



**LOCH ACHONACHIE ANGLING CLUB
NEWSLETTER 45: DECEMBER 2023**



A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST

If you ever wondered what many Highland glens looked like in the past here's the merest glimpse of the transformation of our own Strathconon with the construction of hydro dam on the River Meig. Change has been a feature of recent years too and the Better Cable Route group have been working hard to minimise damage from future power towers. Below, with thanks to Don MacKinnon, Strathconon Scenics for his excellent panoramas of the dam today, the loch with our boat moorings, and Sgurr a Mhuilinn in the distance.



MEMBERS CONTRIBUTIONS

We welcome members' contributions in stories or pictures and so were delighted when club member and a regular writer Archie Prentice, pictured below at Loch Meiklie, agreed to write about his sport of swimming

HE SWIMS WITH THE FISHES

This is an often-used quote, linked to the first Godfather film, but it is a misquote. The actual line is “**he sleeps with the fishes**” referring to a mobster dumped in the ocean, likely attached to a heavy weight.

When COVID arrived on our shores in early 2020, I started to “swim with the fishes”. With pools closed and restrictions on our movements, open water swimming in Highland lochs became a great way to



exercise. But it did more. It got me exposed to the habitats where we have all spent countless, and probably too many, hours trying to catch those elusive specimen fish.

It has always intrigued me how Highland lochs, which seem to be pretty uniform, can fish well in one area, but drift a few yards away and you get nothing. Yes, there are go to features like a dam or cliff face where you can pick up marauding, surface feeding trout. Or shoreline features like a drystone dyke that extend into the water and provide territory for fish to protect. But for the rest of the loch, why do some areas fish better than others?

I have been in lochs with areas where you can have a break from swimming and stand on the bottom, 50 metres - or in the case of Loch Morlich, what seems to be as much as 100 meters from the shore. Some of these lochs have very gradual, sloping bottoms. So if you were fishing from the shore you would have to wade a long way out to cover a decent depth. Where these shelving areas are hit by larger waves, along the shore from Dores on Loch Ness for example, there are just rocks and boulders. Any sub surface plant life appears to have been scoured off the loch bed. A pretty sterile place for fish to reside.

Some of these shallow areas appear like sea mounts. Tip toeing across them you can come to the edge where they drop back down to the depths. Like their salt-water equivalent, does this unusual loch bed feature attract bigger fish that lurk along their edges, before launching themselves upwards to catch an unsuspecting smaller fish, or wet fly?

Often these areas can be soft and muddy. Does this mean that fish will be feeding more on snails and insects residing in or emerging from the mud? Perhaps a trace of traditional wet flies stripped across the surface, could not be more different to what the fish are feeding on at that location.

Some lochs have areas where the bottom vanishes beneath you, a short distance from the shore. Achilty is generally a deep loch but with some shallower areas along parts of the shore, and the island. Go too far away from these features and fishing on the surface could actually be covering water that is quickly 20 or 30m deep. Loch Killin, west of Whitebridge has a deep channel running along the top half of the loch, with Arctic Char and ferox trout residing in the depths below. In the dark peaty waters of Loch Killin, it is hard to see your hand stretched out below you in the water. Trout must have brilliant vision to find food in these darker waters.

One of the most intriguing revelations from open water swimming are the different water temperatures you encounter, in a loch. On a recent swim in Loch Farr for example, there was a lower temperature strip of water running the length of the loch about the same distance in from the east and west shore. Go either side of this strip, and the water was noticeably warmer. This warmer water is less dense than the neighbouring cold water. At times, you can almost feel like you are swimming and moving faster through this warmer, less dense water. Do flies and intermediate/sinking lines drop faster through this warmer water? And as fish are more active in warmer water, will they be more likely to move to investigate and strike a fly? Drift out this warmer water - could it mean less fish and sluggish feeding responses? And what causes these areas of different temperature water, in the first place? Continues next page

HE SWIMS WITH THE FISHES

A swim round loch Morlich involved moving through a patch of what felt, through my wetsuit, like super chilled water. At the east end of the loch is a main feeder stream that brings in water from higher up in the Cairngorms. Could this be the source of this colder, but more highly oxygenated water. Fish may like this colder water in higher air temperatures when there is less oxygen in the water as temperatures increase. There is a hollow, about 150 feet deep, just off the main tourist beach at the east end of the Loch. I've wondered if this contained the outlet of an underwater spring/aquifer where water has been chilled by the surrounding mountains, before emerging into the loch. It would be a hardy fish that resided in this location, when there are warmer and more pleasant waters available, a minute's swim away.

