

CatchUp

Dee Catchment Partnership news

Autumn 2015

Cars removed to restore upper Dee banks

31 old vehicles have been excavated from Dee river bank upstream of Braemar

Thirty one old cars, tonnes of concrete, boulders and railway sleepers have been removed from the banks of the Dee. With its corrugated iron facing, this 60m structure was damaging the river and was an eyesore on the otherwise unspoiled landscape, clearly visible from the Linn of Dee road.

The 'car bank' was built to repair the embankments between Mar Lodge Estate and Braemar that were built in the 1700s to protect deer calving grounds from flooding. In 1937 a flood broke through the embankment and this breach remained open for 50 years.

In 1984, the gap was filled with the cars, as well as spruce trees, railway sleepers, fencing wire, large quantities of concrete, and boulders. The structure was faced with corrugated iron so that ice would be less likely to become pinned against it.

The time had come to remove the waste and return the site to a more natural condition. The structure was breaking down and there was a risk that waste would be released into the river. The erosion around the structure was worsening, damaging river habitats by releasing soil into the clean

gravels that are home to many species, including salmon and freshwater pearl mussel.

The new bank, rebuilt using natural materials, is lower and has a gently sloping face, which will allow the area to flood more often. This will benefit natural floodplain habitats, which need to be wetted regularly. On the day that the works finished high flows nearly overtopped the embankment and we look forward to seeing this happen more often in future.

Many of our partners worked together to remove the waste: Aberdeenshire Council, the Cairngorms National Park Authority, the James Hutton Institute, the Dee District Salmon Fishery Board, River and Fishery Trusts Scotland, RSPB and Mar Lodge Estate have all played key roles. The waste was removed as part of the EU LIFE Pearls in Peril project, which is working on rivers across the UK to restore freshwater pearl mussel populations.

If you remember the vehicles going up to the site, have photographs, or even recognise your car, please get in touch as we would love to hear your story.



The 'car bank' was an eyesore and pollution risk.



The vehicles were in remarkably good condition.



The new bank has a more natural shape with a gently sloping face.



Coir matting will protect the bank from erosion until plants grow.

Out and about with the Dee Catchment Outreach Officer



As Outreach Officer for the River Dee, Joanna Dick covers the whole catchment, from the Cairngorms to Aberdeen harbour, working with land owners, farmers, ghillies, outdoor groups, householders and schools. Please get in touch if you want to learn more about the river and how you can help to look after it. Tel: 01339 880411 or email: joanna@riverdee.org.

Cambus O'May visitor survey

Thank you to 106 people who completed a survey about their use of the Cambus O'May suspension bridge area and improvements they would like to see. The results will be used to propose improvements for the site.

Rangers explore the Dee

In September, I took 14 local Countryside Rangers on a tour of the Dee to see some of the restoration works that are underway in the catchment.

First stop was the Coy fish pass, fitted to a weir near the entrance to Crathes Castle in 2008. The pass allows fish to migrate upstream and a counter takes an image of each fish that ascends. River Dee Trust biologist Jamie downloaded the data from the counter onto a laptop, showing that seven salmon and trout had used the pass during the previous week.

The ghillie at Inver/Tilquillie, Karl Revel, gave a talk outside his fishing hut about the role of a ghillie and how this has changed over the years.



While at Potarch the group enjoyed close up views of the river using glass bottomed buckets that give a clear view of the riverbed and small aquatic life.

Thank you to the Scottish Countryside Rangers Association for a great day enjoyed by all.

Update for resource boxes for Deeside schools

Our schools resource boxes, gifted to schools in 2005/06 by the 3-Dee Vision project, have been updated to support outdoor learning in line with the Curriculum for Excellence.

The new box contains posters, maps, and books from the original boxes, with a new Teachers' Folder, suggestions for indoor and outdoor activities and a list of local Ranger Services. You can see the box contents on our website (www.theriverdee.org/schools2.asp).



Logie Coldstone, Banchory (above) and Skene primaries were the first to receive the new box and will be using them to learn about the River Dee this term.

If your school has the original boxes, we can replace them with the revamped version. Please get in touch to arrange delivery.

Autumn jobs

Clear out garden chemicals:

Dispose of these at Banchory, Inverurie or Altens recycling centres. Any toxic substance will be taken if less than 20 litres (per container). For advice about larger amounts call 03456 08 12 07.

Clear your gutters and drains:

avoid flooding around your home by clearing dead leaves from gutters and drains.

