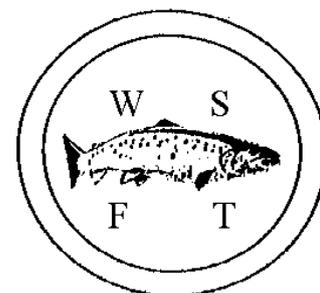


Salmon spawning in the River Laxford

Shortly before Christmas there was great excitement here at WSFT watching the salmon spawning at various sites in the River Laxford. Although repeated attempts to film the action failed spectacularly, we were lucky enough to see the fish for about half an hour on one occasion as they busily dug their redds with seemingly no concern over our presence. Salmon spawning in west Sutherland tends to occur between October and January depending on water temperatures.



Spawning fish (S Marshall)



Sea lice dispersal project making good progress



Copepodid (S Marshall)

Starting in September 2012, the plankton sampling in Ed-drachillis Bay is now well underway as part of the two year sea lice dispersal project that aims to model lice abundance and distribution in the area. In conjunction with the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) and Loch Duart Ltd, the project aims to increase our understanding of sea lice interactions with farmed and wild fish, providing useful data to inform management decisions for effective lice control and wild salmonid conservation. Collecting the plankton always makes for an enjoyable trip out on the boats and away from the office even if it is snowing and blowing a gale! Here at the Trust we are getting quicker at sorting through the samples and identifying the nauplii and copepodid stages of the lice.

American mink:

Mink rafts in the Scourie area are monitored every fortnight during the winter and so far there has been no sign of this invasive species. The past few months have seen little activity as there have not even been pine marten or rodent prints in the rafts and tunnels. Here in west Sutherland we are very lucky in that there are few Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) and the Scottish Mink Initiative is now focusing more on other areas of Scotland. Recent research by Elaine Fraser at the University of Aberdeen has shown

that there are two main groups of mink in Scotland, an eastern and western group originating from farm escapes of different genetic stock. If interbreeding between the two groups can be prevented, the spread of mink throughout Scotland will be hindered due to reduced genetic diversity within the mink populations. As the research also indicated that mink in the north west are isolated from eastern populations, the eradication of existing individuals is a realistic proposition.

Latest News:

- **Atlantic Salmon Trust SALSEA Project:** Tony Andrews of the Atlantic Salmon Trust will be giving two public talks relating to the Salmon at Sea (SALSEA) project in Lochinver and Scourie on the 11th and 12th April 2013 respectively. Details will be posted on the website (www.wsft.co.uk) shortly.
- **WSFT Shop:** The WSFT fly continues to be a great success and can be purchased from our online shop at <http://home.btconnect.com/wsft/Merchandise.html>. Watch this space for new season stock!
- **Ghillies Seminar:** The annual Ghillies Seminar will be held on the 12th April 2013 in Scourie. This is an opportunity for information to be passed between ghillies, estate workers and fishery managers relating to various aspects of fisheries management.



WSFT Bestseller!

Potential new projects for 2013 and beyond

Rhododendron mapping on the Reay Forest Estate

The Trust hopes to carry out contract work for CKD Galbraith mapping Rhododendrons on the Reay Forest Estate. *Rhododendron ponticum* is the main invasive species found in west Sutherland and so far this fast spreading plant has not been included in other INNS removal schemes in the area such as the SEPA restoration grant. Initially the estate would be surveyed using a GPS and sites containing Rhododendron classified into areas of priority depending on various factors including the size of bushes and the receptiveness of the site to seed influx. This information would then be presented on maps using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) software and used to prepare the removal operations.

Sea Trout Tracking

It is hoped to obtain funding to track sea trout movements in coastal waters including estuaries and sea lochs to get a better insight into the marine phase of the life cycle of sea trout. This project is in collaboration with other Fisheries Trusts and such information would be very useful for the future conservation of this species on the west coast of Scotland.



Rhododendrons at Laxford (S Marshall)

2013 Season Work Programme

Post Smolt Netting

As time seems to be racing by we are looking forward to the start of the 2013 field season! The post smolt sweep netting programme will commence in March. If you are interested in coming along to the netting please see the website (www.wsft.co.uk) for upcoming details. This is always a lot of fun and any help is very much appreciated!

Smolt Trap Installation

Smolt traps will be installed at Bhadaidh Daraich and Badna Bay between March and June and checked daily. This will give an indication of the size of the smolt run in each catchment and assess the recovery of migratory fish in Bhadaidh Daraich.

Juvenile Salmonid Surveys

In July the salmonid juvenile surveys will begin again across selected catchments as part of our ongoing monitoring programme to assess the health of salmon and trout populations in the area. The electrofishing is one of the most interesting aspects of the varied work here at the Trust and a good opportunity to get out and about in this amazing landscape.

Mayfly in the Classroom

The Trust will be helping to deliver an exciting new educational project 'Mayfly in the classroom' to introduce local children to this iconic species and its importance in river ecosystems. Pupils will collect mayfly nymphs and maintain them in classroom aquariums before releasing them as adults, giving them the opportunity to learn about the lifecycle of mayflies as well as keeping accurate scientific records. It is hoped that the project will be up and running in local schools in May 2014 and in the meantime the Trust will have fun looking after our own aquarium in the office as a test.

Biosecurity

To date the removal of Himalayan Balsam at Nedd and Clashnessie has proved to be very successful with only a few plants remaining following the efforts of the Assynt Field Club and the Trust in summer 2011. In 2012 only a few plants remained, mostly on the edge of the burn, which were easily removed. This area will continue to be monitored and controlled. Small areas of Japanese Knotweed are present on the Reay Forest Estate and efforts will also be made to remove these.

How can you help?

- Become a member of the WSFT or make a donation
- Sponsor a sea trout
- Look out for tags when fishing and report to the Biologist with tag number, location and length (please return!)

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Blog www.wsft.blogspot.co.uk

If you would like further information, have a view to express or would simply like to make a donation, please visit our website or contact:

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