



2021 NEWSLETTER

(1951 – 2021)

70 YEARS

The year 2021 saw the Club celebrate its 70th birthday. Born from a vision of the late Glan Williams, who, even in those days could see the potential that the river had to offer not only for those who were keen anglers but for the benefit of the Afan Valley as whole.



Glan Williams 1929 - 1988

SPECIAL EDITION

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A Message from the Chairman



Mal Reynolds

The Afan Valley Angling Club is well known throughout Wales and beyond. We are a Club that 'does' things, we don't just talk about it, we do it! Just take a look through this newsletter and the accompanying report and you will see what a small group of just four has achieved in the last 9 months, from the investigation into the effects of CSOs on the river and the writing of a report, through to making substantial inroads into projects such as the restoration of the Nant Clais brook.

Everything we do is aimed at improving the habitat for fish and increasing the numbers of all fish species in our river. It is our aim to give you the members what you rightfully deserve a pleasant and rewarding fishing experience every time you visit the river. As it says on the cover page 2021 was the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Club and those years in the main have been successful years, and it is thanks to the support that you the members have given to the Club that have made those years so successful.

So, let's look towards the next seventy years with the same optimism and enthusiasm that the founding members had when they started.

Hopefully when these restrictions are over, we will meet on the riverbank where we can have a chat and exchange views and stories.

Thank you

INTRODUCTION

The year 2021 marked the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Afan Valley Angling Club. There are some angling clubs who can measure their history in centuries rather than decades so, the club is still in its infancy. But in terms of progress, we have made immeasurable progress.

The coal dust has disappeared, and we are only troubled with infrequent mine water discharges. However, sewage pollution is on the increase, and it is now a major threat to the water quality of the river. But it is being dealt with. The club's Conservation officer Steff Robb is working with Welsh Water and Natural Resources Wales to reduce the instances of spills from Combined Sewage Overflows (CSOs) and the upgrading of the current sewerage system which will eventually lead to much improved water quality. This will improve the habitat for both fish and invertebrates within the river. In 2021 the club carried out an investigation and produced a report of the effects CSOs had on the River Afan, we would urge all members to read it.

There are those that believe fish are at the bottom of the food chain and are there as a mere food source for other wildlife. However, fish are just one link in the ecosystem chain and if any link is removed or damaged there is an inevitable knock-on effect to other species, so, you could ask who speaks for the fish and the wider fresh water eco system within the Afan Well, we do the members of the Afan Valley Angling Club. And so, conservation is becoming more and more an important part of the club's identity and philosophy.

We are working with many of our partners such as 'The Wild Trout Trust, Salmon & Trout Conservation Cymru, West Wales Rivers Trust, National Resources Wales, The Department of Biosciences at Swansea University on several projects, such as the restoration of the Nant Clais Brook as an improved spawning habit for salmonids, the removal of barriers to improve access and connectivity for spawning salmonids. Following the upgrade of Green Park Weir. The Club with John Phillips as our representative on the Afan Water Management Group is now engaged on modifications to Newbridge Road Weir a potential multimillion pound project to reduce the height of the weir and improve the passage for migratory salmon and sewin into the river Afan.

All, of the above are projects are fundamentally based around the conservation of fish, their habitat and water quality. With this in mind, we now believe that the club should change its name to reflect the amount of Conservation work it is engaged with. This we believe from discussions that we have had with the organisations mentioned above would improve our prospects for both funding and technical help.

Of course, other things are going on in the background such as the continued opposition to potential 'Run of River' river hydropower, the opposition to free and open access for canoeing and kayaking in the Afan without the use of 'voluntary access agreements. The effects that fish eating birds have on salmonid populations. These fall under the watchful eye of Len Powell who has had many years-experience in these matters. The club has moved its tool container from the Ynys Park area to Pwll y Glaw and a hard standing is being laid on the club land at Dan-y-Bont.

It would be impossible at this time to pursue any of the projects without the knowledge and experience of those named above and so they are becoming more active within the club. Mal Reynolds who most of you will know is returning to take a leading role in the club and also assisting with the above projects.

However, the club needs more members! So, if you think that you know someone who might be interested in angling let us know. Perhaps you could get your children or grandchildren interested angling is a great gift to pass on. The club also needs help with the projects it is engaged with so, if any member feels that they can assist in any way please contact Mal Reynolds, John Phillips, Steff Robb or Len Powell their contact details can be found on the final page of this newsletter.

All of the above bodes well for the future of the club and we are sure that the next 70 years will prove to be even more successful as the last 70 years.

The contributors and editors of this Newsletter hope that all of the members find it an interesting and informative read.

AFAN WATER MANAGEMENT GROUP (Report by John Phillips)

Afan Water Management Group (AWMG) 2021 Update

- The group met ‘virtually’ four times during 2021 taking the total number of meetings since the group’s formation to forty four.
- The group is made up of representatives from Tata Steel, Associated British Ports, Natural Resources Wales, Neath Port Talbot County Council and the Afan valley Angling and Conservation Club, and recently Dwr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW).
- Over the past eleven years, the main emphasis of the group has been to understand and manage the water usage by both Tata Steel and ABP, whilst continually reminding them of the environmental impact their businesses were having on the river Afan which supplies probably 95% of the fresh water for their operation.
- During June 2020 following a huge sewage spill from Dwr Cymru Welsh Water’s (DCWW) Newbridge Road pumping station outfall, AVAC raised concerns over its impact on water quality, not only within the estuary, but also at Aberavon beach where bathing surfing and other water sports take place. However, DCWW didn’t seem to be too concerned over this discharge (see photograph below). As a result of this discharge the Afan Water Management Group (AWMG) invited DCWW to attend their meetings, and answer ‘face to face’ the questions that they so dearly wanted to ask.

Please see report on CSO’s later in the newsletter.



- Associated British Ports (ABP) managed their operation of Port Talbot dock without the need to impound water from their outer lock through the long dry spell that we encountered this year, which meant that the fish pass had a continuous low flow throughout the dry period. The underwater cameras at the top of the fish pass apart from recording the usual migration of smolts, didn't record any sewin until the first week in June. Late June saw the first 'freshet' of any significance, and both sewin and salmon were recorded. Interestingly, our members had been reported seeing and catching sewin in the river earlier in the year, so we must assume that the fish were using the by wash and not the fish pass.
- The top of the fish pass (exit) has suffered some structural damage to its base, where some large pieces of concrete have washed away. There is a concern that this damage may lead to further degradation of the structure, so NRW are planning to carry out the remedial work next year. This will mean that the pass will have to be closed for two weeks to allow repairs to be carried out.
- Newbridge road weir remained on the agenda, and some major progress has been made. *Please see report on Newbridge Road weir in newsletter.*
- NPTCC reported that the stainless-steel sculpture depicting the life cycle of the Atlantic salmon that was shelved due to cost during the Covid crisis is now under review, so hopefully this will be fully funded and erected adjacent to Green Park weir in the not to distant future.

Newbridge Road Weir

Introduction

The Scheme & Previous Work

The Afan catchments are currently failing to meet good water quality status because of physical modifications such as man-made weirs which prevent fish migrating upstream and reaching their spawning grounds. Newbridge weir provides a major barrier to fish migration and being located close to the mouth of the River Afan, prevents access to the whole catchment. NRW are seeking to improve the water body status by improving fish migration through modification or removal of barriers, with work to Newbridge

Weir.

This report builds on the work previously carried out in 2005 to develop the preferred option of low gradient rock ramp.

It describes the options that have been considered and investigated together with a comprehensive stakeholder consultation being carried out.

In 2005 a phase 1 report was prepared by Atkins to look at modifications of Newbridge Weir (River Afan) to improve fish passage, the Atkins study recommended consideration of the following two options:

1. Lowering of weir by 1200mm (Full width)
2. Lowering of weir by 1200mm (Central 4-5m notch)

The initial preference was for option 2 (localised lowering), as it was likely to be the most cost effective and straight forward to implement, and less likely to cause significant geomorphic changes.

In 2018 following the phase 1 report JBA assessed the feasibility of lowering the weir, and carried out a number of studies, summarised in JBA's report titled '*Newbridge Weir stabilisation and fish passage improvements study*'. The studies carried out included:

- Environmental desk-based assessment & Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
- Geomorphological assessment
- Structural Assessment & Dive survey of weir
- Bathymetric & topographical survey
- Presentation of Options & Recommendations

The main site constraints/risks identified from the above studies were:

- Existing weir is in poor state of repair, significant risk of sudden collapse. Weir appeared to be built at similar time as bridge (possibly to facilitate its construction)
- Bridge immediately upstream of the weir, carries services, and is a listed structure.
- The river has been canalised between embankments which may be at increased risk of erosion/collapse if weir is removed.
- The Afan Estuary Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) is located on the right-hand bank downstream of the weir

Five options were assessed, which included:

Option 1 – Do Nothing. The risk that a sudden weir collapse may lower river-bed levels, and increase the risk of scour at the bridge upstream, releasing large amounts of sediment and destabilising the channel and embankments.

Option 2 - Lower entire crest by 1.2m. The risk and consequences of a sudden weir Collapse is slightly reduced over option 1 but not removed.

Option 3 - Lower single 4m wide panel by 1.2m. The risk and consequences of a sudden weir collapse is slightly reduced compared to option 2 but not removed.

Option 4 – Lower three adjacent 4m wide panels in a stepped arrangement (by 0.6m, 1.2m and 0.6m respectively) The risk and consequences of a sudden weir collapse is somewhere between options 2 & 3.

Option 5 – Rebuild/ reinforce weir and install new fish pass. This is the lowest risk option, but also the costliest to construct. However, the cost to construct must be offset against potential socio-economic costs due to a sudden weir collapse.

Fast forward to 2018 and following the successful completion and commissioning of the Green Park weir construction in 2017, our concerns relating to Newbridge weir tabled again at a meeting of the Afan Water Management Group. The ownership of the land on which the weir was built was confirmed as an asset of Associated British Ports, but it was of no practical or fiscal value to them.

NRW contracted JBA Ltd, who had designed and managed the construction of Green Park weir to carry out a desk-based assessment of the challenges and risks posed by any engineering works at the weir. What was made clear and accepted by all members of the group was that option 5 from the 2005 report was still the way to proceed and further develop. Following this decision, many ideas were considered and debated, with three designs/options being costed and presented by JBA Ltd, (see below).

