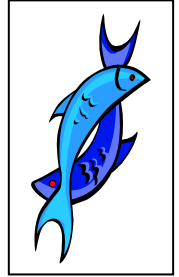


The River Taw Fisheries Association Newsletter



Chairman: Alex Gibson
Lower Braggamarsh House
Burrington, Umlerleigh
Devon EX37 9NF
Tel: 07785 232 393
Email: gibson2sms@btinternet.com

Secretary: George Marsh
Buscott, 21 Station Road
Ashcott, Bridgwater
Somerset TA7 9QP
Tel: 01458 210 544
Email: mrgeorgemars@yahoo.co.uk

Treasurer: Richard Nickell, Blakewell Fisheries, Muddiford, Bamstaple, Devon. EX32 4ET
Tel: 01271 344533. Email: richard@blakewell.co.uk

Web site: www.rivertawfisheries.co.uk

Summer 2018

Chairman's Report




The season got off to a poor start. We lost the first six weeks because of freezing weather and then a number of large spates. As the river settled few salmon were caught and sea trout were late to arrive. By the end of May only about 15 salmon and the same number of sea trout had been caught. We must hope that our migratory fish are simply a month or so late like everything else in the countryside this year.

Last season was mixed – quite good for salmon fishermen, but very poor for those who target sea trout. The beat survey showed 286 salmon and 214 sea trout. (2016 numbers: 185 salmon and 302 sea trout.) This is the first time that I can remember sea trout numbers being below salmon numbers. No-one can come up with a plausible explanation or, perhaps more importantly, a remedy. We do know that sea trout numbers can fluctuate quite dramatically and we must hope for a bounce back. The EA rod catch numbers for 2017 were 243 salmon (88% returned) and 193 sea trout (81% returned). Brown trout fishing had another good year with about 2,300 fish caught, roughly the same as 2016 even though conditions were less favourable.

Members kindly took part in the EA Salmon & Sea Trout Consultation and will have heard about the proposed National Protection Byelaws that should become effective next year if all goes to plan. For us this will mean an end to salmon and sea trout netting in the Taw/Torridge estuary and a requirement on us to reach and maintain a catch and release rate for salmon of at least 90% or face the imposition of 100% C&R. We have never reached 90%, so all fishermen will


have to apply themselves. Those who rent out fishing and those who invite guests to fish their beat will need to get the message across. It is unfortunate that our River Taw Byelaws with their out-dated bag limits convey the wrong message.


The IFCA netting byelaws were finally approved and as a result the salmon and sea trout by-catch in our estuary is now a thing of the past. Everyone should be congratulated for their efforts during a long and complicated campaign.

 Two major water quality problems are taking much of the Committee's time at the moment; siltation and sewage treatment works (STWs). The articles later in the Newsletter by Mark Lloyd and Bill Beaumont directly address the first of these problems. Laurence Couldrick's article addresses the second.


Everyone who fishes our river, with the exception perhaps of those who fish the Bray, will have noticed a huge increase in the amount of silt in the river. The deterioration of the Mole is particularly worrisome. The growing of winter maize is the main culprit. The run-off from fields is dramatic, particularly when combined with a very wet winter and spring. As a non-farmer I am amazed that some farmers are so uncaring about their top-soil. It is in a real sense their equity. There are three anaerobic biodigestors on the Taw system and they have an enormous appetite for maize. Not only that, but they operate on an owner self-monitored basis. If anything should go wrong there will be a major pollution incident with fish kills, as happened recently on a tributary of the Tamar. We can do no more than keep our fingers crossed.

As for STWs, we have at least 35 on the Taw catchment. All of them out-flow into our river and all of them belong to South West Water. The question is – how many are fit for purpose today and how many will be fit for purpose tomorrow as more and more houses are built in the towns and villages of our catchment? We are applying as much pressure as we can on SWW, working with like-minded organisations including Angling Trust and South West Rivers Trust. We have to encourage SWW to do the right amount of maintenance and investment. Like biodigestors, STWs are also owner self-monitored, a term that does not inspire confidence. We are trying to establish what the EA's overseeing role is and how actively they are fulfilling it.

