

# EAST LOTHIAN ANGLING ASSOCIATION

## 2015 Newsletter

January 2016

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## An End to Stocking

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Chris Thomas
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For several years now ELAA has been considering its position on stocking the Tyne and after much deliberation the Committee has decided that the river should no longer be stocked. We arrived at this position by considering the pros and cons of stocking.

We were particularly influenced by the strong consensus between biologists, fisheries management experts, angling clubs and informed anglers which clearly indicates that artificially increasing the trout population by adding fish from elsewhere is not good river management practice and is not the way forward as a means of improving the river for the benefit of anglers.

### We acknowledge that there are opinions in favour of stocking:

- It gives more people a better chance of catching fish because there are more fish in the river.
- It enables fish to be taken from the river without endangering the overall population (one in, one out).
- For some people it's why they buy a permit.

### However, the arguments against stocking, based on internationally accepted fisheries science, are compelling:

- Suddenly introducing a number of large fish into a section of river disrupts the finely balanced ecosystem. Smaller, younger, native fish, which need eventually to reproduce, cannot compete with larger, infertile stock fish for food and territory, but they will increase in size without competition from stockies.
- There is no evidence to show that overall catch rates are increased by stocking. Indeed many associations have reported

increased catch rates when stocking has been stopped and have also noted larger fish being caught (including Tyne anglers in the wild fishery at Nisbet and Clerkington).

- Over many generations fish have evolved with the optimum genetic mix to enable them to thrive in the specific conditions of their native river. Interbreeding with stocked fish weakens the genetic mix of the native population and introduced fish tend not to overwinter well because they are genetically unsuited to their new habitat.

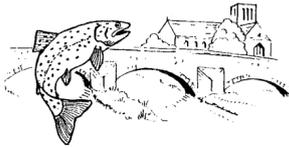


Wild fishery above Haddington

- While it's true that stocking triploid (infertile) fish will prevent interbreeding, at around £1,700 a season the Association believes that this money could be better spent in other areas such as habitat improvement or increased bailiff presence.

- Even when a river is stocked with hatchery-raised fish of the native strain (as ELAA used to do on the Tyne) there is no evidence to suggest that this increases fish populations or catch rates.

- It is quite possible that future fisheries legislation will prohibit stocking altogether, except to re-establish populations lost through pollution or disease. Disease and invasive species (not just fish, but also plants and invertebrates) could even be



introduced inadvertently into the river by stocking.

•Finally, not quite so scientific, but important nonetheless, an increasing number of trout anglers are expressing a preference for catching wild fish in their natural habitat.

The Tyne, like any natural habitat, is an extremely complex and finely balanced system of interdependent species. We now know, because the science tells us, that simply introducing fish into the river from an outside source is not the best way to go about increasing populations.

While stocking may appear to be common sense at first sight, the more we learn the more we understand that the real secret to improving and maintaining fish populations is to manage the entire habitat to make it the best it can be for the native species already present in the river. This means ensuring that water quality and flow dynamics are optimised: it means creating and maintaining fish holding and spawning areas; protecting against pollution, poaching, disease and invasive species; easing passage for migratory fish; promoting catch-and-release and the use of barbless hooks. These are areas that ELAA is already committed to Improving by working together with other fisheries, environmental management and science agencies

We understand that this approach may represent an unwelcome change for some anglers, but it is an approach that is now widely used throughout the world in all the most progressively managed fisheries and has been shown to be effective. We therefore think that it is the right route for ELAA to take in future.

As a Tyne angler we are interested in hearing your views on this matter and we invite you to e-mail your thoughts to [fishing@elaa.co.uk](mailto:fishing@elaa.co.uk). We also intend to discuss this matter at the AGM on January 25<sup>th</sup>.

For more detailed information see:

<http://www.wildtrout.org/content/trout-stocking>

<http://www.wildtrout.org/news/new-fish-stocking-policy-scotland>

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/291703/scho0707bmzi-e-e.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/291703/scho0707bmzi-e-e.pdf)

## **2016 AGM**

**Monday  
January 25<sup>th</sup>  
7:30 PM**

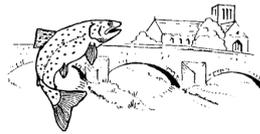
**The Town House  
Haddington**

**Guest Speaker  
Alison Baker  
Forth District Salmon Fisheries  
Board**



Photo: Mick J Reid

**A beautifully marked brownie from the wild fishery at Nisbet**



## 2015 Season F

### Unfavourable Conditions

Low water levels for most of the season and cool, windy weather in Spring and early Summer contributed to reduced opportunities for many anglers.

