A Changing River

Our rivers are changing. Sometimes this seems obvious, sometimes it doesn't. SEPA (www.SEPA.org.uk) has recently published the results of some of their long term monitoring data and our rivers are becoming warmer, mainly during winter although the last two winters buck this trend. They are also becoming wetter **and** drier (we get more rain but it falls in short heavy periods with longer dry spells in-between), while many Scottish rivers are also becoming cleaner. These trends undoubtedly affect our river ecosystems and for comparison, considerable changes in river flylife have been recorded where historic data is available, with some species declining and others increasing. More prolonged periods of low flows reduce the wetted area available for producing aquatic life (this is probably felt more on the East coast than on the West), while periods of extreme high flows are potentially damaging (this is probably felt more on the West coast than on the East). In addition there are other changes we have to take into account. For example, river based predators have generally increased in number – numbers of Otters, Herons, Cormorants and Goosanders have all increased over the past 50-60 years.

So what does this mean for our river trout fishing? Well trout, like many other river species, are fairly resilient (mostly as a result of their ability to produce large numbers of offspring). And like most other species with a relatively short life span they will quickly change and adapt their populations and behaviour to a changing environment. So undoubtedly our wild tout will have changed over the last 50-60 years. This change may be subtle or may be quite considerable – it's difficult to say as fish behaviours are difficult to record. Some anglers report that Tweed trout appear less numerous, but as a result are bigger and there is some evidence to support this (or possibly vice versa – they're less numerous because of some trout surviving longer or growing faster). Other anglers report fish being unwilling to take flies or be caught using methods employed in the past; as such the fish require different flies and approaches to ensure success – possibly as a result of changing flylife? There are also reports of fish being less willing to come to the surface and being generally more wary and selective in their feeding - could this be as a result of frequent disturbance from in-stream predators? It's even possible that fishing itself has affected trout. On a river like the Tweed, has over 150 years of removing the trout most likely to take a fly meant that the ones that are difficult to catch get to reproduce and pass on their genes?

Angling catch records collected on the Tweed show that Dry Fly fishing can still have its day with the catches generally best in evenings from May onwards, particularly in the last hour of falling light. With the exception of the very early season, surface fishing methods generally (but not always) produce low trout catches during the day. Instead, it would appear that weighted nymph patterns fished close to the riverbed and allowed to drift downstream "naturally" generally provide most success. Modern techniques like "Czech Nymphing" and "French Nymphing" all fish well on their day – although time of year obviously makes a difference as well.

One thing that is almost certain is that our rivers are going to continue to change, as will our trout populations, and, regardless of how trout numbers in the future compare to

numbers now, it may require completely different methods again to achieve success when angling for trout.

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