



SECTION 3: THE FISHES OF THE TWEED AND THE EYE

C.3: **Perch** *Perca fluviatilis*



Photo C.3.1: *The Perch*, taken from *British Freshwater Fishes*, by the Rev. W. Houghton, illustrated by A.F. Lydon, 1879

The Percidae (the Perch family) contains 16 species, spread across northern Europe, Asia and America: 12 species can be found in Europe. Two are native to the south of England, the Perch and the Ruffe, and a third, the Pikeperch or Zander was introduced in 1878 and again in 1910 and has now spread around eastern England. Perches are predatory fishes and the larger species can work as groups, rounding up shoals of small fishes to eat.

The Perch is a deep-bodied, rather flattened fish, with two dorsal fins, the front one of which has very sharp spines. The scales are strong, thick and edged with fine spines that make the body feel rough. The thick gill covers also carry spiny outgrowths, making the Perch a well armoured and defended fish. Perch in some populations become stunted through over-population and consequent lack of food, either because they have no predators to control their numbers or because one particular year of fry survived extremely well. Perch are fish of lochs and slow-flowing rivers and canals, and as a very fine food fish that can survive well out of water for extended periods of time, they have undoubtedly been spread largely by humans from their original area. Their diet is of aquatic invertebrates (though not generally snails) but also includes small fish, which they can hunt as a group.

Perch spawn in late spring, when water temperature is between 10°C and 15°C, generally in April and May. The eggs stick to one another and are laid in long, white ribbons up to a metre in length that are draped over weeds



and submerged branches and roots; females produce around 45,000 eggs per kg of body weight. Hatching takes 8 to 16 days depending on water temperature, the newly emerged fry being around 6mm in length and living at the surface. As their fins develop, however, they move inshore and immense shoals of young Perch fry can sometimes be seen in the shallow water around the edges of waters that they inhabit. As temperatures cool in autumn, shoals of all ages move into deeper water, where they seem to become almost comatose, feeding very little. The survival of juvenile Perch is very temperature dependent: a warm summer can produce a very strong year class, a cold one a very weak one. Sexual maturity for males is generally at three years of age, at around 12 to 18cms, but is later and at a larger size for females. In the wild, Perch can live for 10 to 13 years, but can reach nearly thirty in captivity.

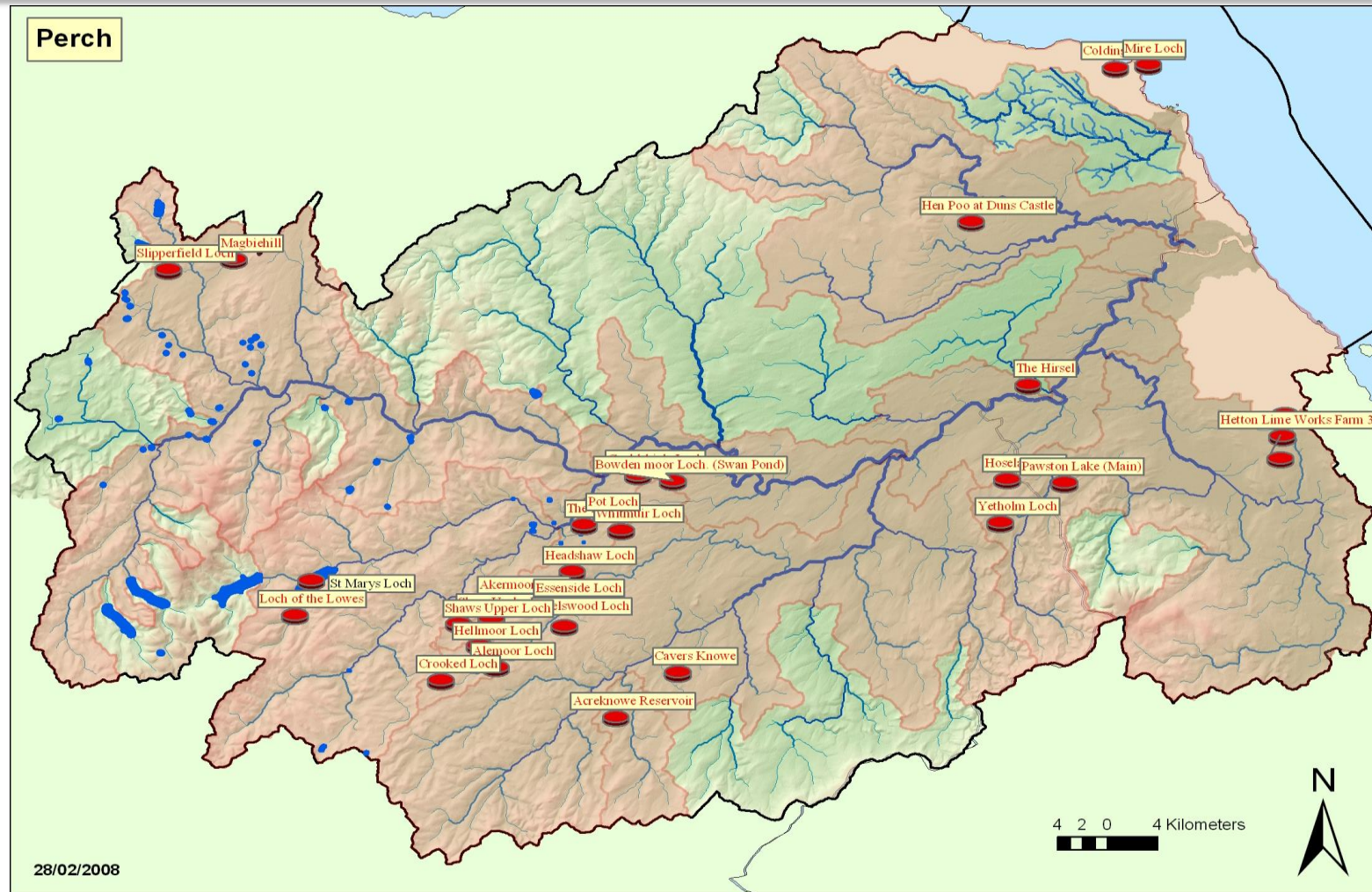
Perch on Tweed: They were probably introduced to the catchment as food fish during the Middle Ages; all the abbeys would certainly have had ponds to provide fresh fish during Lent. The earliest record of Perch in the Tweed catchment found so far, however, is from 1722 in St. Mary's Loch (Hodge, 1722). The Old Statistical Account, whose reports were written in the 1790's, records Perch in the Slipperfield Lochs (Parish of [West] Linton); the lochs of the upper Ale catchment (Parish of Ashkirk); St. Mary's Loch and the Loch of the Lowes (Parish of Ettrick) and in Yetholm Loch (Parish of Linton). The earliest known record from a river comes from 1835, when:-

