

River Ythan SLA Report March/April/May/June 2025

1. Introduction

The Don DFSB have been contracted to carry out fisheries protection, predator surveys, spawning surveys and habitat restoration activities across the river Ythan catchment throughout 2025/26 by the Ythan DSFB under a Service Level Agreement. Each activity is allocated a set number of man-days/patrols to accommodate the requirements of the annually agreed SLA. Activities are defined following consultation with the Ythan DSFB.

Any incidents relating to pollution and policing will be recorded and shared with the Clerk. Information from predator surveys will be collated and shared with the Clerk directly following the survey period. Information on spawning surveys will be collated and reported in a summary report following the end of the spawning period. Any seals reported above Logie Buchan Bridge will be reported to the Clerk as soon as possible.

All activities will be covered by the Don DSFB health and safety policies, as stated in the service level agreement.

2. Reporting

A log of all patrols and activities will be sent to the Clerk monthly.

SLA Activities/ Piscivorous Bird Count/March, April, May

Table 1. Spring Piscivorous Bird Surveys 2025.

Table 1. Spring Piscivorous Bird Surveys 2025	Number of Goosanders	Number of Cormorants	Number of Mergansers
River Ythan Bird Count, 28 th of March.	15	2	0
River Ythan Bird Count, 23 th of April.	22	4	0
River Ythan Bird Count, 28 st of May.	11	2	0

Location of Birds

On the 28th of March, 15 Goosanders were Identified along with 4 Cormorants. 5 Goosanders were identified between Blairfowl and Methlick Bridge and 1 Cormorant. 2 Goosanders were seen above Ythan bank Bridge and a further 4 at the village at Ellon. Down at Newburgh Estuary 3 Goosanders were counted along with 3 Cormorants, these birds were identified at the bird nature reserve.

The Piscivorous bird survey on the 23rd of April, accounted for 19 Goosanders and 4 Cormorants. Locations where birds were identified are as follows. 8 Goosanders between 2 points, Blairfowl and Methlick bridge. A flock of 11 Goosanders seen on the Ardlethan stretch of the river. 1 Goosander at Ellon and 2 Goosanders identified at Newburgh estuary. No Cormorants were seen during April piscivorous bird survey.

On the 28th of May, 11 Goosanders and 2 Cormorants were counted for the last count of the spring period. Blairfowl to Methlick accounted for 3 Goosanders. 2 goosanders were seen just below Methlick Bridge. A short distance upstream of the railway viaduct at Ellon, 2 Goosanders were counted along with 1 Cormorant in flight upstream. 2 Goosanders at Newburgh Estuary and 1 cormorant were identified. At Ardlethan Pond, 2 Goosanders were counted.

Table 2. SLA Activities/ checking for possible obstacles to Smolt migration.

Date	Tributary /River Section Surveyed	Time	Notes
9/4/2025	Littewater Burn and Fourdon Burn	9am to 5pm 1 Staff = 1 day	A blockage survey was carried out in 2 Tributaries, the Little Water and the Fourdon Burn. On the Little Water where commercial felling had taken place, only small amount of tree debris was removed. The Fourdon Burn was surveyed from Rothienorman down to Fyvie. The 4 trees that were identified during the annual redd counts are all bridging the stream, no further action required.
10/4/2025	River Ythan, at Seggat	9am to 1pm 2 staff = 1 day	2 small wind-blown trees were removed from this section; accumulation of debris was also removed.
25/5/2025	Fourdon	8am to 12pm 2 staff = 1 day	Tree stump and concrete blocks were removed from the fish pass on the Fourdon Burn at Fyvie. Further up from the village of Fyvie on the Fourdon Burn, a bridge crossing had been made utilizing tree lengths of stacked forestry logs, and multiple boulders, it was well made and took some time to dismantle. The structure was so tightly made, that water could only seep through.

