AUSTRALIAN TROUT FOUNDATION

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NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2019

From The Editor

Welcome to the March 2019 edition of the ATF Newsletter. First up an apology from me for the very long delay in producing a newsletter. I hope you find this newsletter was worth the wait.
In this issue we provide some news on ATF activities over the last few months, a story on the joy of fishing small waters, an invitation to women anglers and include some important events that will occur in the year ahead.
The key event in the near future is the exciting Ovens River Challenge.
I am flying over from WA to attend the event. I spent my first and only day on the Ovens in April last year and enjoyed it so much I resolved to return and fish it again sometime soon.
The Challenge gives me the perfect opportunity to put my plans into action and I will stay on after the Challenge for a few days to really get to know the river.
I also hope to meet as many of the ATF members as possible during the event so please look out for me and introduce yourself.

Not an ATF Member?

Come and join with the rest of us to protect, rebuild and promote Australia's trout fishing heritage.
Membership is open to any person or association with an interest in trout fishing, whether you fish with fly, lure or bait.
It only costs $20.00 per year to be an individual member and you will be helping to ensure that trout fishing in Australia remains alive and well for future generations to come.

To apply for membership or refinance your subscription go to: http://www.atfonline.com.au/home/page/membership

The 2019 Ovens River Challenge

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is the Ovens River Challenge?

A. The Ovens River Challenge is a "Fishing & Social" event for recreational anglers who are passionate about our native and trout fisheries and the health of our waterways. This Event is a population monitoring "Catch,Measure & Release" Event for native fish and trout.

Q. Dates & Location of the Event?

A. 6th & 7th April 2019 at Myrtleford. Event Headquarters will be at Nimmo Bridge Recreation Area, Buffalo River Road, Myrtleford.

Ovens River Myrtleford (G. Brave).
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Q. What do I have to do to register for the Event?

A. Acquire a Registration Form from the ATF or NFA by email or phone request. Advise Terry or Tim, by email or phone that you will be registering and participating in the Event. You will then be provided with the rules package.
ATF Email: president@atfonline.com.au
Phone: Terry George 0418 332 744
NFA Email: nfavic@yahoo.com.au
Phone: Tim Curmi 0417 419 765.

Prior to commencement of fishing, all anglers must attend the Registration Station at Headquarters (Nimmo Bridge Recreation Reserve) in order to receive a Record Card, Ruler and Identification Token. The Registration Station will be open on Friday 5th April from 5pm until 8pm, and on Saturday 6th April from 7am until 12 noon.

Q. Who are the Organisers/Promoters of the Event?

A. The members, supporters and affiliated Angling Clubs of the Australian Trout Foundation (ATF) and Native Fish Australia (NFA).
The Event is generously supported by the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) and Target One Million.

Q. Who is eligible to enter the Event?

A. All recreational anglers who are members or supporters of the ATF, NFA or affiliated clubs, or anglers who enjoy our inland fisheries and would like to be involved in habitat restoration and enhancing the health of our fisheries.

The "Open Age" is for both male and female anglers. The "Junior Age" is also for male and female anglers who are U18 at 1st July 2019. We hope to see many junior and senior female anglers participating in the Event.

Q. Are there awards and prizes for successful anglers?

A. Yes, separate awards & prizes will be awarded to open age and junior anglers who "Catch Measure and Release" the longest Murray Cod, or Brown Trout, or Rainbow Trout of legal sizes.
Junior anglers can also win prizes for the longest redfin or carp.
Female open age and junior anglers are most welcome to participate and partake of the prizes.

Q. What is the deadline for submission of Catch Record Cards?

A. Angler Record Cards must be submitted at the Recording Station at Headquarters, no later than 12 noon on Sunday, for the recorded fish to be eligible for the Event.

Q. When will the Awards & Prizes be presented?

A. The Awards & Prizes will be presented during the FREE BBQ starting at 12 noon on Sunday; free light refreshments will also be available.

Q. Who will present the Awards & Prizes to the Champions?

A. Travis Dowling, Executive Director Victorian Fisheries Authority, plus Fisheries Managers (John Douglas) and local Angling Club Officials.

