

Pearls in Peril: New educational project a hit with primary schools



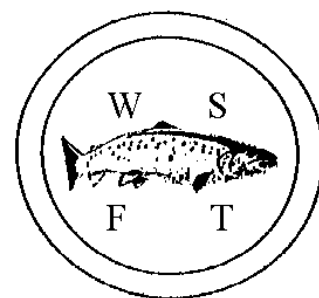
Origami mussels! (S.Marshall)

The Trust has been busy over the summer months working with school groups delivering the new 'Pearls in Peril' educational project. Working with the Highland Council Rangers, schools from the north and south of the area were split into two groups and took part in both classroom and field based activity days aimed at teaching pupils about the lifecycle and ecology of the freshwater pearl mussel.



Measuring the flow (S.Marshall)

Through a range of games, scientific experiments and craft projects the children learnt about the importance of the pearl mussel to the river ecosystem and the many threats they currently face. Out in the field they investigated the fish and invertebrate populations and assessed the water quality for mussels, putting things learnt in the workshop into practice in the field.



Juvenile salmonid surveys off to a flying start



Rhiconich system (S.Marshall)

The 2014 electrofishing surveys got off to an excellent start in July following the dry weather and subsequent low river levels. A total of eight catchments have been completed to date, however the heavy rains and flood events on 10th August slowed everything down and there are a number of sites still to be surveyed over the coming month. In the catchments sur-



Salmon parr (S.Marshall)

veyed so far there do not appear to be any significant changes in fry or parr densities suggesting that the populations are stable even if small in some areas. It is always one of the best times of year to be out and about finding out what is happening in our rivers whilst visiting those more remote sites that would otherwise remain unseen. The reports detailing the electrofishing results

and an analysis of density changes will become available on the WSFT website early next year (<http://home.btconnect.com/wsft/page8.html>).

Quick Updates

- **WSFT Auction:** The first WSFT auction is now live! Get those difficult Christmas presents here. With a wide range of lots there is something for everyone including sculptures and prints by various artists, whisky, fishing tuition and holiday cottage vouchers. Please visit <http://www.melandphil.com/geo/index.php> or follow the link from the website (www.wsft.co.uk).
- **Moy Games:** At the beginning of August WSFT once again had a stall at the Moy Games, this time sharing the tent with the Cromarty Firth Fisheries Trust, Ness and Beaulie Fisheries Trust and the Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Fisheries Trust. Fortunately it was not as windy as last year and a good time was had by all. Congratulations to the winners of the increasingly popular 'Find a Fish' competition!
- **Fun Day:** The final Scourie Detectives Fun Day took place on 23rd August. With a range of walks, talks and demonstrations on offer, the rockpool ramble was one of the most popular giving children and adults alike an opportunity to learn more about the weird and wonderful creatures of the seashore. Many thanks to all involved for all their help on the day and generous contributions to the kitchen.

2014 season well underway

Post smolt sweep netting

The sweep netting programme is well underway with the MIAP sites on the Kyle of Durness and Kinloch already completed between May and July. Netting of the monitoring sites on the Laxford and Polla estuaries started in March and will continue until October. To date there have been good numbers of sea trout at all of the sites with varying lice levels. In the earlier part of the season there were high numbers of larger fish and mended kelts. The site on the Kyle was moved slightly downstream and netted by boat due to the shift in sand bars and changing suitability of different netting areas. For more information on sweep netting or to become a volunteer please visit <http://home.btconnect.com/wsft/page14.html>.



Netting the Laxford (S.Marshall)

Badnabay Smolt Trap

The smolt trap at Badnabay was installed on 22nd April and operated until 29th May to catch the May smolt run. Initially the trap didn't flow due to low water but on 6th May water levels rose and brought the first smolts down on the start of their seaward migration. Good numbers of fish were produced in the system with a greater proportion of salmon to begin with followed by typically higher numbers of sea trout a few days later.

Himalayan Balsam clearing

Once again The Trust was busy at sites in Nedd and Clashnessie clearing Himalayan Balsam as part of its control of Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) under the biosecurity plan. Once forming a dense covering along the burns, now only a few small single plants remain thanks to the hard work of dedicated volunteers at the Assynt Field Club. 2014 is the final year of the SEPA Restoration

Grant obtained in association with RAFTS for the control of invasive plants.

Biosecurity

Scottish Mink Initiative update



Assynt water vole (A-M MacMaster)

Mid-August saw particularly heavy rainfalls and flash flooding resulting in the washout of rafts and tunnels across the area, however upon closer inspection the damage was not as bad as initially feared so we are more or less back on track with new equipment and replacements. There have been several reported sightings of mink concentrated in the south of the Trust area near Lochinver and Achiltibuie between May and July, however there have been no positive signs of mink on the rafts and tunnels in the vicinity. Subsequent trapping efforts have not been successful and the presence of good water vole populations in Assynt provide further evidence that mink are not common here. Despite this Coigach and Assynt remain priority regions for mink monitoring and control to prevent northward migration from Loch Broom and Wester Ross to the 'mink free' zones further north towards Scourie and Durness. Continued vigilance is essential to help protect native wildlife and the freshwater ecosystem so once again a huge thankyou to all our volunteers without whom the project would not be possible!

Outreach Events

The Trust has been involved with a number of outreach events aimed at raising awareness of fisheries management and conservation issues. Once again the annual Ghillies Seminar proved to be a success and this year discussions were focused on river management, enforcement and biosecurity. On the 6th and 7th August we were in Assynt supporting the Fishing Feis organised by Assynt Fly Fishing. With a wide range of available information, casting demonstrations, fishing competitions, fly tying instruction and games, the Fishing Feis aimed to promote fishing in Sutherland whilst highlighting the importance of catch and release and the need for vigilance to stop the spread of Invasive Non Native Species.



Assynt Fishing Feis (S.Marshall)

How can you help?

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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- 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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