

2005 Branch Report – Welsh Branch

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SECRETARY'S REPORT FOR 2005

Programme of events, 2005: We have had a very successful first year with the new Welsh branch committee. Over the summer of 2005 we held an open seminar and ran three fieldtrips with very encouraging attendance at all events, a review of which was published in FISH in October. Keen to follow this success, over the winter we held two seminars, both of which drew members and non-members alike and a lot of positive feedback.

In June, Dr David Sear from Southampton University presented his recent work on the implications of sedimentation on the spawning habitat of the Wye. The talk was very well attended with more than 30 representatives from local angling groups and landowners, as well as the Environment Agency.

June also saw the first of our fieldtrips with a visit to Swansea and a double-bill of aquaculture. We started at Aquaculture Wales (AqWa) a project dedicated to the development of a sustainable aquaculture industry both in Wales, and globally. Based at Swansea University, this state of the art, brand new research facility is designed for feed development and health management studies on finfish and shellfish. The tour was very comprehensive and it was really positive to see such a high priority given to furthering the cause of sustainable aquaculture, from filtering wetland systems to site selection for farms.

This was followed by a visit to the Welsh Peeler Crab culture project at Swansea Docks, the only place in the world where the European shore crab is being cultured on a commercial basis. What was fascinating at this site was the vast difference to the hi-tech facilities just seen at AqWa. The project was started by two anglers who thought that there must be a viable alternative to the wild collection of this much sought after bait.

The second trip found us at Dyffryn Springs trout and coarse fishery, where we had a short presentation by the owner followed by some fishing and a barbecue. It was very interesting to hear the story of the fishery, the trials and tribulations of running a mixed fishery and making it such a success. Also interesting was the "educating them by stealth" management strategy employed, e.g. litter control and caring for the other wildlife which shares the lakes. We all had a thoroughly enjoyable (if troutless) fishing session, with some of the members bringing their children to have a go.

August saw us visiting the Blackrock Lave Netsmen at their open day on the Severn Estuary. Martin Morgan of the Black Rock Lave Fishermen's Association gave us an informative talk on this ancient method of fishing. We were impressed by the enthusiasm of the fishermen and their determination to carry on despite the numerous pressures they face. To top off a very enjoyable evening members and guests adjourned to a nearby Indian restaurant for an excellent curry.

In October we held a follow up to the 2004 annual Conference in Cardiff, an open seminar 'Making Fisheries Sustainable'. The first presentation was from Chris Rees of the Environment Agency's Sustainable Fisheries Programme, about the Taff Salmon Homecoming Project. This project exists on a local scale involving children in schools in the Taff and Ely. It works to educate children on the life-history of salmon, the industrial history of the local rivers and that impact on the salmon, and the role of angling. This education is coupled with practical coaching in fishing, in association with the Merthyr Angling Club. In addition, each school is given a batch of salmon eggs, these are looked after by the children and watched until they start to hatch, at which point they are transferred to the EA hatchery for growing on, then the fry are released into the river by

the children. This project has been a huge success with more and more schools requesting to take part every year. With the inclusion of angling on the school syllabus in some parts of the country, and the growing importance placed on practical learning, this project should go from strength to strength.

The second presentation was given by Alex Hickman of the Marine Stewardship Council, this excellent presentation highlighted the work that the MSC do and outlined their Certification of Fisheries programme. This talk contrasted with the first in that it looked at fisheries on a global scale, we were given an introduction to the current state of fisheries throughout the world, including some scary statistics such as 24% of the world's fish stocks are over exploited, depleted or recovering from depletion. In response to this, the MSC has introduced a voluntary scheme in which a fishery may be assessed and if deemed to be managed in a sustainable manner, the product may be eco-labelled. We were given an explanation of how the assessment is carried out, and how the certification is carried out. The subject is very topical, as we all are no doubt aware such huge problems face the fishing industry, let's hope that everyone took away the very important message that we can make a difference by choosing our dinner a little more carefully. More details can be obtained on those fisheries which are certified, and those currently under assessment for certification on the MSC website, which can be accessed via a link from the Welsh branch homepage.

The second seminar was held in association with the Teifi Trout Association (TTA) in Cenarth, Ceredigion. The subject was Catch and Release, and was such a contentious subject that we had a record audience of 63, mostly made up of local anglers and club representatives. Three presentations were given, the first of which was from Rob Evans of the Environment Agency. The main aim of Rob's presentation was to provide an overview of recent developments in Catch & Release in relation to the continuing decline in salmon stocks in England & Wales. The science behind the legislation and reasoning for these measures was presented in a clear and concise manner, and the benefits of catch and release, especially when used in conjunction with other fishery management tools, were shown. Local and national legislation, management initiatives and voluntary agreements were highlighted with a view to encouraging higher release rates on those rivers where current release rates are low and stocks are depleted. Catch & Release in relation to sea trout stocks were also discussed.

The second presentation was from Simon Evans of the Wye and Usk Foundation on the status of salmon in the Wye and the impact of catch and release on the salmon populations in the river. Historically, salmon stocks in the Wye, like many rivers were healthy and fish abundant. When stocks began to decline, the WUF began to promote voluntary catch and release measures to try to help stocks to recover, including such initiatives as a sweatshirt for proof of release. With the introduction in 1999 of statutory Catch and Release before June 16th the WUF changed its focus to environmental considerations and implemented a huge programme of improving fish passage (opening up a further 132 km of salmon and 330 km of trout spawning habitat), habitat restoration and acid re-balance measures. In recent years, these measures have been complemented by a heavy promotion of voluntary catch and release, which is now up 100%, and a small but significant increase in juveniles has been recorded in the catchment. It was shown how vital catch and release was for the Wye, although other tools were important, the status of the salmon in the Wye meant that without 100% C&R they would not herald the recovery of the stocks.

The final presentation was from Steve Barnard of the EA, and outlined the Fisheries Legislative Review. The Review (published in 2000) made 195 recommendations, 188 of which were accepted by Defra and WAG. Many of these recommendations have already been implemented or are in hand, but 53 require changes to primary legislation. Whilst it is Government's responsibility to progress a new Fisheries Bill to implement these changes, the Environment Agency has developed its views & advice and has discussed these with Defra and WAG. Defra is now at the stage of preparing instructions for parliamentary counsel. A word of caution though: even if a draft Bill for a new Act is completed early this year, further progress will depend very much on parliamentary time and priorities and it is unlikely that a new Act will be in place for at least the next two or three years. Still, for an undertaking of this magnitude - rewriting legislation that has been in place in its current form for 30 years and needing to take into account a very

different set of pressures and drivers - the Environment Agency and Government are working well together and have made great progress.

The idea behind this seminar was to present Catch and Release as one useful tool in the management of fisheries. It provoked lots of lively debate and we came away with some more ideas and suggestions for future seminars, addressing issues such as stocking and predation – impacts on populations, conservation limits and fish counters – their use in population assessments and management. Our thanks go to Colin Chapman and Bob Bird of the TTA for organising such an excellent venue and promoting the event, we look forward to equally successful collaborations in the future.

We believe that all of the talks and presentations we have had over the last year have been both interesting and topical. In order that we can share these with everyone in the IFM, not just those able to attend the events, we will be putting all of the presentations on the Welsh branch homepage.

The 2006 programme of events will be discussed at our AGM in February. Events will be announced and publicised via the IFM web site and through our newsletter.

New IFM website: Welsh Branch member Alex Coley was appointed website manager for the new IFM website. Alex was heavily involved in all aspects of setting up the new site. The success and popularity of the site is largely down to the efforts of Alex in 2005.

Rob Evans

Hon. Sec.

27 January 2006