



AUSTRALIAN TROUT FOUNDATION

Trout Fishing on the Blackwood River



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Fishing Tips and Techniques

Stream and river fishing for trout is probably one of the most exciting forms of trout fishing. As your experience grows you will begin to learn how to 'read the water' and understand where fish will prefer to sit in the river's flow. In flowing water trout (which often look like dark elongated shapes) tend to face upstream into the current and often have a 'preferred lie' where they can sit out of the direct force of a strong current. This can be behind an obstruction like a rock, or log. Here a fish does not have to work so hard to maintain its position in the current and can shoot out from their lie to grab passing food then return to the same spot to wait for more food. Sometimes fish will also sit in front of an obstruction, where the water hitting the obstruction forms a pillow of water that is not moving so strongly. Other favoured lies are under tree roots, undercut banks and the deep shade under overhanging trees. Your observation skills are the key to success. Take the time to observe your surrounding environment such as; insects in the streamside vegetation and the various creatures living on the river or stream bed. Trout will often lie in deeper water just downstream from a riffle or rapid where the strong currents dislodge small animals from the bottom which then drift down to the waiting trout. The drift below riffles and rapids typically forms what is known as a 'bubble' or 'foam line' and fish often lie directly in these.

Look for signs such as fish rising to take food on or near the surface. Polarised sunglasses are helpful for spotting fish lying below the surface (amber is the optimal lens colour). Try and fish on overcast days to avoid casting a shadow on the water, and wear clothing that blends with the environment.

Trout are opportunistic and eat a range of insects, crustaceans, small fish, worms and amphibians. The fish will be where the food is. The four main areas to concentrate on are:

- the headwater and channels of fast flowing rapids;
- river bends, behind rocky outcrops and timbered structures;
- grassy flooded river banks; and
- (in summer) where the cold water from streams join the river.

For bait and lure fishing all you need is a good quality 1.8 – 2.1m, 2 - 4-kg spinning rod matched with a 1000 or 2500 sized reel. Use 2.7 – 3.6 kg braid line with a similar weight fluorocarbon leader. For bait fishing, attach a light weight sinker (or split-shot) with a 40 - 50 cm leader coming off a small swivel and a size 6 or 8 hook drifted down with the current works well. For lure fishing, a similar outfit can be used – just tie your lure straight to your leader or attach a small snap swivel between.

Live baits such as earth worms, mud eyes and grasshoppers are ideal bait when fished on a pattern and size of hook that suits the bait. Dough baits (e.g. PowerBait) are a good option for people

who don't want to handle live baits.

Lures in the size range of 2 to 5cm are best, the easiest lures are small floating or slowly sinking hard bodies. When casting these lures it is recommended to vary the retrieve often; fast, slow, twitchy, steady and so on. Best approach is to keep moving along the bank and other structures casting and retrieving. Bladed spinners and spoons can also be used to allow for longer casts. Use lures that are natural colours (ie. green, brown, olive and black).

Trout also respond well to jigging soft plastics fished on weighted jig heads fished under logs and in fast flowing water. Also jig deep holes, steep banks and rocky drop-offs and remember to vary your retrieve according to depth.

Fly fishing requires fly rods, lines, casting methods, and 'flies'. Most fly fishers use a medium action 2.1- 2.4 m (7-8ft.) carbon fibre 4 – 6 weight fly rod with a weight-forward floating or inter-mediate fly line. The flies are hooks tied with artificial and natural fibres made to look like the wild food trout prey on.

Upstream fly fishing using nymphs (weighted or unweighted) or wet flies can be very effective casting upstream, using good line control to watch the end of the fly line, or an indicator anywhere along the leader (could also help to govern the depth of the fly through its drift). Another popular option is to fish a streamer fly across and down. It is important to keep good contact with your flies at all times and to work a consistent line length, covering all the likely positions in a stream where a fish may be lying. Popular flies include streamers such as Woolly Bugger, Mrs Simpson, Craigs Night-time, Fuzzy Wuzzy, Matuka; dry flies such as ant caddis and hopper patterns and small bead head nymphs in olive or black colours.

Fishing from a kayak or canoe can work well on the river using all of the techniques above, but be aware that the Blackwood River can be dangerous when flooded during the winter months. In winter when the river flows strongly adult fish move upstream into the brooks looking for spawning sites. As spring water levels drop most trout return to the river from the streams and will be hungry. The peak months for fishing on the Blackwood River are between September to December as the silt and tannin from winter rains clears and the water levels drop making access easier and water temperatures are optimal. In summer fish can be difficult to find as they retreat to deeper, colder water.

