

Stutterheim Trout Angling Club

NEWSLETTER – Autumn / APRIL 2013



I write this after recently returning from a week at Gubu Dam. No, it was not a fishing holiday, I was there on various official duties but of course I fished in-between. The fishing was good and between my father and I we landed 50+ rainbows varying in size from the latest 25 cm stockies to a few 60 cm fish, the heaviest of which was 2.6 kg. Most of the fish were the 38 – 43 cm (700 g – 1 kg) 2011's stocking, and having only begun feeding consistently in the shallows again from late March, they've put on little condition over the hot months. It's been a while since the dam has fished as well as it is now, when it's possible to catch six fish before breakfast or having days like our secretary, Ryan Smith, reports from early April, when he and a companion got 18 trout in a day, some of them on the dry fly (there's a pic of Ryan further on). Thanks to the efforts of the previous committee, that is decent fishing, and we can expect to enjoy the momentum of that 12,000-odd fish stocking well into 2014.

Last season's stocking was a much smaller number. 2139 All-female rainbows, averaging 11 cm, were stocked on the 19th of December 2012. The stocking was less than optimum mostly because of a lack of funds resulting from low 2012 membership and the cost of the fish. R10,398 was spent on fish from Martin Davies (who raised the fry from trout bred at Stellenbosch University). The good news is that the little ones are doing well and have at least doubled in length in their four months at large. Grant Wylie from Sandile's Rest and his manager, Alwyn Milns, were instrumental in this stocking. Grant provided his vehicle driven by Alwyn and especially rigged-out with their fish transporting tank and life support system, the fish were safely delivered to Gubu. Robin (from the house on the hill) and Rodney Webb helped majorly in the process on the ground and I would like to make this an official thank you to everyone involved and also to the committee members who made arrangements in the background to get the necessary gear to Grant in time. Incidentally, Alwyn and Robin also stocked Maden Dam on the same day as part of the process, which was a friendly gesture on STAC's and Sandile's Rest's part to our neighbours at the Frontier Acclimatisation Society.

But what is the longer term prognosis of fishing at Gubu? In the last newsletter I reported that I was in discussion with a private landowner (Sandile's Rest) close to Gubu who was interested in developing a small hatchery as part of their own tourism plans and who was willing to enter into an agreement with the club. In late November, Sandile's Rest together with STAC applied for permission to build a hatchery, which was submitted to Mr. Ricky Hannan (Assistant Director: Biodiversity Conservation and Coastal Zone Management at DEDEAT). We channeled all correspondence through Mr. Rory Haschick (the sector specialist on Tourism, Aquaculture & Fisheries and Environmental Management at The Eastern Cape Development Corporation), whose punctual input and services resulted in a fast and positive response from DEDEAT. Here too I would like to state an official thank you to Mr. Hannan for his support in seeing the value to tourism development in this venture, and also to Mr. Haschick in the manner in which he facilitated a positive outcome.

The concept with this hatchery is to source many-generation, South African strain, eyed ova from a breeder in the Western Cape. The ova will be flown to East London and thereafter hatched out and grown to stocking size at Sandile's Rest. A price-structure agreement that has been negotiated between STAC and the Sandile's Rest hatchery can ensure the supply of the required optimum number of fish for STAC waters, and at a cost that STAC can potentially afford (but will require a growth in membership in the future).

There will always be various scenarios in the ratio between stocking numbers, size, and cost, but best-case economics dictates that we stock with fewer fish of larger size. Taking into account the stockings since 2009, and the current observed condition factors, the dam appears close to its carrying capacity. Numbers still need to be fine-tuned, but we hope to stock with 12,000 – 15,000 fish of 7-10 cm in Spring.

Grant Wylie and his team at Sandile's Rest is busy constructing the hatchery right now. I have been involved in the initial design and helping source the various components, but critical to the process and overseeing it all on the side is aquaculturist Hylton Lewis. Hylton's colleagues when he was learning his expertise at Rhodes University have told me that he has green fingers when it comes to breeding and raising trout, so I'm holding thumbs.

