

Wester Ross Fisheries Trust Newsletter, October 2026



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Chairperson's foreword

Since the last WRFT newsletter (February 2026), the Trust has been a hive of industry. There have been changes in personnel; our Chair, Dr Michael Aitchison, stood down (luckily for me, he continues to advise as Outgoing Chair) and Dr Sue Ward retired from her post as Administrator. Their enduring contributions were celebrated at a (very summery) Riverside Picnic on the banks of the Dundonnell River.

Since then, the Trust has been joined by Leah Booker, our new Administrator, by India Thomas, our new Seagrass Officer (Dr Diorbhail Wentworth becoming Seagrass Project Manager) and by Mairin Tibbitt as Fisheries Management Scotland-Nature Scot Intern, who works closely with our Biologist, Peter Cunningham. The Seagrass Project also benefitted from two studentships, won by Christina Beams and Lilja Alam. As well as Peter's and Diorbhail's specific reports, the other WRFT colleagues also contributed to this newsletter, offering samples of their experiences to the reader and making it something of a 'multi-author document'.

As new personnel join us, the wide range of Trust activities continues. They reflect our core purposes; to research, monitor, conserve, inform and to educate. It is worth noting how, although the many WRFT activities span a gamut of habitats, they combine to reflect the interdependence and the importance of the freshwater-marine interface. Similarly, WRFT research and monitoring activities combine to inform and educate local communities, visitors and wider audiences about the diversity and value of the aquatic ecosystems within Wester Ross.

I hope readers will appreciate that Wester Ross Fisheries Trust is a product of its people; volunteers, helpers, students, interns, employees, members and trustees. Our volunteers and our helpers are the Trust's lifeblood and I thank them all; for their irrepressible enthusiasm and support. My own first contact with the Trust occurred when I volunteered as 'bucket monkey' so, if you would like to contribute by joining us (our membership form is at the end of this newsletter), who knows where it may lead...

Dr Steve Kett, October 2026

Cover pictures (clockwise from top right):

WRFT sea trout monitoring team by Gruinard Bay, August 2026; and by Flowerdale, September 2026; salmon and trout fry from the Allt Beith, September 2026; a catshark over seagrass meadow by Red Point, August 2026; WRFT sweep netting, Torridon, August 2026; Preparing seagrass plants for planting at Inverasdale, July 2026; snorkel survey for seagrass meadows at Red Point far beach, August 2026; seagrass project planting team, July 2026.

Please note that all pictures of fish in this report are of fish which were lightly sedated for the purpose of being able to record length and other data prior to being returned to the water following recovery.

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New WRFT staff members

The WRFT office has been very busy over summer. We've been delighted to welcome new staff and students, all helping to further the work of the Trust.

In June, India Thomas took on the role as WRFT seagrass Project Officer with Dr Diorbhail Wentworth becoming WRFT seagrass project manager, and Mairin Tibbitt started her Fisheries Management Scotland – Nature Scot internship.

We were also joined by seagrass project students Lilja Alam and Cristina Beams during the summer.

(right) Dr Sue Ward, Dr Michael Aitchison, Dr Steve Kett and others by the Dundonnell River following a retirement lunch for Sue and Michael on 17th July 2026. Thank you to Alasdair Macdonald, Sophie Macdonald, Dr James Close and others for providing food.

In August 2026, following Dr Sue Ward's retirement *(right)*, Leah Booker started work as WRFT Administrator. Here's what Leah had to say:

"Having visited the area many times in the past with my grandparents living here I finally made the move myself from Yorkshire last year. I come from a mainly Agriculture based background working with livestock and office-based duties which also involved aspects of conservation work, mainly upland conservation. With this background I feel I am well suited to my new role as administrator for the Trust although it is within a slightly different sector it is still carrying on conservation work which I feel will be a very interesting and varied role."

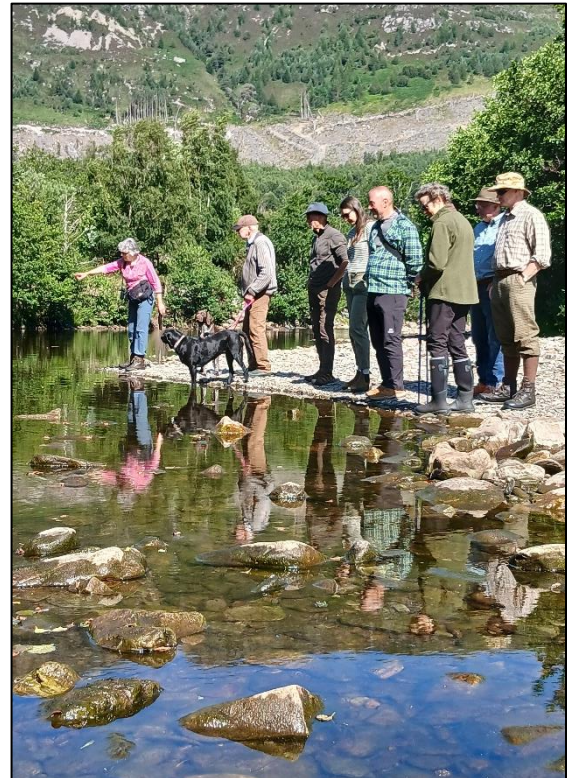
And from India and Mairin:

