



The Newsletter for the Central & Regional Fisheries Boards
Irisleabhar an Phríomh Bhord Iascaigh agus na Boird Iascaigh Réigiúnach

Investment in Inland Fisheries

The recent announcement by the Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources, Mr Frank Fahey, of an investment of €30.4m, as part of the NDP, is an important milestone for the angling sector, representing a very clear vote of confidence by the Government in the sector and its potential to contribute in a meaningful way to rural economic development over the period to 2006.

Minister Fahey stated: "We have a unique natural environment that is there to be enjoyed by all with an excellent and high quality range of facilities and services and we must ensure that this is protected and promoted".

Various reports have highlighted the unique features of Ireland as an angling destination including the natural and unpolluted environment and the range and availability of wild fish stocks.



Angling is uniquely placed to help deliver the benefits across the lesser-developed areas of the country because of its excellent geographic and seasonal spread. There are areas of the country where the local economy currently derives huge benefits from angling.

Tourism & recreation

The Tourism & Recreational Angling Measure, TRAM, as it will be called, will build on the achievements of the Tourism Angling Measure (TAM) 1994 – 2000, which was the single most ambitious product development programme ever undertaken in inland fisheries in Ireland.

Over €30 million has been allocated to TRAM and the Central Fisheries Board is responsible for managing it on behalf of the Department for the Marine and Natural Resources.

While the previous investment programme (TAM) was confined to the development of the tourism angling product, this new measure extends eligibility to recreational angling, training, promotion and marketing. In-stream rehabilitation works, improved access to fisheries, the provision of information and promotional material all offer opportunities under the scheme to maximise the potential of the tourism and recreational angling product.

The Minister sees a major role for angling clubs in delivering on minor enhancement projects and encourages clubs to submit well thought out proposals for funding to allow them to do this important work themselves.




What is eligible for grant aid

Under the TRAM funding is available to support the development of tourism and recreational angling sector (coarse, game, and sea) through

- the improvement, conservation and expansion of fishery habitats and stocks.
- the purchase of sea angling boats
- the provision of training facilities for tourist and service providers
- the supply of technical advice for fisheries development
- the strategic promotion and marketing of the angling product in overseas and domestic markets.

Environmentally beneficial

The overall objective of TRAM is to develop the angling product in an environmentally beneficial and sustainable way that widens the spatial spread of angling within the Regions, diverts pressure from highly developed areas and increases under-developed Regions' share of national tourism and recreational angling revenue. Angling, however, can only be developed in a manner that ensures the long-term sustainability of our fisheries.

Conserving fish and their habitat remains an important facet of the Fisheries Boards' responsibilities. Through TRAM they will continue to create an open environment to progress present and future initiatives so that the resource is developed, managed, promoted and conserved in the best possible way. 

With angling getting back into full swing following a very wet few months and the opening of the game angling season, we have another exciting edition of FIN for your perusal.

In this issue we look at the Lough Melvin Catchment Management Project, which is under way in the Northern Region. This is a unique cross Border project, which has great potential for the conservation of Lough Melvin. Furthering the Board's positive and progressive approach to Human Resources policies, we announce the latest additions to our policies.

The threats to our fisheries environment from the continuing development of the country's infrastructure is causing the loss of fish and their habitat. In this issue, we review the present situation and argue that early consultation and dialogue can ease the way for future development. The Boards are not anti-development, but pro fisheries conservation. We can have sustainable growth without damaging the fish habitat and in this key article we outline how this can be achieved.

In this issue we also introduce you to one of those lesser known fish species, the Char. Its very existence in Ireland is now under severe threat.

I hope you enjoy the mix of articles we have for you in this edition. I would like to thank all those who have contributed putting together this edition of FIN and while we cannot fit everything in please continue to send your contributions.

Eamon Cusack
Editor

Prevent the spread of zebra mussels

Zebra Mussels are unwelcome in Ireland. They have already altered the ecology of many lakes and have invaded and killed off native freshwater swan mussel populations by attaching to their shells and suffocating them.

They are presently found on the navigable lakes, rivers and canals of the Erne and Shannon, having spread there on the bottom of cruising craft. Large numbers of zebra mussel have been found in Kilgory Lough near Tulla in Co Clare infesting aquatic plants, stones and the native freshwater mussels. Their spread to other waters must be prevented.

