

FLY LINES



AUGUST 2026

The VFFA Annual Dinner

BOOK HERE

Thursday August 20:
Our Annual Dinner –
6:30pm at the
Cricketer's Arms Hotel

One evening. Good food, good company, and everything you need to hit the new season running.

Join us for our annual dinner, the social night of the year for our members. It's a chance to catch up over a meal, swap stories from the season past, and get set for the one ahead.

On the night:

Flyfishing trivia: Test yourself against the room on all things flyfishing. Bragging rights are on the line, and so are some great prizes. Come prepared.

Season opening presentation: With opening weekend around the corner, we'll walk you through where the best early season options are and how to plan your season around them. Where to be, when to be there, and what to have ready. You'll leave with a plan, not just good intentions.

Event Details

Date: 20th August 2026

Time: 6:30 for 7pm

Location: Cricketer's Arms Hotel Port Melbourne

Cost: \$50

Bookings essential. Guests welcome!



Our Annual Dinners are always fabulous events with superb food and great company

Index

The VFFA Annual Dinner	1
Vice President's Message.....	4
Being Better	5
The Flyfisher's Report.....	8
From the Editor's Desk	10
Tasmanian Season Opening.....	12
In Search of the Unicorn Fish	14
Rangitikei Report	17
Is it Teaching or Learning?.....	20
Notes from the Victorian Fisheries Authority	22
Australian Fly Fishing Centre	24
VFFA New Member Spotlight: Christy Taylor	28
Nymphing Freestone Streams	30
This Month's Yarn	35
Fly of the Month.....	37
VFFA 2026 meetings & other activities	39

THE VICTORIAN FLY FISHERS' ASSOCIATION INC.

VOL. 77 NO.6 - AUGUST 2026

Organisation No. A0024750J

P.O. Box 18423 Melbourne Bourke Street,
Melbourne 3001

www.vffa.com.au

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT

John Spragg

Phone: 0407 555 621

JUNIOR VICE PRESIDENT and HONORARY SECRETARY

Rodger Muir

Phone: 0414 253 890

HONORARY TREASURER

Glen Oliver

Phone: 0412 295 744

HONORARY LIBRARIAN

Bill Jeans

Phone: 0448 967 192

HONORARY EDITOR

Lyndon Webb

Phone: 0488 555 724

Other Council members:

Scott Raggatt 0402 433 450

Bernard Chu 0402 638 880

John Wieladek 0497 673 467

Rod Hirst 0418 477 368

Andrew Fuller 0408 661 324

All material copyright © all rights reserved. No part of the contents of this publication may be reproduced without prior written consent of the publisher. Published monthly by the Victorian Fly Fishers' Association Inc., PO Box 18423 Melbourne Bourke Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3001.



VFFA ANNUAL DINNER 2026

COUNTDOWN TO OPENING DAY

The long winter is nearly over.
Rivers are calling. Fly boxes are full.
Waders are ready.
Let's get together and
kick off the season in style!



GREAT FOOD
& GOOD COMPANY



AWARDS &
RECOGNITION



TRIVIA &
PRIZES



**THURSDAY
20 AUGUST**

Be part of the excitement
as we celebrate another fantastic year
and look ahead to the 2026–27
trout season.



THE CRICKETERS ARMS HOTEL
69 CRUICKSHANK ST, PORT MELBOURNE
EXCLUSIVE USE OF THE HEATED COURTYARD
WITH PRIVATE BAR

\$50
PER PERSON

**TWO COURSE MEAL
DRINKS AT BAR PRICES**



ALL GUESTS OF VFFA MEMBERS MOST WELCOME!

BOOK HERE

Vice President's Message

... John Spragg

July has been a good month for the VFFA, with Kossy's fly tying nights, new members signed in, and a good response to our call for annual subscriptions. We also finally received our gazebo, which was put to good use at the last casting day along with our barbeque, thanks to Ray Goddard.

Our General Meeting was quite well attended, and Stuart Murphy and our Chris Gray gave an informative and well-presented update on the Australian Fly Fishing Centre. A number of questions were asked, as there is great interest from VFFA members in this project.

Sunday July 26 saw what I believe were record numbers to our open casting day at the Red Tag Pool. Our thanks to Andrew Fuller and *The Flyfisher* for offering many rods, reels and lines for casters to try before they put their hands in their wallet pocket. Our new gazebo was on show, thanks to the grant from Stronger Fishing Clubs, and I hear Ray Goddard did a great job with the barbeque. Anyone want to bid for the 9 kgs of sliced onions that Ray left on the kitchen bench?

July 28 was the final Fly Tying evening for this year, and while the number attending was a little low it was a superb night, and Richard Kos showed why he is one of the master tiers in Australia. I am sure his flies last far more casts and catch more fish than those tied by others. So a big thanks to Kossy, and to our hosts for all the fly tying evenings - ex-president David Hookes and his good lady Jenny.

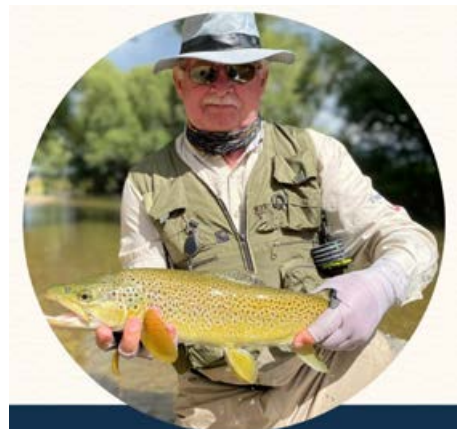
Our Annual Dinner is locked in at the Cricketers Arms, 6:30 pm at 69

Cruikshank Street, Port Melbourne. Bookings via [THIS LINK](#) or the VFFA website, so get in early. It should be a fabulous night.

