

## WSA MISSION STATEMENT

We wish to improve the salmon population of the Wye by bringing together all individuals, associations and representative bodies sharing their skills and knowledge in a common aim. We want to ensure that funding is targeted towards increasing salmon production and that those efforts are monitored for best practice by qualified scientists. We will lobby the agencies and bodies responsible for factors that are perceived detrimental to the Wye environment. We will seek representation to any relevant body in order to pursue our aims. We want to bring new impetus and new solutions to all areas in order to achieve our goals.

# WSA Newsletter

Wye Salmon Association

August 2011

Issue 2

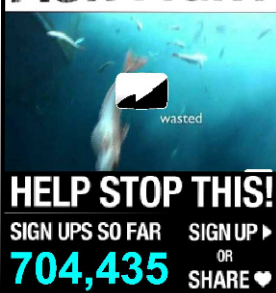
## COMMENT

Issue 1 was delivered to 220 owners, gillies and anglers, since publication a further 45 have added their names to our circulation list. 141 of those recipients have now responded with positive support for our mission & objectives. So what were their responses and comments? Well a good range of positives as you can see on page 2, so where next? We have no intention at this stage of creating a fee paying membership, preferring, to build on the interest in our first newsletter & create a base in preparation to support initiatives that we believe are taking place elsewhere. As we reported in our first issue we believe these will give a kick start to a recovery programme for the river. Key issues we expect to result from these are increased stocking, more effective monitoring of fish stocks & a review with the controlling bodies, of infrastructure and organisational changes necessary to deliver the objectives. Our objective will be to offer skilled resources necessary to deliver a stocking and monitoring programme. More of this in next issue. However we should also be prepared to offer a backup plan and contingency to support the river if the initiatives fail to deliver.

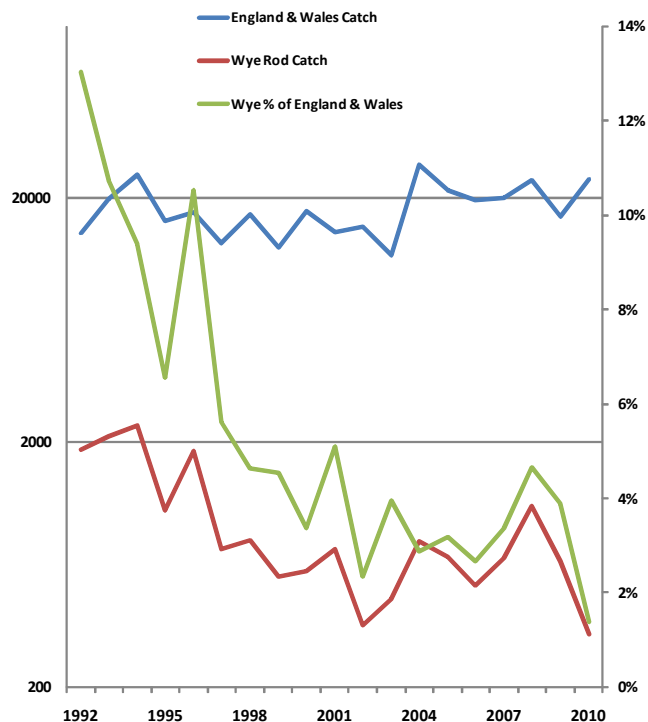
One of our supporters raised the issue of fish kill in the North Sea and Hugh Fearnley Whittingstall's campaign to stop this insane waste. Not directly impacting on Wye perhaps but never the less we have added a link to his campaign below. We have also included in this issue some quotes from the 1976 UWIST reports produced in response to the proposal to enlarge Craig Coch reservoir and regulate the discharge to the river Wye. Designed to provide baseline data for water quality, fisheries and general ecology they make interesting reading.