Option 1 –Rock Ramp downstream of Weir

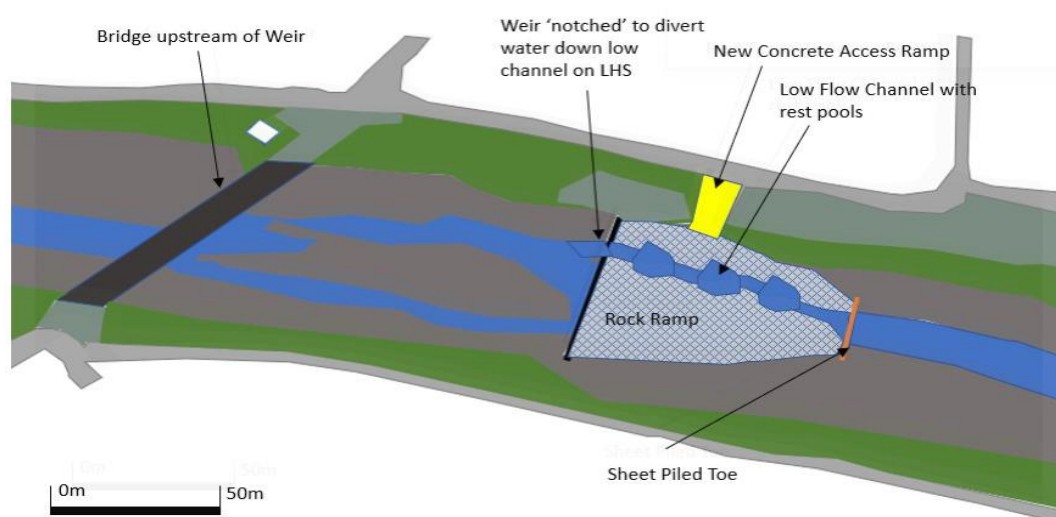


Figure 3-1 Rock Ramp downstream of Weir

Here a rock ramp is positioned downstream of the weir. The rock ramp provides fish passage and prevents sudden failure of the weir. A low flow channel is positioned on left hand side to enable access for maintenance. A sheet piled toe prevents the ramp breaking up from the downstream end. Costings prepared by Jones Bros (Henllan) indicate that this would be the lowest cost option, currently calculated to be approximately £1.5 million (without risk allowance, or design & supervision costs). The construction time is estimated to be 16 weeks.

Option 2 – Rock Ramp upstream and downstream of Weir

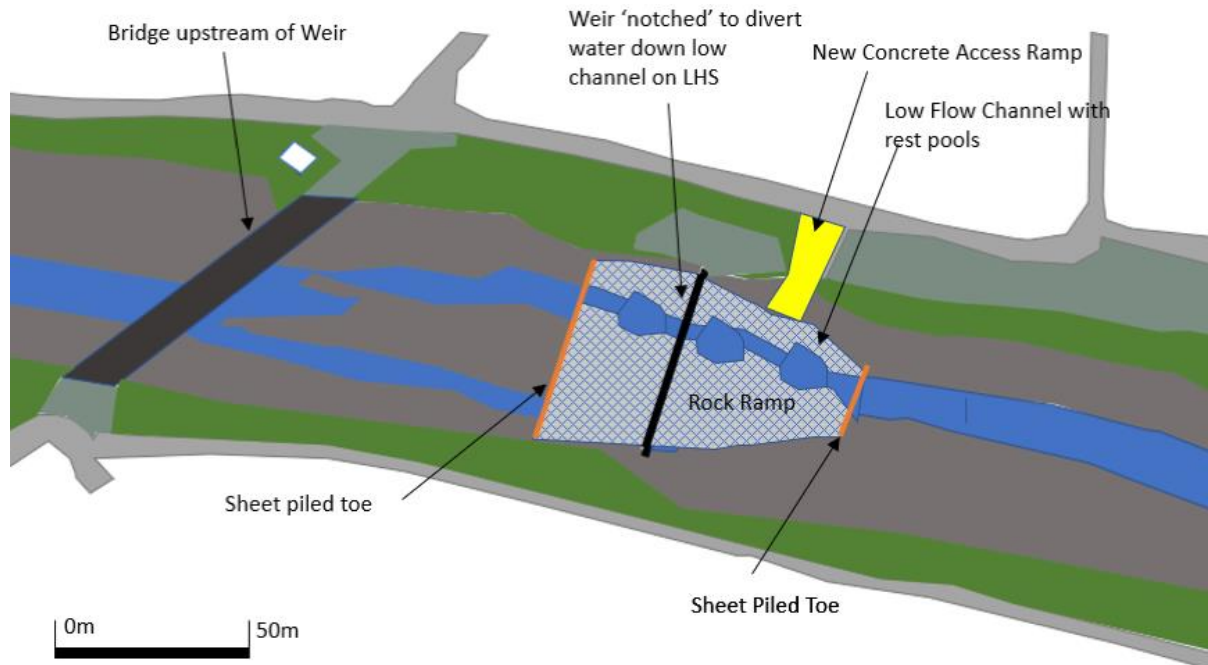


Figure 3-2 Rock Ramp upstream and downstream of Weir

Here a rock ramp is positioned both upstream and downstream of the weir, and the weir lowered, this aims to reduce the top of weir by at least 1.2m but further investigation would be required to determine final amount by which the weir could be lowered. The rock-ramps provide fish passage and prevents a sudden failure of the weir. A low flow channel is positioned on left hand side to enable access for maintenance. Sheet piled toes prevents the ramp breaking up from both ends. The weir is effectively sandwiched above and below by rock. Finer sediment from behind the weir may be employed to fill the interstices between the rock so that less water is lost from the low flow channel through the rock fill. A shorter ramp downstream of the weir would reduce the amount of tidal working.

Costings prepared by Jones Bros (Henllan) indicate that this would cost more than Option 1, currently calculated to be approximately £1.7 million (without risk allowance, or design & supervision costs). The additional piling upstream increases the costs together with increase in time for the required for construction 24 weeks instead of 16 weeks (due to additional piling & working both sides of weir)

Option 3 – Rock Ramp with Groynes

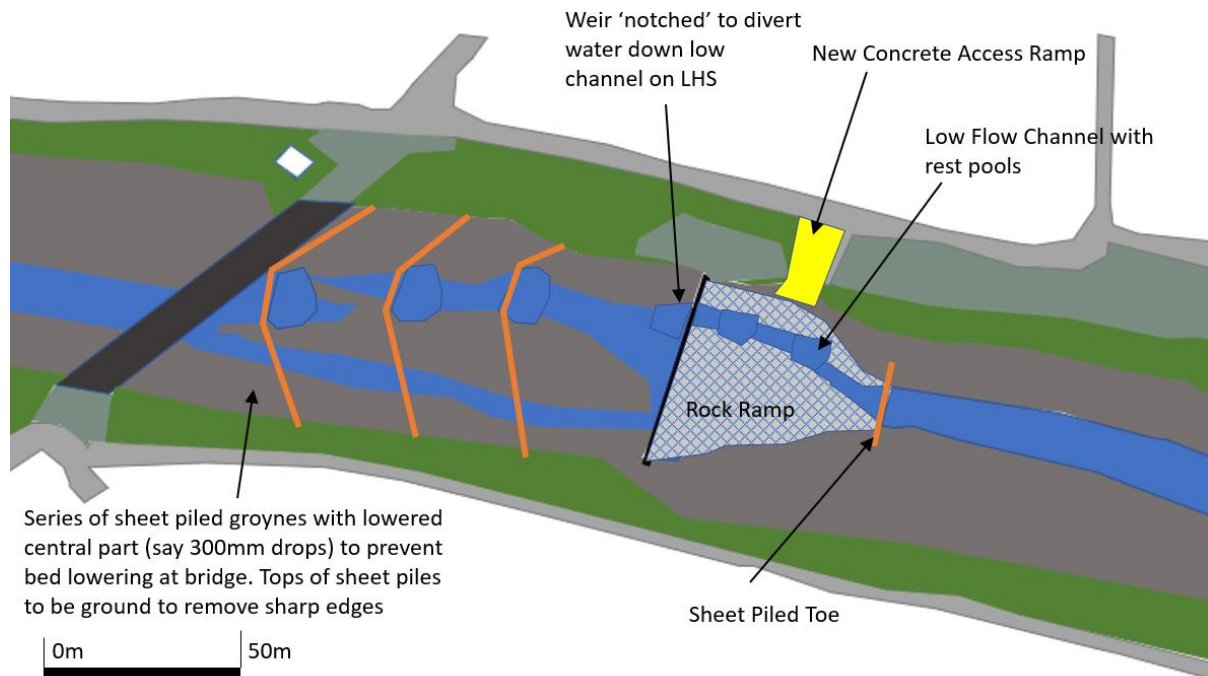


Figure 3-3 Rock Ramp with Groynes

Here a shortened rock ramp is positioned downstream of the weir, and the height of the weir reduced. Upstream of the weir a series of stepped sheet piled groynes slows sediment movement and erosion of upstream river-bed levels and banks. The rock-ramp provides fish passage and prevents a sudden failure of the weir. A low flow channel is positioned on left hand side to enable access for maintenance. A sheet piled toe prevents the ramp breaking up from the downstream end. Costings indicate that this option would be the more costly of all of the options due to the additional piling required.

Conclusions & Recommendations

Following stakeholder workshop the general consensus was that **Option 2 – Rock Ramp Upstream and Downstream of the weir** should be taken forward. It was also considered that any solution should be robust and easy to maintain whilst allowing fish passage, and that weir should be lowered as far as possible.

To do develop this Option through to construction the following additional tasks (to those already carried out) have been identified.

- Additional Topographic Survey for Modelling Downstream of Weir
- Investigation/Coring to Bridge to confirm construction details and sensitivity to drop in bed levels
- Scour Assessment of Bridge
- Sediment Sampling and Analysis for CFD Modelling and Marine Licensing
- Hydraulic Design Ramp including Low Flow Channel
- Drawings for Fish Pass Approval & Planning Consent

- Fish Pass Approval Application
- Landscape Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)
- Planning Consent Application
- Listed building Consent Application
- WFD assessment
- INNS Management Plan
- Appointment of CDM Principal Designer
- A Detailed set of drawings and specifications
- Detailed BoQ or Activity Schedule
- Design Risk Assessment & Preparation of Pre-Construction Information in accordance with CDM regulations
- Preparation of Tender and Contract Forms
- Application for Marine Licence
- Application for Flood risk Activity Permit (FRAP)
- Construction and Supervision

Additional tasks may become apparent once design and construction is underway so an adequate risk allowance should be provided for these tasks, currently a risk allowance of 15% has been made.

A project brief has now been drawn up to determine the next steps, using Arup as the design contractor and working with the ‘Salmon for Tomorrow 2 Project’. The project has been handed over to the NRW Projects and Programme Delivery team, and assurance and approval has been secured for the project. NRW have allocated £75k to the project for this financial year, and they are very hopeful that detailed designs will be achieved by the end of this financial year.

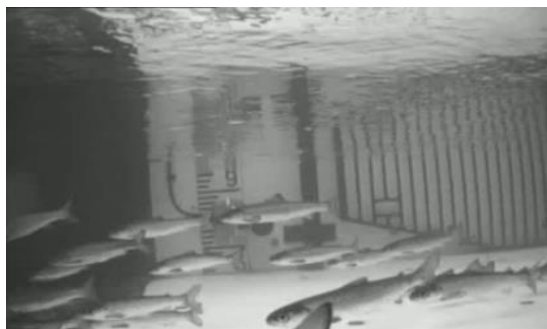
The NRW have also engaged the services of ‘Fishtec’ a company that are very experienced in fish pass design and in taking designs through the national fish pass panel and other approval processes. Providing funding can be secured, we are hopeful that work on the removal/easement of this obstruction will be completed sometime in 2023/24.

We are extremely grateful for the continued support of the ‘Afan Water Management Group’ in recognising that this weir is having a major impact on the river Afan.

FISH (Report by John Phillips, Steff Robb & Len Powell)

A cold dry start to the season kept many members away from the river however, some good size trout were recorded that were in excellent condition.