"As a marine biologist and self-confessed seagrass nerd, it's been a pleasure to take on the role of Seagrass Project Officer. In my previous work, I have surveyed seagrass meadows across the Mediterranean and Indo-Pacific, and I particularly enjoy searching for and surveying seagrass beds across Wester Ross as part of this role. Wester Ross is home to incredible marine biodiversity, and I am happy to play a small part in protecting and restoring it in the face of environmental threats." **India Thomas**



"I recently left high school this year, as I have taken a year out before I go to the University of Aberdeen to study Scots law. I've always been passionate about the natural environment around me and hope that once I finish university, I can pursue a career in environmental and marine law. This internship has been a really great opportunity for me to understand more about the environmental and fisheries issues around the Wester Ross area; being able to gain a deeper insight into what we can do to help protect keystone species and habitats. I am really looking forward to the next stages of my internship." **Mairin Tibbitt**

(left) Mairin Tibbitt and Ben Rushbrooke measuring juvenile fish by Tournai



Spawning herring; bait balls of sandeels, sprats and herring fry

Our fish survey year started in late February with shore watches for signs of shoals of herring approaching spawning grounds (*right*). An abundance of spawning herring in coastal waters is great for other wildlife and fisheries; subsequently herring larvae and fry provide ideal food for migrating post-smolt salmon and sea trout.

Wildlife associated with herring shoals seen from the shore in early March 2026 included three minke whales, a humpback whale, 20 porpoises, 20+ seals (mostly grey seals), pods of common dolphins (mostly further offshore); and up to 40 gannets (that's down from several hundred in some previous years).



Observations from the shore suggested major spawning events from 4th March near North Erradale; and to within 300m of the shore near Carr Point around 18th March. Dive teams (from elsewhere) confirmed widespread herring spawn on the seabed both to the north of Gairloch (west of North Erradale – Melvaig) and to the south-west of Gairloch (west of Opinan and South Erradale). Herring spawn was observed on clean maerl gravel and on sugar kelp as in 2025 (see <https://wrft.org.uk/news/newsitem.cfm?id=261>).

In August 2026, shoals of sandeels, juvenile herring and sprats attracted hundreds of guillemots and razorbills which created bait-balls near the surface attracting flocks of gulls (several species), gannets, common dolphins, porpoises and minke whales, all of which could be seen from the shore around Wester Ross. Several thousand seabirds were seen in Loch Gairloch on 30th and 31st August; the biggest seabird gatherings in Loch Gairloch for several years.

Wester Ross based wildlife tour boats recorded minke whales lunge feeding on bait balls of juvenile clupeids close to Gairloch (*below*).



(left) minke whale feeding on a bait ball of small clupeids, possibly including juvenile herring in late August 2026 just outside Loch Gairloch. Photo by Donna Hopton, [Gairloch Wildlife Cruises](#)

In early September many of the seabirds dispersed away from Loch Gairloch following a change in weather conditions.

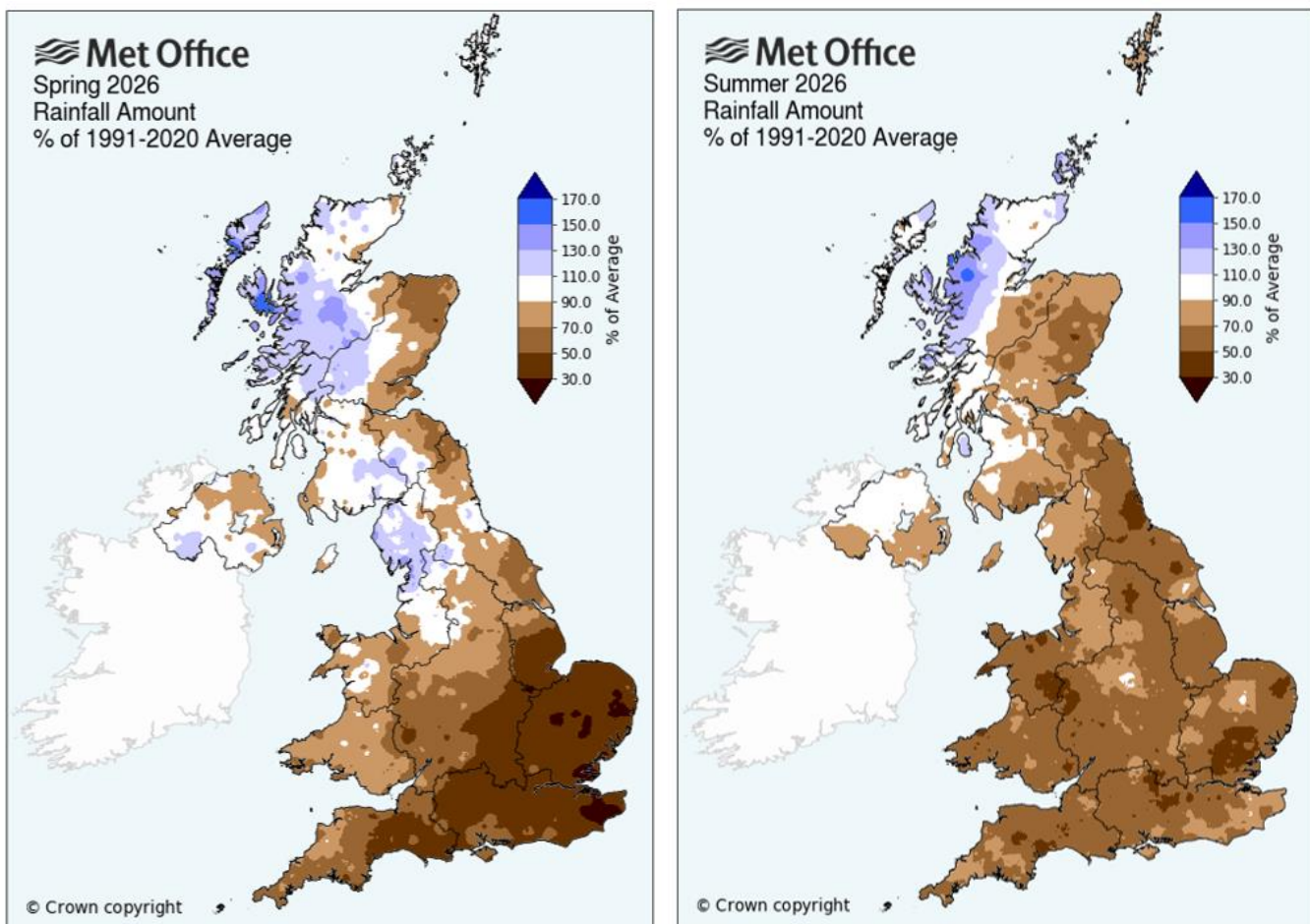
Thank you to many volunteers for helping to watch for signs of spawning herring and to dive teams for support and for reporting observations of herring spawn during March; and to observers on wildlife tour boats and elsewhere for reporting observations.