One of the unanticipated benefits of open water swimming, is how wildlife engages with you. Floating and having a rest on a loch, it is not unusual for a fish to rise and take a fly, just a few yards away. And sometimes as you swim, turning your head to the side to take in a breath, you see gulls, swifts or even on one occasion, a red kite flying just above, intrigued by this strange, thrashing object on the surface. On a swim out to and along the shore of Gruinard island, a juvenile seal followed about 10m behind. When I stopped for a look around, it stopped as well, watching to see the next move. It would not realise how much effort it was taking me to swim through the waves, while it could so effortlessly chase down its next fishy meal.

As always seems to be the way with fishing, as soon as you try and answer one question, another 10 emerge. So, despite my many "swims with the fishes" I am no more enlightened as to how I am going to increase my catch rate of those specimen beasties. As I thrash about the surface, trying to understand the water and how to catch more, these specimen fish are very likely, lounging, down in the depths, looking up me and thinking "aye right, dream on bud!"

WINTER LEAGUE 2023-24

After three legs our intrepid team are looking forward to completing the pre-Christmas part of the competition without weather cancellations before resuming at Achagour on 6 January.

| League Position | Leg 1 Points | Leg 2 Points | Leg 3 Points | Total |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------|
| Lewis Ross | 1 | 4 | 5 | 10 |
| Derek Williamson | 2 | 5 | 5 | 12 |
| Dave Macgregor | 3 | 2 | 8 | 13 |
| Neil Macritchie | 7 | 3 | 4 | 14 |
| Stevie Dowds | 4 | 10 | 7 | 21 |
| Scott McMath | 5 | 16 | 1 | 22 |
| Andy Downie | 8 | 6 | 9 | 23 |
| Ally Hunter | 11 | 11 | 2 | 24 |
| Ian MacPhail | 6 | 9 | 10 | 25 |
| Ali Morrison | 15 | 1 | 12 | 28 |
| Derek Ritchie | 11 | 14 | 3 | 28 |
| John Ritchie | 11 | 7 | 14 | 32 |
| Graham Hoare | 9 | 12 | 12 | 33 |
| Gavin Morton | 11 | 13 | 11 | 35 |
| Gordon Martin | 15 | 8 | 14 | 37 |
| Neal Drummond | 10 | 16 | 14 | 40 |
| David Duguid | 15 | 14 | 14 | 43 |
| Alex Mark | 15 | 16 | 14 | 45 |
| Brian Scobie | 15 | 16 | 14 | 45 |

Here's where we are at end of November and it's interesting to note that Ali Morrison's dramatic end to last season's competition has continued in dramatic fashion but this time in a good way with a fine 9lb 2oz rainbow pictured below with Achagour Fishery owner Cindy Auger.

The first three legs fished were 1 Lagg in NW Sutherland; 2 Achagour near Cawdor; and 3 Artloch near Huntly – next up Mill of Kellas

WINTER LEAGUE 2023-24 - LARGEST FISH SO FAR



CATCH RETURNS SALMON 2023

Pleasing to report that the emailed based returns this season has improved significantly the volume of returns from members. An 85 % return rate from club members responding to the email request/s but still a worryingly low number of river day tickets **were not returned to Contin Filling Station** and as you'll know Marine Scotland (now called Marine Directorate) demands a considerably detailed account of all salmon caught whether kept or returned. The club also has to set out what is called Rod Effort – the number of rods/day actually fishing the rivers. Any disparity between these figures and the catch returns reported could cause problems for our club. As with last season we know of anglers who have caught salmon and not reported this as required. “Ballpark” figures for salmon catches this year are below, despite the weather a good number of fish reported and most returned – a total return rate of approximately 82% .

Upper Conon and Upper Blackwater combined catch - 63 salmon caught with at least **52** of them safely and 11 cock grilse kept. All numbers down from last season.

