

DFA 2011 - SECRETARY'S REPORT

- **2010 Season – [a] Catches** – a very dry April, May and June did little to help salmon and sea trout run the river early on but probably helped the netmen to have their best season since 1994. They caught 97 salmon [last 5 year average 45] and 196 Sea Trout [last 5 year average 114]
Rod catches have yet to be given to us by the EA but it would appear there were good numbers of salmon in the Duchy water towards the end of the season, although the grilse run was poor. At least catches of sea trout should be up on 2009 with good numbers of school peal present in the lower river. The redd counting that was possible in a wettish autumn indicated encouraging numbers of salmon redds however it is likely that the EA will calculate that the river has again failed to reach its Conservation Limit [for salmon] of around 600 females. They are therefore likely to continue to want us to try to achieve 90% release: with the DAA, who catch the majority of our fish, achieving almost 100% release we should be close to achieving this target. It has, however, been pointed out to the EA that setting this target is counter-productive insofar as it reduces fishing effort greatly, resulting in fewer salmon being caught, thus almost certainly giving a false impression of our salmon stock.. Until we get fish counters operating on Totnes Weir [hopefully by this autumn] we are never going to know what the true picture is eg if the Tamar was judged by its rod catches it would certainly fail to reach its CL but because it has a counter it is known that its stocks are, in fact, quite healthy.
[b] In river works – Toby Russell will talk at the meeting about the work the WRT have carried out on our behalf in the past 12 months, including work on the Duchy fishery. Additionally [i], as we have been short of volunteers in recent years, Mike Maslin obtained £1,000 from the EA to pay Andy Pascoe for the weeding and gravel raking of our redds on the Cherrybrook and Wallabrook, which work he supervised. For this coming year hopefully, some volunteers will be willing to supplement Andy's work so we can tackle more tributaries. [ii] the hemlock on the bottom section of the Stannonbrook, which was getting out of control, was sprayed
[c] Ph study – with £15,000 obtained by the WRT we had hoped that Exeter University would be able carry out a project intended to show whether the low ph flushes, which occur periodically in the upper river system, are affecting our stock or whether our salmon have developed a genetic resistance to low ph. Unfortunately a change in personnel within the EA led to it being necessary to postpone this important project. The WRT will now try to obtain alternative funding for this project so we hope it will go ahead this summer.
- **Survey of our weirs and abstractions** – in addition to the good work being undertaken by Mark Owen and Roger Furniss of the Anglers Trust on abstractions within the Dartmoor SAC which would appear to be a factor in the decline of our salmon stocks, we have commissioned Pete Kibel of Fishtec to undertake a survey of all our weirs and abstractions. Both Roger and Pete will report their findings at the meeting and will be working together so that a strong case can be put to the EA [to reduce our abstractions].
- **Netting situation** – one of our three netmen, Tim Hannaford-Hill, has indicated that he would like to be bought out, and we probably have sufficient funds left over from our buy-out of 10 netmen 5 years ago to be able to do this. However before proceeding it will be necessary for DEFRA to reduce our Net Limitation Order from 3 to 2, something they will not be able to do before the start of this coming netting season. So for this year we are looking at paying him not to net.
- **Canoeing** – with Canoe England still pushing for Voluntary Access Agreements/Arrangements to apply on a 365 day basis on all rivers for the first time for many years we currently do not have such an Agreement in place. Riparian owners have therefore agreed to permit canoeing to carry on during the winter until March 15th. It will then be made clear to canoeists that we will take all necessary steps to try to prevent any canoeing between March 15th and October 1st The Angling Trust is putting pressure on the coalition government to get the BCU/CE to agree to VAAs which effectively limit canoeing to winter months, but a longer term solution may be to require all canoeists to be licensed only to canoe in an agreed period on each river, in the same way we have to take out an EA licence to fish
- **A web site for the river** – work has started on a simple web site for the river www.riverdartdevon.co.uk which will give a brief description of the river with links to sections on Conservation and Management, Fishing and Canoeing. Hopefully this web site will be operating before the AGM..