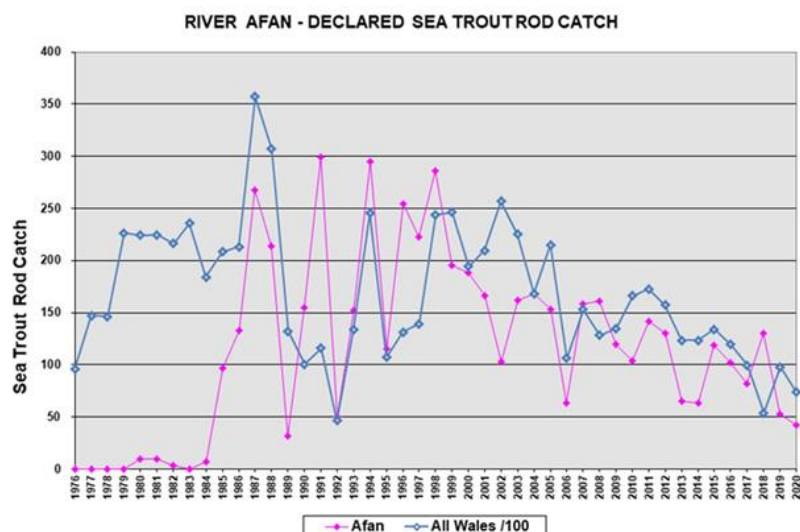
The cameras down at the fish pass recorded good numbers of smolts leaving the river, but due to the low water levels no sewin or salmon were monitored during the months of March and April.



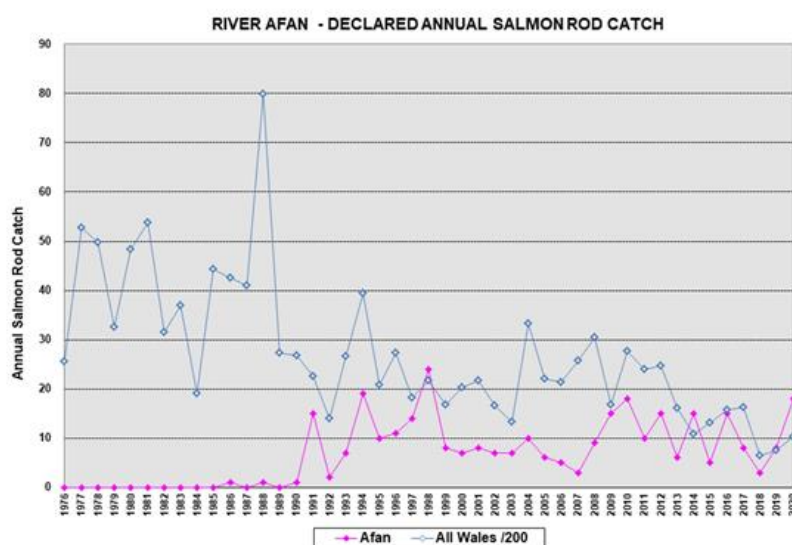
Smolt migrating to sea from the ‘fish pass’ at Green Park Weir

The first freshet of any significance came mid-May where the cameras logged the first salmon of the season on the 13th of May, but it wasn't until the 6th of June that the first sewin was logged on the cameras. This is late as the large sewin are usually seen entering the Afan in May. However, many members had reported seeing large fish in the river before this date, so we must assume that they were able to enter the river via the by-wash on the weir. From June onwards, some very nice salmon and sewin were caught, with the largest salmon being recorded as 33.5 inches long, and this equates to approximately fourteen and a half pounds in weight. Many of our members post their photographs on a 'Facebook Page' and some excellent pictures of the fish have been posted there. (See Gallery below).

It should be noted that sea trout (sewin) catches for the Afan are in decline from 100 in 2010 to just 42 in 2020. Although the figures are erratic the trend from 1998 is a gradual decline (see fig1 below). Measures are currently being taken to halt and hopefully reverse this trend through improvements in water quality and spawning habitat.



(Fig 1 Sea Trout (Sewin) Rod catch statistics for the Afan 1976 – 2020)



(Fig 2 salmon Rod catch for the Afan 1976-2020)

Since 2010 the Afan has been punching above its weight as far as salmon catches go, even though catches have been somewhat erratic, up one year, and down the next, for a small river which is not classed as one of the 'principle' salmon rivers of Wales, the Afan is fishing well. If previous trends prevail there should be drop in catches in 2021 and an increase in 2022.

In November some salmon and sewin with a fungal disease were spotted on the River Tawe Natural Resources Wales (NRW) investigated the situation.



Pictured above a fish with fungal disease

It should be borne in mind that not all fungal disease is Ulcerative dermal necrosis (UDN) Mortalities of salmon with UDN-like lesions were widely reported in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s, with outbreaks confirmed in Ireland and Sweden. Since then, cases of UDN in Britain have remained at a low level with only occasional, isolated losses.

The current fungal disease is thought to be Saprolegnia. NRW are monitoring the situation on all our major salmon rivers, and they are anticipating more reports of the disease from other rivers.

Saprolegnia causes white, cream or pale brown cotton wool-like growths on the skin and fins of fish. These infections often start as small round patches, but can increase in size to form larger plaques covering the body. Although Saprolegnia is commonly referred to as a fungus, it is actually a type of cold-water mould known as an Oomycete and is not strictly a fungus. The most common species that causes problems in our fisheries is Saprolegnia parasitica, which is found in freshwater environments throughout the UK.

Should any Club member come across a diseased fish **DO NOT** attempt to remove it from the water. But please get in touch with NRW on 03000 65 3000. If possible, take a photograph and note the location.

2021 GALLERY



Karson a proud angler



A beautiful Afan wild trout with Gemma Williams



Look at this one says Shaun Williams



Craig Harris caught this one



A double from Gereint Mortimer



Another fine salmon caught by Dale Watkins



Jonathan Crannage's first sewin



Not to be outdone by Gereint this is a double caught by Craig Ridsdale



“Triple Crown Success”

Husband and wife team Shaun and Gemma Williams had a great afternoon's fishing in August when they successfully landed a salmon, sewin and trout between them.

2021 AWARDS

Best Salmon: Craig Ridsdale 33.5” Est. 14lb 8 onz & Nigel Price 33.5” Est. 14lb 8 onz.

Best Sewin: William Thomas 27” Est.

Best Brown Trout: Craig Ridsdale Est 5lb +

Best Junior Fish: Zac Jenkins age 8 Trout 8-10 onz & Karson Watkins age 11 Trout 14”

Clubman of the Year: Steff Robb

Meritorious Service Award: Mike Herd

BAILIFF REPORT (Report by Gereint Mortimer)

A drought season, characterised by low flows and very little fishing effort, although, when there was water the few who were out fishing did well.

The run of fish didn’t diminish with the low flows and thanks to everyone who helped keep the pass clear, they could all enter the catchment.

On the poaching front, fairly quiet with no major incidents, gypsies from Nottingham and local boys.

The number of mullet in the estuary throughout the summer suggests no unknown netting incidents.

On November 12th 2021 at 13.30 a local club member reported that there were 7 kayakers illegally paddling in the river above Corlanau weir they were equipped with helmet mounted cameras. We would advise club members not to approach any ‘paddlers’ but to take all the details they can and report the incident to a club official. The issue of illegal canoeing / kayaking, is discussed in section Access to Inland Waterways.

HYDROPOWER (Report by Len Powell)

The future use of Run-of-River hydropower schemes is difficult to predict. Changes in rainfall patterns and increases in extreme events means flash floods and droughts are becoming increasingly common. Summers are likely to get hotter and winters likely to get warmer and wetter and river flows are predicted to increase in winter and decrease in summer. This may not suit Run-of-River hydropower generation as these schemes are best suited to a constant flow of river water at a quantity suitable to the size of the scheme.

The effects of climate change might therefore see a reduction in the implementation of such schemes which can have a devastating effect on the ecology of a river.

THE GLYNCORRWG HYDROPOWER SCHEME

There is only one run-of-river hydropower scheme currently in operation in the River Afan catchment, this is at Glyncoirwg. The scheme abstracts water from two small brooks the Nant cwm Cas and the Nant yr Allor the abstracted water is carried down to a Powerhouse inside a penstock. It then passes through a turbine which generates electricity. Most readers of the Club's newsletter will recall that this scheme contravened several conditions which were placed on the planning consent. NPTCBC Planning enforcement were carrying out an investigation. However, the onset of the Pandemic has delayed the investigation. The Club is currently awaiting an update from NPTCBC Enforcement.

MICRO-HYDRO GENERATION

A Micro-Hydro project to generate electricity and introduce vehicle charging points was proposed for two places on the river, both of which were to be located at weirs. However, this scheme has not advanced since it was introduced by Cardiff University and Geode Energy. It does not seem likely that it will proceed. However, the club must be vigilant and constantly view the NPTCBC Planning Portal for any planning applications for Run of River hydro-power schemes

SWANSEA BAY TIDAL LAGOON (Report by Phil Jones & Len Powell)

The Swansea Bay Tidal Lagoon has finally sunk!

The development proposed by Tidal Lagoon (Swansea Bay) plc (TLSB main man Mark Shorrocks) first sought the necessary consents in 2014:

- Development consent was granted by the Sec of State for DECC (Dept for Energy and Climate Change) in June 2015. It contained many pre-commencement conditions, few of which had been discharged by the time the consent expired in June 2020.
- The Marine Licence that TLSB needed from NRW, however proved more difficult to obtain and this time last year the application had stalled because TLSB had failed to provide satisfactory evidence as to the likely fisheries impacts.

Things went quiet for a long time and it came as a bit of a shock in June 2021 to learn that TLSB had mounted judicial review proceedings in the High Court, seeking a ruling that the development consent had not actually expired in June 2020, as everyone else thought it had. Their lawyers produced a detailed legal case which clearly couldn't be dismissed out of hand.

It looked as though the PASAS and AVAC group which had opposed the proposal since it was first mooted in 2013 might have to get its act together and get out on the case again!



PASAS and AVAC Anti-Lagoon Group: Ray Lockyer, Phil Jones, and Len Powell

In July 2021, however we learned that NRW had finally treated the Marine Licence application as withdrawn because of the failure to provide the “further information” required.

The judicial review proceedings re the Development Consent therefore seemed a bit academic, as they wouldn’t be able to proceed with the development without a Marine Licence.

The case eventually came to court on 3rd November 2021: His Honour Judge Jarman QC, sitting as a judge of the High Court and 5 barristers including 2 QCs representing the various parties:

- Claimants: TLSB
- Defendants: BEIS (formerly DECC), Welsh Ministers and Swansea Council.

Detailed arguments took a day and the Judge reserved his judgement for 2-3 weeks. The judgement was handed down on 25th November, The Judge found for the Defendants. The Claimants, TLSB, had failed to show that the Development Consent remained in force.

Hopefully therefore, that’s the end of the TLSB proposal (which we now call TL1). Two other more recent proposals Dragon Energy Island (TL2) and Blue Eden (TL3) might rear their ugly heads at some point.