Prepare your septic tank for winter:

avoid dealing with blocked drains this winter by having your tank emptied and make sure your system is in good working order.

Yellow fish update

We are continuing to spread the word about drain care through our Yellow Fish project. Last month Skene (below) and Banchory Primary Schools made Yellow Fish door hangers and later enjoyed a trip to the River Dee as part of the River Dee Trust's IntroDee programme.



Marr Area community workshops

People often think that improving the river only involves large-scale, expensive projects like planting trees, installing fish passes on dams or reducing pollution sources, but we can all do small things around our homes to help.

I ran two workshops at Marr Area Community Meetings on the theme of 'What you can do to help the Dee', covering drain and septic tank care, water use, garden waste, access to the river, and responsible recreation.

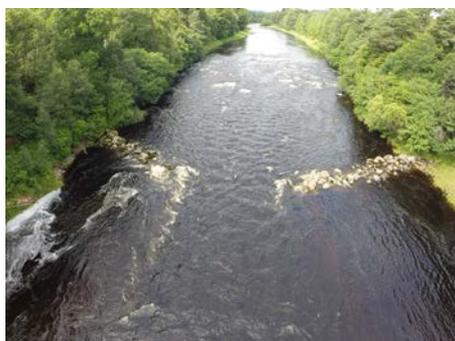
If your group would like to learn more about the Dee please get in touch to arrange a talk.



Croy removal total rises to twenty eight

Twenty eight croys have been removed from the Dee to restore habitat for freshwater pearl mussel and salmon. Last year six croys were removed at Aboyne with a further 24 removed at Banchory and Slui/Commonty this summer.

The croys were constructed in the 1990s from large boulders taken from the riverbed. This was once a common practice in Scottish rivers, undertaken to create pools and so increase salmon catches. This was unsuccessful, and the croys instead damaged habitat for freshwater pearl mussels, salmon and trout.



BEFORE: two large croys divert the flow

The boulders have been re-distributed in the river bed to reduce erosion, provide habitat and sheltered areas called 'lies' for adult salmon, with the additional benefit of allowing gravel salmon spawning beds to recover. The largest boulder removed was 37 tonnes, and this had to be carefully rolled across the river to its new location.

The work was done as part of the EU LIFE Pearls in Peril project (PIP), co-ordinated by Scottish Natural Heritage and working in partnership with the Dee District Salmon Fishery Board and the River Dee Trust.



AFTER: all boulders redistributed

Report non-native invasive plants to NESBReC

Invasive plants are spreading in the north east, and are a serious problem in some areas. The picture is changing all the time so it is vital to keep an up to date record of where the plants are. Sightings should be reported to the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) at www.nesbrec.org.uk. who add them to a freely accessible mapped database.

The plants that cause the most problems are Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed, with skunk cabbage becoming an increasing problem. On the Dee these plants are present from Ballater to Aberdeen, mainly along the riverbanks.

Landowners must not let these plants spread beyond their land. See www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/nonnative-species/ for pictures, advice about control and information about your responsibilities.



Himalayan balsam



Japanese knotweed



Giant hogweed (*causes severe burns*)

In brief

2015 invasive plant control

Giant hogweed, Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam have been tackled along 26 km of riverbank between Drumoak and Aberdeen. Spraying is complete, with balsam strimming underway at Bridge of Dee. Although weakened, the plants will regrow and so the work will be repeated next year.

Polhollick bridge reopened

Following this summer's restoration works, Polhollick bridge was reopened on 12 October by Provost Hamish Vernal. A group walked from Ballater to the bridge, where a short ceremony celebrated its reopening. The group continued over the bridge to complete the Seven Bridges Walk, which is now open.

River of Fish auction

230 ceramic salmon made by local schools and community groups toured Deeside this summer and were auctioned off to raise funds for the River Dee Trust and Banchory Sports Village.

Monitoring the benefits of river restoration

We have completed surveys at Mar Lodge Estate and the Logie Burn to monitor how our restoration works improve conditions for vegetation and river life. The surveys will be repeated in two years' time.

'Water man of India' visits Aberdeen

Rajendra Singh, winner of the 2015 Stockholm Water Prize for bringing water to 1000s of villages in a barren region of India, visited Aberdeen in August as part of a collaboration with the James Hutton Institute to develop ways to reduce soil and water runoff from farmland.

theriverdee.org/projects

New information boards at Potarch Bridge

New boards have been installed near Potarch Bridge to provide information about nearby facilities, promote responsible enjoyment of the site and give a flavour of the area's history.

