

The historical Jonkershoek hatchery

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I often wonder whether, some day, someone will pick up my diaries and page through them, discovering precious gems of significant information about my time at the Jonkershoek fishery at Stellenbosch which now, to me, seems fairly ordinary.

"Can you believe, back in 2008 they still had to rely on petrol to run their bakkies?...and look at this... they were considering using rotenone to clear sections of rivers of alien fish..." They would need a delicate touch, just as I have, when going through the century-old reports titled "Cape of Good Hope, Dept Agriculture: Report of the Marine Biologist", some of which are so fragile that the pages need to be turned with a spatula to avoid breaking their brittle yellow paper. Yet there is a beautiful formality and disciplined orderliness in the method of their record taking that hints at an era when time and pride were taken in monitoring and documenting events and findings. Daily life lacked the new age complications of cellphones and internet that now keep us wired into the pace of city life, constantly reminding us of demands and deadlines, lest we fall asleep to the sound of the old hatchery house as its waters whisper of fish and rivers stocked in days gone by.

I'd like to share with you a few fascinating gems from the historic Jonkershoek records - both for the adventurers out there who want to go in search of long forgotten trout streams or the historians who marvel at the twists and turns in our development of an understanding of our local rivers, ecosystems and their conservation.

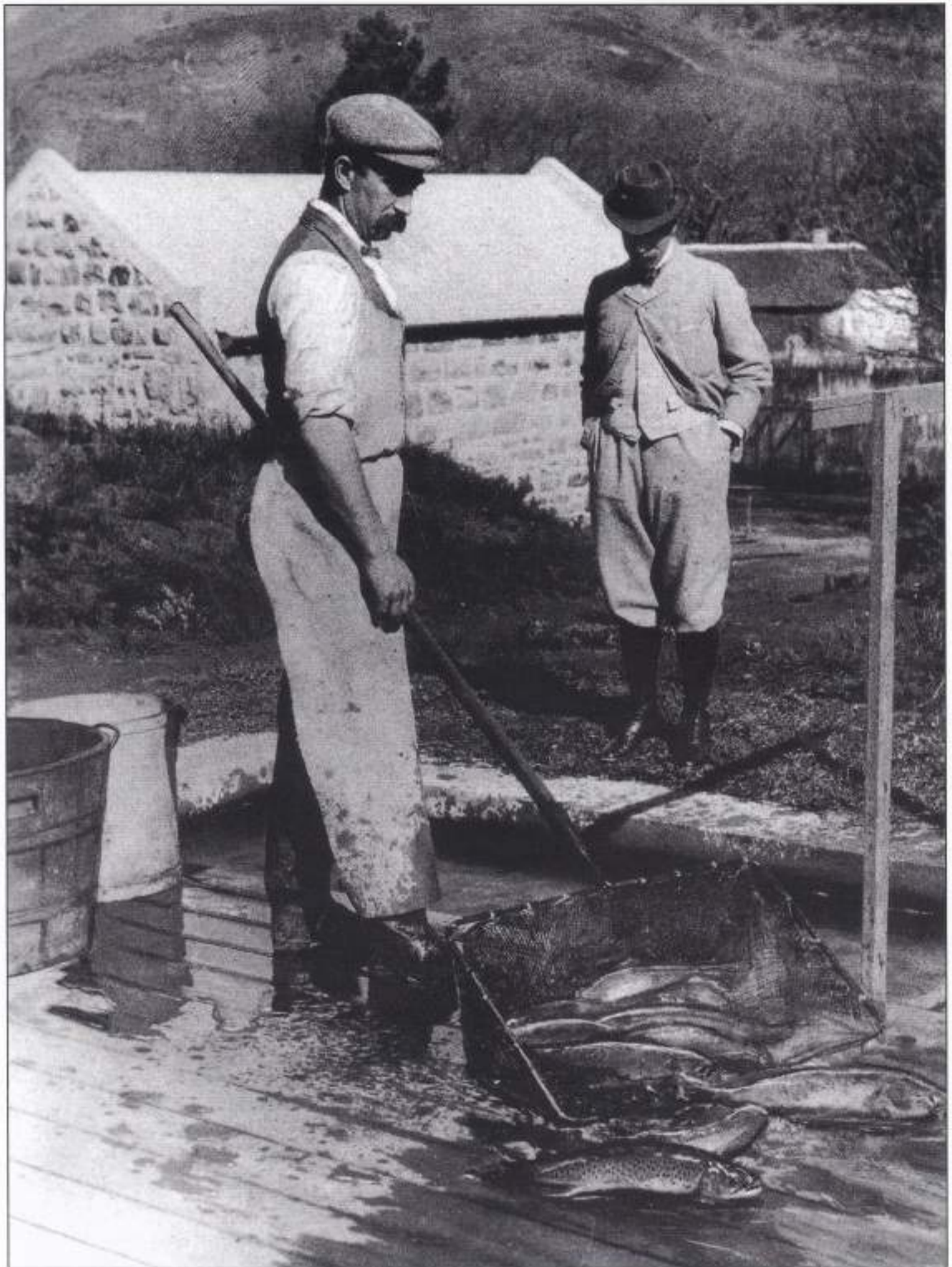
1894 The stocking of the Seven rivers, Lourens, Eerste, Kluitjies Kraal and Houw Hoek. Each year this list expands with new rivers added.