Keep Sunday the 30th of August free and head down to the Red Tag Pool, as we are having a Cane Day. So anyone with a cane rod: get the dust off it and bring it down and show us all your stuff. At the other end of the pool you can cast your favourite rod, no matter what material, and get some practice in as Opening Day is then just a few days away.

Sunday, October 4, is pencilled in for fishing and a barbeque and raffle with Latrobe Fly Fishers, fishing their many stocked dams. Further info to follow closer to the date.

Hayes on Brumbies is also pencilled in, arriving on January 31 and finishing on February 6. Peter Hayes can only guide on February 1 - 5. Let me know if you are interested as we will need to make a decision on viability asap. I will be a starter if we get good numbers, and I'll be the organiser.



JOHN SPRAGG

We are working with the Millbrook Team to arrange fishing there. We are looking at a couple of options from them. More on this very shortly.

See you at the Annual Dinner, keep safe, and tight loops.

"I have a secret fishing spot that even the fish do not know about"(Anon)

Being Better

... by Peter Hayes



Peter Hayes – one of our top fishing guides

(Peter has very kindly allowed us to use some of his fabulous material on fly casting.)

The importance of your line hand / non-dominant hand in fly fishing is often overlooked, writes Peter. When you are new to fly casting, it seems most of your focus and practice effort goes into learning how to move the fly rod using your dominant hand. There is so much to concentrate on here. Grip the rod with the correct hand tension - not too strong a grip but not too loose either. Move the rod through the right arc - not too big or the loops will be too wide: the cast won't be accurate, your distance will suffer, and the leader will collapse in a messy heap.

Conversely, if the arc is too small, a tailing loop will surely occur. If you are lucky, this won't cause the greatest tangle in the

world that will cost you fishing time and a brand new leader to fix. Instead, you may merely end up with a few wind knots in your leader ... which with up to an 80% decrease in breaking strain could cost you the fish of a lifetime.

Then there is the power application. If you don't apply a smooth acceleration to the rod tip every time you move it either backwards or forwards, then the loop shape will go pear-shaped again, more than likely resulting in another tailing loop. Lastly, there is the need to understand how to 'pull' into the forward loading move. This is perhaps the very hardest thing to learn in fly casting. In short, you need to learn to pull your hand down (vertically) as you rotate the rod forward.

Countless books, videos and You Tube presentations deal specifically with these issues, yet I have never seen any discussion or teaching whatsoever on the correct use of the non-dominant hand - which for efficiency, I'll subsequently refer to as the left hand (apologies to southpaws, just reverse). In my years of teaching experience, I believe one of the hardest things for new players to grasp is the correct use of the left hand. What makes things even worse, is that the learning is often retarded by trying to do new stuff with your non-dominant / less able hand. As an example of this challenge, try to brush your teeth for the next few days with your left hand. I guarantee you will dribble a lot, whack your gums, and at some stage jag the brush up your nose. Try it!

If I ever write a book on flyfishing, the very first chapter will be on the subject of line management. Most guides will tell you that one of the greatest issues for guided anglers is line management. Line management is the job of the left hand. So many bad casts and so many lost fish are the result of unskilled left hands. As guides, we can't correct this issue much on a fishing day - it's a muscle memory deal that will take thousands of correct repetitions to stick.

What are the tasks you must teach your left hand to do?

When not casting, but fishing: *Retrieving the line*

Place the line under your rod hand finger at the end of the delivery cast. This sounds easy. You have the line in your left hand, and you simply need to pass this point to the top of your rod hand index finger. This seemingly simple procedure goes wrong if you completely let go of the line on the delivery cast.

It becomes even more of a cock-up if you always reach up in front of your rod hand finger to pull the line in. I can't tell you how many fish I've seen lost because of this line-gathering technique. Anglers easily pull the first strip, but they ALWAYS have difficulty getting the line back under the rod finger for the subsequent strip. The solution is this - you must condition yourself to pull line in from BEHIND your rod hand finger - Always! Every Strip!

Holding Coils

I consider it's paramount that as soon as you start your fly fishing journey, you learn to carry coils of line in your left hand. You must learn to hold 3 to 6 coils of line, which should be lined up, in the order of retrieve, on your left hand index finger. These coils should be held in place on your finger with slight pressure from the heel of your left thumb.

There's a real knack to the lining up the coils without looking. For me, it works like this. I place the tip of my left index finger under the line, at the point where the line exits my rod hand finger. I then twist my left hand in toward my stomach, so the line slides across my index finger and comes to rest against the previous coil. My thumb instinctively moves across and clamps this coil, so it is lined up with previous coils.

Learn to 'figure-eight'

The figure-eight is a single left hand twist retrieve technique. It's often known there's a nymph fishing retrieve, however it is important to learn for other reasons too. The name comes from the fact that whilst you coil line into your palm, the loop turns over into a Figure 8 shape.

Good advice would be to learn this technique from someone you know, or maybe even from YouTube. After say

10 coils you should drop these in front of your feet or into a stripper clip or stripping basket, then start again for the next 10 coils. Holding too many coils in your hand will likely result in a tangle on your next cast.

Years ago, I learned that a slight variation of the standard figure-eight retrieve made a remarkable difference to the amount of coiled line I could hold in my palm, while still having tangle-free deliveries. You simply need to learn to wrap the coil around your index finger, so every loop is looped over this finger.

While Casting

Be aware of never holding your left hand down for back-casts, then lifting it up toward the rod hand on the forward cast. If you don't understand correct hauling, then be sure your hands are close together at all times while you are casting. A good thing to remember is that both your elbows should stay at about 90 degrees whilst you are false casting. It's really bad form to be casting with one, or both, arms straight.

Single haul or double hauling - properly

To my mind, hauling is the single most beautiful and enjoyable aspect of fly casting. I would consider giving up fly casting if I was told I could never haul again. Seriously.

