



Project No. LIFE04NAT/GB/000250

Newsletter 1 – Spring 2005



Dr Colin Bull – CASS Project Manager at Glen Clova, Angus - the site of some planned habitat work which will be funded by LIFE & the Esk District Salmon Fishery Board (image courtesy of SNH)

Welcome to the first Newsletter of the Conservation of Atlantic Salmon in Scotland Project – better known to many of you as the Salmon LIFE Project. This Newsletter will be produced on an annual basis and given that we are at a very early stage of the Project, this first edition will be very much of an introductory nature.

Firstly we would like to welcome **Dr Colin Bull**, who is the CASS Project Manager. Colin will be well known to many in the Scottish fisheries world. He has a PhD in Zoology from the University of Glasgow and has a strong fisheries background, having previously worked as Biologist and Executive Manager for the Awe Fisheries Trust and Forth Fisheries Foundation.

We also extend a warm welcome to Colin's colleagues appointed to assist in managing this exciting 4 year Project - Project Officer, **Dr Ruth McWilliam**, and **Claire Myles**, Project Administrator. The Project Team is based at Clunie, by Pitlochry.

As you may know, a great deal of work has been invested over the last 3 years in preparing a bid for European funding to enhance the conservation of Atlantic Salmon at designated Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in Scotland.

To assist those uninitiated with LIFE, below are several basic questions and answers which will give you an impression of what LIFE is, who is involved with the project and what the project aims to do. Further Newsletters will elaborate further as project work unfolds.

What is LIFE?

LIFE, the Financial Instrument for the Environment, introduced in 1992, is one of the spearheads of the European Union's environmental policy. It co-finances projects in three areas:

LIFE Nature works to conserve natural habitats and the wild fauna and flora of European Union interest, according to the Birds and Habitats directives, thus supporting

implementation of the European Union's nature conservation policy and the Natura 2000 Network. **LIFE Environment** aims to implement Community policy and legislation on the environment in the European Union and candidate countries. This approach enables demonstration and development of new methods for the protection and the enhancement of the environment. **LIFE Third Countries** concerns technical assistance activities for promoting sustainable development in third countries. This component of the programme supports the development of environmental management capacities, both for our administrative partners outside the Union and for companies and NGOs in those countries. LIFE is open to all EU countries, some candidate countries (currently Romania) and some third countries bordering the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea.

The Conservation of Atlantic Salmon in Scotland project is half-funded by the **European Community's LIFE-Nature** programme, a source of EC funding that specifically targets conservation actions in designated areas aimed at natural habitats and wild fauna and flora protected under the EC Habitats Directive or Wild Birds Directive. The network of designated sites is collectively known as Natura 2000.

Why Scotland?

Scotland is a European stronghold for Atlantic salmon and has around 80 per cent of the UK's Atlantic salmon population. Although the Scottish population is still one of the healthiest in the world, by 2000

global salmon abundance had dropped to about a third of levels experienced in the 1960's and 1970's. The salmon's unusual life cycle, which involves spawning in clean freshwater gravel beds, followed by a journey down to the sea once they reach one to three years old, and then returning as an adult to spawn at the birth river, is fraught with dangers. Water pollution, obstacles, over-fishing, habitat destruction, climate change and the effects of fish farming, are all factors which put pressure on fragile salmon stocks. In addition to other measures being taken to address these threats, 17 sites in Scotland have been given EU-level protection as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for salmon. Eight of these areas will be covered by the LIFE-Nature project.



Tree-planting work in the Blandoch catchment. (image courtesy of Galloway Fisheries Trust)

What will the project do?

The project is worth £3M and is the most significant for Atlantic salmon conservation ever undertaken in Scotland's rivers. It will coordinate work to substantially improve the conditions for salmon in eight key salmon rivers. These include measures such as removing

obstacles in rivers, reducing pollution run-off from grazing animals, and protecting riverside vegetation.

As well as hands – on project activity, equally important will be raising awareness of salmon conservation amongst river owners, schools and the general public. The Project will also network with similar initiatives in other EU countries and exchange information to enhance our understanding of mutual issues. The Project will also network with similar initiatives in other EU countries and exchange information to enhance our understanding of mutual issues. The LIFE-Nature project is the largest public-private sector partnership investment in Atlantic salmon conservation and brings together a broad spectrum of organisations which work with salmon in Scotland's rivers.



Salmon egg box work in the Bladnoch catchment (image courtesy of Galloway Fisheries Trust)

Who is involved?

The Project is coordinated by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), in partnership with the Association of Salmon Fisheries Boards, participating fisheries boards and trusts covering the rivers, the Scottish Executive, Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Hydro-Electric.



Education has a strong theme in the project – school children visit a salmon hatchery to learn about the life history of salmon (image courtesy of SNH)

The ultimate inclusion of the rivers in the project was dictated by the response from the bodies that manage the salmon populations (ie the DSFB's). During development, the relevant management groups for salmon in the 17 SAC rivers were asked to provide project briefs for inclusion. Many of these river areas declined this offer, or were not in a position to take on administering such a complex task. Out of the initial 10 rivers in the funding bid, 2 were excluded due to the Commission being unable to fund certain elements of work and a number of the smaller SAC rivers, located in the West and North, were the recent recipients of LIFE funding to develop management plans (LIFE Rivers project) and according to the rules, were therefore not eligible for further LIFE award.

What next?

The project is at a very early stage and much energy has been expended by the Project Management Team on setting up administrative systems so that it runs smoothly and without undue

problems. Local Operational Planning Teams (LOPTs) have been created – reporting systems fine tuned – financial planning undertaken etc. Whilst these aspects of the Project are perhaps not as inspiring as some of the expected outputs such as unblocking fish obstacles and improving riparian habitat, they are of critical importance if the Project is to be a success. Rigorous reporting obligations to the European Commission exist and extreme discipline will be required amongst all the Project Partners in terms of financial transparency, timeous reporting of action and meticulous record keeping in line with the EU conditions of the award.

ACTIONS IN 2005 - For the first full year of the Project, we anticipate action on the following items and further details will be provided in the next Newsletter at the end of 2005:

River Oykel: Purchase and non-operation of salmon netting rights, improvements to fish passage at Duchally and continued development of angler education in salmon conservation.

River Spey: modification of five man-made barriers to improve passage for salmon, along with installation of two fish counters. A programme of enhancement stocking to ensure adequate re-seeding in affected areas.

River Dee: Restoration of riparian habitats in significant tributary areas along with improvements to in-stream habitat in places where serious degradation has taken place. Coppicing to improve light penetration and the installation of silt traps to reduce damage to salmon redds.



Upgrading of passage facilities and screening for salmon at man-made barriers are planned (example of screens prior to refurbishment – image courtesy of SSE)

River South Esk: Fluvial audit undertaken to provide the information to optimise future bankside and in-stream habitat improvement works in Glen Clova.

River Tay: Improvements for salmon access in two major tributary areas and production of guidelines for landowners on gravel extraction based upon a fluvial audit.

River Moriston: re-establishment of a salmon nursery area and co-ordinated broodstock and enhancement stocking programme to ensure adequate re-seeding.

River Tweed: Installation of a new fish counter on the Gala Water.

River Bladnoch: Installation of a new smolt counter, improvements to both instream and riparian habitats and mitigation stocking to counter the continuing impacts of acidification.

If you have any questions, the Project Team would be delighted to help you – please do not hesitate to contact Colin, Ruth or Claire on 01796 484120 or email: colin.bull@snh.gov.uk