

UPPER SHIN NEWS



2003



2004

The lasting memory of the 2003 season will probably be the weather. None of us can remember a longer, drier period in the Highlands for a very long time. Although the Shin flows at the same level all summer, despite drought conditions, this does not mean that fish will enter the system. The first salmon this year went to Nigel Potter in the Aquarium on the 24th June (nearly a month later than usual) at 4:40pm on a no 10 Blue Charm. It was a hen fish weighing 13lb 4oz, with sea lice. The next fish was a stale cock of 12lbs in Frying Pan six days later. To add to the drought conditions, we had to put up with the river levels constantly changing. This was due to the Hydro replacing its turbines in the Lairg Dam, the diversion dam and in the power station at Invershin. We kept on pestering them as to how long this work would be continuing for, but were never really satisfied with the answer. These two factors combined to make catching what fish there were, nigh on impossible, and I congratulate all of you who managed to land one.

First fish were caught by:

- Paul Hammick in Mill a 7lb cock with his leg in a full plaster cast!
- Shona Muir in Suspension 7 ½ lb hen returned.
- Paul Backhouse in Upper Eleanors 4lb cock returned.
- Mike Huskins in Fir 7½ lb returned
- Lucy Maclaren in Dam a 6lb cock.
- Alick Murray Eleanors 6lb cock. Played by Camilla Windsor-Clive, returned.



Jamie Clarke & Shona Muir

The total for the year was 160, not as low as 1991. We ended the season with fresh fish still arriving. I think if the water levels had been stable then July might have been better. The most successful fly by far was the Sunray shadow with 53 fish. The next was the Collie Dog with 17 fish and the Ally Shrimp with 16 fish. The Silver Stoat had 9 then with 8 the Oykel GP, and with 7 the Black and Yellow. The Willie Gun on 6 and the Stoats Tail and Baldrick on 5 apiece.

The really encouraging news is that despite or maybe because of the lower numbers of fish caught, the overall release rate for the Upper Shin was a commendable 79%. The rods in the Lodge book managed a most fantastic return rate of 79% on the 87 fish caught and the Twinners book recorded another brilliant figure of 76.5% on the 73 fish caught. I very much doubt any of the other Kyle rivers will have achieved such a high rate.

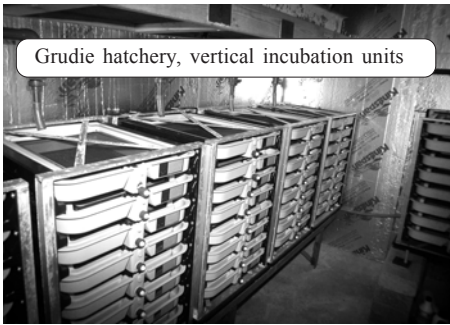
The boat across the Cottages was almost universally welcomed. I think the only people who might not be so enthusiastic are the ones who were tipped out when disembarking! I received a report that one unfortunate gentleman, was sitting on the edge of the punt when his wife stepped out. The punt promptly up ended, dumping him in the water. This is not the end though! The punt continued over to land upside down and completely cover the gentleman in the water. A comment was made that for a few moments he looked like a turtle. I am glad to say that no one was hurt in the incident (other than pride).

The Upper Shin ferry in action (I think more dogs used it than people)!



Shin Hatchery News

We will take out 150 pairs from the Shin. This is less than in the past, but is the same as last season. It is consistent with our most recent advice that the fish are best left in the river to spawn provided there is not too much overcrowding on the redds, or there is sufficient food supply for the young fish. Robert Douglas Miller and I plan to expand and develop the Grudie



hatchery to take more of our Shin eggs. It has the right water temperature, water quality and chemistry, and hopefully it will not freeze up. We will be looking at ways of filtering the burn water and at ways of avoiding the water supply freezing up.

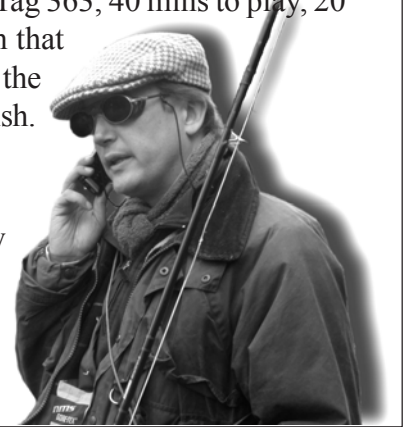
The Scottish and Southern Energy Company are proposing to pit tag smolts coming through Loch Shin to test once and for all whether smolt mortality in Loch Shin is one of our major problems.

On the Conon system they have had to give up stocking one loch above the Rogie Falls because of the 100% smolt mortality from ferox trout, pike & perch. The outcome of this project, due to start in May 2004, is eagerly awaited. If we are proved right and the smolts are not making it through Loch Shin, then the Hydro will have to build smolt traps for us on the three rivers that feed Loch Shin. Smolts will be transported to below the dams, as they are at present on the Grudie. Ian McMyn, our resident biologist, is very excited because, if we do have the traps, he hopes that within ten years the salmon population in the Shin will be self-perpetuating.

One of the more unusual things to happen this year was that Fiona Martin managed after a long battle, to catch and release a lovely 15lb hen fish in Phils. She makes the comment in the book, "Stale, Tag 363, 40 mins to play, 20 mins to put back". Now this would not seem that remarkable until I tell you that six days later in the same pool Julian Pullan (*right*) caught the same fish.

Julian estimated the weight at 13lbs.

Fiona caught it on a number 12 Ally Shrimp at 16:40, and Julian caught it on a Sunray Shadow at 11:15. This is the first time a tagged fish has been caught again. Three years ago I managed to catch one in the Dam pool that had had its adipose fin clipped the day before.

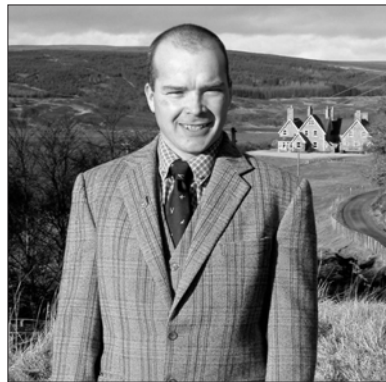


I shall continue to crow about the much under utilized trout fishing on the Shin. I once again had a fabulous week on the Upper Shin in May. The river again produced vast numbers of trout, ranging in size from a couple of ozs to a few fish over 2lbs.

They offer superb sport on lightrod and line. The fishing is free, the only thing you have to pay for is accommodation and travel. At the time of going to press you could fly to Inverness on Easy Jet for £11 each way. I found one flight for under £2!



a brown trout caught in Lady Herbert in May.



We would all like to congratulate Alick on his first season on the Shin, what a pleasure it has been to have him on board. He was very ably assisted this season again by Jamie Clark, and during the school holidays by Ian. Everyone has commented on the enormous amount of work that Alick has achieved along the river. Alick says he has learnt so much in such a short time, but he realizes he has a long way to go before he matches the knowledge of some of our more seasoned fishers. The major bank maintenance projects for this winter are; The path on the railway side to Cliff. The path along the Dam pool, and the lower path between Cottage 2 & 3, and anywhere else he has time for.



Twinnies is to have a new shower room in time for next season. The door to the loo will be blocked in and a new door made into the last bed room on the left, making it an ensuite. We have also decided to bow to pressure & put in a television.

Tight lines, and have a very Happy Christmas and New Year.

For more information
visit the Lairg Estate web site at:
www.lairgestate.co.uk