SLA Activities/ Table 3. June, SLA Activity/Policing Patrol allocation of shifts

Date	Patrol Area	Time of Patrol	Notes/Incidents
5/6/25	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary	2pm to 6pm 2 staff = 1 day	All beats checked, few anglers on Newburgh today.
12/6/25	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary	2pm to 6pm 2 staff = 1 day	All beats checked, extremely hot day, few anglers fishing
13/6/25	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary	2pm to 6pm 2 staff = 1 day	A few rods today fishing the Estuary, Sea trout showing in the pools.
19/6/25	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary	2pm to 6pm 2 staff = 1 day	Sea trout in the 2-4lb range being caught today at Newburgh Estuary. All permits checked.
30/6/25	Methlick to Newburgh Estuary	12pm to 4pm 2 staff = 1 day	Quieter day at Newburgh Estuary, high winds creating very rough conditions.

From the middle of June, Sea trout were starting to show in better numbers, although angling effort was on the slow side. Sea trout in the 2-4lb range were being landed by those who ventured out.

From Methlick down to Ellon, angling has been very slow due to the extreme hot day time temperatures, along with very low water conditions in the river.

There have been 2 callouts recorded, 1 callout in May and 1 for June,

On the 6th of April, 1 male was caught fishing without permission on the south bank of the river, directly below the Railway viaduct above Ellon village. He was given a verbal warning and removed from the river,

On the 31st of May, 3 men believed to be travellers were reported to be fishing at Newburgh Bridge. When the Bailiffs arrived at the scene, a white transit van was seen leaving the scene. It is believed it was the same 3 persons that had been fishing.

SLA Activities/ Table 3. June, SLA Activity/Consultation/SEPA Licence

Date	River or Tributary	Time	Comments
28/3/25 21/5/25	Ebrie Burn, Auchnagatt.	1 staff member 13.30pm to 16.30pm 10am to 15.00pm = 1 day	2 site visits and reporting 1 day
27/6/25	River Ythan. Chapel of Seggat.	1 staff member 9am to 5pm = 1 day	1 site visit acquiring permission from owners and acquiring additional data for SEPA application licence.

SEPA Consultation-Barrier to Fish passage.

On the 14th of March I was contacted by SEPA who were working on a barrier to fish passage, I had not been aware of this barrier. The barrier is a high step before entering a culvert on the Ebrie burn.

The Culvert runs under the A948 at the village of Auchnagatt, I visited the site on the 28th of March to acquire pictures and suggest options on best steps to correct the high step. The survey was unsuccessful at that time of my visit due to high and discoloured water. I revisited the site on the 21st of May, with more success, the Ebrie burn was at low flows, and I was able to see the high step at the entrance of the culvert and 4 pre-weirs within the culvert, they increase the water levels within the culvert to allow fish passage. The front step would not be a hindrance to adult fish, but to juvenile salmon and trout it would be a barrier for them getting through the culvert.

I later discussed this barrier with Mr Andy Gowans, Senior fish ecologist of SEPA, and decided that the best option, would be to place a small Pre-weir 2-3 Meters below the step. By doing this it will increase the water level at the step and allow fish passage more easily for juvenile fish species. Pictures below showing series of pre-weirs within the Culvert in Fig 1

Fig 1, Series of 4 Pre-weirs within the Culvert



Fig 2 upstream view of high step before entering the Culvert.



Gravel Washing Chappel of Seggat,

On the 27th of June, I gained permission from the owners of Chappel of Seggat to carry out gravel washing later in the year. I have now sent away for the licence that is required for this task and am awaiting a reply from SEPA.

Forth coming actions.

July/August I will start Ranunculus weed cutting on the Ebrie Burn. While carrying out survey work on the Fourdon Burn, Ranunculus weed was noted to be more abundant than in previous years, the water temperatures are higher early in the year due to climate change. This weed seems to be thriving in these conditions and flowering earlier than previous years.

Seal Predation

No reports have been submitted.

Jim Kerr
Senior Fisheries Officer.
Acting on behalf of the Ythan DSFB