Wester Ross: the wettest place in the UK during the summer of 2026

For the sea trout and wild salmon of Wester Ross, 2026 has been a relatively good year. A brief period of low water at the end of April and into early May may have delayed migration of salmon and sea trout smolts from some rivers; however thereafter there has been much rain and water levels have been generally good for supporting production of juvenile fish and for salmon angling, in contrast to much of the rest of the UK which experienced drought conditions and very high temperatures.

Wester Ross was the only part of the UK where the summer 2026 rainfall was over 130% of the 1991 to 2020 average in 2026 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Rainfall maps for Spring and Summer 2026, compared to the 1991 to 2020 average. Source: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/climate/maps-and-data/uk-actual-and-anomaly-maps>. Note that these maps are based on the HadUK-Grid dataset. Maps for the most recent year are provisional. Maps for previous years are updated on an annual basis in-line with the latest version of this dataset. Contains Met Office data © Crown copyright 2026; copied under the [Open Government Licence](#).



High river levels delayed some of our planned juvenile fish surveys until the autumn; however, there have also been many good sunny days with light winds to be able to get on with other activities.

Fewer sea lice on sea trout sampled at Gairloch in 2026 than in 2025

Wester Ross was formerly well known for its sea trout fisheries including those of Loch Maree. Sea trout (*Salmo trutta*) have been sampled by WRFT in coastal waters around Wester Ross since 1996 to learn more about factors affecting sea trout productivity.

A major issue of concern has been the infestation of sea trout by the parasitic sea louse, *Lepeophtheirus salmonis*. In 2026, sea trout were sampled from the shore by the WRFT sweep netting team at five sites around Wester Ross between April and early October primarily to inform nearby salmon farm Environment Management Plans [EMPS] of lice levels on wild fish. Samples of trout were also taken at new sites near Kishorn to provide data for the Scottish Environment Protection Agency [SEPA] which has been tasked with developing a sea lice regulatory framework for salmon farms.

Sea trout sampling team at Flowerdale, Loch Gairloch, in July 2026



Table 1 summarises results of sampling for sea trout in 2026. The main findings were as follows:

In the Kanaird estuary north of Ullapool, 30 fish were sampled on 2nd June: a mix of sea trout and ‘estuarine’ trout. Some of these fish had lice-damaged dorsal fins, indicative of high lice infestation in nearby waters earlier in the spring.

The largest samples of sea trout were taken at Gairloch. In contrast to samples taken in previous years including 2023 and [2025](#), none of the fish sampled at Gairloch in 2026 carried sea lice numbers high enough to be a likely cause of premature mortality.

Few sea trout were sampled at Torridon; those seen, including some adult fish, carried low numbers of parasitic lice.

There were fewer lice damaged sea trout in samples taken at Applecross in 2026 than in 2025. Only four sea trout with over 0.3 lice per gram fish weight were recorded; all these fish were small post-smolt sea trout and were taken at Applecross on 19th May 2026 demonstrating high lice infestation pressures in the sea not so far away.

At nearly all sea trout monitoring sites, many of the larger trout had damaged but healing dorsal fins indicative of sea lice infestation earlier in the year or in earlier years. Anglers also reported catching sea trout with lice-damaged dorsal fins, particularly around the Loch Broom and Little Loch Broom areas.

Table 1 Summary of results of sea trout sampling around Wester Ross in 2026 (north to south). All fish were caught using a seine net unless stated otherwise.

