

Lochinver Riverwatch Launch

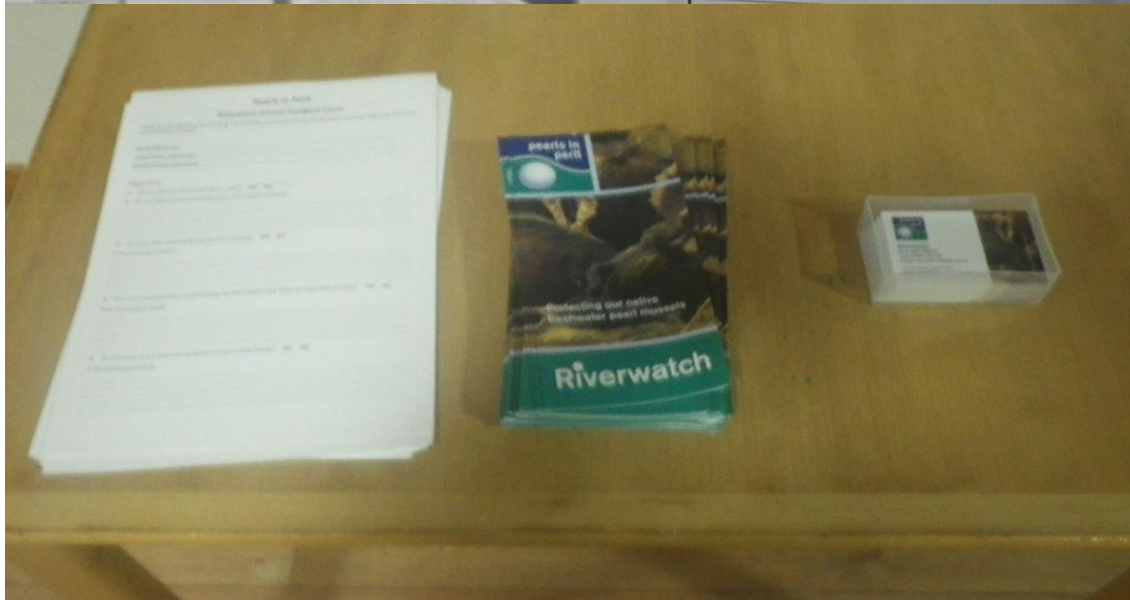
A Riverwatch was launched in Lochinver on Thursday 20th November at the Assynt Centre. There were 20 people in attendance. The Riverwatch launch was publicised locally and in national news and radio. The talk lasted for over an hour and I received a positive response from people in attendance who were concerned about the amount of wildlife crime occurring and eager to help combat criminal activities against pearl mussels.

The Riverwatch covers four SACs in the surrounding area – due to the small population on the west coast it made the most logistical sense to hold one launch for many SACs rather than repeating the same talk for very small audiences around the west coast.

SAC's Covered:

- Foinaven
- Abhainn Clais an Eas and Allt a' Mhuillin
- Ardvar and Loch a' Mhuilinn Woodlands
- Inverpolly





Posters publicising the talk and literature distributed at the launch



Launch in action

A press release detailing the launch received very good media coverage being published in:
The Times, BBC News, The Scotsman, The Press and Journal, The Herald, BBC Radio Scotland and Moray Firth Radio.

Welcome to your preview of The Times

Highlands riverside watch group set up after pearl mussel thefts



Jeremy Watson

Last updated at 12:01AM, November 20 2014

A “riverwatch” project has been set up to protect rare colonies of freshwater pearl mussels after three incidents of poaching in northwest Scotland.

The Highlands are the last refuge of the species in the UK but Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) said that illegal fishing is damaging populations.

The poachers targeted different rivers in the area of west Sutherland and, in the worst case, thousands of empty shells were found.

Experts said only one in 1,000 of the mussels will grow a pearl so the chances of finding a lucrative haul are remote.

The names of the rivers in the Assynt area are not being divulged to deter future raids on the mussel colonies
The Scottish Wildlife Trust/PA

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Pearl fishers threat to mussels

Wednesday 19 November 2014

A crackdown on illegal pearl fishing is being launched following a spate of recent incidents threatening a vulnerable species.

Investigators in the Riverwatch initiative have found three cases of illegal fishing for freshwater pearl mussels recently in different rivers in West Sutherland.

In the biggest incident, thousands of empty shells were found discarded in a river, resulting in most of the population in the river being killed.

Experts say it is likely to take decades for the population to recover as pearl mussels are very slow-growing.

Scotland's rivers, including those in Assynt, contain many of the world's most important remaining pearl mussel populations.

Conservationists are now launching a Riverwatch scheme in Assynt to raise awareness of the threats to freshwater pearl mussels.

Natalie Young, a riverwatcher for the Pearls in Peril Project, said: "Pearl fishing damages already-threatened populations of a species that is significantly important to the Highland region as it is one of the few remaining strongholds for the mussel species."



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