Aquaculture is an extremely risky endeavour; a glitch the day before stocking can cause all to be lost. There are a thousand things that have to go right before we can breathe easy the day we actually stock, but with people who have the combined enthusiasm and respective know-how of Hylton, Grant and his team, I am confident that we are doing the best we can.

At the time of writing the last newsletter (November 2012), membership was at 43 paid-up memberships. Subsequently there has been some growth to around 60 memberships, with the actual individual members when including family and married couple memberships being quite a few more. To be sustainable in the longer term however, our goal needs to be 100 memberships at least. With those kinds of numbers we can have good trout fishing for evermore and perhaps too the potential to include some of the smaller farm dams near Gubu. With this in mind, I propose that you invite your like-minded fishing mates to join you for a trip to Gubu, especially for an overnight at the clubhouse so they can soak up the atmosphere, get in some fishing and mountain air and see the bang they're getting for their buck.

Last week I had a meeting with a traditional leader, Mr. Mdledle, in the Mnyameni Valley as well as representatives from Cata Lodge, all of whom are part of the Border Rural Council's Amatola Wild Trout tourism initiative and who manage the fishing rights to Mnyameni Dam and the Cata River. This meeting was to further earlier written proposals of a reciprocal fishing agreement between Cata Lodge and STAC to give STAC members access to these wild fisheries. I was very well received and the proposal was seen in a positive light, though no final decisions have been made and the community representatives asked for more time to mull over the ideas presented.

News on the proposal to merge STAC with the Frontier Acclimatisation Society (that manages the fishing access to Maden Dam) is that both the STAC and FAS committees and FAS members are largely in favour of this. What this would mean is that the Maden and Gubu Dam fisheries and their associated facilities will come under a single body, which makes sense given the proximity of the two dams. It also adds value to both the original clubs by making both venues available to all of the members. This is a big plus especially if rain has muddied the one water and not the other for your fishing weekend. Maden, at only 9 Ha, is also less intimidating than Gubu's 109 Ha, and when the fishing gets tough at Gubu, Maden is often a little easier. What remains with this merger is for there to be no serious objections from STAC members and should there be none, to also decide on a new name for the merged clubs. The century old FAS is probably the longest standing fishing club in Africa, and this name should be retained. The STAC name has little historical significance and in reality we have few Stutterheim members these days as well as the club is quite different to its beginnings as mostly a yachting and fishing recreational club for the Stut community.

What I propose is that a new club name be Amathole Fly Fishing Club, Incorporating the Frontier Acclimatisation Society. With this name we are linked to the broader Amathole region and with fly fishing in general, instead of specific waters and just trout. This might be important should the club's waters grow in the Amathole region to perhaps include access to waters beyond Maden and Gubu for other species like

yellowfish. This is just a proposal, any objections, ideas and comments re. a name and the merge in general are welcomed and should be sent to our e-mail address (stac.trout@gmail.com) by 31 May 2013.

I met with Mr. Francois Sparks (Amatola Forests Plantation Manager) last week to discuss the clearing of the pine plantations growing along the south bank of Doctor's Creek and along the north bank leading towards The Drift. Francois explained that these areas had never been cleared due to the concern that indigenous plants might not establish on the clay soils that lack sufficient topsoil. I expressed my concern that pine plantations reduce the nitrogen content of the soil and water leaching into the dam (nitrogen is an important nutrient for the base of the food chain), that the blanket of pine needles adds to organic acids leaching into the dam and reducing the pH (a neutral to alkaline pH is more productive), and that the plantation is home to very few terrestrial insects, etc. Francois has agreed to have the pines removed. The larger trees will be removed for their commercial value but remaining branches and the smaller will be placed in such a way to help prevent erosion and aid the rehabilitation of the area in the long term back to indigenous grassland. Indigenous grassland fringes improve the health of the dam by reducing organic acid runoff, reducing nitrogen depletion and providing a healthy biodiverse habitat for all manner of insects and larger life, some of which end up in the water as trout food. The idea is that barring the campsite, eventually all of the dam will have a restored, indigenous grass buffer between the water and the pines.

