



What do wild salmon mean to me?

Peter Hutchinson



Prior to his retirement in late 2017, Dr Peter Hutchinson was the Secretary of the inter-governmental North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO). He was Chairman of NASCO's Standing Scientific Committee for more than 20 years. His work for NASCO over more than thirty years involved international collaboration with all the North Atlantic countries/jurisdictions with Atlantic salmon interests and the large network of Inter-Government and Non-Government Organisations accredited to NASCO, including Fisheries Management Scotland.

About fifty years ago during a family holiday, I joined a crowd of people which had gathered to witness one of nature's greatest spectacles, salmon migrating upstream. It was the late 1960s and salmon abundance was high, perhaps anomalously high, and the sea pool was teeming with fish. There was talk of an epic ocean odyssey and precise navigation back to the natal river. I was enthralled and captivated but certainly did not imagine that I would have the great privilege of spending virtually my entire career working on this magnificent animal. The Atlantic salmon is a truly international species and one of a small number of fish with an international treaty devoted to its conservation and restoration.

I have been very fortunate to witness the vitally important work being undertaken all around the North Atlantic by the many organisations and devoted individuals committed to conserving Atlantic salmon and protecting the 2,500 rivers they frequent. Each one of those rivers, although very different in nature and scale, would be immeasurably poorer without the wild Atlantic salmon. But survival at sea and abundance of salmon are currently low all around the North Atlantic, in some areas critically low, diversity is threatened and there is increased uncertainty associated with a changing climate. The wild Atlantic salmon and those committed to

its conservation face many challenges.

The American astronaut, Neil Armstrong, once said '*I think we're going to the moon because it's in the nature of the human being to face challenges. It's by the nature of his deep inner soul... we're required to do these things just as salmon swim upstream*'. Salmon, perhaps now more than ever, need our help in meeting the challenges it faces. We need to work to ensure the maximum number of healthy wild salmon smolts can go to sea and that means focusing and enhancing our efforts on the factors affecting salmon that are under our control including fisheries, habitat and salmon farming.

The need for cooperation at all levels, including internationally, has never been greater and the International Year of the salmon is a great opportunity to raise awareness of the challenges facing the wild Atlantic salmon and increasing our conservation efforts.

Our actions can make a difference. Salmon rivers affected by acidification, barriers to migration and parasites have been restored and the salmon populations in those rivers have responded. Urban rivers now have salmon returning to them for the first time since the Industrial Revolution. These examples should inspire stronger actions to conserve and restore this wonderful, iconic species. The Atlantic salmon deserves nothing less and an international treaty requires it.

Discover more about the importance of wild Atlantic salmon at:
www.fms.scot/what-do-wild-salmon-mean-to-me/
[#wildsalmonmatter](https://twitter.com/wildsalmonmatter)

