

# SUSPECTED POACHERS DETAINED AFTER RURAL CRIME OPERATION IN COUNTY DURHAM

The enforcement operation was located in the village of Escomb in Bishop Auckland, where fisheries enforcement and police officers joined forces to target rural crime and wildlife offending in County Durham.

Environment Agency officers, who were patrolling the banks of the River Wear at Escomb, identified the three males using a high powered lamp and a 1.5-metre gaff (which is a long-handled steel hook used to spear the fish).

It is thought that the men were attempting to illegally remove salmon and sea trout from the Wear that are currently spawning in the shallow waters. These fish are particularly vulnerable at this stage in their life cycle and have historically been the target of 'poachers'. Such cruel methods of capture are extremely damaging for the animals. If they manage to escape, they are very likely to die due to severe wounds.

David Shears, Senior Fisheries Enforcement Officer for the Environment Agency, said: "This joint operation with Durham Constabulary enabled us to protect local wildlife and highlights the consequences of illegal fishing. This sort of activity will not be tolerated.

"Atlantic salmon stocks are low and the River Wear is one of the country's major sea trout and salmon rivers. Not only are these fish an integral part of our environment but contribute significantly to local communities through the income generated by properly managed fisheries."

Officers were able to observe the males, and direct other Environment Agency and police officers to their location. All three were successfully detained. The gaff and lamp were seized and two of the males were released pending further investigations.

The third man was taken into custody for an unrelated matter.

PC Scott Crowhurst of Durham Constabulary, said: "We worked in partnership with Environment Agency Fisheries Enforcement Officers to quickly detain the suspects, ascertain their details, and provide support in dealing with this issue.

"Poaching and related rural crime will not be tolerated, and we will continue to work collaboratively with partner agencies to target those that engage in rural crime."

People who operate unlicensed nets or fish illegally risk prosecution, with unlimited fines and possible prison sentences available to the courts. Environment Agency officers also have the powers to seize equipment and vehicles.

Fisheries Enforcement Officers who are patrolling the North East's coasts and

rivers and responding to reports of illegal fishing are abiding by the latest Coronavirus government guidance.

If you ever wish to report any incidents of illegal fishing or poaching then please contact the Environment Agency's 24-hour incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

[You can buy a fishing licence online](#)