

BASS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

by Brian Carcary

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INTRODUCTION OF BLACK BASS INTO SOUTH AFRICA AND ZIMBABWE

South Africa

The first Black Bass imported into South Africa were brought in by the Rand Piscatorial Association (now known as the Pretoria and District Angling Society) and the following article taken from *Piscator*, the Journal of the Cape Piscatorial Society of Cape Town. No 108 December 1981 tells the story:

The First Importation of Largemouth Bass -The Story of an Old Label

Stained and faded, but with print and pen and ink entries clearly legible, all but the date, it is an emblem of the beginning of a new inland fisheries epoch in South Africa. It reads:

6 Cans. Black Bass

From Surrey Trout Farm, Ltd, Haselmere Station, Southern Railway.

Live fish. Perishable. Immediate. By first passenger train.

To R.J. Neville, Esq., S.S. Walmer Castle, Southampton Docks (Terminus Station).

	Arr. a.m.	Dept. a.m.
Haselmere		7.11
Woking	7.59	9.07
Eastleigh	10.19	10.38
Southampton Docks	10.57	

Important Please!

There were eight largemouth bass fingerlings in each can - plus one. They had been bred at Arnhem in Holland in the European summer of 1927, and were obtained from there by the Surrey Trout Farm for re-shipment to Cape Town. Mr Neville, the Honorary Secretary of the Rand Piscatorial Association, gave them such good care that only four were lost on the sea voyage.

On February 20, 1928, he handed over all the 45 survivors to Mr F.G. Chaplin of the Jonkershoek Hatchery, Stellenbosch.

These were the first largemouth bass to be imported into South Africa; and they matured and bred at Jonkershoek in October, 1929.

That was the beginning of it all, and most of the hundreds of thousands of bass which have been caught in Southern Africa are descendants of these original emigrants.

Black bass in Rhodesia

From the Minutes of the Rhodesia Angling Society (now the Bulawayo Angling Society)

The Rhodesia Angling Society had been formed in early 1925 and, as the only Angling Society in the country, had as one of the objectives in its Constitution to stock the dams and rivers of the country with fish. From the outset in 1925 it imported and stocked firstly carp, followed later by trout and then yellowfish, all of which it stocked into the dams and rivers around Rhodesia - very successfully in most cases.

In March 1938 the Society wrote to the Government Trout Hatcheries, Stellenbosch, (later to become the Jonkershoek Hatcheries) requesting information on black bass which they had just recently received from overseas, and also the availability of bass fingerlings. A reply was received in April 1928, advising the Society that bass would be a good fish to stock but they were not in a position to supply bass as yet.

In October 1930 the Society again wrote to the Government Trout Hatcheries, Stellenbosch, with regards to the possible supply of black bass and were awaiting a reply.

In January of 1931, having received no reply to their letter, it was decided to write to the Rand Piscatorial Association to see if they could assist in the matter. In July of 1931 it was reported that the R.P.A. could not supply bass "at present" but would endeavour to do so as soon as supplies became available. In September 1931, Mr R.J. Neville, the Secretary of the R.P.A. who had been instrumental in bringing black bass to South Africa, said in a letter to the Society that he would give the R.A.S. application priority and would supply fingerlings as soon as possible, dependent on the result of that season's spawning.

In April 1932, the Society was advised to apply immediately to the Curator, Jonkershoek Hatcheries, as they were in a position to supply the Society with fingerlings. The application had been despatched by return. A letter dated 1 May 1932 was received from Mr F.G. Chaplin, the Curator of Jonkershoek Hatcheries, indicating that they would despatch the bass as soon as possible.

A telegram was received, stating that 50 black bass fingerlings had been despatched from Jonkershoek Hatchery on 25 July 1932 and that the balance of the fish ordered would only be supplied in 1933.

On Wednesday 27 July 1932, 50 black bass fingerlings arrived safely at Bulawayo Station and were successfully transferred to the Matopos Dam on the same day. The fish were all fingerlings of not more than two inches in length.

These were the first black bass ever introduced into Rhodesia (Zimbabwe).

In May 1937 the Society was offered 50 black bass by the Swaziland Angling Society at a price of two shillings each but transporting them to Bulawayo would create a major problem. The Chairman, Mr Alick Stuart, "very sportingly undertook to go to Johannesburg to meet the train from Breyton and bring them back here by road."

In September 1937 the Chairman of the Society reported that he had made the trip to Johannesburg by car and had taken delivery of the bass fingerlings sent from the Swaziland Angling Society. Nine fingerlings were found dead on arrival at Johannesburg but he safely transported approximately 75 to Bulawayo by road and deposited them in a small private dam kindly placed at the Society's disposal by Mr L.F. May.

In March 1938 Mr May reported that an appreciable number of black bass had been hatched out

in his ornamental dam, and he had removed them into a smaller pool for observation. Mr May confirmed in November that there had been four spawnings, resulting in the hatching of about 3 000 fry, but that half of them had disappeared without explanation and he assumed they had been eaten by frogs.

