

DFA 2018 AGM SECRETARY'S REPORT

Although we appeared to have a reasonable run of sea trout last year numbers of salmon were disappointingly low, additionally there was a considerable amount of disease before July, which clearly affected our catches— numbers still awaited from the EA – so there seems little point on dwelling for long on last season other than to say [a] that it appears likely the higher than normal numbers of sea lice found on our incoming sea trout were creating lesions which were then attacked by the saprolegnia fungus that exists in all rivers [b] the WRT and EA electro- fishing results were only a little down on 2016 and [c] November and December redd counting results was slightly better than in 2016 [more information on both at the meeting] . Additionally the extensive monitoring of the quality of the river's water by Plymouth University, the EA, SWW, the DWLT and WRT throughout the year did not produce any untoward results or provide reasons why our stocks of salmon and sea trout appear to be lower than in the Teign, or indicate reasons why disease appears to have been worse on our river than in other SW rivers.

Looking forward to this year with our season about to open I was taken by a letter in this month's Trout and Salmon from which I quote "Here we are standing on the edge of a new season. It may not be as good as it used to be....and if salmon are in terminal decline then we have only a finite amount of time to enjoy fishing for them, and if they are not then we have to hope that all the efforts being made on their behalf will have a positive impact – perhaps this season will be the best for some time. In either case let's have a bit of positivity about the place. It's a new season, a new year and so let's all hope for better things to come and try to give the impression that we do actually enjoy ourselves some of the time – it might help to attract a few new faces to our sport!"

And the positive things about the future for our river include:

- ! After many years when we really had no one to turn to within the EA, except Simon Toms for special situations, Chris Lawson is now back in post in Exeter and we have a very well respected and experienced Bailliff in Tam Sneddon now responsible for our river. We also have the Westcountry Rivers Trust's Bruce Stockley and Olivia Creswell to turn to in the event of problems, as well as carry out our liming trial and to do our important electro-fishing in the summer.
- ! Dave French will now be in charge of all our "in river" works, including taking measures to improve our spawning gravels in the upper river system, ensuring any obstacles to fish migration are removed and undertaking our redd counting in November and December. With his unrivalled knowledge and experience of the river we are very fortunate to have him.
- ! The new IFCA byelaws on netting in our estuary mean that the only [legal] netting that will take place will be for sand eels close to the mouth.
- ! The results of the EA's Salmon Consultation process are still not [at the time of writing] clear but it seems that we are unlikely to have any further mandatory restrictions imposed on anglers – hopefully more information will be available before our meeting.
- ! Although we are no closer to persuading Canoe England to agree to a "Voluntary Access Arrangement" at least the DNPA have amended their canoeing web site to reflect both the legal situation and that canoeing is only permitted between October 1st and March 30th below Dartmeet.
- ! We are hopeful that a new fish pass will be installed on Holne Weir before the autumn. Although it is clear that fish have no problems getting over the weir in high water, as Pete Kibel has said, we have no way of knowing how many are delayed, or even put off from trying to get over the weir, in low water. Everyone agrees we need to make sure that we make it as easy as possible for our salmon and sea trout to reach their spawning grounds, and one of the EA's five points in their recent strategy to improve salmon stocks is the removal of all obstacles [to migration].
- ! The members of our Water Quality group will continue to monitor the quality of the river's water, and it is hoped that our Fly Life Project will start. We also will be seeing if it is going to be possible to raise funds to increase our monitoring to include the effect that synthetic chemicals may be having on our fish stocks, however as this is likely to cost around £80,000 over 4 years this may be one ambition we fail to achieve.
- ! The Westcountry Rivers Trust will continue their liming trial, in conjunction with Plymouth University, on a tributary of the upper West Dart and hope to be allowed to progress the trial to using unbagged limestone by the EA this spring – more information at the meeting.
- ! SWW's Upstream Thinking project is producing substantial funds for use by the DWLT and WRT in our catchment – approx. £275,000 in 2017 and approx. £230,000 this year. David Smith, head of Upstream Thinking, is our guest speaker at our meeting and will explain what these amounts are being spent on and the benefits to our river.

- ! The two new fish passes on Totnes Weir are now fully operational and we should get regular reports on the number of both salmon and sea trout that have swum up them, with Phil Prowse and Chris Glover involved in the analysis of the photographic information. Towards the end of last year Pete Kibel told us the numbers in 2017 were over 3,500 covering both salmon and sea trout, with the great majority being sea trout.