



# Save the Spring November 2024 Update



The River Dee



■ This month's update looks at spawning activity around large woody structures in the River Muick, as well as recent stakeholder engagement and communication events.

Save the Spring is a partnership between the River Dee and Atlantic Salmon Trust, supported by the University of Stirling and UHI Inverness.

[riverdee.org.uk](http://riverdee.org.uk)  
[atlanticsalmontrust.org](http://atlanticsalmontrust.org)



# Spawning Observations on the Muick

- Since 2018 the River Dee team has installed over 400 large woody structures in River Dee headwater tributaries as part of a strategic approach to restore natural processes. Recent observations show wild salmon are spawning around them.

The last several years have seen significant habitat restoration work in and around upper catchment tributaries, carried out by the River Dee team. In response to rising temperatures and droughts, as well as damaging winter flood events which have destabilised spawning gravels, this action has been strategically focused on slowing the flow of water off the landscape and diversifying tributary channels to rebuild stability and provide wild salmon with a variety of beneficial habitat features.

Among the actions taken has been the installation of over 400 'large woody structures' in upper catchment areas, including the River Muick - the initial priority area for Save the Spring. These are intended to mimic natural tree fall which will occur when mature native woodland is re-established in the future. It is important to note that the location and placement of these structures has been carefully designed with partner organisations and environmental engineering consultants, with the Muick work funded by the Biodiversity Challenge Fund managed by NatureScot.

The effect of this work will be monitored over time, with anticipated benefits coming from how these structures affect the hydrology of the stream - essentially how water flows and interacts with them, contributing to a diversity of habitat types for salmon at different life stages, including spawning gravels, riffles, deep pools and pockets. On a recent 'Walk and Talk' trip to the Muick, led by the River Dee team and involving a group of Trustees from the Atlantic Salmon Trust, adult salmon were seen taking refuge in and around the structures, and evidence of salmon nests or 'redds' in adjacent areas of gravel was also observed. This interaction is encouraging and will continue to be monitored.



**Evidence of salmon nests or 'redds' next to a large woody structure in the River Muick.**

**Redds can be recorded through drone observation by identifying lighter areas of gravel which have been excavated by spawning salmon.**

## River Dee local stakeholders visit University of Stirling

November 2024 saw the River Dee team leading a local stakeholder engagement visit to the University of Stirling Institute of Aquaculture to meet the team who are currently overseeing the smolt-to-adult supplementation programme. This group included River Dee Board members, landowners, community representatives within the catchment, and River Dee ghillies.

This meeting was focused on the 'conservation translocation' methods currently being piloted on the River Muick priority area, whereby wild smolts have been captured and are now being reared to maturity in captivity, with a view to releasing them back into the Muick in the future as mature adults to support wild spawning. This was a great opportunity to hear from the team at the University of Stirling, including biologists and veterinary experts, as well as a chance for visitors to ask questions about the programme.

We look forward to holding similar events in the future in order to continue to clearly communicate the programme's goals, why it is taking the approach that it is, and the underlying science which is informing our decision making.



**The meeting was focused on the smolt-to-adult supplementation work currently being piloted with fish from the River Muick priority area.**





## From Deeside to Central London

This year the Atlantic Salmon Trust's annual Curzon Cinema event in Central London featured John Miller as a keynote speaker.

John is a Trustee for the Atlantic Salmon Trust and a lifelong lover of the River Dee, having fished the river for the last 30 years. We were delighted when John voluntarily joined the Save the Spring programme earlier this year to assist with its strategic development and organisational management. In addition to his work on Save the Spring, John is also a Trustee for the charity, Curlew Action, and brings with him an acute understanding of the habitat requirements of a range of threatened species and the need for an ecosystem-wide approach to catchment restoration.

An audience of over 100 key wild salmon supporters were present at the event in London, where an update on the two elements of the programme, habitat restoration and wild fish repopulation, was delivered, with interesting parallels drawn between our smolt-to-adult supplementation work and 'headstarting' in curlews.

Engaging with audiences in Deeside and across the country is essential both in terms of raising awareness, so that other river systems can benefit for the lessons we are learning and techniques being piloted, as well as attracting the all-important funding support which will enable the programme to expand in the future.



**John Miller, Trustee for the Atlantic Salmon Trust, speaking on behalf of the Save the Spring programme at the Curzon Mayfair in London, November 2024.**

### Fundraising

### SUPPORT US

You can support Save the Spring as an individual or an organisation. Contact the Atlantic Salmon Trust's Corporate Ambassador, Mark Cockburn, to see how you can help.

**[mark.cockburn@atlanticsalmontrust.org](mailto:mark.cockburn@atlanticsalmontrust.org)**

### Volunteering – Boots on the ground

If you would like to register your interest as a project volunteer, either for the habitat restoration or fish capture elements of the programme, please contact the River Dee team at **[info@riverdee.org](mailto:info@riverdee.org)**

### Spread the word – Your voice matters

In order to maximise the potential of the Save the Spring initiative, we need you to help spread the word! Follow and share our **#SaveTheSpring** social media posts to help the project reach an even wider audience.