



## River Ogmore and tributaries



An advisory visit carried out by the Wild Trout Trust – June 2008

## **1. Introduction**

This report is the output of a Wild Trout Trust advisory visit undertaken on the River Ogmore and headwater tributaries on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2008.

A project to evaluate and enhance wild brown and sea trout habitats has been promoted by the Environment Agency as part of the Wild Trout Wales partnership.

For this particular advisory visit the WTT was approached by Mr Ian Fynlas (Habitats and Improvements Officer for the Ogmore Angling Association) to provide some general advice on the current status and management of the fishery. A priority for the club was to look at the spawning and nursery habitats found in the upper reaches of the waters under their control.

The comments and recommendations made in this report are based on the observations of the Trust's Conservation Officer, Andy Thomas and discussions with club officials, Mr Fynlas and Mr Dave Smith who is the club's Vice-chairman.

Throughout the report, normal convention is followed with respect to bank identification i.e. banks are designated Left Bank (LB) or Right Bank (RB) whilst looking downstream.

## **2. Description of the Fishery**

The Ogmore Angling Association is one of the largest angling clubs in the area with in excess of 400 members. Further details about the angling association can be found on the club's website at [www.ogmoreanglingassociation.com](http://www.ogmoreanglingassociation.com). The club has also joined the recently formed SE Wales Rivers Trust. Many of the issues and problems that have impacted the river are similar to those found on the rivers to the east of the Ogmore. It is hoped that membership of the SEWRT will enable the club to build on the good work already achieved. Details of the SEWRT can be found at [www.sewrt.org](http://www.sewrt.org)

The river system is made up of the main Ogmore river with the main fishable length extending to approximately 8 miles with a similar distance of small lightly fished and unstocked headwater tributaries. The headwaters are set within comparatively unimpacted rural valleys, whereas the fishable reaches on the main river are located within semi-urban and urban environments.

Long sections of the lower river pass through the Bridgend conurbation and are heavily constrained by hard flood defences, either constructed from block stone, brick wall or sheet steel piling. There was some evidence of habitat mitigation works in the form of concrete shelters, presumably designed to give overhead cover to migratory salmonids. The lower river represents some of the most productive angling water on the river, however, it could be further improved with some softening of the defended margins and the provision of natural cover and shade. Ideas for enhancement are discussed in the recommendations on page 12 of this report.



The valley of the Ogwrfawr tributary. Hardwood trees, light grazing pressures.  
An ideal catchment for a spawning stream!



The Ogmore in Brigend. An urban fishery ripe for enhancement

The Ogmore is a river that has significantly improved in quality following the decline of the local coal industry during the 1970s and 80s. The improvements to water quality have enabled the river to recover significantly with salmon *Salmo salar* stocks now on the increase, albeit with most fish arriving very late in the season. The sea trout *Salmo trutta* fishery had improved dramatically but in the last few seasons catches have been significantly down on those experienced around 2001.

Stocking of adult brown trout *Salmo trutta* has long been a tradition in the Ogmore AA. Historically modest numbers (approximately 1500 per annum) were stocked in the lower reaches to provide early season sport for rods in the March-June period before the main run of school sewin. The club took the decision to increase stock densities of farm reared diploid trout with 4000 fish being stocked in 2006 and 3600 in 2007. Concerns have been expressed that perhaps the recent decline in the sea trout rod catch is linked to the increased levels of brown trout stocking and potential for excessive predation by the stocked fish on downstream migrating smolts.

Another potential issue has been raised over the condition of the main spawning tributaries, the Ogwrfawr and the Dimbath, which is a tributary of the Ogwrfach.



Fish shelters in the town

All upland headwaters inspected appeared to have excellent catchments with unmanaged hardwood glades and very light grazing pressures. The natural impervious geology and steep gradient can lead to rapid spate conditions developing with lots of evidence of natural channel modification as a result of big rainfall events. On such catchments there is the potential for spawning gravels to be stripped of finer gravels and flushed into lower sections which are less desirable for spawning. Fortunately there was plenty of good quality spawning habitat available, largely due to the unmanaged nature of the streams with plenty of examples of fallen trees and woody debris (LWD) holding back stones and gravel and creating ideal trout spawning and nursery habitats.



