



LOCH ACHONACHIE ANGLING CLUB NEWSLETTER 49 : SEPTEMBER 2024

SO HOW'S THE FISHING BEEN? LOCHS & UPPER CONON & UPPER BLACKWATER

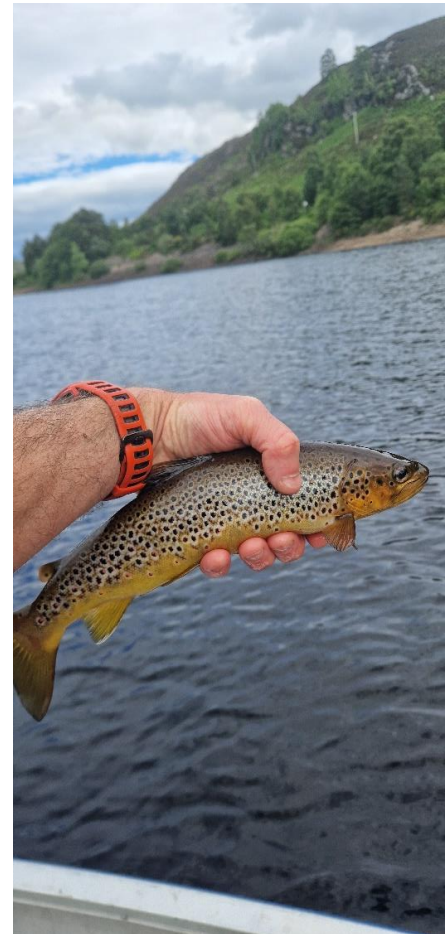
As Autumn (or is it Winter?) takes charge of the last month of our trout & salmon season, it's mainly the chilly and strong winds that are biting as I get this newsletter finished and out to you all. We certainly didn't seem to have much of a summer, but neither did the salmon get the water needed when they could have used it to run further upstream. Nevertheless, there were salmon caught in the Upper Conon last week, with many fish to be seen clearly moving upstream even in depleted waters and loads of very dark fish throwing themselves in the air in our beats on the Upper Blackwater though not throwing themselves at the many flies and lures being offered. It was always going to be a strange salmon summer on our rivers with the impact of no generation flows due to SSE ongoing work at Luichart Power Station, but I still look forward with optimism to receiving your catch returns which may paint a better picture of your fishing season. Certainly, the lochs have fished well and with both Meig and Achonachie stocked mid-June & July some chunky fish have been caught and some feisty wild fish featuring too. Those fishing for trout on the rivers have also had great sport, and a number of pike angler outings have been well rewarded. Significant water level changes on Loch Meig in particular have continued to frustrate anglers and fish alike – the imperative of electricity from renewables affecting the fish ever more. So, September is a good time to look back on good things in the year to date and catch up with members' activities, outings and competitions.

Great to get this email below and photos of a very happy outing on Loch Meig





“Following on from a very successful evening from the bank last week that I had, my son and I, and Dave Genney and his sons decided to book boats as a treat for the kids. Needless to say, we had a fantastic day’s fishing on Loch Meig with firsts on the fly and biggest fish for all involved. All the kids catching spectacular fish, creating that special day which wants the kids to keep on fishing. This is all too hard to achieve at times, this will provide the buzz to keep them coming back. Thanks to Bob Mortimer and Paul Whitehouse, all fish returned to fight another day. With chants of "aaaaand awaaaaayyyy". Attached



are a few happy kids with fish. We all can't wait to head out again. Thanks to all the club and to the committee. It is a great shame to lose a loch, but with this fantastic fishing on our doorstep we have some happy kids.
Mac & Ivor Macdonald.
Dave & Fraser and Angus Genney

WINTER LEAGUE 2023-24

Just as a wee “attractor” for the forthcoming Winter League 24-25 here’s a taster of how it ended late in March. We headed to the excellent wild country, but heartily stocked and cared for Lagg Trout Fishery in far off NW Sutherland for the final leg of eight challenging Saturdays from October to March. Now under the experienced management of Euan Anderson, Lagg fishery has moved on from what we considered halcyon days in Tom Sharpe’s ownership. Euan has definitely kept the faith, the fishery has changed hands and remains in tremendous shape. It always figures twice in our league fixtures, often the December leg and always the March final. Closely contested and wonderful companionship characterise this competition which at various times has featured competitors pulling each other’s cars out of ditches, pushing buddy’s cars up iced slopes, digging snow out from wheels, and even pulling competitors out of at least two fishery lochs (names can be supplied if those dampish anglers don’t pay the ransom in time!)

