

SEA TROUT CONSERVATION POLICY FOR THE SPEY

Under the Salmon Act 1986 sea trout have the same legal status as salmon, and Fishery Boards are responsible for their protection and improvement. Sea trout in the River Spey are poorly understood, and often overlooked. However, catch statistics show that the Spey sea trout rod fishery is one of the largest in the UK, with an average annual catch of almost 4,000 fish in 1998-2002. By comparison only the Rivers Teifi and Tywi in Wales catch more fish.

In July 2004 an International Sea Trout Symposium was held in Cardiff to focus current understanding of sea trout. The following key points and recommendations were made:

- Sea trout are the sea-running form of brown trout;
- Sea trout and brown trout interbreed;
- The majority of sea trout are female;
- Unlike salmon, sea trout can return to spawn up to 10 times;
- Because of their larger size, female sea trout provide most of the trout eggs laid in a river;
- Genetic studies show that large, longer-lived sea trout produce young that are also likely to grow large;
- Finnock are sea trout in their first year after leaving the river as smolts;
- Some finnock enter rivers in the summer/autumn, and some breed while others do not;
- Interbreeding with stocked 'domestic' brown trout can interfere with sea trout genetics, and should be avoided;
- Sea trout and brown trout should be conserved and managed jointly;
- Because sea trout are largely coastal, they are barometers of the health of local marine environments.



Sea trout (top) and brown trout (bottom) are the same species and interbreed (Photo: James Butler)

Although rod catches on the River Spey have been good during the 1980s and 1990s, numbers since 1997 have not exceeded the 10 year average (Fig. 1). This is not related to reduced fishing effort or any other obvious change in the fishery. Nor is it clear what environmental factors may be responsible. The Spey Fishery Board (SFB) is undertaking the following actions to understand and protect sea trout:

1. Analysis of juvenile surveys to examine trends in the young trout population;
2. Identification of trout spawning and rearing habitat and improvement where necessary;
3. Floy-tagging of sea trout to investigate their movements;
4. Stocking of native Spey sea trout into suitable areas;
5. Protection of the coastal environment through membership of the Moray Firth Partnership;
6. Management of predation by seals, mink, cormorants and sawbill ducks.

Following extensive consultation with Owners, Angling Associations and Ghillies the SFB is introducing a Sea Trout Conservation Policy in 2005 for the rod fishery (see overleaf). This aims to provide protection for most finnock (10 oz. and under) and all large sea trout (3 lbs. and over), and to increase the number of fish released by anglers by imposing a bag limit. The policy will be reviewed at the end of 2005.

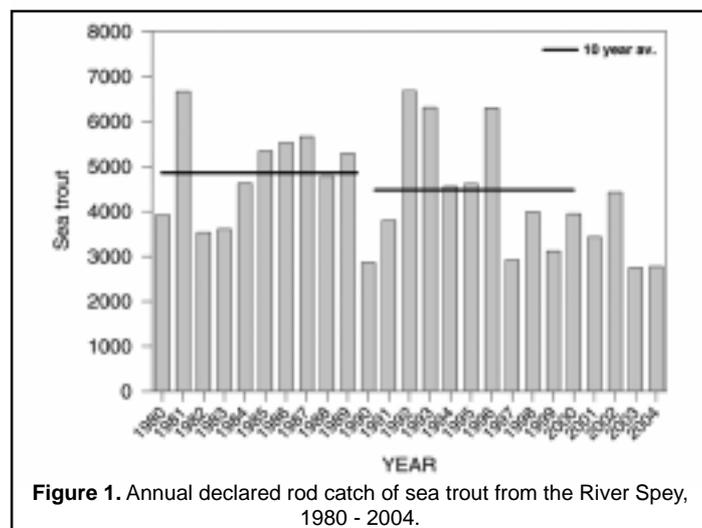


Figure 1. Annual declared rod catch of sea trout from the River Spey, 1980 - 2004.

SEA TROUT CONSERVATION POLICY 2005



Photo: Ian Neale

1. FINNOCK: Release all fish of 10 oz. / 25 cm / 10 " *or less.*

2. SEA TROUT: Release all fish of 3 lb. / 50 cm / 20 " *or more.*

3. BAG LIMIT: 2 sea trout or finnock of takeable size per calendar day.

4. UNSEASONABLE FISH: Release all unseasonable fish (smolts, stale fish, kelts, over-wintered finnock).

SALMON CONSERVATION POLICY 2005



Photo: Ian Neale

Following the continued success of the Salmon Conservation Policy in 2004, when 68% of salmon and grilse were released, the SFB has decided to maintain the Policy for the 2005 season. The Policy remains as follows:

1. CATCH & RELEASE

- Until 30th June each angler must release the 1st, 3rd, 5th etc. salmon and grilse caught.
- After 30th June all hen salmon and hen grilse must be released.
- Throughout the season all stale or gravid fish must be released.
- Escaped farm salmon must be retained.

2. METHOD

- Where possible anglers should be encouraged to fish with a fly.
- All hooks should be pinched or barbless.
- Where spinning is allowed only one set of barbless hooks may be used on a lure.

3. FISHING EFFORT

- Where possible the numbers of hours and rods fished should be limited.