Originating from Black and Caspian Seas Region, they were first discovered in Ireland in 1993, arriving on boats from Britain or the Netherlands. In Ireland they are poised to spread further with the overland transport of boats to uninfested water bodies.

Clearances of water will almost certainly result in more aquatic plant growth to impede fishing activities. Zebra mussels will attach to any firm surface and underwater rock fields. In larger lakes, encrustations of three centimeters in depth have been found, making it now one of the most abundant animals in Ireland. In Lough Key alone it is calculated that there are



Zebra mussels encrusted on a swan mussel

more zebra mussels present there than there are people in the world. Zebra mussels reproduce rapidly and produce many young. Attempts to exterminate them have not succeeded.

Dan Minchin, Marine Organism Investigator, says to prevent infestation:

- Clean the hull of your boat before you leave an infested region.
- Remove all plant materials snagged on the engine or trailer.
- Do not leave your boat in the water for long periods if this can be practically avoided.
- Please inform your local Fisheries Board should you come across zebra mussels in a catchment outside of the Erne and Shannon

News in Brief

Aasleagh Lodge re-opens its doors

The newly refurbished Aasleagh Lodge in Leenane, Co. Galway, is open to anglers from the 1st of April 2002. Situated on the banks of the famous Erriff River, the lodge has been extensively refurbished since its management transferred to the Western Regional Fisheries Board in 1999. As part of the refurbishment, in-stream developments have been carried out on the Erriff River system and a major bank access project is in the pipeline entailing the provision of footbridges, parking, entry gates and stiles.



Bag limit ends in May

The new annual Bye-law that imposes a bag limit of one spring salmon or one sea trout (over 40cms) per angler per day introduced this January 1st ends on May 31st. Recommended by the National Salmon Commission, this new regulation was agreed by all stakeholders in the conservation of the wild salmon resource.

National Salmon Commission awards

Winners of the 2001 Irish Atlantic Salmon Conservation Awards (IASC) scheme were: Overall Prize – Coomhola Salmon Trust Ltd.; Spring Salmon Prize – Blackwater Salmon Development Programme; Sea Trout Prize – Save Our Sea Trout; and Youth Prize – Leixlip and District Angling Association. The Awards, designed to encourage and promote conservation of salmon, were presented by Frank Fahey T.D., Minister for Marine and Natural Resources, in Galway.

Gardai assist Board staff

In the on going efforts to combat poaching and conserve our dwindling stocks of salmon a major new enforcement initiative is to be undertaken.

Following a meeting convened by the Minister for Marine and Natural Resources with senior Gardai and Fisheries Board Officers, the Minister stated that the use of violence against Fisheries Board Staff would not be tolerated, it was announced that a major crack down on illegal fishing, would be commenced.

This new initiative will particularly target the criminal gangs who are involved in poaching. Areas hardest hit by poachers include Donegal, Limerick, Cork and Kerry.

Lough Melvin Catchment Management Project

Lough Melvin and its catchment straddles the border between Co. Leitrim and Co. Fermanagh. Indeed the border passes through the lake itself, and runs along one of the tributaries. The southern portion of the catchment falls under the remit of the Northern Regional Fisheries Board (NRFB), while the Fisheries Conservancy Board in Northern Ireland oversees the northern part.

Lough Melvin is unique for the diversity of its trout stocks, and the high quality of game angling in the lake. But there is also the world-renowned River Drowes, which almost invariably claims the first salmon of the year on New Year's Day. There are several races of trout in Melvin, sonaghen, gillaroo, and ferox. Arctic char are also present, as well as perch, eel and rudd.

