

AFA AGM Chairman's Report 2019

Introduction and Thanks

Welcome to the Old School, South Brent and to this evening's meeting. Thanks to all of you who have come out this evening to support the Association at its AGM.

Firstly I would like to thank the committee for all of their hard work throughout the year. Committees do change, however. Last year Dave Farnworth retired. His position as secretary was taken on by Brian Dent on a temporary basis. We now have a new full time secretary in Paul Woodham and we look forward to working closely with him. We shall be losing another committee member this year as Dennis Dawes will be standing down this year but I'm glad to say that he will continue to fish the river. Thank you Dennis for your contributions to committee meetings. They have certainly enlivened Tuesday evenings!

Catch Returns for 2019

The number of fish caught were:

Salmon 6 (100% returned)

Sea Trout 28 (86% returned)

Brown Trout 485 (99.6% returned)

Year	Salmon	% Released	Sea Trout	% Released	Brown Trout	% Released
2019	6	100	28	86	485	99.6
2018	2	100	25	92	757	99
2017	8	100	21	81	470	100
2016	11	72	47	78	727	99.8
2015	7	70	34	88	886	99.9
2014	8	100	90	74	653	99
2013	10	70	229	83	768	100
2012	22	77	73	72	853	99
2011	39	84	56	72	1037	99
2010	52	78	62	56	855	99
2009	16	75	86	60	616	98
2008	19	68	40	75	779	99
2007	15	80	17	35	1007	99
2006	45	66	46	34	359	97
2005	29		96		436	

2004	31		78		446	
Average	21		67		709	

Brown Trout: Numbers caught were well below the 15 year average of 709 at 485, 20 percent of these were 8 inches or more. Reports from anglers highlight the very low, clear water which persisted for much of the summer; although there are always many other factors at play.

Sea Trout: 28 fish were caught, the biggest being 20 ins. Fishing was difficult to say the least with many anglers fishing without seeing or hearing fish move. The absence of large sea trout was a most worrying.

Salmon: Six fish were caught on Association water and 2 on a private beat in Diptford. Many more salmon were seen this year and as many were hooked and lost as were caught. All fish were caught from mid October to mid November. Water was in excellent condition for long periods of time encouraging fish to run.

I would encourage members to look at the AFA website and access the data available on historic catch rates for all three salmonid species; it makes interesting reading. You will also see that for the last two years Paul has calculated the Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) this allows better comparison of data within and between rivers. For example a five year mean CPUE for Salmon (2012 -2016) SW Rivers=7.3 this year the Avon CPUE for Salmon = 5

Overall, though, a disappointing year particularly for sea trout and brown trout. Returns of migratory fish were very high and I would encourage this trend to continue.

Prizes

The Jim Coombes Trophy for the largest sea trout goes to Stephen Lowe with a fish of 20 ins

The Presidents Prize (Donated by Sir William Peek) Goes to Stephen Lowe with a total of 85 brown trout

The Bob Sadler trophy for the largest brown goes to Dave Farnworth with a fish of 18ins

The Silveridge Conservation award goes to Adrian Cross for releasing 2, Salmon, 8 Sea Trout and 45 brown trout.

The Cedric Potter Trophy for the largest salmon goes to John Roberts with a fish of 26 ins

Ticket Sales

Ticket sales Loddiswell Post Office £ 548 less £55.00 commission leaving net sales of £493.00

Social Events

The annual AFA dinner at the Avon Mill organised by Paul Edginton, was again a success. Riparian owners enjoy the venue and the evening itself. I do wish that members would take the time to attend. Meeting riparian owners and discussing issues is a valuable exercise.

The AFA jolly to the Avon Dam was held once again in 2019. Sadly numbers attending declined to four. After discussion with Brian it was decided to discontinue the event.

River Maintenance 2019.

Our priority for 2019 was to complete riverine improvement on one part of the river, in this case a part of the true right bank on Mortimore's water and part of the water upstream of the cottages pool near Gaza Bridge. It took 5 days to complete and provided in river shelter for fry and smaller fish as well as habitat for fresh water invertebrate species. It is a longterm project and the benefits of such work may take some years to produce results. More projects of this nature are planned for the future as well as making the river more accessible, particularly the lower water.

WRT: As many of you will know the Association has worked closely with the WRT on many projects, all of which are aimed at improving the riverine environment. For the past five years we have been involved with a joint project (WRT, University of Plymouth, SWW) of gravel replacement on the Upper Avon above Lydia Bridge. Funding for this project has come from SWW but this will be reduced during the next five years. Future plans for its continuation will be formulated later this year but i likely to consist of monitoring the movement of gravel with periodic addition of new gravel. I think it safe to say that the gravel replacement scheme has been a success, particularly on the upper reaches.

The association has also re-opened the Rake beat as part of the WRT passport. We hope that this will encourage younger anglers to access our river as well as those who wish to join the waiting list.

SWRA: My attendance at the SWRA has not been as regular as I would have liked for various reasons. Nevertheless minutes are sent regularly and I am capable of keeping up with events.

Riverfly: The Riverfly project has been running for four years now and continues to provide us with valuable data on the invertebrate population of the river and as a pollution indicator. These surveys show that the river has a healthy level of invertebrates species at the base of riverine food chain. During the long, hot spell there were marked changes to areas sampled on the lower water. The growth of algae became a major problem making the sample area above mill bridge almost devoid of invertebrates. The EA were called in in case a pollution incident was the cause, the area was sampled but nothing untoward was found. It was suggested that low flows and high temperatures were to blame.

Overview

I was hoping to bring a little more cheer into my closing remarks this year sadly that is not the case. The situation regarding salmon offers a glimmer of hope as does the gravel replacement data. It seems that trout fry numbers are increasing in selected areas of the upper Avon particularly at Badworthy stream, Bala Brook, Goosepool copse and Badworthy. this can be attributed to the success of the gravel replacement scheme. Salmon fry numbers are also increasing and at good and excellent levels below Ludia Bridge and at S Brent Island. What the long term improvements are we will have to wait and see.

Most disappointing of all were the numbers of brown trout caught (485) and while the numbers were low they are not wholly unusual: since 2004 there have been four years where the catches were lower. In 2006 359 were caught in 2007, however, 1007 were caught our highest number over the last 16 years. This does not mean that we should be complacent but should look afresh at all factors that impact our trout populations and try to ameliorate their impact. I hope that this season sees an improvement in our fishing and I wish you all tighter lines in 2020.

John Roberts