

## Best Salmon Season Since 1995

Rod catch figures for 2004 show that the River Spey has had the best season for nine years. A total of 9,820 salmon and grilse were caught, exceeding the 10 year average of 9,100 fish (Figure 1). This represents the best catch since 1995, when 11,100 fish were taken.

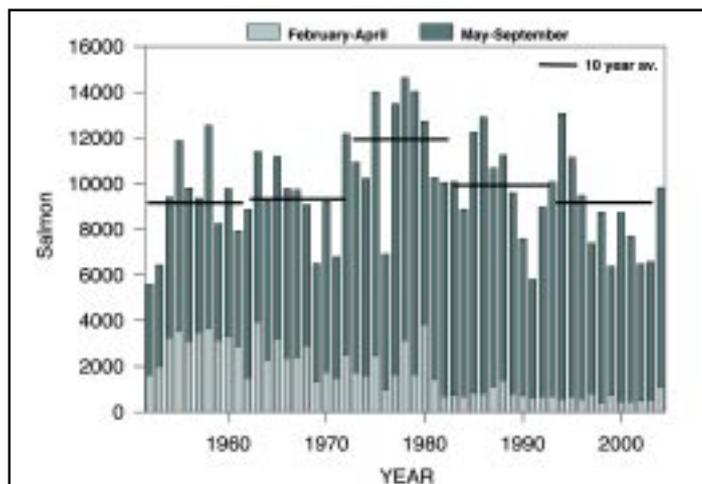
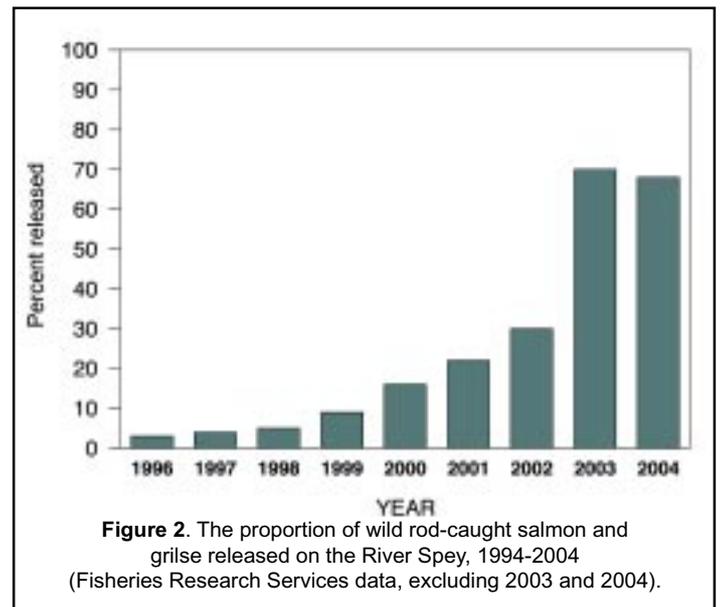
The excellent season continued from a promising start. During February-April, 1,100 spring salmon were caught (Figure 1). This represented the best start since 1988, when 1,400 fish were caught.

Fishermen continued to support the Spey Fishery Board's Salmon Conservation Policy, releasing 68% of all salmon and grilse caught. This was similar to the 2003 release rate of 70%, and remained a significant improvement on the 2002 rate of 29% (Figure 2). As a consequence of the efforts of Anglers, Ghillies and Proprietors, an additional 6,678 salmon and grilse were released to spawn in 2004. This continued improvement is welcomed by the Board.

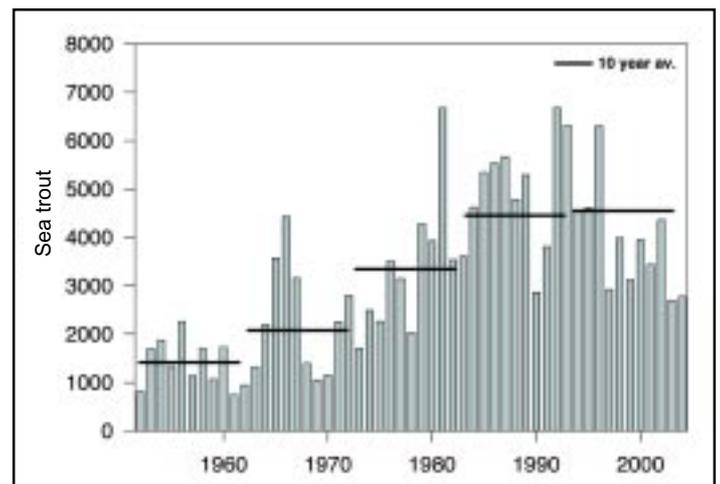
A total of 2,770 sea trout were caught in 2004, a marginally higher number than in 2003 when 2,700 were taken (Figure 3). As in 2003 this catch fell considerably below the 10 year average of 4,600.

