

CatchUp

Dee Catchment Partnership news

Spring 2015

Planting trees to keep the river cool

Over 40km of riverbank tree planting is underway in the upper Dee

Trees are being planted along 70km of riverbank in the upper Dee to restore woodland lost from the river corridor over the last 200 years. 40km is well underway, with a further 30km planned by 2017.

As they grow, these trees will benefit the whole river system by creating shade, reducing bank erosion, easing flooding, and providing habitat for wildlife. The shading will be important in future as temperatures are predicted to rise due to climate change.

Trees have been planted along the rivers Clunie (near Braemar) and Gairn. Some are in small 4m x 4m enclosures to allow deer to move between them, while others are in much larger fenced areas.

The trees are being planted as part of a UK-wide EU project to improve conditions for the freshwater pearl mussel. The 'Pearls in Peril' project will help to restore the habitat of the Dee's highly endangered 1.3 million pearl mussels. In doing so, it will bring long-term benefits for the whole river and its wildlife, including the salmon population.

On the Dee, Pearls in Peril will result in improvements worth £2.4 million. These are being delivered by national agencies and local organisations working with landowners and managers throughout the catchment.



In years to come, the trees will help keep the river cool during hot weather

Culter catchment re-opens to migrating fish

For the first time in 255 years salmon and sea trout can access the Culter Burn catchment. The construction of Culter Dam in 1750 prevented migratory fish from entering all but the lower stretches of the Culter Burn, leaving 67 miles completely inaccessible.

In October 2014 the Dee District Salmon Fishery Board and River Dee Trust installed a fish pass on the dam and just days later fish started to migrate upstream. The fish counter at the top of the dam shows that 43 salmon and 69 sea trout ascended the dam

last season and soon afterwards salmon redds were recorded further upstream. After the one remaining obstruction in the catchment has been eased, around 1500 additional salmon are expected to return to the Dee each year.



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 find out more about the river and how you can help to look after it. Tel: 01339 880411 or email: Joanna@riverdee.org

Leave only footprints

The Dee has several sites that are very attractive for picnics, barbecues, swimming and camping. Unfortunately, the popularity of these 'hotspots' can lead to problems such as conflicts with other users, litter and wildfires. The busiest sites are Cambus O'May suspension bridge, Potarch bridge and the Clunie Flats, outside Braemar.



Last summer we visited the main hotspots to promote responsible enjoyment of the area. We spoke to over 150 people, installed signs to remind people to take their litter home and distributed leaflets throughout the catchment from Braemar to Banchory.

To ease pressure on these busy sites, we are encouraging people to visit other areas in the catchment that have more facilities and a greater range of walks for people to enjoy, such as Muir of Dinnet NNR and Glen Tanar Estate.

'Leave only footprints, take only pictures' is a handy reminder that will help to protect the natural beauty of these areas for us all to enjoy for years to come.

New guide for canoeists and fishermen

A new guide has been produced to provide information that will help canoeists and fishermen enjoy their sport while sharing the river. The 'Paddler and Angler Guide' was produced by Aberdeenshire Council and the Dee District Salmon Fishery Board and is available on our website.

RiverBank boxes for schools

In 2005, Dee RiverBank Resource Boxes were gifted to 17 schools and 6 ranger services in the catchment. The boxes are a treasure trove of teaching materials covering a wide range of Dee-related topics, including equipment to help with outdoor activities like pond dipping.

Following some very useful feedback from teachers, the boxes have been reduced to one much smaller box and the contents updated to fit with the Curriculum for Excellence. The updated box is being piloted by Logie Coldstone Primary School this spring and will be rolled out to other schools in the catchment later this year.

The box contains an updated Teachers Folder and this is available on our website.



Drain campaign

What we put down our drains, sinks and toilets can be harmful to water quality in the River Dee. Following in the footsteps of an initiative in Canada we are running a project called 'Yellow Fish' to promote better care of our drainage system.

Street drains around Torry have been spray-painted with distinctive yellow fish to show which drains connect to the river and so must not be used for anything other than water. We have produced 'The Drain Care Guide' to help people understand how to dispose of waste that is often (wrongly) put down drains and toilets.



Tullos Primary School in Torry (P3/4) was the first school to take part in the Yellow Fish project. They made Yellow Fish door hangers (above) as fun reminders of the items that cause the most problems. The class held an assembly to tell their school and parents about what they had learned and show off their work. We will be running the project with other groups later this year.

Please get in touch if your school or brownie / cub / beaver group would like to take part in any of these activities.

Peatland restoration underway on Mar Estate

This winter the Cairngorms National Park Authority started the process of restoring peatlands in the Cairngorms. Burning, over-grazing and trampling by deer, combined with the effects of the weather, have resulted in extensive areas of damaged peat habitats across the upper Dee.

Some of the restoration is taking place in the upper Dee on Mar estate. Around 9km of eroded ground has been re-profiled and re-vegetated and it is already hard to see the restored areas. Elsewhere, bare peat ground has been prepared for spreading sphagnum-rich brush for re-vegetation. All work has involved specialised machinery and used only material from the site.

Stephen Corcoran



Winter weather has hindered progress but work will resume once there is snow-free ground. The work will have long term benefits for wildlife, water quality, carbon stores and climate change, as well as improving the overall landscape.