Some of the LAAC rainbow warriors at Mill of Kellas in December, a very neat and well kept fishery now thriving again under new management.



COMPETITOR	Leg 1 28/10/23 Lagg	Leg 2 11/11/23 Achagour	Leg 3 25/11/23 Artloch	Leg 4 9/12/23 Mill of Kellas	Leg 5 6/1/24 Fergue	Leg 6 27/1/24 Fergue	Leg 7 2/3/24 Artloch	7 LEG TOTAL	BEST 5 LEGS	LEAGUE PLACING
Stevie Dowds	2 7lb 9oz 4	1 2lb 10oz 10	3 6lb 9oz 7	3 6lb 5oz 6	2 5lb 4oz 14	N/S	3 7lb 11oz 1	56	28	8
Andy Downie	2 5lb 2oz 8	2 4lb 2oz 6	2 5lb 7oz 9	N/S 0 15	3 7lb 3oz 10	2 9lb 3oz 6	3 6lb 6oz 3	57	42	12
Neal Drummond	1 3lb 2oz 10	N/S 0 16	N/S 14	N/S 0 15	3 10lb 9oz 6	N/S	15	90	59	16
Graham Hoare	1 4lb 1oz 9	1 2lb 12 0	12	1 4lb 3oz 11	2 4lb 15oz 15	2 6lb 2oz 13	0 0 13	85	57	15
Ally Hunter	0 0 11	2 2lb 6oz 2	8b 2oz 2	2 4lb 5oz 10	3 15lb 15oz 1	3 8b 12oz 7	3 6lb 3oz 4	46	24	6
Dave Macgregor	3 10lb 3oz 3	2 6lb 11oz 2	3 5lb 10oz 8	3 7lb 3oz 4	3 7lb 8oz 8	3 9b 14oz 5	3 6lb 8	38	22	4
Ian MacPhail	2 6lb 13oz 6	3 3lb 8oz 9	2 4lb 12oz 10	3 6lb 6oz 5	3 6lb 7oz 11	3 7lb 4oz 11	0 0 13	65	41	11
Neil MacRitchie	2 6lb 6oz 7	3 6lb 7oz 8	3 7lb 1oz 4	1 3lb 12	3 5lb 10oz 13	3 12lb 2oz 8	3 6lb 3oz 4	46	21	3
Gordon Martin	N/S 0 15	2 3lb 14oz 8	N/S 14	3 6lb 1oz 7	2 10lb 15oz 3	3 6lb 11oz 12	2 4lb 9oz 10	69	40	10
Scott McMath	2 7lb 8oz 9	N/S 0 16	3 9lb 5oz 1	3 4lb 13oz 9	2 5lb 11oz 12	3 16lb 6oz 1	3 6lb 3oz 4	48	23	5
Ali Morrison	N/S 0 15	3 12lb 3oz 1	0 12	3 7lb 9oz 2	1 2lb 3oz 16	3 11b 11oz 4	1 2b 5oz 12	62	31	9
Gavin Morton	0 0 11	1 1lb 9oz 13	2 4lb 1oz 11	0 0 14	3 7b 11oz 7	3 7b 7oz 10	3 5lb 15oz 9	75	42	12
Derek Ritchie	0 0 11	0 0 14	3 7lb 3oz 3	3 11lb 8oz 1	3 14lb 2	3 8lb 5oz 9	1 2lb 11oz 13	51	26	7
John Ritchie	0 0 11	3 3lb 15oz 7	N/S 14	1 2b 9oz 13	3 10lb 15oz 3	N/S 14	N/S 15	77	48	14
Lewis Ross	3 14lb 11oz 1	3 4lb 11oz 4	3 6lb 15oz 5	3 7lb 4oz 3	3 10lb 13oz 5	3 8b 11oz 8	3 7b 7oz 2	28	15	1
Derek Williamson	3 12b 4oz 2	3 4lb 10oz 2	3 6lb 15oz 5	2 5lb 3oz 8	3 7b 4oz 9	3 15lb 14oz 2	3 6lb 3oz 4	35	16	2
Biggest Trout	Lewis Ross 7lb 7oz	Ali Morrison 9lb 5oz	Scott McMath 4lb 9oz	Derek Ritchie 6lb 12oz	Ally Hunter 10lb 6oz	Scott McMath 8lb 10oz	Stevie Dowds 3lb 3oz			