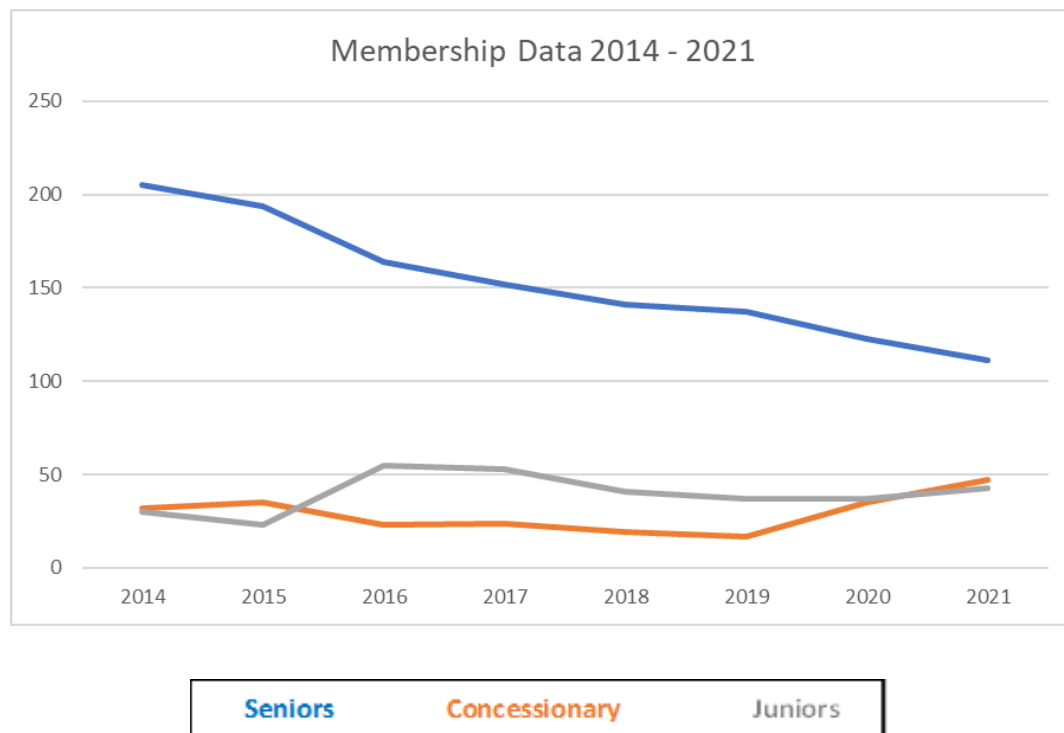
CLUB MEMBERSHIP (Report by. Paul Llewellyn & Len Powell)

The 2021 season has seen the Senior membership still in decline, almost 50% in the last 7 years, whilst Concessionary membership is slowly increasing. Junior membership remains stable, this is likely due to Clubs parent / son rule (see graph below).

The declining membership has a direct effect on our finances. Attempts to increase the membership numbers have so far failed. However, looking to the future with more and more people being encouraged to be more active outdoors the club is hopeful for the future.

The Club still operates the policy of a parent / grandparent who is currently a full-time member of the Club is allowed to have a son / daughter or grandchild join as a junior member of the Club free of charge. (NRW Rod Licence must be obtained).

The Club needs to increase membership numbers, hopefully the catch returns for 2021 with the number of salmon and sewin caught will generate some interest.



PREDATION (Fish eating birds) (Report by Len Powell)



Male and female Goosanders and a Cormorant

In Wales the rivers (Wye, Usk, Tywi, Cleddaus, Teifi, Dyfi, Mawddach, Conwy, Clwyd and Dee) are classed as principal salmon rivers, this includes four rivers (Wye, Usk, Teifi, and the Dee with Bala Lake) which are designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) with Atlantic salmon among the primary reasons for site selection.

Fish stocks in each of these rivers have declined significantly and are below safe biological limits and potentially at risk from predation by fish-eating birds (see above) as a factor limiting populations or suppressing stock recovery. It should be noted that all wild birds in Wales have legal protection. The Regulator Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has powers under which they can authorise others to kill or take particular species of wild birds, eggs and nests for certain purposes, for example in order to prevent serious damage to crops, livestock or fisheries, to protect public health or safety or to conserve other species of wildlife.

Under section 16(1)(k) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, NRW may grant licences to carry out lethal control of wild birds for the purpose of preventing serious damage to fisheries.

As well as the principal salmon rivers mentioned above the Afan being one of the principal sea trout rivers in Wales has a population of 'fish eating-birds'. Many of you who regularly fish the river have, over the years seen an increase in the numbers of these birds especially in the spring when smolt are migrating to sea. At the same time a decrease in fish populations has been observed. The Afan is now classed as being 'at risk' for sea trout (sewin). There are several factors which could contribute to the current status of the Afan as being 'at risk' for sea trout, and 'fish eating birds' is no doubt believed by all anglers to be one of them.

NRW issued a call for evidence to inform a review of NRW's approach to regulating the shooting and trapping of wild birds in Wales. The 'Call for Evidence' opened on 02 December 2020 and it closed on 27 January 2021.

NRW are undertaking a review of how they exercise these powers.

This review is looking at the different types of permissions that they offer, and the processes used to deliver these activities to seek to make improvements.

A Consultation opened on 19 Aug 2021 and closed on 11 November 2021

The findings of the consultation will help shape NRW's future approach to the permissions they give for shooting and trapping wild birds in Wales and the destruction of their eggs and

nests. The 'Consultation Document' can be seen here. [Wild Bird Review Consultation paper FINAL.pdf correct.pdf \(cyfoethnaturiol.cymru\)](#) Anglers however, are sceptical that NRW will introduce measures sufficient to control the rapid increase in these bird populations.

L.F.G (SOUTH-WEST WALES REGION) (Report by Steff Robb)

South West Wales Local Fisheries Group (LFG)

The group has only met once over the last year, but we continue to support the LFG's and have attended a meeting via the "Teams" platform. The meeting is a valuable source of information from the NRW and other rivers/fishing clubs within South Wales with regards to legislation and an overall trends and fish catches.

The most recent meeting included the following :

Sustainable Fisheries Program Delivery SW

Dave Charlesworth NRW gave a presentation on the fisheries project delivery in 20/21 which described the various funding streams (SFP/SAF/S4T2) and our partnership working with West Wales River Trust (WWRT). Schemes presented included fish passage improvement, habitat improvement and angling infrastructure improvement. **DC** also presented a forward look into delivery in 21/22 and again highlighted a similar programme of works planned with headline fish passage schemes on the Mynys and the Afon Clydach.

Enforcement Update SW

Alun Thomas NRW gave an enforcement update for SW. He gave details of a police officer current on assignment, NRW and new staff trained with Salmon & Freshwater Fisheries Act (SAFFA) warrants. High level information on numbers and types of cases ongoing were presented to the group.

AT highlighted the use of 'What Three Words' app as a tool for locating incidents and as a tool for personal H&S.

Smolt Tagging - Tawe

Ray Lockyer and **Phil Jones of (PASAS)** presented a summary of the smolt trapping/tagging that has been carried out on the Tawe over the last two years with some initial findings. The local angling society has contributed many hours (250) in support of the project and hope to present findings as results are gained. Both highlighted issues of filamentous algae clogging the nets and were worried about eutrophication on the river.

Agri Regs / White paper

Creighton Harvey Carmarthenshire Fisherman's Federation (CFF) (Retired Solicitor) gave an update on the Agri-Regs and Agri-white paper. He expressed his disappointment at the NFU and their resistance to the new regulations, he explained that the NFU were in the process of a judicial review. NFU were accused of running a 'project fear'. **CH** explained the 3 phases of the Agri-regs, with the first phase already provided legislation around slurry spreading and suggested it might be useful for NRW to issue guidance on how they will look to enforce the new rules.

CH presented the wider timelines for the phasing in of regulation from now till 2024 when the full range will be imposed with closed periods and spreading limits (25kg/h) he went on to talk about the Agri-white paper consultation and highlighted the range of different enforcement tools being considered with particular reference to enforcement undertakings.

Issues were raised again in relation to CSO discharges in the Afan and Tawe catchments. **RL/PJ** talked specifically about Trebanos CSO on the Tawe and the chronic issues there. The suggestion was made that Dwr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) were prepared to invest at the site but were being held up by NRW. **DC** took an action to investigate what might be the issue for next meeting.

Additional papers and reports were circulated before the most recent meeting on the following subjects:

- Joint Fisheries Conservation NGO Position Statement on Eurasian Beaver Reintroduction into England and Wales.
- Sustainable Fisheries Project Delivery in SW 20/21 by DC NRW
- Welsh Fisheries Forum update paper
- Cyfoeth – NRW Green Recovery Projects.

If anyone would like to receive a copy of any of the above documents, then please advise one of the Committee.

RECONNECTING OUR RIVERS (Report by Professor Carlos Garcia De Leaniz, Steff Robb & Len Powell)

The River Afan & Reconnecting the Salmon Rivers of Wales

You may remember from last year's newsletter that we advised that the mapping of the Afan is virtually complete with regards to barriers. The plan was then, now and in the future to remove as many of these barriers to fish migration and biodiversity as possible. Funding was sought from a number of avenues. The BLUE RIVERS project proposes to encourage EU citizens to take ownership of their national rivers and feel proud about them. This is an EU based fund. Applications were duly constructed by Swansea University and submitted but we were unsuccessful in our attempt.

Applications were also submitted for funding from Pen y Cymoedd windfarm by West Wales Rivers Trust on our behalf for improvements on the Afan with the same subject in mind i.e. the removal of the barriers. Unfortunately, once again it was turned down, this time as they advised they wanted our application to be further progressed – i.e., have identified the specific barriers we were addressing and have consents in place for them. They were happy for us to reapply but obviously we are a long way from that stage yet.

The Project ‘Reconnecting the River Afan’

Millie Parks, an MSc by Research student at Swansea University supervised by Prof Carlos Garcia de Leaniz and Dr Josh Jones (now at the Rivers Trust), has been using a mathematical optimization approach to prioritize barriers for removal in the Afan, based on removal costs and connectivity gains for species with different swimming abilities. The original algorithm optimises connectivity gains based on river length but Millie has modified it to use both the extent and quality of the habitat, and applied it to brown trout, bullhead and Atlantic salmon. The Afan is an ideal good test ground to try this approach as it is the only catchment in Wales (and possibly in the UK) where there is a complete inventory of all barriers to fish movements, both natural and artificial. Simulations show that a targeted approach to barrier mitigation yields benefits from the first barrier and is about 3-6 times more effective (cheaper) than removing barriers at random (Figure 1). Results also show that the budget plays a significant role in prioritizing barriers for removal. At low budgets it is better to prioritise barrier removal based on river quality and area, but with higher budgets the differences are not so important and managers can use river length. When the budget is very limited (as it is often the case in river restoration), it is essential to use as much information on habitat quality as possible as this determines how much quality habitat can be made accessible with each removal.

