

NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND MEDIA RELEASE
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The best places to watch salmon leap in Scotland

It is one of the iconic sights in Scottish wildlife, the final desperate stages in an epic journey which has taken them from river to ocean and back again.

There are moments when the task seems impossible, when the leap up and over a craggy waterfall seems too high for even the largest salmon. It is, as Rob Dewar explained, at times like this when miracles happen.

“It is such a thrill to watch,” explained the Natural Heritage Advisor for the National Trust for Scotland. “The salmon have gone through this extraordinary life cycle. They have been in the ocean for years and this homing instinct guides them back, through the rivers, to their breeding grounds.

“You see them at the waterfalls, throwing themselves up, hitting the rocks and falling, disappearing into the white surf. Then you see them emerge and try again and again until they make it.

“It is one of those iconic scenes in Scottish wildlife and, if you pick the right place and the right time, it is incredible to watch.”

October through November is the prime time to see Scotland’s Atlantic salmon return home and thousands make the journey along rivers and waterways during autumn.

This is when they are at their fittest and fattest and have the best chance of reaching the spawning redds, nests buried underwater in the gravel by females which are then fertilised by males.

The next generation of salmon then spend most of their early years in the rivers before moving to the ocean as adults. They then return home, on one final journey, to continue this relentless cycle.

Every year it becomes more difficult and in April 2019, Fisheries Management Scotland said stocks of Wild Salmon were at "crisis point".

So, is this ‘a last chance to see’ one of Scotland’s natural wonders?

The National Trust for Scotland is engaged in a number of projects designed to help the fish along the way. They extend beyond the building of salmon ladders and may not be immediately obvious to the untrained eye.

“We do what we can inland and, through our work and campaigning, to try and influence what is happening elsewhere,” explained Rob. “Unfortunately, some of the biggest issues are out of our hands, like ocean fishing and fish farms, from where we have seen sea lice spread to wild salmon populations.

“We work to improve river conditions and try to create the best habitats and give the fish the best chance of getting back in good numbers.

“At Crathes Castle we are allowing vegetation to hold up the flow of the river to create natural conditions for spawning and improve the river for the salmon. At Mar Lodge we are planting trees along the river, which helps moderate the temperature of the water and provide food for insects.

“If you come to Scotland on holiday it is sights like this that you really want to see. Through our work, we do our best to try and protect it.”

Killiecrankie is another prime spot for salmon spotting and several hundred years on from the dramatic Soldier’s Leap, where one young soldier jumped for his life while being pursued by Jacobites, you can see another breath-taking bid for survival.

“There is another perfect spot, near Killiecrankie,” added Rob, “just at the Linn of Tummel junction of the river Garry and Tummel – there’s a car park nearby and easy access. A fish ladder has also been installed at Crathes Castle, Aberdeenshire, where a tributary river flows into the River Dee.

“The best time to spot salmon is early morning and evenings in the autumn, October and November are the best months.

“A period of rain after a dry spell will provide the perfect conditions for the salmon to leap.

“All you have to do is find a good safe vantage point by the river looking for stretches with small waterfalls. This is the best opportunity to take some spectacular photographs using a fast shutter speed.”

Some of the locations are included in the National Trust for Scotland’s Stride out for Scotland campaign, which is encouraging people to get out and enjoy the nation’s most amazing outdoor spaces. For more information, visit nts.org.uk

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Editor's Notes:

The National Trust for Scotland is the charity that celebrates and protects Scotland's heritage. It relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work of caring for the natural and built heritage of Scotland for everyone to enjoy.

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