unable to control these species within the same area!

### 4. **Seals in the River and Estuary**

As last year's report stated, more than sixty seals were established at the mouth of the Ythan. We did receive a licence to shoot but not in the estuary during the latter part of 2007 and on re-application received a similar licence for 2008 but only in respect of the river upstream from Logie Buchan bridge. The requirements of the licence have been fulfilled.

We are concerned that the Sea Mammals Research Unit asked for proof of photographs of seal damage at Newburgh at the time of making our application for the licence. No photographs were provided by the ghillies but a count has been carried out by members of the Angling Association. The Superintendent has asked the anglers from Newburgh to Fyvie to report any seal damage and we have received some photographs of seal damage which were helpful but overall there is little evidence of physical damage and few, if any, complaints by anglers of damaged fish being caught. There were some damaged fish at Cruden Bay complained of by the operators of the Nets who carried out appropriate control measures in accordance with the rules which apply to netsmen. We are convinced that we will not be allowed to shoot within the estuarial waters with a high powered rifle as, amongst other reasons, it is too dangerous as there are too many members of the public walking both day and night on Newburgh beach. The police have intimated that there are no safe places to shoot within the estuary at Newburgh.

### 5. **Spawning Salmon and Sea Trout**

A reasonable number of both Salmon and Sea Trout have spawned in the main river and tributaries namely:

Ebrie	Salmon seen up to Arnage and Sea Trout above Arnage up to Auchnagatt
Bronie	Sea Trout up to Pitmedden and Salmon at Littlemill of Esslemont
Forvie	Sea Trout up to Smiddyhill / Leask
Auchmacoy	Sea Trout seen up to Berefold
Little Water	Salmon up to Asleid and Sea Trout above Greens
Fordoun Burn	Salmon up to below Rothienorman, Sea Trout above Rothienorman
Auchterless	Salmon up as far as Tifty Bridge, Sea Trout well above Auchterless

Also numbers of Sea Trout have been seen in the Raxton, Youlie, Sessnie and Keithfield burns. Overall spawning is anticipated to be good.

## 6. Red Vent Grilse

Not much more to report on this problem this season but some small grilse reported as having swollen red vents affecting not more than 20 fish.

## 7. Fish in the River 2008 Season

**February:** Some Finnock caught and returned.  
**March:** Some Finnock around Ellon.  
**April:** A lot of kelts, both Salmon and quite a number of Sea Trout  
**May:** Still kelts, some in good conditions. Two spring Salmon caught and returned at Haddo.  
Mention of a spring fish at Fyvie caught by an Aberdeen and District Angling Club member (unconfirmed).  
**June:** Sea Trout and Finnock in the estuary.  
**July and August:** Sea Trout in the estuary but fishing poor (not many anglers).  
More or less the same as July but still anglers scarce. Some who did fish caught some good Sea Trout. Rises in river level led to Sea Trout and Salmon being caught at Ellon and above.  
**September:** Fish at Ellon and above, particularly Ardlethen and upstream to Schivas.  
**October:** All beats catching Grilse and Salmon and some Sea Trout (returned). In addition, a good number of Finnock up to 1-1/4 lbs was seen on most beats and all were returned.

We are pleased to report that anglers have been in an up-beat mood, particularly upstream of Ellon where the fishing has been good with good numbers of fish caught and a large number returned. There is, however, room for improvement with stories of the keeping of gravid hen fish and of too many fish, particularly Sea Trout, being retained. It has been suggested that the Scottish Government should consider a tagging scheme similar to that carried out in Ireland.

## 8. Angling Season

Except for the Newburgh beats, most of the river fished extremely well.

## 9. Smolt Migration

Most smolts were seen leaving the river below Ellon at the end of May / beginning of June. Anglers fishing at that time reported a lot of smolts being taken on every cast and this should auger well for future stocks, particularly of Sea Trout, if there is not a problem at sea.

**10. Sea Poaching**

No illegal netting has been found on the coast of the Ythan, being Newburgh, Collieston, Cruden Bay and Boddam but we have had some reports of netting in the sea near St Combs and this has been reported to the Ugie Bailiff. The Superintendent had a report one evening of someone phoning from the Ugie area complaining that there was a lot of shooting going on near the Rattray Head area. The Superintendent made his way there and met someone on the beach. He asked him if he had heard shooting and he replied affirmatively that it was poachers that could not get their nets set for the number of seals so they were shooting them!

**11. Poaching in the River**

Several people were warned off for fishing without permits. Polish and East European, Irish travellers, principally around the Ellon public water, Meadows, Auchmacoy. Due to the language barrier, there is not a lot one can do and it is a waste of time getting the police. However, stern warnings have been given. A few poachers were intercepted at the Meadows in September when there were a lot of good fish seen (none of these were taken so far as we know). No poachers' nets have been set up to now but we will be on red alert to keep poachers from netting the river. As usual, the Honorary Bailiffs have been a great help in counteracting poaching and also helping with work in the river. Their help is very much appreciated and the work of the policing of the river could not be done without them.

