

## AFA AGM Chairman's Report 2023

### Introduction and Thanks

A warm welcome to you all and to our guest speaker for this evening, William May Somerville, vice chair of the SWRA. As always I would like to thank the committee for their help and support throughout the year. Without them my job would be infinitely harder. This year is notable because we will be losing two long standing committee members: our secretary, Brian Dent and Paul Edginton who, for many years, organised our annual dinner. I would like to thank both for all the help and support they have given me and the Association over the years. You will both be greatly missed.

### Catch Returns for 2023

The number of fish caught were:

Salmon 6 (100% returned)

Sea Trout 21 (86% returned)

Brown Trout 2083 (99.9% returned)

Year	Salmon	% Released	Sea Trout	% Released	Brown	% Re-
2022	6	100	21	86	2083	99.9
2021	4	75	32	82	712	99
2020	14	100	34	85	487	99.8
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	
Total	341		1117		11596	
Average	(18)	88	59	73	720	99.3

**Brown Trout:** 2083 fish were caught this year.

**Sea Trout:** 21 fish were caught this year.

**Salmon:** 6 fish were caught on Association water.

## **Prizes**

**The Cedric Potter Trophy** for the largest salmon goes to Andy Myall with a fish of 30 inches.

**The Jim Coombes Trophy** for the largest sea trout goes to Tom Pakes with a fish of 24" (Est 6 lbs)

**The Presidents Prize** (Donated by Sir William Peek) Goes to Tom Pakes with 1233 brown trout caught

**The Bob Sadler trophy** for the largest brown goes to Mike Robinson with a fish of 19 inches.

**The Silveridge Conservation** award goes to Tom Pakes who returned 100% of fish caught

**Catch returns:** I repeat what I wrote last year that I am very pleased to see that the vast majority of anglers are filling in their catch returns online. There are still a few members sending their results by e mail. This is time consuming for those who have to transfer the data on to the master table. Some members are failing to send in any returns. Please send in a return even though it is a nil return. Accurate data is crucial to the way we approach river work and our approach to conservation. I would like to add that returns should be completed by the end of December so that data is available before the AGM

### **Catch and Release**

Last year I spent some time talking about the Associations catch and release policy and the possibility of the EA introducing an England wide compulsory catch and release policy for salmon and a bag limit of two sea trout. At the time of writing I have not heard that is the case. To remind you I repeat what I said last year regarding data we have from 2004 - 2012 and 2013 - 2021

- (1) A marked drop in salmon caught of 73%
- (2) A significant drop in sea trout caught of 37%
- (3) A smaller drop in brown trout caught of 16%
- (4) Brown trout returns are stable at 99%
- (5) An increase of 8% in salmon returned
- (6) A marked increase of 25% in sea trout returned

The increase in the percentage of fish released has been achieved by the goodwill and common sense of AFA members. I must re-emphasise, though, the importance of releasing fish, particularly when numbers are low as they are now. Not only salmon will benefit but also sea trout. Releasing sea trout benefits both sea trout and brown trout stocks and while a release figure of 83% is excellent we must continue to ensure that high release rates are the norm for migratory fish and especially for large sea trout (and in particular large hen sea trout) an absolute priority.

It seems a great shame that for all our good efforts salmon catch rates continue to decline ( or in our case remain very low) an indication that the real problems lie in areas we cannot influence.

### **The Fishing Year**

The year was dominated by high temperatures and low flows which persisted from June to September. Many members reduced their fishing effort during these months particularly for sea trout but also for brown trout. Salmon were seen in the river as early as June but in very low numbers. Low flows persisted until the end of October and only rose consistently in November when all but one of the six salmon were caught; all of them at Kerry Downs. As a footnote it seems that for one reason or another 50% of members did not fish at all this year. The vast majority due to work or family commitments.

**Email Addresses:** I say again that it would be most helpful if all members would contact the membership secretary, Paul Woodham and inform him of their email address. All communications are conducted on line and so it is very important that he has an up to date list of email addresses.

### **Website**

We have a new website courtesy of Jamie Snape at BIG Online. I hope that those of you who have visited the site will agree with me that the company have done a very good job. I will remind you that we also have a Facebook page for day to day items. I would encourage you to report on your fishing experience with a report off catches, flies used, conditions and so on. My thanks to Tom Pakes and James Fillingham for some excellent contributions.