Stuart Smith

## FISH FIGHT



Half of all fish caught in the North Sea are thrown overboard dead. Over 700,000 people have supported the campaign so far! By supporting the Hugh Fearnley Whittingstall backed campaign your name will be added to a letter sent to Commissioner Maria Damanaki, Members of the Common Fisheries Policy Reform Group, and all MEPs. Help us stop this insane waste, add your name to the petition on [www.fishfight.net/](http://www.fishfight.net/)



Graph shows most recent comparison with England & Wales plus % share of catch

## WHAT WAS RESPONSE TO ISSUE 1?

Paul replied 'congratulations on this, fully support your objectives count me in'

James quickly followed with 'desperately needed before the only way to catch a salmon is in Scotland, good luck, please let me know what I can do to help'

However Jonathon said, amongst a long reply 'count me out of your ill-conceived plan'.

Don wanted 'a bit more detail on who is involved with WSA, what the immediate aims & objectives are & how I can help'.

There followed a number of 'yes, yes, yes' & 'where do I sign' responses

Dave replied with a 'good luck with all of this, & if I can be of any assistance in any way'

Jake said 'this is an initiative that's been needed for a long time, I am sending copy to all my members, good luck'

Peter was bullish & responded 'I am generally in support of the aims of the association, however I feel that one of the key elements in recovery of the Wye is the introduction of a professionally run and managed hatchery along the lines of the one successfully operated by the EA on the River Tyne'

John responded 'Thanks for the email. I do agree with the WSA aims and objects and I would be delighted to receive the next Newsletter'

David said 'Yes, yes, yes.....I did wonder if you would be seeking donations?'

So a good range of in the main positive feedback then, we look forward to responses to issue 2!

## WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE RIVER?

Weather patterns & consequently catches remained much the same on the river during late June & July though there was a moderate rise of 3ft which introduced colour & hopes of upstream movement of fish. It's true that a few fish were caught on upper beats. As is often the case they seemingly disappear into the miles of the middle & upper river & have very little impact on catches. This pattern repeats itself & it's indicative that the present population of salmon is not sufficient to stock a river of this size. Despite good catches for those fishing the bottom beats, expecting the fish stock contained in 6 miles of lower river to travel upstream in good water & improve significantly fishing in the other 80 miles or so is unrealistic. Catches tailed off in July below Monmouth almost matching 5 year average at 77, whilst June at 181 & May at 165 were well above. Beats below Monmouth have now caught 86% of season total for the river. Reports on good numbers of grilse being seen but few were caught & unusually [for the Wye] some were as small as 2lb. The great majority of the fish were of the 2 sw variety with again one or two better fish. The best of 25lbs taken from Bigsweir by Steve Balding who also took 2 other fish of 16lbs & 12 lbs in just an hour or so spinning at Llandogo. Some good size parr have also been reported in various locations, particularly the lower river. A salutary lesson from an angler fishing lower river. His only catch being himself.....an overhead cast in windy conditions resulted in a treble penetrating his eyelids. No glasses & 7 hours spent in Hereford A & E as a result! Speycasting & wearing of sunglasses recommended in future please!

At Wyesham sport continued with regulars all taking fish and here, after a record May of 75 they recorded 61 fish for June before slowing to 17 in July and a seasons total to date of 171. Cadora raised their total to 29 and Upper Bigsweir to 11. Cadora Backs/Redbrook had 7 for the month and a total of 64 for the season. To date Coedithyl have picked up 32. This is in stark contrast to the rest of the river where despite the respectable rise very few fish were showing a total of just 16 fish for July in the upper section of the river. If that was poor then Glasbury to Hereford was simply awful with 4 fish & below Hereford things only improved marginally with 6 fish. Season total so far of around 490 fish with only just over 67 have come from the beats above Monmouth. Many say that fishing effort on the middle beats is minimal, fuelled though by a lack of fish, a perception perhaps not entirely unjustified. However some anglers wishing to fish the middle beats around the time water was good, found beats were already booked by coarse fisherman. WUF reporting that few beats still had vacancies as the coarse season started. As the main salmon pools are the favoured haunt of barbel it's no surprise that that's where the barbel fishermen tend to congregate, not a situation which would be entertained on other salmon rivers. However we have also received reports of 11 salmon anglers being found by EA bailiffs on lower river fishing without EA Rod Licences!