Why salmon catches improved while sea trout catches remained moderate is unclear. Salmon runs have been good throughout the east coast of Scotland, while sea trout have been less abundant. This suggests that marine conditions in 2003 altered to the benefit of salmon, but not sea trout. While the Spey Fishery Board (SFB) can do little to

influence the wider marine environment, it will continue to implement policies to maintain and improve salmon and sea trout runs by protecting and enhancing the freshwater and coastal areas within its control.



**Figure 1.** Declared rod catch of wild salmon and grilse on the River Spey, 1952-2004, showing spring (Feb.-Apr.) and summer (May-Sept.) catches (Fisheries Research Services data, excluding 2003 and 2004).



**Figure 3.** Declared rod catch of sea trout on the River Spey, 1952-2004 (Fisheries Research Services data, excluding 2003 and 2004).

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# Hatchery Progress 2004

In 2003 the SFB introduced a Stock Enhancement Policy with the following aims:

- Areas accessible to salmon and sea trout proven to be underpopulated should be stocked to boost natural smolt output;
- Inaccessible areas should also be stocked;
- Only wild broodstock from the Spey catchment should be used;
- Broodstock should be taken from close to target stocking areas, to maintain local adaptations and ensure optimal survival of stocked juveniles;
- Eyed eggs, fry or autumn parr should be stocked out subject to ease of access;
- Stocked areas should be monitored by juvenile surveys.

Using the Spey Research Trust's Geographical Information System it has been estimated that the area of water suitable for stocking requires approximately 2 million salmon eggs to produce the maximum natural output of smolts. The space to incubate and hatch these eggs is provided by the SFB's Sandbank Hatchery (1.2 million eggs), the new Glenmore Hatchery kindly provided by Tulchan Estate (0.6 million eggs), and the Alvie Hatchery, Kincaig (0.2 million eggs).

To achieve the required number of eggs, adult salmon were collected during Autumn 2003. Anglers on Gordon Castle, Delfur, Delagyle and Castle Grant generously donated rod caught salmon during September and post-season angling under specific Licence was also implemented. Sweep netting, with assistance from the Kyle of Sutherland Fishery Board, and electro-netting, with staff from the Environment Agency was also utilised. By late Autumn, 386 female and 414 male salmon, had been collected, as had 164 sea-trout. These produced 2.1 million salmon eggs and 150,000 sea-trout eggs which were reared over winter. From February through to August 2004, eyed ova, fed fry and autumn parr were planted out in selected locations.

The first year that these fish are likely to return to the Spey as adults is 2006. To estimate the numbers of hatchery fish surviving to return, and the numbers caught by rods, the Spey Research Trust has begun sampling all broodstock to determine their genetic 'fingerprints', and those of their offspring. Samples will then be taken from rod-caught fish starting in 2006 and matched against the fingerprints from the hatchery fish.

In July 2004 the SFB purchased an electro-net with a 50% grant from SNH. SFB Bailiffs were trained to use it by the Environment Agency, and it was operated for the first time in October for broodstock capture. 286 hens and 234 cocks were captured, and the target of 2 million eggs has been reached. The net has proved to be an efficient tool, allowing Bailiffs to collect fish from targeted areas more quickly than in the past. The net has also reduced the logistical costs of collecting rod-caught fish in September, and the problems associated with holding broodstock in tanks for prolonged periods. With the help of Ghillies from Gordon Castle, Castle Grant, Delfur, Rothes & Aikenway, Delagyle and Tulchan stripping has now been completed at all three hatcheries.

## The Spey Fishery Board would like to thank the following for their assistance with broodstock capture and hatchery work in 2004:

Colin Reid, Ian Tennant, John Whyte (Gordon Castle); Ronnie Low, Robbie Stronach, Alan Sheppard, Mark Melville (Delfur); Mike Ewen, Steve Younie (Rothes & Aikenway); Willie Mearns (Delagyle); Lionel Main, Roddie Hastings, Simon Crozier (Castle Grant); Alan Irvine, Lawrence Derosa, John Anderson, Robert Mitchell (Tulchan); Ally Grant (Strathspey Angling Association); Graham Wilson; Steve Fraser, Owen MacGregor (Aviemore Angling Association); John Tansley (Tomintoul Angling Association).

**Visitors to the SFB Sandbank Hatchery are welcome.**

**Please contact Hatchery Manager,  
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**Tel. 01807 590467**



The SFB has purchased an electro-net which has proved effective for capturing broodstock in 2004 (Photo: James Butler).