Q. Will we hear about the future plans for our inland fisheries?

A. Yes indeed, Travis will relay the VFA plans for the future, as will Terry (ATF) and Tim (NFA) It will be a short presentation but you will have the opportunity to ask any relevant questions about our fisheries.

We look forward to meeting and greeting lots of recreational anglers at the Event, and we wish you "Tight Lines, Screaming Reels, and a few Lucky Casts".

Ovens River in Autumn (L. Konya)
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Little Rivers; Big Thrills

by Ray Buckland

Ever since I have been chasing trout with a fly, it is the little mountain streams that keep calling me back. They are invariably located in the most wild and picturesque areas of our state where a cold, clear stream gurgles and cascades over rocks and moss covered logs. Located in these beautiful streams you see feisty rainbow and brown trout smash your fly with the speed of a snake's strike. Then the water erupts and a trout with red and brown spots, or a magnificent flash of pink fights so much above its weight in the highly oxygenated water. You release it back to the stream and wear a perpetual smile all day.

The speed of the mountain trout reveals a different ball game. They hit the fly incredibly quickly and spit it in a nano-second if you do not have contact with the fly. It is so different to the Tassie Lake trout which give you time for your wife /partner to give birth and finish a congratulatory champagne before you strike. Okay, a slight exaggeration; two seconds as the trout turn over and head for protective sites but the difference is significant I assure you.

Where to start in Victoria: the streams in the Murrindindi Shire like the Little Yarra, Acheron, Steavenson, Taggerty, Rubicon and Royston Rivers. The La Trobe, Toorongo and Tanjil are also very good small rivers to fish and they are not too far away from home.

The best months to fish are Late October to March when the fly activity is at its zenith and with regards to times; the hour before and after dusk. These rivers are under great pressure during the holiday periods and weekends so midweek is a better time to fish.

Suitable equipment: 2 to 4 weight rods from 6' 6" to 8' 6". The shorter rods are ideal for the heavily timbered banks and the overhead cover . The longer rods in these conditions result in many flies being sacrificed to the riparian gods and sometimes rod breakages occur. Woolly buggers of brown, black and green with tinsel are good flies to begin with if you are a newcomer to the sport and they are 24/7/365 options. Also it can take a short time to master an accurate enough cast, and the short retrieves and rests which mimic the movements of smelt and tadpoles which really gets the trout's attention.

Casting: Casting on the small streams requires great accuracy and basically four types of casting. I use a roll cast about 80% of the time because on the little rivers I fish there is usually a lot of bush behind me. We must always remember the length of back and forward casts are equidistant. With practise we can become very skilled using the roll cast.

If we have low hanging bush above us, the bow and arrow cast really does the trick. This entails taking the fly in your hand and pulling it towards your body causing a good bend in the rod. We then release the fly and if you're pointing the rod and line at a desired position for the trout's take it should work. We can use overhead casts if there is minimal overhead bush, and the fourth option is side casts on windy days

Three valuable pieces of advice: before you go into combat with the trout: spend the first fifteen minutes observing what is on the menu both under the rocks below the surface and the bugs above it. Carefully note the fly's size, colour and contact with the water[dips] because a natural presentation of all of these aspects are what you are aiming to duplicate to catch trout.

The second observation is the structure in the river. The trout take a position where they are safe, where there is a food highway [bubble line] and where they can maintain a position expending a minimum of energy for their safety and food sources. Look for rocks and logs in the stream especially if there are some weeds because the trout will likely to be on the downstream side of this structure waiting to dine on what is on offer.

The third aspect of hunting with a rod and fly is to remain inconspicuous and approach from downstream because the trout always face upstream anticipating the food highway's offerings. Wear clothing which blends with the river' s vegetation and when you see a fish rising, approach the casting position using the bushes or trees as a cover. I hunt the trout just like I used to hunt the wild pigs in western NSW, using stealth, a silent approach and shrubs for cover. There is usually a lot of cover on these streams for us to utilise.

