

Controlling the spread of Ranunculus

Ranunculus is an invasive aquatic plant species which is non-native to the River Spey. It was accidentally introduced to the river over 30 years ago near Grantown-on-Spey and much of the River downstream of Grantown is now badly affected by this plant. It will be familiar to many anglers on the River for whom it has caused tangled lines and problems landing fish.

In the past we used to control Ranunculus using the chemical Midstream, which contained the active and toxic ingredient diquat. Sadly, because of EC legislation, we are no longer able to use this chemical and so the plant is spreading and in some areas choking the flow of the river. The plant is detrimental to two of the SAC-designated species (Atlantic salmon and freshwater pearl mussels). The extensive mats of Ranunculus often accumulate sand and gravel underneath, choking the underlying substrate beneath it. This affects the freshwater pearl mussel and salmon fry habitat.

Alternative methods of control, such as manual cutting and removal or hand pulling, are not considered practical as they are costly, labour-intensive and pose considerable health and safety issues for individuals working in a fast flowing river. The SFB tried to obtain a special consent from the UK's Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP) to use diquat on a limited, experimental basis, for which Ministerial permission would also have been required. The highly toxic nature of diquat naturally aroused concern that any application of this chemical could have an adverse effect on the species in the river which qualify it as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). So before applying to the ACP, the SFB, in conjunction with experts from Scottish Natural Heritage, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Water, looked at commissioning a series of laboratory tests to determine whether a limited application of diquat would have any adverse effects on the integrity of the River Spey SAC.

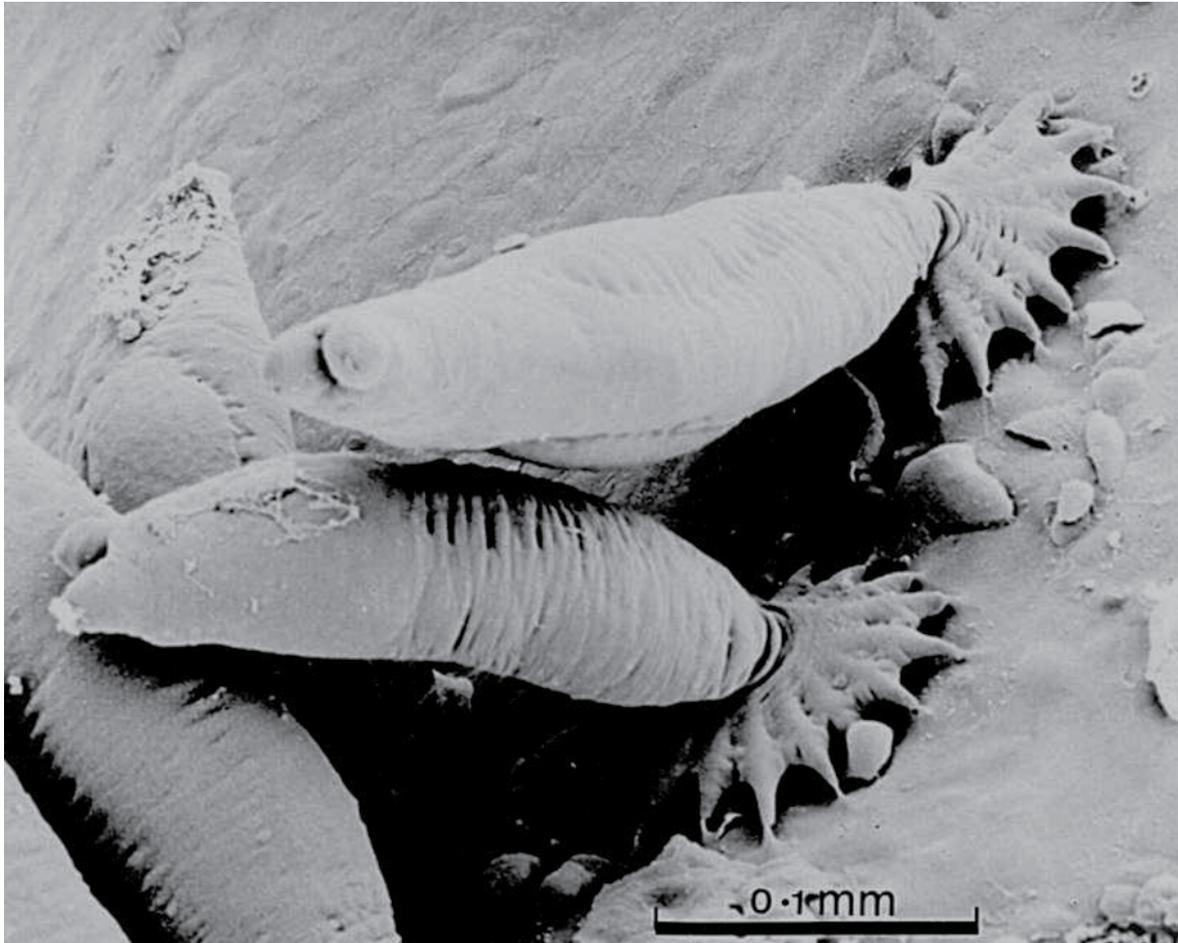
The ACP felt, however, that we would still not be able to prove that we could mitigate against the broader impacts of diquat on all species within the River and it became apparent that whatever laboratory tests were conducted, a licence to use even limited amounts of diquat would not be forthcoming.

The SFB is now working closely with the PSD to find an alternative chemical with which to control Ranunculus. There are a number of other organizations, including Natural England and various water authorities in England, who are equally keen to find an acceptable solution to this problem. As a result, the PSD are convening a meeting in York on 6th October 2008 to look at how we might achieve this. SFB Director Roger Knight will represent the Spey at this meeting, which will also be attended by representatives from SNH, SEPA and the Scottish Government.



Ranunculus on the River Spey (Photo: Roger Knight)

Keep *Gyrodactylus salaris* (GS) out of the Spey!



The Gs parasitic fluke: note the size against the inset scale”)

Gyrodactylus salaris (Gs) is the greatest threat to wild salmon in the River Spey, and the UK as a whole. It is a parasitic freshwater fluke which is indigenous to rivers in parts of Russia, Norway and Sweden, where salmon have evolved resistance to it. However, Gs has spread to rivers in Denmark, Germany, France, Spain and Portugal where native salmon have no resistance, resulting in mass mortality of juvenile fish. In Norway infected rivers lost 98% of their salmon within 5 years. Infected rivers must be poisoned to remove all fish hosts, and barriers erected to stop salmon entering the river to spawn and generate more hosts.

Currently the UK is Gs-free. The economic and ecological consequences of Gs entering the country and the Spey would be catastrophic. Angling on the River Spey is worth £11.8 million per year to the local economy and secures 367 full time-equivalent jobs, all of which would be under threat if Gs were to arrive here.

Gs can survive for 5 to 7 days without a host in damp conditions (e.g. angling clothing, waders, wet reels, lines or landing nets). Please do your part to prevent Gs from decimating the Spey's wild salmon by signing the Angler Declaration Form before fishing. The form is available from estate offices, ghillies and tackle shops, or it can be downloaded from www.speyfisheryboard.com