Date	Location	Number of fish in sample	Average length (mm)	Average condition factor*	Sea lice prevalence (%)	Sea lice infestation intensity*	Average number of lice per gram	Average dorsal fin damage score*	Comments
02-Jun-26	Kanaird	30	195	0.97	47	7.4	0.02	0.07	
11-Aug-26	Kanaird	11	276	1.07	27	5.7	0.01	1.05	
22-Sep-26	Kanaird	7	276	0.82	0	0	0	0.57	river high, fish caught in freshwater
19-Jun-26	Gruinard	5	252	1.29	40	1	0	0.2	
31-Jul-26	Gruinard	2	252	1.04	50	6	0	0	
01-Sep-26	Gruinard	0							
29-Sep-26	Gruinard	3	397	1.13	0	0	0	0.5	
28-May-26	Firemore	0							waves too big
27-Jul-26	Mel. Chalres	0							waves too big
27-Jul-26	Balnaluib	0							
16-Apr-26	Gairloch	15	249	0.86	67	4	0.01	0.68	
12-Jun-26	Gairloch	30	162	1.05	3	7	0	0.03	
14-Jul-26	Gairloch	18	279	1.12	59	5.2	0.01	0.92	
27-Aug-26	Gairloch	31	332	1.12	97	5.7	0.02	1.18	mostly healed dorsal fins
25-Sep-26	Gairloch	13	318	0.96	77	4.85	0.02	0.89	mostly healed dorsal fins
21-May-26	Torridon	2	133	0.89	0	0	0	1	
30-Jun-26	Torridon	6	208	1.07	0	0	0	0	
20-Jul-26	Torridon	8	335	1.17	88	13	0.02	0.88	
26-Aug-26	Torridon	1	195	1.01	0	0	0	0	off-shore wind
16-Sep-26	Torridon	2	212	1.06	0	0	0	0	
19-May-26	Applecross	30	165	0.82	33	14.9	0.11	0	
16-Jul-26	Applecross	3	167	1.07	0	0	0	0	
18-Aug-26	Applecross	12	248	1.11	67	7.7	0.02	0.96	rod & line catch; river too high to net
04-Jun-26	Kishorn	25	326	1.15	24	3.67	0	0.76	mix of estuary trout and sea trout
02-Jul-26	Kishorn	16	345	1.04	0	0	0		tide out; <i>Saprolegnia</i> on some fish
13-Aug-26	Achintraid	1	120		0	0	0	0	

***Notes:**

Condition factor = (fish weight [grams] x100) / ((fish length [mm] /10) ^ 3)

Prevalence = % of fish in the sample carrying sea lice

Intensity = average number of lice on the lice infested fish in the sample

Dorsal fin damage score : '0 no dorsal fin damage; 1 up to 1/3 of dorsal fin damaged; 2 between 1/3 and 2/3 of dorsal fin damaged; 3 over 2/3 of dorsal fin damaged

Primary purpose of sampling

	to inform Ardmair salmon farm EMP
	WRASFB funded exploratory sampling in Loch Ewe
	to inform Torridon salmon farms EMP
	to inform Caol Mor (East of Skye) salmon farms EMP
	SEPA contract sites

WRFT was also contracted by SEPA via Fisheries Management Scotland to sample sea trout by Loch Kishorn, just to the south of the area normally covered by Wester Ross Fisheries Trust. In addition to sea trout (carrying low numbers of lice), many estuarine trout were caught. In the sample taken at Kishorn on 2nd July 2026, some of the trout had ulcerations around the head, thought to have been caused by the cotton mould *Saprolegnia* spp.

There is currently much concern in other parts of Scotland that new *Saprolegnia* strains are developing that cause higher levels of mortality of wild salmon. Fish kills in the River Findhorn and other east coast rivers have been linked to *Saprolegnia*. Please follow FMS biosecurity advice and disinfect with Vircon Aquatic (or a similar product), especially after fishing in a river or loch where high concentrations of fish pathogens may be present.

Sea trout of 300mm carrying 69 sea lice with (below) associated damage to dorsal fin and pelvic fins. Kanaird, 2nd June 2026.



Two factors may have contributed to generally lower sea lice levels recorded in 2026. Firstly, many nearby salmon farms were fallow from late winter prior to initial sampling in April, including those in Loch Torridon and by Loch Kishorn. The reported cumulative on-farm biomass of salmon between Gairloch, Loch Carron and the Isle of Skye during spring 2026 was the lowest for many years. An extended fallow period at this time of year with corresponding low concentrations of infective stage sea lice in nearby coastal waters may also improve survival of post-smolt salmon as they migrate through nearby coastal waters. Thank you to fish farm operators MOWI, Bakkafrøst and Scottish Sea Farms for fallowing their farms during this period.

Secondly, wet summers help to limit infestation of sea lice on both farmed and wild fish. *L. salmonis* lice are unable to survive for long in freshwater. Indeed, salmon farming companies often use freshwater baths (now on large well boats) to help to control sea lice on farmed fish.