### Permit Sales

Despite this, however, permit sales were slightly up on last season, 364 against 354 in 2014. Catch return details will be available in time for the AGM and it will be interesting to see they reflect the unfavourable conditions that prevailed for most of the season.

### Infected Fish

These unfavourable conditions also gave rise to a number of sightings of larger fish moving sluggishly and showing white fungal marks on their bodies. Let's hope they managed to improve their condition and press on upriver to spawn.

### Stocking

Stocking was the big issue of the 20125 season with ELAA announcing that the Tyne would no longer be stocked. This is a major change in the Association's approach to river management and a departure from previous practice. The decision was based on sound scientific evidence and modern fisheries management practice and is explained in the article above. We hope to discuss this at the AGM, so please come along to make your voice heard on this and other matters.

### Habitat Improvements

The Committee also plans to carry out habitat improvement work throughout the coming year including clearing spawning burns, managing bankside vegetation to improve access and hopefully continuing the electrofishing programme to enable us to build a long term picture of fish populations.

### Developments

There have been a number of developments in fisheries administration and legislation recently which will have implications for the future of angling in Scotland (see below for further details).

### Haddington Show

Once again ELAA had a stand at Haddington Show where Committee members took the opportunity to promote the work of the Association to the public.

### Committee Members

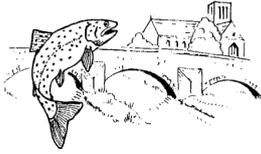
Sadly Scott Mackintosh resigned as President. We would like to thank him for his contribution to the work of the Association and we hope he will return to the Committee at a later date.

There are vacancies on the Committee. If you are interested in joining the Committee please come along to the AGM January 25<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 PM at the Town House, Haddington

### ELAA HELPS BLOOMING HADDINGTON

David Elder ELAA Committee Member is also a member of Friends of the River Tyne. This year and last he helped out at the Nungate Bridge by telling the Britain in Bloom inspecting committee about the river.

On 31<sup>st</sup> July, a bright, sunny day, he set out early to fish his way down from the Stevenson Bridge. When he was at the back of the West Mills, to his surprise, he caught (and then released) a lovely ½ lb brownie on a Greyhen & Rusty. Was this a lucky omen? Haddington went on to win a Gold Award for Best Medium Town.



## Changes to the Governance and Administration of Fishing in Scotland.

In recent years there have been a number of proposed changes to the way Scottish angling is governed and as responsible anglers we need to be aware of these changes.

### Wild Fisheries Review

The most significant development has been the Wild Fisheries Review in which the Scottish Government sought the views of interested parties on how fisheries should be governed. This was a major consultation aimed at ensuring that fisheries are managed for maximum environmental, recreational and economic sustainability on the basis of sound science. It produced fifty-three recommendations. See <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00460195.pdf> for the full report.

### FMOs

Many of the recommendations relate to consolidating and rationalising the governance of angling nationwide and propose the establishment of Fisheries Management Organisations (FMOs). At present there are 41 District Boards, in future there may be between 15 and 20 FMOs. The Forth District Salmon Fisheries Board is the statutory body currently covering the Tyne, and it works in conjunction with the Forth Fisheries Trust, whose role is to provide scientific information, advice, guidance and education services to enable the Board to put policy into practice.

Please report poaching or any other wildlife crime (in confidence) to:

Lee Fisher, Bailiff  
07887835549

Or  
Police Scotland  
101

### Bailiffs

FDSFB also manages anti-poaching enforcement and has recently appointed Lee Fisher as Acting Bailiff to replace Bill Cunningham after 21 years of service. ELAA would like to welcome Lee and thank Bill for his work. We wish Bill a long and happy retirement.

### Licence to Kill

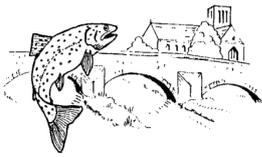
Another aspect of the Review is "Licence to Kill" in which the right to take salmon from the river is determined by that particular river's ability to meet its proposed Conservation Limit, based on salmon populations. Three categories have been introduced and the Tyne is Category 3, meaning that no salmon should be removed. Catch-and-release for all species is presumed to be the best option and the option that ELAA already promotes for the Tyne.

### Implications for Tyne Anglers

It is still too early to say exactly how the reforms will affect angling on the Tyne, and although much of the discussion focuses on salmon, the Review refers to an overall species approach based on evidence from fisheries science research and the application of modern fisheries management practices.