Rare ice pancakes make world headlines

They are more commonly spotted in the Antarctic or the Baltic Sea, but rare 'ice pancakes' were found on the River Dee in December. The story sparked worldwide media interest and featured on BBC2's Winterwatch Unsprung.

Around 100 ice pancakes were found on the Lummels Pool at Birse, near Aboyne. They were formed in a pool downstream of a fast flowing part of the river, where the foam and froth gathers and circles together.

The conditions must be just right for ice pancakes to form. It is believed that the foam froze overnight, and the pancakes were formed as the frozen pieces collided. The rim was created due to rising temperatures during the day and the cooler nights. You can see more photographs on our website.

If you are out and about in the Dee catchment keep an eye out for unusual features and send us your pictures.

Jamie Urquhart



Pancake ice formed at Lummels Pool (Birse) during the December cold snap

In brief

Invasive species control

The Dee Catchment Partnership has secured funding to continue the fight against three species of invasive non-native plants. The aim is to eradicate Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam in the lower river, from Park Bridge down to Aberdeen. The work will be delivered by the River Dee Trust, as part of their wider programme of controlling invasive plants. The 3 year project is funded by the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route Offset Mitigation Fund.

Aboyne croys removed

Last summer, fishery board bailiffs broke up three large croys by hand and redistributed the boulders in the river bed. Over time, this should improve habitat for pearl mussels and salmon, and reduce bank erosion.

Tarland buffer strips

10km of fenced-off riverbank ('buffer strips') have been installed in the Tarland catchment by the Pearls in Peril project, working with farmers and the MacRobert Trust. The buffer strips will protect water quality and are part of a growing network of over 50km in the middle Dee.

UK Septic Tank Guide

Our Septic Tank Guide has proved so popular that it is being used across the UK, and has even been translated into Welsh. Copies on our website.

Help for farmland burns

SEPA staff are visiting farms throughout the Dee catchment to advise on improvements that will benefit the river. In a separate initiative, farmers are being consulted about making improvements to river beds and banks to help restore the stream channel and reduce flood risk.

To learn more about our projects visit our website:

theriverdee.org

Tarland environmental projects take centre stage

Tarland has been a centre for environmental improvements for over 10 years, due to funding from a range of initiatives, and the support of the MacRobert Estate. The Dee Catchment Partnership met at Douneside House last November to share progress on key projects and visit the improvement sites.

The focus was on buffer strips, fenced-off land along riverbanks which reduce the amount of soil, fertiliser and pesticide that gets washed into burns and rivers, greatly improving water quality. The strip of grass, and in some places trees, also provides habitat for wildlife, from beetles and butterflies to water voles and otters. The group saw the first buffer strip created in Tarland over 20 years ago, which now boasts

many mature trees, and then visited the Tarland Burn to see an example created earlier this year.

The group visited the popular community wetland created by the Tarland Development Group and MacRobert Estate. The wetland collects water from neighbouring fields and releases it slowly, helping to reduce flooding in the village. It is a haven for wildlife and an education resource for Tarland Primary School.

In the adjacent field, an earth bank called a 'bund' has been built to form a barrier that slows the flow of water running off the field and prevents soil from washing into the wetland. This unassuming bank is actually a carefully engineered feature that will keep the wetland working properly and help to reduce flood risk.

Rebecca Fitton



Buffer strips protect streams from fertilisers and pesticides and are a haven for wildlife

Discover the Dee: Wells of Dee

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

The Dee's 87 mile journey to the sea begins on Braeriach in the Cairngorms. At 4003ft (1220m) this is the highest source of any major river in Britain. Emerging in a number of pools called the Wells of Dee the young Dee flows across the plateau to the cliff edge from where the Falls of Dee plunge into An Garbh Choire.

Colin Miller



What's on?

23 April Cairngorms Nature Seminar Boat of Garten, 10.00am - 4.00pm, 01479 870511 sarasmith@cairngorms.co.uk

25 April Tarland Producers' Market (DCP stand) The MacRobert Hall, Tarland, 10.00am - 12.00pm

16 - 17 May Cairngorms Nature Festival Aviemore, Ballater, Blair Atholl and Tomintoul sarasmith@cairngorms.co.uk

16 May Come and Try Fishing (Cairngorms Nature Festival) Tullich Fishery, 10.00am - 12.30pm, 01339 880411 joanna@riverdee.org

19 May Forest Management for Priority Species Glenmore, 01479 870519 pennylawson@cairngorms.co.uk

2 June Forest Management for Priority Species Ballater, 01479 870519 pennylawson@cairngorms.co.uk

3 June Wood Ants - Identification, Ecology and Appreciation Strathspey, 01479 870519 pennylawson@cairngorms.co.uk

10 June Wood Ants - Identification, Ecology and Appreciation Deeside, 01479 870519 pennylawson@cairngorms.co.uk

12-14 June Banchory River Festival. River Dee events include: Litterpick, River Dee stand, try fishing 01339 880411 joanna@riverdee.org banchoryriverfestival.co.uk

10 July Muir of Dinnet Fun Day Burn O'Vat Visitor Centre, 12.00pm - 4.00pm 01339 880411 joanna@riverdee.org

11 July Echt Show DCP stand

Get in touch

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