It's the addition of the minimal but critical movement of the left hand which turbochargers your casting. If you haul properly it gives balance between the left and right sides of your body. It allows you to make tighter loops and use the rod with much smaller, more condensed and less aggressive movements. It feels so sweet and effortless when you get it right.

Do yourself a favour: get someone to teach you how to double haul properly. Practise

until it becomes a second nature for casts of any length dash even short ones. Understand that double hauling is not just a saltwater fly fishing or or forecasting long distances with heavy flies.

If you are trying to learn the technique yourself remember:

- a) the left hand should always be moving away from your rod hand whilst the rod is making a forward or backward stroke.
- b) your left hand never should move toward your right hand while you are applying power.

The skill of transferring line and retrieving without looking away from the delivered fly

Your left hand should never completely release the line on the final delivery cast. Instead make an O by touching the tip of your left index finger to the tip of your left thumb.

When you shoot line into the delivery cast, this left hand O should be open enough to let the line run smoothly through it and into the stripper guide. Then, a moment or two before the line is fully unrolled this O should be squeezed shut quickly and tightly.

This action will immediately transfer any of the loops' 'bottom leg' energy into the loop's 'top leg'. This helps the leader turn over, as well as taking the forward energy out of the line - something which can otherwise result in noisy, messy, splash landings which scare fish into the next postcode.

As soon as the fly lands on the water, the left hand should immediately transfer the line to the rod hand finger. You need to learn to do this automatically and without looking away from the fly. If you simply

touch both hands together, the line will easily transfer to your rod finger.

The exact opposite to this would be when the angler completely drops the line from their left hand on the delivery. Consequently, the line will jump up and wrap round the rod as it shoots, meaning not only will the line fail to shoot as freely, but once the fly lands on the water, the angler needs to look down to see where to grab the line.

Often, they then have to unwrap a turn or two from the rod, and subsequently get the line under their finger for control. Too bad if a fish heard the fly land and ate

it within the first couple of seconds of it landing - which they often do.

It is similarly bad news if the current on a stream has moved a metre or two of slack back towards you while this stuff-up is going on. I kid you not in both cases this is one of the most common causes of missed strikes.

In summary, take my advice and put some concerted effort into learning to fly fish using both hands well.

Consider signing up on my website to receive future tips and tricks to help with your fly fishing and casting.

The Flyfisher's Report

... by Andrew Fuller

Plenty happening on the water this month, so let's get into it.

The Western Victorian lakes are fishing really well at the moment. Lake Tooliorook is producing trophy trout, but the word's well and truly out, so it's copping a hammering. For the lucky few who got onto it early, they did well on some massive fish.

A smelt explosion has resulted in trout in crazy condition. If you're heading up there, expect company. Tullaroop Reservoir is quieter and well worth a look too, with water quality as good as we've seen it in a while. Moorabool Reservoir has had a stocking of advanced yearlings and has come up nicely as a result. Big fish are still scarce out there, but the stockies are providing fast, steady action right through the day, which makes for a great session if you're after numbers over size.

In the local salt, the pinky snapper have been thick and eating a fly well, particularly around Williamstown. The trick is moving around until you find



Mick Hurren with an Eildon fly caught cod on August 5th
them. Find one and you'll usually find heaps.

Worth also getting onto the Murray cod at Lake Eildon while conditions are right.

This time of year the cod push into quite shallow water, making them a really reliable target on the fly rod. One example was landed on the 5th of August, spotted using livenesscope technology, and caught on the first cast - proof that when you find them shallow like this, they're often willing to eat straight away. Pop the trout gear in too. While not as reliable as our Western Victorian lakes, if you're in the right place on Eildon at the right time, it can be spectacular.

Further afield, the Tasmanian trout season has opened, and from all reports the lowland rivers and lakes are fishing really well. It's a great sign for the season ahead, with some solid dry fly fishing already being reported this early on. The weather down there has been sunny and beautiful, though anyone heading up into the Highlands has been coping bitterly cold conditions.

Back home, we had a great time at the casting day we ran recently. Over 50 rods and around 40 lines were out for people to try, and it was fantastic to see such a strong turnout of members alongside plenty of prospective new faces. Feedback was excellent, we're already keen to run it again.

It also gave us a good chance to show off some of the new stock we've been bringing in as we ramp up for the Victorian trout season, and we're bursting at the seams with it. The Yamaga fly rods were easily the most talked about item of the day. These Japanese built rods really are special for the money. Whether you're after a small creek rod with a soft action for

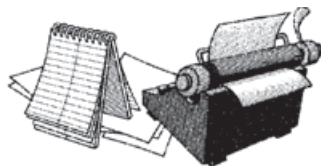
dry fly work, or a fast action saltwater rod built with the latest componentry and the durability you'd expect from Japanese craftsmanship, they're well worth checking out.

Looking ahead, the Annual Dinner is fast approaching, and we're excited to be welcoming Mick Hurren from our Yea store, who'll be presenting on where to fish at the start of the season. Mick knows the local streams better than anyone we've ever come across, so it's sure to be an informative evening. We can't wait to see you all there!

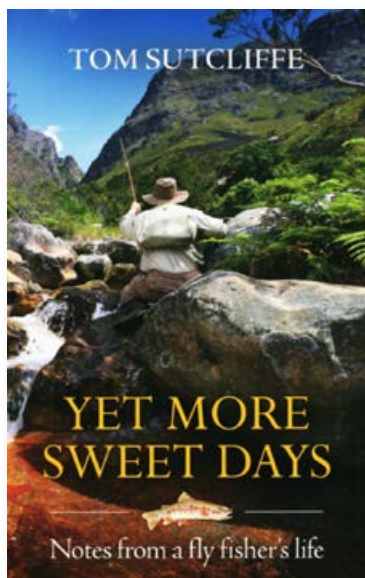


*Port Phillip Bay pinkies are great fun.
Melbourne Star in the background should be a clue..!*

From the EDITOR'S DESK



... from Lyndon Webb



One of Tom's brilliant books on fly fishing

As I've mentioned before, books are a big part of our fly fishing lives. Well, certainly of mine. I recently retrieved and read again some of the books I had purchased written by Tom Sutcliffe.