Shad numbers have been good & they seem to be hanging around quite late this year, many still not yet spawned. Sea lampreys have been seen but seem somewhat less numerous than usual!

## PROSPECTS

Without a substantial and sustained rise the pattern of catches looks likely to continue. No doubt the upper river will pick up a few more fish but fresh fish into the lower river consisting of 2sw summer salmon & grilse look the most likely outcome for any consistent sport, though numbers usually start to fall off somewhat into August. So small flies, fished very early or very late will be the order of the day.

## FISH EATING BIRDS

In England there is clear evidence of a national Fish Eating Birds (FEB) problem: since 2004, 400-500 licence applications per annum have been submitted to Natural England (NE) in order to mitigate cormorant & goosander predation. In 2009-10 licensing year 457 licences were requested and 95% granted, & there is still headroom for more. In Wales in the last two years, 100% of applications made to Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) were granted, **last year only 11 licences were requested**, 5 for rivers & 6 for still-waters. In Wales there have never been more than 20 licence applications per annum in the last ten years. **Are FEBs not a problem in Wales?** Sound applications, presented with good evidence of the presence & numbers of birds & their negative impact, appear to be considered objectively. NE & WAG statistics over the last ten years show the majority of licence applications are granted. As such, one can conclude failure to obtain a licence is probably the fault of the applicant & not the licensing authority. In January, the Angling Trust (AT) met with Richard Benyon, Fisheries Minister for England and Wales, in order to set in train a process to address licensing anomalies & concerns, including four key issues which all apply in Wales: to simplify licensing procedures - worse in Wales than in England; to question the philosophy of shooting to reinforce scaring on rivers (guidelines and recommendations are based on Moran Committee report for still-waters & are of little relevance to scaring on rivers); to align the shooting season with the period of maximum fish predation in order to protect fish & fisheries & not just to fit with protecting breeding birds - so, not just between September & March; to achieve a more reasonable balance between the number of birds shot compared with the number of birds present & perceived to be causing predation. Should there be positive outcomes from this review, there will unfortunately be no impact in Wales because: AT has no representational authority with WAG but, much more significantly, unless riparian & fishery owners apply to WAG for licences, WAG has little evidence of FEB problems &, consequently, anglers, fishery & riparian owners, have little case to argue for change.

If you consider FEBs a problem where you fish, contact your riparian owner & request they participate in a licensing scheme. If you are a riparian owner, apply for a licence. Evidence of numbers of FEBs, supported with photographic evidence is essential, together with your opinion & evidence of the negative impact that FEBs have had on your fishery. Record & photograph the number of goosanders on your fishery whilst this year's broods grow to maturity. As far as the licensing authorities are concerned, no application means no problem & no evidence of a problem means no case for changing licensing protocols. **If you are concerned about the impact of FEBs, don't just complain, do something about it.**

**For the Welsh bit of the river you need to apply to WAG. Just Google Welsh Assembly Government licences piscivorous birds and all is revealed. Or go to:**

**<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/consmanagement/conservationbiodiversity/wildlifelicences/ukspecies>**

**For England, applications need to be made to Natural England. Just Google Natural England licences for piscivorous birds and then go to How to apply for a licence or go to:**

**<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/wildlife/species/fisheatingbirds.aspx>**



### WHAT WAS BEING SAID IN 1976?

With proposals to enlarge Craig Goch Reservoir and regulate the discharge to the River Wye research, designed to provide baseline data for water quality, fisheries and general ecology was carried out by UWIST under contract to Welsh National Water Development Authority. The research projects were based at their Newbridge on Wye study centre. The 54 reports amounting to 905 pages make interesting reading & some conclusions and views remain relevant today. Extracts follow:

