

Week Thirty & Thirty-one

The New Year is here and what does it bring snow, snow and more snow. It's alright for the ski centres but not so good for the rest of us.

With the weather as it is I'm effectively office bound until it clears. This works out well as at this time of year as I have plenty of data to input from surveys over the summer months, funding applications to complete and other bits and bobs as and when they appear. It's also the time of the year when there are a few courses and conferences to attend vital for informing Trusts and Boards on current scientific research and government policy.

The first two weeks of the year was a mix of working from home due to the weather and the freezing cold office, taking a trip up to the Hatchery with Martin and Stephen and meeting with Dr Sam Martin to discuss the Salmon in the Classroom project.

The hatchery visits are a regular occurrence for the Board staff, it's imperative that the incubation hall water supply is maintained. The guys were up every other day throughout the holidays and have been since and deserve thanks for all their hard work.

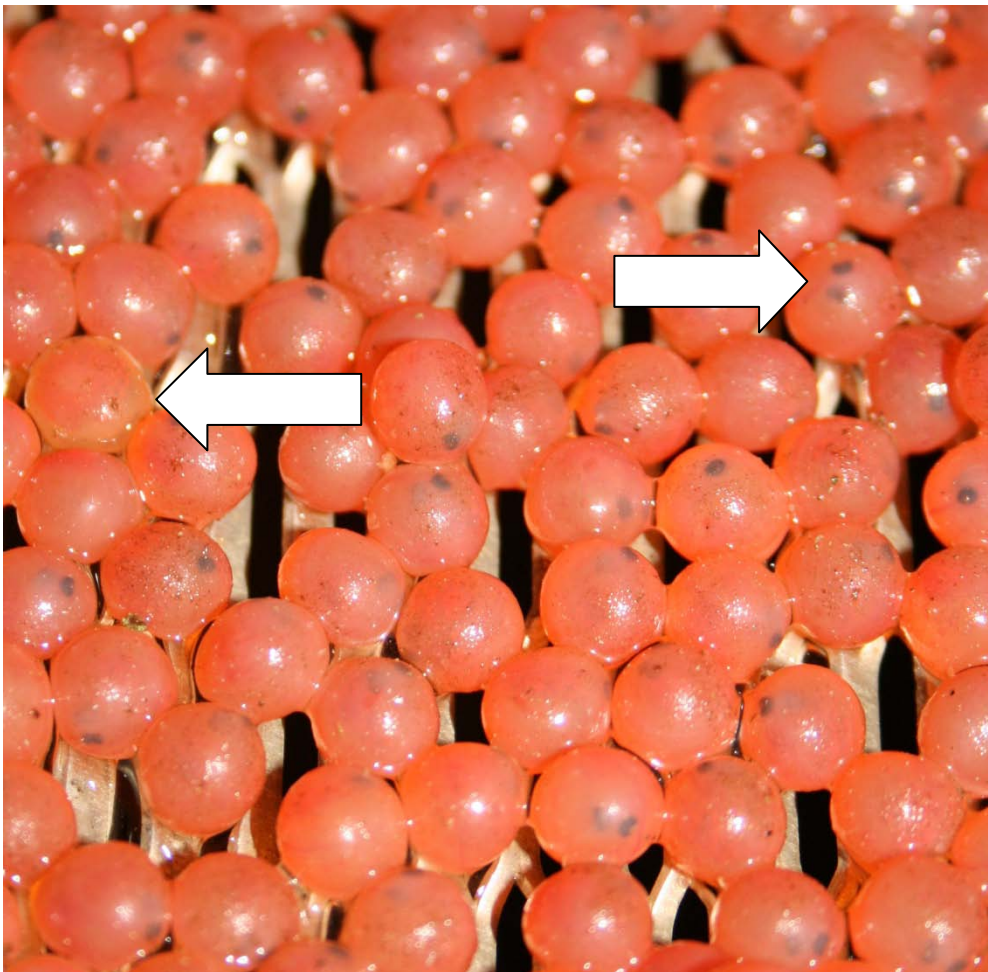
The adverse weather has resulted in several problems for other fishery boards, I'm aware that the Helmsdale had some problems with water freezing the pipes at the hatchery, the problem was quickly solved and as a result no casualties occurred, but the Deveron fishery board were not so lucky. The current structure used for the Deveron hatchery is a polytunnel situated in the upper catchment. Over the past few weeks there have been some serious snowfalls in the upper Deveron catchment and this has resulted in the polytunnel collapsing under about 4ft of snow and ice. The Deveron board staff and volunteers managed to rescue about half of the stock and relocate them to another hatchery downstream. This is still a devastating loss especially given the potential damage caused by the previous month's spates upon the natural spawning sites across the Deveron catchment.

On a happier note I'm glad to say that the Don has come off unscathed during the recent snowfalls and frosts. The only downside evident at present is that the current conditions may impact the planting out of the eyed ova (see image).