Sadly, Tom died in 2024. During his life he was certainly a very significant, perhaps the most significant fly fisher in South Africa. As the accolades record, he was "an author, artist, doctor, family man and revered trout stalker; from the stillwaters and rivers of KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape, the Western Cape and everywhere else in between, Sutcliffe's has been a life very well fished."

From another: "Tom Sutcliffe is a lifelong angler, historian, artist, doctor, and conservationist from South Africa who many people refer to as the South African John Gierach. His books include *Hunting trout*, *Shadows on the Stream Bed*, and *Elements of Fly Fishing*. He describes everything related to fishing in South Africa with the knowledge of a researcher and individual who has used angling as a form of solace for the majority of his life.

And another: "In his family, fishing, friends and his physisc, Tom reaches out across time and space to elevate the cares and the affections of the heart. His work for Red Cross Children's Hospital and on behalf of mental health always inspire. His books have pride-of-place in my library, next to Norman Maclean, and my teacher and friend Frederic Michael Halford. I am fortunate beyond measure to know him." (Dr Hugh Rosen -Professor of Molecular Medicine at Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, California)

A South African TV News reporter wrote : "Tom was Director General of



Time to change flies

Health for the Western Cape, responsible for a budget of billions and a staff of thousands. When political interference became intolerable, he resigned without other employment in prospect, an ethically brave move for a family man without other employment in prospect. Fortunately, he was quickly employed by the Western Cape Mental Health Review Board and went on to play a stellar role as its leader for the next few decades.

From Tom: *"The first fish I remember catching was a brown trout that, if cooked, you could have eaten between two slices of buttered bread. I had caught other small fish by then, aged nine, off jetties and in gullies on rare visits to the coast, but this was the first fish I remember."*



Tom released nearly all the trout he landed

Tom's books are among my favourites. He writes brilliantly, so I have scanned a few small sections and included them in this newsletter. I hope that our readers enjoy them as much as I have.



Penstock Lagoon – a very famous Tasmanian lake

Tasmanian Season Opening

... some notes from Mike Stevens



Tasmania's Great Lake – which can be a desolate and forbidding place to fish

There are plenty of places to fish at the imminent opening of Tasmania's fishing season.

Lake Crescent is surging in popularity after a chequered history, including a massive carp eradication program completed by the Inland Fisheries Service in 2009. Today, strict regulations mean it is an artificial lure and fly fishery only; bait fishing, night fishing, and camping are prohibited.

Despite an average depth of just 1.5 to 2.0 metres and constantly turbid water, monster trout thrive here. They grow to massive sizes by gorging on high-calorie

prey, primarily the endangered golden galaxias (*Galaxias auratus*), alongside mudeyes, frogs, and snails.

Anglers can fish from the shore, but a boat offers the best access to the productive northern marshes and rocky edges. Because the water is murky, trout hunt using their lateral lines rather than sight. Anglers should use 4 – 6 kg fluorocarbon leaders and large, high-action flies retrieved with slow strips and long pauses. With high water levels creating optimal fishing conditions, now is the perfect time to visit.

Continuing IFS's lead into the 2026-27 brown trout season starting on 1 August 2026, the Central Highlands remains a favourite destination for trout season opening, particularly for anglers willing to brave the cooler weather.



Tassie's Lake St Clair

Yingina/Great Lake continues to be Tasmania's most visited fishery early in the season and is once again home to the \$25,000 tagged trout in the Tasmanian Tagged Trout Promotion. Recent rainfall has seen lake level begin to rise, creating ideal conditions for shore-based fishing as

trout feed aggressively to regain condition after spawning.

We encourage you to experiment with style, colour, depth and retrieve speed if fishing is slow. A slower retrieve can often make a significant difference in the cooler water temperatures experienced at this time of year. The lake's productive charophyte weed beds are key fish-holding areas. Anglers can locate these on the Anglers Access brochure map. Consistently productive areas include Swan Bay, Tods Corner, Beckett's Bay and Elizabeth Bay.

At an elevation of 651 metres the Bradys Chain offers milder conditions than many other Central Highlands waters early in the season. The IFS stocking program has recently released 1,600 rainbow trout and 2,070 brown trout into the system. There are several camping opportunities available. Productive locations include the major inflows at the White Water and Dee Portal areas of Bradys Lake. The interconnecting canals fish well when water is flowing, while Tungatinah Lagoon is another reliable option. Fly anglers should also keep an eye on the shallow eastern shores of Lake Binney, where early-season tailing trout are often encountered. The system is also home to \$5,000 tagged trout in the Tasmanian Tagged Trout Competition.

Penstock Lagoon and Little Pine Lagoon are expected to attract plenty of fly anglers on opening morning. At Penstock, anglers stripping wet flies from boats found success during last season's opening weekend despite cold conditions. While Little Pine Lagoon proved challenging at times last season, persistent anglers were rewarded with some excellent fish. In years when water levels are favourable, the famous tailing trout fishery can produce excellent sport at first light on opening day.



Mike Stevens with a superb Tasmanian brown

Woods Lake experienced mixed fishing results last season but should not be overlooked. Water levels have improved during winter, and the blue-green algae issues that affected the fishery in previous years have not been observed for more than 12 months. Traditionally an excellent early-season water, anglers should consider wet flies around the marshes. A toilet at the boat ramp carpark adds to Woods Lake's appeal as a family-friendly camping destination.

