

Improved spring salmon runs on Spey

The start of the 2004 salmon fishing season on the Spey has been the best for 16 years. Provisional catches indicate that over 1,000 salmon were caught by rods in February-April. Scottish Executive statistics show that this is the highest total for the period since 1988, and almost double the 10-year average of 600 (Figure 1). The majority of proprietors, anglers and ghillies have continued to support the Spey Fishery Board's (SFB) Salmon Conservation Policy, with 75% of fish being released.

The marked improvement in this year's spring run has been mirrored in all major Scottish rivers. This suggests that there has been a general increase in marine survival in the North Atlantic influencing all salmon rivers, rather than any specific factor within the freshwater environment of the Spey. The buy-out of the majority of licences in the drift net fishery in north-east England in 2003 is unlikely to be a factor, since these nets mostly intercept salmon runs from rivers in the Scottish south-east.

While the 2004 spring run has been encouraging, the SFB still regards the restoration of spring salmon as a priority.

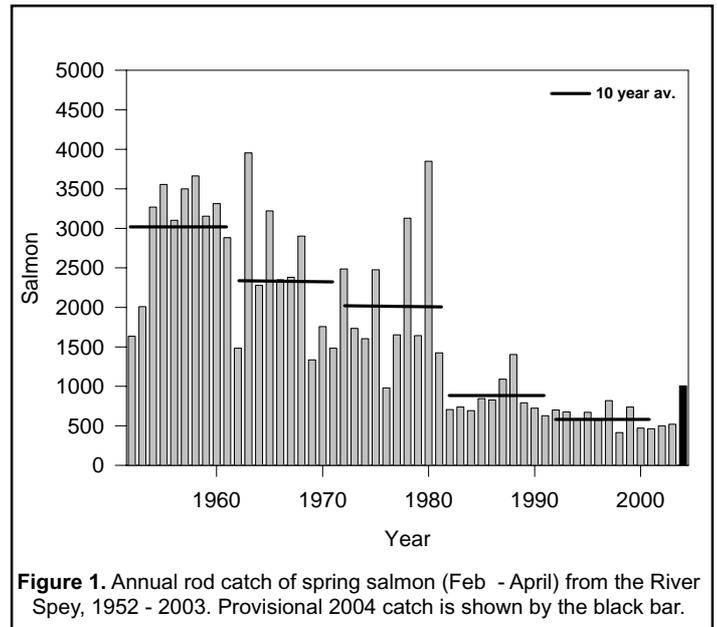


Figure 1. Annual rod catch of spring salmon (Feb - April) from the River Spey, 1952 - 2003. Provisional 2004 catch is shown by the black bar.

Consequently the SFB will continue to pursue measures to protect this stock, including the Salmon Conservation Policy, until there is evidence of a complete recovery.

The Economic Value of Angling in Scotland

In 2003 the Scottish Executive commissioned a survey by Glasgow Caledonian University entitled *'The Economic Impact of Game and Coarse Angling in Scotland'*. The study was published in April 2004 and has concluded that anglers spend £113 million annually in the Scottish tourism industry. By comparison expenditure on golf is estimated by VisitScotland to be £105 million. Other important points presented by the study were:

- angling supports 2,800 jobs in Scotland
- £67 million would be lost annually if angling ceased
- salmon and sea trout anglers contribute 65% of all expenditure

- 66% of expenditure on salmon and sea trout fishing is contributed by anglers originating outside Scotland

A similar study has also recently been published for the Spey. *'An Assessment of the Economic Impact of Water-Related Recreation and Tourism in the Spey Catchment in 2003'* was carried out by the same consultants, using the same methodology, allowing direct comparisons to be made with the Scottish survey. These indicate that the River Spey contributes:

- 11% of national angler expenditure on all species
- 15% of national expenditure on salmon and sea trout
- 13% of national employment generated by angling

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Castle Grant Habitat Project underway

During autumn 2003 a major programme of habitat restoration started on the Milton Burn at Castle Grant, near Granttown-on-Spey (see map). Working jointly with Strathspey Estates, SFB bailiffs have been clearing a 1.5 km section of this important spawning burn that has become overgrown with conifers. Under the canopy the burn is completely shaded, and sand from forestry drains has choked the stream bed. As a result the burn provides little habitat for fish, and salmon and sea trout no longer spawn in the area.

The first stage of work has involved the clearing of a 10 metre corridor on either side of the burn to allow light to reach the water, and the regeneration of native riparian vegetation. Throughout the winter trained bailiffs and ghillies from Strathspey Estate, generously assisted by Gordon Castle Estate and Delfur ghillies, have been working with chainsaws to remove the conifer thicket. Once the corridor has been created the sand will be removed from the burn, and the spawning gravels reconditioned. Using its Geographical Information System the SFB is also identifying other areas of the catchment that require similar restoration work.



The Milton Burn before clearance (below left), SFB Bailiff Duncan Ferguson clearing a corridor (above), and the final result (below). (Photos: Bob Laughton)

