

Sparling (Smelt)

Osmerus eperlanus

Fish · Spawns in the Nith in early spring



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A slender, semi-transparent silvery fish with a greenish back, a large mouth and fine teeth, and a small adipose fin marking it as a relative of the salmon. Fresh sparling smell strongly and distinctly of cucumber. The species has all but vanished from Scottish rivers, and the Nith supports one of only a handful of surviving spawning populations — which makes it a fish of real regional importance.

BEHAVIOUR

Sparling live in the estuary and inshore waters and run a short distance into fresh water to spawn in early spring, usually in late February and March, laying sticky eggs on gravel and stones in the tidal reaches. They were once caught in quantity and sold as a delicacy. The remaining Scottish runs are on the Cree, the Forth and the Nith, and all are closely monitored.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Smelts (Osmeridae)
SIZE	Typically 15–20 cm
UK STATUS	A conservation priority; one of only three Scottish spawning runs

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