Bronte Lagoon produced outstanding fishing at times during the early part of last season, with both brown and rainbow trout in excellent condition from the opening weeks. Wet fly fishing along the shallow margins also produced results. Camping is available along the northern shore, with toilet facilities provided at the boat ramp carpark.

To view recent fish stockings for the Central Highland region visit the IFS website or download the free Infish App. Please check weather conditions before heading out!

In Search of the Unicorn Fish

... report from Way Out West by Jim Blakeslee



Jim Blakeslee with a golden trevally

This was my seventh trip to Christmas Island. Since my first trip in 2016 I had caught many bonefish - the primary reason for going there, and the target of fly fishermen like myself. I had also bagged lots of triggerfish, the occasional big GT and bluefin trevally, and had lost a monster barracuda. Still, there was one species that was talked about and occasionally seen by anglers, though seldom hooked let alone landed on the fly at Christmas Island. I had caught them fly fishing at Weipa in Northern Queensland, so I knew what to look for, the flies they would take, and their fighting qualities. Still, here I was in 2026, 10 years after my first trip to Christmas Island, and I hadn't ever seen one or heard of anyone catching one while I was on the island.

After arriving on the Wednesday morning flight from Fiji we had moved into our rooms, showered, had breakfast, then rigged up our fly rods and prepared for our first day of fishing inside the lagoon. We boarded our boat with guide and boat driver, and 15 minutes later climbed off onto Smokey Flat to start the day's fishing.

Two members of my group, Trevor Roberts and Gus Turiello, had never

fished Christmas Island before and were on a steep learning curve trying to spot bonefish and practicing how to cast to bonefish without spooking them. They learned to strip the fly back correctly to attract them and strip-strike when a fish took the fly. Then they were amazed by the speed of a big bonefish as it ripped line off their reels and they then watched all their fly line disappear, followed by many metres of backing. Finally, they had the satisfaction of landing one of these silvery torpedoes and holding it in their hands for a photo.

All of us enjoyed that outing on the lagoon. We walked miles on Smokey, Nine Mile and Taina Flats, and caught some magnificent bonefish.

In the late afternoon we were back at Ikari House. We had time to clean up our gear, shower and change clothes, and were



Jim with a fine bonefish



Gus with giant trevally

having drinks and snacks sitting around the social-area table back at our motel-style accommodation, chatting about the day's adventures – the fish seen, hooked and caught or lost.

Eventually Andrew Martin, the new Ikari House "host", arrived to tell us about arrangements for the next day's fishing, and to give us a few pointers regarding flats fishing, flies and techniques to use. Towards the end of his talk about bonefish, big GTs, triggerfish, etc, he mentioned the almost mythical "Unicorn fish."

Andrew described how this fish was very occasionally seen tailing or cruising the flats in the Christmas Island lagoon, though seldom hooked and rarely landed. It was in fact so unusual to catch one that he referred to them as being "as rare as a Unicorn." He said none had been caught in the two years he had been there. So, while he was on Christmas Island, in addition to catching a double-figure bonefish, monster GTs, sailfish, etc., he was on a mission to bag one for himself.

The next morning after our cooked breakfast we were at the harbour ready to

board our boats by 7 am. Kurt Nessler, who was on a "premium package" had already taken off with his guide James. Our guides for the day were Toby and Itu, and the first destination Toby announced would be Te Ren flat.

When we stepped off the boat I was to share Toby with my friend Trevor. As I had fished Christmas Island many times before, I asked Toby to spend the day helping Trevor.

I had walked about a hundred metres away from and parallel to Trevor and Toby when I spotted a school of fish cruising around a patch of coral and occasionally stopping to "tail." Were they big bonefish??

I slowly waded to within casting range, made one false sidearm cast, and dropped the #6 hot orange Crazy Charlie a metre in front of the fish leading the school. I made one strip, the fish made a bow wave as it rushed the fly, I struck and the battle was on. The fish immediately rushed for the edge of the flat. In 10 seconds all of my fly line was gone along with 50 metres of backing, as the fish cleared the edge of the flat and powered into open water. I waded as fast as I could to the edge, holding the rod high and hoping the fish wouldn't



Kurt with bonefish



The Group

dive into some submerged coral and cut me off. Luckily for me the fish kept going straight out, and with 100 metres, then 150 metres of backing now gone, I was getting worried he would never stop that first run.

In the early morning light, when all I could see were the sickle-tails of a school of fish cruising the flat, I thought it was a big bonefish that had taken the fly, but now the way it had run off the flat and was slugging it out in deep water, I thought it felt more like the fight of a trevally. Bonefish usually prefer to stay in shallow water over the flat. They mostly make a long, smoking run away from you, then turn and run back towards you before turning and making another couple of long runs away. But with this fish there was just a constant pull going away, and I was putting maximum pressure on my 7 kg tippet, hoping it was enough to stop it without straightening the hook or the fish breaking it off.

I had loaded my reel with 300 metres of 15 kg braid backing, but I was still very relieved when the fish stopped with some 200 metres of backing gone. It seemed like 10 minutes had elapsed where neither the fish nor I seemed to be winning.

Then it seemed to tire and slowly, slowly, pumping and winding, pumping and winding I cranked the fish into the edge then back onto the flat.

I waded slowly backwards towards Toby and Trevor with the fish in tow. I had been battling it for about 20 minutes. I shouted for Toby to come over for the “photo opportunity.” He sauntered across to me, then burst into a huge smile and announced: “It’s a Golden!” So, on my first cast on the second day of my trip I had caught the Unicorn fish! How cool was that?

It was a great start to the trip for me. During our seven days fishing on Christmas Island we all had some great days and memorable catches. Gus spent a lot of time and effort targeting GTs and lost a couple of big ones before eventually landing one for the photo. Toby and I also figured that Gus hooked, then lost a Golden Trevally that cut him off on coral a couple of days after my encounter with the Unicorn. Maybe they aren’t as mythical and actually becoming more common than we think?

