Newsletter – *Autumn 2013*

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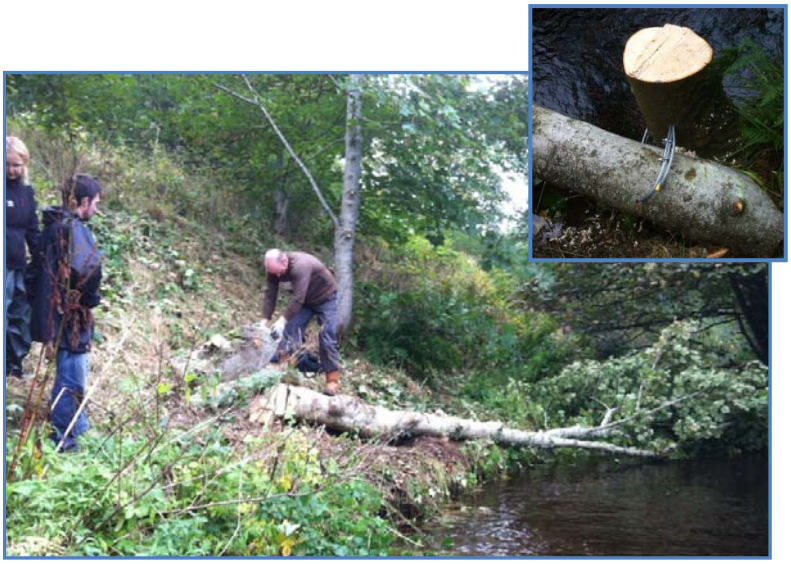
River Restoration Work

The autumn is always a busy time for practical in river restoration work as there is a narrow window for working in the river before the fish return to spawn. This year was no different with multiple MFTI projects going on in the River Peffery and the Strath Rannoch tributary of the Conon Blackwater.



TCV volunteers fixing a sycamore tree to its trunk with galvanised wire (inset) on the River Peffery where it will begin to improve in stream habitat.

The Peffery Project succeeded in gaining funding from the SEPA Water Environment Fund to conduct a Large Woody Debris (LWD) installation trial. When trees (LWD) naturally fall into the river they immediately begin to have an influence on the hydrology and morphology of the river helping to create a diverse range of habitats. However, where the channel is straightened and trees are removed the channel can become relatively featureless and lack diversity. This project is trialling the felling of bank side sycamores into the river and their effectiveness at increasing scour, sorting of gravel, retention of silt and the creation of habitat for fish and invertebrates. Over three days in September the Conon DSFB bailiffs, the MFTI Project Manager, Marcus Walters, and a team of TCV Volunteers felled 5 sycamores and manually moved them into position in the river before fixing them to their stumps with steel cable. Over the winter and coming years the trees will be monitored to assess their impact on the river channel and to ensure they do not create a flood or erosion risk.

FCS installing LWD into the Strath Rannoch to help improve in stream habitat diversity. Photo: Ed Rush

The Strath Rannoch Project is an exciting collaboration between the MFTI, Cromarty Fisheries and the Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) to trial the introduction of LWD on a larger scale and with more precise scientific monitoring of the effects. Under the latest Forestry Management Guidelines the FCS is pulling back commercial plantations from the river banks to create a buffer strip between the river and the forestry. In many areas this buffer strip or riparian zone is being planted with native deciduous trees which in the long term will help regain some natural physical and ecological functionality to these water courses and help protect against climatic warming. However, it will take many years for these native deciduous trees to begin having a significant effect on the ecology and function of the water course. In the meantime the FCS is keen to trial the benefits of artificial LWD

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introductions which will mimic the natural process of riparian trees falling into the river. Over a 2km stretch six mature conifers (LWD) have been introduced to six discrete 20m reaches and each LWD introduction will be monitored for ecological and physical habitat changes and compared against six 20m control reaches further upstream. Each site underwent a detailed habitat and cross sectional study as well as a full 3 pass depletion electrofishing survey which was very time consuming and the help of volunteer Dave Smith was invaluable in completing this work.

Survey Work

Habitat and electrofishing surveys of the small and coastal burns around the Moray Firth is a key part of the MFTI and will help improve our understanding of how trout use these habitats and in highlighting the areas that need restoration and improved management. Since the spring Marcus Walters, has completed the SFCC Introductory Electrofishing and Habitat Survey courses as well as recently completing the SEPA funded SNIFFER fish barrier assessment course. These skills are essential for the project to fulfil its aims while also creating opportunities for volunteers to learn from these survey techniques. Marcus has been putting this training to good use surveying burns all around the Moray Firth. In the Ness District he helped the N&BFT survey the coastal burns east of Inverness. While further east he worked with local volunteers from Gardenstown to survey the Tore Burn and discovered a huge weir that blocks access for migratory fish in this otherwise great trout burn.