This is the third in a series of brochures the ATF is developing on where to fish for trout in the SW. If you would like to see more of these brochures then consider joining the ATF:

<https://australiantroutfoundation.com.au/product/membership/>

Angling Regulations (Fisheries)

The regulations listed here relate specifically to the Blackwood River and it's tributaries. A valid Freshwater Angling Licence (available online from Fisheries) is required to fish for freshwater fish. The licence fee covers a 12-month period from the date of issue. Anglers under the age of 16 do not require a licence. There is no closed season on the Blackwood River.

Anglers may only use a single fishing rod and line or a single hand-held line. The use of both lures and bait is permitted. Landing net restrictions apply. Anglers may possess only a short-handled (maximum 500mm) net within 50 m of the waterline of most dams and rivers all year round. The landing net regulations are designed to protect the marron fishery for which you need a separate licence and there is a restricted open season. More information is available on the Fisheries website.

Bag and size limits

Daily mixed species bag limit, per angler

You may take four fish (combined) of the following species:

- rainbow trout;
- brown trout; and
- freshwater cobbler.

'Daily' means from midnight to midnight.

Minimum size:

- Trout, rainbow and brown: 300 mm
- Other species (redfin perch): no size limit

Fish smaller than the minimum size must be gently returned to the water immediately. There are no bag or size limits for other freshwater fish. To help keep WA waters pest free, please thoroughly clean and dry all fishing and wading gear before fishing in another waterway. Pest species such as carp, goldfish, tilapia and other cichlids and redfin perch destroy habitat and prey on juvenile marron and native freshwater fish. It is recommended that they are NOT returned to the water and are humanely euthanised, with dead fish NOT left on the shore. For more information visit the Fisheries website at:

www.fish.wa.gov.au or download the recreational fishing guide at: www.fish.wa.gov.au/guide

Please note that this is only a guide - Angling regulations change from time to time.

It is important to check the Fisheries website to ensure you are familiar with the current regulations.

The Blackwood River

The Blackwood River is the largest river in the South West with an average annual flow of 940 gigalitres. From headwaters on the Yilgarn Plateau the river flows southwest, crossing the Bannister Plain and Darling Plateau before turning south through the Scott Coastal Plain to discharge into the Hardy Inlet at Augusta. The two main upper tributaries are the Arthur and Beaufort Rivers. Below the confluence of the Arthur River the Blackwood River is permanent.

There are no dams on the main channel of the Blackwood River. While salinity is high in the upper catchment (where land has been cleared for agriculture) the river has lower salinity downstream below Bridgetown because the river flows mostly through state production forest and the tributary streams have low salinity. There is a significant contribution of groundwater to the main river channel from the Yarragadee aquifer which lowers salinity in the stretch between Milyeannup Brook and Layman Brook. Trout can be found from Hut Pool to above Bridgetown with more than 200 kilometres of fishable river between these two locations because the river meanders through many bends. Some of the best trout waters are to be found along the stretch between Wrights Bridge and Nannup.

The Blackwood was first stocked with trout in 1896 when brown trout fry from the Whitby Falls hatchery were released. Both brown and rainbow trout fry from the Mundaring hatchery were released in 1905.

In the 1930s brown and rainbow trout from the hatchery at Pemberton were released into the river. Stocking was not a regular annual event for several decades but after 1968 rainbow trout have been stocked in most years. with both rainbow fry and yearlings stocked each year. Typically yearling fish are released into the main river while fry are currently stocked into a number of tributaries, including Carlotta, Balingup, Hesters, Maranup, Mokerdillup, Nannup, St. Johns and St Pauls Brooks.



Rainbow Trout

When to Fish

There are two peak periods for fishing on the Blackwood River. The first peak is in late autumn/early winter when the water temperatures drop and the first rains flush down the main river and the brooks. At this time fish that have been sheltering in shady deeper holes of the river over summer become more active and will move to rapids and riffles looking for food. Fish that are ready to spawn will move to the mouths of brooks and then move upstream once there is a strong flow in the brook. They will congregate below obstacles such as rock bars and water falls both on the river and in the brooks.

Later when the river floods with winter rains the Blackwood can rise by more than 4 metres and fishing is not possible or advisable due to deep water and strong currents. Typically the river is turbid during floods and carries a lot of sediment and fish can be hard to locate. However, when the river is high and flooding over the banks then fishing in flooded paddocks and overflow channels can be worthwhile especially after dark and at dawn. Fishing the many brooks can also be productive when the river is in flood as the brooks tend to run clear.

Water levels on the main river can still be quite high in late winter /early spring, but the fishing often improves as fish move back into the main river at this time, particularly when the flow in many of the brooks starts to fall. The best time to fish the main river is late spring to early summer when there is still plenty of water flowing, the temperature of the water is still cold and the water is clear. As water levels continue to drop in summer fish become much harder to find but some will congregate at the mouths of brooks wherever colder freshwater is still flowing into the river. Note that many of the brooks will cease to flow in the summer months.