 Northam Landfill continues to lurk in the background with 650,000 cubic metres of waste in danger of being exposed to the Taw/Torridge estuary. Storms last winter ate away at the Burrows and brought the problem into greater focus. We are adding our voice to those keen for proper protective action to be taken.


 River improvement work was carried out on the Little Dart and its tributary, the Sturcombe, on a match-funded basis between RTFA and

WRT. 13 debris dams were cleared and 17 spawning gravel sites cleaned. Selective coppicing and wood debris enhancement work was carried out over about 3km of bank. This work will continue this year. In our river improvement plans there will be an emphasis generally on gravel cleaning. Bill Beaumont's article explains why. Any change in farming practice to reduce siltation will take time and is not within our control. Gravel cleaning has an immediate effect and we do have control over it.

 This year the EA will carry out its 6-yearly juvenile survey at 67 sites. To enable us to "read" the river effectively and prioritise river work we need to find a way to finance the WRT's fry index surveys in the intermediate years. Each of these surveys cost about £8,500. Some financing ideas are being worked on.

The Taw has lagged behind other rivers in providing volunteers for the Riverfly Partnership. This season we are making a big effort to redress this situation. 8 potential volunteers have been identified for training. Over time their surveys will add to our knowledge of the water quality and general health of the Taw.

I am concerned about what I perceive as a lack of fishing effort on the river, especially since we have lost the early part of the season to the weather and there is always the threat of drought conditions as we move into summer. Rod catch numbers are an important indicator of the health of a river and its fish stocks. So please, when the river is fishable get out there and fish.

 A final point. Please have a careful read of Roger Furniss's article. Before long we may need to review our constitution which has a rather old-fashioned look about it.

Alex Gibson
Chairman

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Hon. Treasurer's Report

The Association continues to work to improve the Taw catchment and last season made two donations, £3,870 and £5,000, on a match-funded basis with WRT for river improvement projects on the Little Dart.. We will be committing to further projects next season, again with WRT on a match-funded basis.

Currently our own cash resources total almost £14,000 and we also have an additional £23,000 held to our account at WRT. This is a comfortable position, but river improvement work is expensive and we must continue to seek additional funding sources

AGM

RTFA held another very successful AGM and auction at Highbullen Hotel in March. Following on from the success of last year, the auction this year raised a total of £4,280, a very important boost to RTFA funds. Thanks must be given to those who donated auction lots and to those who organised the auction and its delivery.

Subscriptions & Membership



Subscriptions are due in April and I am pleased to report that we are now receiving the majority of subs via standing order. This is good news. A total of £3,640 has been collected. May I remind you all that the RTFA bank details for setting up a standing order can be found on our website under the heading Membership, along with application forms for new members. New members are asked to complete an application form and send it to me for our records, but at the same time please set up your standing order and inform me when you have done so.

Recruitment continues. We have 5 new members this year and I am sure this figure will increase as the season progresses.

Rates

Full Members (Riparian Owners)	£35.00
Associate Members	£15.00

Raising money requires hard work and commitment. I would like to thank you for your continued support.

Contact details

richard@blakewell.co.uk

Blakewell Fisheries, Muddiford, Barnstaple, North Devon EX31 4ET.

Richard Nickell
Hon. Treasurer

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RTFA AGM and Dinner

River Taw Fisheries Association AGM

Friday 22nd March 2019




Highbullen Hotel

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The Environment Agency (EA)

It was good to speak to so many of you at the AGM in March. As regards Fisheries Enforcement Officer numbers in Devon we have remained the same as last year, but the addition of the fully warranted part time officers has been of great benefit. In line with all Enforcement Agencies we operate an intelligence-led approach to enforcement, so you all have an important role, acting as eyes and ears for your river. Please continue to report any suspected illegal fishing activities to the EA's 24 hour hotline - 0800 80 70 60. The more intelligence we have, the more effective we can be on your behalf. Pollution incidents can also be logged on this number. For non-urgent or general fisheries information please feel free to email me.

 So far this season I have not had any reports of diseased salmon in the Taw which is good news. Again please update me if you do see any diseased fish.

