

Winter 2025

Issue 27

DEVON ANGLING REVIEW

The Newsletter of the Devon Angling Association

Season 2025 Summary:

As ever, the 2025 season on the river was very well supported by members with good permit sales. In the opening paragraph of last year's newsletter we noted "*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!*" well frankly that pretty much summed up the 2025 season too!

Despite the challenging conditions in the first three quarters of the season, the Brown Trout angling still produced some quality fishing though often requiring stealth, patience and the correct choice of fly. Once again specimen Brown Trout were landed, including a special fish by James Beveridge [see later in the newsletter].

Salmon had been seen and a single 7.5lb specimen was caught in September during early spates. Finally, a decent run arrived in early October and continued to arrive well after the end of the season. Eight Salmon [5lb to 7.5lb] in total were reported landed along with two sea trout. This was a disappointment, particularly when adjacent rivers in the Forth catchment were having good runs and catches of fish pretty much throughout the whole season. Clearly fish are only entering the river when there is sufficient water for the fish to get over the weir at Cambus (river spate and/or high tide). Concern was raised about the potential impact on the breeding stock, so the Association commissioned the Forth Rivers Trust to undertake electrofishing of the main spawning burns, which showed good populations of juvenile Salmon and Trout.

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

The DAA work parties have completed another year of path cutting, fallen lumber clearance, stile/gate maintenance etc. In addition, Alan Graham, Robert Wright and friends have undertaken a significant project to improve cover for juvenile fish and provide improved biodiversity in the river.

Once again, the DAA are proud to support and sponsor the Forth Rivers Trust 'Fish in the Classroom' initiative. A local primary school will rear Brown Trout in their classrooms, while learning about the environment and their local river, before releasing the fish.

Thanks to the support and hard work of the Forth Rivers Trust and Crown Estate Scotland we have continued to make some tangible progress on several projects.



River Devon: Invasive Non-native Species Project:

As we reported last year, the DAA approached Forth Rivers Trust [FRT] to help address 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 and funding from other parties including Clackmannanshire Council, we were able with the considerable support of the Trust to undertake a programme of works dealing with the our main INNS species from 2023 to date.

The principal INNS species which dominate the River Devon catchment are Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam. Contractors have sprayed and stem injected the extensive strands of Japanese Knotweed (and limited areas of Giant Hogweed) from Glendevon down to Cambus. This October saw Forth Rivers Trust staff complete surveys to track down any fresh hotspots along the catchment to allow for planning for further spraying.

Alongside the extensive cutting and strimming undertaken by the DAA work parties; various community groups along the river have been undertaking 'Balsam Bashes' to remove Himalayan Balsam plant before they have any opportunity to seed. One of the most active groups is based at Muckhart and have been working with the Trust clearing Himalayan Balsam from the meadows and watercourses leading down to the Devon.

The Forth Rivers Trust are collaborating with CABI [Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International, a global non-profit organization focused on solving problems in agriculture and the environment through scientific knowledge and expertise] for dealing with Himalayan Balsam. Over the last twenty years CABI have undertaken extensive research into natural solutions for dealing with Himalayan Balsam, starting first with surveys in India and Pakistan in the plants natural habitat, looking for natural enemies that could be used as bio-control agent. These studies identified a rust fungus, with the catchy name '*Puccinia komarovii* var. *glanduliferae*', was an excellent control agent. The fungus was extensively tested to ensure that it posed no threat to any other species. It was approved by UK and European regulators for use in controlling Himalayan Balsam and has been used on over 50 sites throughout the UK. Trust staff collected seeds for CABI to grow on, in controlled laboratory environments, to check that the fungus would be appropriate to use on the Himalayan Balsam in the River Devon catchment.

The Forth River Trust welcomes reports of INNS species and now provides a platform to report your sightings. The DAA website will have a copy of the link to the survey and a list of the INNS species complete with ID sheets for each species.



Devon Restoration Development & Weir Removal

Last year we introduced the Forth Rivers Trust proposal for restoration works to the River Devon and its associated flood plain in the vicinity of Taits Tomb, including extensive fencing to keep stock out of the river. The scheme has progressed, albeit slowly, as the Trust endeavor to secure funding. The same fate befalls the proposal for removing the weir at Dollar. Most of the technical design and consultation has been completed and the Trust are again seeking funding to move the scheme forward.

Catching a big Devon Brown Trout on a dry fly



Jamie Beveridge while fishing solo on the Devon in late May spotted a trout feeding at or near the surface and covered the fish with a barbless mayfly style dry fly. He had the good fortune of getting a take and landing the fish above. He beached the fish in a shallow channel so he could lift it and place in his net for weighing. The fish was an 8.5lb female fish, which as soon as it was weighed, was returned to the river.