Further north, however, some of the salmon farms in west Sutherland reported high lice counts on their fish during spring months, so the onward migration of post-smolt salmon from Wester Ross may have not been entirely free of high sea lice infestation pressure. Monitoring of wild salmon in the River Laxford by the Atlantic Salmon Trust may help to clarify the impact of sea lice infestation in coastal waters nearby.

Our biggest ever sea trout!

On 19th June 2026, the WRFT sweep netting team led by Nic Butler caught the largest sea trout recorded to date by Wester Ross Fisheries Trust (since the Trust was formed in 1996), a fish of 630mm, 3250g (7lb). The WRFT Biologist (when he returned from holiday in the Uists!) recognised this fish by its spot patterns as one that had previously been caught in 2024, when it measured 540mm. What a fish! Well done everyone 😊

Sea trout length 540mm, 9th August 2024, weight not recorded. No sea lice, dorsal fin damage score 1.



Recapture: Sea trout 630mm, 3250g, condition factor 1.30, 19th June 2026, 1 preadult louse. Same fish as the one above! Age about 10 years old (to be confirmed by scale reading . . .)



For permissions and support for sea trout sampling in 2026, thank you to Kanchulish estate, Eilean Darach estate, Dundonnell estate, Gairloch estate, NTS Torridon, Beinn Damph estate, the Applecross Trust, members of Achiltibuie Angling Club, Nature Scot Beinn Eighe NNR, Fisheries Management Scotland, WRF Ardmair salmon farm and many helpers (see end of Newsletter). Sea trout sampling was funded by MOWI, Bakkafrøst, Wester Ross Area Salmon Fisheries Board, and SEPA via Fisheries Management Scotland.

A report with further details of sea trout sampling and other information will be prepared in the coming months.

Salmon fry missing from the headwaters of the River Ewe, parts of the River Balgy system and main spawning burn at Tournai

Following a detailed survey of juvenile salmon distribution and occurrence in Wester Ross in 2025 (see [Status of Juvenile Salmon in Wester Ross Report for 2025](#)), juvenile fish surveys have been carried out in six river systems so far this year (2026): the River Broom, the little Tournai River, the Bruachaig River (above the Bruachaig falls, near Kinlochewe), the Torridon River, the River Balgy and the Applecross River. Our main findings have been as follows:

Although much modified by historic channelisation and embankment, the River Broom provides ideal habitat for wild Atlantic salmon and retains an important population. In July, salmon fry and parr were found throughout the accessible area of the River Broom at levels of abundance indicative of healthy populations. We also explored in the River Cuileig above the Linn falls (below) where local anecdotes suggested salmon were historically present; but found no juvenile salmon here. Our survey of juvenile salmon in the Broom this year is part of a contract for the Scottish Wildlife Trust [SWT]. Inverbroom (which includes most of the left bank of the River Broom) is now the SWT's largest nature reserve.



In contrast to the Broom, the little Tournai River system by Loch Ewe is one of the smallest to have supported wild salmon. Since 1999, WRFT has monitoring juvenile salmon and trout emigrating from the river in the spring and adult salmon and sea trout returning to freshwater via fish traps in an old fish ladder. Numbers of fish travelling in both directions have fallen to low numbers in recent years. Earlier this year, a new downstream trap was installed using trap sections recovered from the former Marine Scotland Science's Shildaig Seatrout Project trap by Loch Torridon. Fewer salmon smolts were recorded during the spring than anticipated; this was thought to be partly due to low water and predation; a brash-dam blockage caused by a fallen tree may have obstructed downstream progress.

In August, salmon fry and one-year-old parr were found in the lowest 400m of the Allt na Coille, the spawning burn above Loch nan Dailthean demonstrating spawning of salmon in 2025. However, no salmon fry or one-year old parr were found above the lower falls in this burn.

Otters frequent the burns at Tournai; and on 11th August 2026, 20 harbour seals and 30 very energetic common dolphins were seen to within 500m of the burn mouth.

The Bruachaig River flows into the Kinlochewe River which flows into Loch Maree. WRFT supported a stocking programme to restore a self-sustaining wild salmon population in the Bruachaig River until 2012. Two run-of-the-river hydropower projects were subsequently developed in the Bruachaig River; a fish pass was installed through the intake weir of the lower Bruachaig falls scheme to enable adult salmon to reach the large area of habitat where juvenile salmon had been stocked in earlier years.

Salmon spawned above the falls and fish pass in 2018 and thereafter in several years up until 2023; these may have included progeny of fish stocked in earlier years. However, on 25th August 2026, no salmon fry were found at any of the four electro-fishing sites surveyed above the Bruachaig falls. At one of the sites in slightly deeper, faster flowing water, some large 2+ or 3+ year old salmon parr were recorded, so not quite all gone. . . (below right).



The Torridon River and the upper parts of the River Balgy were surveyed to inform the Torridon salmon farms environment management plan [Torridon EMP]. Water levels were high on the day of survey at Torridon (29/7); nevertheless, moderate numbers of salmon fry as well as parr were found at core sites in the Torridon River and at two sites in the River Balgy system above Loch Damh (9/9). However, salmon fry were not found in the Allt Eisd (tributary of Abhainn Dearg above Loch Damh) and no juvenile salmon were found in the burn flowing into the top of Loch an Loin by Glasnock.