Rangitikei Report

... Nick Taransky



A typical Winter Rangitikei pocket rocket rainbow

While much of the normal fishing season slows down and closes here in New Zealand from the end of April until October, this has still been a busy and rewarding time for me.

“The Swing is the Thing”, and “The Tug is the Drug”...

The closed season is usually a good time for me to work on bamboo rod orders, as well as run rod-making classes. But in the last few seasons I have taken advantage of some larger local rivers that are open all year to get into the “swing” of two-handed casting during winter.

The act of casting, for me, is a big part of why I love fly fishing. Sight casting a single fly (usually a dry fly) is central to my love of the sport. But a couple of years before moving to New Zealand I began

to appreciate the value of Spey casting. However, in Australia there were very few places, if any, where this technique was applicable.

But now that I have moved to the Rangitikei region of New Zealand, I have several waters nearby where this is an effective and rewarding method. From here in Taihape, Turangi is just over an hour away, so most of the fabled Tongariro is available. Even more accessible is the mighty Rangitikei, which is around the same size as the Tongariro, and the nearest access is only around a ten-minute drive from home. So in a little over an hour, I can escape cabin fever, do some two-handed casting, usually manage a fish or two, and be back home guilt free to get back to the workshop.

While the Tongariro and Rangitikei are similar in size, they are different fisheries. As most would know, the Tongariro fishing in winter is driven by runs of rainbows from Lake Taupo. The terrain that the Tongariro drains is also relatively stable, so it usually stays clear even when the level comes up. In contrast, the Rangitikei runs all the way to the ocean, so doesn’t have a lake full of fish “in the bank” to run into the river to spawn. Some sections of the Rangitikei (and more



A solid brown taken using a two-hander rod



*Peter Hayes loading up a two-hander
on the Rangitikei*

so a couple of tributaries in the middle reaches), cut through some unstable geography. This means that after modest rainfall it can colour up significantly for a few days.

Cyclone Gabrielle took its toll on the fish population in 2023, but the river is bouncing back and holds a large number of smaller pocket rocket rainbows in the middle to lower reaches. (The trophy fish remain in the headwaters, which were largely unaffected, but these are closed in winter).

Despite the lack of prolific fish numbers compared to the Tongariro, the Rangitikei holds a year round population of both browns and rainbows, eager to come to a swung fly. In some ways, with nearly zero angling pressure, and not TOO many fish, it's even better when it comes to casting practise. It's nice to pull up to an access bridge without another car or angler in sight, to have the whole river to yourself.

I was lucky to have Peter Hayes visit for a week in July. Our focus was very much on working on two handed casting more than fishing (though quite a few fish obliged by eating our flies over the week). We fished

three rods (all bamboo) over the course of the week. Two rods were of my design - a hollow built 10-foot #4 Trout Spey, and a 12-foot solid build #6. The other was my Bob Clay built 11-foot "Dean's Skeena 5-sided, hollow, #5/6. All of the rods performed well, but interestingly, Peter Hayes commented that maybe the solid built 12-footer nudged the others as his

favourite. For me, I think the 10-foot #4 will be my go-to for now, but I am working on some variations on the taper and length as part of my NZ R&D.

We tried a range of lines over these rods, and casts including Single and Double Spey, Snake Roll, Snap T, Circle C and variations. It was a lot of fun, and of course spending time with Peter Hayes is both inspirational and an amazing



*A selection of fine rods to "taste-test" on
a visiting Peter Hayes*

opportunity to learn from one of the best casters and teachers in the world.

Peter is an elite single-handed caster. While being a very good two-handed caster, he says that he is on a learning curve in advanced Spey casting. For me it was a huge lesson to watch him and see how he approached breaking down the various casts and systematically improving his casting (from an already high base).

We also spend a half a day with renowned two-handed caster, Kunio Oshini (www.flyfishingninja.com), on the Tongariro, which was a great opportunity to learn and talk Spey casting and swinging. I can highly recommend him to anyone visiting the Tongariro for guided fishing or two-handed casting techniques.

Cressy Cane 2026 and Rod-making Classes

Aside from actual fishing, this April saw the 9th running of “Cressy Cane” (www.cressycane.org) at “Hayes on Brumbies”. This bamboo rod gathering, initiated and organised by “Bamboo” Dave Hemmings, is an amazing opportunity

to talk and learn about cane rods. This year, there was a major focus and project on hollow building, driven by Victorian maker Chris Fiddes. We had maybe 40 hollow rods in different configurations and variations at the gathering. For me, hollowing is definitely a parameter that can be incorporated into rod design on some tapers to achieve a desired action. It really did verify to me that many bamboo rods and tapers are still best in solid configuration, particularly rods under 8 feet in length. And it was interesting that Hayesie’s favourite Spey rod was solid...

My “off season” has also been busy with five bamboo rod-making classes, across Australia and New Zealand. They are a highlight of my year, and I’ve now had over 70 students make a bamboo rod at my classes. Close to half of them have continued on in their own rod-making, and many have returned for second and third classes. My Cressy classes are already filling for next year, so if you are interested, contact me ASAP (<https://taranskybamboo.com/classes/>).



A two-hander in action here – being used to make long casts to reach fish close to the far bank

Is it Teaching or Learning?

Can you teach fly fishing? Or do you learn flyfishing? Possibly the immediate response is, "Well it's a repeatable trait, a confluence of both that make a 'good' fisher." But we all know there are those who are good at the art and those plodders who love the sport but whose skills are still developing. Some can tie any and every knot, and those who lose a fish because, 'the line broke'. Such is life, Kelly once said.

These conundra I ponder, not so much for myself (an oldie but average fisher), but more for those emerging into the sport. We need to encourage the succession of fishers so they can enjoy the mateship, the challenging activities, while protecting the habitat and environment for tomorrow.