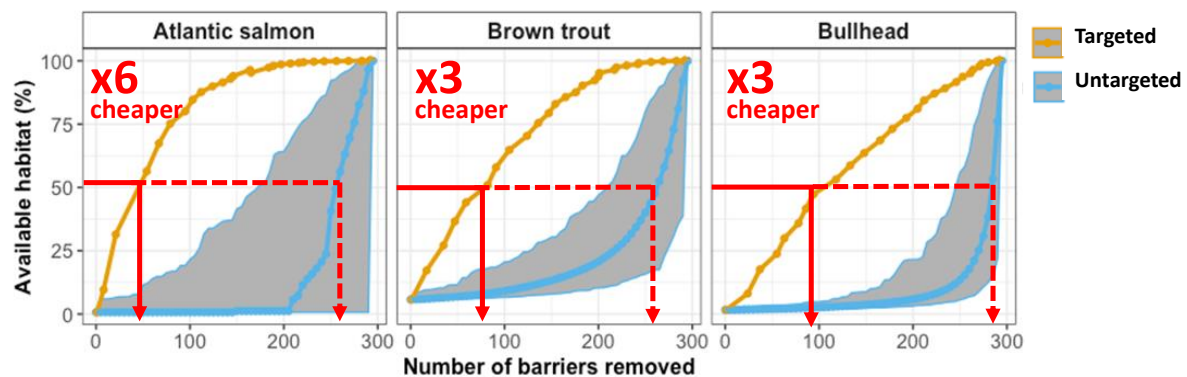


Figure 1. Simulations of barrier removals in the Afan show that a targeted (optimised) approach (A) is 3-6 times cheaper than a random (untargeted) approach and yields benefits since the first removal, but a plan is needed.

The Project ‘Reconnecting the Salmon Rivers of Wales’

The project led by Swansea University has been awarded £500,000 for barrier removal from the Nature Networks Fund (Lottery Fund)

This project will help reconnect five iconic Atlantic salmon rivers in Wales and reverse the impacts caused by habitat fragmentation. Reconnecting quality habitats for salmon will make salmon populations less isolated and therefore more resilient to future change. It will also benefit many other aquatic species, including the freshwater pearl mussel, sea trout, sea lamprey, white-clawed crayfish, and the Eurasian otter who require free-flowing rivers. In collaboration with our partners (**Natural Resources Wales, Welsh Water, West Wales River Trust, Afonydd Cymru, Afan Valley Angling Club**) we will remove and/or ease 17 disused barriers and help reconnect 141 km of fragmented river habitats across Wales. We will use the AMBER *Barrier Tracker* app (<https://amber.international/category/barrier-tracker-app/>) to engage with local communities and showcase the benefits of collaboration in river restoration.

AFAN STAKEHOLDER FORUM (Report by Steff Robb)

Stakeholder Forum 2021 Update

Bullhead translocation project.

The Pelenna is the priority waterbody under the Water Framework Directive (WFD) that sits within the wider Afan catchment. Waterbodies are given priority by NRW based on our understanding of the pressures on the rivers and our ability to influence land management and other pressures that will help to improve their status.

As part of our WFD monitoring, we have determined that the Pelenna is failing due to a lack of fish numbers at our electrofishing monitoring points, specifically salmon, trout and bullhead.

As you will be aware the Afan Water Management Group has been instrumental in securing real improvements to the large structures on the Afan at Green Park Weir and Marcroft. As a result of this excellent work, we are pleased to report that we expect the numbers of migratory fish to improve steadily over the next few years.

The species that will struggle to recover and repopulate are bullhead as they were wiped out along the Pelenna due to the gross pollution associated with the coal mines in the Blaen Pelenna and Gwenffrwd valleys. Bullhead, expand their range very slowly and we feel that translocation into the Pelenna from the wider Afan would help to expand the range.

Using a wide data set, including the work commissioned in 2012, we hope to identify good donor sites and move fish into suitable sites in the Pelenna. We hope that the removal of barriers and the translocation of bullhead will see the Pelenna achieve moderate status in the

medium term and ultimately good ecological status in the longer term with trout and salmon numbers increasing over time.



Bullhead (*Cottus gobio*)

POLLUTION / WATER QUALITY (Report by Steff Robb)

The Afan has in no doubt been through some very difficult times in the past with decades of pollution from industry within the valley. Although a vast majority of these polluters have been addressed, we are still left with the historical legacy of under investment within our sewerage system. Our report earlier this year highlighted the extent of what we would consider illegal discharges. The problem we have is that there is a system in place which is supposed to be self-policing by the water company, DCWW. The regulator NRW is supposed to review the data and actively sample the water quality and act on incidents when they occur. DCWW assets i.e., the sewer main that runs through the valley with its connection chambers and numerous CSO's. From records we calculate there are 21 CSO's in the valley but are also aware that there may be more that are not included on the most recent plans. These CSO's have EDM's fitted (Event Duration Monitors) which pass data back to allow review of how many times these overflows are discharged into our river. We should remember these CSO's are permitted. However, the conditions of the permit refer to events such as heavy rainfall, snow melt etc. which could overload the system.

Unfortunately, our experience is that these CSO's overflow even when the above events have not occurred. From discussions with DCWW we understand that they are also aware of water ingress into their trunk sewer. This can occur for a number of reasons i.e. when the pipework is breached by a possible tree root or a pipe joint leaks or the cement on a chamber at river level starts to break down, allowing external water from the river or surrounding area to enter the sewer system. The result can then overload the sewer system. As most of these breaches are out of sight under normal circumstance, the first indication is increased discharges from

the CSO's or the lifting of manhole covers on the connection chambers. Unfortunately, in both cases they result in an uncontrolled discharge of raw effluent into our river. There are inevitable delays in any action then to overcome these discharges. When they are finally reported by whatever means DCWW then have to deploy cameras into the pipelines if there is no problem to pinpoint the blockage, restriction or ingress point. Some of these overflows from the CSO's are however monitored and are considered frequent spillers when they reach a threshold. The data from DCWW confirm more and more that these thresholds are being exceeded without intervention. More of a concern is the unknown spills which occur from restrictions in the pipe resulting in the manhole lifting and discharge of large amounts of effluent into the river in remote positions. These go undetected for long periods without being addressed. Quite often being reported by club members as DCWW or NRW do not have the resources to patrol these areas. We have highlighted to DCWW some connection chambers which are actually at river level with deteriorating cement and brickwork and during a spate the failing brickwork allows water back into the sewer system. We have also offered evidence to show that the effluent flows back out into the river depending on river levels.



Extensive damage to an Inspection Chamber caused by continual river flooding

Ongoing works: The connection chamber above Bennetts has lifted its lid and overflowed a number of times within the year. We increased the pressure on DCWW to address the problem. A number of attempts have been made and some debris has been removed from the main pipe with manual jetting systems. Unfortunately, there is still a significant amount remaining, DCWW now proposed to build a road from Afan Tce. down to the access point to allow machine jetting of the pipe to assist in its clearing.

Incidents reported this year:

17/02/2021	Above Maes y Betws	Fly Tipping
05/03/2021	Below Cynonville	CSO
26/03/2021	Above Ynys-y-Gwas	Building spoil
05/04/2021	Below Ynysafan Bridge	Trunk sewer manhole lifted
18/04/2021	Bennets bend	Trunk sewer manhole lifted.
22/06/2021	Above Ynys-y-Gwas	Sewage discharge
27/07/2021	Rhyslyn	Silt
27/07/2021	Tonmawr	Sewage discharge
02/08/2021	Bennets Bend	Sewage discharge
08/08/2021	Scotts Yard	CSO Sewage discharge
24/09/2021	Ynys Afan Bridge	Gas bubbles (methane)
05/10/2021	Scotts Yard	Sewage discharge, manhole lifted.

This is an ongoing fight, and we must **all** take part in reporting these incidents. The emergency number is on your license (03000653000). Please make sure you play your part in trying to stop this ongoing blight to our river.

DCWW walkover survey of new freshwater main being installed at Cwmclais farm and through Dinas woods

Steff Robb attended a meeting with representatives from DCWW and Morrison Water Services. Morrison's being the main contractor for DCWW on this project.

Concerns previously discussed were highlighted in that suggestions of flushing chemicals would be flushed into the Nant Clais water course and the stream bed would be disrupted and subject to excavation and possibly causing silt to be mobilised and depositing further downstream. They were made aware of the recent Invert survey, so they know we are actively monitoring this watercourse.

We were assured that the chlorine used to soak and sterilise the new pipe would be contained and neutralised at the lower levels before discharge to surface drains Cwmavon Rd. level. This water would be tested before any release to ensure no adverse effects on the water course community. The route of the new pipe was walked to understand the proximity and relation to the Nant Clais stream. The new liner route travels down Mervyn Tce, and underneath the stream inside the old pipe. Excavation is required on the furthest bank to allow a right-angled turn. They assured us that they would use track mats across the stream to reduce any disruption of the stream bed. They also advised that they would use a sediment system or straw bales to catch any disturbed silt. The route then follows the path to meet up

with the Dinas lodge road before descending to Zion and underneath the road to the side of Mike Herd's house where excavation is required once again to allow another right-angled turn and then head towards the bottom Brit and up to Ynysagwas Bridge. All the above is describing the main pipe which will predominantly be below ground inside old existing pipe. There is however another temporary pipe which will take an over ground route that will allow disruption of the main but maintain services to the local housing. This temporary pipe would be buried in places and one of the areas is London Row outside the Brit Pub. This would obviously cause disruption on a narrow road. They have requested that we allow the temporary pipe to be placed outside the perimeter of the Brit Pub at the river-bank level from the bridge to the houses. There will be no requirements of machinery into the river to fix this pipe and it is envisaged that this pipe would remain in position for approximately 8 weeks. I have looked at this route and have no objection but advised I would offer it to the committee for comment. I have asked for further information which they have agreed to share and will pass on when I receive.

In addition to the above, SR has been invited to and attended two more onsite meetings. The meetings consisted of updates to advise where there had been a deviation to the original plan. On both occasions it was considered that this sectioned DCWW are doing their utmost to make sure there is no disruption or pollution incident during their project. They now intend to fit a filtration unit downstream of the pipe crossing at the bottom of Mervyn Tce. to ensure any silt disturbed by machinery is caught and removed.

Water Watch Wales.

At present no new data has been published with regards to the water quality of the Afan and indeed all the rivers in Wales. The most recent data available is still the 2018 version. We were advised early on in 2021 that new data would be available by the summer of 21 but unfortunately, we are still waiting.

Coal Authority Mine Water Treatment Schemes: Highlights from 2021 and Next Steps (Report by Abby Moorhouse-Parry, & Team, The Coal Authority)

Coal Authority walkover survey of Glyncorrwg Reed beds 16/6/21

John Phillips and Steff Robb joined representatives from the Coal Authority and Severn Trent Water Services. Severn Trent act as the service contractors for the Coal Authority in maintaining their assets like the Reed Beds etc. The walk through was very interesting, allowing us to gain further information on the action and process of the filtering process. Glyncorrwg has 13 passive reed beds in series in its scheme to remove the dissolved iron from old mine workings before the water enters the river. The present condition of the beds was highlighted by SM & GM earlier this year. We are advised there is a representative from Severn Trent who tests the water on a fairly regular basis for Ph etc. before the water enters the river. They had planned to carry out work last year but due to Covid and issues with access from the landowner meant there were delays. However, the additional prompt from ourselves resulted in this survey.

The survey revealed that the first 3 beds were now in crucial need of refurbishment. These beds are the ones that receive the water directly out of the mine working Adit (Adit being the hole in the ground). The CA now have a plan to remove the existing reeds from these beds and leave them to drain. During this process the contaminated ochre deposits will then be removed from the bed and disposed of, the majority of the reeds will then be replanted. Whilst this work is being undertaken the flow from the mine workings will be diverted into the remaining beds below the ones under overhaul.



Two Adit's in the valley



One of the beds overloaded by the ochre which is due for refurbishment



Sampling and testing area at last reed filtration discharge



River Corrwg below the discharge of reed filtered water.

