



TROUT & SALMON

THE VOICE OF GAME-FISHING SINCE 1955

INCORPORATING
trout
FISHERMAN

A midsummer night's dream

Hunt big sea-trout in
a beautiful Welsh valley

REASONS TO
RETHINK YOUR
RETRIEVE

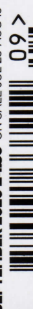
**HURRAH FOR
HORNCLIFFE**

Thrilling salmon sport on the Tweed

The buzzer man

A modern approach to
Loch Leven's famous trout

SEPTEMBER 2020 £4.50 ON SALE JUL 23-AUG 19



BANGING ON ABOUT BEAVERS

Simon Cooper fears our man-made chalkstreams will be destroyed by rewilding



THE OPENING CLIP OF BBC *SPRINGWATCH* on June 3 (don't they know that spring ends on May 31?) featured a beaver swimming across a lake "somewhere" in south-west England, we were breathlessly told. What a wonderful way to start the show, the presenter intoned as if this creature heralded the second coming. Later in the programme we were treated to a two-minute sequence filmed on a Norfolk chalkstream that showed the sights and sounds of the river. No people. No commentary. Just nature doing the talking. The same presenter was equally rapturous, but he failed to join up the dots. You can have beavers. You can have chalkstreams. But you cannot have both.

Now, I know I might be guilty of banging on about beavers (*T&S*, March) but to use a word much bandied about these days, these European hybrids (genetically pure British beavers disappeared centuries ago) pose an *existential* threat to the chalkstreams. They will destroy one of the most unique ecosystems created by man. By my estimation it will take no more than a dozen beavers to destroy the Itchen from Winchester to its source.

For make no mistake, beavers are not benign dam builders. I have seen what they build. These are not the sorts of dams that improve a river. They kill a river. Stone dead. These are impenetrable barriers to water. Above the dam will be a deep muddy pond and beyond that acres of swampy wetland. Below it little more than a muddy ditch. You've seen those photos of chalkstreams that dry up in summer? That is what beavers will do permanently to miles of chalkstream. Yes, we'll get a scrappy population of wild brown trout in the swamp land but without any path to sanctuary it will only take one significant dry spell to wipe out an entire cohort.

As for migrating fish, forget it; the route in and out will be barred. Sea-trout run to sea not for fun, but to protect the brown trout species from catastrophe. Chalkstream

salmon, a unique *salar* sub-species, are already on the brink of extinction. Beavers will do for them as well.

I tell you all this because we must act before it is too late. When beavers were first illegally released 20 years ago in Devon and Scotland, we didn't think much of it. But in the past decade wildlife groups have, under the radar, colonised more than 50 new sites across Britain. Beavers tick all the cuddly critter boxes. It has been an easy ride for wildlife trusts with the statutory bodies, who have rolled over, accepting the PR hype around beavers. But make no mistake: this is not all about beavers. This is about wildlife bodies changing the riverine environment. They know full well that proposals for indiscriminate wetlands created by human-built dams would fail ecological scrutiny. But if beavers randomly create them? Well, so be it.

There is good news: those of us who question the "science" of the pro-beaver lobby have commissioned a review of the impacts of beaver activities on salmonid populations by an independent fisheries scientist. This will take time, so in a letter to Government on May 26, the Angling Trust has requested a moratorium on further licensing approvals (First Cast, *T&S* August).

Meanwhile, we mustn't be complacent. The Beaver Trust claims to have the support of more than 60 bird, wildlife, river and countryside groups. If you are a member of any such organisation, do enquire as to its policy regarding beavers. It might just be our chance to change the dialogue. ■

Simon Cooper is managing director of Fishing Breaks (fishingbreaks.co.uk) the leading chalkstream fishing specialists. He is author of Life of a Chalkstream and The Otters' Tale.