(right) these juvenile salmon from the Loch Coultrie burn where it flows into Loch Damh on 9th September 2026 had slightly eroded caudal fins and / or opercula.

In the Applecross River (7/10), salmon fry were found in the Allt Coire Attadale 800m upstream from the top of the main Applecross River at the top of the glen; and at high catch per unit effort in the main river at a site 2km further downstream.

There is still uncertainty as to how far upstream salmon were formerly able to ascend within the Allt Coire Attadale. Were they able to make it all the way to the lochs at the top of the glen?



Seagrass Meadows Scotland SMEEF project update

By Dr Diorbhail Wentworth (WRFT Seagrass Project manager) and India Thomas (WRFT Project Officer)

Seagrass (*Zostera marina*) meadows can provide excellent habitat for sea trout and other marine fish and wildlife. WRFT received funding in March 2025 from SMEEF to restore a seagrass meadow near Inverasdale in Loch Ewe, with funding running until March 2028 (see [WRFT Newsletter February 2026](#)).

In March 2026 we were successful in securing additional funding from SMEEF which has seen our restoration area target expand from 0.5 hectares to 1.5 hectares. This additional funding also included a project officer post, and India Thomas joined the Trust in June this year. India has since been busy surveying local seagrass beds (see below). The aim of these surveys is to identify local beds that can act as donor sites, thereby removing our reliance on storm wash-up for planting. Other than surveys, the seagrass project has been kept busy with lots of other activities.

Seagrass nursery build

We also secured funding through SMEEF and the Scottish Government Nature Restoration Fund to build our seagrass nursery. There was a tight deadline, so the build had to go ahead through the winter months, but we now have a fully working nursery consisting of three large tanks with pumps and UV filters, housed in a polytunnel. The fund also paid for a shed for kit storage. Huge thanks to Ant Hall for the design and build, and Kate and Duncan Donald for letting us build on their croft.

(Below) Building the polytunnel for the seagrass nursery, Inverasdale, 22nd March 2026



Collection of storms wash up

Staff and volunteers are getting a better idea of when to head out to search beaches for storm wash-up following high winds and big seas; success can be very dependent on a combination of wind direction, tide, and sea state. So far this year the far beach at Redpoint, Opinan beach, Port Henderson beach, Gairloch beaches, and the beach at Big Sands have all provided us with wash-up.

Seagrass planting

We have had six days of planting and planted 925 shoots over 0.44 hectares. These days are a huge team effort, however we are learning more efficient methods all the time.

We have been out numerous times to monitor the planted seagrass. We have utilised two methods, one where we attach metal washers to shoots to weigh them down and other methods where we plant shoots in hessian bags that act as pots. Overall, the washer method appears more successful, but we were delighted to see brand new shoots and a 15-spined stickleback amongst the hessian bags we planted in July. Fingers crossed the fresh growth survives the winter and the plants continue to thrive next year.



(right) planting at restoration site, 14th August 2026

Setting up collaborations

The project manager, Diorbhail Wentworth, recently visited another SMEEF funded seagrass project in Barra. Whilst there we helped with a seagrass survey and started to set up a system for sharing material as they have much more washing up in storms than we do.

Studentships

We also had two students working with us for five weeks over the summer. Lilja and Cristina were kept busy with surveys, planting, collecting storm wash up, and tending for plants in the nursery. They were a huge asset to the trust during their time here and we hope the experiences they gained will help them in their future careers. See later in this newsletter for reports in their own words.

(right) Lilja Alam, Peter Cunningham, Cristina Beams and India Thomas on a boat trip in Loch Gairloch, September 2026.



A previously undocumented seagrass bed discovered near Red Point

Surveys this summer have focused on finding and surveying suitable donor seagrass meadows that could potentially be used to harvest seagrass plants next year. These have been led by India.



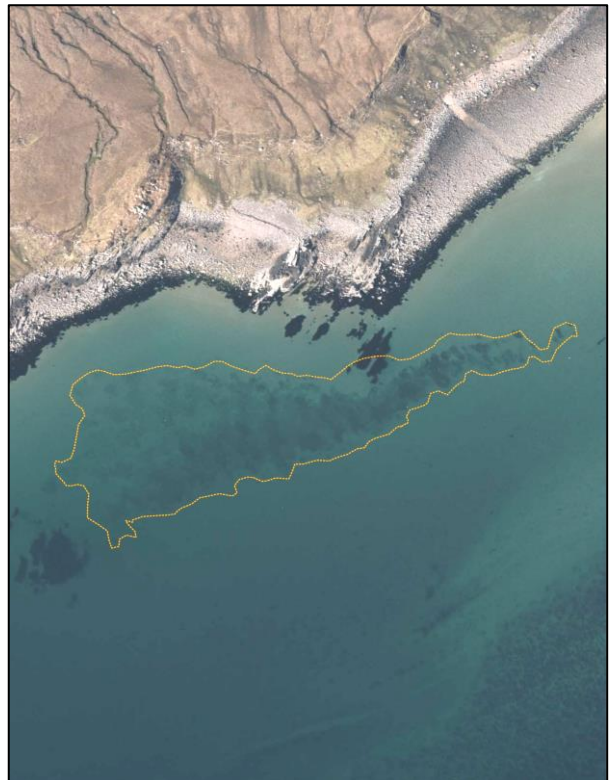
At the start of summer, we conducted drone surveys, taking photos of potential and known seagrass locations to investigate mysterious dark patches in the water. This included Gairloch beach, Second Coast, Gruinard, Mungasdale and Red Point. From this, we identified several potential new areas of seagrass.