Throughout 2021, we have continued to operate our mine water treatment schemes in the Afan Valley alongside our partners Severn Trent Services, as part of our work to protect and enhance the environment.

Despite the gradual easing in COVID-19 restrictions over the course of the year, the pandemic has continued to have an impact on our programme of works, meaning that we have still had to continue prioritising certain activities over others, such as the intensive field monitoring, that for now remain on hold. Two significant projects that have been completed in the Afan Valley catchment this year, however, are the reed bed refurbishments at our Gwenffrwd and Garth Tonmawr schemes.

Works actually began on the refurbishment of the reed beds at both sites last year. At Gwenffrwd we diverted the mine water to the adjacent Whitworth A&B lagoon and reed bed for the duration of the works to ensure that the mine water had some partial treatment, removing the risk of completely untreated mine water being discharged to the river. Once the reed bed was isolated, all the vegetation that had established in the reed bed over the past decade was removed (including small trees and bushes) after which the reed bed was dug out, with all the old reeds, ochre and organic debris removed. Unfortunately, due to the delays caused by COVID-19 and some local Welsh restrictions, by the time these works were completed, it was too late in the season for the new reeds to be planted into the reed bed, so we had to wait until this year before we could plant the reeds and finish the work. This delay had the advantage that the reeds were older and stronger by the time they were planted, which allowed the reed bed to be brought gradually back online this summer.

At Garth Tonmawr, although we have cut the reeds previously at this site to try and improve the performance of the scheme, it became evident that the final treatment cell contained a lot of ochre and debris, with numerous bare patches where there were no reeds, so a full refurbishment was required. In order for us to carry out these works, we have had to capture the water at the inlet of the treatment cell in some temporary pipework to make sure that the reed bed was isolated for the duration of the works. This was done to prevent any material dislodged when the reed bed was dug out accidentally discharging to the river. Following the

removal of the old material last year, new young plants were planted this spring in addition to some of the original reeds that we were able to successfully rescue and transplant back into the wetland. As with Gwenffrwd, this reed bed also successfully went back online in the summer, so the mine water is now being treated by the whole scheme again.

Back in June, our Contracts Service Manager (Operations South), Chris Crowe, and Severn Trent Services' South Region Operations Manager, Charlie Anderson, met up with some members of the Club at our Glyncorrwg scheme, to show them around the site. This scheme is quite complex, treating multiple mine water discharges and divided into an upper and lower section. The scheme is primarily made up of reed beds and has the second largest number of individual reed beds of any scheme in the UK. The upper section of the scheme was impacted in 2018 by a sudden increase in flow from one of the mine water discharges that coincided with an increase in iron concentration. As a result of this event, some major refurbishment works are now required in the upper section of the scheme to repair the damage that was caused. These works have been delayed however, not only due to the pandemic, but also the challenging access conditions. We are currently working with local landowners and stakeholders to find a solution to these problems, after which we can begin to plan what will be a complex and costly project.

In addition to the future works required at Glyncorrwg mentioned above, we intend to continue making improvements to the schemes in the area over the next 2 years to ensure their longevity for the next 10 to 15 years. These works are always subject to funding availability however, which in the aftermath of the pandemic may become more of a challenge. We will also continue to monitor the performance of the schemes and it is anticipated that in the next year or two we will start to see the benefits of the works we have already completed.



Photo 1. Garth Tonmawr reed bed in July 2019



Photo 2. Garth Tonmawr reed bed in May 2021

ACCESS TO INLAND WATERWAYS (Paddling-Canoeing/kayaking & Wild Water Swimming) (Report by Len Powell)

The issue of 'Access to Inland Waterways' is far more complex than disagreements and confrontation on the riverbank between anglers and canoeists / kayakers ('paddlers'). The organisations of Canoe England and Canoe Wales are lobbying hard to get governments in England and Wales to grant them 'full and free' access to all inland waterways 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 52 weeks a year. This will entail 'paddlers' getting in and out of their canoes/kayaks from the river bank or from within the river (riverbed) itself both of which are private property. To enable them to do this Canoe Wales wants Welsh Government to amend the CROW Act 2000 (Countryside and Rights of Way Act) to confiscate / take away land from private landowners to enable paddlers to do this. The Club owns the bed of the river and in places are also riparian owners with land adjacent to the river. This could end up with the club losing some land and or sections of the riverbed.

What anglers want is to negotiate with the paddling organisations 'Voluntary Access Agreements' (VAAs). Such agreements will give paddlers access at certain times of the year and when river levels allow, this will protect fish when they are migrating and spawning, and also protect redds. So far, the paddling organisations are reluctant to do this as they are convinced that they have an inalienable right of navigation on all inland water ways.

This belief is based on a Master of Law Degree thesis written in 2004 by a retired clergyman, the Reverend Douglas Caffyn. It is believed that the Reverend Caffyn was a retired access officer with the British Canoe Union or the English equivalent of Canoe Wales and was never a practising lawyer. The gist of his thesis was that ***"In common law there is a public right of navigation on all non-tidal rivers which are naturally physically navigable by small boats and on those rivers which have been made physically navigable at public expense."***

The Angling Trust Position: *"We support the Welsh Government's historic policy that the best way forward, to increase access for other water users, is by the creation of Voluntary Access Agreements (VAAs), as set out by Welsh Government's Sustainability Committee on Access to Inland Water in Wales 2010."*

"We are keen to promote VAAs at times and place where this is appropriate and in supporting the use of VAAs, The Angling Trust and Fish Legal has led the way in opposing the imposition of uncontrolled access to rivers by boats by supporting voluntary schemes that better manage the needs of all users. Because of this, we intend to gather evidence to demonstrate to Welsh Government that it is not angling clubs who are preventing progress being made to improving responsible access to Welsh rivers". (Source Angling Trust Campaigns)

This issue is still not resolved and has been ongoing since before 2012. The then Minister Mr John Griffiths AM was considering legislation to give unfettered access to paddlers (canoeists and kayakers) and wild swimming enthusiasts to all inland waterways. This approach generated significant opposition. Since the departure from office of Mr Griffiths AM the issue of access to inland waterways has still not reached a satisfactory conclusion and Welsh Government are coming under continued pressure to do something to increase access to the countryside for all members of the public.

For the purposes of this article, I have ignored wild water swimmers as anyone who goes swimming in rivers in these days of sewage and other pollutants is risking their health. However, these wild water swimmers will want a share of access to rivers and they will continue to advance their argument for open access.

In November 2019 Welsh Government published a paper *Welsh Government Outline Policy Intent* (Link to the document here) <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-09/access-inland-waterways-our-intentions.pdf>

Natural Resources Wales have held a series of workshops with stakeholders to explore Welsh Governments proposals for access reform.

In 2020 following the publication of the Government's summary of responses, Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government at the time, Hannah Blythyn, published her intention to address this issue. In that statement, she asked those with conflicting interests, which includes the angling and paddling communities, to find a practical and joint solution by October 2020. If this is not achieved, she is not ruling out the possibility of future legislation on access. Hannah Blythyn who set out proposals for reform was due to make a statement in the autumn of 2020 however, Ms Blythyn has been allocated another ministerial post leaving the Rural Affairs Minister Lesley Griffiths MS without a deputy and with an ever-increasing workload. (Source: Countryside Alliance)

In December 2021 a report was published. The way forward is envisaged as below.

Report on the progress of the Access to Water Sub-Group of the National Access Forum Wales. Prepared by Dave MacCallum, Chairman of the Access to Water Sub-Group. 31st March 2021.

The way forward.

The sub-group members have demonstrated good progress towards formulating a possible new model for increased access to water by the two main user groups, Angling and Paddle-sport. This embraces the Minister's challenge to progress towards increased access to water. It is accepted by all parties that the model will be delivered on a voluntary basis.

The next stage of consideration comprises the following 3 steps:

Step 1.

Quantify and test the viability and deliverability of the proposed model mechanisms:

- Regulatory and control framework.
- Licence scheme.
- Riparian payment scheme.

Step 2.

Identify a river with a broad demographic and varied recreational use upon which to conduct a desk-based assessment which will collate and map Baseline Data under the following categories.

Environmental status:

Identify designation status, sensitive species and habitats, seasonal considerations e.g. nesting waterfowl, fish spawning and other seasonal aspects, biosecurity considerations, water levels information / data.

Ownership and current usage:

Identify all consultees e.g. Landowners, riparian owners and lessees

Identify existing and potential users / organisations.

Facilities and infrastructure:

Identify areas of protection, access/egress points, parking, footpaths and other facilities.

Existing and potential recreation opportunities.

These data will be presented using ARC geographical Information System (GIS). It is anticipated that stage 1 and stage 2 can be conducted in parallel, with progress to the next stage being contingent on their successful and viable completion.

Step 3.

Evaluate the agreed model (outline schematic below), as a pilot, assessing its acceptability and deliverability on the chosen catchment, through engagement with property owners and users.

It is recognised professional consultancy will be needed to deliver these steps, providing research, analysis and recommendations.

Welsh Government will I am sure take action soon and the Club must be prepared for it. Some years ago, a draft VAA was drawn up by the Club, this should be resurrected and reviewed with input from the Club's affiliated organisations. A letter has been sent to Stuart Singleton-White campaign manager for The Angling Trust outlining the Club's concerns.

NEATH PORT TALBOT NATURE PARTNERSHIP (Report by Steff Robb)

The Club continues to support the Nature Partnership by attending and contributing to the regular meetings. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 restriction the meetings this year have again taken place remotely by the "Teams platform". The group is made up of the following interested groups and individuals but not limited to Ecologist/ Bat Group, Tai Tarian , Butterfly Conservation, NPT Council Celtic Wildflowers, Swansea University, (Friends of the Gnoll), Llais y Goedwig, Buglife ,NPT B-Lines, Gower Ornithological Society (GOS), NPT Council , NRW (Area Statements South West Team), Amphibian & Reptile Conservation (ARC), NPTCBC, Bryn Residents Action Group, Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales (WTSWW), NPTCBC, Wales Biodiversity Partnership (WBP), Afan Valley Angling Club.(AVAC).

The Club had previously contributed to the habitat profile for Freshwater Ecosystems but has also contributed to the Marine Ecosystems habitat profile in Neath Port Talbot and this will form part of a larger document in the form of an NRW Area Statement in the Biodiversity Plan. Further details may be found on the following link <https://www.npt.gov>. A more detailed account will feature in the report 'State of Nature in NPT'. The subjects and projects are quite diverse but with the common goal of protecting and enhancing the nature and biodiversity within Neath Port Talbot.

The partnership group has been working on a project called NRAP (Nature Recovery Action Plan) with the following objectives:

Objective 1: Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels.

Objective 2: Safeguard species and habitats of principal importance and improve their management

Objective 3: Increase the resilience of our natural environment by restoring degraded habitats and habitat creation.

Objective 4: Tackle key pressures on species and habitats.

Objective 5: Improve our evidence, understanding and monitoring.

Objective 6: Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery. Five National Themes: •Resilient Ecological Networks •Knowledge and Knowledge Transfer •Investment & Funding •Upskilling for Delivery •Reporting our Progress

There are also other initiatives that are ongoing that include wildlife recording that can be accessed easily from your computer or mobile phone (<https://www.sewbreord.org.uk/>) This builds up a database of wildlife records. The real plus with this is you can do this in your own garden or property to encourage children/grandchildren to get involved with nature. Give it a go!