Enough of the verbiage; now for the serious hunting. The season begins slowly from September and a nymph or two trolled along the bottom gets the trout's attention. Short line nymphing is almost a guarantee of trout when you master the skills entailed. Speak to the young guns in the club or seek YouTube titles which demonstrate the relevant skills which will assist you with all aspects of this method. It assures you of success all year round because nymphs are about 80% to 90% of the trout's diet. I use a weighted brown nymph. a red copper John, a caddis variation or a sparkly, brightly coloured hybrid. Sizes 16 to 12 are the usual suspects; it depends on the size of the nymphs in the stream at the time. This fishing method is used by me for about 6 weeks of the early season because the surface and aerial fly activity is miniscule due to the cold.

When it begins warming up in mid October you can begin tying on some dry dun type patterns like a parachute Adams, blue winged olive, twilight beauty or October dun. A red humpy, royal wulff, orange stimulator or a muddler have their role too. The fuller bodied flies with bright colours like red orange and yellow certainly fish well in faster, sometimes dirtier water which is likely at this time of the year. Another possibility is a tandem rig covering the surface feeders with a larger fuzzy fly like the muddler, stimulator or red or orange humpy. We then attach a favourite nymph about a metre below and this covers the mid stream feeders. This method is very successful and as the season progresses and it is warming up and the catch ratio of dries to nymphs increases in favour of the dries.

From about mid October, especially on the humid days, the flying ants appear and these hatches really get the trout feeding. Millions of ants will do that. The termites appear first and these are usually followed by the larger red ants in November. Tie on size 16 and 14 ant pattern and your success depends on matching the colour and size well and casting them accurately. Some duns like the Adams, Kosciusko and various paraduns appear in significant numbers at this time of the season too. Once again size 16 and 14 in most mayfly species are appropriate.

Dry fly fishing really steps up in November when the emergers of the mayfly species are active and these include CDC variations, possum emergers, Klinkhamers and foam emergers. In December the spinners [adults] of the above named mayflies in black, red, orange and Kosciusko spinners and the Royal Wulff are high on the trout's diet. Don't forget the beetle patterns black, brown, geehi, gum beetle and red tag which are highly effective in the high Summer period.

When Summer really comes into prominence in January and February the grasshoppers come on and this is the most exciting method of fishing. This is the only time of the year you can cast a shocker where the fly lands like a kid's first belly whacker and you can catch a trout. The key to success is observation and you will note in the paddocks over time the grasshoppers begin small and green and eventually morph into a beige with red, black and yellow body parts. Once again colour and size are the key to success

The hoppers must taste like crayfish or chocolate because trout smash these fly patterns with reckless abandon. This is a great time to take your kids trout fishing because the wariness of the trout is lower than at most times. The variations which are very successful are any of the deer hair variations, Dave's hopper, any Rick Keam variation [depending on the season] or the Wilsons hopper.

At this time of the fishing season I seek out the streams which have the cooler water because of higher altitude or underground spring feeds. These features keep the water temperatures more consistent and several degrees below the streams which do not have these advantages. Once the temperatures rise up from 18 to 22 degrees, trout activity diminishes significantly. Their feeding patterns slow up and they just lie up in undercut banks or at the bottom of deep pools. It is a good idea to carry a small thermometer to give you that edge of temperature awareness when the outdoors shade temperatures are in the 30's for a period.

Okay, a true confession; probably the main reason I fish the small streams is the opportunity to duplicate a battle with a trout which tests all your skills, equipment and guile. I caught a powerful brown trout about 5 lbs in the Tyeena River in Tasmania. Trout and fisherman jumped from pool to pool, losing skin and scales [and fly equipment] in contact with the many rocks and logs; we both had racing heartbeats for many minutes. The catch and release of this beautiful fish was a joy beyond belief.; As I was walking back to the car I thought 'How can I create more of these special moments with a large, fighting trout in a magnificent river? Oh yeah; scale down the equipment from a 6 weight to 2 or 3 weight and you will have a comparable battle. Hook up a rainbow of about 430 mms on a 2 weight and I can tell you I lost a similar amount of ego, skin, and I bruised several bones and had a heart rate of 300, [all right it may have been 160]. Don't take my word for it; bloody well get into these superb streams and find out for yourself!