1896 Salmon released into the Eerste at smolt stage to go to sea. Rivers restocked and trout sent to Princess Vlei, Knysna, Aliwal North, East Umtata, Villiersdorp, Worcester, Seymour, Ventour, Upper Hex, Palmiet, Upper Berg, Cold Bokkeveld, Breede and Dwars. The first batch of rainbow trout arrived at the hatchery (previous fish were all brown and brook trout) along with carp, tench and perch brought in by Mr JDF Gilchrist.

1897 A bush fire above the hatchery severely affected water quality and resulted in major losses of fish. Fish for stocking were sent out to the Zuurfontein, Cyphorgat, Prince Albert, Griqualand East, Somerset East, Witte near Wellington, Bredasdorp and Schoombie.

1898 Trout, salmon and coarse fish are doing well. Trout were stocked in Bedford, Mancazana, Fairford, Matatiele, Kokstad, Vermaak, Zuurfontein, De Hoop and the Klein Berg.

1899 Carp and rainbow trout had an excellent spawning season and trout were sent to Riversdale, Natal, Clanwilliam, Cathcart, Rondevlei and Zeekoevlei.



Netting trout for spawning at Jonkershoek on 15 August 1896. Mr JC Watermeyer looks on.

1900 Trout are declared thoroughly established with the Palmiet River being the only river not showing signs of supporting trout. Rainbow trout develop and grow faster than brown and brook. Trout sent to Rustenburg, Johannesburg and De Aar. The first batch of



John Geddes-Page (right), Jonkershoek curator from 1946 to 1951, trapping fish.



The Chaplin hatchling box.



Adam Adams who worked at the hatchery for many years. A daily chore was cleaning the screens between the ponds to prevent them overflowing.

carp was sent out to the Hon Dr Smart's dam near De Aar. This was despite grave warnings that had been issued by the Canadian Ministry of Agriculture about the severe damage caused by these fish to inland waters in Canada and America.

1901 Considering opening the rivers to public fishing. Further wide stocking of trout prevented by the imposition of martial law, so future stockings were all concentrated around the Western Cape. It was observed that brown, rainbow, brook and Loch Leven trout all spawn at the same time in South Africa (as opposed to separate spawning times in their home waters) thus making it possible for them to hybridise. This gives some insight into the remarkable markings on fish in the Lourensford river. Local rivers were restocked. Carp are doing well and prove excellent for vleis and dams.

1902 Local rivers restocked again. Otters, kingfishers and herons causing concerns and plans are being made to exterminate them.