Quite an achievement to land the largest fish of the season on the DAA waters; a Brown Trout and caught on a dry fly!

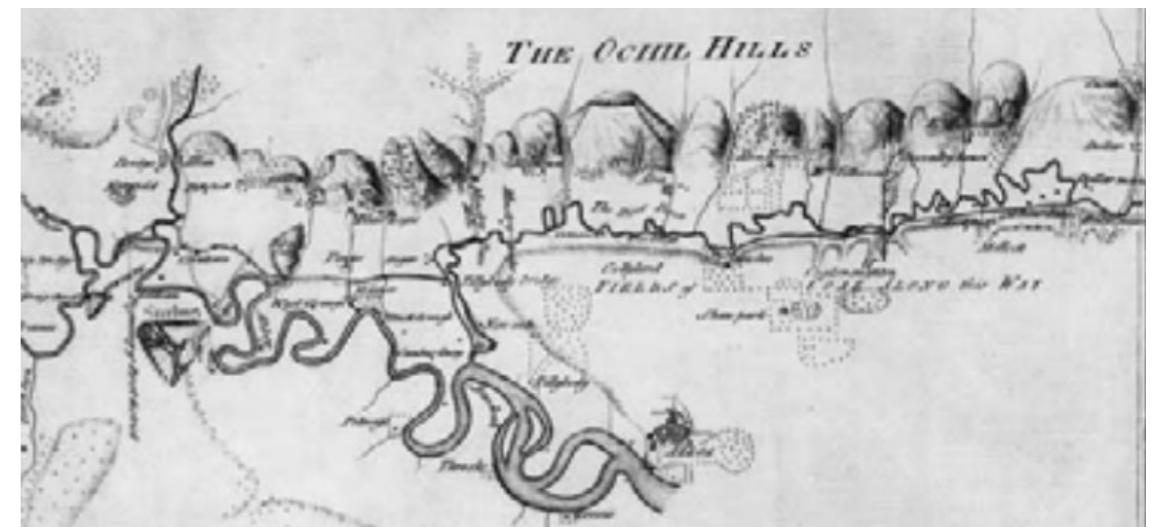
What might have been!

While parts of the river run a very natural course, careful observers will notice that at times past there are sections of the river which have been subject to extensive management. Some of this is quite modern, for example protecting sewage works outfalls or bridge abutments from erosion. Others are probably 150-200 years old associated with the mills along the river, for example the long straight section of the river from downstream of Rackmill where the banks are protected by old wooden piles, stone walls etc.

In the middle years of the eighteenth century, the great landowners and industrialists of Clackmannanshire and Stirlingshire began to explore transport options to move Clackmannanshire coal directly to the ports on the Forth and to move coal to fire lime kilns for improvements to the newly reclaimed carse land west of Stirling. Two of the greats of British engineering were involved:

1. John Smeaton, the father of civil engineering – in 1766 made a proposal for the construction of a canal linking coal workings at Melloch Foot with a new harbour at Cambus.

2. James Watt, most famous for his work developing steam engines – in 1774 James Watt alongside James Morrison were involved in a much more ambitious plan to move coal from the Devon Valley to Gartmore. This would have involved a canal from Rackmill to Tullibody Old Bridge connecting to a branch to Cambus, the canal would join the Forth below Stirling, boats would then navigate the tidal river to Stirling and then to an improved River Forth to Gartmore and the Goodie Water to near Thornhill. The attached plan (courtesy of the National Library of Scotland) produced by James Morrison in 1774, shows the canal running parallel to the Devon before crossing to join the Forth at Manor



Both schemes never came to fruition, principally on costs (which included purchasing a great deal of prime agricultural land) but also the advances of technology (ironically Watts contribution to the steam age) and the interest of the mill owners. Had either scheme been successful we could have a very different river system now!

River habitat improvements

Members may have across the work of a small group of volunteers led by Bob Wright and Alan Graham who have taken on the herculean task of habitat improvements. Their objective has been to provide greater cover for fish from predators, improve the habitat for invertebrates and provide shelter/sanctuary for juvenile fish, by two principal techniques.



1. Transplanting existing aquatic plants to areas currently devoid of aquatic plants. These plants provide important shelter for juvenile fish and habitats for invertebrates
2. Traditionally fallen lumber would be hauled from the river and cut up. They have now been cutting the lumber to handleable lengths, and then placing fallen lumber along the margins secured with wire hawsers. These bodies of fallen lumber provide a tried and tested means of providing cover for fish from predators and shaded areas.

These are being placed in a manner to improve the habitats without detriment to the anglers.

Anyone wishing to help out with this and the other works undertaken by work parties on the Devon and Glenquay, please just get in touch with the Association.

Best of luck for the 2026 season to all our members and visitors.