### **Ticket Sales**

Ticket sales via the WRT resumed this year. However due to the exceptionally hot summer the WRT closed the Rake Beat during July and August so reducing any income from them. I'm pleased to say that AFA ticket sales will resume in full next year and will be available from Loddiswell Garden Centre.

### **Social Events**

An excellent annual dinner was had by all at the Avon Mill Garden Centre, my thanks to Paul Edginton for organising this event. It seems unlikely that we shall have this venue again this year. Suggestions for an alternative would be gratefully received.

### **River Maintenance 2022.**

A great deal of work was carried out on the Rake beat in March last year. A few hardy members turned out on several Sundays to complete work on this lovely stretch. Reports from anglers using a WRT ticket were favourably impressed.

It must be said that asking members to carry out heavy work found very few takers. It was decided to contract out work instead. We were lucky to find Dartington Gardening services to carry out five days work on the lower water from Venn Weir to John Locks. I hope to employ this firm again this year to carry out further work.

### **SWRA**

Swra meetings were attended this year. I will little about them as William May Somerville will, I am sure, talk about some of the major topics that have preoccupied the SWRA las

## Review of EA Electrofishing 2022

The survey concentrates on the upper water and feeder streams and, in this respect, follows the previous patterns of EA electro fishing surveys . We have three major surveys that I can access: 1962, 1997 and 2022. Minor surveys occur between these dates usually concentrating on known and important salmon and trout areas.

### 2022 Survey

Concentrates on feeder streams and the upper water only three main river sites are sampled below Lydia Bridge, they are: Avonwick Station, Bickham Bridge and upstream of Knapp Mill. Electrofishing usually took place over 30 - 60 m in length and 1.75 and 8.5 m wide depending on the size of the water sampled. There was usually one run completed on each sample area.

### Broad Sweep of the Survey

The survey shows a variety of fresh water species inhabiting the Avon as well as Saltwater species (Flounder). There are goodish numbers of Bullhead and Stone Loach with minnows and sticklebacks in smaller number. Eels and Elvers were found but in very reduced numbers than before. I was pleased to see Lampreys present but again in small numbers. None of the above were to be found above Lydia Bridge.

### Brown Trout

Site: Of the ten sites sampled the overwhelmingly important ones were: Zeal (Bala Brook), Badworthy, Avon Mill (Glazebrook) and Avonwick Station. of the 387 trout caught 306 were caught at these locations. Sampling sites further downstream had much reduced populations. This accords with the 2019 WRT EF programme.

Size: The size of trout did not show a trend. The spread of sizes were as wide at Zeal as they were upstream of Knapp Mill. Brown Trout on the Avon tend to be small. About 42% were between 2-3 inches in length and 32% between 4-6 inches. The figures are in line with the 1962 survey which remarked on the lack of fish in excess of 10 inches. They found that only 1.14% of trout in that survey measure 10 inches or more.

### Salmon

The survey concentrated on Salmon fry and is, perhaps, our greatest area of concern. Two sites, Avonwick Station and Avon Mill (The Glazebrook) contained 84% of salmon fry caught. Surprisingly, no fry were caught above Lydia Bridge! Two of those sites Zeal (Bala Brook) and Badworthy being part of the re-gravelling programme carried out by the WRT. WRT Electrofishing does show healthy numbers of salmon fry below Lydia Bridge, Brent Island and Avonwick. Interestingly the 2022 survey pretty much mirrors the 1962 survey but with a large increase in the numbers found in the Glazebrook.

## **The future**

Last year I talked a little about the long term future of the AFA. It seems that the vast majority of members are happy fishing the river. I was particularly concerned about the governance of the Association. As I mentioned earlier we have lost two valuable members this year and will lose further members next year. We face a problem, not uncommon in many clubs and associations, of an ageing membership. I am very pleased to hear that people have responded positively to our call for committee membership and I hope that this continues next year.

## **Overview**

It seems that a major contributor to our problems with declining fish stocks is climate change. This was brought home to us this year with a long and very hot summer. Not only that but we have also seen an increase in drier springs and warmer winters both of which impact fish stocks in general, but salmon stocks in particular. I do not believe that rod and line anglers are a major cause of this decline. Nevertheless we must play our part by returning fish. If nothing else it will allow us to occupy the moral high ground. Fishing this little river is still a delight. In November my good friend Richard Power had a day fishing for salmon in a good spate. It was a blank day but a most enjoyable one with good company in a beautiful environment and practicing our art. Ninety per cent of fishing is exactly that. Tight lines in 2023.

John Roberts