

Tay Salmon News

from the Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board

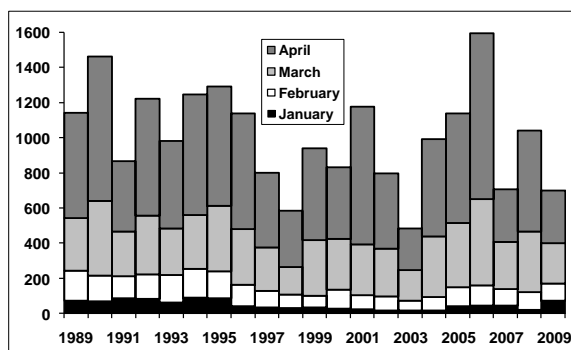
A promising start, turned sour

The 2009 salmon season started with great promise. With about 80 springers caught in January it was the best start to the season since 1995. February also held some promise, but come March catches just did not rise as they ought to have and the expected good fishing of April just did not happen.

Like last year a notable feature was a better showing of larger fish in the teens and even twenties of pounds, the 3 sea-winter fish for which the Tay was long famed. As these fish tend to run very early in the year their better numbers helped the start of the season.

It was the smaller 2 sea-winter fish, the 7 to 10 pounders which are the normal backbone of the spring run, which were not in expected numbers.

It looks likely that the spring catches up to the end of April will be among the poorest on record, despite the promising start in January and February, though not as bad as 2003. Fortunately 2003 was rescued by a good May. Will it happen this year? Perhaps, but we cannot assume this.



Estimated spring 2009 catches compared to other recent years.



A lovely 25 pound Tay springer caught at Stanley which was released. Bigger fish have once again been a feature of this season.

100% catch and release now required

As a result of the widespread failure of 2 sea-winter salmon runs (see overleaf) the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards has taken the unprecedented step of asking all boards and anglers to consider releasing all salmon caught for the remainder of this spring.

The Tay Board has endorsed this view and recommends that anglers should release all salmon caught during May 2009.

Most anglers already release nearly all the spring fish they catch and we hope that in this difficult time anglers will act responsibly to ensure the future of the salmon and their sport by doing that extra bit. It is very important that **all** salmon fisheries comply with this.

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We are not alone!

This spring's downturn has not only affected the Tay but all rivers along the east and north coasts of Scotland. Catches on the Tweed have been even more affected than those on the Tay, being about 70% below the average. The Dee and the Esks have also fished less well.

It seems clear therefore that the root of this problem lies at sea and probably represents another facet of the problem of small and thin grilse we have been seeing in recent years. Recent research by St Andrews University has implicated warmer winters in the Norwegian Sea as a potential cause.

Perhaps the only good news is that poor feeding in early sea-life may be causing a few more salmon to remain longer at sea and return as real specimen fish.

River Tay Conservation and Awards Dinner

The Tay Conservation and Awards Dinner will be held at Ballathie House Hotel on **11 June 2009**, with a prize draw and Auction to raise funds for River Tay Conservation and Development projects. The guest speaker will be Jim Davidson.

The following awards will be presented at the dinner:

The Ballathie Trophy for the Tay Salmon Conservation Award;

The Redford Trophy for the largest fish caught and released on Opening Day;

River Tay Long Service Awards.

Some tickets are still available, priced £75 with a limited number of discounted tickets available for angling club members and river workers. For further details contact Lorna Bromley-Martin at TDSFB offices.

What benefit will releasing fish have?

The value of catch-and-release on future fish stocks depends on three big factors: the strength of the run, the proportion of the fish which are exploited and the extent to which juvenile habitats may be underpopulated. Thus the greater the exploitation and amount of vacant juvenile habitat the greater the benefit will be. The latter of course is likely to be related to the former.

Studies have shown that spring salmon are more readily caught than other types. They are exposed to angling for longer and may have a greater degree of unsuppressed hunger. Though data are not available for the Tay, catch rates of 30% or even 40% have been found in some other rivers. Spring salmon are also most in decline and so are most in danger of being "overfished".

So if any type of salmon might benefit from catch-and-release it has got to be the springer. This is particularly true in poor years like this year when the number of eggs laid will be low. In such years it could be crucial. For example, it only requires 33% of springers to be caught by anglers for full catch-and-release to mean 50% more spring salmon on the redds.

While angling is clearly not the cause of this year's major decline in spring salmon, full catch-and-release will have a significant effect on spawner numbers if everyone implements it now.

The future really is in your hands!



Catch and release will be vital in ensuring adequate spawning stocks of spring salmon are maintained this year.