

## Investigating salmon run-timing on the Spey

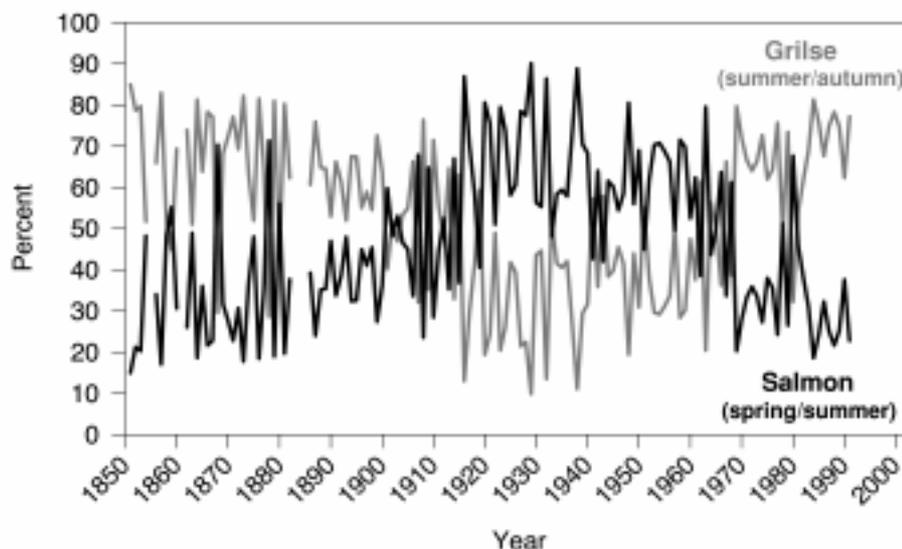
Catch records for the Rake sweep nets operating in the lower Spey between 1851 and 1991 show distinct cycles in the prevalence of salmon (multi-sea winter fish) and grilse (1 sea-winter fish) (Figure 1). During the period 1851-1910 grilse predominated, but in 1910-1960 salmon were most common. From 1960 grilse have again predominated. Because grilse enter the river from June onwards, the periods when they are most common indicate that the bulk of adult fish run during the summer and autumn. Multi-sea winter salmon enter the river from January onwards, suggesting that during periods of their dominance spring and summer runs are more common.

Although the Rake nets closed in 1993, rod catches in 2004 show that the Spey is still in a period of summer/autumn run-timing, with 62% of fish being caught in July, August and September. In 1998-2000 the Spey Research Trust operated a hydro-acoustic counter at Boat o'Brig, Delfur, and results proved that rod catches reflect the seasonal abundance of salmon. Moreover, in 1999 the counter was operated after the end of the rod fishing season, and showed that larger numbers of fish were running in October-November than in March-April.



(Photo: Malcolm Newbould)

This pattern of cyclical shifts in run-timing is mirrored on other east coast rivers, including the Dee, Tay and Tweed, and these rivers are also experiencing an increased abundance of autumn runs. On the Tweed the rod fishing season extends until 30<sup>th</sup> November, and the majority of fish are caught in September-November.



**Figure 1.** The proportion of salmon and grilse recorded in the Spey Rake nets, 1851-1991 (data kindly provided by Dr. David Summers, Tay District Salmon Fishery Board)

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# Autumn Salmon Project 2004 and 2005

In 2004 the Spey Research Trust began an Autumn Salmon Project to address the following questions:

**1. Are salmon running the Spey after the end of the fishing season?**

**2. What are their characteristics and how abundant are they?**

**3. Where and when do they spawn?**

A licence was granted by the Scottish Executive to fish experimentally with rod and line in October-December 2004. Gordon Castle and Carron Estates allowed experimental fishing to take place on their beats. A total of 14 anglers were invited to fish by Gordon Castle and Carron, including proprietors, Gordon Castle and Carron ghillies, and local members of the River Spey Anglers' Association. Anglers were instructed to follow the following protocol:

- Fly-fishing only;
- Catch and release of all fish caught;
- Fish in pairs whenever possible.

Anglers were issued with appropriate equipment by the Research Trust, and trained to:

- Sample all salmon and sea trout caught, including kelts;
- Measure their length;
- Photograph the fish;
- Take scale samples;
- Floy tag fish;
- Record information on scale packets and data sheets;
- Record fishing effort.

Research Trust staff subsequently assessed the condition ('fresh' or 'stale') and reproductive status (un-spawned or kelt) of each fish from the photographs. From 25<sup>th</sup> October – 25<sup>th</sup> December a total of 156 salmon and grilse were sampled, including 65 kelts. Preliminary results show that 30% of all un-spawned fish were fresh-run in October and November.

Because only small numbers of fish were caught on two beats, and research only began in late October 2004, the Spey Fishery Board asked the Research Trust to repeat the exercise in 2005. Gordon Castle, Orton, Delfur, Carron and Knockando Estates volunteered to host experimental anglers. A Scottish Executive licence was granted, and fishing is taking place between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 15<sup>th</sup> December. Results for 2004 and 2005 will be collated during the winter.



*(Photo: Malcolm Newbould)*

A fresh-run October grilse, floy-tagged and ready for release

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