



WILDLIFE FACTFLIE: Atlantic salmon

The Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), weighing up to 40kg, is a large fish only found in the cleanest rivers, mostly in the north and west of the UK. This species of fish spends most of its life at sea but will return to spawn (reproduce) in the same part of the river/stream it hatched in. This epic annual journey begins with a gathering at sea, where salmon have spent 1-4 years maturing, growing and getting stronger. The salmon will wait at the mouth of the river until the autumn rains raise the water levels and help them to start the journey. Once in the river, the salmon stop eating; their only focus is to return to where they were born. This travelling upstream usually happens between November and February every year, although you may be able to spot a salmon making its journey from mid-October. Over the coming weeks, the fish will risk their lives taking part in the uphill battle to get home. Only around 10% of salmon survive this journey, but those successful fish reproduce by creating dips in the bottom of the river known as 'redds' by flapping their tails. Females lay their eggs in the reds, the male fertilised them and then the female covers them over. With the eggs fertilised and covered, the salmon return to the sea. Once hatched, the juvenile salmon will stay in freshwater for up to 6 years before migrating back to the sea. They undergo morphological changes which allow them to survive in saltwater.

Not only do salmon make this journey on an empty stomach, losing weight, muscle and energy; they also face the risk of being eaten, attacks from other fish and some man-made issues. The odds really are not in their favour! One of the most troubling issues faced by migrating salmon is rivers which have been modified by dams or weirs, which cause the fish to waste valuable energy when they must jump over them. However, some dams and weirs are simply so big that the fish cannot complete their journey at all. Making rivers more salmon friendly is a huge part of our work at Ribble Rivers Trust. Where we can, we install a fish pass which allows the salmon to get around the barrier and continue their journey. Sometimes, however, the whole weir needs to be removed. To find out more about our fish pass installation and weir removal projects, head over to our website: <https://ribbletrust.org.uk/>.

