



## NEWSLETTER May 2020

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### Preparing to cast.

Well, we are still in lock down and will be for some time to come, but the show must go on and I have to earn my keep, so here goes with a very meagre newsletter.

I have not included the usual Calendar of Coming Events, because there probably will not be any for quite a while. There is also uncertainty about next month's meeting, scheduled for Thursday 28th May, which, as I understand things, is also on hold for the moment.

We may well be allowed some recreational fishing in the near future, but organised outings to the beach and to local dams will, I'm sure, not be allowed. Trips to Wattled Crane and Mountain Lake will of course also definitely be out for some time. When we receive more clarity after the May 1st, the committee will be in a better position to arrange something, but don't rely too much on that. When allowed, go out and throw a line, even if it is by yourself.

This month, of course, we have nothing on local outings, but there are two articles on unusual methods of fishing. The first, while true, is very tongue-in-cheek; the second is also a true account of a very effective, albeit unscrupulous method.

Lockdown, is starting to give many of us "cabin fever" and there are a few stories as to how members are coping. If you have any more, drop me a line. I will still be very short of copy for next month. Keep safe Cheers Arthur.

### Coming Events.

#### Fly of the Month.

The flies, which would have been judged at the May meeting are the freshwater Bibio and the saltwater Half and Half. Recipes for both have been sent out to members. These will be judged, together with April's flies, i.e. Mike's Scalie Killer and Tom's Gully Fly at the next meeting, whenever that may be. Remember this will, of course, also be the AGM.

#### Fishing Australian rivers and coasts. By Myotis Macropus.

I was born at a very early age and currently live in my birthplace in a location overlooking the Hawkesbury River, north of Sydney in New South Wales, Australia. Fishing is my passion and have indulged in this from Melbourne, up the east coast, in Sydney harbour itself and up the east and northern coasts, as far as Darwin. I know that many South Africans will, at this stage already have lost interest in what an Aussie has to say, but bear with me and hear me out, as this is a fishing story with a difference.

Akin with most semi-outback Australian families, my folks were really poor and survived mainly on a diet of self-caught fish. No luxuries in our abode, the roof of which leaked whenever it rained and the wind always sounded like a pack of banshee wolves on the prowl.

As is the case in many under-privileged communities, living in close proximity to one's neighbour, leads to a high degree of in-breeding, which in our case has caused all members of our society to have extremely poor eyesight.

Catch-and-release was definitely not a culture that was practised in our family. Catch-and-eat-as-quickly-as-possible, ensured that you had a small chance of survival. There was also virtually no sharing of the spoils, so one had to learn to catch at least something, every time that one ventured forth. Mother's milk for the young, but a "go and catch your own" culture was instilled in the siblings at a very early age.



Despite the urgency for success at every strike, barbless hooks were and still are the norm and surprisingly very few fish are lost. Admittedly large, curved caddis type hooks are used exclusively and a method of "reverse jigging" is employed.

The fish is jigged on the forward cast, rather than on the retrieve. This of course takes many hours of practise, but when perfected, is an extremely effective method.

The hapless victim wriggles and squirms and tries every tactic to get back to the safety of the water, but a tight grip ensures that breakfast, or supper is secure. I rarely fish at mid-day.

Like most Australian rivers, the waters of the Hawkesbury River and even the sea around Sydney harbour is clean, well let's say that it is clear of mud, even though scientific tests have shown that there are unacceptable levels of heavy metals in abundance in the harbour. This pollution is extremely worrying to fisher folk such as us and the authorities are busy with efforts to improve the situation. If unsuccessful, this pollution will spell the end of my generation.

Back to the positive! The clarity of the water ensures that any luckless fish that shows a dorsal fin above the surface, will be the target for a well placed strike. In fact the dorsal does not have to actually break the surface; a mere swirl will betray the fact that dinner lies below. How, you ask is this possible when, by your own admission your eyesight is not 20/20?

A wonderful and well known fact of nature is that when one of the senses is impaired, the intensity of others are enhanced. In my case, poor eyesight led to an improvement in both my hearing and my sixth sense of "seeing with my ears." This improvement enables me to sense where the fish is prowling just below the surface and to home in with deadly accuracy. Well, most of the time, anyway. I do occasionally miss one of my strikes, but I rarely come home with a totally empty stomach. Fish that are targeted are admittedly on the small size. This is of necessity, as I weigh less than 20 grams. Yes, I am an Australian fishing bat. Go to any of the numerous websites on Australian fishing bats and get more accurate information than the account given above. Fascinating.