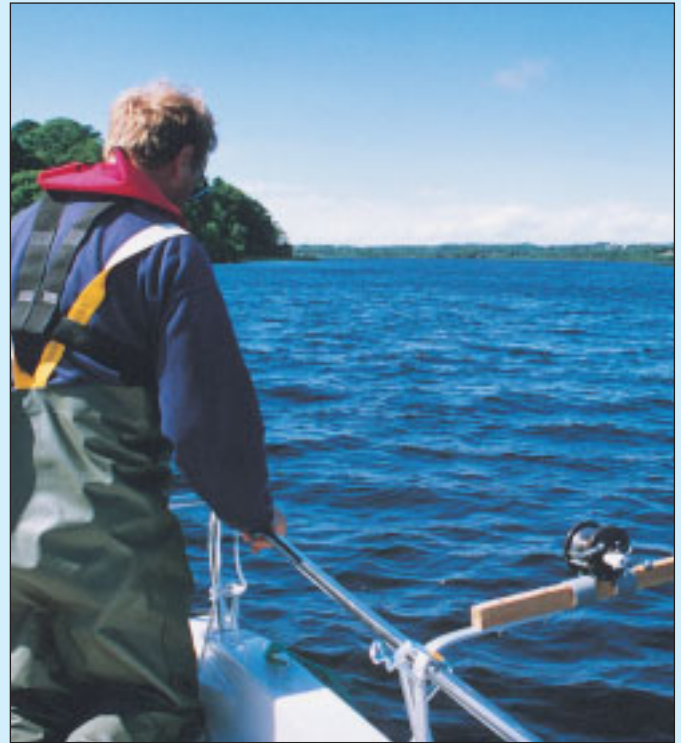
The Project

The catchment has been chosen as one of the six pilot Catchment Management projects in the country. It is the only cross-border catchment chosen, and this requires co-operation between agencies north and south of the border. In addition to fisheries, representatives from forestry, agriculture and local councils on both sides of the border are involved in the steering group of the project.

At present, baseline data is being collected on the catchment and a Catchment Management Project Officer has been appointed to co-ordinate the various functions. Fish stock surveys have been undertaken in conjunction with Central Fisheries Board (CFB) technical staff, which included electro-fishing rivers and quantitative netting in the lake. An acoustic survey of the lake was carried out by the Department of Agriculture & Rural Development in Northern Ireland in co-operation with CFB and NRFB.

Fish Stocks

An important finding from the stock assessment was the presence of roach in the lake. This is the first record of this species in the catchment, and indicates further spread of the species nationally. How roach gained access to the lake is not known at this stage. As yet there is no indication of roach impacting on the trout population, although rudd which also occur in the lake, may become marginalised by competition and hybridisation. While results of the survey have yet to be processed, indications are that Lough Melvin continues to be very well stocked with trout.




Water Quality

The Northern Ireland authorities are committed to the project, as witnessed by the investment of Stg£100,000 (€164,000) by the Environment and Heritage Service, in a land use inventory and nutrient input study to be carried out in conjunction with Queen's University in Belfast.

A postdoctoral scientist has been appointed to carry out this study, and the lake and main tributaries will be sampled every two weeks over the next year to quantify nutrient input into the lake. Leitrim County Council is also installing gauging stations on the main tributaries entering from Co. Leitrim to assist with this work.

Threats

The main dangers facing Lough Melvin are water quality, which is being addressed within the current study, and the illicit introduction of non-indigenous biota, such as Zebra mussels, which pose a serious threat to the ecology of the lake. They are endemic in the nearby Erne system, and many local anglers transfer boats between these waterways every year.

Education campaigns have been undertaken, and public meetings are being held with angling clubs in the area to encourage responsible boat maintenance and cleaning. The long-term impact of roach is unpredictable but hybridisation and eventual replacement of the indigenous rudd population is anticipated in the short term. Introductions of any other aquatic species to this unique ecosystem must be actively discouraged. 



Construction vs Environment

Dialogue, the key in planning developments

The impact of Ireland's ever developing motorway and housing schemes pose a huge threat to the river environment, but dialogue and consideration for the environment can ease the way.

It is estimated that two streams are lost in the greater Dublin area each year due to massive road and motorway construction, according to the Eastern Regional Fisheries Board.

In Co Mayo, the renowned angling lake, Lough Cullin, is no longer termed a trout fishery by the North Western Regional Fisheries Board, as stocks have been decimated in recent years due to sewage discharges into the river system. This is because the huge increase in housing in Castlebar hasn't been matched by sufficient sewage treatment infrastructure.

These are just two instances where protecting Ireland's valuable natural resource has been forgotten in the rush to build roads and houses. The need to build new and upgrade existing roads is essential, as is the need to satisfy the huge demand in housing. The growth in the Irish economy has warranted urban and infrastructural expansion.

Early consultation

The Fisheries Boards recognise this and are in favour of development. But not at the cost of Ireland's natural habitat. They say that if they are consulted at an early enough stage in the planning of these developments, many problems would be solved.

Alan McGurdy, Chief Executive of the Eastern Regional Fisheries Board, commented: "Under law, we are not a notifiable body when it comes to major road works. This means that sometimes we only hear of a potential problem when it's too late. If there is a major problem, say the disruption of fish spawning in a river, then we can legally delay construction until the spawning has finished. This could cost developers tens of thousands of euro in lost time."