1903 Rivers opened for fishing! Watercress, lilies and bulrushes imported.

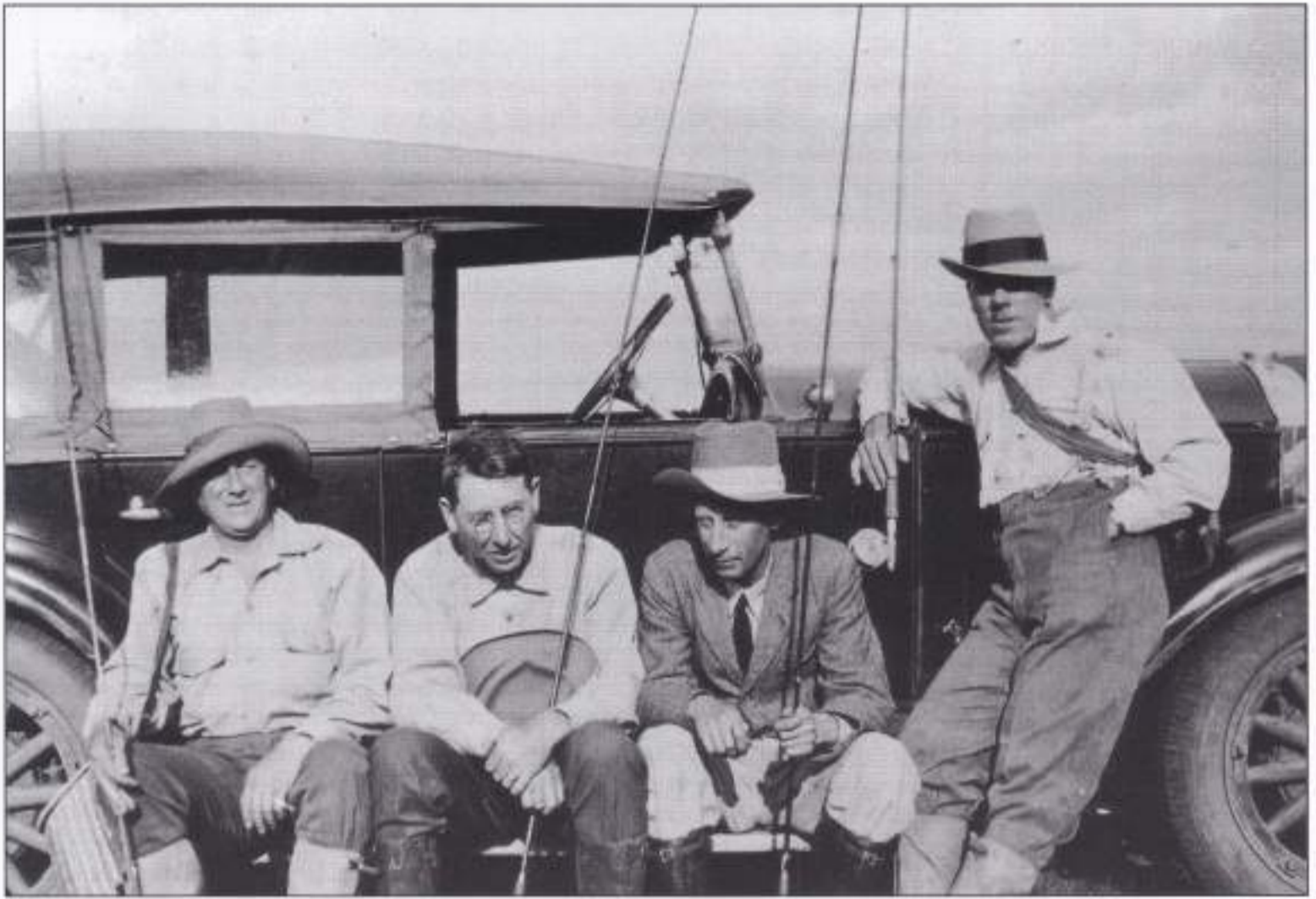
1904 Carp sent to Tokai, Ceres and Transvaal for stocking.

1905 Trout sent to Rhodesia for stocking

1911 Mr Chaplin (Curator at the time of Jonkershoek) recommended the discontinuation of carp from Jonkershoek.

1921 Carp breeding stopped at Jonkershoek and all brood stock killed.

1906 - 1940 Gap in official records due to ban on official records during the war. Next



A turn of the last century flyfishing party.



Fishing the Mooi River in Maclear – This photograph is also shown in Sydney Hey's Rapture of the River, recently reprinted by Platanna Press.

records start under Department of Inland Fisheries and Dr Douglas Hey.

1938 Bluegill Sunfish imported on the recommendation of the American Fisheries Authorities as a forage fish for bass. These fish were later found to be a nuisance as they out-compete all other fish in the impoundments and quickly overpopulate waters.

1944 Spotted and largemouth bass bred at Jonkershoek. Both are widely distributed, but only the largemouth established itself significantly in the local waters.

1946 Smallmouth and spotted bass were stocked into the Olifants river system and the aquarium was built at Jonkershoek.

1957 CPS members carry a mix batch of rainbow and brown trout up to the Krom river for stocking.

1959 Brown trout female and brook trout male crossed to form tiger trout.

1961 Discovered tiger trout all sterile! Elandspad river stocked with brown trout by helicopter.

1963 Yellowfish conservation efforts start at Jonkershoek.

1964 Clanwilliam yellowfish stocked into the Berg river.

1966 Yellowfish spawn and breed at Jonkershoek.

1976 Distribution of smallmouth bass terminated.

1978 Clanwilliam yellowfish breeding station established below the Clanwilliam dam.

1980 Fuel and labour shortages combined with heavy drought result in heavy downscaling of operations at Jonkershoek.

1986 Kleinplaas Dam built in the Jonkershoek valley.

1989 University of Stellenbosch takes over the trout grow-out station and begins research work at the Jonkershoek Hatchery.

2002 Jonkershoek Flyfishing repairs the old hatchery dams and opens as a commercial flyfishery.

2005 Witvis stocked into the fishery dams as an alternative summer fish for fly fishing.

2007 Witvis seen spawning in the fishery dams

2008 Jonkershoek becomes the official Bells Flyfishing Academy of the Western Cape. The hatchery now produces 500 000 fry per year.