Being more specific, how does my 15-year-old grandson learn all the aspects of the art of flyfishing? And, of course, how do I teach him? Let's call him JT. We have fished together on and off for about four or so years. He is enthusiastic and dedicated. First onto the water and last off. I have fifty years' experience; he has about six. He is agile and I stumble. We both enjoy fishing with others who are better than ourselves. We watch how Ian casts, how old Monty used to tie any knots. And JT has received plenty of early advice from his dad Dean.

JT has good gear handed down by his father and grandfathers. He takes good care of it and respects names like Sage and Scott. Good gear is one thing, but learning is another. JT's calling card is, "if I can, I will".

For example, he asked me to teach him double hauling. Ouch! Well, that aint easy, and where and how do we fish at Poolburn Dam; you really don't need the extra distance there.



A superlative catch by young JT

I said to him I do use single hauling on occasions, and it's like patting your head and rubbing your stomach at the same time. His eyes glazed over; I could read his mind, 'Poppa that isn't helpful, I wanted someone to teach me'.

We moved on. Well, with time, like a month passing, he practised by himself in his dad's driveway for hours on end, sight unseen by me. A few lessons on YouTube and the next time we went to Poolburn he was extremely proficient at double hauling. He didn't boast, or show me. He just did it.

It is now his common go to method. I didn't teach him, he learnt. He also learnt from Dean the care, catch and release ethos. Over time he experimented, and now ties all his own flies. All I advised him was he could do it.

Poolburn offers all the usual forms of fishing for brown trout, usually from 1 to 8 pounds. The weather, and time of day and the year dictate the better fly fishing methods. JT and I have our own preferred (some say favourite quirky) methods that sometimes work! Styles and techniques. He rigs my rod and tackle, and of course his own. He does like to fish alone (or at least at a distance) and decides what flies and the sizes he will use. After that, he tells me something different and bigger for me so I can see it on the water!

Old age he understands. He prefers to fish with a size 16 nymph of a particular sparkle pattern below a dry indicator. He occasionally asks me what indicator to use. I used to fish that way years ago, but in recent times I have stuck to dries or streamers. I know my consistency doesn't always pay off, as JT, with his own ways, out-does me about half the time.

We both love to fish, talk together, and try to unravel the complexities of trout

behaviour. Have I taught him? Has he learnt? After the years together, I really think he is better at learning than I am at teaching. But me just doing my thing in my way, rather than any 'formal' lesson, might be enough. He doesn't do what I do, he does it his way and does it very well indeed!

When we go out together these days, as the day draws to a close I have a nip or two, and he plunges into his electronic device for hours. I ask, 'JT what did we learn today?' Most times I don't always get a full answer, but a smile from a grandson is more than sufficient. We both did learn something.

The attached photo is JT catching and releasing his PB - a 7.5 lb brown on his size 16 nymph.

George Benwell
July 2026



The Australian Trout Foundation members. The VFFA is a strong supporter of the ATF

Notes from the Victorian Fisheries Authority



Al Vanstan, Wimmera Fish Hunters, with an impressive Tooliorook brown.

Tooliorook fires up!

Situated approximately six kilometers west of Lismore in Western Victoria, Tooliorook Lake is producing some incredible brown and rainbow trout fishing at the moment. This small but highly productive lake receives around 5,000 browns and 5,000 rainbows every year from the VFA's stocking program. Every few years the conditions are right for a massive productivity boom, and this year is just such a one! Anglers are reporting reliable catches of brown trout up to (and over) 50cm, such as this thumper, landed by Al Vanstan. Al reports that the fish are taking big (over 2") Clouser Minnow and Barra flies that imitate the small baitfish that have the lake all fired up.

Talking Trout

Hosted by the Australian Trout Foundation and the VFA, the eighth

Talking Trout Conference was held on August 1 in Ringwood. Approximately 300 delegates from around Victoria attended this free event to hear from a diverse range of expert speakers.

Tom Jarman, Australia's Number 1 competition angler and captain of the Australian Fly Fishing Team, kicked off the conference, outlining a year in Victorian trout fishing and proving that there's always something going on across our diverse and productive trout fisheries.

The proceedings then meandered through an historic and scientific appraisal of where our trout came from and what they're up to, followed by a session showcasing six of our best wild and stocked trout fisheries. Sometimes we all get locked into our favorite haunts and forget that with a bit of research and creativity we can almost always get amongst some quality trout fishing in Victoria!

The VFA goes on the road – 2026 Rec Fishing Forums.



Tom Jarman talks through a year in Victorian Trout Fishing

This month the VFA is rolling out another year of Recreational Fishing Forums across Victoria. Attendance at these forums is free, so you just turn up to hear about what’s been happening over the past year in recreational fishing and fishery management. These are also a valuable opportunity for the VFA to hear about your fishing wins (and losses!) so we can continue to deliver and improve on our world-class fisheries. Forums commence at 7:00pm and a light super is provided.

Tuesday 11 August	Geelong and District Anglers Club, Geelong
Thursday 13 August	Yarra Valley Fly Fishers, Lilydale
Tuesday 18 August	Hunter Marine, Swan Hill
Wednesday 19 August	Mallacoota & District Angling Club, Mallacoota
Thursday 20 August	Gippsland Lakes Fishing Club
Monday 24 Aug	Hopetoun Angling Club, Hopetoun
Tuesday 1 Sept	Mildura RSL Angling Club



Date	Venue
------	-------



Mark Adams (VFA) updating fishers on the VFA’s stocking programs at the Myrtleford Recreational Forum

Australian Fly Fishing Centre

... report from Chris Gray



Running water in Fairfield!

A world first at Fairlea Road: The fight to build Australia's National Fly Fishing Centre. Fairfield's 95-year-old casting pool is set to become the Australian Fly Fishing Centre - complete with the world's first purpose-built simulated fly fishing stream.

