

## Report on River Helmsdale 2023 Season.

The early anglers faced cold and wintry conditions. River levels were good. May provided some productive fishing until a period of dry weather commenced.

Rain fell but not in quantities to significantly raise water levels and move fish around in the system. Whilst the ground was not parched light rain failed to change fishing fortunes. June was an abnormally dry month and catches languished.

In July significant rainfall changed fishing on the river. Rain started in the second week. There were considerable catches in the last half of the month and recurrent rainfall kept water heights good. Anglers commented on the seemingly poor grilse run. Catches were mainly of springers which had moved station in the river and fish from a good run of summer salmon. These are the older multi-sea-winter salmon which form the backbone of a salmon population.

The sea-trout were of above-average weight. Unusually there were fresh sea-tout entering the system until late summer.

In mid-summer dry weather resumed. Catches were steady but unspectacular. Towards the end of the month low atmospheric pressure produced more cloud bursts and with them higher catches. Some late August fishing was excellent.

The last month of the season, September, is when catches can vault sharply upwards. This did not occur until the last fortnight when for the second time in the year the private beats caught over a hundred in a week.

The beats ended with 1,107 salmon and grilse and around a hundred caught on the Lower Helmsdale produced a final River Helmsdale catch of about 1,200. The rate of fish caught and returned was 97%. Therefore the huge majority of fish caught by anglers were released to contribute to spawning and re-stock the river.

The Helmsdale is Conservation Grade 1, meaning stocks are considered to be in good health.

After angling had ended really heavy rain lasting two days and a spate big enough to change the profile of the river arrived on 21st October. Gravel was moved, spawning redds disappeared beneath sediment, and new redds appeared from upstream shifting silt. Parts of the Strath of Kildonan were underwater from side to side. It resulted in the highest high-tide mark for floods for 30 years. Electro-fishing in 2024 will reveal the effects on populations of young fry.

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