

Sea trout and the seas around Wester Ross

White-tailed (sea) eagle

Trawling: Rising fuel prices provide additional incentives for the further development of alternative, more selective, fishing methods.

Gannet

Sea birds:

The 'catastrophic and unprecedented breeding failure' around the West of Scotland in 2005 has been attributed to a shortage of sandeels (RSPB).

Seals: Populations of both harbour and grey seals are near recorded highs. There are few natural predators in local waters (rare Orca sightings). Formerly culled by salmon netmen.

Otter:

Widespread and abundant around the coastline. Feeds on small fishes and crabs. Diet is unlikely to include healthy sea trout in the sea.

Phytoplankton: Production depends upon sunlight and dissolved nutrient concentrations, and reaches a peak in early summer.

Zooplankton: Changes in the relative abundance of important *Calanus* species may be related to global climatic change.

Minke whale and porpoise: Target sandeels in the early summer, then sprat and herring from mid-summer onwards. Whales were less common in 2005 than in 2004.

Herring and sprat: Herring stocks around the west of Scotland were lower in 2005 than in 2004, with particularly few fish in the Minch (ICES).

Small gadoids: Pollack, Saithe, Whiting, etc.

Sandeels: of vital importance for sea birds, marine mammals and many fish species. ICES advise that the current status of West Coast sandeels is 'unknown'.

Jellyfish: Dense aggregations of moon jellyfish formed in local sea lochs during summer 2005. Jellyfish may out-compete juvenile fin-fish for zooplankton.

Pollack: Large pollack may be significant predators of small sea trout. Gadoids (including Pollack) are important food for seals.

Cod, Haddock and Whiting: Taken as bycatch by *nephrops* trawlers. Cod and whiting stocks are near historic low levels; haddock at sustainable levels.

Sea trout: Kelts, over-wintered finnock and smolts may be particularly vulnerable when water temperatures are still cold in spring, especially if health is compromised (e.g. by sea lice infection).

Common prawn: Other small crustaceans are also of importance as food for sea trout.

Common shrimp: Emerges from sand to feed at night. An important food for many fish species.

Nephrops: Live in burrows in deeper water. Fishermen in Loch Torridon catch only larger *nephrops* by using creels with 'hatches' that allow smaller *nephrops* to escape (MSC 'Sustainable Fishery').