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In fact, this is what did happen during the construction of the N4 between Dublin and Galway. The Eastern Regional Fisheries Board delayed the Kinnegad bypass in Co Westmeath for six months because of spawning salmon in the Kinnegad River. "If we had been consulted early enough in the planning of the bypass, this would have been prevented," said McGurdy.

McGurdy believes that the Fisheries Boards should be notifiable in these instances. "As well as advising on timing on road construction, we can also advise on how to minimise the impact of bridges or stream culverts. The Board can help developers to remove fish stocks and redirect waterways, so that the impact on aquatic life is kept to a minimum."



A bad design of culvert that would prevent the passage of fish.

How a river was saved

A housing development in Loughlinstown, Co Dublin was planned and through the site ran the Shanganagh River. The developer contacted the Eastern Regional Fisheries Board and in 1998 a new river channel was created and the river diverted through it. The Board saw to the removal of fish in the existing river and then the returning of the fish into the new system. The following year, the fish stock was assessed by the Board and the new channel had a thriving trout population.



New bridge construction on the River Feale in Co. Kerry

Housing

Where the Fisheries Boards are notifiable is in housing development, but that sometimes doesn't prevent problems.

Vincent Roche, Chief Executive of the North Western Regional Fisheries Board, has had several problems with the major expansion of urban towns like Castlebar in Co Mayo.

"It's great to see towns in the West thriving, like Castlebar," says Roche. "But they are growing at such a rate that the infrastructure in place to treat sewage isn't sufficient. We have a situation where the amount of sewage effluent discharged into the Castlebar River has virtually killed Lough Cullin, one of Ireland's best trout lakes."

A minimum dilution rate of one part effluent to 20 parts water is required to meet EU Directives. When water levels are low in Summer, more effluent is piped into the Castlebar River than there is water flowing in it – up to 2.5 million gallons of effluent per day.

Roche goes on to say, "We consulted with the County Council on the future provision of sewage treatment and found it to be woefully inadequate. So we had no option but to object to planning applications for large developments. We were labeled as anti-development, but we're not. We're pro-development, but first and foremost we're pro-conservation."

Through continued dialogue with Mayo County Council and conditions imposed by An Bord Pleanála, the immediate planning crisis is close to being averted,

Fish-friendly culverting

Culverting a stream is seen as the last resort by Fisheries Boards, as this method can starve a river of sunlight and therefore life – it is said that a fish will not pass through a tunnel if it can not see light at the other end. The Boards prefer bridging or stream redirection, but culverting is usually the preferred method by developers, as it saves on cost.


Culverting can be fish-friendly, however, as an example in Druid's Glen, Dublin, showed. The developer consulted with the Eastern Regional Fisheries Board and stone pitching was embedded in the culvert to mimic a natural river bed and light shafts were introduced every three inches. Even though the culvert was relatively long at 30 metres, the stream continued to thrive.

but there are still concerns about the long term situation. "Through dialogue," commented Roche. "We will hope to solve these problems. Lough Cullin, however, will take years to recover to its former greatness as a trout fishery."

Fine ecological balance

There is a fine balance between the needs of a growing economy like Ireland, and looking after its beautiful

countryside. The two are inter-linked. If Ireland's rivers, streams and lakes are lost, this will have a serious impact on tourism, which plays a huge part in the welfare of the State.

What the Fisheries Boards want to see is constructive dialogue, at an early stage, so developers can work hand-in-hand with organisations like the Boards, whose job it is to help protect the natural resource. 



A good example of a re-directed stream with 'baffles' to aid fish migration.

Salmon Quotas Introduced

Salmon catch quotas for commercial fishermen proposed by The Minister for Marine and Natural Resource, Frank Fahey, have been endorsed by the National Salmon Commission (NSC).

Quotas levied will vary from fishery to fishery. Some districts will have a cap on previous catches and some seeing a quota up to the maximum reduction of 15% of average catch per district (based on 1997-2001 catch figures). The different levels of quota are

allocated to areas with the greatest decline in the number of wild salmon, based on statistical catch data over the last five years. Socio-economic factors have also been taken into account in each area, as have the concerns of the commercial fishermen.

