

Salmon under threat

Our native salmon are facing uncertain future – but recreational water users including anglers, canoeists, rowers and small boat users can help to protect them.

It is always thrilling to see wild salmon leaping up weirs and waterfalls as they return to their spawning grounds. But a parasite spreading through Europe could destroy the population here.

The parasite (Latin name: *Gyrodactylus salaris*) is less than half a millimetre in size and barely visible to the naked eye, but it can cause severe damage to salmon, and often results in the death of affected fish. It is now widespread in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, and has also been found in France, Germany, Portugal and Spain.

Thankfully the parasite has not yet been found in the U.K – but experiments have shown that our salmon would be killed by it, so it is really important that it is not introduced from Europe. It is possible that even one parasite imported to an previously unaffected river could cause an epidemic in a very short time.

The main threat is from the importation of diseased fish and controls are now in place to minimise these risks. However, there is also a smaller risk that watersports enthusiasts returning from these European countries could inadvertently carry the parasite back to this country.

The parasite can survive in wet or damp conditions for 5 to 6 days on boats, equipment or clothing. Most affected are recreational water users returning with their equipment, or European competitors entering the UK for events, where they intend to re-use their equipment within a week.

If you are returning with equipment used in rivers in the European countries listed above you can help prevent importing the disease on equipment such as keep nets, reels, boats and canoes plus associated items, wetsuits, clothing and footwear by doing two simple things:

- **Thoroughly drying all equipment for at least 48 hours. Drying in sunlight in temperatures above 20°C**
or
- **Disinfect by simply immersing equipment in seawater or a salt solution (sodium chloride concentration 3% or more) for a minimum of ten minutes can kill the parasite. All equipment should then be thoroughly rinsed in tap water.**

Marine vessels returning from abroad do not pose a risk as the parasite cannot survive in seawater but consideration should be given to tenders or other equipment used in rivers.

Further information

Environment Agency web site www.environment-agency.gov.uk/recreation.

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) web site www.defra.gov.uk

Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS)
web site : www.efishbusiness.com