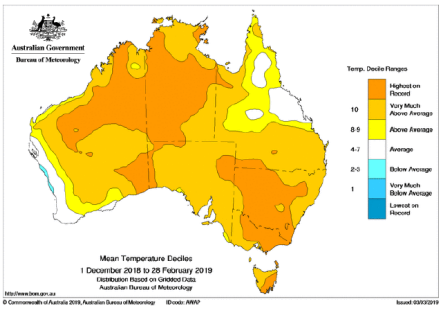
I shall finish with some suggestions related to our magnificent fishery and our role in its future. There is a fabulous groundswell which entails fishers taking ownership of their sport. They are working with teams on riparian and in stream structures, placing trout and native species fertile eggs in incubators and siting them in suitable streams. They are also spreading the message of the correct procedures involved in 'catch and release'.

If you wish to join the fast growing army who wish to catch a wild trout or cod with our grandchildren, come on board. When our grandkids catch their first fish, their squeals of delight and perpetual smiles are indelibly locked into our special memories for ever. Perhaps my family fishers will meet yours on a small river somewhere; I hope so!

Future Proofing Our Fisheries

by Russell Hanley

The summer just past is officially the hottest recorded over most of the country. Temperatures across southern Australia including South Australia, Victoria, Southern New South Wales and Tasmania were generally very much above average and in many cases were the highest ever recorded. The exceptions were the western and southwestern coastal regions of Western Australia where temperatures were either typical for summer or even below average.



Even during an average summer there is plenty of evidence across southern Australia that trout inhabiting lowland rivers and streams often suffer from the effects of high water temperatures.

The classic literature suggests that both rainbow and brown trout begin to stress when water temperatures exceed 19ºC and that temperatures at or above 24ºC for any sustained period of time are typically fatal for trout. There are however more recent studies which have demonstrated higher thermal tolerances of rainbow trout in southern California, Japan and the south west of Western Australia. I will provide a more detailed article on these studies for the next issue of the newsletter.

Of course our rivers and streams experience high temperatures during the summer low flows. The level of summer flows has diminished in recent years as a consequence of lower annual rainfall and run off in catchments - a trend that is forecast to continue over much of southern Australia.

Add to the mix the pressure of increasing demand for extraction of water and it's not surprising that some streams and rivers cease surface flow in some years and water temperatures in shallow pools approach 30ºC. Once temperatures reach these levels trout are unlikely to survive for long. An increase in nutrient loads in warm water can lead to algal blooms which cause oxygen depletion and then few fish are safe - we have all seen the depressing pictures of the large scale kills of native fish at Menindie.

Now hot dry summers and poor rainfall years are hardly a new thing on our dusty continent, however there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the more extreme events are occurring with a greater frequency. Add to that our ever increasing thirst for water and it's highly likely that the resilience of our rivers and streams and all the creatures that depend on them will generally continue to decline.

Will we lose some parts of our fishery? Personally I think we are likely to lose some of the currently self-sustaining populations of wild trout in south eastern Australia.

In the south west of the country it is already the case that there are virtually no rivers and streams that sustain wild populations and repeated annual stockings of hatchery fish are necessary to maintain a fishery. Might a similar scenario be the new paradigm for the trout fisheries in the south east?

Perhaps, but there is still much we can do individually and collectively to protect and enhance the resilience of our trout fisheries across Australia, if as predicted by climate models, we are facing a warmer and drier future.

I think as a community we already acknowledge that our rivers and streams are important for a host of reasons including recreation, water supplies, environmental values, biodiversity and so on. Unfortunately as the recent events at Menindee have shown, our management of the complex needs and demands on our waterways sometimes fail. Translating our community and stakeholder concerns into the political dimension often appears to be very difficult.

There is no doubt that our technical and scientific understanding of the ecology of our rivers and streams has greatly improved in recent decades, mostly as a consequence of increased funding of the necessary research. Sometimes though the complexity of research results and data makes it difficult to navigate a way through to a more thorough community understanding of what our rivers and streams require to protect and enhance their resilience.

Our focus here is on our trout fisheries so what are their requirements to promote and enhance resilience?

