

# AFA AGM Chairman's Report 2025

## **Introduction and Thanks**

Good evening everyone and welcome to Heron Valley and to our annual General Meeting and many thanks to Barney Green for arranging the venue. May I also thank Louise Wainwright for agreeing to be our guest speaker and for all the hard work she does on behalf of our river. 2024 saw the retirement of two stalwart committee members in Patrick Bromley and Paul Woodham, their hard work and dedication will be sorely missed. In February of last year we lost Mike Cooper whose work as Riparian Owner Liaison Officer, angler and friend will be greatly missed by me and many others in the Association. I have said said before that changes to the structure of the AFA are in the air and I repeat, then, what I said last year to newer and younger members of the Association that the future of the AFA is in your hands and that it is time to consider who will lead the Association in the coming decades.

## **Catch Returns for 2024 season**

Good catches of Brown trout are still possible on the river with well over a thousand caught again this year. Sea Trout numbers are up from last year with fifty seven coming to the net. Sadly, only three salmon were caught but decent numbers were seen ascending the falls at Lydia Bridge and evidence of the downward movement of Kelts were seen at Loddiswell. I have to report that fishing effort was well down this year with (at the time of writing) 16 members reporting no fishing on the river this year and a further 12 not submitting a return). There is no doubt in my mind that, like many other rivers in the South West, the Avon is affected by environmental factors beyond our immediate control. To name but one: The storm overflow at South Brent in 2022 was 609 hours in 2023 a little over 3000 hours! I suspect Louise might enlarge on some of the other factors later. To sum up then:

The number of fish caught were:

Salmon 3 (100% returned)

Sea Trout 45 (100% returned)

Brown Trout 1212 (100% returned)

## Catches 2004 to 2024

Year	Salmon	% Released	Sea Trout	% Re-	Brown	% Re-
2024	3	100	45	100	1201	100
2023	2	100	17	86	1740	100
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	(16)	90	55	75	720	99.3

**Brown Trout:** 1740 fish were caught this year.

**Sea Trout:** 17 fish were caught this year.

**Salmon:** 2 fish were caught on Association water.

## Prizes

**The Cedric Potter Trophy** for the largest salmon goes to Ollie Yeoward with a fish of 38 inches.

**The Jim Coombes Trophy** for the largest sea trout goes to Tom Pakes with a fish of 22.5”

**The Presidents Prize** (Donated by Sir William Peek) Goes to Tom Pakes with 842 brown trout

**The Bob Sadler trophy** for the largest brown goes to Tom Pakes with a fish of 20.5 inches.

**The Silveridge Conservation** award goes to Tom Pakes who returned 100% of 879 fish

## The Fishing Year

If 2023 was dry then 2024 was wet, wet, wet. Early fishing proved difficult, but as the year progressed trout fishing became much better in the morning and, especially, the evening. The overall catch rate was down on 2023 but still substantial at 1201. Sea trout numbers were up on 2023, 45 as opposed to 17. Salmon numbers remained low with only 3 caught and returned. I am surprised when I read the returns at how many members did not fish in 2024. Of the 41 returns I have received, 40 percent did not fish. Our river data depends on numbers of fish caught. If our fishing effort remains low it affects our returns and our status as a river.

**Catch Returns:** Catch returns are now recorded on line. I believe that some members have had problems finding the Google Form we use as their browser will not permit entry to our website as it registers as unsafe. I have spoken to Moortech about this and they are looking into it. I did email all members a link to Google Docs which was successful. I believe. Given that catch returns are so easy to complete I am rather surprised and disappointed to still be waiting for 12 returns (20/01/25).

**Website** The website has now been running in its new form for well over two year and seems to be operating successfully apart from the odd problem which I hope to sorted this year.

**Facebook.** The association as a Facebook page please use it to convey any point of interest. Be careful about putting up photos of fish caught. If you do then make sure the fish is photographed in the water and in the net.

## Ticket Sales

Ticket sales via the WRT continued this year allowing access to the Rake Beat only. A net amount of £337 was raised.

**Social Events** There was no annual dinner in 2024. This event will be reintroduced this year and it is to be hoped that many more members will attend. It is a good way to meet fellow anglers and committee members as well as our riparian owners.

**River Maintenance.** Michael Lock continues to carry out major bank work on the Avon. This year his work included bank clearing at Kerry Downs as well as at the lower water.

**SWRA Meetings.** I attended meeting of the SWRA on Tuesday 14 January and shall attend the AGM in April. The major topic for discussion was the plight of salmon in the South West. In 2024 456 salmon were caught on the 20 or so rivers in the South West, 10 of which were taken! To put this into perspective in the SW in 1996 5093 salmon were caught in nets and 2,372 by rods. There was, nevertheless, a very positive report from Andy Hurst from the Lune and Wyre on how individual associations can improve the riverine environment and consequently the numbers of salmon and sea trout spawning in the upper reaches of their rivers.

**Gravel replacement.** The gravel replacement on the upper Avon overseen by the WRT has reached the end of its 5 year funding by SWW. I have spoken to Olivia Cresswell of the WRT who are carrying out the work on the upper Avon. She is confident that funding will continue for the next five years. I sincerely hope that this is the case. Due to gravel replacement good numbers of salmon fry are now being found above Shipley Bridge for the first time in many years.

**Riverfly.** I have carried out very little river fly work this year. Nevertheless less, on the few occasions I have sampled numbers of invertebrates have remained pretty constant over the years.

**Devon Avon Champions.** Over the last few years more and more people have become aware of the dangers facing our rivers in the South West. We are very fortunate to have, along side us, Devon Avon Champions and I am very pleased to have as our guest speaker their chair, Louise Wainwright, who will tell us all about the work being done on behalf of the River Avon and it's environs. Many thanks Louise, for all you have done and will do in the future.

**Structure of the Committee:** I am very pleased to announce that we now have a new treasurer in Ian Thompson and a new Riparian Owner Liaison in Barney Green. Many thanks, gentlemen for what you are doing for the Association. My thanks, also to our President and the Committee for all of their continuing hard work.

**Summary.** In my summary last year I spoke about the discouraging, indeed despairing situation regarding salmon and sea trout in our river and the wider south west. Things look even bleaker this year especially regarding salmon but the sea trout situation seems a little better even if it is far from perfect. Nevertheless we must do the best we can with what we have even if the major threats of climate change and fishing at sea are the major threats which we can do little to alter. As you may, or may not, know it is my intention, in a years time, to stand down as chair of the Association. I feel that I have done all I can do as chair and it is time a new and younger person to take the Association into the next decade. The Association has a year to do this and I would urge members who wish to serve to come forward and use their energy and talents for the betterment of this lovely river of ours. Tight lines for 2025 everyone.

John Roberts (Chair AFA)