

CPS COUP!

Story and Pictures by Ed Herbst

The 1990 CPS Annual Dinner was memorable for a number of reasons; Tom Sutcliffe's side-splitting speech on the vagaries of youth, the presentation by one of South Africa's foremost sculptors, Jean Doyle, of a magnificent bronze trout which will serve as a fly-tying trophy, and the announcement by the Cape Department of Nature and Environmental Conservation that a CPS application to have the fly-only rule re-applied on Western Cape Streams had received the go-ahead.

As this was the third year in succession that Tom had been guest speaker at the CPS dinner he was running out of matters piscatorial to talk about. He thus spoke on the very broad topic of "youth", a speech which dealt only peripherally with angling but dwelt at length on his own formative years. Some of the word-pictures he conjured up had his audience literally weeping with mirth. I will long recall his account of the chaos and confusion which occurred when a treacherous hammock deposited him on top of the peacefully sleeping family canine while he was "camping" in the garden one night.

One of the guests of honour, the then American Deputy Ambassador in South Africa and present American Ambassador in Namibia, Genta Holmes, said later that it was unusual for an after-dinner speaker to hold an audience in thrall for as long as Tom did.

Another guest of honour was sculptor, Jean Doyle, who had been commissioned by the CPS to sculpt a trout in bronze which will serve as a floating trophy to be awarded in the CPS Fly-Tyer of the Year competition. Jean is best known for her life-size sculpture of "Just Nuisance", which stands in Simon's Town's Jubilee Square and commemorates the life of this World War II friend, confidante and protector of Simon's Town's matelots. However, she is winning increasing acclaim for her wild-life bronzes and was one of the artists approached by the Save the Rhino fund to contribute work for auction in that campaign.

Also attending as a guest of honour was the Director of the Cape Department of Nature and Environmental Conservation, Dr Johan Neethling. And it was he who brought the glad tidings that a representation by the CPS for a return to the *status quo* on the trout streams of the Western Cape had been approved in principle by his Department.

This was something for which the CPS has, with quiet diplomacy, lobbied for several years and it means that administrative control of streams such as the Smalblaar, Holsloot and Witte will pass to the CPS and the "fly-only" regulation can be re-introduced.

On page 101 of the recently-published proceedings of the symposium on aquatic invasives held at the JLB Smith Institute of Ichthyology, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, we read the following:

"Legislation protecting the rights of members of organisations who fish for certain exotic species such as trout should be re-enacted in non-sensitive aquatic ecosystems. This would not only provide control measures for those members of the public utilising the sports fishery, but should provide overall control and monitoring of these areas by conservation authorities."

This is laudible because the influx of lure and bait fishermen onto the handful of Cape trout streams after the protective legislation was removed quickly led to the more accessible streams being fished out. It also led to an increase in people-pressure which these ecologically fragile mountain catchment areas could ill afford. There was an increase in litter, erosion and trespassing on neighbouring farms.

And to what purpose? There is no evidence that there has been any, let alone substantial, increase in indigenous fish stocks as a result of the measure. This is logical because the majority of threatened species which are endemic to the Cape are in the Olifants River system which, except for its upper reaches, is far too warm for trout. The Cape authorities do not, in fact, regard traditional trout streams such as the Smalblaar and Holsloot as sensitive in terms of threatened indigenous fish. Everyone acknowledges that habitat degradation by man is the major threat to these fish followed by the depredation of the bass. An even greater piscine threat looms in the form of the barbel which is now being found in increasing numbers in Western Cape river systems. It is believed that the barbel was translocated by local farmers who wished to follow the Transvaal example and breed barbel for sale as an alternative source of revenue.

One of the reasons given by the Cape Authorities at the time was that an anomaly existed in that there was no legislative protection for threatened indigenous fish but that there was for trout which, after having been in Cape waters for almost a century, was considered an alien. With the wisdom of hindsight, would it not have been better to retain the legislation protecting trout and introduce legislation protecting indigenous fish?

Keeping in mind that the first people to be detrimentally affected by any measure which leads to a decline in the popularity and growth of fly-fishing will be the black people employed in its commercial infrastructure (such as the hundreds of people dependent for survival on the incomes of those employed in the Eastern Cape fly-tying factories such as High Flies and Hairy Fairy Flies), one hopes that the authorities will never again consider such a measure.



Guest speaker Tom Sutcliffe with Dr Willie van Niekerk and his wife, Magriet, and FOSAF President Fred Crony.



Michael and Genta Holmes (left), with Ian and Lucy Lehr.



One of South Africa's best sculptors, Jean Doyle, handing a bronze of a leaping trout to CPS President, Dr Frank Bradlow.



Enjoying a joke at the CPS dinner are Mike Stott, angling fundi at Jack Lemkus Sport (left) his wife, Cape Town City Councillor Eulalie Stott and Dr Johan Neethling, Chief Director of the Cape Department of Nature and Environmental Conservation.