**Stable chunks of large woody debris – crucial in promoting good quality trout habitats**

Most sections appeared to have a good balance between light and shade which promotes the provision of shelter and a supply of allochthonous food items. Where incident light can penetrate it ensures that inchannel food production can also contribute to trout survival and growth.

The only exception observed to this was a section of the Ogwrfach in Ogmor where the channel was very heavily shaded with sycamores.



A shaded section of the Ogwrffawr where some light thinning of sycamore on the LB would be beneficial



Exposed service pipe on the Ogwrffawr. Some sections of pipe were undercut and unsupported. A potential threat if the service is still in use?



Drinking water or sewage? The club should commission a search of services to identify any potential threats



An example of heavy erosion on the Dimbath stream. This is not always the disaster it sometimes appears to be. Active movement of the stream can free up seams of finer gravels important for these upriver spawning sites. Where excessive erosion is deemed unacceptable, techniques using large flow deflectors and defensive tree planting can help to slow down the process.



Hard defences on their own do not guarantee an effective defence against erosion

The evidence of erosion within the upriver reaches should not necessarily be a major concern. The presence of numerous service pipes crossing and running parallel with the channel could, however, potentially represent a threat. Even a broken service pipe carrying treated drinking water could potentially damage juvenile trout habitats at sensitive times. A rising main carrying untreated sewage could be potentially devastating and it is recommended that an audit be carried out to identify what the services contain and who is responsible for their maintenance and protection. Any stream that has the capacity to shift large boulders can easily undermine or fracture an exposed service pipe.

A brief inspection was also carried out on the lower tributary, the Ewenny, which the club actively fish. This stream is completely different in characteristics to the main Ogmere, being derived from a predominantly limestone catchment with a reduced gradient. This stream is obviously very productive, supporting good populations of large grayling *Thymallus thymallus* as well as resident trout and sea trout. The WTT have already carried out an advisory visit on Pencoed and District Angling Club's section of the Ewenny. This report can be downloaded via the WTT website [www.wildtrout.org](http://www.wildtrout.org)



A tributary of the Ewenny with beds of watercress giving away its credentials as a hardwater limestone derived stream

### 3. Conclusions

The Ogmore can broadly be divided up into two different habitat types. The lower main river which supports the bulk of the angling activity is constrained by development and the need to control erosion and protect property from flooding. Good adult holding pools are present but there is considerable scope for improving many of them through the provision of natural cover.

One possible solution on sections with steel piling is to weld or bolt reverse pile pockets onto the revetment and plant with goat willow or sallow *Salix caprea* to provide low marginal cover.

**It is a legal requirement that some works to the river may require written Environment Agency consent prior to undertaking any works, either in-channel or within 8 metres of the bank. Any modifications to hard defences will require a land drainage consent on any river designated as "main river". Advice can be obtained from the Development Control Officer.**

The WTT is currently looking at developing a range of habitat options on urban rivers through its Trout in The Town project. It is hoped that the project will be identifying and undertaking a range of urban projects designed to create good habitats in situations very similar to those on the Ogmore in Bridgend. For further details about the project contact the Mr Paul Gaskell (Project Officer) at [pgaskell@wildtrout.org](mailto:pgaskell@wildtrout.org)

The upper spawning tributaries look to be in good condition. The adjacent land use does not appear to pose any significant threats, however, the naturally steep gradient and local geology means that big erosive flows can be expected after heavily rainfall events. Retaining as many fallen trees and debris dams to stabilise gravel wash out is recommended.

During the inspection numerous juvenile trout were observed and were most probably small resident browns as well as juvenile sewin destined for one more year in the stream prior to downstream migration.

No assessment of aquatic macroinvertebrates was made during the visit other than a cursory inspection under the odd stone where both stone fly nymphs and caddis was observed. The nature of the catchment, with a range of different spawning streams feeding into the main Ogmore reduces the risks associated with the loss of production through potential pollution incidents. Although there was no evidence of any impacts on the sites inspected it would be sensible for the club to undertake some self monitoring of flylife through the Riverfly Partnership. Upland catchments, with sheep farming activity, has been identified as a particular threat to the health of some systems where pollution has occurred through the use of pesticides in some locations. A programme of simple self monitoring would enable the club to keep a close eye on the general health of these important nursery streams. For details of the Riverfly Partnership go to: [www.riverflies.org](http://www.riverflies.org)