As part of the Biodiversity in the Woodland Estate project, funded by NRW Dr. Charles Hipkin has given comprehensive onsite talks on the incredible diversity of wildlife found in conifer plantations in South Wales. There are large amounts of conifer plantations in South Wales, particularly in the uplands of Neath Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taff. In the past, ecologists regarded these places as biological deserts, so people are surprised when the diversity of animals, plants and fungi they support is revealed to them. The presentation provided an introduction into the dynamic structure, biodiversity and ecology of the conifer forest and non-forest structure.

As part of Buglife Cymru's Neath Port Talbot B-Lines project a series of talks and workshops have been delivered on pollinating insects, their identification and how to help their conservation. Please visit the link below to gain further information.

(<https://www.buglife.org.uk/projects/neath-port-talbot-b-lines/>)

Lost Peatlands Projects: There have been numerous activity days within the year but more are planned. Get the kids involved join us on site to find out more about what the Lost Peatlands Project will be running in the coming years! Wildlife surveying & recording,

Management skills and Guided Walks are the focus for these opening events. Come along and get involved! Where and when? These have been the dates and venue's over the last year

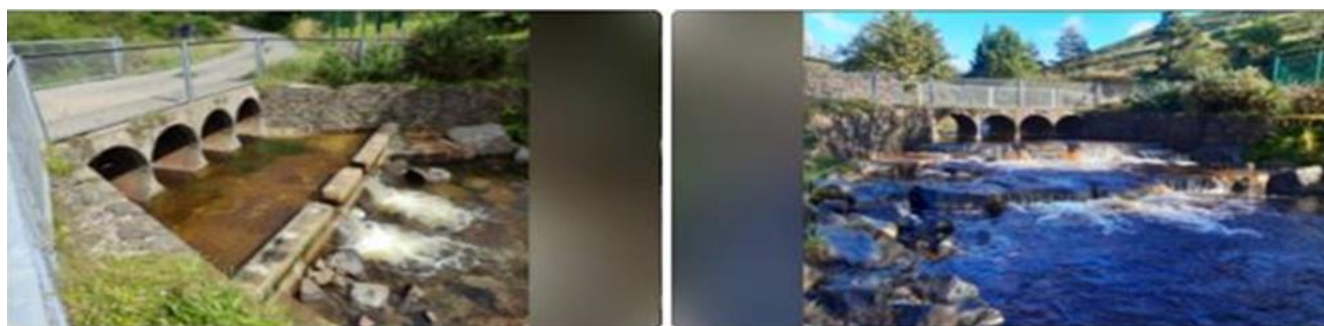
- Glyncorrwg—1/9/21, (Heol Bryn-Gwyn, NPT) Cymmer Tip—7/9/21 (Car Park off Railway Terrace, NPT) Gwynfi—10/9/21, (including Guided Nature Walk!) (Gwynfi Street, NPT) Hendre Mynydd—14/9/21 (Hendre Mynydd Car Park, Rhigos Rd. RCT)

For more information on precise meeting locations or anything else, visit our social media pages, email lostpeatlands@npt.gov.uk or call 07791638201. The above is only an example of the activities within the different groups, if you have a particular interest in nature and it is not included in the above, please get in touch, it may already be represented within the group.

PRESENT & FUTURE PROJECTS Report by Steff Robb, Len Powell, John Phillips & (Dave Charlesworth of NRW)

As I am sure you are aware the Afon Pelenna is a tributary of the river Afan and has been subject to remediation and restoration since the 1980's. Over the last 10 years it has been a Water Framework Directive (WFD) priority waterbody and more recently identified as a heavily modified catchment. Fish populations are slowly recovering primarily as a consequence of extensive coal authority remediation work that has improved the water quality however, the habitat remains fragmented due industrial heritage and man-made structures such as weirs and culverts. AVAC, Swansea University and NRW have been systematically addressing these structures identified and looking to improve them for fish passage. This year has seen the completion of a further 2 schemes that have involved the fixing of *FSC* certified timber baffles to adjust the flow conditions across culvert structures. These are pragmatic, technically designed interventions that allow fish to negotiate these structures and migrate to the spawning grounds upstream. This type of fish passage improvement scheme is designed to be an over engineered single management action that delivers subsequent benefits for the whole life of the structures introduced. Green Oak is used for its longevity and robustness in the water environment. Both schemes were delivered via the Sustainable Fisheries Programme (SFP) with GIA from the WG who recognise the benefits that can be derived from sustainable fish populations in Wales.

To unlock the 'in combination' benefits of these interventions, a further 2 outstanding structures need to be address in 22/23 and we and NRW are working hard together to design & deliver solutions at both locations. Once complete, the Pelenna will be fully accessible for fish and coupled with the Coal Authority remediation and wider work on restoring natural process, improved ecological performance will follow.



Timber baffles installed to adjust flow conditions across culvert structures

The Road Bridge at Tonmawr

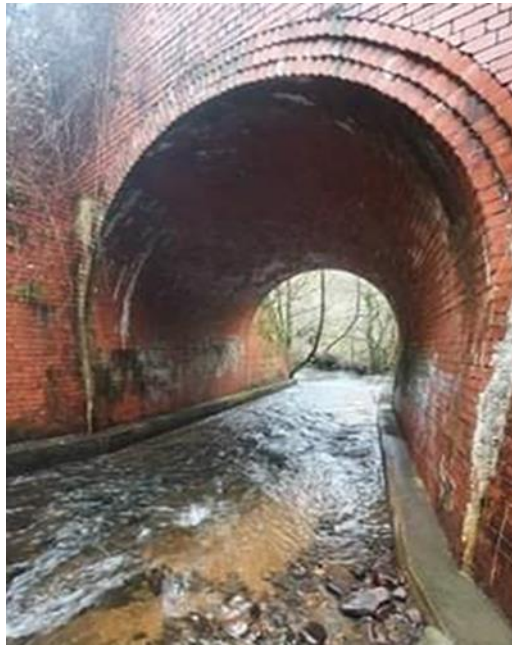


Photo 1. The Road Bridge at Tonmawr before the baffles were fitted. Note! the high velocity and low water levels clearly an obstacle for migrating salmonids.

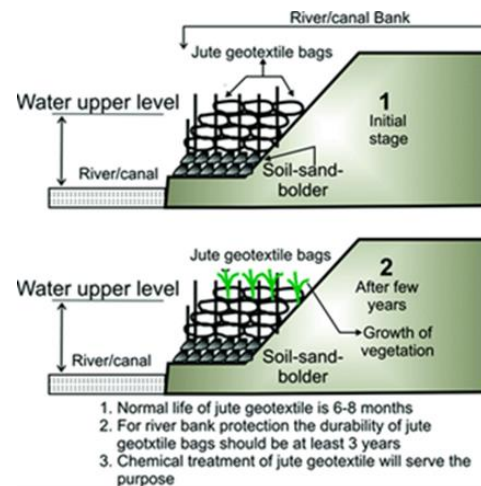


Photo 2. The Road Bridge at Tonmawr baffles are now fitted inside slowing the flow allowing fish to pass upstream

A new project might just be emerging involving riverbank erosion near to Cwmafan, where a main trunk sewer is exposed, and DCWW Network Engineers would like to propose a scheme at the site. This would entail the possibility of reinstating the bank, with Geobags back into the embankments. This would reclaim ground and stabilise the trunk sewer in a sustainable manner with no wet materials or heavy civils and also be visually pleasing upon regrowth and encourage some biodiversity. Further again we could form a walkway to it and form some spots for anglers or a slipway It may also be possible to incorporate a disabled access for anglers. However, it must be stressed that this is at the very early stages and needs financing and planning, but with all of the stakeholders DCWW, AVAC, NRW and NPTCBC adopting a positive approach we are sure that there is a good chance that the objectives can be achieved.



Re-instating of the riverbank with Geobags



Elevation showing the new structure using Geobags

The Restoration of the Nant Clais Brook (Steff Robb, Len Powell and John Phillips)

During the investigation into the effects of Combined Sewage Overflows (CSOs) on the River Afan and the writing of the report, the tributaries and brooks which feed into the Afan were identified and categorised as either existing spawning habitat or potential spawning habitat. Although the Nant Clais brook is featured in the 'report' itself as a special case, it is worthy of a mention in this newsletter as it will become a long term project.

The research carried out during the writing of the report highlighted that the Afan is woefully short of salmonid spawning habitat. Many of the salmon which return to the Afan spawn in the main river itself and the Nant Clais Brook. The brook which was once a prolific spawning habitat for salmon, sewin and native wild brown trout had deteriorated so badly that there were very few fish present. The brook has been affected by a number of issues not least one of which being the re-routing of the brook to accommodate the new housing at Ynys-y Wern. This resulted in a lengthening and widening of the water course in places and in doing so slowing down the flow allowing the silt to drop out of suspension and smothering the breeding gravel. You will note from the pictures below that the silt in this section appears to be from a left over building aggregate (sand), possibly discarded following the completion of the build. The water quality has also been severely affected by bank erosion siltation, another legacy left over from the housing build. This together with the Combined Sewage Overflow (CSO) that discharges into the brook itself resulted in a marked reduction of salmonids using the brook as a spawning habitat. In addition to the water quality issues the Nant Clais there are significant stretches affected invasive species such as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam. The brook is also deprived of light by overgrown trees.

Over the last year several surveys have been undertaken to establish data and help to confirm our suspicions of the true cause of the damage to the brook. The Club commissioned Dr Peter Jones of Swansea University to conduct a Macro Invertebrate survey to establish the biodiversity above and below the discharge from the CSO. The conclusions from the report are as follows:

This survey indicated that Nant Clais is substantially impacted by a combination of siltation issues arising from the redirection of the stream around the housing estate in 2003 and water quality problems related to the CSO. Disentangling these respective impacts is challenging but the observations of this survey are good evidence that further investigation is required, and it was clear that the problems will be ongoing without intervention. This part of Nant Clais is very low gradient, and the stream has limited flushing capacity to prevent the accumulation of pollutants. The location of the CSO is approximately equidistant between Nant Clais and the River Afan (Figure 4). Diverting the CSO to discharge into the River Afan is likely to improve the situation substantially. The discharge is unlikely to have a significant impact on the main stem of the river due to its higher flushing capacity.

Dealing with the sediment issues on Nant Clais is likely to be more challenging. Sedimats™ appear to have been deployed in the vicinity of DS1 to trap silts mobilised during construction, presumably for subsequent removal. However, these have been left in place and were never removed. The iron rebar used to hold the matts in place are still visible, but it is likely that the mats have degraded and broken up or they are buried in deep silt. Removing the large silt deposits now present would likely require an excavator but any intervention along these lines would need to be undertaken with care (i.e. silt management controls) to prevent further negative impacts downstream. The stream banks are also unstable with evidence of recent erosion. Bank stability is compromised by the extensive Japanese knotweed cover on site so any works in the area would need to manage the risk of bank collapse.

In addition to the above Invert Survey a walkover Geomorphology Survey was carried out by NRW and some possible options for restoration and improvement were suggested within their report findings. Following this report a plan to restore the Nant Clais brook was discussed by Len Powell, Steff Robb and John Phillips and a set of measures are currently being put in place with the assistance of Dave Charlesworth of Natural Resources Wales (NRW).



