

AMATOLA FLY FISHING CLUB

Incorporating the Frontier Acclimatisation Society and the Stutterheim Trout Angling Club

NEWSLETTER – AUTUMN / APRIL 2014



This is the first newsletter in a while, that's because I don't like to write about our waters without at least a little firsthand news.

Autumn is my favourite time fish for trout, so I always try to get to Gubu sometime in April. I spent four days at the dam around the 30th April and was surprised to find the water still at 17-18 C°, when at the same time last year it was 15-16 C°. We were blessed with classic autumn weather, but the crisp, dead-calm days, can mean dead-calm fishing too. We (my fishing friends and I) did okay in the end though. We caught our fair share of 1-1.3kg fish (mid to upper 40cm), with two or three going 50cm+ too. These bigger fish were in poor condition as is often the case at Gubu where the heavier fish can find it difficult to maintain condition with the warm, summer water temperatures forcing them to spend most of their time in the deep water, where there's a lack of larger food organisms. That said, midge larvae (blood worms), midge pupae, and daphnia often help improve the situation.

Stockies we caught plenty of. They have grown well and are currently around 26cm long. To fill everyone in on the 2013 stockings, the main Gubu stocking of 19,711 fish (averaging 3.8g/7.5cm) took place on the 19th October. A further 1,000 fingerlings (averaging 20g/13cm) were stocked on the 17th January. Maden Dam was stocked with 3,538 fingerlings (averaging 4.2g/7.5cm) on the 18th October. There's a whole shoal of thank-yous that must be said with respect to the stockings. First, to Grant Wylie and his team (especially Alwyn Milns) from our local hatchery at Sandile's, who did an excellent job of building a hatchery and hatching and rearing the fish to start with. Aquaculturist, Hylton Lewis, helped make sure everything ran smoothly and was on-hand for any speed wobbles. Grant also provided Sandile's vehicle, stocking equipment, and life support system free of charge, plus, the 2nd stocking at Gubu (the extra 1000 fish in January) was a special favour from him. A number of club members came to physically help us at the dams, especially with carrying buckets around, thank you: Andrew Pautz, Matt Bekker, Bruce Truter, Colin Levey, Lionel Cromhout, Robin, and Karl and Victor Krull.

The stocking MO was to fragment the batches of stocked fingerlings as much as was practically possible, rather than releasing all of them at just a few locations. What tends to happen with large stockings at a limited number of stocking sites is that the fish often form big schools that can take a few days to break up and disperse, and all the while get hammered by larger trout, cormorants, otters, kingfishers, etc. Releasing the fingerlings by the scoop-net full all along the vegetated margins of the dam, which is what we did, immediately reduces the threat of major predation losses and spreads the competitive load of the little trout for food. It was interesting to note that the fingerlings were in such good ('happy') condition and relaxed temperament, that most of them could be observed immediately going on the feed and gleefully attacking every floating insect in sight. I would like to extend the club's gratitude to Karl Krull and his son, Victor (chief scoop-'n-dip trout stocker), as it was thanks to Karl providing his rather special boat that we were able to stock how we did. The survival number of the stockies thus far appears to have been

excellent, which is not only a financial boon for our investment and an indication that the stocking strategy is paying dividends, but will also mean that we can look forward to some fine fishing rewards.

The planned stocking strategy for 2014 is to be much the same as 2013 in fish numbers, timing, and the actual stocking. It is difficult to gauge in the short term how close our stocking strategy is to the optimum. But, bearing in mind that the 2013 numbers were determined after a lengthy desk-top review of the stocking history of Maden and Gubu, a review of the area (in hectares) of the dams' productive zones, and the combination of various stocking models from elsewhere in S.A. and the world, the numbers were no thumb-suck. This, together with the dams' ecologies and their fish stocks and fish condition currently appearing in a healthy state, is an indication that our plan is probably safe enough until nature tells us otherwise.