Bio-security is of great importance for river users to prevent the transfer of invasive aquatic species. Please adopt the "Check, Clean, Dry" approach with all your fishing equipment particularly if you fish on a variety of different waters. For more information go to www.nonnativespecies.org/checkcleandry

I mentioned at the AGM that this summer, weather permitting, we will be carrying out the full Taw catchment electro-fishing programme at 67 sites. This should give a comprehensive review of the current juvenile stock status in the catchment.

Paul Carter
EA Fisheries Enforcement Officer North Devon
pj.carter@environment-agency.gov.uk

If you want to know.....



About the state of the river and for fishing reports visit the River Taw Fisheries Association Web Site on

www.rivertawfisheries.co.uk
and click on Current News and Webcams & Gauges


Save our soils to rescue our rivers

Over the past 60 years, we've seen a dramatic change in farming practices and land use choices, driven principally by high intensity production of cheap food and European subsidies. This has led to the soils on which we depend for food throughout England and Wales becoming damaged and eroded, causing widespread pollution and flooding. Agriculture is now responsible for the highest number of serious pollution incidents of any sector and is the main reason why only 14% of rivers are in good health.



Bare fields of maize, stubble turnips, over-grazed pasture, slurry spreading and winter-wheat have all led to vast amounts of soil, nutrients and water washing off the land into rivers and lakes. This has a disastrous impact on aquatic wildlife because it smothers insects and fish eggs in gravels on river beds and leads to algal blooms that deplete oxygen in the water. It also heaps costs on the rest of society. Government research estimates the costs of poorly-managed soil to be £1.2 billion each year, or £23 million a week. We are losing soil at around ten times the rate that it is being produced, which is fundamentally unsustainable.

By contrast, healthy soils have high organic matter content, a strong, porous structure and a wide range of soil organisms including worms, fungi and bacteria that work symbiotically with plants to produce more nutritious food and lock up carbon underground. They allow free percolation of water to replenish groundwater storage and keep rivers flowing in summer droughts.

 Of course we have to keep on farming, but we do need to change farm practices significantly to save our soils and rescue our rivers for future generations. Simple measures like minimising soil disturbance, sowing rows across the slope, planting follow-on crops to avoid bare fields, reducing stocking densities and slurry quantities can all make a dramatic difference. In high-risk areas (probably less than 10% of the area of a catchment) land-use change will be needed, such as switching from arable to pasture or pasture to woodland.

There have been initiatives such as Catchment Sensitive Farming which have offered advice to farmers and land managers. These have been a step in the right direction, but have largely failed at a strategic scale. Too often they've worked with farmers who are most receptive to change, rather than those who are causing the biggest problems. Uncertainty about budgets, inappropriate targets and a lack of clear objectives has led to high staff turnover and an incoherent approach.

Most importantly, advice hasn't been backed up by a credible enforcement regime. The government has directed the Environment Agency and Rural Payments Agency to take a light touch approach to enforcement and has slashed

budgets to a point where the EA is now able to visit fewer than 1% of farms each year. The many farmers who are following the rules are exasperated to see their neighbours cutting corners and getting away with it.

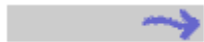


The government has at last recognised these strategic failures, and it is running a consultation about the future of farming in advance of an agriculture bill. The Angling Trust, WWF and The Rivers Trust have teamed up to write a report setting out a pathway towards a more sustainable future for land and water.

Achieving fundamental change across more than 100,000 farms in England and Wales will require a co-ordinated approach with four complementary measures:

- Alignment to a clear set of objectives and planning process in each catchment by all relevant organisations, co-ordinated by the Catchment Based Approach network;
- Firm but fair enforcement by the Environment Agency of existing and new regulations to outlaw excessive soil erosion, water run-off and pollution;
- Local, well-trained, expert advisors providing free, advice targeted at the higher risk landowners;
- Targeted incentives to enable land use change in high risk areas of the catchment (probably less than 10% of land area).

The Government intends to phase out direct payments to farmers and move to a new system where public money requires delivery of public benefits. Our report estimates that to reimburse farmers fully for changing land-use in England would cost less than £500m per year out of the £2.3 billion subsidies currently paid in England and Wales.



We estimate that enforcement and advice will cost just £10 million a year – a fraction of the cost to society of continuing with our current approach. This is a no-brainer of epic proportions that could transform the state of our natural environment rapidly and ensure that we have food and water for the next generation.