Siltation present in the Nant Clais Brook smothering natural gravel and invertebrate life

Some work has already been carried out to open up the canopy over the Nant Clais in order to increase the light and encourage vegetation growth on the banks of the brook. An in-water tree which was blocking the brook and substantially reducing the flow was removed at the same time. This work was carried out by NRW contractor under the supervision of Dave Charlesworth. Steff Robb was on site all of the time the work was being carried out. Access

to the Nant Clais to carry out this work was facilitated by AVAC who affirmed their land ownership rights by using a Land Survey company who along with John Phillips and Steff Robb spent a day surveying and marking out the definitive boundary of the title owned by AVAC.



Opening up the canopy for additional light to enter the brook & encourage bankside vegetation growth



Removing a tree from the brook which was severely impeding the flow and the increase in flow after the removal of the tree.

Discussions about the Nant Clais Brook have increased and are now part of a number of different forums that we are involved in to attempt to raise awareness of historical damage caused but also to attempt to gain help to improve the situation. There are ongoing discussions between DCWW, NRW and AVAC with regards to a way forward with this work to restore the Nant Clais. There is a substantial amount of work required to remedy the situation. The work will undoubtedly require multi agency help and participation but also involvement from ourselves if we want this to work.

For the moment we are attempting to establish the landowners (other than AVAC) of the Nant Clais and the banks that stretch from where the stream exits the culvert at old Zion, to the cemetery bend. Barratt Holmes have been contacted and we await a reply.

When the ownership is confirmed and approval given, we would hope that NRW would then proceed with clearing and opening up the canopy within the first section. NRW also have licenced Japanese Knotweed specialists that could then start a spray program. We would hope to assist with the pulling of Himalayan Balsam.

We will continue to meet with and lobby DCWW and hope to persuade them to move the CSO to discharge to the main river where it can be diluted more effectively.



The effects of siltation on the bed of the Nant Clais. In places it is totally covered with silt. In other places where there is gravel it is clogged in between with silt. The bankside is overgrown depriving the bed of light.



The effects of the Combined Sewage Overflow on the Nant Clais. The grey tinge and cloudy water can be clearly seen.

‘What’s in a Name’? (A short ‘Blog’ by Len Powell)

As I sit writing this, I recall my early days as boy fishing the River Afan. I did not give my surroundings much thought then, the trees, the birds and the other wildlife, neither was the lack of fish in the river uppermost in my mind or even on occasions how black or orange the water was, depending on what the pollutant was on that particular day either coal dust or mine water. I was totally absorbed in the pursuit of the trout that I was going to catch and have my mother cook for my tea.

My teenage years were spent chasing prey other than trout which instead of brightly coloured spots displayed brightly coloured dresses and hairstyles.

When I settled down to a domestic life of married bliss and the raising of children I returned to fishing and found that it was as if I had never been away from the riverside. I continued to pursue trout, this time for my wife to cook for our tea.

Though it persisted, the polluted water of the River Afan began to bother me now, so did the number of trout rising, which, seemed to be diminishing.

I was a young twenty-seven years of age when I was asked by the late Glan Williams, the then Chairman of the Afan Valley Angling Club and the Club’s ‘well known’ angler, fly tier and rod maker, Viv Evans to join the Committee of the Club and help with the recovery of the river. It was a steep learning curve for me. I learned all about fish and habitat from Viv and from Glan I learned how to deal with the then regulatory body The Glamorgan Rivers Board.

It took many years to rid the river of the coal dust which emanated from the washery and to reduce the effects of the mine water pollution seeping into the river from old, abandoned coal mines. Fish stocks were becoming an issue and even though at that time there was a policy of stocking the river with hatchery reared fish, I was now beginning to think that the killing of trout for my tea was not the right thing to do. So, I stopped doing it.

As I matured in age, (a gentler term for getting older), I found that I was paying more attention to my surroundings, the environment and the wildlife were becoming important, and my focus was turning more to preserving both fish and their habitat along with the water quality of the river.

Mine water is still a nuisance and sewage spills from Combined Sewage Overflows (CSOs) are becoming more frequent. The Afan is no longer stocked with hatchery reared trout and for the last ten years it has become a wild brown trout river.

These days I firmly believe that most anglers don’t kill the fish that they catch but return them safely the river. Anglers now also pay much more attention to the water quality and habitat of the river Afan, and they regularly report the first sign of any pollution.

Are anglers now becoming conservationists as well as anglers? I believe that they are, and that anglers now devote their thoughts and energy not just to catching fish, but to the preservation of fish and their environment. We are not just an angling club any longer, we are an angling and conservation club.

So, when I now ask ‘myself ‘what’s in a name’? I know the answer!

Senedd Salmon Species Champion Appointed



Our salmon champion Huw Irranca Davies AM (centre) with our President John Phillips and Conservation Officer Steff Robb

On the 23rd September Steff and John welcomed Senedd member Huw Iranca-Davies and Richard Garner Williams of Salmon & Trout Conservation Cymru to the banks of the Afan. Huw has recently been appointed ‘Salmon Species Champion’ to help inform the Senedd and protect the species for years to come.

Time was limited so we met down at the fish pass, where we explained the work that had recently been completed. We had hoped to see some salmon running the weir apron, but extreme low water made this impossible. However, there were fish ‘showing’ in the pool below, and we were able to show them recorded video of salmon and sewin ‘caught’ on camera earlier in the season.

We then moved upstream to show them the Nant Clais brook (sometimes referred to as the Zion brook). Here Steff explained the issues that this brook has and is suffering from excess siltation and poor bankside vegetation not at all a suitable spawning habitat for salmonids. Following the visit, we received the following message from Richard:

Dear friends,

Many thanks for your warm welcome to the banks of the Afan on Thursday. I’m sure Huw Irranca-Davies, our Species Champion for the salmon, was as impressed with the enthusiasm that exists within the club for the conservation of salmon and sewin as was I. Afan Valley should be proud of the leadership they are demonstrating in taking angling into the 21st century and are to be applauded for their foresight and commitment.

Thank you also for the tie and badge. I’ll be sure to wear them as soon as a suitable occasion arises.

Thank you again and my best wishes for the continued success of the club.

Richard

Richard Garner Williams | Swyddog Cenedlaethol National Officer Salmon & Trout Conservation Cymru

OFFICERS & COMMITTEE

President: Mr John Phillips

Vice Presidents - Mr Len Powell, Mr Mal Reynolds, Mr Norman Pugh, Mr Mike Herd,
Mr Colin Walton, Mr Martin John, Mr Lyndon Jones

Officers & Committee:

Chairperson- Mal Reynolds

Vice-Chairperson - Mr Deryl Jones

Secretary – Mr Steff Robb

Treasurer - Mr Anthony Powell

Conservation Officer- Mr Steff Rob

Head Bailiff - Mr Geraint Mortimer

Mr Wayne Smith (Committee)



For those members who are reading, or have read this Newsletter and find it interesting, and you would like to get involved with some of the projects, and if you are computer literate. The Club needs persons to help it move forward. So please contact any one of the Club officials who's Contact Details can be found at the end of this Newsletter.

OBITUARY



Ray Lewis (1949-2021)

Ray had been a member of the club since his childhood, becoming a committee man in his early twenties, head bailiff, Vice President and since 2015 President of the Afan Valley Angling club, a position that he truly deserved and indeed was extremely proud of.

Nothing was ever 'too much' for Ray where the river Afan and club were concerned.

Paula (his partner) told me that there were two great loves in his life...The river Afan and Andrew Scotts... I think there were three...Paula, the Afan and Andrew Scotts.

Ray worked tirelessly over the years to enhance the salmon and sea trout population of the Afan, and in 2016-17 he oversaw the removal and reconstruction of Green Park weir as an employee of Andrew Scotts...I think it was the best 18 months of work Ray could have wished for.

Needless to say, Ray was also a very good fisherman. His favourite spot was just downstream of Ynysygwas bridge, behind the "old peoples home". We used to refer to it as 'Rays beat' and over the years he won the largest fish competition three times with fish from this area. However, in recent years, Ray very rarely went fishing, he was far more interested in the conservation of the river, improving the water quality, and the removal of barriers to allow the fish to migrate to the head waters.

At the beginning of this year, and 70 years since the club's formation I suggested to him that we should rename the club, adding the word "Conservation" to our name, he was immediately on board, and with the unanimous endorsement of the committee the club will be renamed, and will be known as the "Afan Valley Angling and Conservation Club".

He and I would have a chat on the phone once, sometimes twice a week, always discussing our club, but as you all know Ray was not really fond of computers, and never a fan of Facebook.

I used to update him with the comments made relating to our club on Facebook. Some were good, some were bad, and often laugh at the comments made by our members.

But on the 7th of June when I posted the sad passing of Ray, the President of our club, many, comments were posted. Here is a selection:

“Such sad news, he was a fantastic man, he will be very much missed - RIP Ray.”

“So sad to hear this news, found Ray to be a true gentleman - a great loss to the club, I’m sure we would all agree.”

“Sad news, a lovely chap, what a shock - RIP Ray”

“Sincere condolences to the family of a true gentleman. RIP ‘Old Warrior”

“Very sad news, a good friend that would do anything to help you - condolences to his family.”

“Very sorry to hear this, Ray was a lovely guy and will be sorely missed by a lot of people.”

“Sad news indeed, Ray was a true gentleman and will be missed by all who knew him. RIP Ray, our thoughts go with you and your family.”

“RIP Ray, sad to hear this news. He was one of the good guys.”

“Sad, sad news, Rays passing leaves a large hole in our club membership, a hard act to follow.”

“Sorry to hear of Rays passing, he was a real gentleman. A great loss to his family and to our club.”

And finally,

“Ray leaves a great role model for future generations we will enjoy the benefits of his achievements for many years to come...A sad loss.”

A big thank you to those members who posted the above comments. I am sure that they reflect all of our thoughts and feelings.

John Phillips

And Finally!

The Afan Valley Angling Club acknowledges and give thanks to the following contributors to this Newsletter:

John Phillips-President, Steff Robb-Conservation Officer, Len Powell-Vice President, Mal Reynolds Vice President, Paul Llewellyn Membership Secretary, Gereint Mortimer Head Bailiff. (Afan Angling Club)

Swansea University Bio Sciences Department (Professor Carlos Garcia de Leaniz & Team)
Natural Resources Wales (Dave Charlesworth Area Statement Senior Officer)

Natural Resources Wales (Afan Stakeholder Forum)

The Coal Authority, (Abby Moorhouse-Parry & Team)

Pontardawe and Swansea Angling Society (PASAS) Phil Jones

'Tight Lines for 2022'

End of Season News 2021

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Steff Robb Conservation Officer steff121@btinternet.com

Mal Reynolds Vice President mal.reynolds1@yahoo.com

On a lighter note, given the current controversy over sewage pollution in rivers here is a poem by Pam Ayers

SHITCREEK RIVER

Now river life is dying,
And turning up its feet,
Along the Shitcreek River,
Where vapours ain't so sweet,
Where water ain't so crystal clear,
Where sewage oozes down,
Along the Shitcreek River
Where the banks are turning brown.

Farewell sparkling brooklet,
The salmon in the pool,
Good morning pantie-liner,
The tampon and the stool,
Funny that a government,
On thrones of power seated,
Pollutes its joyful waterways,
With sewage left untreated.

Pam Ayres 2021