Fish from this spawning were offered to Midlands, Gatooma, Gwanda and Selukwe Angling Societies and 300 were to be placed in Matopos Dam.

Eventually fish were supplied to the Midlands Angling Society, Banket Dam, Gwanda Angling Society, Nyasaland Piscatorial Society, Umtali Piscatorial Society as well as numerous private purchasers in Mashonaland. The numbers of fish distributed was not stated, but these were the first black bass ever bred in Rhodesia and those sent to Nyasaland (Malawi) were, in all probability, the first bass ever introduced into that country.

A number of these fish, together with the brood fish, were moved into the breeding pond at Lakeside Dam, previously used for holding carp, and thus the Rhodesia Angling Society's bass breeding programme, which continues to this day, had its beginnings.

Florida Bass to Zimbabwe

(From the Minutes of the Bulawayo Angling Society)

In 1980, after the country became independent and changed its name to Zimbabwe, the Rhodesia Angling Society changed its name to the Bulawayo Angling Society.

Shortly before midnight on Friday 15 May 1981, 2 000 Florida strain bass fingerlings arrived in Bulawayo from Montgomery, Alabama, United States of America. The Federation Department of B.A.S.S. in Montgomery had persuaded the Alabama Game & Fish Department to breed and supply the much sought-after "Florida" strain bass, and then co-ordinated Delta and T.A.P. Airlines to deliver the bass to Bulawayo, free of charge. They arrived after 62 hours 30 minutes with only about 6 percent loss in transit. The fingerlings were approximately 2.5cms long and had withstood a journey of over 16 000kms, through six time zones, left in summer and arrived in winter, a truly fantastic journey for the new immigrants.

The importation of these Florida Bass had been arranged by Gerry Leach, Chairman of the Bulawayo Chapter of Bassmasters, who was also a committee member of the Bulawayo Angling Society, and had been in close liaison with Mr Ian van der Lingen of the Fisheries section of the National Parks and Wildlife, and the committee of the Bulawayo Angling Society.

The fingerlings that succumbed did so because some of the boxes containing the fish, in oxygen-filled plastic bags, had been upset in transit, and a number of the fingerlings were trapped in the dry corners of the bags.

Approximately 750 of these fingerlings were given to the Bulawayo Angling Society to be used for breeding of Florida bass in their hatchery breeding ponds.

The balance of the fingerlings were distributed as follows: 750 to Ian Morris-Eyton at Fort Rixon for breeding in his ponds and 500 to the National Park's hatchery at Lake Kyle.

The Bulawayo Angling Society placed the fingerlings into two ponds where they were given special treatment in an effort to get them to grow. However their growth was very slow. This was possibly due to the fact that their metabolism had been upset, having left the USA in early summer and arriving two and a half days later in our early winter which had been unusually cold at the hatchery.

In October the bass had only grown to 6.5cm, whilst those at Fort Rixon were up to 10cm and at the Lake Kyle hatchery they were up to 20cm long. The National Parks had placed their fingerlings into warmed fish tanks on arrival, to stimulate growth, however they lost about 65% of their fish due to a faulty thermostat in the tank causing the water to overheat.

In February 1982 the Florida bass in the ponds were still only 10cm long. In July 1982, 74 Florida bass were distributed into the balance of the breeding ponds where they were fed heavily to encourage growth. No breeding was attempted during 1982.

During 1982 the National Parks distributed several lots of 20 bass, 25cm long, to various other organisations as breeding stock. They were given to Mashaba Bassmasters, a group of bass anglers in the Lowveld, plus other hatcheries in the country.

Ian Morris-Eyton's ponds had successfully produced breeding sized fish and in August 1982 the Florida bass in his ponds bred, as did the bass given to the Lowveld anglers, and these were the

first Florida bass to have been bred in Zimbabwe.

On 15 August 1983 the first nest of the Florida bass were observed at the B.A.S. hatchery and about a week later the first fry were seen. These were the first Florida bass bred in the Bulawayo Angling Society Hatchery and, by July of 1984 when the ponds were drained for cleaning in preparation for the following breeding season, no less than 58 184 Florida bass fingerlings had been produced - a new record production of bass fingerlings from the Bulawayo Angling Society Hatchery.

Between August and November of 1983, 57 590 Florida bass fingerlings were stocked into Inyankuni Dam, where 3 120 Florida bass fingerlings from Ian Morris-Eyton's ponds at Fort Rixon had been stocked during January and February of 1983, making a total of 61 070 Florida bass stocked into the dam in that season.

Because of the Bulawayo Angling Society's recorded history as the original introducer to the country of the Largemouth Black Bass, the committee adopted this fish for their new Society badge when the Society changed its name from Rhodesia to Bulawayo Angling Society in 1980.