**12. Vehicle / Mobile Radio**

Communication is working well. The Suzuki Swift has been sold and replaced with a Ford Fusion Diesel car which has a little more clearance off the ground and similar efficiency. We have also received a grant of £2,000 from an oil company for a 4 wheel drive Mazda truck to work within the system to carry out habitat improvement such as jet cleaning of spawning beds, electric fishing in areas off road, scaring birds and seal control. The £2,000 paid for the vehicle insurance and a certain amount of running costs and our thanks go to the oil company concerned.

**13. Jetting of Spawning Beds**

Some jetting has been carried out within the Ebrie burn continuing on the work done last season to potential Sea Trout spawning beds downstream of Mill of Elrick. This was a success at the time but there had been quite a lot of siltation following the work and the operation may have to be carried out on an annual basis. Next year we wish to undertake more work to the Ebrie and in the main stem above Methlick and Fyvie. The replacement 4x4 has been a great help in undertaking this work and the Honorary Bailiffs have helped, as well as some anglers. The majority of the jetting would not be necessary but for agricultural run-off.

#### 14. **Pollution**

The following pollution of the river catchment took place and has been reported to SEPA.

(i) Bromies Burn (foul water) (several times, (ii) Cruden Burn (oil pollution) – no proceedings by the Procurator Fiscal, (iii) River Ythan, Methlick (oil pollution), (iv) Fyvie Estate (bank work) – unauthorized, no controlled activities regulation permit granted, (v) Dead Wife's Burn (slurry pollution) (3 times), (vi) surface sewer at Meadows, Ellon (oil pollution) on several occasions and other debris, (vii) Mill of Meadapple, Rothienorman (silage pollution), (viii) various other weekly problems from drains, sewers, roads etc.

Compensation has been agreed with the Superintendent and Clerk for the purchase of fish and improvement of the habitat totaling £5,750.00. These incidents have a marked affect on the river system and although all are reported to SEPA, frequently their local knowledge is so minimal that they rely upon the work of the River Superintendent to establish the polluter and frequently ask us to follow it up. The River Superintendent has approached polluters seeking compensation for the damage caused by pollution of the river. This has been a success in that most have not been taken to court but have made payments to the Board (which are of much more help to re-establishment of damaged stocks and river cleaning programme for the damage done) as a fine will merely go to the Treasury. We recognise and appreciate the contributions that have been made by these polluters, either paid by them or on their behalf by insurance companies. The fish we have re-stocked with are smolts and fed fry and we have been very pleased with the quality and numbers of stock (which are frequently greater than that invoiced). Both the Clerk and Bailiff consider SEPA's efforts to be paltry and we have complained at SEPA's lack of qualified staff to follow up complaints. On a number of occasions they have failed to turn up at night and by the time they do arrive to investigate, the pollution and cause has long gone but the damage remained.

#### 15. **Vermin Control**

The Water Vole Officer is continuing to catch the odd mink. There are a lot less minks than their use to be but the numbers caught have been much less than were caught by the Superintendent in the past.

#### 16. **Re-Stocking from Kishorn**

Bob Kindness (Sea Trout, Smolts and Fed Fry) paid generally through polluters.

Fyvie Estate	2,500 Sea Trout smolts 6,000 Fed Fry
Roger Glennie, Methlick (oil pollution)	200 smolts 6,000 Fed Fry
Cruden Burn (oil pollution)	20,000 Fed Fry
Bromies Burn, Ellon	20,000 Fed Fry (foul water)
Ebrie Burn, Nethermill	5,000 Sea Trout Smolts

**17. General Observations by the River Superintendent**

The fishing season of 2008 has been good with most beats of the Ythan upstream of Ellon catching fish. Had it not been for the relatively high water conditions, most of these fish would have remained in the tidal stretch below Ellon. I believe that most anglers on most beats have acted pretty fairly (there will always be some who please themselves). Personally I would like to see a ban on upstream fishing and upstream casting of more than 25 degrees and the rule that all gravid hen fish have to be returned observed by everyone, as well as all Finnock to be returned as the more fish that get up the river to spawn, the better for future generations. As far as the number of fish kept, it is just a rule of the water you fish – it is not the law. One can watch anglers from a distance catch fish but who, unless you watch all the time, knows how many they keep or put back. One is at the mercy of people telling the truth. It is sad to say that this does not always happen but I believe that 95% are honest.

**Top Left**

**Spawning bed jetting on the Ythan**

**Below**

**Seals hauled out at Newburgh**

**Bottom**

**Sandy Milne re-stocking Fed Fry within the Youlie Burn**

**Top Right**

**The bank of the Ythan following unconsented work carried out at Fyvie**

**Below**

**Ranunculus below Ellon**

**Bottom**

**Oil pollution (boomed off) within the Ythan**

**Centre Photograph**

**Fred Robertson (Haddo Gamekeeper) with five fish around 40 years ago.**