

# AMATOLA FLY FISHING CLUB

Incorporating the Frontier Acclimatisation Society and the Stutterheim Trout Angling Club



## NEWSLETTER – SUMMER / DECEMBER 2018

Our 29 September fundraising competition entrance was a bit lower this year, which I've put down to a sign of the times, as each year our marketing and reach broadens, and this year was no different. That said, fundraising per capita was up, which was largely a function of the quality of the prizes on hand, I think. While competition entrance itself was down, event attendance was good and we had 43 people at Gubu, which all went off very nicely. The weather played along, more or less, and everyone had fun.

The fishing results summary for the competition are: 63 trout caught, being 56 rainbows and 7 browns, that's a ratio of 9 rainbows to 1 brown ; the biggest rainbow was 53cm (caught by Scott Blair) and the biggest brown was 49cm (caught by Dean Stoltz). Sean Swart caught the most fish for the day with 11 rainbows from 42 to 51cm.

The AGM followed the day after, which turned out to be a strange event and all present agreed they had too little to say to warrant hanging around for a meeting and asked that they simply be informed via e-mail of whatever they need to be informed of. That document has duly been completed and e-mailed out.

Subsequent to the news and items reported in the AGM document, there are a few updates which will be discussed forthwith ...

There are now combination locks on the Gubu clubhouse gate and door, the combination is changed regularly and can be got from Robin or Ronald when signing in on arrival, buying electricity, etc. There's also a slightly modified system now for those wishing to use the clubhouse, the nitty gritty of which is that all persons using the clubhouse must be noted in the accommodation register upon arrival, and all non-member accommodation, rod ticket, and electricity fees must be paid upfront. There's also been an increase in the rod ticket to R150 pp/pd, the rest of the fees remain as before.

We are also slowly getting all the unused and unnecessary stuff out of the clubhouse and I'd like to make an appeal to everyone using the clubhouse: PLEASE, very-much PLEASE (!) don't leave any of your garbage behind or any item you feel someone MIGHT find useful one day. Each time I visit Gubu I cart away bags of left-behinds, past-use-by-dates and so forth (see the photo showing 9 bags I had to cart back to P.E. from my November visit). I'd much rather spend my time working on the technicalities of our AFFC fisheries for everyone to have better fishing than on tidying up.



A recent and typical collection of the endless rubbish and other miscellaneous, near-useless stuff left behind to clutter up the Gubu clubhouse and that needs to be ridden away every few months. It's a proper pain in the ass!



Brenton Freeman with an example of one of the very solid rainbows currently in Gubu. It remains to be seen how their condition will be after the summer, but for now they are looking better than they have been in many years.

The much more fun news is that the fish in Gubu are looking the best I've seen them in years. The condition factors and sizes for the individual year classes of rainbows are higher than they've been since about 2012. I attribute this partly to the lower water levels of the last while that have allowed for weed growth to establish in areas with previously too little sunlight. And the newly-exposed, bare banks and big winds (read waves) of 2018 have also probably allowed for a lot of minerals to be washed into suspension and taken up into solution (hence the murky colour right now), which provide various positives into the nutrient chain and in creating substrate for biofilms on which microorganisms that make up the base of the food chain depend. Added to this have been favourable temperatures closer to the ideal growing temps for the trout. This is all just hypothesising but if some of it is correct, it just goes to show that a full, stable water level is not necessarily as good as a fluctuating water level, which is in keeping with Nature's plan anyway.

What is also most probably a positive contributing factor is the reduced stocking policy of the last few years, i.e. fewer little, hungry mouths and thus a reduced impact on the lower part of the food chain, e.g. the plankton like the daphnia and phantom midge larvae so important in Gubu, which might be helping the other, larger food organisms the trout eat, and help the larger trout directly when they need to spend more time in deeper water due to warm temperatures. The trade off of course is less fish overall and lower catch per unit effort, but I hope that anglers will be happy with how things are and I remain confident that every year we get closer and closer to finding and tweaking the sweet spot on how to manage our fisheries.

