

The second Upper Shin news letter comes to you with thoughts of the state of Atlantic Salmon stocks going into the next millennium. We are all in agreement that 'things are not like they used to be'! What can be done and what is being done to help conserve existing stocks? The Kyle of Sutherland District Fishery Board is vigorously leading the way in conservation of habitat, scientific studies of parr density, improvements in facilities for holding brood stock for hatchery purposes, as well as co-ordinating the ideas and wishes of all the many people involved with the entire Highland fishing tourism industry.

We attended a recent meeting of the Board and the consensus among the other river proprietors is that Atlantic salmon stocks are reaching crisis levels. Smolt mortality rate at sea is at an alarming 85%, so it remains vitally important not to hit the returning breeding stock too hard. To use a shooting simile - owners of grouse moors do not shoot their moors when grouse stocks are low, giving time for the species to recover. This is a tremendous economic sacrifice to the owners of these estates but a grouse shot is dead and cannot go on to reproduce. However, a released salmon has given sport and enjoyment, but will continue through the river system to breed and renew the species. Something to consider through the long non-fishing months.

Now on to some Upper Shin news. June saw a distinct improvement on last year. Many more multi sea winter fish entered the upper river in May. We would like to thank the fisherman who caught two fish in the first week of June and returned one of them, well done and a very good example. July continued to show the bigger fish and one third of these were returned - albeit mostly by the proprietors party! The grilse were slow to materialise and this was reflected throughout the Highlands this year. What happened to them is a source of great debate amongst fishery scientists, managers, proprietors and tenants. Stories of factory ships taking 90 tonnes of salmon at sea destined for the Danish market were rife. These things can only be remedied by Governments, if they have the will to address the problems. Something for the new Parliament in Edinburgh to consider maybe?

August was affected by drought, although the Upper Shin is so fortunate with its compensation water, the fish remained dour and difficult to entice to the fly. Some of the parties did not manage to field full teams of rods so the river was more lightly fished than usual. This is always good for conservation but makes the figures look a bit unbalanced.

September was a victim of cold winds and little fresh water. The grilse began to pick up and half of the fish caught were returned (you must be reading the instructions!). This is a great step forward and the catch and release message is getting through to the more enlightened fishermen and women.

A certain party had a chequered journey to the river this year. Family sporting commitments meant they had to miss the first couple of days. However, they drove through the night, telephoning ahead to ascertain which beat they would be on in the morning. They duly arrived, somewhat jet lagged and began fishing. Great success, two fish before breakfast, something going right at last they thought. On returning to Twinners, they realised to their horror that they had been fishing the opposition's beat! This was admitted to and all was well.

On a sad note, the Estate has said farewell to Jamie Clark, who has been at Lairg for four years as a student keeper and ghillie. He has secured a place at the Agricultural College in Edinburgh to read Land Management. His cheerful and enthusiastic presence will be greatly missed but we wish him well with his decision to further his education. He has promised to come and help out in the holidays to supplement his student grant!

We would also like to take the opportunity to thank David and Jamie for their wonderful and continuing work on the river banks which makes fishing the river such a pleasure. The new boards on the path in Cottages has had a terrific effect and the trimming of the alders in Cottage 4 has made everyone's casting so much easier. Their bank work is on going and this is why we feel it is important to recognise this in the gratuities that the rods give them.

Millennium Ghillies have mobile phones these days and although it can be a disturbance to the tranquillity of the river bank, it does have its uses. David and Jamie have used

them when patrolling the river and are able to alert the Water bailiffs to any poaching problems. Sadly, David dropped his in Eleanors when landing a fish for one of our lady guests, it is still drying out!

A certain lady guest who had achieved some fame before her arrival on the Shin this year by being a Millennium Frontispiece in a well known country magazine took her first salmon from Mill. It weighed 16lbs and she has decided to have it stuffed for her latest commercial venture - an oyster bar in London. We hope that she will also make a contribution to the North Atlantic Salmon Trust from her endeavours!

Late News just in.

During early November, the netting for brood fish has started. The initial signs are that there are a good number of MSW fish and a proportion of these are from the first Grudie Smolt trap experiment. These MSW fish have no adipose fin and this has healed over, indicating that they are not fish that have been caught and released this year.

Tight lines for 2000

James Greenwood