

East Lothian Angling Association

2016 Newsletter

January 2017

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Damaged fish pass at Knowes Weir.

Photo: Clive Baker

What Next for Tyne Weirs?

For some time now the weirs on the Tyne have been recognised as a major impediment to the passage of migratory fish. To put it simply, if fish cannot get upstream to their redds in good spawning condition, even at relatively low water levels, then the Tyne will never be able to hold the populations of trout, salmon and other fish species that it is capable of holding.

East Lothian Angling Association has always advocated for improvements to fish passage, more recently in relation to the Knowes Weir. However, improving fish passage is a slow, complicated and expensive process, requiring the involvement of all the interested parties, public and private, on a whole-catchment basis. Unfortunately the law doesn't allow us to just roll up our sleeves and get stuck in, much as we would like to. Even the ownership of some of the weirs is unclear, and the law around responsibility for maintenance and usage is not straightforward, involving licences and other forms of compliance.

Spurred on by events early in the season when the Knowes fish pass was damaged (almost certainly as a deliberate act by poachers), the Association has had extensive discussions with SEPA and the River Forth Fisheries Trust, who in turn have spoken to other parties involved, and even had questions asked in the Scottish Parliament. The aim is to produce a solution that looks at the whole river catchment, and at a recent ELAA Committee meeting (together with representatives of Friends of the River Tyne), Charles Perfect from SEPA explained that the whole catchment plan was due to be completed by 2027 and at least one important obstruction is due to be alleviated by 2018. In the meantime there is a lot of work to be done in scoping, research, planning and sourcing funds to complete the project.

In a nutshell: improving fish passage is a complicated and expensive process, ELAA is well aware of the problem and is working with SEPA, River Forth Fisheries Trust and other agencies to get the job done – but it takes time.

2017 AGM

Monday

23rd January

7:30 PM

Haddington Town House



Season Summary

2016 has not been an easy season for Tyne anglers. The weather was not kind, with a long cold Spring and low water levels throughout the Summer, so opportunities to get on the river were often few and far between for many people.

Permit Sales

This is reflected in the permit sales, which are well down on previous seasons: 282 permits were sold in 2016 compared with 363 permits in 2015. Thirty-three completed Catch Returns (56 in 2015), show 314 brown trout caught (largest 3lbs) and 9 seatrout reported (largest 4lbs). Other factors which may have influenced permit sales and catch returns include the end of stocking and our biggest permit outlet (J S Main, Haddington) coming under new ownership. We need to see what 2017 brings, but the good news is that permit prices will remain the same for next season.

Weirs

The most obvious issue facing the river continues to be the problems with the weirs, particularly the Knowes, and the obstruction to fish passage. ELAA is working on this problem, but it takes time (see above).

5-Year Plan

In the longer term, and in line with the direction the Association needs to take in future (see President's message below), we are developing a new 5-year Plan which we hope will lead eventually to significant habitat improvements and fisheries management projects on a catchment-wide scale: addressing sediment levels and other water quality issues and restoration of spawning burns for those fish that will benefit from easier passage up the river through future improvements to the weirs.

These projects involve working closely with various organisations, most notably the River Forth Fisheries Trust and SEPA, with whom we already have good relations and whose scientific and other expert knowledge we value highly because it enables us to work together towards the same end: producing and maintaining an affordable wild fishery based on the principle of managing the river habitat to ensure that it maintains its optimum level of natural productivity. It's going to take time, but the ball is already rolling, albeit

Slowly: on the Bearford Burn (an important spawning tributary) and on the weirs.

Catch and Release

In line with this approach we recommend that anglers practise catch-and-release and use barbless hooks. If you put fish back you can catch them again and they'll be bigger next time and in any case the Tyne is categorised as Grade 3 by law which means that no salmon may be removed from the river.

Poaching

Once again we thank the bailiffs for their dedication and commitment in protecting the river from poachers, often in difficult and even dangerous circumstances. As anglers, we can help them by reporting any incidents or intelligence on 07736466725 or Police Scotland 101.

Other Activities

ELAA took a stand at Haddington show again in 2016 (together with representatives from the River Forth Fisheries Trust, including the bailiffs), and in the New Year we are hoping to get a fly-tying group underway in response to demand expressed on the Facebook page.