Mark Lloyd
Chief Executive, Angling Trust


Fishing Hotels on the Taw and Mole

The Highbullen Hotel, Chittlehamholt
The Fox and Hounds Hotel, Eggesford
The Rising Sun Inn, Umberleigh


Tel: 01769 540561
01769 580345
01769 560447

Salmon spawning gravels in the chalk streams of Southern England and their impact on egg survival.

In recent years declines in Atlantic salmon numbers and catches have given cause for concern in many of the southern chalk rivers. Several potential causes for such changes have been suggested, including factors operative in both the marine and freshwater phases of the life of the salmon. There is, however, a strong viewpoint that problems at the early freshwater stages could be of major significance.

 Whilst the composition and quality of salmon spawning areas have been reasonably well studied in North America, in the UK there have been very few published investigations in the UK on gravel composition that is suitable for Atlantic salmon.

Over most of the stream beds of the chalk rivers of Southern England, the gaps between the larger gravels are filled by finer sediments and in many places, there is an overlying blanket of sand or silt, often associated with growths of aquatic plants. There is a seasonal cycle of low-flow (spring/summer) sediment deposition followed by high-flow (autumn/winter) wash out. In general, by the time that salmon spawn (normally December onwards), the shallower, faster flowing reaches of river which they select for redd construction will have been swept free of fine sediment by the seasonal increases in discharge. In addition, the female fish disturb the gravel and, in the process, winnow away clogging interstitial material. In normal conditions this redd construction creates an open structure which persists for sufficient time to permit adequate irrigation of the egg pockets by flowing, oxygenated water, thus promoting egg development and, ultimately, enabling emergence of fry. If, however, the flushing flows are inadequate or conversely, if the sediment load is greatly increased, it may be that the areas of suitable spawning gravel are greatly reduced or degraded. In these situations, if the female fish are unable to loosen, excavate and/or winnow redds or the interstices of redds become blocked by fine particles during development and prior to emergence, then the spawning will be a partial or complete failure. In the case of blockage of interstices during development, it is known that when fine (less than 2 mm) sediment is more than 20% by weight and/or less than 1 mm sediment is more than 15% by weight, reduced survival is likely.

 Several factors are known to contribute to increases in fine sediment loading of streams. Impacts from abstraction of water, reduced weed growth, forestry operations, enhanced erosion of the land surface, aquaculture e.g. discharge from fish farms and cress beds, poor agricultural practice, etc. are all likely to have detrimental effects on the river's fine sediment load. Recent changes in agricultural practices are causing particular concern, increased growing of maize as a silage or biofuel crop (a 2,500% increase in acreage over

the last 40 years) and intensification of livestock farming are known causes of increased sediment loads entering rivers.

Several fisheries have historically cleaned areas of gravel where salmonids are known to spawn. With evidence increasingly suggesting that siltation of spawning gravels may be a significant cause in the widespread decline in salmon numbers, (Solomon 1992, Scott and Beaumont 1993) there is now a resurgence of interest in the natural composition and the impacts of cleaning of salmon spawning gravels.

To establish the structure of potential spawning gravels in southern England, a gravel composition survey of sites on the rivers Hampshire Avon, Wylde, Nadder, Dorset Frome and Piddle was carried out. The objective of the study was to compare conditions between and within rivers, to determine the particle size composition of spawning gravels, and to consider the implications of the results obtained on likely salmon spawning success.



To obtain detailed information on gravel bed structure, bed samples need to be collected, as far as is possible, in an undisturbed state. To do this freeze cores were taken of the stream bed. A copper pipe was inserted into the riverbed and 2 litres of liquid nitrogen was gradually poured into the pipe over a 5-10 min period. The pipe with frozen attached sediment was then withdrawn and laid on a tray to thaw. The tray was partitioned transversely into 100 mm sections to permit depth stratification of the sample.

Gravel cores were collected from the rivers during March, a period when salmonid eggs and alevins would still be present in the gravel and hence the data would be applicable to their survival. Cores were taken either from areas of known salmon spawning activity or from areas where salmon were known to have spawned in previous years but actual redds were avoided. In all cases the extreme margins of the river were avoided.

