

# DEVON ANGLING REVIEW

**The Newsletter of the Devon Angling Association**

## Season 2024 Summary:

As ever the 2024 season on the river was very well supported by members with good permit sales. It was another season of challenging weather with the river frequently running at very low levels. When the heavens opened in late August and early September the river finally got a decent flush!

Brown Trout angling in low water is often challenging, but even in these conditions' anglers were able to land some specimen trout. To get the best chance of landing trout, late evening fishing proved particularly popular this year. Once again, the upstream nymph angling community proved adept at landing the specimen fish, in all conditions!

In total, a mere eleven Salmon were landed alongside six Sea Trout. This was a disappointment, particularly when other rivers in the Forth catchment were having good runs and catches of fish. It is difficult not to speculate that the combination of over-extraction of water in Glendevon and the barrier created by the tidal weir at Cambus are major contributors to these relatively poor catches?

It is disappointing to report that there was a poaching incident at the weir pool at Dollar which was reported to the Crown Bailiff for investigation.

Glenquey proved to be a happy hunting ground for members and visitors with Trout up to 2.5lb being caught. A typical Glenquey trout is around 0.5lb but much larger fish, do appear periodically, particularly when the level of the reservoir drops.

Jim McGuire stepped down from the roll of River Bailiff after many years dutifully patrolling the riverbanks, The DAA extends it thanks for his contribution as a bailiff and as integral member of the work parties.

The DAA work parties have completed another year of path cutting, fallen lumber clearance, stile/gate maintenance etc. The winter storms have already given them a long list of jobs to do in the 2025 season and are more than happy to accommodate any eager hands interested in a bit of graft and banter!

Thanks to the support and hard work of the Forth Rivers Trust and Crown Estate Scotland we have made some tangible progress on several projects which are covered elsewhere in the Newsletter.

## River Devon: Invasive Non-native Species Project:

In 2023, the DAA approached Forth Rivers Trust [FRT] for help addressing the problem of invasive non-native species [INNS] of plants which are well established throughout the catchment. Thanks to a grant from Crown Estate Scotland, we were able to engage to undertake a series of measures through 2023 and 2024.

NatureScot consider that INNS are classified as one of the principal threats to riparian eco-systems. A number of these plant species are characterized by their ability to colonise, overcrowd, and out compete native flora species. The spread of these species leaves the riverbanks dominated by single species and have a direct impact on the biodiversity of the river system. The Devon is particularly dominated by Himalayan Balsam, whose root system is much shallower and less extensive than native flora, which leaves the banks at risk from excessive erosion.



The first tasks were to engage with landowners and then to identify and map INNS species in the whole catchment from source. It will come as no surprise to anglers that the principal INNS species encountered were Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed, but a small infestation of Giant Hogweed was identified along with Bamboo and, of course, American Mink.



*Japanese Knotweed treated by stem injection in the river bed*

Treatment by spraying of the Giant Hogweed infestation began in 2023 and will be continued for at least 9 years.

Treatment of the Japanese Knotweed began in 2023 from the upstream extent below Glendevon reservoir downstream through a combination of stem injection and spraying (stem injection being used on exposed banks and where stems are within the river. The FRT have been able to secure additional funding from the EU Merlin funding programme to engage the Invasive Weed Agency to treat Japanese Knotweed outside the areas that the DAA had funded. As a consequence, the full length of the River Devon has been treated for Japanese Knotweed in 2024 through a mixture of spray and stem injection techniques.

The EU Merlin funding has also supported a trial use of Rust Fungus on Himalayan Balsam along the Devon. The fungus targets Himalayan Balsam delaying and reducing seeding, thereby increasing the time available in the growing season for treatment.

FRT secured funding from NatureScot's Nature Restoration Fund to engage with local communities to begin controlling Himalayan Balsam. This began in earnest in 2024 where the most upstream source of Himalayan Balsam was located Muckhart Community Woodland and Muckhart Golf Club. The local community throughout the summer have actively engaged in clearing Balsam over the length of the Back Burn.

## **Beavers:**

It is now common knowledge that Beavers have established themselves along the Devon and Black Devon catchment and there is plenty of evidence of their teeth sharpening prowess!

We do not expect there to be any direct conflict between our angling interests and the beaver population, but periodically it is likely that there will need to be some active management required to minimise their impacts. They are a protected species and NatureScot provide advice and resources for managing their impacts.

Chris Ward spotted one of the mature trees at the Haugh had been worked on by one of the local beavers. In line with NatureScot advice, Keith Broomfield and Chris secured the tree survival using 12-15 wire gauge weld mesh. An excellent barrier to the beavers' ambitious lumberjacking!

One of the upsides of their tree felling exploits, particularly close to riverbanks, is the that in time the roots of broadleaf trees will often pollard. This is the natural process of regrowing with a dense head of foliage, which provide excellent cover for immature fish (and used by medieval foresters to encourage new growths of wood for poles/posts and to provide fodder for beasts).



