Fungus on salmon and sea trout

Briefing note and advice to anglers June 2015

This year we have received a number of reports of wild salmon and sea trout with fungal infections. We have also had reports of fish with the skin condition Ulcerative Dermal Necrosis (UDN), although confirmed cases of this disease remain scarce. These are both natural conditions that usually affect low numbers of salmon and sea trout every year as they return to our rivers. Numbers of affected fish can increase during certain conditions, such as periods of low flows, and this spring we have seen small numbers of affected fish in rivers across England. We are monitoring the situation on all our major salmon rivers and working with partner organisations to progress our understanding of these diseases. Please get in touch on **0800 807060** if you see any dead or unhealthy fish in the wild.

Fungal patches on a wild Atlantic salmon

Fungal infections in salmon and sea trout are often confused or misreported as UDN. Fungal infections typically cause pale, cotton-wool like growths on the head, body or fins. These infections usually occur following damage or during periods of stress. Salmon and sea trout entering our rivers to spawn face many natural challenges and these infections are commonly seen from spring onwards. During heavy infections, large areas of the body may be covered. Badly affected fish become lethargic and may die as a result of the infection.

UDN is also a natural condition of wild salmon and sea trout, but its cause is still unknown. Fish with UDN usually develop smooth, rounded ulcers on the head. UDN has been recorded in Britain since the late 1800s, with outbreaks in the 1960s and 70s. Far fewer cases have been confirmed in recent years. It is a complex condition that can only be confirmed by laboratory examinations. Fish with UDN can recover and spawn successfully, but may also become infected with fungus which can mask a diagnosis.

A UDN-type lesion on the head of a salmon

Our local and national teams are working closely with staff at our National Fisheries Laboratory at Brampton to monitor these diseases and rule out other pathogens. We are also working with partner organisations including Stirling University, Marine Scotland and Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science to learn more about these diseases and their cause.
Please contact us on 0800 807060 if you see any affected or dying salmon or sea trout. This will help us to focus our monitoring efforts and assess the extent of any problems. Do not remove fish from the river and please return any affected fish you catch carefully to the water.