TROUT RETURNS

These will be reported in the next newsletter but it was interesting to note how many more anglers, both members and visitors have been fishing the beautiful wilds of Loch Scardroy.

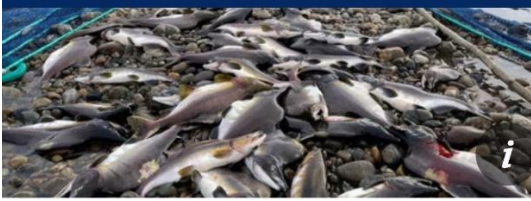


Kerri McEwan Marketing Assistant at Gael Force Marine has been in touch again with discount offer for **LAAC** members. Here are the details of the December discount code that can be used by your club members [online](#) or via our telesales desk (01463 229 400) from 1st December to 31st December.

Code to be entered at checkout: **LEUQ75** 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.

IN THE NEWS – WORRYING VISIONS OF THE FUTURE ?

In a challenging year for fish and anglers alike there have been some interesting and worrying articles in the news. Here are three – pink salmon in Norway; a Red Alert for the future of Atlantic Salmon as marine ecosystems face collapse; and proliferation catch & release in England’s fisheries – an opinion from the editor of T&S ;



Seascape: the state of our oceans

'It smells so bad': glut of wild salmon creates stink in Norway and Finland

The irony of having too many salmon as global populations fall is not lost on locals, who have seen the pristine Tana River littered with the rotting corpses of an invasive Pacific species that is pushing out the local Atlantic species

A worrying article in the Guardian - worth a read !

Along the border between Norway and [Finland](#) lies the world’s greatest Atlantic salmon river. To the Norwegians, it is the Tanaelva or Tana; the Finns call it the Tenojoki or Teno. But to both countries it is known as one of the purest and cleanest rivers, passing through largely unspoiled and unpolluted regions from Finnmark, Norway’s northernmost county, into Lapland. Now, however, the river’s waters and banks are crowded with rotting fish, their skin peeling away, and the air is thick with the odour of decaying flesh. “It’s a mess. It’s quite dramatic, says [Aino Erkinaro](#), a doctoral researcher from the University of Oulu in Finland. “And, oh man, it smells so bad now.”

The carnage is the result of an invasion – not of Atlantic salmon but Pacific pink salmon, which has prompted both Norway and Finland [declare an emergency](#). Also known as *pukkellaks* or humpback salmon, for their characteristic bulge, pink salmon were introduced into the Kola peninsula in Russia in the 1950s in an attempt to stimulate the economy. They live in oceans and swim up the same rivers every two years to lay their eggs and then die.

More at :-

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/oct/02/it-smells-so-bad-glut-of-wild-salmon-creates-stink-in-norway-and-finland>

12/12/2023

IUCN Classifies Atlantic Salmon As Endangered



There is stark news for the world’s fish in the latest species reassessment by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Published on 11 December, the report shows that nearly a quarter of the world’s freshwater fish are at risk of extinction, with the main UK population of Atlantic salmon reclassified as endangered and global Atlantic salmon populations reclassified from least concern to near threatened.



WHAT I AM ABOUT TO EXPRESS HAS troubled me for years, but when Anglian Water, owners of four key Midlands reservoirs, mandated catch-and-release for all stocked brown trout at the start of this season, my concerns intensified.

The crucial term here is “stocked”. These fisheries are stocked with infertile brown and rainbow trout solely for angling purposes. Since the reservoir opened in 1976, anglers have been able to keep fish for consumption, or more recently, release them if they choose. I suspect this sudden shift with brownies is driven by cost-cutting and greed. Farmed brown trout are pricier than rainbow trout, though I will admit they appear to survive

better in Rutland than rainbows. However, since Rutland’s halcyon days, the owners have reduced the number of fish they stock by as much as 40%. While fishery budgets have dwindled and angler fees have risen annually, the company’s profits have soared.

My concern now is that with brown trout off the table, Anglian Water’s only card left (apart from wanting even more buck for less bang) is to impose mandatory catch-and-release for rainbow trout, too. This would be the end of Rutland Water as a trout fishery.

Since catch-and-release of wild fish is now encouraged, if not mandatory, put-and-take fisheries have become the last bastion for hunter-gatherers.