Those fisheries hardest hit are Waterford, Galway, Bangor in Mayo and Letterkenny in Co Donegal. The healthier fisheries where caps will be implemented include Wexford, Kerry, Drogheda and Dublin.

The Minister affirmed in January that his policy objective was to reduce the commercial take while enhancing the price dividend for fishermen through quality and marketing strategies. The quota scheme was preferred to the proposed buy-out of commercial fishermen that many in the salmon industry were calling for. The scheme will be administered by the Regional Fisheries Boards through the Tagging Scheme.

Equality Policies in the Fisheries Boards

An Equal Opportunities Working Party, comprising of management and staff representatives have, following a number of meetings, produced two documents i.e. Equal Opportunities Policy & Respect and Dignity at Work Policy & Grievance Procedure. These policies and procedures have been adopted by Central & Regional Fisheries Board management and SIPTU/MSF and are now formally launched.

Having regard to Section 4 of the Respect & Dignity at Work Policy, appropriate training (two days), delivered by external training providers, for two designated contact persons from each Board took place on 30th & 31st January. Lelia ní Ghuairim, Equality Officer, will be visiting each Board to give a presentation on our responsibilities with regard to current equality legislation and familiarise staff and management on the Fisheries Boards' Equality documents.

This initiative reflects the Fisheries Boards' active and effective commitment to the provision of the Employment Equality Act, 1998 and our requirements as set out in the provisions pertaining to Equality in the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness. More importantly, they represent positive and progressive HR policies and procedures which aim to ensure the maintenance of a working environment free of barriers and encourages staff to achieve their full potential.

Tá leagan gaeilge de na cáipéisí seo le fáil i ngach Bhord lasaigh. Más mian leat cóip a fháil cuir glaach air an bPríomh Oifigeach Feidhmiúcháin Cúnta in do Bhord.

News in Brief

Specimen Awards

Adrian Molloy, Kilcar, Co. Donegal stole the show at the annual Specimen Awards with the largest fish ever taken on rod and line in Irish or UK waters – a bluefin tuna weighing in at 440kg, caught in Donegal Bay. The Irish Specimen Fish Committee presented the award, along with three other Irish Record Fish. The Committee ratified a total of 508 specimen fish for the year. Dr. Paddy Fitzmaurice is set to retire as Chairman of the Committee and will be succeeded by Trevor Champ.



Terry Jackson with a specimen pike, 30lbs 12 oz, caught in Lough Beg, Co Antrim.

Kevin Linnane

Kevin Linnane, who was Sea Angling Officer, and later Manager, for the Central Fisheries Board for nearly 30 years, has died at the age of 60, following a long illness. He will be remembered for his tireless work in promoting sea angling around Ireland. Our deepest sympathies go to his wife, Maeve, and sons Barry and Louis.

New offices for Shannon Board

The Shannon Regional Fisheries Board has moved its headquarters to the following address: Ashbourne Business Park, Dock Road, Limerick – tel: 061 300 238, fax: 061 300 308.

Ireland host international salmonid workshop

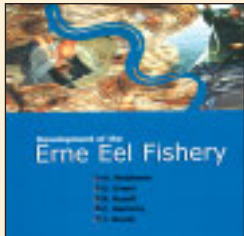
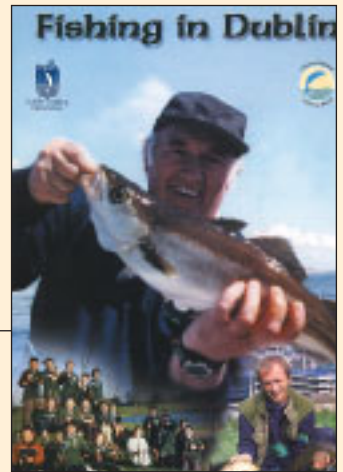
Ireland is to host the 13th International Salmonid Habitat Enhancement Workshop in Westport, Co Mayo this September. Held biannually, the last meeting was hosted by Waterville Valley, New Hampshire, U.S.A. The workshop will have speakers from many countries involved in designing and implementing salmonid riverine enhancement programmes. It will also provide visitors the opportunity to view Irish Salmonid Enhancement programmes around Westport. The workshop will consist of two days lectures and a two-day site tour. If you are interested in participating in the workshop, which will be on 16–19th September, or receiving information, please contact Sandra Doyle at the Central Fisheries Board – sandra.doyle@cfb.ie

Publications

Fishing in Dublin

This A4-size fold-out has a large map showing the best places to fish in Co. Dublin's rivers, canals, lakes and shores – with details of the what fish to catch where. Included in the guide is a species poster and a number of individual maps showing the best spots in greater detail.

