

DFA 2014 AGM– SECRETARY’S REPORT

- **2013 Season – [a] Catches** – after the very wet summer of 2012, when the rod catches, as advised to the EA, were 119 salmon and 261 sea trout, it would seem that last year’s very dry summer resulted, in line with other rivers in the area, in excellent catches of sea trout - probably more than 700, including a substantial number of schoolies later in the season, but much lower numbers of salmon – probably around 50 with hardly a grilse in sight. Our two operating netmen [we pay one not to net] had a better, but not a great year, catching 28 salmon [2012 – 11] and 57 sea trout [2012 – 16] . With such a wet winter redd counting was almost impossible, but good numbers of fish were spotted at Riddon on the Wallabrook and a number of sea trout were spotted before the rains came in December

[b] the Westcountry Rivers Trust – now headed up by Jonathan Bailey who moved from the EA in November, with Dylan Bright moving to become head of SWW’s Environmental services – have again been active on our behalf. 2013 was the second year of their three year Catchment Restoration Fund project aimed at trying to ensure the river reaches “Good Ecological Status” by 2016 using DEFRA monies. Their main works have included [i] **electro-fishing** on 24 sites throughout the upper river catchment [ii] excellent **gravel cleaning** [contracted work] on the Wallabrook, Cherrybrook and Stannonbrook [iii] a walk-over survey of the West Webburn above Ponsworthy, which will help us to agree what needs to be done this year [iv] **the removal of a major obstacle** in the Lower Wallabrook and a walk over survey of that stream to identify coppicing and other work that will be done this year, liasing with the Duchy’s own work plan [v] extensive work with the EA, Natural England, the DNPA and the Duchy aimed at getting approval for **our liming trial** on an upper catchment stream, which we have been talking about for the last three years. Having thought we had EA approval in the autumn to using the Blackabrook for this trial it now appears we are going to find another site, very frustrating! An update will be given at the meeting.

- **Main objectives for 2014** – working closely with the WRT and EA our aims are:
 - [a] to get agreement to our **liming trial** aimed at raising ph levels [there is concern that although low ph levels may not be killing our juveniles they are being affected when, as smolts, they meet salt water in the estuary]
 - [b] to try to get agreement to a **reduction in the amount of water abstracted** especially from the upper river system
 - [c] to **remove any obstacles** to upstream and downstream migration of our salmon and sea trout, including coppicing work on the lower Wallabrook
 - [d] to improve our **spawning gravels** and areas of juvenile habitat
 - [e] to carry out the **spraying of hemlock** and undertake other improvement works in the West Webburn.
 - [f] to obtain a **reduction to our current Net Limitation Order** of three.
 - [g] to initiate a **cull of our cormorants and gooseanders** using new Government guide lines which will be published in May.
 - [h] to revise our current **bye-laws** for the river with the EA.

Additionally [i]the WRT will carry out a **walk-over survey of the East Webburn** [ii] both the WRT and the EA will be carrying out extensive **electro-fishing operations**, which should give a better idea of the numbers of our juveniles in the river system.

NB A detailed Work Plan for the year will be agreed with the EA and the WRT at our forthcoming Partnership meeting

- **The Totnes Weir Hydro-electric scheme** – we are still optimistic that work on this project will start this summer either on the left or on the right bank. This scheme includes two new fish passes both to be equipped with fish counters which should, for the first time, give us an idea of the number of migratory fish in the river nb a new fish counter in the Teign at Sowton has already recorded over 2,500 fish including a number of large salmon. Additionally a hydro scheme is being planned for **Kilbury** which scheme, hopefully, will also include a fish counter.
- **Estuarial and off- shore netting** – we are becoming increasingly concerned about the extent of the offshore netting in our coastal waters. Roger Furniss will give us more information at the meeting.