I understand that, if a wild fishery is not sustainable, or if a species is under threat, we must practise restraint, as we have been doing. But when the fisheries we rely on to alleviate pressure on wild fish go the same way, we are, in my opinion, risking reduced participation and economic damage to our sport, not to mention becoming more vulnerable to the antis.

Do not think for one second that dragging a fish by a hook for sport alone is acceptable to most non-anglers. The idea of putting a fish through this ordeal and putting it back to go through the same process repeatedly carries little ethical weight. If you take a fish home to eat, the public are more accepting.

Recently, I met a vegan couple picnicking at Rutland. They kindly offered me a bite to eat, which I declined, but we sat and chatted for an hour. To my surprise, they accepted why I fished, provided I killed fish humanely and ate them. However, when I mentioned putting fish back, they questioned whether it was ethical.

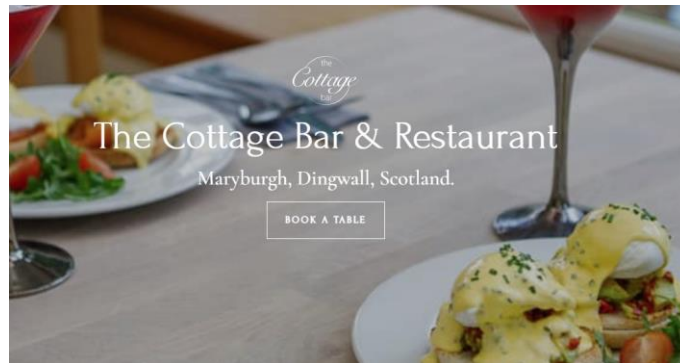
Ultimately, anglers on Rutland put nearly all brown trout back, so surely Anglian Water can permit the odd one to be taken if anglers choose. If this choice is removed, anglers may walk away from the sport. We have witnessed this in salmon and sea-trout fishing, and should avoid a similar outcome on stocked stillwaters.

Andrew Flitcroft, Editor

SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES

SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES

Been out last minute Christmas present shopping – need some restoration - have a think about visiting our club’s supportive partners at the Cottage Bar & Restaurant in Maryburgh. Excellent food, refreshments, great service and a welcoming atmosphere here, and we thank Hannah & Scott for their support for our club in 2023. Cheers !



www.thecottagebar.co.uk

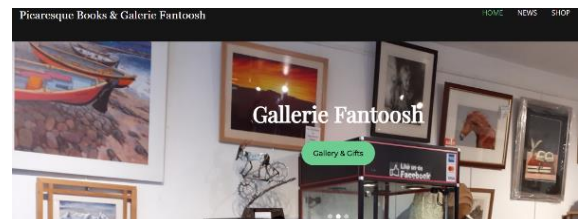
CHRISTMAS BOOKS
Shop Local. Shop Independent.

PICARESQUE BOOKS & GALERIE FANTOOSH
55 High St. Dingwall IV15 9HL • Tel:01349 863140
E: picaresque@btinternet.com • www: picaresque.scot
f https://uk.bookshop.org/shop/picaresquebooks i

Come and see us for your free guide to the best books for giving this Christmas

Each Christmas LAAC club members are given a **special 15% festive discount** at two of the stores on Dingwall High Street.

Both have an online presence if you want to browse ahead of your visit and you’ll receive a very warm welcome when you visit their absolute treasure trove shops.



Just up the street from the Town House you’ll find Andy & Debbie Downie ready to help you get just the right gifts for your family at **The Sports & Model Shop** - and with a generous **15% discount to club members** your Christmas spending money will go much further. You might even see Santa Andy Downie →



If you have enjoyed this newsletter and found it useful, please let us know. Many thanks to all who have taken the time to do this already. Next edition will carry articles on the club's AGM, Pike fishing, and renewal arrangements for 2024 along with the advantages of using our Permit Exchange scheme. **Do please remember your contributions in stories and photographs are always very welcome!** Our Club website <https://highlandfishing.net/> our Facebook page and Instagram site are all available to stay up to date with LAAC activities and news. Always email the club at achonachie.angling@gmail.com

Finally, to all our members, families, friends and visitors we wish you a very **Happy Christmas** and every best wish for 2024.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Dowds". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Stephen Dowds
LAAC Chairman/Secretary
DECEMBER 2023