On the subject of habitat, Dean Rhind has donated a couch to replace the previous clubhouse couch that was a danger to one's health. Glenn Raath has donated fine tables to go with the couch in front of the main fireplace. It really is cushy now and our appreciation goes to Glenn and Dean. I have donated a set of crockery and cutlery, and a few extra pots etc. so that it's no longer necessary for one to cart that stuff for overnight stays. When I arrived at the clubhouse last week, I found it spick and span and sparkling like a medical research facility, which is wonderful (I am not sure who was responsible for the big clean, but I am thinking it was Shaun Peterson). It goes without saying that *na lag kom huil*, so after any party in the clubhouse, please leave it ship shape (that also means don't forget your defrosting boerewors in the microwave).

Anyone having household items in good condition that the clubhouse could use must please contact our treasurer, Glenn Raath, on 0845076267. Glenn will comment on if we can use it or not and make a plan to get it to the clubhouse. The clubhouse has some large expanses of bare concrete floor, so carpeting and rugs would be a lot friendlier on the feet when they come out of wet boots in winter.

The club has needed a new lawnmower for too long. After I appealed for assistance on this front, Mr. Div van Niekerk, a member from Jeffreys Bay made arrangements through Mr. Gerhard Fourie of Die Kooperasie (Hermitage branch near Addo) to obtain a mower via Mr. Mike Cowie, the area sales manager for Allcut Power Products in Port Elizabeth at a most reasonable price. Again our thanks to Div, Gerhard, and Mike and everyone else involved in the process and getting it to our committee member, Shaun Petersen, who has taken charge of it and already done a great job on the lawn. Shaun has also slaved away with herbicide to keep the grass away from the clubhouse fringes. All we need to do now is clone folks like Shaun, he really goes beyond the call of duty to make the club better.

Some members have expressed an interest to take their dogs to Gubu. This is currently not allowed as the area is in a conservancy managed by Amatola Forests. However, Francois Sparks has agreed that members who would like to take their dogs with them to Gubu can obtain official permission (a three month permit) from Mr. Ian Taylor, the head of security at Amatola Forests. Ian can be contacted via e-mail (iantay@rancetimber.co.za) wherein you state the number and breed of dog. Please note this concession is only for smaller breeds and the dogs must have collars allowing them to be leashed. Also, Ian asks that should anyone see stray dogs, or dog packs near Gubu to report it to him on 0797036410 / 043-6835247.

There have been instances of late of Robin finding anglers on the water without day tickets who are members' guests. The excuse is typically, "Oh we were going to pay later." That's fine in the event of an early start or not to waste fishing time upon arrival, but in order to avoid being painted with ill intent, please phone Robin or Ronald (043-6832887) before arriving to say you'll be on the water with X number of guests and that you will stop at the bailiff house to settle up later. Or similarly, stop off at the house quickly to state your plans when arriving and then finish up there at the end of the day as you head home.

If passing through or using the clubhouse please enter your catches in the register. The format has been changed slightly and no longer includes location of one's catch, which many anglers are hesitant to tell on. What is important though is the number, size/length and condition factor of the fish caught t. Fishing feedback is important in order to understand and manage the fishery properly. Further changes will be made to the register and a register system in future to make it easy and practical and of value to complete.

We are planning a get-together at the dam in late August / early September. This will be for the AGM but also a social do open to the public that will include some fun activities like a distance casting competition, accuracy casting competition, broomstick casting competition (which really separates the men from the boys), etc. as well as a fishing competition but with a few curious twists compared to those of the past. If there's sufficient interest we'll also look to screening a fly fishing movie or two. We will settle on a date soon and send that out. A work-party to take care of some cleaning and maintenance is also necessary.

The end of May 2012 will be subs-paying time. At the last AGM a unanimous decision was made to raise the subs by 10%, so best you pen that into the budget. The fee can be written off against your tax as a medical expense. By the way, did you know a 1973 subscription to STAC cost R5.00?

All that remains to be said is that Gubu is producing the goods at the moment, so round up family and friends and go catch a couple.

Tight lines,

Edward Truter, April 2013
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