The key attributes are water quality, water quantity, refugia from predators and high temperatures, food supply and suitable substrates for breeding. I think all of us can quite easily list each of the attributes that are best for trout.

An abundance of cool to cold, clean well- oxygenated water with some gravel substrate, a healthy stock of instream invertebrates and other fish species, logs, rapids, riffles rocks and deeper slower moving pools, riparian vegetation providing shade and sedges to filter runoff.

Whenever I list these requirements it always conjures up a vision of what such river or stream looks like and reminds me why I and so many other trout fishers I know love spending time on good trout waters - they are beautiful places to be.

Not surprisingly the same attributes that produce good habitat for trout also create good habitat for a host of other species.

Of all the attributes I listed above the quantity of water available in most rivers and streams is the most vexatious as far as finding workable solutions. In a drying climate that is forecast to get drier it is not possible to make it rain more often. Without getting into a debate on the causes of global warming or whether it's even real, it is clear that any anthropogenic influence on climate is on a scale that would defeat any local efforts we might make. I believe we should all be looking for global solutions by acting on a local level but do not expect to see any progress on reversing the warming trend during the remainder of my lifetime.

There is however still much we can do collectively to protect and enhance the quantities of water available to our

rivers and streams, especially during summer low flows. For example, we could call for a moratorium on new impoundments (both private and public) on rivers and streams on any system we considered under threat of losing it's trout fishery. We can also call for increased environmental flow releases from impoundments (both private and public) during the summer months on all systems. Much of the modelling assumes systems can get by with the bare minimum of low flows and in most cases this assumption has never been adequately tested since the flow regime was implemented.

One of the most interesting aspects of the debate over environmental flow releases from impoundments is the focus is firmly on freshwater environmental flow requirements. There is virtually no reference to the equally important requirements of freshwater inflows to estuaries to maintain coastal fisheries production.

There is no doubt that there are powerful vested interests that would resist calls for a moratorium on dams and for increased environmental flows during summer. But these are issues which can be managed on local, regional, state and national scales.

Fortunately, all of the other attributes I referred to earlier can all be addressed on a local scale by the process of habitat enhancement.

Revegetation at a catchment scale improves water quality, as does planting of sedges and other wetland plants along water courses by reducing sediment loads in runoff which lowers turbidity and allows the persistence of gravel beds and deeper pools. Water temperatures are reduced under the shade from riparian trees, particularly in the upper catchment. Healthy stands of native riparian vegetation are also great sources of terrestrial insects for hungry trout. Riparian vegetation is therefore a key attribute.

In stream habitat modifications also are important as they provide refugia for trout and substrates for prey species.

The ATF has been engaged in many projects of habitat enhancement in Victoria and has a remarkable record of success there. The future will however likely require an even more concerted effort across much of Victoria if the forecast changes to climate are realised. In that context the ATF and the wider community of fishing clubs, catchment management authorities, the NFA and other stakeholders are going to have to identify priorities. The development of a draft strategic plan by the ATF last year was the first step in readying the organisation for what will be required.

The recent inititative between the VFA and ATF whereby 50 thermometers have been provided to the ATF is an example of the stewardship role that can be adopted by organisations. The idea is that fishers will record temperatures when they go fishing and the data will be relayed back to the VFA via the ATF. The data set collected can be used to identify streams considered vulnerable to lethal summer temperatures for trout which can in turn lead to priorisation of funding to mitigate the problems through interventions like riparian restoration.

Anthony Forster of the VFA presents Terry George with the thermometers

There is a need for a continued focus on habitat restoration and enhancement projects in Victoria. Projects of a similar nature also need to be initiated elsewhere in the country.

Western Australia and South Australia arguably are in a more perilous position in respect of the continued viability of their trout fisheries. The recent establishment of the ATF in WA means there will now be an opportunity to develop and implement habitat restoration and enhancement plans in that State.

There are simple things each of us can do individually when we are out on the water fishing, particularly during the warmer months of the year. These might seem trivial compared to the more intensive approaches including large scale habitat modification or political lobbying...but if we all practice these simple rules we can each increase the resilence of our fisheries.