Following this, we conducted snorkel-based surveys to ground-truth the areas we had identified and map any known or newly discovered seagrass meadows. In total, we have mapped six seagrass meadows this summer, including three beds that have never been recorded before.

(left) India Thomas planting seagrass at restoration site, 16th July 2026

One particularly exciting moment was finding a seagrass meadow covering 1.6 hectares at Red Point south beach. There have been a couple of previous records of seagrass in this area, but in a shallower location than the meadow that we found. The 1.6-hectare bed is in water around 5 metres deep at low tide, meaning it sits at approximately 10 metres at high tide. This is close to the reported maximum depth at which seagrass can grow in the UK, likely due to the lovely, clear waters around Red Point.

(right) Map showing the extent of a seagrass bed at Red Point South Beach, mapped using a hand-held GPS in August 2026. Satellite basemap © Microsoft Corporation, Bing™ Maps



Further seagrass searching was also carried out using our new Seavu camera kit, a system that allows a GoPro to be mounted below a vessel while providing a live view from a tablet. We conducted a kayak survey around Gruinard Bay using this setup and found further previously unrecorded seagrass, as well as a new area of unrecorded maerl.

The focus is now shifting towards more in-depth quadrat surveys of the potential donor meadows we have identified. We previously conducted a quadrat survey at Gruinard Slipway using randomly selected quadrat locations.

Seagrass student reports from Lilja and Cristina



"One of the most memorable moments I'll be taking away from my studentship was during a seagrass survey out at Red Point, where we were out looking for seagrass to map out. There was such an infectious burst of excitement (and lots of screaming underwater) when we first stumbled upon the edge of the bed. We spent an hour and a half snorkelling around the meadow, mapping out the area. This was the largest seagrass meadow I had ever laid my eyes on, and it was one of those moments that I feel really captured the passion our team had for this marine habitat."

My overall experience on this studentship was honestly just so refreshing. From the people, to the place, to all the different levels of seagrass restoration work I had the opportunity to be a part of, it not only increased my knowledge within restoration, but also my confidence in the field and in myself. Before coming in, my confidence was definitely a lot more shaky, but the support from the team at Wester Ross Fisheries Trust, alongside being in the water most days and actually getting to use the skills I had picked up throughout my career journey, made such a difference. With each survey, ID guide, experiment and piece of writing, my confidence in myself and my abilities as a marine scientist and restorationist grew."

It was a short but intensive placement, but I came out of it feeling more than ever that I'd be able to lead my own surveys and experiments, with stronger in-water skills and plenty of new skills I would not have thought to pick up myself, from using satellite imagery to plan seagrass searches to learning different restoration and nursery techniques, to getting kayak certified. Overall, this has perhaps been the most helpful placement of my career so far, and a huge part of that is down to the people at WRFT, their positive attitude towards the project, and the encouragement they gave us to come up with our own ideas and really take ownership of the work we were doing." Lilja Alam



"My time at Wester Ross Fisheries Trust was unforgettable, and I enjoyed every minute working with the dedicated, friendly team. Over five weeks, I gained first-hand experience in seagrass restoration, from seagrass planting to snorkel surveys. These experiences allowed me to gain insight into the daily operations of seagrass restoration, while obtaining confidence in the demands that conservation work requires.

As this was my first time working in seagrass restoration, I developed new knowledge about seagrass ecosystems and their importance across Wester Ross and globally, within a supportive network of scientists and volunteers. I learned to execute snorkel surveys with efficiency and careful planning, and I successfully conducted experiments both at the nursery ponds and in an aquarium tank. I feel that these particular skills will equip me for my future aspirations of pursuing research, and I will carry these through my career as a marine scientist. I am very grateful for this wonderful opportunity with the Wester Ross Fisheries Trust." **Cristina Beams**

Studentship photos are from Lilja and taken during September 2026 in preparation for Seagrass planting.



FMS - NatureScot internship update

by Mairin Tibbitt

'Within my first week at the Trust, I was busy helping with sweep netting in the Flowerdale estuary and ocean ecology workshops for the schools in Gairloch - even paying a visit to the seagrass nursery with Diorbhail and India to do a water change for the plants we had at the time. Sweep netting has been interesting, being able to meet all the other volunteers and helpers with the Trust as well as travel around Wester Ross learning about the lice populations and the work the Trust does to monitor this was really new to me but equally exciting.

Over the last few months I have had numerous training courses, some with the Trust and some funded as part of the internship, a few of these include; First aid training, Kayak training, Electrofishing course, Hydromorphology level one RRC, Freshwater pearl mussel talks, and an ARC GIS course in October. All of which I am grateful for and have helped me further my skills and understanding of what the Trust does and other marine conservation bodies. These have also been crucial in providing a baseline of knowledge for a lot of the outdoor field work we do at WRFT.