Volunteers from Gardenstown helped survey of the Tore Burn, near Troup Head, and discovered this weir which stops migratory fish accessing the upper half of the Burn. Volunteer, Tom Bean, on the right, shows the scale of the obstacle.

Nice mixed habitat with cover and spawning for trout in the upper Garrick Burn which is the main spawning tributary for Loch Eye.

Marcus also carried out an investigation of the main spawning tributary (Garrick Burn) for Loch Eye with the help of local volunteer Dave Smith who was a great help in conducting a detailed walkover survey of this small but very important burn. Although there is some excellent spawning upstream there is a section that is overgrown and also two long culverts that could restrict migration, particularly in low flows. A repeat visit is required at higher water levels to see how bad the problem is and if any action is required.

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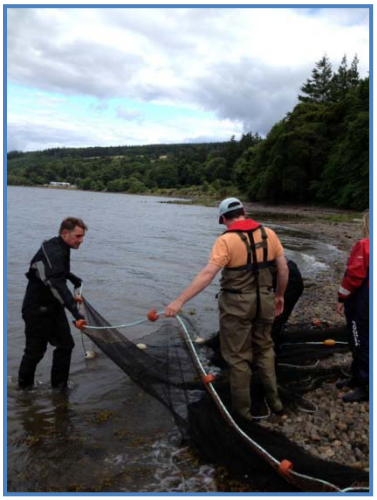
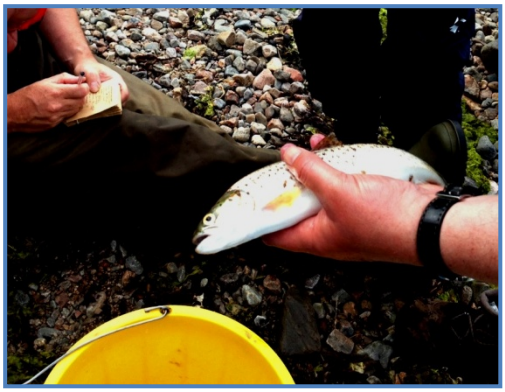
Coastal netting in the Inner Firths for trout is a key project that the MFTI is developing with N&BFT to help us learn more about how trout use this inshore coastal environment. On our second outing in the Beauly Firth we were fortunate to have help from volunteer Lex Pearce, who brought extensive experience from numerous marine surveys in his previous job with SEPA. His expertise and guidance paid off - we caught our first sea trout, along with many flounders and even a juvenile cod!

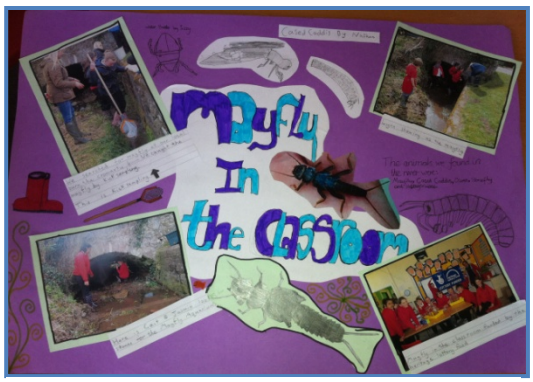




L to R: The MFTI team deploying the sweep net, taking scales from a small sea trout, project manager, Marcus Walters, with one of the flounders.

Education

The MFTI Education Programme has been a huge success; already visiting 18 schools and conducting 4 events the project has engaged with more than 319 children. This is a great achievement for the first year of the project and we look forward to building on this next year. Schools have undertaken river visits, seen electofishing displays conducted kick samples for invertebrates and some have even hatched out their own mayflies in the classroom. We have a very flexible programme of activities so if you think your school or local event might be interested please get in touch!



Some great artwork from Cromarty Primary illustrating the Mayfly in the Classroom project

WTT Auction

It is the time of year again when we start collecting lots for the annual WTT Auction. We are always looking for exciting new lots to advertise the great trout fishing around the Moray Firth so if you can donate anything to the auction we would be very grateful for your support. Suggested lots include: fishing, guided fishing, accommodation, flies, books, shooting and memorabilia etc. More information can be found here: www.wildtrout.org/content/auction-2013. All monies raised by lots donated to the MFTI are fed back into the project and help support our range of education and conservation activities.

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