

NOTES ON  
THE INTRODUCTION OF TROUT TO THE WESTERN CAPE  
AND THE ORIGINS OF THE CAPE PISCATORIAL SOCIETY

By John Ness

During the 1860s trout and salmon ova were transported to Australia in refrigeration chambers of vessels plying that run. The success of these efforts stimulated local interest.

Act No. 10 of 1867 was passed by the Cape Government. The purpose of the Act was: "for encouraging the introduction into the waters of this Colony of fishes not native to such waters".

The first recorded effort to establish trout in the Cape was syndicated. In 1875, a Mr Campbell Johnston arranged for a consignment of salmon and trout ova to be shipped on ss Windsor Castle. Mr C A Fairbridge and Mr Layard reconnoitered the Liesbeek and Eerste Rivers to locate suitable redds. And the syndicate collected funds to support the project. The ova were dead on arrival.

The vision inspired a Mr Lachlan MacClean. Mr MacClean was the Cape Town agent for the Donald Currie Steamship Company. A visit to the International Fisheries Exhibition in London, 1883, stimulated Mr MacClean's interest. Lachlan MacClean arranged for 20 000 brown trout ova to be shipped in the Windsor Castle. The consignment arrived early in 1884. The ova were taken by rail to Wolsley and incubated at the Waverley Mills wool washery. 17 000 alevins hatched; an 85% success. These were transferred to perforated galvanised rearing trays. Sixty eight fry survived the resultant zinc poisoning. The survivors were transferred to a pond from which all but three were swept away by flood. The three remained in the pond until 1890 when they succumbed to high temperatures during a drought. The largest survivor weighed 3 lbs. It was preserved in spirit and displayed in Lachlan MacClean's office.

The Western Districts Game Protection Association was formed and assumed responsibility for the introduction of trout to the Western Cape. Lachlan MacClean was Secretary of the Association in 1890, when members persuaded the Cape Government to finance further importations of trout ova.

In October, 1891, the Colonial Secretary, the Hon. J W Sauer, appointed a "Fisheries Committee" to supervise the work. This committee included Lachlan MacClean, R Trimen (SA Museum), W G Fairbridge and Anders Ohlsson, M.L.A.

Mr Ohlsson placed the cellar at Anneberg Brewery, Newlands, at the disposal of the Committee. The Committee ordered 30 000 Loch Leven ova and 70 000 brown trout ova from Andrews of Guildford. A professional pisciculturist, Ernest Latour, was contracted by the Cape Government.

Mr Latour arrived in Cape Town on March 18, 1892. The first consignment of ova arrived the following day in good condition. This consignment suffered from chemical reaction between the acidic spring water and the metal hatching trays. The second consignment arrived in poor condition and was a write off. By March 30, 1892, when the third batch of ova arrived, Mr Latour had corrected faults in the plant and the consignment hatched out well.

By 1893, the Newlands facility was inadequate and Government rented a section of Jonkershoek. Latour constructed holding ponds and trout were transferred to Jonkershoek in December, 1893. The last batch of imported ova was hatched at Newlands in 1894. During the years 1892 to 1894, 146 000 fry were hatched at Newlands. Ernest Latour moved to the Pirie Hatchery and was succeeded by John L Scott who built the hatching house at Jonkershoek. In June, 1895, Scott obtained the first batch of ova from brown trout reared from imported eggs.

In 1902, the Western Districts Game Protection Association amended its title to include "Trout". The Western Districts Game and Trout Protection Association represented angling interests in the Western Cape until 1931, when it was reconstituted as the Cape Piscatorial Society.

1991 is significant. It is the 60th (Diamond) anniversary of the Society as presently constituted. If "direct descent" from the "Fisheries Committee" of the Western Districts Game Protection Association is accepted, October, 1991, is also the Society's centenary!

On this occasion it is perhaps appropriate to remember, with gratitude, the dedication of and the contribution made by the late A C Harrison to angling in the Western Cape.