Sediment analysis was carried out by washing the gravel through a succession of sieves. Sand indices were calculated for all sites. This index looks at the ratio of coarse to fine sand in a sample and relates it to the probability of a salmon egg surviving to emergence. For this study particle size categories of 2.0 mm to 0.5 mm and 0.5 mm to 0.063 mm have been used for the coarse and fine sand respectively.



The study showed that from the point of view of salmon spawning conditions, all the chalk streams studied had Sand Indices above levels at which reduced emergence of salmon fry may be expected to occur, with even the best river gravels in the region having reduced emergence expectations. Thus, the level of fines within

the southern chalk streams may be a contributing factor in the recent reduction in numbers of salmon within these rivers.

Any excess of sediment (particularly in late winter-early spring) could further affect hatching potential and perhaps even prevent successful emergence of salmon.

Although a salmon may spawn successfully in certain types of gravel, it does not follow that the gravel will give good survival rates for the eggs and alevins. Studies have shown that when salmon spawn in gravel with a high percentage of fine material present, egg survival was below 10% compared with around 60% in good gravels.

Further studies were carried out on effectiveness of gravel cleaning. This process uses water jets to flush the fine sediment out of the gravel to allow good survival of the eggs. This management was found to be both effective at increasing egg survival, giving an 8-fold improvement in egg survival, and for the effectiveness to last at least two years.

Of course, the quantity and quality of spawning gravels are only two factors in the complex life history of the salmon. However, unlike problems that occur in the marine environment, mitigating measures can be taken to improve gravel condition and alleviate this aspect of the problems that beset these keystone species.

W. R. C. Beaumont
Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

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Westcountry Rivers Trust (WRT)

Our ever changing catchments and the sewage treatment problem.



Many of the rivers and streams in the West Country fail the standards set by the EU Water Framework Directive due at least in part to high phosphate levels entering the water. Modelling, mapping and monitoring of a river usually highlight three sources: farming, both point source from slurry and manure stores but also diffuse, from across the land and riverbanks; septic tanks from small hamlets and individual properties and sewage treatment works (STWs). Apportionment studies from across the region show that the split between the three is locally variable, but in general around 50%, plus or minus 20%, is from agriculture and the balance from sewage treatment.

As you know Westcountry Rivers Trust has worked with farmers over the years to try to reduce agricultural loadings. This is having some impact where we can

secure infrastructure grants and improvements in land management. In some of our catchments we have seen reductions in nutrient loadings and increases in invertebrates and fish populations, but that still leaves the other side of the problem, namely sewage treatment.

Over the years our small rural sewage treatment works have been pushed outside their original design specifications as increasing population has led to increased housing development. This, coupled with changing weather patterns, misconnections, where clean roof and road water is getting into the sewerage system and a reduction in the permeability of our towns and gardens as people pave over their land, is reducing STWs capacity to treat waste. It is therefore not surprising that the effectiveness of individual STWs is called into question in terms of their contribution to phosphate loading within our rivers. This is in addition to other chemicals and pollutants that may make it through the treatment process.



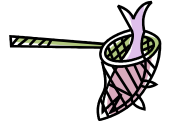
At the Trust we have always tried to operate through evidence and consensus, which is why we are gathering more and more data on our rivers in order to pinpoint the problems and provide sufficient data to hold polluters to account. This is why we have also set up citizen science programmes and invested in monitoring kit that can be deployed upstream and downstream of any problem area. These efforts have allowed us to highlight the problems as well as develop solutions. This does not always mean the best option is the end of pipe solution of a multi-million pound facility, although in places with significant development this is exactly what is required. The solution needs to be defined by the scale of the problem in relation to the rest of the river.

An alternative option that exists alongside formal treatment is the creation of constructed wetlands to take final discharges. This is currently being used successfully in the east of England. Where space permits this option has been shown to be effective, but correct design is essential. Another option is to work with the communities that use the STWs to prevent clean water getting into sewage systems, to hold back flood water and stop it overwhelming these systems and to reduce the amount of phosphate products used by householders. The final option involves reducing other loadings to bring the total loadings in an area under the legal limit. Whatever option is taken though, there needs to be an increased openness and honesty led by community monitoring, if we are to truly deal with these failures on our rivers.

