

## Stutterheim Trout Angling Club

NEWSLETTER – NOVEMBER 2012



The club's AGM was held at Gubu on the weekend of the 20<sup>th</sup> October and a few diehards made the trip to enjoy the full brunt of miserable weather that is typical of spring in the Amatolas. But mist and dripping rain are good for fishing and most of those who took a shot had some action, with stockies at the very least. Scott Blair caught the two biggest rainbows during Saturday's competition, his biggest a 2.8 kg cock fish. A better than average (by recent years' numbers) stocking in 2011 has resulted in a good crop of feisty, perfectly conditioned fish that are mostly 40 cm / 700 g-plus at the time of writing. Older fish of 2-2.5 kg are still being caught and the oldest year-class are solid fish of 2.8 kg and bigger, including the likes of the 3.7 kg triploid that Simon Thomas caught in late autumn. I watched one of these big fish feeding during a visit in May, it looked to be chasing frogs or baitfish in the shallows and seemed to displace the same amount of water as an otter. I could not fool it with my fly.

Attended by a mix of newer/younger and long-time/not-so-young members, all with the club's interest strongly at heart, the AGM was a constructive and positive gathering (members should receive the minutes thereto attached) and I would like to elaborate on a number of the discussion points and more in this newsletter.

Everything waxes and wanes as has been the life of the Stutterheim Trout Angling Club. Right now with 43 paid-up members, it's probably at one of its low points. I can't say for sure but I am guessing that one of the reasons for that is that catch per unit effort has dwindled significantly since the early nineties. Economics, the time folks need to spend working, fuel prices, social trends, etc. all play a role. We can't control most of these things so let's just talk about the fishing. Simply put, Gubu is a big dam (around 109 Ha) and to keep it producing fish requires high stocking numbers. What those numbers and the stocking strategy should be, no-one can say for sure as there has never been a systematic stocking and monitoring program to determine optimum stocking size and number. Historically, stocking has mostly been determined by the availability of fish and/or funds. Dr. Olaf Weyl, a fisheries scientist from SAIAB (Grahamstown), has offered his services to help design a program that will record and monitor stocking, growth rate, survival, etc. so that we can better understand the Gubu fishery over the longer term and plan accordingly.

That said, the club still needs to be able to afford to stock. We are looking to raise the club's membership by convincing old members to re-invest in building a prime fishery and by canvassing for new members through a low-key marketing and awareness program; the more members, the more subs and stocking donations we'll have. Added to this strategy, I hope to be able to get more bang for our stocking buck by accessing alternative sources of fish. This year's stocking will cost R2.90 a fish (averaging 2" in length) from Martin Davies. That is 6897 fish with the R20,000 that is currently available for stocking, which is about 10% of what is estimated to be the minimum stocking for Gubu with 2" fry. The technical constraints (water quality, temperature, etc.) on Martin's hatchery make it costly for him to produce fish, though amazingly, and to his huge credit, he gets it right often against

all odds. But there are other sources of fish, for example Molapong Aquaculture in the Western Cape who sell 4" fish for R1.48 each. Yet, then there's the cost and risk of transporting fish a long distance.

All of this points to the need for the club to attempt to be less dependent on outside hatcheries, which is why I began looking into the feasibility of the club having its own hatchery. At a meeting of STAC committee members and aquaculture specialist volunteers at Gubu in May this year, two potential hatchery sites were identified and various basic designs considered. I approached DWAF regarding the use of one of the sites, their boathouse on the clubhouse grounds, as a hatchery. To shorten a long story, the proposal was well received at top-level but we had the book thrown at us by staff closer to the ground. Rather than negotiate the bumpy, and somewhat undisciplinary road of red tape, I have looked for other options. Currently I am in discussions with a landowner living close to Gubu who would like to develop a hatchery as part of his own business and who is willing to enter into an agreement with the club. Under said agreement the club will be able to buy eyed-ova and pay the costs of hatching them out and raising them to the required grow-out stage. To facilitate the process, and especially the permit application process for the hatchery, I have enlisted the assistance of The Eastern Cape Development Corporations' sector specialist on Tourism, Aquaculture & Fisheries and Environmental Management, Mr. Rory Haschick, whose input and facilitation services have been invaluable so far. We also have unofficial access to a number of other aquaculture specialists who have offered technical help along the way. I have drafted an official application requesting permission for a hatchery setup that is to be submitted to DEDEAT (the old Environmental Affairs) before end November. It must be said right now however that even if the hatchery goes ahead, hatching and raising trout is an extremely tricky affair. There are no guarantees that everything will be a huge success off the bat. I will keep you posted.