The brown trout from the Feb. 2017 stocking continue to show exceptional growth and condition, and some of them are well into the 50cm size class now and in the 3lb to 4lb range. We still don't know if these browns have turned onto the goby biomass as a primary food source, as we hoped they would, but if they have, it could explain their growth. And to continue hypothesising, if the browns are feeding heavily on the gobies, reducing goby numbers could have a positive impact on the populations of the organisms on which the gobies feed, and that could lead to a direct and indirect chain reaction bringing about an increase in dragon fly larvae, crabs, chubby head barbs, etc. And if that is indeed all true, it would be a delicate balance keeping the populations of food organisms stable and sustainable, i.e. one doesn't one too many browns totally depleting the goby food source, but rather just enough browns to feed on just enough gobies to allow just the right amount of the other organisms to be in balance with each other. All of which points to a cautious and prudent approach with little adjustments as we learn.

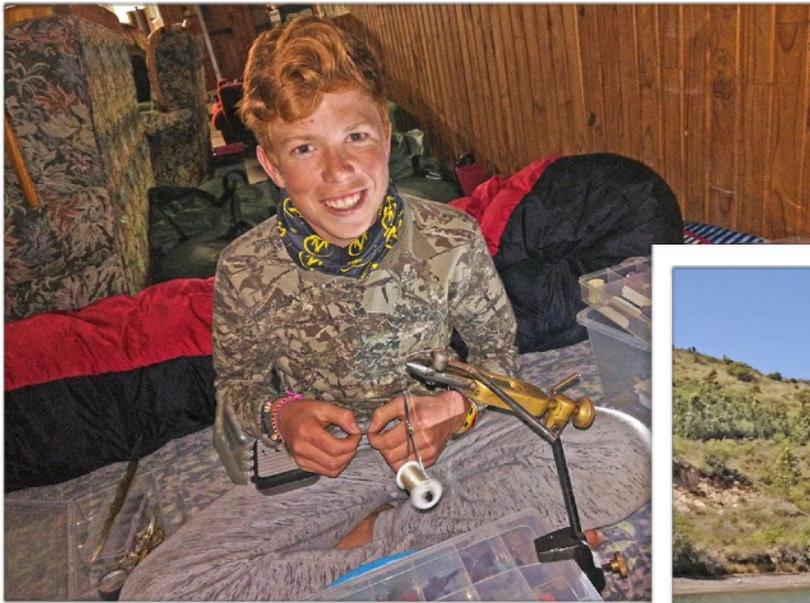
The latest rainbow stocking saw 3500, 5.3g, 8-10cm, mixed sex fingerlings go into Maden, and 12500 into Gubu. A massive thank you to Ryan Smith and his team who did the Maden job on the 16th November, and to Devin Isemonger and Karl Krull and their team and helpers who did Gubu on the 17th November. A big thank you as always too, to Grant Wylie, Andre Du Bryn, and the rest of the

Sandile hatchery team who do so well at hatching and raising excellent quality fingerlings each year and offering our club some special concessions in the stocking and pricing.

We are waiting for some of the 3967, 4-5cm the browns that were stocked in late July to put in an appearance. These fish were supplied to us at half the size they were supposed to be and it's impossible to know how many of them will survive the ills they typically face, but even if just 1/4 of them make it to catchable size, it will be an exciting addition to the current population of browns in Gubu, and we hope to keep the brown trout stockings going.

In the AGM note I reported that we were setting up an agreement with the Border Rural Committee that will allow for our members to fish the Cata River and Mnyameni Dam, this is still in-process as the communication lines are slow between the various parties. But it's all good and we'll get there in the new year at which time I'll send out a note explaining the wheres and whats.

I'm going to end this newsletter with two photos that sum up part of the philosophy of what I believe our club stands for, that being to provide fisheries that bring people joy and outdoor-time through fly fishing. The pics show Kirstie Eastwood with her second trout (taken on a dry fly from Mnyameni), only a day after learning to fly cast, and Matt Naude, growing into the fly fishing life and excitedly tying flies by torchlight. Seeing the smiles that having fish to fish for in quiet, beautiful settings is what it's all about. And for me personally, there's a bigger picture too, as I believe that the experiences that people take away with them from time spent on the water makes them better human beings who are more in-tune with our planet and more inclined to take better care of it.



Wishing everyone a happy festive season, the perfect kind of holiday, and happy fishing!

Ed Truter