Laurence Couldrick,
CEO, Westcountry Rivers Trust



CATCHING THE ENIGMATIC TAW SEA TROUT



The sea trout is often regarded as an enigmatic fish by anglers. It is a very close cousin to the Atlantic Salmon and appears to have a similar lifestyle. The sea trout is in reality a sea-run brown trout that starts its life in freshwater before it smolts and descends to the sea in the May of each year. However, in truth we know far less about the sea trout than we do about salmon. No one really knows where these juvenile fish go to feed and grow. The accepted wisdom is that they chase shrimp, sand eels and capelin in waters around the coasts of the Celtic Sea and grow quickly before returning to the river of their birth in the years that follow. They are by nature a rather secretive fish, running the rivers in the dark hours and the best time to catch them on the fly is probably at night when they are up on the fin and at their most active.

Across Devon and Cornwall the sea trout is colloquially termed a “peal”. On the Taw the smaller fish that appear in large numbers in June, July and August are called “school peal” or “harvest peal” and the bigger fish in the 2 to 6 pound bracket are “peal” or “salmon-peal” in old parlance. Any fish above the 6 pound mark is termed a “pug”, a term coined by the old salmon estuary netsmen to describe these deep and powerfully built fish. If you are lucky or skilful enough catch a 6 pounder or anything bigger, then you will have done well because it’s a very good fish indeed. The Taw regularly produces big sea trout; the biggest in recent years caught by a salmon angler on the main stem was over 16 pounds – a monster. A big fresh August hen of over 14 pounds was also caught on the Mole in 2016, but every year double figure fish are taken and a good smattering of 7- 9 pounders regularly succumb to night anglers.



So how do you go about finding a taking sea trout on the Taw system? Well the first thing to realise is that the fish start to run the river far earlier than most people imagine. Some of the big fish start to appear in late April and continue to trickle into the system throughout May. These fish often run hard and can be found well up on the Upper Taw and Mole. I have seen sea liced peal caught at night at Wampford Bridge on the Mole in the second week of May. On the Taw night fishing operations normally commence in earnest at the beginning of June. The runs of fish really start to build and by the third week of June good numbers of peal will be present throughout the main stem and well above the junction. Night time temperatures will have warmed and stabilised and with a bit of luck, warm and gentle South Westerlies will blow, thus encouraging the fish to be in a taking mood. Rather like salmon, the truth is that fresh run fish will more readily take the fly than the

older residents. But fishing a fining river after a small summer spate will pep things up and often produce great results.

Sea trout will lie up in sheltered water and deep shaded pools during the day, but will become more active as the light values change at dusk. When the river is low, anglers fishing at night will often hear fish in the riffles as they move from pool to pool. Sometimes these new arrivals will settle in a pool and then become ready takers. At times you can intercept running fish at the heads of the pools but more of that later. It is generally accepted that in settled conditions as the darkness deepens and night draws in the peal will become more active. Some will decide to run upstream, but those that have stopped to rest will often move from their daytime hiding places to take up positions in the deeper glides and pool tails. They will often lie together as a loose shoal or you may find a smattering of individuals distributed through the pool, but when there is a bright moon peal will seek the shelter of the gloom provided by overhanging trees and bankside vegetation. When conditions are good you will often see or hear peal swirling and moving or jumping with a very distinctive “ker-plosh”. An encouraging sound that is always good for morale.



Let's talk a little about tackle, flies and tactics. Given that the Taw is essentially fly only, you'll need a nine and a half to ten foot fly rod rated AFTM 6 or 7. A good quality fly reel with a properly working drag and floating line to match. A good reservoir or still water trout set up will suffice admirably.

Depending on your level of expertise or approach you may want to pack a couple of medium or fast sink versi-tips or poly-leaders if you should wish to fish deep in the pots later in the night. Use 10lb BS leaders of 9 to 10 feet in length – anything lighter and you are asking for trouble. Peal at night aren't generally line shy. You should aim to travel light, there is no need to festoon yourself with vests, pockets and gismos. Wear chest waders if you can because they will allow you to wade deep and manoeuvre in the pool when required. Wear a warm jacket with big pockets into which you can deposit licence, fly boxes, leader material, nylon clippers, spare torch et al. Take a net – a small Gye net or other suitable alternative is a must. A hat with a peak or wide brim helps and a modern LED powered head torch is essential; make sure it has a red-light function. By turning away from the river, you can use the red light to change flies and undo the inevitable tangles and most importantly the red light won't spook the fish and ruin your night vision. Never, ever, shine a white light on a pool at night – you will kill the fishing.