Haddington Show Stand

Photo: Chris Thomas

Last Paper Newsletter

Please note: this will be the last edition of the ELAA Newsletter to appear on paper.

In order to save time in distribution, postage costs and the use of paper, future editions will be sent to you by e-mail and will also appear on the ELAA website and the Facebook page.

To ensure that you get your copy, please write your e-mail address CLEARLY and LEGIBLY on the form when you buy your permit.



Take me to your Leader

Leaders can be confusing for the newcomer to fly fishing, so here is a brief guide for the less experienced angler.

Essentially a leader is a length of nylon monofilament or fluorocarbon with a fine tippet at the end whose function is to create an invisible link between the very visible fly line and the fly.

Length

As a rough guide the leader and tippet together are normally about the same length as the rod, with more tippet material being added as it shortens through changing flies. For slow or shallow water with wary fish then a much longer leader would be more effective – up to 20 feet.

Taper

Most people now use a tapered leader, with a thicker end which attaches to the fly line, tapering down to a length of fine tippet to which the fly is attached. The purpose of the taper is to transmit the energy of the cast evenly along the length of the line to give better turnover so that the fly lands delicately and accurately on the water. Modern tapered leaders are knotless and usually around 9 feet in length, though some people still prefer to tie their own leaders to a formula that suits their casting style.

Droppers

For multiple wet flies, nymphs or spiders simply tie a short length of tippet on to your leader to form a dropper for each additional fly using a water knot.

Furled Leader

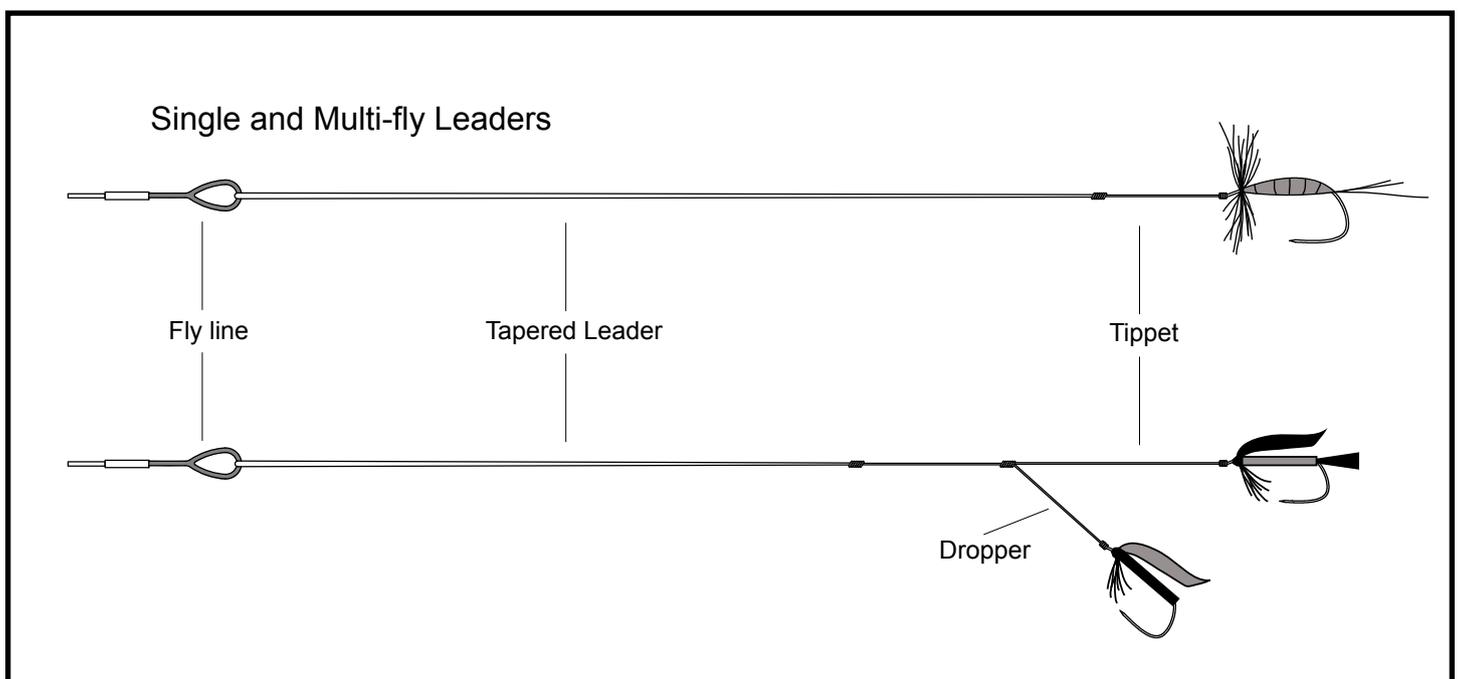
The furled leader is also becoming popular because it gives a very delicate presentation, especially with dry flies. This is a type of tapered leader made from plaited tying thread or monofilament. Usually between 3 and 5 feet long, to which fine tippet material is then tied in to achieve a practical casting length.