The cold water has held things back a little in terms of egg development which is a good thing at present as the board are hoping to plant out the eggs into the upper catchment but this is very weather dependant. With many of the likely locations for planting out (usually the upper tributaries) under snow and ice it may prove difficult. The board staff are hoping that things will thaw out over the next few weeks so that the eggs can be planted out around beginning of March. If not the eggs will be kept on until they are classed as unfed fry and released into appropriate locations later in the year. This results in more time and effort being required to care for these fish when it could be better used elsewhere. Unfortunately this is one thing which cannot be accounted for.

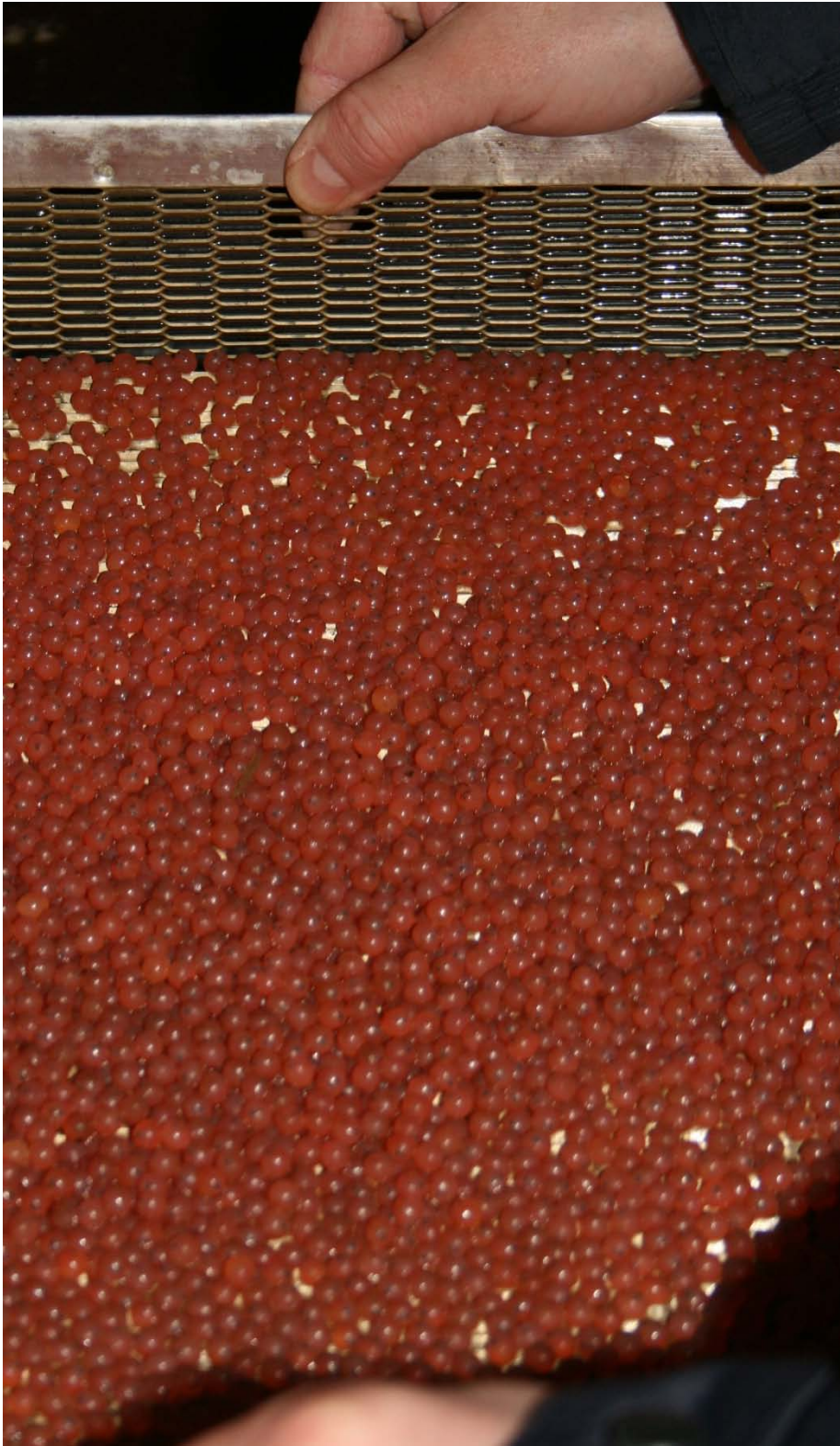
I joined Martin and Stephen on a few occasions to help dig a path into the hatchery and also to see the eggs progress. Here are some images of the eggs in the hatchery.



A close up of the eggs at different stages, the left arrow is pointing to a whin egg one which has not been fertilised and the right arrow is pointing to an egg with two visible black dots these are the eyes, hence the name eyed ova.



Martin checking the eggs in one of the trays. This process is carried out every other day to remove any dead eggs to prevent disease spreading to the other eggs. Each of the blue troughs has four trays, Martin is seen here lifting a tray to remove sediment and allow a better picture. Each tray holds approx 10,000 eggs.



A close up of one of the trays. The trays are made from a fine aluminium grate type material with four inch legs. The trays sit in the trough side by side and are just submerged by the water. The flow of water running through the trough provides adequate oxygen for the eggs survival. A dark cover is placed over the top to replicate the natural conditions of a redd.

Cheers Jamie