

Sparrow's friend more than a pale imitation

WHEN Linda Crowther saw a rare white sparrow in her garden it was a million-to-one chance.

But days after the surprise arrival turned up at her bird-feeder she was stunned to see a second one - the first time two have ever been photographed together.

Mrs Crowther, 58, of Lossiemouth, Moray, took a photo of the first white bird - thought to suffer from a rare pigmentation disorder called leucism - in her garden last week.

She said: 'I was surprised just to see one white sparrow, as they are a one-in-a-million rarity.'

'And while there have been sightings of white sparrows before, it's unknown to see two in the same place at the same time. These are the only recorded photos of two together.'

'I first suspected there were two of them about ten days ago, as they look slightly different to each

By Will Lyon

other, but I couldn't be sure as they had never turned up side-by-side before.

'I watch them for a couple of hours a day through the kitchen window.'

The photos have sent twitchers into a frenzy and Mrs Crowther's garden has become a hotspot for birdwatchers.

She said: 'I've had a few people who have popped around to watch the birds. There was even one foreign couple who came around and watched.'

An RSPB Scotland spokesman said they had never come across a sighting of two white sparrows.

She added: 'It's got a lot of people here very excited. The fact that these birds have been spotted in the same place with the same condition suggests they are more than likely from the same brood.'



Two in a million: The first known photograph of white sparrows together, taken by Linda Crowther

Fear for fish industry as one in five salmon dies

By Victoria Allen

FISH farms are losing almost a fifth of their salmon to fatal diseases and parasites.

Around 6.8 million salmon died last year in underwater cages - an estimated 17.6 per cent of the farmed population, figures show.

The death rate has been blamed on outbreaks of disease among captive fish, including heart failure, pancreatic necrosis and sea lice - parasites that eat the fish alive.

These diseases are also spreading through wild salmon populations, prompting criticism of the multi-million pound 'aquaculture' industry.

The sector was worth £563million in 2010 but has a mortality rate which has seen as many as one in four salmon die at some farms.

Freedom of Information (FOI) responses by Marine Scotland and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) show the number of salmon killed soared by almost a third from 5,322,096 in 2010 to 6,870,577 last year.

That is set to rise still further in 2012, with more than 2.2 million found dead already in the first three months of this year. That includes 700,000 salmon in one month in Orkney and 291 tons lost at the St Molios farm run by Meridian on Arran.

Don Staniford, of the Global Alliance Against Aquaculture (GAAIA), which requested the figures, said: 'Salmon feedlots are a breeding ground for infectious diseases and parasites. Cramping a migratory species like Atlantic salmon in cages is a recipe for disaster.'

'It is shameful that millions of farmed salmon are dying each year on Scotland's filthy feedlots.'

Hughie Campbell Adamson, Scottish chairman of the Salmon and Trout Association, said: 'Were these figures for a farming operation on land, there would be a national outcry at the mortality rate.'

The Scottish Government is to

MORE than half of anglers believe Scottish independence would have a damaging effect on the nation's salmon fishing industry - and its £240million income from country sports tourism.

A new report, commissioned by Dundee sporting agent Salmo International, also found one in four was 'very worried' by the prospect of breaking up the Union.

Greig Thomson, founder of Salmo International, said: 'Our report uncovered serious worries about an unshackled Government cosyng up to the salmon farming industry at the expense of our magnificent wild salmon stocks.'

publish its figures for the aquaculture industry at the end of the month. In 2008, the latest year for which official figures are available, 17.8 per cent of salmon died in fish farms.

However, FOI figures for 2010 show 32,060,000 salmon were harvested, of which 13.67 per cent died. Assuming a similar figure were brought to market in 2011, FOI figures give a death rate for last year of 17.6 per cent.

GAAIA claims some fish farm companies use toxic chemical treatments to bring infected fish back to health, raising fears over what is in the salmon exported across the world.

Scott Landsburgh, of the Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation, said: 'Fish farming is highly professional but losses can happen.'

'Wild salmon are exposed to the same factors as farmed. The survival of farmed salmon is vastly higher than the survival of wild salmon.'

A Scottish Government spokesman said: 'The survival rate for farmed salmon increased by 6.7 per cent between 2004 and 2008, to 82.2 per cent. Reports of unexplained mortalities are investigated by the Fish Health Inspectorate.'

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