Other Leaders

For Czech nymphing, which uses heavy nymphs fished right down on the bottom, you can use a level leader with no taper because no real casting is required. There are other European nymphing techniques (Spanish, French) that use no fly line at all, just an extremely long leader, but that's for another day.

Further Information

There is plenty of information about leaders and knots in angling books and online - and don't be afraid to ask fellow anglers on the bank about the leaders they use.





The Voice of Experience

We wanted to get the views of someone who has fished the Tyne for many years. So we asked Ali Irving who knows the river well.

How long have you been fishing the Tyne?

On and off for almost forty years, although I did take a break now and then to go home to my wife, when my children were born etc...

How did you learn to fish the Tyne?

Still learning, but really just trial and error, spook a fish, then next time creep up on them. Read up on fly life as catching fish is all about feeding fish and if you know what/where/when then you're well on your way.

What's your best fish and what did you take it on?

My best brown trout was 16 inches long and was caught early season on a cdc olive dry fly.

Have you got a favourite part of the river?

Yes, there are bits I prefer but the river has different stretches that offer different challenges. Quite often I will move around, if it's not happening where you are then move. There is no special bit; there are lots of fish throughout.

What type of tackle and methods do you normally use?

I normally fish a 9ft 3-weight rod with a 2-weight floating line, a 9ft tapered leader with another 3ft of tippet. This is my dry fly set up and I fish dry probably 90% of the time targeting rising fish. For nymph fishing the Tyne is very well suited to the Duo method, this involves fishing a big, easily-seen dry fly on a short dropper and a nymph, usually a small pheasant tail/hare's lug, on the point. The dry acts as an indicator for fish taking the nymph but it can also take rising fish too.

Favourite fly?

The Tyne does get consistent hatches of Blue Winged Olives from June to October so my favourite fly would imitate these. A size 20 cdc shuttlecock style dry with body of hare's ear or olive usually does the trick.

What's best about the Tyne?

The Tyne offers excellent value for money and you can usually have miles of river to yourself. The fish are very willing to take flies from the surface so if you like dry fly then you can enjoy good sport.

What could be better about the Tyne?

Probably getting access to the water, there are stretches where its very overgrown, especially in summer.

Have you got a favourite fishing book?

I think Trout Hunting by Bob Wyatt is a good book, it debunks a lot of the myths about clever fish. If you are being outsmarted by a fish with a brain the size of a pea then you need to take a long hard look at yourself. On a serious point, it also talks about catch and release and his journey from killing fish to putting them back alive. This is something we can all practise, it takes 4years for a wild brown trout to reach adulthood and 4 minutes to kill it. That fish we put back will create the next generation of Tyne trout and we can catch it again and again, and each time it will be bigger.

“Fishing is easy: see fish, stalk fish, cast to fish, catch fish. If only it was like that. Tight lines.”



Ali Irving – Man of Mystery, with a cracking fish.



Griffiths Gnat

This is a very effective general-purpose emerger pattern that works well on the Tyne, particularly with a long leader on smooth, slow water when wary fish are gently sipping small insects from the surface film. (e.g. on the bend above the footbridge at Nisbet) and it's very easy to tie, right down to size 18, or even 20 if you really need to.