'the increased enrichment of Wye downstream is probably related to geology & land-use in the Wye catchment. Upstream the Wye drains impermeable shales and mudstones, downstream it drains principally permeable Old Red Sandstone & the more fertile river valley is subject to more intensive agriculture. Such use is reflected in the substantially greater load of nitrate probably derived from nitrogenous fertilizers'

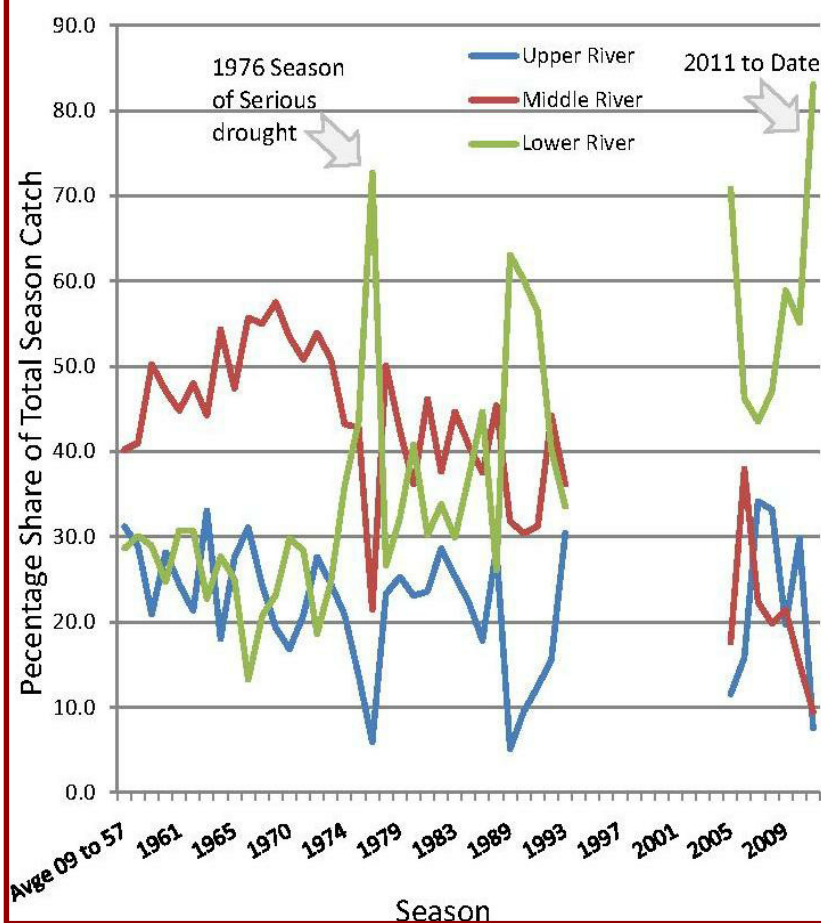
'decline in fishing success was coincident with a deterioration in water quality & decrease in flow in 1976. Angling success, as measured by catch/effort, appears to have decreased with distance above the estuary. This suggests that catch/effort was limited by availability of salmon rather than by differences in efficiency of capture. Low flows during the whole of 1976 angling season probably prevented most fish from venturing upstream. The lowest fishery benefited from this situation, the total catch in 1976 being 164% of the 1965-1974 average'

'future studies on fisheries should place more emphasis on the adult stage of the salmon life-cycle & it is essential that the catch ability study is continued & the proposed tagging programme implemented. Acoustic tagging of adults to determine movement in relation to patterns of flow seems highly desirable. Data collected to date on juvenile stages should be complemented by an assessment of the distribution & abundance of juvenile salmon downstream of the present study area & of the size and age composition of migrating smolts'

'illustrated by catches of netsmen who leased the netting rights as far upstream as Symond's Yat. In 1890 they caught 89,600 lb (7-8,000 fish) of salmon & reached their peak in 1892 with 136,340 lb. (12-13,000 fish)'