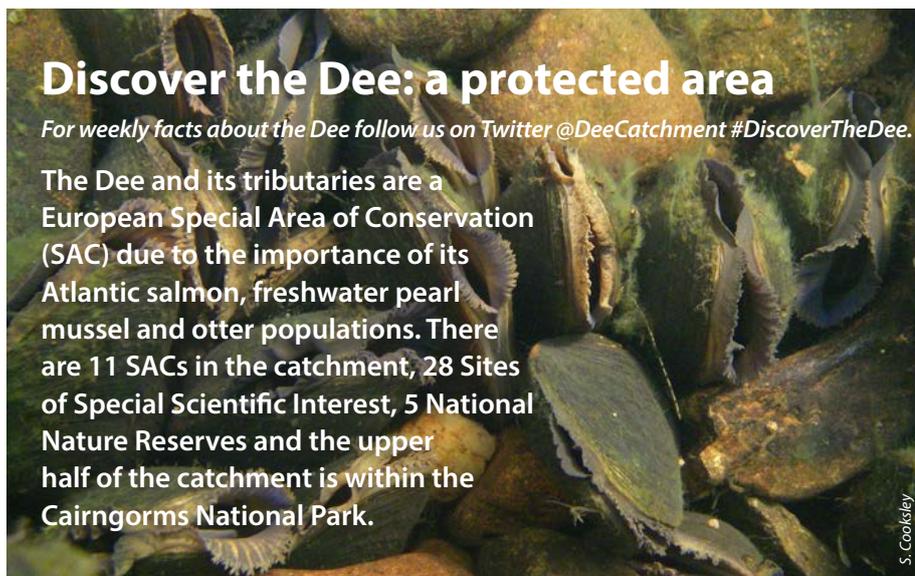
Potarch is very popular with visitors for walks, picnics and swimming and Potarch (Potties) Green, has lots of facilities including a car park, toilet, litter bin, dog waste bin, picnic tables, and raised metal stands for disposable barbecues to prevent them from scorching the grass.

Built 201 years ago, Potarch Bridge features in legends about local characters including athlete Donald Dinnie and the infamous escapee Jock Young. The boards also give information about Kincardine O'Neil, the oldest village in Deeside. You can start a walk along the Deeside Way from Potarch, starting at the boards in the car park just off the A93 North Deeside Road at Potarch Bridge.

Thank you to local landowners and community groups for their help in creating these boards.



New boards at Potarch bridge display information about facilities at Potties Green and stories about local characters



Discover the Dee: a protected area

For weekly facts about the Dee follow us on Twitter @DeeCatchment #DiscoverTheDee.

The Dee and its tributaries are a European Special Area of Conservation (SAC) due to the importance of its Atlantic salmon, freshwater pearl mussel and otter populations. There are 11 SACs in the catchment, 28 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 5 National Nature Reserves and the upper half of the catchment is within the Cairngorms National Park.

What's on?

1 November Balmoral cairns guided walk A walk linking historical cairns on the estate, with spectacular views of Deeside. 10am - 4pm, 10km/6 miles, booking essential, call Balmoral Ranger Service on 01339 755059.

14 November Hands on conservation 10am - 4pm. Tools and instruction provided, wear warm clothes and bring a packed lunch. Booking essential, call Glen Tanar Charitable Trust Ranger Service on 01339 886072 or email ranger@glentantar.co.uk.

18 November Ticks: You and your livelihood Workshop for land managers and outdoor workers on ticks and tick-borne diseases. 9.45am - 2pm, Lonach Hall, Strathdon. Contact Catriona Campbell on 01479 873535 or email catrionacampbell@cairngorms.co.uk.

12 December Make your own Christmas decorations with natural materials Spittal of Glen Muick Visitor Centre, 10am - 12pm. Booking essential, call Balmoral Ranger Service on 01339 755059.

6 December Hands on conservation Glen Tanar Charitable Trust Ranger Service. 10am - 4pm. Tools and instruction provided, wear comfortable warm clothes and bring a packed lunch. Booking required on 01339 886072 email ranger@glentantar.co.uk.

9 December Environmental projects - how to run a better project SNH Sharing Good Practice event. 10am - 4pm, Battleby Conference Centre. Learn the project management skills needed to run 'on the ground' environmental projects. Booking required on 01738 458555 email sgp@snh.gov.uk.

Get in touch

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Contact us if you would like to receive CatchUp by email.

