

DEAR SIR—

North Town Belt, Temuka, 15th April, 1923.

Regarding yours of the 6th April: It is with pleasure that I furnish a report on the salmon-run in the Rangitata for this season, hoping that you will find some of it useful, and if you do my pleasure will be twofold.

I will take your questions in rotation as you have them written out.

First question: About what date did the salmon make their first appearance?

The last days of January there was an odd salmon seen, hooked, and caught. A flood came, and it lasted over a week; when the river became right for seeing salmon and fishing it was the 9th February. The salmon came strong by the 14th February, and there has never been a stop up to this date.

There was a steady moving run that increased at times, but never waned to a poor run until lately, when there was a big decrease but no stop.

Second question: How does the run compare with last season?

The differences are in the double volume of salmon with no extreme waves and stops, an almost steady run that has outlasted for time the 1922 season.

Third question: Approximately what number have been taken?

It is a hard matter to deal with a boundary river and its fish captures, but I have not the slightest hesitation in placing it over a thousand by rod and line.

Fourth question: How does the condition of the fish and average weight compare with last season?

The average weight would be about 17 lb. this season: last season they would not average 14 lb. The run being composed of 20 lb. and over, with the largest numbers being from 10 lb. to 40 lb.

This season it was a rare thing to see a 12 lb. salmon, and there was practically no small salmon of 4 lb. to 10 lb. They ran from 14 lb. to 20 lb., with a large majority of them 18 lb. and 20 lb. While, on the other hand, no large salmon were seen or caught—*i.e.*, 36 lb. to 50 lb.

The condition of the salmon was good, although they were not to be compared with the condition of the salmon last year. The following, taken from the last five salmon I saw caught, will help to give a fair example of the salmon that run the Rangitata: Length, 34 in., 17 lb.; length, 31 in., 14 lb.; length, 35 in., 19½ lb.; length, 29 in., 16 lb.; length, 33 in., 17 lb.

Fifth question: Have any anglers taken advantage of the regulations which allow them to market the salmon they catch? Can you give approximately the number sold and the price?

This is a difficult question for me, but I know of over fifty salmon being sold. The first of these fish sold at 1s. 6d. a pound cleaned. Later they sold at 1s. a pound cleaned.

Sixth question: What is your opinion and the opinion of others regarding the sporting-qualities of the quinnat salmon, and whether they are considered to be a valuable acquisition to the sporting and food fisheries of the Dominion?

My opinion of the quinnat as a sporting fish can be taken as a basis for all the anglers that fish for salmon, and my opinion was based on the literature I had read, and of that as a whole it caused me to be biased on the quinnat as a sporting fish only. This, I may point out, has been the cause of so much antagonism between the anglers and the quinnat, because we were led to believe they would not bite.

Since the quinnat have run in fair numbers this past few seasons and anglers have gone to fish for them, a method of fishing has been found along with a bait that rewards the angler with a creel of salmon that it is impossible to procure on any snow-river at this time of the year with trout.

I say so now that the quinnat salmon is an asset to the acclimatization societies, and a valuable acquisition to the sportsmen of this country, and a food fish superior to trout.

It is only a question of time when a general knowledge will get diffused through the angling communities of the means whereby quinnat salmon can be caught successfully in a sporting manner by rod and line, although at the present time this is not the general opinion owing to that old bias.

Regarding the information I may give which you say you would be pleased to have, I would like to point out that out of every hundred salmon I have seen sixty of them have been cut and marked—some old and healed, some newly healed, some not properly healed, and some with great raw wounds.

This shows the large number of enemies the salmon have to contend with in the open sea, while the death-rate of immature salmon must be appalling. Stroke-hauling accounted for a fair number of salmon. This is not the worst feature of this method. The only salmon they land is the ones hooked in the boney parts of the fish. Think how many wounded, ripped, and torn fish they leave in the pools to get fungus or some other disease in the newly-torn flesh that has no protected covering. If you can strengthen the hands of those members of societies by helping to do away with the bamboo rod I am sure you would do sportsmen a power of good.

A very noticeable feature of the salmon this season was the difference of the sexes. This could not be told last season when they were running up the river.

In my opinion the season for taking salmon should be the same as trout. Three weeks ago 25 per cent. of the salmon running were kipper salmon. Last week they were all kippers. Fins red, belly black, and the fish a dark appearance. The ovaries were well advanced, and between that and their appearances some anglers would not take them home when killed.

I have, &c.,

J. SCOTT MAIN, Ranger.

Chief Inspector of Fisheries, Wellington.