

Gudbrandur Orri Vigfússon

Curriculum vitae

Orri Vigfússon was born in 1942 in Sigluffjordur, a herring town in Northern Iceland. He was educated in Icelandic schools before moving to London in 1959 where he continued in higher education. He completed a degree in Business Studies at the London School of Economics in 1964.

During his career Orri has worked in several small manufacturing companies in Iceland and has been engaged in development projects in rural areas mostly in Iceland and in Greenland helping to generate new employment opportunities.

Professional & Civic Positions

Board member, Íslandsbanki hf (Iceland's leading financial services provider, 1987-2004)
Director/Chairman, Icelandic Opera (1990s)
Trustee Chairman, The Migratory Salmon Foundation UK
Chairman, Laxárfélagid Salmon Club (Big Laxa/Laxá í Aðaldal)
Chairman, Strengur River Sela Sporting Club
Director & Secretary, Icelandic Angling Club Akureyri (Fljótaá)
Chairman, Íslenskur Fiskur ehf. (Family-owned fish processing company)
Man. Director, Kolmúli ehf. (Small investment company)
Chairman, Verktakar ehf. (Herring company)
CEO of Sproti EHF (ICY Vodka)

Honorary Positions

Chairman & Founder, North Atlantic Salmon Fund (International)
Director, Atlantic Salmon Federation (US)
Director, North Atlantic Salmon Fund (US)
Life Member, The American Museum of Fly Fishing
Honorary Life Member, The Flyfishers' Club, London
Honorary Life Member, Anglers' Club of New York
Honorary President, Icelandic Angling Club, London
Vice President, NASF (UK)
Honorary Life Member, Llandysul Angling Association, Wales
Patron, South West Rivers Association, UK
President, NASF Northern Ireland
Member, European Salmon Restoration Team

Recognitions, Honors & Awards

2016 International Game Fish Association's Hall of Fame
2014 Gold Award, Association of Icelandic River Owners
2013 Heritage Award, The American Museum of Fly Fishers
2012 Knight Order from the Government of France
2008 *Foodandwine.com* Eco-Ocean Award
2007 Goldman Environmental Award
2006 *The Economist* Leading Social Entrepreneurs List
2005 Ashoka Senior Fellowship Appointment
2004 *Time Magazine* European Hero
2004 Theodor Gordon Flyfishers Ed Zern Salmon Award GF
2003 Coldwater Conservation Award, North America
Chuck Yeager Award: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, USA
Lee Wulff Conservation Award: Atlantic Salmon Federation, USA
HRH the Prince of Wales Conservation Award
Akademia Café Opera Award
Gold Award: The Reykjavík Angling Club, Iceland
Knight Order from HM The Queen of Denmark
Knight Order from the President of Iceland
VISA Cultural Award for Nature Conservation
Enviro-Capitalist Award: Political Economy Research Center, USA
Honorary Goodwill Salmon Ambassador for Denmark

About Orri Vigfússon – the Man and his Mission

Orri Vigfusson has become the Atlantic salmon's greatest friend as this iconic species struggles to retain its position as the 'King of Fish'. His enormous efforts to rebuild the threatened wild salmon stocks in the North Atlantic have brought him global recognition and well-earned honours from a huge assembly of admirers. Royalty and commoners, presidents and governments, anglers and conservationists alike have all applauded and rewarded his work with a wide variety of awards and supportive declarations.

This successful Icelandic businessman and passionate salmon angler, first came to the aid of the salmon over 20 years ago. Grossly excessive commercial fishing was the main ingredient in a poisonous cocktail of destructive issues that was decimating against wild salmon populations throughout the North Atlantic.

Man-made problems of pollution, habitat destruction and the diseases, mass escapes and the lethal by-products of the salmon farming industry had combined with natural fluctuations in the ocean's ability to feed the migrating salmon shoals. The steep decline in the number of fish which completed their long oceanic migration and survived to spawn in their home rivers was threatening to turn the salmon into a vanishing resource.

In 1989 Orri observed the great damage being done by nets and long lines to the relatively small numbers of salmon that remained. As a descendant of a commercial fishing family he knew that there was only one way to halt this decline – the fishermen had to be persuaded to stop salmon fishing. If this was to succeed the income they would lose would have to be replaced with cash and the equipment to develop other kinds of sustainable fisheries.

Fortunately for Orri, his salmon fishing friends and some of his business contacts could see he was right. They give him both support and money to launch the organisation that soon became the North Atlantic Salmon Fund (NASF). It has spread to all the countries with Atlantic salmon rivers. It is fair to say that his love of the species *Salmo salar* has taken him on a journey that mirrors the determination and stamina of the fish he so admires. As such he has become the mastermind of one of the world's greatest conservation adventures.

It has taken enormous effort but it works! It is estimated that his commercial conservation agreements now cover 85% of the waters which the Atlantic salmon inhabits and that between 5 and 10 million salmon that would have fallen victim to the fishing industry have been saved to return to their rivers of birth to spawn. Drift-netting has been virtually eliminated and all fishing on the high seas has stopped.

It began when Orri successfully pursued his idea of buying up commercial salmon quotas from fishermen in the Faroe Islands. A quota buyout was subsequently agreed with fishermen in Greenland in 1993. Gradually more agreements have been made on both sides of the North Atlantic through the work of NASF and its coalition partner organisations and the governments of Canada, USA, United Kingdom and Ireland.

Orri sees his belief in 'green capitalism' as the only way that abundant and profitable fisheries can be maintained in the future. Greenland is now the world's major exporter of lumpfish roe thanks to NASF assistance after the buyout deal. A host of similar schemes and offshoot projects has come from a seemingly simple idea to help salmon survive on their ocean feeding grounds and offshoot projects that have drawn in thousands of campaigners, volunteers and benefactors.

Continuous fundraising is a critical element to Orri's efforts. Every week of the year he has to raise considerable funds in order to maintain these conservation agreements. He is therefore constantly roaming the world hoping to find new conservation partners.

Over the past two decades he has been showered with tangible recognition of his work with NASF. It includes Knight Orders from Her Majesty The Queen of Denmark and The Icelandic Falcon from the President of Iceland. Awards have been bestowed by *Time Magazine*, *The Economist* and HRH The Prince of Wales and in 2007 he was recipient of The Goldman Environmental Award. In 2013 the French Government awarded him an Order of Knighthood. However, he is the first to admit that he could not have achieved so much without the cash, advice and myriad help he receives from supporters.

There is still much to be done but as long as Orri is at the helm the salmon will continue to have a much better chance of making it back to their home rivers each year, bringing joy and wonder wherever they swim. Orri's latest project is a demanding and daring venture to restore salmon to the East Machias river in Maine. It will use the hatchery and stocking techniques created by Peter Gray, the expert whose work was the main factor in restoring the river Tyne to its former glory. Now that the massive industrial and domestic pollutants have been addressed the river has been firmly reestablished one of England's finest salmon rivers.