Many anglers are happy to stick with the more traditional fly patterns such as Silver Invicta or Butcher and so on, but these days many anglers also fish modern flies that are bigger by comparison



and of substantially different appearance. I have real confidence fishing slimly tied Black and Silver Snakes, Waddingtons or tubes of anything between an inch and two inches in length on the point. There are those who say that fishing a dropper increases the chances of tangling and they are probably right. However, there are a lot of anglers who do fish a dropper because it works for them. My fishing friends and I use black and silver stoat's tail and hair wing butcher variants, tied on size 6 or 8 low water salmon singles on the dropper and we catch a substantial proportion of our fish on them.

Let us assume you have secured your beat for the night. It is late June, the evening is settled, warm and there is good cloud cover. Having checked the Bye Laws the first thing to do is arrive early when it is still light, stow your kit in a safe place and conduct a recce. Stay well back from the river and Identify the pools, pool tails and glides that might hold fish. Also check those hazards that might affect your casting and those areas where a switch or roll cast might be useful. Take note of the access points and routes because the river will become a different place when darkness falls. As the dusk deepens and the bats appear you might wish to start by having a cast or two in the riffles at the heads of the pools. This is often the place to intercept running fish and there is always a chance of encountering a resident salmon in the oxygenated water. You will find that your eyes will adjust to the gloom and when the dusk deepens and all becomes a darker uniform grey, switch your fishing effort to the glides and pool tails. Make your way gently into the water and cast downstream at a forty five degree angle under the far bank, put in an appropriate mend and work your flies back across the river with a gentle series of pulls or a slow figure of eight retrieve. Fish your cast out, take a long pace and cast gain. Remember, you are searching for that taking fish and always fish right down to the very tail of a pool. Peal will often lie in amazingly shallow water at night.

In the wee small hours you may feel the river has gone dead. The peal may have stopped showing and gone down and all is quiet. This is the time to change tactics. Put on a quick sinking poly leader and short tippet; team it with a big fly and start searching the deeper parts of the pools. Fish the fly with a slow retrieve and concentrate on getting the fly right down. This method often delivers surprising results. However, as the eastern sky starts to lighten it will be time to switch back to the floater and concentrate on the glides and pool tails before dawn heralds the end of your fishing.



A peal will take your fly in a variety of ways. Sometimes you will feel a fish pluck at your fly, but not take. Take a step back and cast to the same place again, a fresh fish will more than likely have another go. Sometimes the pulls are savage, sometimes the fly just stops dead and sometimes the fly feels as if it has gone peculiarly light in the water. No matter, the response should be the same.

Don't strike per say, but rather lift the rod firmly and pull down on the line in your other hand. Tighten into the fish and hopefully the fireworks will begin. The wonderfully exciting thing about night-time peal fishing is that you never know what is coming next. It could be a feisty school peal, but equally it could be an eight pounder fresh from the tide. On feeling the hook there's a good chance that the fish will immediately take to the air and then run and then jump again. Fights can be spectacular and heart-stopping - a big peal will change direction in an inkling, so be warned - but weather the initial storm and things will calm down. Sooner or later you will be able to draw your prize into the net and with beating heart and shaking hands saviour one of angling's great triumphs and admire one of our most enigmatic game fish – before doing it all again.

Oh and by the way, a word of warning. Once you try night-time peal angling it can become seriously addictive.



Ian Blewett
RTFA Committee Member



River Taw Fisheries Association Committee

Chairman	Alex Gibson
Secretary	George Marsh
Treasurer	Richard Nickell
Lower Taw	Simon Hillcox Mark Maitland-Jones
Upper Taw	Simon Phillips John Smith Peter Tyjas
River Mole	Andy Gray John Macro Chris Taylor

Associate Members' Representative	Ian Blewett*
IT Adviser	Bryan Martin*
Newsletter Editor	Judith Kauntze*
Torridge Representative	Paul Ashworth*

* Non-voting Members



RTFA – FIT FOR THE FUTURE?