'The value of the rod fishery is particularly underlined in such a comparison, for whereas the total rod and net catch, averaging 6800 in recent years represents some 10% of the total catch in 25 major salmon rivers in England and Wales, the rod catch of 5400 represents 25% of the corresponding England and Wales rod catch. In fact, the average Wye rod catch exceeds that of any other river in the two countries'

'It is now 13 years since Hellowell (1966) predicted that if the downward trend in catch/effort continued at a constant rate then the salmon population would be almost completely depleted this century' The 555 salmon caught represent 10.7% of the total Wye rod catch & the mean angling success rate equivalent to about 22 h [2.75 days] per salmon, compares favourably with that for other rivers in Britain and Canada' **Note! Our current rate is circa 14 rod days per salmon!**



### MIDDLE RIVER DEMISE.....The key issue?

Although missing a significant period of data the graph on left showing percentage share of catch for lower, middle and upper river over the period 1909 to date, shows some interesting trends. The most significant being the relative decline in share of catch from middle river over that period and more so since the early 90's. The drought of 1976 clearly shows the effect that lack of water has in suppressing the ability of and the desire to travel upriver. A situation that has been similarly evident during the first half of this season. Whilst containing some peaks and troughs, probably the result of water levels, as pointed out in the Graig Goch reports of 1976, the upper river has maintained its share at circa 25% of catch. Is resolution of the middle river problem the key to achieving recovery and is it the indicator to river performance going forward? Lack of catches, abstraction, siltation, navigation pressure, no juveniles, few or no redds they are all endemic to this part of the river! Traditionally 70 to 80% of this middle river catch was taken before the end of June and never was the old adage that the season total rarely exceeded double that to the end of June more true! Spring fish 'springers' of course made up the bulk of this catch, fish that ran early season with good water and resided in these middle river beats until caught or travelling on upstream in autumn to spawn.

## PROPOSED NEW BYELAWS (ROD & LINE) WYE, TAFF & ELY

Communication by EA Monday, August 01, 2011

The National Salmon Byelaws which were confirmed by ministers on 15th May 2008 prohibit the removal of salmon taken by rod and line before the 16th June, unless those fish are immediately returned to the river with the least possible injury.

New byelaws now proposed for the Rivers Wye and Taff & Ely (Rod and Line Byelaws 2011) extend the existing catch and release requirement, by prohibiting the removal of salmon and migratory trout taken by rod and line at any time.

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE NEW PROPOSALS?

Stocks of salmon in the Wye and the Taff & Ely are at risk of continuing to fail to achieve their conservation targets. Consequently we believe it is necessary to take steps to ensure that as many salmon as possible survive to spawn.

### WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW?

We are currently advertising the byelaws for a period of 6 weeks as we are obliged to by law. This gives everyone the opportunity to consider the proposals and decide whether they support or object to them.

### OBJECTIONS & SUPPORT

If you would like to  
Peter Gough  
Regional Technical Specialist Fisheries  
Environment Agency Wales  
Hadnock Road,  
Monmouth,  
NP25 3NQ

or email : [peter.gough@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:peter.gough@environment-agency.gov.uk)

### *Comment*

Copies of the proposed byelaws as proposed, as well as the technical papers which supports the case were included with the communication. These documents have been made available on [www.rwga.co.uk](http://www.rwga.co.uk) for your study. WSA would recommend that newsletter readers should study the documents carefully and as requested by EA write to Peter Gough, objecting or offer your support to these byelaws, stating your grounds for any objection.

## HOW'S THE RIVER PERFORMING?

Date: 02 August 2011

	2008	2009	2010	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Total
Upper River	355	130	130	1	0	2	13	16	0	0	0	32
Middle River	177	108	57	12	3	7	8	6	0	0	0	36
Lower River	518	376	264	21	29	156	160	56	0	0	0	422
Total	1050	614	451	34	32	165	181	78	0	0	0	490

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