The league statistics as we headed into the final leg

Fishing for heaviest bag of three fish and biggest fish of the leg involves judgement, tenacity and luck. Over the first seven legs this winter's league had six different leg winners viz. Lewis Ross on first leg at Lagg; Ali Morrison at Achagour; Scott McMath at first Artloch leg; Derek Ritchie at Mill of Kellas; Ally Hunter at first Fergue outing then Scott McMath at second Fergue visit; and Stephen Dowds at the snowy return to Artloch – so as we headed to the final everyone was focussed on beating Ally Hunter's 10lb 6oz beauty from Fergue. Moreover, it was tight at the top of the table with any one of five able to come out as league winner if they could sneak past Lewis Ross in pole position. It was another windy & cold day, unexpected for west coast late March, but we got a warm hospitality welcome with bacon rolls provided by Eاون's wife Sarah – thanks!

The chilly wind affected quite a few anglers and those who secured sheltered spots on the top loch did well early on. Neil MacRitchie bagged up with a hefty looking trio of rainbows which looked as if they might sneak him into top spot until disaster struck. Keeping his fish bag in the shallows to prevent any weight loss (previous legs had been won by a single ounce) proved problematic as one of the fish headed back into the loch. Undaunted, and clearly determined he took the long march back up the hill to the top loch and hooked a bigger one. It was now all down to an eagerly watched weigh in which saw Neil perfectly tied at the top with Lewis. In the count back to previous legs – a kind of tie breaker – Lewis Ross came out with the marginally better record to win the league, with Neil in second, and Hunter, MacGregor and Williamson making up the top five and Ally Hunter's 10lb+ fish remaining unchallenged for biggest fish prize. Thanks to all the fishery proprietors, a very special thanks to Ruth Wright and friends at Artloch, and to Andy & Debbie Downie of Dingwall Sports & Model shop for prize vouchers.

It all starts again next month so if you're interested email now for details.

MEIG OPEN COMPETITION JUNE 2024

Our annual invitation open had two fewer visiting teams this year with two clubs having to call off at the last minute. It was cracking day though, picnic weather too which is always good if you've "bagged up" As individual winner (best bag 4lb 7oz & biggest fish 2lb) Neal Drummond (pictured right) and his boat partners Williamson & Dowds did. Best boat with a joint 11lb 10oz for 9 fish went to (pictured below) Ian MacPhail's boat - fishing with Eccleson & MacGregor and 2nd best boat was Dowds, Drummond, & Wiliamson. Tying for 2nd biggest fish were Robert Ross and Stephen Dowds at 1lb 10oz





BEST BOAT MEIG OPEN 2024

Ian MacPhail, George Eccleson, Dave MacGregor



COMPETITIONS BEAULY & LOCH SHIN CLUBS

Weather made competition days challenging and even cancelling one on Loch Shin. Difficult – cold east wind conditions faced four teams from LAAC who went up to fish the Beauly AC annual boat competition on Loch Watten in May, very few fish caught but Dave MacGregor took this beauty – a typically outstanding fish from that loch. Fishing with Ally Hunter they took best bag, biggest fish and best boat – a clean sweep.



Happy boys' picnic lunch during the Meig Open



LOCH SCARDROY – STRATHCONON ESTATE & EARTHKEEPER.DK

Thanks to the many members who wrote in expressing views and contributing several helpful thoughts in response to the decision by the Danish billionaire owner of Strathconon Estate to stop us leasing the loch for fishing. The next steps in this “dispute” are about to take shape when we meet with our own MSP, Deputy First Minister Kate Forbes on Friday. When the club committee met last week, they asked me to send out to all club members the submission made to Strathconon Estate owner Sophie Kristiansen and their Eartheeper.DK “rewilding” organisation. The text, polite and succinct is below.



For attention of The Board : Strathconon Estate / Eartheeper.dk

Thank you for agreeing to hear a statement by Loch Achonachie Angling Club (LAAC) in response to the decision communicated to us in March regarding the non-renewal of our fishing lease on Loch Beanacharain. I met with Troels Bavnhoj shortly after the communication. I made a number of points that I felt had not been fully considered. I would now like to expand upon these and request a reconsideration of the decision. If appropriate, I would be pleased come to meet with you to discuss more fully and openly. It is clear from the evidence of current “rewilding” projects that unless the human element of the ecosystem is involved and engaged with “rewilding” then it cannot be fully successful. Given that there has been no consultation with our club before this decision was made it is self-evident that there is no involvement of those who have lived, fished, and deeply care for the area. Indeed, most will see it as part of their birthright and responsibility to care for Strathconon. In discussion with Troels I raised a number of points, some below.

