



Graham Purbrick and Martin Donovan: an inquiry has cleared their fishery of responsibility for the lack of salmon in the Test



## TALE OF THE RIVER

■ Adult salmon begin to return from the Atlantic in March. They find a place in the river to rest until they are ready for spawning.

■ The females lay the eggs upstream, which are then fertilised by the males. The eggs hatch within three months. About six months later the body acquires characteristics of the fish and is called a parr.

■ From 18 to 24 months, the fish develops its silver scales and becomes a smolt. It then heads down the river for the sea.

■ The young salmon return within two years for spawning. The life span is five to six years.

# Mystery of the missing salmon raises suspicion of skulduggery

By Valerie Elliott  
Countryside Editor

IT IS one of the most cherished fishing stretches in the world, but troubled waters have gathered on the River Test.

Salmon have gone missing from the upper reaches of the chalk stream and a number of fisheries owners suspect that someone is interfering with the salmon run.

The bickering is the talk of the angling world because one of the stretches most affected by the lack of salmon is the Broadlands Estate, former home of Earl Mountbatten of Burma, now run by his grandson, Lord Brabourne.

He has won support from Sir Peter Cresswell, a High Court

judge who has interests along the upper part of the Test.

They are clearly mystified by the lack of salmon, without which their fisheries will lose value. The higher the catch the more anglers are willing to pay for a day's fishing. When there is plenty of salmon, anglers will pay between £200 and £300 a day, and a season ticket costs between £650 to £1,000.

The suspicions from up river are taking their toll on owners and river keepers downstream, particularly a fishery known as Testwood, which is adjacent to the Broadlands stretch. This fishery is leased by a syndicate of three businessmen: Alan Kilkenny, Ian Skipper and Graham Purbrick.

One independent investiga-



tion into the lack of salmon has already been completed by the Environment Agency and found the five-mile Testwood fishery, which runs to the sea, to be blameless.

The agency report was ordered after figures for last

year's fishing season showed that downstream the catch was 444 while upstream it was 19.

Experts carried out checks on the river and found no tampering with the salmon flow. The agency blamed the plight of the fish on hotter weather and lower rainfall, which has reduced water levels.

Lord Brabourne and other riparian landowners were sceptical about the findings. However, their suspicions about the river flow were raised again after figures for this year's season from March to September. The salmon catch was just as bleak: while the Testwood fishery had a catch of some 360 salmon, upstream it is about 20.

Martin Donovan, a river keeper for Testwood, has even

been accused by a fisherman on the Broadlands stretch of hanging shark fins on the river sluices to frighten the salmon and blocking passes with wire mesh. He said: "How ludicrous can you get? If someone offered you all the tea in China to stop salmon from running the river and going exactly where they wanted to go, it would be impossible to do."

Lord Brabourne and Sir Peter declined to discuss the issue but they are so unhappy they have called in their own expert to conduct a new investigation. Mike Beach, a former inspector with the Government's Fisheries Research Laboratory, is studying the river flow to find out if the salmon are being deliberately obstructed.