### ELAA Approach

ELAA is already taking such an approach with ongoing plans for habitat improvement; the end of stocking and the creation of a wild fishery; recommending anglers to use barbless hooks and to practice catch-and-release, together with supporting anti-



## Some Reflections on the 2015 Season.

I write this having just come in from Aberlady Bay, watching the pink-foot geese coming in to roost. We're past the equinox now, there's a chill in the air, Autumn has come and the trout season is over, so time to take stock.

I don't know about you, but my season's been very mixed. I didn't get on to the river until early May. It was already at summer-low and there was thick algae on the riverbed. Low flows, diffuse pollution and warm conditions reduce oxygen levels and the river seemed unusually quiet. There just wasn't much incentive to get out with the rod. Even great stretches like Hailes, where we'd had purple sessions last year, provided only lean pickings. It was also distressing to see so many sea-trout with fungal infections in the lower part of the river, the large white patches clearly visible.

While I had about a hundred fish the previous season, this year I've had less than half that, blanking at least twice. In general, the fish have been found in the liveliest water, just as you'd expect under such conditions, but this doesn't always make for easy angling. Well-managed nymphs worked, but often most effective were parachute-style flies, especially the inevitable Klinkhamer; these often worked well as evening came on, when the trout were targeting sedges. My companion had success with John Goddard's Super Grizzly Emerger.

I had one or two very good fish from some surprisingly lean places, then caught nothing from runs you'd think were a sure bet. The key has been to mix it up: nymphs, dries and New Zealand-style combinations, and to adapt to the circumstances. When we knew the fish were targeting duns, a delicate dry tied with a single grey CDC did well. Easy to tie, but it's not very robust, and I recently discovered the bizarrely-named 'Frog's Fanny' desiccant is perfect for drying them out.

Right at the tail of the season, my companion and I met for a short 'evening' session to round things off. Conditions looked good, but the fishing was very thin. After an hour, I had four fish in five casts to a parachute grey duster. We called it a day as dusk settled quickly and the air chilled. Now grayling beckon and I'm even planning forays into the world of 'coarse' angling. There's more to life than fishing, but not much more. Hope you had a better season than me, but here's a warming dram to next year. Pray for a wet winter! Tight lines!

*GRHE*





## Stealth Tactics

**O**ver many generations trout have evolved camouflage colouring to make them invisible from above and a heightened sensitivity to movement and vibration to protect them from predators. As soon as they sense danger they are off and it is usually some time before they return to start feeding again. Wouldn't you do the same if your life depended on it?

### High Alert

Because trout are always on high alert they are never going to make it easy for the angler. So it's essential to stay out of sight and be as stealthy as possible when fishing, particularly in a wild fishery like the Tyne. Whether you're on the bank or in the water, sudden, careless movements, clumsy wading, moving shadows and stumbling through vegetation will spook fish and so will brightly coloured clothing and poor casting.

**The good news is that all these faults are anglers' faults, which can be addressed, and avoiding them can make a big difference to your day's fishing.**

### Fish Upstream

Trout generally face upstream to intercept food items coming down with the current, so if you fish upstream and approach carefully from behind it's surprising how close you can get and how accurately you can present your fly. However, while trout might not be able to see you behind them, they can certainly feel vibration in the water and on the riverbed, so wade carefully, and remember that you and your rod cast a shadow. Use bankside vegetation as cover if you can.

### Careful Casting

Careful casting is also essential because no matter how perfect your fly or your choice of fly, if it comes crashing on to the water like a hippopotamus, followed by a pile of slack line then you might as well be fishing without a fly, because the fish will have gone. Also, by drawing enough line off the reel before you start to cast you can minimise the need for frequent and conspicuous false casting.

We can learn a great deal about stealth from watching the heron at work - and wouldn't we all love to match the heron's catch return at the end of the season?

### Careful Approach

These observations apply particularly to slow water (where longer leaders also help). In faster water your chances improve somewhat because there is a lot of background noise from the moving water. Also, visibility is not so good and fish have less time to examine your fly before having to decide whether to take it or leave it, but they remain on high alert, so you still need to be careful in your approach.

### Stealth is Essential

For most anglers the full fly fishing experience consists of working out where the fish are and what they are feeding on, selecting a fly, and then applying the appropriate tactics to entice the fish into taking that fly. However, before you can do any of these things you have to make sure you haven't already sent the fish scurrying for cover through your clumsy approach. Stealth is absolutely essential in fly fishing, and when it works the results are very satisfying.



The stealthiest fisherman on the river