The Sunday Times, 26th April, 1835: "On Monday evening last, the Duke of Buccleuch, after a day's hunt killed, within an hour, in the pool close by Monteviot, three Salmon, two Perches and a Pike of 14 lbs with a single gut line. Besides those secured, his Grace ran several other Salmon, and another large Pike..."

The New Statistical Account, whose reports were written in the 1830's records Perch in more lochs than its predecessor : Alemoor, Hellmoor and Moodlaw lochs (Parish of Robertson); Hoselaw Loch (Parish of Yetholm); Yetholm Loch (Parish of Linton); in some of Essenside, Sheilswood, Headshaw & Ashkirk lochs (Parish of Ashkirk); a loch at Rachan (Parish of Broughton, Glenholm and Kilbucho); Ponds at Whim and Macbiehill (Parish of Newlands); Slipperfield loch (Parish of [West] Linton); Cauldshiels Loch (Parish of Galashiels); St. Mary's Loch (Parish of Yarrow) and Duns Castle Loch (Parish of Duns).

When angling guide books to the catchment begin to appear in the middle of the 19th Century, Perch are listed as an attraction to the angler visiting St. Mary's Loch: *"The Lochs (St. Mary's and the Loch of the Lowes) - In addition to the yellow trout, and migratory fish, the lochs contain both pike and perch; but the last two are nearly, we believe, confined to the Loch of the Lowes. Any quantity of these perch may, occasionally, be caught; and English gentlemen - trained to bottom fishing, with all the appliances of floats, sinkers &c. - sometimes make dreadful havoc among them."* (Robertson, 1859). This comment, that Pike and Perch are largely confined to the Loch of the Lowes, is repeated in another angling book of the same period (Francis, 1874). A later guide-book gives the stream connecting the two lochs as being the best place to fish for Perch (Brown, 1907).

While Perch are still very much to be found in the lochs and ponds of the catchment, they are now a great rarity in the rivers, which was not, apparently, always the case. When smolts were being netted for tagging by the Experimental Committee of the RTC in the 1860's, between Wilford and Whiteadder mouth they recorded that *"large numbers of Perch (on some days many hundreds) were captured during several of the days of experimenting"* (Anon 1867). In the 1860's, Perch could be fished for on the Till (Henderson, 1876 and Moffat, 1865) and in the 1890's, at Boleside on the Tweed (Lang, 1895). Occurrence in the main river down to the area of tidal influence was still regarded as common at the beginning of the 20th Century (Bolam, 1919).



Map C.03.1: Known distribution of *Perca fluviatilis* in still waters within the District