

# Week Eleven

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Week Eleven was due to start with a day's electro fishing with the Dee team, but due to the river levels it was deemed too difficult to survey given the conditions. So I spent the morning in the office before heading into meet with Ian one of the Trust directors. Here we discussed the progress to date and discussed various plans of action over a nice cup of tea. After meeting with Ian I headed into the University of Aberdeen to meet with the new Water Vole Conservation and Mink Control Officer, Sarah Atkinson. The aim of the visit was to introduce her to my previous work with the project and to begin the handover phase. I spent the afternoon going over various aspects of the post and establishing plans for the forthcoming weeks.

Tuesday was the first day of electro fishing with the Don Bailiff team. From our previous meetings we had outlined our survey plan and it was now time to put it into action. Sarah was to join me to meet the bailiff's and also to provide an extra pair of hands. We headed up to meet the Jim and Martin at the hatchery at Strathdon, where we prepared the electro fishing kit and set off. The first site was on the Nocht Burn one of the more important tributaries upstream of the hatchery. We sampled at two locations on the burn carrying out Stock samples as well for the Don Board. It made sense to make the most of the extra bodies whilst in these locations. I was amazed at the number of fish found in very small sections of the burn. In general twice as many trout as salmon were found but we did cover a variety of habitats within a survey section. The density of the fry and parr was amazing, who said there are no fish in the Don, There were some rather chubby trout in the deeper pools and under the undercut banks which I suspect were feeding on the trout and salmon fry present. These fish would soon be moving downstream to the main river; due to their size they just don't have the cover to protect them from predators in the smaller shallower burns.

Jim was in control of the electro fishing backpack and Martin and I were responsible for catching the fish. We collected the stunned fish with scoop nets and placed them in buckets of water. Once a section was completed we left the water and worked on the bankside. Where we identified, measured and recorded the fish caught prior to taking a genetic sample. We only wanted to sample the salmon and so upon identifying returned the trout to another bucket to recover before releasing. The salmon were anaesthetised, then measured, given an age class and a small section of tissue was clipped from their adipose fin. This sample was then placed into a labelled tube containing ethanol to preserve it. This procedure was then repeated at another location on the Nocht further downstream and at two further locations on the Buchat and Ernan Burns. The day was very interesting enabling me to get to know new sections of the upper catchment more intimately, whilst working with the Board to achieve not only our targets but the boards also.

Wednesday and Thursday were taken up with Sarah as part of her induction, introducing her to the volunteer base and raft network across the Ythan and Dee.

Friday consisted of some office work in the morning followed by a site visit to the Goval Burn to carry out some habitat surveys. The afternoon was very interesting, I had first to gain permissions before surveying and after a period of survey work with permission from one landowner I reached a boundary which required a new permission. With the increasing inclement weather I decided I would be best securing permissions for the whole catchment in one go. Following some very

interesting discussions with farmers and landowners the job was complete. Here is just one of the sites I went to see in the upper section of the Elrick burn. It seems that a bit of remedial work could be carried out in some areas along side any future improvements.



Next week I'll be working with the Don Bailiff team on some genetic sampling again and also some habitat sampling and I'll also be having a meeting with the Deveron Trust Biologist at the office here to discuss various issues relating to both Trusts and how we can share best practice and resources.

Cheers Jamie