All things being equal, this year's stocking will take place on Saturday the 8<sup>th</sup> December. If anyone would like to make a stocking donation, the bank details are: **FNB / BRANCH CODE: 210421 / ACC.: STAC / NO.:53813519841/ REFERENCE: STOCKING.** The following donations have already been pledged/received: S. Peterson (R1000), R. Webb (R1000), G. Raath (R1500), D. Rhind (R1000), M. Olivieri (R1000), S. Thomas (R1000), R. Smith (R1000), B. Clark (R80), E.Truter (R2000), Sandile's Rest (R1000).

Another subject I have been looking into is how the club can add value for its members. One way is by providing access to more trout waters than only Gubu Dam. With this in mind I have approached the Border Rural Council who manages the fishing in the Mnyameni and Cata Valleys and proposed a reciprocal fishing agreement based on 100% catch and release. This agreement has been accepted favourably and what remains is a meeting with the BRC representatives at Cata Village to discuss how to control and manage respective fishing access. The Mnyameni Dam (which is very scenic and has a self sustaining population of rainbows) and the Cata stream (with a 100 year old plus strain of wild, Africanised brown trout) are a 40 min drive from Gubu; both are very interesting areas to fish.

There has also been a proposal for the STAC to merge with the Frontier Acclimatisation Society (that manages the fishing access to Maden Dam). I feel this is a good idea and we will be following it up with the FAS chairman, Dean Stoltz.

A new committee was formed at the October AGM, here is a quick who's who:

**Edward Truter (Chairman)** – New to the committee, I first joined the club when I was 12 years old (1986) and like a few others no doubt, I caught my first trout off the Gubu slipway (on a Woolly Worm).

**Ryan Smith (Secretary)** – Ryan is one of the younger members and was secretary last year. He is nuts about his fishing and is often the first and last off the water.

**Glenn Raath (Treasurer)** – Glenn has held various positions on the committee over the years. If you look in the catch register you'll see he's been catching for a long time.

**Rodney Webb (Clubhouse maintenance)** – Rodney needs no introduction, he is an honorary member and was chairman for many-many years.

**Marco de Olivieri (Youth development)** – Ryan and Marco put the idea forward to try and involve the youth in fly fishing by approaching schools, it's a good idea and will net us more members.

**Justin Thackeray (IT Administrator & Communications)** – Justin is an IT professional (and a fisherman), just the person to help us get a website up and running (for marketing and general information purposes) and help maintain the club's on-line records, which in-turn makes it much easier for the committee, club members and the public to communicate.

Communication is key. As just about all of our members have a valid e-mail address, e-mailing is going to be the most effective way to stay in touch. We will aim to publish a newsletter every quarter and members (and anyone else interested) are invited to also 'friend' the STAC facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/gubu.dam?fref=ts>). It's a good place to show and tell what you caught.

Many members did not receive renewal notices in May this year, but a new application form will be sent to old members soon (anyone else, please request a membership form via the e-mail below). We will no longer issue the typical membership cards but rather e-mail a membership certificate, which you can print out and fold away in a Ziploc bag. Ronald and Robin, the bailiffs at the dam have also been provided with a membership list to help prevent any monkey business. Paid-up members should receive their certificate in the next few weeks.

There is some work ahead to get Gubu Dam (and surrounds) closer to realizing its full potential as a quality trout fishery and all that we can do is work through it step by step. I hope that current members (and old members who sign back on) and any new members, will see their membership like they would an investment, and something that grows more exciting with time.

Tight lines,

Edward Truter, November 2012

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