

Latest News

Autumn/Winter Updates



View of Loch Stack from Stack Woods (S.Marshall)

Despite being busy preparing the reports from the last field season, on occasion The Trust did manage to escape the office during the winter. Before Christmas we were out in Stack Woods establishing a series of quadrats at known coordinates to collect baseline data from which to assess the effects of deer grazing and trampling on vegetation.

The Achriesgill catchment is currently being surveyed with the intention of producing a new catchment management plan for the area. The SFCC habitat surveys started downstream in mid January and will progress into the Spring.



Upstream towards the old dam, Achriesgill (K.Batchelor)



Possible salmon spawning (S.Barnes)

In addition there was much excitement following signs of salmon spawning in the Laxford catchment in attempts to get some decent footage. There did not appear to be much activity before Christmas, although we were lucky to see some movements in the new year when we went out counting redds. Unfortunately there did not seem to be as many fish or redds compared to previous years, with little signs of gravel disturbance in areas that are known to be good spawning habitats. Fewer dead kelts were also observed.

Mink Capture near Achiltibuie

A dead mink was found above the high water mark near Achiltibuie at the beginning of March following several reported sightings around Christmas and the New Year. This highlights the need for continued vigilance to remove the species from Sutherland and prevent recolonisation. Many thanks to our dedicated volunteers in the area.

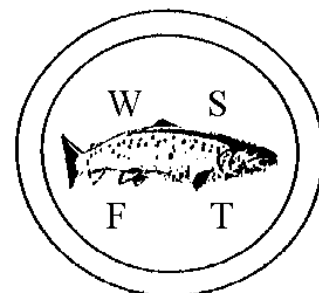


American mink carcass (C.MacLeod)

WSFT continues to monitor 21 mink rafts and tunnels on behalf of the Scottish Mink Initiative (SMI) although there have been few signs of life over the autumn and winter, apart from the odd rodent print here and there. Once again The Trust would like to thank our many volunteers for their endless help over the past few months, without which the work of the SMI would not be possible. If you have any questions regarding the mink project or information about a sighting please contact us at wsft@btconnect.com or visit www.scottishmink.org.uk.

Upcoming events

- **Ghillies Seminar:** The annual Ghillies Seminar will be held on the 11th April 2014 in Scourie Village Hall. This is an opportunity for information to be passed between ghillies, estate workers and fishery managers relating to various aspects of fisheries management.
- **First sweep netting of 2014:** Weather permitting the first post smolt netting of the season will take place on the Monday 17th March at the Polla estuary at 3pm, and Tuesday 18th March at the Laxford at 2:30pm. This is always great fun and we look forward to seeing old friends as well as welcoming new volunteers. For more information please visit the website at <http://home.btconnect.com/wsft/page14.html>.



Looking ahead to the 2014 season

Pearls in Peril

Alongside other educational events including the annual Ghillies Seminar and Scourie Detectives, The Trust will help to deliver the exciting Pearls in Peril schools project to P5-P7 pupils alongside the Highland Council Ranger Service. These events will comprise a series of indoor workshops and field activities in May and June that are designed to introduce children to the lifecycle of freshwater pearl mussel and raise their awareness of the many threats they face, whilst also exploring more complex processes within the freshwater ecosystem.

Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed

Once again Himalayan Balsam will be removed in August from areas of Nedd and Clashnessie as part of The Trust's biosecurity remit. Much progress has been made in recent years thanks to the Assynt Field Club volunteers. Few plants now remain although the smaller plants amongst reeds and nettles are harder to spot! In addition patches of Japanese knotweed will be removed from the Reay Forest Estate.



Balsam clearing at Nedd (S.Marshall)

Potential new projects

The Trust is actively seeking funding for several new projects including investigating the effects of road salts on freshwater ecosystems and aquatic biota. At present relatively little is known about the affect of contaminated groundwater and runoff from treated roads on water chemistry and wildlife. It is also hoped that another project can be taken forward in collaboration with the local fish farm in relation to wild fish and aquaculture in the near future following recent discussions.

Salmon and trout population monitoring

Subject to funding it is hoped to continue with the post smolt sweep netting in the Laxorfd, Polla, Dionard and Kinloch estuaries. The Polla and Laxford will be sampled monthly between March and October, and the Dionard and



J77, The largest recaptured sea trout at the Polla, 2013 (A.Marsham)

the Kinloch in the summer months as part of the ongoing MIAP project. Sweep netting yields a lot of information relating to sea lice abundance and intensity, growth rates and population dynamics of sea trout throughout the Sutherland area.

The ongoing electrofishing monitoring programme assessing juvenile salmonid populations in the various catchments will commence in July. Electrofishing demonstrations as part of The Trust involvement with schools and the wider public will also be scheduled for the summer months.

Badna Bay smolt trap

In early April the smolt trap will once again be installed at Badna Bay in the hope to catch the smolt run (usually May in west Sutherland). Kelts will also be tagged on their way downstream. The traps help to get a far better idea of the smolt output from the system, and such information can be used in future management and conservation plans for salmon and sea trout.



Trout released from Badna Bay trap 2013 (S. Marshall)



£2

WSFT Shop!

A wide range of merchandise is available from our online shop (www.wsft.co.uk) including the bestselling WSFT Fly exclusive to the Trust, and these handy tape measures. Just the thing for catch and release!

Discounts available on certain items.



£2

WSFT Auction 2014

The Trust is organising a fundraising auction to be held in autumn this year. So far we have some excellent lots so do keep an eye out! If you feel you can help The Trust through the donation of lots please contact Shona (wsft@btconnect.com).

How can you help?

- Become a member of the WSFT or make a donation
- Sponsor a sea trout
- Look out for tags when fishing and report to the Biologist with tag number, location and length (please return!)

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If you would like further information, have a view to express or would simply like to make a donation, please visit our website or contact:

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