- Hook:** barbless, fine wire dry fly
- Thread:** fine black or brown
- Body:** 2 or 3 peacock herls
- Hackle:** grizzly with, short, stiff fibres palmered along the hook

1. Start at the eye of the hook and wind the thread down to the bend.
2. Catch in the peacock herl and the hackle and wind the thread back along the hook to 1 or 2 mm before the eye.
3. Wind on the peacock herl and tie in about 2 mm behind the eye.
4. Wind the hackle forward (palmered) and tie in together with the peacock herl.
5. Form a small head with thread wraps, whip finish and varnish.

How to Tie Off a Dry Fly Hackle

Have you ever found yourself finishing off your beautiful creation and it all goes pear-shaped at the end?

Fibres suddenly appear from nowhere, splaying out at all angles and blocking the eye of the hook.

Swearing often follows.

Here is a simple method for finishing off with a neat head and a clear eye which makes the fly much easier to attach to your leader on the riverbank.

- Firstly, make sure you leave sufficient space at the eye of the hook for a head. It's a common mistake to wind the hackle too close to the eye.
- After you make the final wrap of hackle, angle the loose end in your hackle pliers slightly towards the eye to create a V, then put a single wrap of thread through the gap to secure it.
- Now angle the loose end back into the hackle, put down several thread wraps in front of it to fix it all in place then tie a head and whip finish as usual.
- Finally, go into the hackle with your scissors and gently separate the loose end from the hackle and snip it off. The stump will disappear into the hackle leaving a neat head, which can then be varnished - no swearing required. Good luck!

Always use barbless hooks or press down the barb with pliers before you start tying.

Why Use Barbless Hooks?

- They hook more effectively.
- They allow you to release fish quickly and easily.
- They cause less damage to the fish.
- They are easier to remove from anglers.
- It's the 21st Century folks!



And Finally A Word from the President.

How do you feel about the River Tyne?

Do you see it just as a conduit carrying water from which trout can be extracted? I hope not! I hope you see it as much more than that.

Hopefully you see it as an ecosystem rich in wildlife that, amongst other things, once again includes otters; that it is a properly functioning part of the East Lothian landscape, essential to all species, including us humans - and an environment in which it is a privilege to be able to fish affordably for wild trout.

The Tyne is the latter, but only in part: unfortunately it is by no means pristine. Too much fine sediment, too much nutrient (nitrogen, phosphorous), water extraction for irrigation and the effects of several barriers on fish migration count against its water quality and bio-diversity, ultimately impacting on fish populations. Poaching is the other insidious curse from which the Tyne suffers, especially damaging breeding stock by taking largely hen fish. It is these impediments on which the ELAA committee is focused. In partnership with the River Forth Fisheries Trust, we are working hard to secure progress on barrier mitigation with SEPA and to help build the evidence base that can impel action by regulatory authorities. And our volunteer bailiffs are disrupting and limiting poaching activity, often at considerable personal risk to themselves.

While the Association's particular goal is improved angling for our members, the greater and more important benefit must be to all the wildlife that needs the river's riches to survive – microbes, insects, birds and mammals, as well as fish. If we help get the latter objective right, we will have better fishing for wild trout. There are now many, many examples from across the UK where such an approach has delivered major improvements in the quality of angling.

Our ambitions are necessarily long-term in view and improvements will accrue only slowly because of the complexity of the challenges. But we are thinking not just of next season, but seasons many decades into the future, when, hopefully, our descendants will be fishing a river of the highest quality, surrounded by fabulous wildlife. The Tyne deserves nothing less if we are to honour the privilege we have to fish it. So, I commend the activity and enthusiasm of the hard-working committee to you. And if you're so inclined, come and join us on the committee.

Simply by purchasing a permit, you are supporting our work – please renew for next year and tight lines for 2017!

Chris Thomas
President



Blue winged olive nymph (*Seratella ignita*): easily identified by 3 tails and distinct barred markings on legs. Together with the large dark olive (*Baetis rhodani*) this is the most abundant medium-sized upwing fly on the Tyne and an essential food species for wild trout. We need to make sure that the river can produce as many of these insects as possible to maintain an optimum trout population.

Photo: Nick Main