No brown trout were stocked in 2013 as no ova or fry were available, a situation that has carried over into 2014, but we are hopeful that, and are working towards, some browns being an option for 2015. There does however appear to be a very small, self sustaining population of browns in both our dams though, as every now and then one gets caught and reported by a reputable angler.

At the 2013 AGM it was planned to have the 2014 club gathering, Gubu competitions, and AGM in May, but due to some of the committees' work and personal commitments this has not been possible, so it will default to the traditional ex-opening of trout season weekend of 6/7th September. You can pen that in on your almanac and start praying for pleasant weather. The idea is to have a similar format to last year, although the casting competitions (apart from the broomstick) will be with your own gear, so practicing your distance (no shooting heads or 9' + rods allowed) and accuracy is on the cards. More info will be e-mailed as ideas develop. In the meanwhile, if anyone would like to provide any help in any way (manpower, prize sponsorship, sponsorship ideas, general ideas, etc. they can let me know).

The non-member rod and accommodation tickets have just been updated, and it's the same paperwork regardless of whether it's Maden or Gubu that's being fished. As in the past, tickets are available from Target Line in East London, Criterion Supermarket (Cambridge Rd., K.W.T), the bailiffs at Gubu and we hope in the near future, from Mrs. Robertson at Maden Dam. A special thanks is due to one of our members, Malcolm Klein, and his staff of CB4 Retail & Production, who undertook the prep and printing of the new ticket books at their expense. (If you need any, especially retail-related, printing work done contact Malcolm 043-7351345.)

A note on boat usage at Maden: I have confirmed with Mr, Bruweni, the Buffalo City Municipality supervisor for Maden Dam, that contrary to previous information, non-motorised boats are allowed on the dam, i.e. it's the same rules that apply at Gubu.

Most of you are probably aware of the discussions that have been taking place between the Department of Environmental Affairs, FOSAF (national) and Trout SA in order to devise acceptable, practical legislation with regard to managing trout within a balanced framework of human needs, the environment and biodiversity. FOSAF national chairman and legal guru, Ilan Lax, and another Natal lawyer, Ian Cox, have been working tirelessly in this regard and all of those of us who enjoy fishing for non-native fishes, owe them a great deal. More can be read about this on the FOSAF website.

One of our neighbouring clubs, the Queenstown Fly Fishing Club, will be having their annual gathering on the long weekend of 13th – 15th June. The club has great stillwaters with quality fish, so check their website (www.qffc.co.za) for more info and to make a booking. You can also contact club chairman, Andre Naude, on 0826518502.

Long-time Grahamstown members, Denny & Derek Richardson, have the following for sale: an Xplorer XPTII 1-man pontoon boat with all accessories (oars, foldable anchor, rod holders, pump, etc.) in mint condition for R4500. Also, a 2.9m fibreglass 'Clinker' boat with dolly, which is currently at Gubu, for R1000, contact Derek on 0834695358 / derek@hitecsecurity.co.za. For anyone interested in going retro, Chris Gilson in Port Elizabeth has two float tubes of the original belly-boat/doughnut style as was sold by the Fly Fisherman in Pietermaritzburg (before *A River Runs Through It*), and a pair of same-generation waders for R500, contact Chris on 0828975162 / chris@cadar.co.za.

Subs will be due at the end of May; we've applied a less than 10% increase. A membership renewal form will be e-mailed at a later date, and there's the standard, one month's grace.

Our numbers are growing all the time and we are currently at 91 memberships, but we still need bigger numbers for long-term security. Remember, during the course of promoting the club you can always direct interested folks to our website (www.amatolaflyfishingclub.co.za) where they'll find more info and can download an application for membership form. We are also on Facebook, which is a great portal to share what's happening on the water with other members. Search for "Amatola Fly Fishing Club" or go to www.facebook.com/gubu.dam?fref=ts

Fair winds and fine fishing,

Edward Truter



HIKERS' HUT, GUBU DAM, AUTUMN 2014 (photo: K. Nairn)