Thermometers are easy to use and many of us already have one in our kit. Measure water temperatures during the warmer months and avoid fishing when the water is at or above 24°C . Always use a net, handle fish gently with wet hands and return the fish to the water quickly. Rest the water. Fish early and late and avoid the middle of the day in summer when the water temperatures are likely to rise.

Rubicon River Planning

The ATF is currently working with project partners including VRFish, Goulburn Broken CMA Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research on a range of upcoming projects on the iconic wild trout fishery, the Rubicon River. The projects includes habitat boulder seeding, improving existing public access points, re-vegetation and enhancing fish passage through existing barriers.

An Invitation to all Women Fishers- Take Ownership of Your Fishery.

There is a groundswell of women and families sharing great times on rivers and lakes and the numbers of women fishers are growing. They are no longer taking a passive role with their families; they are active fishers and also more are now mentors for their children in fishing activities.
The purpose of this invitation is to implore all women who fish to take the next step and become involved with a team of passionate fishers like the Australian Trout Foundation [ATF] who are a voice for all of us. I am sure many women have concerns about our fishery and its future. Climate change and waterways with riparian, instream and water quality issues are paramount.

The ATF Committee is a dynamic, active foundation with one female committee member who is a valuable voice but it needs to be more representative of our whole community. We would be delighted to have a 50/50% gender ratio; we are sure you have much to offer. You can contact the committee to discuss how you may get involved by sending an email to:
info@atfonline.com.au

Come on board and make a difference; your fishing family will thank you.

Ray Buckland
Vice President

WA Branch of the ATF

by Russell Hanley

The WA Branch has now submitted an application to the State Department of Commerce for incorporation as an Association. In coming weeks we will hold a meeting to elect our office bearers. A number of members have already indicated their willingness to serve on the state committee and I thank them for that.
Once the election of office bearers has taken place we can then open a bank account for the branch and then we are able to apply for grants.
We obviously need to consult our WA members to develop a set of priorities that will shape our grant applications.
We will also continue to focus on increasing our membership here in the West.

FFRG

The Freshwater Fisheries Reference Group meets regularly to make recommendations to the Department of Fisheries in Western Australia on where and what to stock into rivers, streams and impoundments each year. The FFRG met just recently and made its recommendations for stocking of brown and rainbow trout fry, yearlings and ex-broodstock fish.
The recommendations are broadly similar to the last few years with the exception that the decision to hold some yearlings for longer at the hatchery has meant there are fewer yearlings in total this year. The advanced yearlings will primarly be released into impoundments toward the end of the year. It is hoped the larger fish will be less likely to suffer the heavy predation from cormorants and pelicans that has been observed when standard sized yearlings have been released into these impoundments.

Healthy 43cm rainbow taken recently from the Collie River WA

The fry stocking will comprise more than 650,000 fish which are typically all released into tributary streams of most of the major rivers that are stocked with yearlings.

One of the issues discussed at the FFRG was the fish kill of trout at Big Brook Dam over the summer when water levels were lowered to enable work on the infrastructure. RecFishWest advised that discussions with both WaterCorp and Fisheries had agreed that better communications well in advance would enable a response that might have saved some or all of the fish that were affected.

Did You Know?

The Brown Trout (Salmo trutta) is a native of Europe ranging from Iceland in the west to Russia in the east. The species is also native to Turkey, Afghanistan and Armenia.

Brown trout
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It has been introduced to 39 countries and has become established in 30 of them. Ranging from Canada, the U.S. through Croatia and Serbia, Greece and Cyprus to Iran, Pakistan, India, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Australia, PNG, NZ and Japan. It is also found in Panama and in most countries along the Andes, including Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina. The species is also found in a chain of east and southern african countries from Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania to Malawi and Zimbabwe and South Africa. Countries where introductions failed to establish include Algeria and Morocco, Israel and Jordan, Nepal, Fiji, Puerto Rico, Colombia and the Hawaiian Islands. The species has disappeared from Switzerland and Czechia which were part of it's native range.
The first successful introduction of brown trout was into Australia in 1864.