It has also been lovely to meet the interns at the other Trusts across Scotland on our training days, being able to swap stories of our experiences with each Trust and learn about everyone's backgrounds. The variety across each Trust depending on their location in Scotland is incredible. It also highlighted to me the importance of the work that happens at WRFT, since we live in such a rural and coastal fishing area - the water quality and wild fish populations are crucial to not only the environment but also the community for people's livelihoods and income.

Whilst working with WRFT I have also been able to pursue some of my own interests. Between site days I have written up a small [article on the Loch Maree fisheries system](#). Previously, Sue Pomeroy (very helpfully!) interviewed many of the older fisherman and ghillies that used to work on the loch and we had a growing collection of information around the office waiting to be written up so this was a really nice project that helped me ease into working at the Trust.

Recently, I have been able to utilise the skills I learnt in my training courses. Over the next few months, I am hoping to complete a habitat survey of the South Erradale burn only a few miles away from the office. This is in line with our FMS targets for the Wester Ross area for 2028 and it is helping the Trust come slightly closer to their overall goals for the next few years. The hydromorphology course will be useful here. I'll be using a QGIS system that I have been working on as a forum for the habitat survey, using drone photos from the river which are collected in partnership with India.

It's been lovely to help contribute to the Seagrass project we have at the Trust. Helping to discover existing beds using drone surveys, collecting storm fragments and working with volunteers at our restoration site in Loch Ewe, this job has really helped me gain a wider insight into conservation work for fisheries and marine areas for Scotland.



It has also helped me learn that no two days are the same - which I really enjoy. This internship and the opportunities available to me at the Trust are fantastic reminders of why I want to have a career in environmental law. Over the next coming months, I am excited to see where these projects will lead, and how we can continue to preserve, educate and monitor local aquatic habitats in Wester Ross.'



New roadside interpretation panels by Gruinard Bay

Four new interpretation panels have been put up by a layby by the A832 overlooking Gruinard Bay between Laide and Second Coast to provide information about wild fish and other wildlife, the Wester Ross Marine Protected Area and the importance of the area for wild Atlantic salmon conservation.

The four designs for the interpretative panels and other posters about fisheries and wildlife in Wester Ross fisheries can be found here <https://www.wrft.org.uk/downloads/files.cfm?id=13>.

Thank you to Aultbea Estate, the local grazings committee, The Highland Council, Sea Changers, Wester Ross Biosphere, Little Loch Broom Marine Life, North Highland Initiative and R. Wotherspoon Fencing Ltd for permissions and for support.



Social media update

New Instagram and LinkedIn pages have been set up by Mairin and India who are trying to post as frequently as possible to allow organisations and the local communities to be aware of the conservation and other work the Trust is doing. Daily updates and expanding local knowledge of what we are doing (especially for the seagrass project) are great to network with neighbouring communities and potentially reach a wider audience. Helping to contribute towards the Trusts educational targets for 2028. Please see [Instagram WRFT](#) and [Linkedin web page](#).



A new facebook page has also been set up following loss of access to a previous facebook page

To follow along with WRFT's journey of conservation and monitoring around Wester Ross, please follow these pages or search '*Wester Ross Fisheries Trust*'.

Thank you to everyone else . . .

Our work has been supported by a loyal and experienced team of part-time assistants and other helpers. Many thanks to Nic B, Chloe and Ant H (and Trixie), Dr Ginevra H, Tracy M, Roger M, , Nicky MJ, Stephen B, Rachel H, Bruce M, Rob and Mel M, Eilidh M, Jonny S, Jonathan S, Mojo MJ, Fee M, Ben R, Sgt. Kieran M, Huw and Sophie B, James C, Amelie C, Alison H, Greg W, Rob M, Iain S, Murray S, Charlie H, Nature Scot Beinn Eighe NNR volunteers, WRF Ardmair salmon farm helpers, Gerry M, Keith D, Alasdair M, Mark M, Wayne and Robbie G, Billy B (SWT), Alex G, Sandy B, Dr Paul K and Peyton K, Donna H, Steve T, Andy V, Doug A, Olly S & team, Toby L, Alasdair M, Donald R & family, Prof Annie W. Thank you to Duncan and Kate D for seagrass project support. Thank you to Maxine G for helping as WRFT administrator.

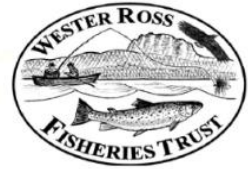
For continued use of our office by the harbour in Gairloch, thank you to the Estate of Gairloch. Thank you to Alan W, Helen F, Graeme C and Brian D at Fisheries Management Scotland. Thank you to Wester Ross Area Salmon Fisheries Board.

For permissions and other support, thank you to Prof Eric M, Keanchulish estate, Foich estate, SWT Inverbroom, Dundonnell estate, Eilan Darach Estate, Aultbea estate, Tournaig estate, Inverasdale estate, Coulin estate, NTS Torridon, Beinn Damph estate, Applecross Trust, F Wotherspoon Fencing Ltd.

. . . and all those who have supported our work over the past six months.

WESTER ROSS FISHERIES TRUST: MEMBERSHIP FORM

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Please return via email to: admin@wrft.org.uk or by post to:
Wester Ross Fisheries Trust, Harbour Centre, Pier Road, Gairloch, IV21 2BQ

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