



Grayling



Photo:
Rod Calbrade,
The Grayling
Society

Description

The grayling (*Thymallus thymallus*) is a species of the salmon family (Salmonidae) and is found mainly in rivers. It is readily distinguished from other salmonids by the large dorsal fin and quite large scales. It is often silvery or grey in colour (hence the name), although mature fish, particularly the males around spawning time, can be darker.

The grayling is native to parts of England and perhaps Wales, and was first introduced to Scotland from the Derbyshire Wye 150 years ago. It is now present in many rivers of the central and southern parts of Scotland (Figure 1), and can be the dominant fish species where the river current speeds are moderate and many pools are present. The grayling is very sensitive to industrial pollution which also influences the distribution pattern.

Life history

Grayling spawn in river shallows where there is fine gravel and moderate current speed in spring. The eggs are quite small, measuring about three millimetres in diameter, and hatch after two or three weeks.

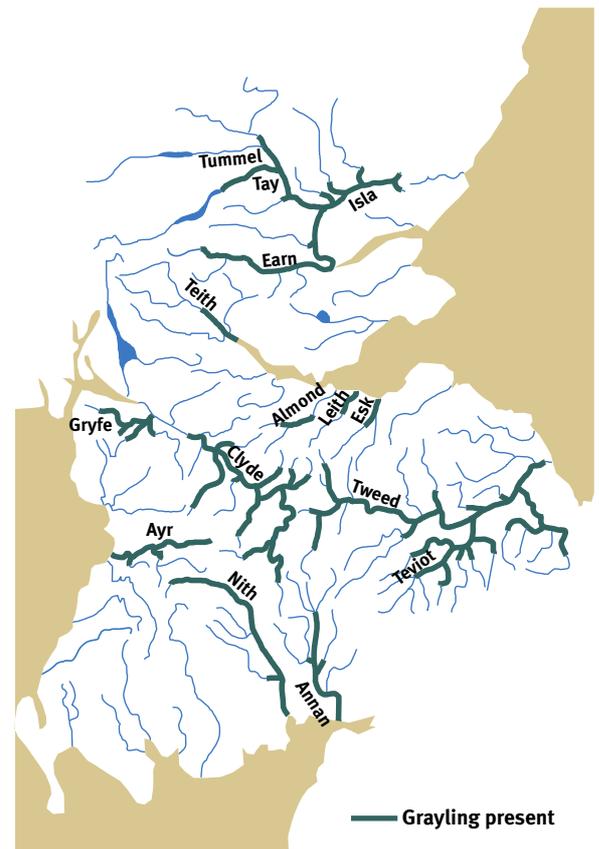


Figure 1. Present range of grayling in Scottish waters (small burns not shown).



When the larvae emerge from the gravel, they measure between 12 to 18 mm in length, and may be seen swimming in shoals near the surface in quieter water, close to the river bank. In favourable circumstances grayling grow quickly and can reach 30 to 40 cm by the time they are three years old. In later life, their growth rate slows down, and the maximum length reached is usually between 35 and 45 cm.

Diet and feeding behaviour

Grayling feed mainly on insects and their larvae, crustaceans such as freshwater shrimps, as well as worms, leeches and molluscs. In winter, salmon and trout eggs may also be taken. Grayling feed by intercepting material drifting downstream either mid-water, or on the water surface and by grazing over the river bed and any strands of vegetation.

Grayling as a sport fish

In Scotland, grayling can be fished for throughout the year. Until quite recently, grayling did not enjoy a high reputation as a sport fish among many anglers. Indeed, it was more often regarded as a possible competitor to

salmon and trout, a predator on their eggs, or a nuisance by-catch, than as a desirable sport fish in its own right. This view has changed significantly in recent years, with both an increase in the popularity of fishing for grayling and a new emphasis on conservation through catch-and-release.

The Grayling Society

In 1977, the Grayling Society was formed by a group of grayling and grayling fishing enthusiasts. The society, which now has over 1,200 members in the UK and overseas, has been instrumental in improving the image of the grayling through education, the promotion of good practice, the publication of newsletters and a journal, and by organising meetings and outings. There is an active Scottish branch.

Society website: <http://www.graylingsociety.org/>

The European Habitats Directive

The grayling is listed in the European Habitats Directive as a species of Community interest, and as such its exploitation may be subject to fisheries management measures.