## **Dennis Toon – an appreciation:**

Dennis Toon who had been a member of the Devon Angling Associations for decades, passed away on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

Dennis became a committee member in 1983 and finally resigned in 2023, having given 40 years' service to the DAA. He represented the DAA on various bodies including:

- Co-opted member of the Forth District Salmon Fishery Board from 2010 to 2014
- Chair of the River Forth Fisheries Trust (now FRT) between 2010 and 2015.
- Chair of the Ochils Landscape Partnership between 2011 and 2015

In recent years he had been involved in Enabling Projects in Clackmannanshire [EPIC] which built the walkway above Dollar Weir and supported the DAA in a number of projects.

While not a native of Clackmannanshire over the years he developed an encyclopedic knowledge and love of the River Devon, Strathdevon and his adopted home of Dollar. He was very devoted to Dollar, where he and his wife Val were actively involved in the creation of Dollar Museum (where he was chair of the trustees) and more recently was the founder chair of the Dollar Community Development Trust.

Dennis made an important contribution to the DAA, Dollar and wider environmental improvements throughout the catchment. The Association pass on both their sincere appreciation and condolences to the Toon family.

## **Devon Restoration Development**

The Forth Rivers Trust have completed the initial survey and design work for restoration works in the vicinity of Taits Tomb. This is an area which sits in the natural flood plain of the River Devon, where the river has a meandering course. In recent years, banks have been heavily poached by cattle who have free access to both banks. This has accelerated erosion of the banks in recent spates.

The project intends to use natural flood management techniques by mimicking natural flood plain activity by slowing the flow of water by reconnecting the river to its flood plain. This will be achieved by recreating natural flood plain features (ponds, oxbow lakes and wetlands), chutes/riffles to allow flood water onto the plain during spates (designed to have no impact on river levels in normal conditions) and engineering works to protect the Black Bridge from erosion. A buffer zone will be introduced by offset fencing to keep stock out and there will be areas of broadleaf tree planting.

The net gain will be the Devon behaving naturally, a flood plain that is less likely to dry up, a cattle free river, greater cover for juvenile fish and a wider biodiversity.

The landowners are apparently very supportive of the project and the Trust are beginning the difficult task of seeking partners and funders for the project.



## **Weir removal**

The outline design and feasibility study for the removal of Dollar Weir has been successfully completed. The regulatory authorities are supportive of scheme. The Forth Rivers Trust are now seeking funding to complete the detailed design, authorisations/consents and removal works. This is an area which the Trust have a lot of experience in, having completed similar projects in the catchment (including on the West Lothian Almond).

The Trust have continued their discussions with SEPA and Diaego about the removal of the weir at Cambus. This is a complex issue, requiring our patience but more has been probably being achieved in the last year, than in the previous decade.



## What a whopper – Part 1 - Finnock



In late August Alan Armstrong took his grandson Lewis for a wee fishing session. Using a collapsable spinning rod, a No.1 gold mepps and all his might he managed to land this beautiful 6lb Finnock (Sea Trout). As Alan said at the time, enviously, beginners' luck!

## What a whopper – Part 2 - Salmon

It's a well recorded fact that Georgina Ballantine landed the largest rod caught salmon in 1922, on the Glendelvine beat of the River Tay near Caputh. Georgina was a remarkable woman, a native of Caputh who had served as a nurse during WW1. By the time she reached her early thirties she suffered terribly from arthritis and by 1922 her hands were afflicted.

On the day in question, she had already landed three salmon of 25lb, 17lb and 11lb, but in the late afternoon while harling with her father, when she was able to land a cock salmon of 64lb, half of Georgina's own body weight and after a two-hour battle. An unbeaten record.

But is that the record? Perhaps not. There were rumours of a massive salmon landed in either 1901 or 1902 in the Devon's tidal pool at Cambus. It was purportedly a massive black salmon, heavily infested with sea lice, very ugly but weighing an incredible 103lb! Mr W.L Calderwood, Inspector for the Scottish Fisheries Board, interviewed a "*quiet, self-reliant man*" (probably a polite euphemism perhaps for a well-regarded poacher) who landed the fish with two companions. Calderwood is quoted "*No visible record of the fish was retained, since the possession of the fish was fraught with a certain amount of danger to the captors. I have, however no reason to doubt the statement of my informant*" and "*personally believe that in reporting the matter, I am recording the greatest known weight of any British salmon.*"



## What a whopper – Part 3 - Whales

Is a 103lb salmon the biggest creature caught at Cambus? ..... Not even close, In August 1850, whales were spotted off Boness harbour, they carried on unhindered as far as Dunmore, where a boat was launched to chase the whales up the Forth. By the time they reached Cambus, more boats arrived from Cambus and Alloa, accompanied from the shore by the citizens of Cambus. The whales were forced into the tidal pool of the Devon and attacked from shore and boats with harpoons, gaffes and ropes. The pod was stranded by the receding tide and killed. A total of 37 "whales" were killed partially butchered by locals before eventually being towed down stream to the markets of Leith and Kirkcaldy.

Contemporary reports described them as bottle nosed, being 10-20 feet in length and referred to as Grampus suggesting that these were a pod of Risso's Dolphin (though they may have been the larger Northern Bottlenose Whales) and were probably chasing salmon upstream. A typical Risso's will weigh anything between 600lb and 1000lb (0.3 to 0.5 tonnes). By all account the children of Cambus were traumatised by the screams of the whales and the whole community by the almighty stench of the rotting remains until a spate finally washed the remains into the Forth. A different age!