### **Fishing with Euphorbia.**

Before you get all excited and think that the title describes a fishing week-end with a dewy eyed brunette, let me explain that the Euphorbia, commonly called "splurge" is a member of the large genus of plants containing many thousand species. These range from small specimens to woody trees and are commonly grown in many gardens in their native countries of Africa, Madagascar, the Americas, Australia and Asia.

A common denominator of all Euphorbias, is that they produce a white milky latex sap when the branch is damaged. This sap is a complex mixture of proteins, alkaloids and a host of other nasties and is produced to keep herbivores and most bugs and caterpillars at bay. It also coagulates quickly when exposed to air, thus aiding the plant to heal any damage that may have been caused by an animal or high wind breaking a branch. The composition of the latex is interesting. Besides causing extreme irritation to the skin of some sensitive handlers, it also causes severe pain if one inadvertently gets a drop into the eye.

What has this to do with fishing?

This latex also contains the poison rotenone. To those of you who have more or less kept up with the saga on "Trout and other alien species in Africa" that FOSAF have been fighting for many years, will remember that Cape Nature poisoned the Rondegat River in 2012 with rotenone, this in an effort to get rid of invasive bass. (They incidentally also killed adult indigenous yellow fish and all other crabs and noonoos, but that is another story for another time.)

Back to the Euphorbia latex.

This latex, containing rotenone does not actually "poison" the fish, but it has the property to inhibit the respiratory organs from functioning. In other words, it paralyses the lungs, the fish loses consciousness and floats to the surface.

Many tribes of Africa and South America have used this form of fishing for centuries. The fish have not been poisoned, per se, so the flesh can still be safely eaten.

There are limitations to the system however. First of all, as with all forms of fishing, selection of the venue is important. It is highly successful in still water on a "once only basis" that is, until the dam is re-stocked after the rotenone has been flushed out.



Very successful in a slow flowing stream or in a backwater, where the toxin can do its work and the fish can be easily retrieved. Not very successful in a fast flowing stream, as the poison is diluted to a point where it is ineffective.

Mr Google says that this practice is now prohibited in Africa, although it is still used in remote areas. I dare say that many South American Indians have never heard of Mr Google, so they are probably continue to use the method with great success.

I have personally only had one experience of the effects of Euphorbia on fish, when the gardener of a friend "pruned" a Euphorbia tree that was growing near a Koi pond. Needless to say a branch dropped into the water and within minutes, fish started rising to the surface. A large number were saved by giving them artificial respiration i.e. dragging them backwards and forwards through an unaffected section of the system, but a number also joined the bass (and yellow fish) of the Rondegat River.

For those of you who are considering incorporating Euphorbia into a fly, no, they do not have a berry that can be used as a bead!!!!!!!!!!!!

### **Fry, Fingerling and Stockie Stories.**



Sakkie is one member who is really being affected by the lock down. He reports that he has taken to fishing in his bath. You may remember those plastic toys that had a magnet attached to the body and were designed to keep kiddies amused in the bath. While cleaning out a cupboard he found a few, that for some reason had never been thrown away. Among these were some fish. Being a resourceful chap, he rigged up a fly line and "Voila," he was into a yellow on his first try followed by a blue fish (read "Australian shad.") He reports that he has refined his casting, and can now hit the bath from the bathroom door at every attempt.



Another story from Sakkie is that he is gradually running low on supplies of his favourite tippie. He has tried to solve the shortage by recovering a half bottle of Tassenberg. This is a fine cooking wine, but terrible to drink. He solved the problem by adding half a bottle of lemonade and created a blend of Tassenberg Rosè. Desperation indeed.

### **Last Cast.**

Many of you undoubtedly think that our current status of "lockdown" has no positives. You are wrong. When it is finally lifted, our partners, who by that stage will be totally sick and tired of us, will be only too glad to send us way on an extended fishing trip. Roll on stage "whatever-it-is" when we can get out onto the beaches, dams and rivers.

Till then stay safe and please send in a few better stories than those contained in this edition. Cheers Arthur.

