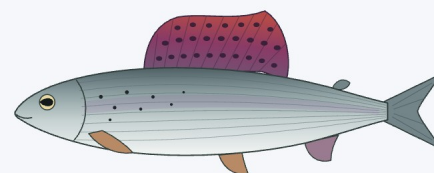




European grayling

Thymallus thymallus, the “lady of the stream”

A spring-spawning cousin of trout and salmon with a sail of a dorsal fin, built for cool, clean, fast-flowing rivers. Native to a handful of British rivers, it now swims from the Tamar to the Tay after two centuries of introductions.



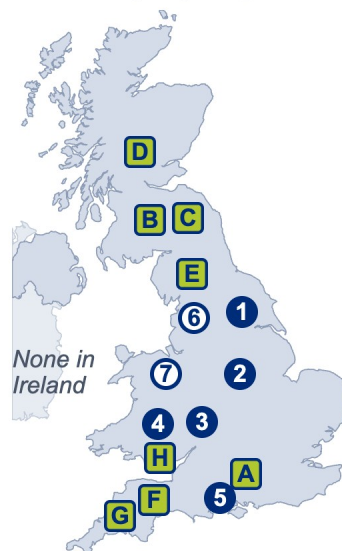
The basics

Size	Mature at 2–4 years and 25–30 cm; the largest UK fish reach about 2 kg.
Home	The “grayling zone”: gravel riffles, pools and runs on a gradient near 5.7 m per km. Adults are rare in streams under 5 m wide.
Breeding	March to mid-May at 3–11 °C. Eggs in the top 5 cm of clean gravel hatch in about 25 days at 7 °C.
Food	Invertebrates: midge larvae for fry; shrimps and larvae off the bed, plus drifting flies, for adults.
Travel	Freshwater only. Home ranges are often under 1 km, with spawning runs of up to 11 km.
Limits	Prefers 4–18 °C. Water above 25 °C, or oxygen held under 4 mg/l, is fatal.

How they got here

At the peak of the last glaciation, over 20,000 years ago, Britain was too cold for any freshwater fish. Grayling survived in refuges in northern continental Europe, then swam in along rivers now drowned by the North Sea, when eastern English rivers as far north as the Humber were tributaries of the Rhine. Grayling scales from archaeological digs in Yorkshire, Northamptonshire and Herefordshire back the story up. Scotland has no native grayling and Ireland has none at all; some authors count the Thames as a native river too.

Where grayling are truly native



- **Native**
 - 1 Yorkshire Ouse
 - 2 Trent
 - 3 Severn
 - 4 Wye
 - 5 Hampshire Avon
- **Possibly native**
 - 6 Ribble
 - 7 Welsh Dee
- **Introduced**
 - A Test, 1816
 - B Clyde, 1855
 - C Tweed
 - D Tay, 1880
 - E Eden, 1880
 - F Exe, 1886
 - G Tamar, 1919
 - H Taff, 1980s

How many populations?

Close to one per river. A genetic census of nearly 1,200 fish from 27 rivers found each river's grayling genetically distinct. They fall into four broad groups (five by one method): **Welsh** (Wye, Severn), **Northern** (Ribble, Aire, Wharfe, Ure), **Southern** (Hampshire Avon, Test, Itchen) and a **mixed** group of Trent tributaries, the Dee, Eden and most Scottish rivers, whose genes match the old stocking records.

An indicator species



Grayling tolerate a narrower band of temperature and water quality than trout, so a thriving, mixed-age population signals a cool, clean, connected river: “an ideal indicator species of habitat quality and climate change”.

Two centuries of moving fish: by rail, wine bottle and church wall

📦 1816 · Avon to Test

No grayling swam in the Test in 1808. Fish carried over from the Hampshire Avon were released about 1816. The Itchen followed in 1901.

🚂 1855–57 · To the Clyde

First, 36 young fish went by rail from Derbyshire to Abington. Then 20,000 fertilised eggs took the night train from Bakewell, packed in wine bottles.

🏰 The Monteviot escape

Grayling kept in a pond on Lord John Scott's dairy farm got out when a dam was breached by accident, and colonised the Teviot and Tweed.

🏰 The Eden · Over the wall

Fry tipped into the Eden over a church wall at Musgrave were swept to Appleby by a flood, spread 20 miles downstream, then worked back up.

Thyme

Thymallus means “thyme smell”. To St Ambrose, wrote Izaak Walton, it was “the flower of fishes”.

99.7%

of 82,343 grayling logged by UK anglers went back alive. Once they were culled as “vermin”.

235

prey items, of 17 kinds of invertebrate, were found in one grayling. Not a fussy eater.

4 lb 8 oz

British rod-caught record: Dorset Frome, 2019. Well established in just two UK lakes, Bala and Gouthwaite.