LAAC members do **not** fish for salmon in Loch Beanacharain. It is in fact a small proportion of our membership who fish the loch - mostly occasionally, and for wild brown trout. Most often using natural fly imitations to mimic the insect life of the local environment.

There is **no threat to the salmon** from our fishing as was alluded to in my meeting with Troels. On the contrary, our members are fully engaged with the environmental and biological work of Cromarty Firth Fishery Board for example i) in supporting the successful migration of smolts through artificial barriers ii) in supporting the agreed approach to protecting and enhancing the area to aid successful spawning of all salmon species iii) in reporting any abuses by “unwelcome” visitors who might not respect our area iv) and in fostering positive attitudes to wildlife both flora and fauna of our country. The list is not exclusive – our attitudes are positive.

Our angling club was formed over 70 years ago and has promoted positive attitudes to our environment over those many years and has done nothing other than help the environment and protect and enhance the ecosystem. My mailbox has been well filled since the decision with messages from disappointed anglers, a few of whom fish only Loch Beanacharain and have done since they were youngsters. It is worth considering the impact that exclusion has on the people themselves.

There are thousands of wild lochs in Scotland but many offer little in the way of an improved future for the fauna & flora of those lochs precisely because they are not being cared for and are left “unmanaged”. The notion that this is good for the plants and animals is not supported by scientific and genetic studies. That is not to say that LAAC members do not support measures to protect from harmful and intrusive practices. Neither is it to say that there are elements of “rewilding” that are not needed. Our point is that our fishing causes neither harm nor unwanted intrusion. Rather the opposite. To deny our engagement in that is to fail to recognise those crucial human elements of experience and knowledge, involvement with the environment, **and of mutuality of purpose and consent.**

In further discussing the situation with Troels I offered a number of suggested actions to alleviate concerns about the continuation of our lease and to support the project. These included:

- Limiting the numbers of anglers using the loch per week – it’s already quite low
- Removing spinning from the allowed fishing tactics for adults – it’s often just used for junior anglers in any case because it’s an easier introduction to the skills and attitudes of responsible fishing
- Access to our boats for ecological work such as invertebrate population sampling
- Limiting fishing access to **members only** – no visitor tickets sold in other words. This allows us both to know that those fishing will share the ethos & values of our club membership as well as valuing the strategic direction of your overall project.
- The genetics of fish populations dictate that where there is no top predator involved the quality of the population will decline and do so quickly. There is evidence for that all over the Highlands of Scotland and elsewhere. Rather than having a loch of outstanding quality, ready to face challenges of climate change, the balance will sway towards small wild fish less attractive to predator species dependent on the existence of good size, high quality prey. A top biological & angling writer recently stated in the angling press that Loch Beanacharain was the “Jewel in the Crown” of LAAC fishings. I feel we have played our part in determining and promoting that recognised quality, and so you will understand the dismay felt at your decision to exclude us. Fundamentally, we feel it is the wrong decision for the loch itself.

Nature restoration is critical given the rapid collapse of Earth's systems, but success will only be achieved if this includes humans. I look forward to hearing from you, hoping dearly for the lease to be renewed, and hopefully the opportunity to meet to discuss shared hopes for all species in Strathconon.

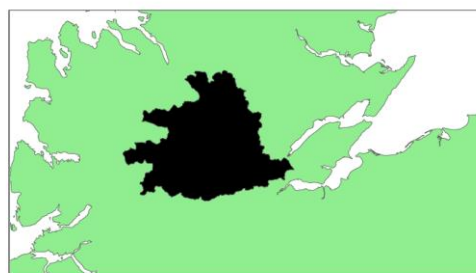
Yours sincerely,



Stephen Dowds
Chairman/Secretary
Loch Achonachie Angling Club

CONSERVATION STATUS CONFIRMED GRADE 1

River Conon: Grade 1



It is credit to all who work and fish our rivers and lochs, and to the fantastic environment we enjoy living and working in that the Conon is continuously considered a **Category 1 river system**. Maybe worth taking into account by those who would prevent decent folk from fishing our lochs & rivers? More information via the Scottish Government link below [Supporting documents - Salmon fishing: proposed river gradings for 2025 season - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultation-papers/collections/documents/Supporting_documents_-_Salmon_fishing_proposed_river_gradings_for_2025_season_-_gov.scot) (www.gov.scot)