Available from the Eastern Regional Fisheries Board.



Erne Salmon Management Report and Erne Eel Fishery Report

These two highly detailed reports have been produced by the Northern Regional Fisheries Board, in conjunction with various Governmental and educational bodies North and South of the Border. Five years in the making, these reports look at the history and current situation in relation to salmon and eel development in the Erne catchment with recommendations on how the fishery can be developed. Total funding for these projects was over £2.5m (€3.17m) - £1.77m (€2.25m) for the salmon report and £800,000 (€1.02m) for the eel report.

Available from the Northern Regional Fisheries Board.

Irish Specimen Fish 2001

This is the Annual Report of the Irish Specimen Fish Committee. It details Specimen (large) fish of all species caught and officially weighed and ratified during 2001. Last year there were four new records which included a bluefin tuna – which at 440kg was the largest fish ever caught on rod and line in Irish and British waters. The report also details anglers who have received special awards for catches during the year.

Available from the Central Fisheries Board.



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The Arctic Char (*Salvelinus alpinus*)

Arctic char is probably our least known native freshwater fish, despite the fact that it was the first fish to colonise Ireland after the last Ice Age. This is due to the fact that very few anglers in Ireland ever see, let alone catch char.

Arctic char are normally an anadromous fish, i.e. they have two modes of life. In this respect they are rather like the salmon and sea trout (of which it is a close cousin). In Northern regions the adult fish and parr migrate to the sea to feed and mature and then return to freshwater to spawn. However, Irish char do not travel to sea, those fish that were left over after the glaciers retreated became confined to lakes in which they lived and grew smaller and smaller with passing time. In Ireland char are not very well understood as little research has been carried out. Initially the char was thought to be quite rare, as it was an infrequent component of angler's catches. However, in Ireland the distribution of char is quite widespread, particularly in western counties.

Char in Irish Waters

Ireland is known to have had over seventy populations. However, since the 1850's many Irish populations have become extinct. The main causes have been pressure on environmental quality caused by eutrophication, fish introductions and acidification.

There are many predators of arctic char in Irish lakes. The most common predator in many lakes is the pike, an 'introduced' species and most probably a factor in some char extinctions. Adult trout and perch are also known to predate char. In Lough Corrib large eels were known to eat char, though whether they actively pursued the fish or ambushed them is not clear. What is clear is that to eels, char smell rather attractive. In netting operations char are often the first captured fish to be molested by marauding eels in preference to trout and other ensnared fish.

Over 13 populations are now believed to be extinct. It is known that a similar number of populations have not been found in their native lakes for over seventy years. The extinction of arctic char from lakes in Ireland continues at an alarming rate. In the 1990's it is believed that as many as three populations were lost. Two of Ireland's most important lakes in terms of biodiversity and species richness, Lough Corrib (14 species of fish) and Lough Erne (14 including pollan) have both lost their populations of char.

Habitat

Today char in Ireland are only found in cold, deep lakes, often corrie lakes in more mountainous areas. Most of the populations of char in Ireland feature diminutive fish, however they are not a true dwarf race as their size is not dictated solely by genetics. Irish char are small compared to anadromous char, but their size range is typical of other European landlocked populations. It is thought that char in Lough Owel may have reached weights of up to 1.4kg, but this may never be known.

They feed primarily on plankton - mainly midge larvae and small crustaceans, though some populations feed at the bottom of their lakes eating snails and other deepwater invertebrates. Char rarely eat other fish in Ireland. On warm summer evenings, char can often be observed dimpling the surface of a lake, one of the few times they will take prey from the waters surface and it is then they may be caught on the fly.

Further information can be sourced on the web-site of the Irish Char Conservation Group at www.charr.org

finfacts

- ▶ Char in Irish waters are a small, slow growing fish, taking as long as 6 years to reach 28 cm.
- ▶ The oldest recorded char was 9 years old and only 30cm.
- ▶ Char are at the southern limit of their range in Ireland and do not migrate to sea.
- ▶ The heaviest char recorded was over two pounds and was caught in Lough Owel. This population is now extinct.
- ▶ Char are under threat in Ireland - almost 40% of all known populations are now extinct.

