



# What do wild salmon mean to me?

## Mark Bowler



Mark Bowler has been fascinated by fish since the age of seven. He studied Fisheries at Edinburgh University, and then went on to work on a trout hatchery and trout fishery, then worked supplying coarse fish, and subsequently went on to trap eels, and run a salmon smokery.

When working on Salmon, Trout & Sea Trout, he launched Fly Fishing & Fly Tying magazine, which he now runs from Aberfeldy. He lives a Spey cast away from the river Tay.

When I'm lucky enough to catch a salmon, I know I'm cradling a miracle of piscatorial evolution.

Apart from the beguiling, iridescent blend of blues, pinks and lilacs shimmering over that solid flank of silver scales, what intrigues me are its innate abilities, most of which are unique, and remain a mystery to Man.

The salmon is a traveller. A river-dweller with a calling, to pit its wits and instincts against the ocean, and thrive. From its humble beginnings in the land of Scots pines, red deer and otters, it thrusts away the gravel to emerge into the stream with thousands of its brothers and sisters with one ambition: to survive, grow, and then head downstream to the sea.

There's a thing: for a fish to swim from freshwater into sea water defies the laws of physics. The laws of osmosis say the young salmon should swell up and die on entering the salt water. The salmon is Nature's law-breaker.

The salmon is a supreme navigator. It heads to the rich and plentiful Arctic currents, where it grows at phenomenal rates. It then turns south, swimming thousands of miles to return to the river of its birth. No one knows how.

The salmon is an athlete. 'Salmo salar', the leaper, can slide effortlessly through currents a man cannot stand in, and it can scale a foaming waterfall with a few flicks of its turbo-booster tail.

The salmon is strong-willed. It does not feed on re-entering its home river. And patient: some lie for almost a year before the spawning urge draws them onto the

gravel redds to spawn.

The salmon is a labourer, using its tail to create a gravel hollow into which it will bury its eggs, from which those young fish will emerge next spring.

Meantime, the adult fish has made the ultimate sacrifice. In dying after spawning, its rotting flesh provides the nutrients to feed its young.

The salmon is born a survivor, but can it overcome man's influence on its world today? Much as I admire this beautiful, mysterious, powerful and amazing fish, and despite its plethora of evolved talents, the best I can do is hope.



Discover more about the importance of wild Atlantic salmon at:  
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