

## Red Skin Disease

In recent years there have been reports of small numbers of wild salmon caught in Scandinavia, Ireland and parts of the UK with signs of ventral haemorrhaging. We are monitoring the situation on all our major salmon rivers and working with partners to better understand the cause. Please report any similar sightings, or fish in distress to us immediately.

### Initial reports

Low level mortalities of wild Atlantic salmon exhibiting unusual ventral skin lesions have been reported in rivers draining into the Baltic Sea and Northern Atlantic in the last few years. Cases were first reported in the UK from Scotland in summer 2019. This condition, termed Red Skin Disease, has prompted efforts to monitor its occurrence, confirm exact characteristics of the skin lesions and identify the cause.

### What does it look like?

From reports so far, the most consistent characteristic of the condition appears to be severe ventral haemorrhaging in fresh run Atlantic salmon. This can appear like a spotted red rash (petechia) running along the underside of affected fish. These lesions may become ulcerated and vary in appearance due to secondary infections. Affected fish have mainly been seen during the warmer summer months.



**Marked ventral haemorrhaging in a wild Atlantic salmon associated with RSD**

### What is the cause?

The cause of this condition is currently unknown. Detailed characteristics of the condition also remain unclear. There is a need to establish more reliable descriptions to support consistent reporting and enable comparisons to be made between countries. Identifying the cause of any skin condition in wild salmonids can be challenging due to the role of common opportunistic infections that can complicate or mask underlying changes.

## What is the impact of this condition?

The importance of this condition is also unknown. So far, only small numbers of salmon have been affected and it is unclear what impact these lesions have on fish health. Low level lethargy and mortality have been reported in some rivers, although affected fish may also appear in good health and it is thought that these fish can recover.

## Observations in England and Wales

There have been a number of visual reports of suspected RSD of varying severities in wild salmon from rivers in England and Wales. Staff operating index monitoring traps have also seen mild red patches on the underside of healthy salmon returning to our rivers for many years, but these are less severe than other recently reported cases, and have not been associated with any losses or evidence of ill-health. Work is underway to establish whether these skin lesions are in any way connected to reports elsewhere.



Cases of mild ventral haemorrhaging observed on Atlantic salmon in England

## What we are doing

We are in contact with partners across Europe to better understand this condition and share observations. We continue to monitor disease in all of our major salmonid rivers and are working closely with colleagues in Natural Resources Wales to monitor and collate reports. Investigations are ongoing through staff at our National Fisheries Laboratory to try to understand more about this condition.

## What you should do

We are asking anyone who encounters fish that are diseased or in distress to contact our incident hotline immediately. This will allow us to respond promptly to any serious or emerging disease incidents. We also ask for anglers to be vigilant but not to remove or handle any fish in distress. Photographing fish with signs of abnormality can be extremely useful if the situation allows and it is safe to do so. However, any fish caught by rod and line showing signs of disease should be returned to the water as quickly as possible.

We encourage anglers to practice good biosecurity and disinfect their waders, boots, nets and wet equipment after fishing and before moving to other waters. This can be done by thorough drying in sunlight or with the use of appropriate disinfectants.

**To report dead or dying fish, please contact our incident hotline immediately: 0800 80 70 60. For further information please contact the National Fisheries Laboratory - Tel: 02084 745244; E-mail: [fish.health@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:fish.health@environment-agency.gov.uk)**