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Press Release

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The highs and lows of Atlantic salmon monitoring in France and the UK

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust has just published its latest report on Atlantic salmon monitoring on the river Frome in Dorset. The report gives fascinating insight on the rise and fall of salmon populations on this typical lowland chalk stream during some of the most extreme weather conditions in its 41 year history.

Despite the weather conditions, the report identifies that 2013 was a good year for Frome salmon smolts reflected in the high numbers of parr recorded the previous September. However, for the adults returning to the rivers from the sea to spawn it was a very poor year with only 343 fish counted (compared to over 1,400 returning fish in 2011). This is the lowest number ever recorded by the team of researchers, who are investigating their long-term data to gain a better understanding of how extreme flooding affects this fascinating species.

Dylan Roberts, from the GWCT's Salmon & Trout Research Centre at East Stoke said, "Understanding how extreme flooding impacts on salmon is complicated and can affect them in many ways during their life-cycle. Our long-term data helps us to understand these factors better, which in turn can help us improve their survival in the freshwater phase of their life-cycle."

To gain further insight on the plight of this iconic species, which has declined by 70 per cent over the past three decades, the GWCT fisheries scientists on the river Frome are collaborating with French scientists from the National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA) in Brittany.

This cross-border project called Morfish (Monitoring for Migratory Fish) is funded by the EU Interreg IV4A Channel Area programme and will run until June 2015. The aim of Morfish is to ensure that data from the three rivers – Rivers Frome in Dorset, the Oir in Normandy and the Scorff in Brittany – is collected in a similar way to facilitate their combined analysis. This will help us to better understand drivers underlying changes in our populations of migratory fish, particularly Atlantic salmon.

Both partners have recently completed their annual monitoring of the young salmon's migration as they leave their rivers in the spring for the sea as smolts. In one to three years' time, the surviving fish from this year will be counted as they return to their natal river as adults to spawn.

Dylan Roberts reports that the size of the smolt run on the River Frome this year was slightly smaller than normal with approximately 9,000 fish recorded as opposed to the an average of 11,000 over the last nine years. However, the smolt run on the Scorff proved to be better with around 10,000 young fish leaving the river and heading for the North Atlantic feeding grounds. Analysing these slight differences can be crucial in gaining further insight on fish survival both in the river and in the marine environment.

In addition, the fish scientists discovered that both English and French rivers experienced an earlier migration than normal probably caused by a mild winter followed by high flows in the spring.

Dylan Roberts said, "This early migration could have future implications on their survival and performance in the sea. We are not sure what this could mean in the long term, but a crucial element of our Morfish collaboration will be to gain a better understanding of these factors to better manage these iconic fish."

To obtain a copy of the GWCT's 2013 salmon research report, please contact Daniel O'Mahony on 01425 651060 or download a copy from the GWCT's website: www.gwct.org.uk/salmonreport2013

For further information on the MorFish project please visit www.morfish.org.uk.

Notes to editors: The European Interreg IVA France (Channel) – England Programme 2007-2013 is the IV generation of the Interreg programme between France and England. Around

the Channel, French and English cross-border territories share common challenges. Since 1990, the European Union has run the Interreg programme (strand A) which subsidises projects with cross-border partners willing to work together. Each border area thus becomes a forum for exchanges and orchestrated efforts between European neighbours. The programme has a total of 173.5 million euros in grant available through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust is an independent wildlife conservation charity which carries out scientific research into Britain's game and wildlife. We advise farmers and landowners on improving wildlife habitats and we lobby for agricultural and conservation policies based on science. We employ 14 post-doctoral scientists and 50 other research staff with expertise in areas such as birds, insects, mammals, farming, fish and statistics. We undertake our own research as well as projects funded by contract and grant-aid from Government and private bodies. The Trust is also responsible for a number of Government Biodiversity Action Plan species and is lead partner for grey partridge and joint lead partner for brown hare and black grouse. For Information, contact: Morag Walker – Head of Media, Telephone – 01425-652381 (direct 01425-651000) Mobile – 07736-124097 www.gwct.org.uk

The Institut National De La Recherche-Agronomique (INRA) INRA is the leading European agricultural research institute and one of the foremost institutes in the world for agriculture, food and the environment. It is also the second largest public research institute in France. Founded in 1946, the National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA) is a public research institution under the joint authority of the Ministry of Higher Education and Research and the Ministry of Agriculture, Agrifood and Forests. The research conducted at INRA concerns agriculture, food, nutrition and food safety, environment and land management, with particular emphasis on sustainable development. Government authorities, the farming and industrial worlds, and associations of citizens or consumers all have a crucial role to play in orienting, monitoring and valorizing research. INRA has an active partnership policy with: the socio-economic world: private companies, agricultural organisations, local authorities, public authorities which call upon the expertise of INRA scientists on the national, European and international levels. INRA is ranked 2nd in the world and 1st in Europe for publications in the agricultural sciences, and plant and animal sciences. It maintains scientific partnerships with major scientific research institutes worldwide, universities, and agronomy and veterinary schools, and is committed to helping build the European Research Area. It develops a large number of collaborative projects and exchanges with the scientific community in numerous countries in Europe, America, Asia and Africa. Human resources: 1,800 researchers, 2,500 engineers, 4,000 technicians and administrative staff, nearly 2,000 PhD students and more than 1,800 foreign students and researchers and approximately 2,000 interns hosted each year in research units.Organisation: 13 scientific divisions, 18 regional research centres, 6 metaprogrammes. Budget: €881,61 million for 2013.Status: public scientific and technological establishment (EPST)


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