Alex Gibson asked me to contribute this article to your Newsletter because of concerns about whether RTFA is up to speed constitutionally. Nevertheless it is with some temerity that I write as a very new (2018) Associate Member of RTFA. This article reflects my experience gained over 14 years serving the 20 individual river associations in the South West and as a Committee Member on the Exe, Fowey and Teign Associations. The views expressed are mine alone.

In common with most of the river associations in the South West, RTFA started life as a Riparian and Fishery Owners' Association reflecting the direct ownership interests of its leading players. This is apparent in the membership arrangements with two different levels – Full for riparian and fishery owners and Associate for everyone else – as a new rod holder on the Taw I have joined as an Associate Member which means I pay less than for my membership of three other rivers! Does any of this matter?

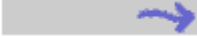
When I first joined the Exe Association, RETA, its constitution was similar to the Taw's. It had relatively few members and had been run by the same small group for many years. It changed its constitution to allow anyone with an interest in the river and its fishing to be a full member by the simple addition of the word 'and anglers' in its constitution which now includes *To represent the interests of riparian owners and anglers of the River Exe and its tributaries*. The Committee includes representatives from all parts of the river. There are now 250 individual members each paying £30 pa, many by Standing Order, plus a few corporate members paying varying amounts. The benefits of the changed constitution include:

1. Better representation of all anglers on the river and reflection of the socio-economic benefits of angling on the river – removal of the old 'us and them';
2. Better basis of influence on the establishment (Defra, Environment Agency, Exmoor National Park, SWW, Angling Trust, IFCA's, etc);
3. Better income from a wider base;
4. Easier fundraising for specific projects, especially when applying for public funds;
5. A bigger pool of potential Committee Members;
6. More potential volunteers who feel fully involved – now reflected in work on Riverfly, juvenile fish surveys, habitat and gravel improvement, and cormorant and goosander monitoring and control;
7. Easier communication with the bulk of the Exe angling community.



This is not to suggest that the RTFA is not a very successful

association – its work on barrier removal and other river improvement schemes, IFCA netting byelaws, siltation and sewage treatment is testament to its success which rivals that of most associations. Indeed RETA is only now following the Taw’s lead on removing barriers to migration. However there is an increasing threat which suggests it’s time for a change - the threat to game angling, especially for salmon and sea trout, posed by the EA’s focus on regulating fishing while doing little to address the real threats to rivers, their fish and hence our fishing.

 To be a credible force when dealing with this and all the other threats and to influence the debate it is important to have a strong democratic base – there are still those in power who see us as an anachronistic irrelevant group of rich owners even though our track record of caring for our rivers is in direct contrast to theirs. The continuing reduction in the EA’s ability to fulfil its statutory fisheries duties is increasing the need for us to manage our own rivers for the benefit of all anglers, not just fishery owners. Equally the interests of owners (and I am one on the Exe) are best served by the most effective river associations.

As I said in the opening I wrote this with some temerity and it is with the same temerity that I ask the question – is RTFA constitutionally fit for the future?

Roger Furniss
Former Secretary, South West Rivers Association



End of Season Gathering

The newly refurbished Rising Sun Inn at Umberleigh will be hosting an evening to mark the end of the season on Sunday, 30th September. More details to follow on the website.

To book a table and for further details, please contact
Charles O'Shea on 01769 560447

River Taw Byelaws

Seasons

Salmon	1 March to 30 September
Sea Trout & Brown Trout	15 March to 30 September

Methods

Fly fishing permitted all season
Spinning permitted until 31 March
No other method or bait fishing permitted

Limits

Salmon	No salmon to be retained before 16 June No salmon greater than 70cms in length to be retained after 31 July
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Salmon bag limits	2 fish in any 24 hour period 3 fish in any 7 day period 10 fish in a season
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No rod caught salmon to be sold or offered for sale

Sea Trout bag limits	5 fish in any 24 hour period 15 fish in any 7 day period 40 fish in a season Size limit 25cms
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No rod caught sea trout to be sold or offered for sale

Brown Trout	Size limit 20cms
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We strongly recommend
that you practice catch and release wherever you can
and release all sea trout under 1lb and above 4lbs