Understanding the role of fallen timber in these streams is crucial. The club should adopt a policy of retaining LWD in the river channel wherever possible. The West Country Rivers Trust provides a useful guide to the management of natural LWD:

1. Is the debris fixed, if yes then continue to 2, if not continue to 5.
2. Is the debris causing excess erosion by redirecting the current into a vulnerable bank? If yes then go to 5 if not then go to 3.
3. Would fish be able to migrate past it (take into account high river flows). If yes go to 4, if no go to 5.
4. **Retain the woody debris in the river.**
5. **Extract the debris.**

Note: If the debris dam needs to be removed but there is still a significant amount of the root system attached to the bank then it is recommended that the stump be retained for its wildlife habitat value and its stabilising effect on the bank.

LWD not only protects and improves spawning gravels but also provides a high quality habitat for invertebrates, some of which will have a requirement for rotting woody material. Provision of habitats for invertebrates is essential in maximising production for juvenile trout, sea trout and salmon.

Most of the sites visited had a nice mix of dappled light and shade. On those sections where excessive shading was evident, some thinning of the overhead canopy should be tackled in selected areas. Taking out some of the less valuable tree cover (for example sycamore) outside of the bird breeding season would seem the best option. It should be remembered that tree shading plays a vital role in keeping water temperatures down during periods of low flow and hot weather.

A few examples of non native plants Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* and Japanese knotweed *Fallopia japonica* were seen during the visit. Himalayan balsam tolerates low light levels and, in turn, tends to shade out other vegetation, impoverishing habitats. When the plant dies back in the winter it leaves banks even more vulnerable to erosion. Currently there is not a huge problem with balsam on the Ogmore, but club members should be encouraged to identify and pull up plants before they flower.

It is the view of the Conservation Officer that the stocking of in excess of 3000 adult trout per annum in the lower river is excessive. Domesticated farm reared brown trout are a poor substitute for wild fish and are generally unlikely to displace them, however, stocking at such high densities increases the risks of displacement of both wild and uncaught stocked fertile fish, which could then go on to have spawning interactions later in the year with wild stocks. A move to stocking with low densities of sterile browns should be considered as an option.

Currently the club allow some worming and spinning on some beats. Worming is a great way of introducing youngsters to trout fishing but care should be taken to ensure that nursery streams are protected from excessive exploitation. Promoting trout conservation through "catch & release" as well as sensible bag and size limits for those wishing to take fish is crucial in protecting valuable brood stock.

#### **4. Recommendations**

- Undertake a programme of sensitive tree management on the spawning streams, ensuring that as much LWD is retained within the channel as possible.
- Retain large fallen timber whenever possible
- Identify use and ownership of numerous service pipes and arrange for survey/inspections.
- Look at options for planting low scrubby cover adjacent to hard bank defences in the town sections. Overhead cover will enhance holding pools for migratory trout.
- Promote wild trout conservation. Increased levels of catch and release may result in bigger trout coming through, as well having local broodstock available to naturally build the population.
- Keep the introductions of farm reared browns to minimum and consider an early move to sterile triploid stock. All stocking of brown trout will have to be with sterile stock by 2015 (Environment Agency Trout & Grayling Strategy – Stocking Review)
- Monitor your fly life.
- Identify and eradicate the non native plant species Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed.

#### **5. Making it happen**

There is the possibility that the WTT could help the Ogmire AA to start an enhancement programme. Physical enhancement works could be kick-started with the assistance of a WTT 'Practical Visit' (PV). PV's typically comprise a 1-3 day visit where an approved WTT 'Wet-Work' experts will complete a demonstration plot on the site to be restored. This will enable project leaders and teams to obtain on the ground training regarding the appropriate use of conservation techniques and materials, including Health & Safety equipment and requirements. This will then give projects the strongest possible start leading to successful completion of aims and objectives.

The WTT can fund the cost of labour (two/ three man team) and materials (max £1800). Recipients will be expected to cover travel and accommodation expenses of the contractor.

There is currently a big demand for practical assistance and the WTT has to prioritise exactly where it can deploy its limited resources. The Trust is always available to provide free advice and help to clubs, syndicates and landowners through guidance and linking them up with others that have had experience in improving trout fisheries.

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