Summary Table

Eggs required (m ²) ^a	Area (m ²) ^a	Total egg requirement ^a	Percentage chance meeting requirement					Overall	Grade
			2019	2020	2021	2022	2023		
2.85	2,304,000	6,540,000	89.39	94.46	93.52	93.46	86.71	0.91508	1

^a Figures presented are median values



Kerri McEwan Marketing Assistant at Gael Force Marine has been in touch with the regular discount offer for **LAAC** members. Here are the details of the September discount code that can be used by club members [online](#) or via GaelForce telesales desk (01463 229 400) up to 30th September.

Code to be entered at checkout: **JKD4HHY** This gives you **10% off** your order with a minimum spend of £30. It excludes outboard engines, inflatable boats, kayaks, marine electronics, and gift vouchers.

SMOLT GUIDANCE PROJECT: UPDATE

As you know from last two newsletters we've been working in co-operation with **Cromarty Firth Fishery Board, SSE & WHOOSH** on an electro guidance system to assist smolt migration down through the **Meig dam** and track the passage of **PIT** tagged smolts. These are fish that have been trapped upstream and fitted with tiny tags that can be tracked as they pass down the system and out to sea. The electro pontoons positioned near the downstream exit from the dam were supposed to guide the smolts on the usually blocked passageway to sea. Instead, it seemed to cause more problems for the smolts, some becoming "confused.com" as Cromarty Firth Fishery biologist Sunny Bradbury put it, and heading back upstream into the river Meig and even I to the smolt traps they had been previously caught and tagged. The accumulation of smolts milling around the electro-pontoons, was attractive to resident trout and perch (as warned about by us at the CFF Board meeting in March) and during the times when the electricity was switched off there was undoubted predation. Back to the drawing board but we're looking forward to hearing Sunny's full report. Meantime the Fishery Board & Trust have been repairing the fish pass at Rogie Falls where there has been a large late run of fish trying to get upstream. Their Facebook post reads "Remedial action at Rogie Falls fish pass when a rapid response is required. Three dry suits and a Tirfor winch - all in a day's work for the CFFB team"



SSE WATER LEVELS

Our pontoon system at Loch Meig has turned heads from the outset, with some wondering why the pier was built so high. It's more than proved its worth adapting to the kind of changes in level seen in these pictures. We have some new adaptations to make to the runners on the pontoons that allow the bridge section to tilt and run back and forth to keep the pontoons levels as the levels change.



Pontoons here level with the pier as the level rises to the spill line on the Meig Dam.



No slope on the bridge when the loch is at the spill line. Readers will recall that when the water level reached almost 2 metres above the spill line the reverse incline of the bridge levered the wheels out of the runners. We hope to prevent that with adaptation we're working on for the close season.



THANKS

It is always good to get prompt reports of things that need to be sorted and even better when the member fixes the problem too. So, thanks to Graham Hoare, who like many of us noticed the increase in recent years of frankly daft and inconsiderate parking across access gates. Graham sourced and fitted new signs to a number of gates – pictured right our access to South No.1 Beat on Upper Conon. Thanks Graham, great work. Thanks too Phil Lamb who noticed an oar missing from Boat 3 on Loch Meig got out and about and found it some distance down the bank before retrieving it and refitting the oar. Thanks Phil.



Our Club website <https://highlandfishing.net/> and Facebook page and Instagram site are all available to stay up to date with LAAC activities and news. Remember to get a record of your fishing tidied up so as to make it easy for you to complete your mandatory catch return in October. Your stories and photos are always welcome too so please keep them coming! Next edition will look at some experiences members have had whilst enjoying the many Exchange Tickets we have with clubs all around the country. Early notice below for you of this year's AGM date as we'd really appreciate a good turnout of members.

LAAC AGM 2024 TUESDAY 10 DECEMBER : COTTAGE BAR & RESTAURANT 7.30PM

Email us anytime at achonachie.angling@gmail.com

Tight Lines when you're fishing the final weeks of the season!

Stephen Dowds
LAAC Chairman/Secretary
September 2024