But a land-use decision sitting with Parks Victoria stands in the way.

At the end of Fairlea Road in Fairfield, tucked between the Eastern Freeway and Thomas Embling Hospital, sits a shallow rectangle of concrete filled with about 300 millimetres of water. There are no fish in it. Nobody uses hooks.

To the walkers and cyclists on the adjoining river circuit trail it barely registers. Yet for the better part of a century, this unassuming pond has been the beating heart of fly fishing in Melbourne, and it is now the centrepiece of the most ambitious plan the sport has ever attempted in this country.

The Red Tag Fly Fishers Club (Red Tag), established in 1932, has managed casting facilities at Yarra Bend Park since 1953 and

built the current pool on the site in the late 1970s. Today, Red Tag has around 200+ active members, with roughly 600 people using the precinct across all the clubs and associations that share it. What it does not have and has never had is a home.

There is a 20-square-metre shed with no power. Refreshments are made on a camp stove balanced on a picnic table. When the weather turns, members put up a marquee. The nearest toilets and the nearest wheelchair-accessible car spaces are both more than 300 metres away, a five-minute walk, at the Fiona Richardson netball pavilion.

Closing that gap is an ambition Red Tag has never held alone. Its closest partner in it has long been the Victorian Fly Fishers Association (VFFA), and the idea of a proper home for the sport at Fairlea Road was instigated by the two clubs together some twenty-odd years ago, driven by a group of passionate members from both who could see what the site might one day become.



The proposed new facilities at Fairfield look very impressive

That early effort never found the funding or the political moment it needed, and it quietly waited. It has now been renewed, and this time it carries significant support from every level of the fly fishing sector, from local clubs through to state agencies and national bodies. At the centre of that ambition is the Australian Fly Fishing Centre (AFFC).

From access paths to a national institution

The project began modestly. In early 2023, members floated the idea of pouring some concrete paths and installing lights so the pool could be used safely after dark. Conversations with Yarra City Council, the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) and neighbouring clubs quickly revealed something bigger was possible, and the scope grew to include a clubroom on the adjacent land.

Australian Fly Fishing Centre – news article - In December 2023 Red Tag lodged a grant application with the VFA to fund a masterplan. Funding came through in March 2025. Brand Architects, a firm whose director Laurence Robinson counts more than 30 significant public projects including Darebin's Narrandjeri Stadium, was appointed in August 2025. The master plan project was launched by the minister

on April 8th 2025 and completed December of that year.

The Precinct Master plan that emerged is not a sketch. It is backed by planning advice, a cultural heritage assessment, a site survey, underground services tracing, an arborist report, geotechnical and contamination investigation, heritage Victoria assessments and a full cost plan assuming a 2027 construction start.

What Gets Built

The proposal centres on a single-storey pavilion in the south-west corner of the existing lease, given fly casting requires substantial clearance for the back-cast and the prevailing winds make that corner the least-used side of the pool.

Architects raised the building on a low concrete podium, roughly 40 to 45 centimetres above ground, creating an elevated spectator view without a forest of ramps and handrails. A low-pitch butterfly roof frames two central entries and carries north-facing solar panels.

Inside: a foyer with space for displays and memorabilia, a large multi-purpose vent space, a library and reading room, a meeting room for 12, three club rooms of 20 to 24 square metres each, one

earmarked for Red Tag, one for the VFFA and one for affiliated organisations.

In addition, a commercial kitchen and non-gendered toilet facilities including an accessible bathroom with a shower (for anyone who ends up in the pond!).

The whole footprint must stay under 500 square metres. Crossing that line introduces additional compliance obligations at considerable expense. Outside, the plan adds 33 car parking spaces including two accessible bays, a concrete social deck, perimeter paths and bridges, lighting poles positioned to avoid interfering with casting lines, rainwater harvesting, and an expansion of the pool itself to accommodate Double Spey Casting.

The world-first element

The feature that has drawn national attention is the simulated fly fishing stream, a purpose-built flowing watercourse with adjustable flow rates between one and four metres per second, incorporating natural rock features and a casting platform on a hinge. Nothing like it exists anywhere in the world.

Australian Fly Fishing Centre – news article

It would allow anglers to be taught advanced competition techniques, reach casting, aerial mending and drift control in genuine moving-water conditions without travelling to a river and without any dependence on the weather or the seasons. For Australian teams preparing for international competition, it means controlled, year-round training. For school groups and beginners, it means a safe and accessible introduction to a sport that usually demands a long drive and a pair of waders.

The upgraded pool would also be capable of hosting International Casting Sport Federation competition events, positioning Fairfield as the cornerstone venue for national and international casting events.

An unprecedented coalition

Perhaps the quieter achievement is political. Fly fishing in Australia is famously fragmented, multiple sporting bodies, dozens of clubs, associations and special interest groups, and no central voice.

Christopher Gray, past president of the VFFA and their stakeholder representative on the project, put it plainly in a progress report to members:

“This is the first time in Australian fly fishing history that an opportunity has been worked through to unite the diverse stakeholders.”

He noted that some VFFA members had been trying to get a project like this off the ground with Red Tag for over 20 years. Support in principle has come from federal MP Ged Kearney and state MP Kat Theophanous, Yarra City Council, the Victorian Fisheries Authority, VRFish, the Australian Casting Federation, Fly Fish Australia, Native Fish Australia, Mending Casts, the Council of Victorian Fly Fishing Clubs, and more than fifteen clubs from the Northern Suburbs Fly Fishing Club to the Goulburn Murray Fly Fishers.

Fly Fish Australia has gone further, identifying the venue as its proposed National Training Centre, a base for coaching pathways, officiating, youth and women’s development programs, and elite training camps.

The Bottleneck

For all that momentum, and in order for the project to proceed to the next stage of



Melbourne fly fishers can look forward to some stunning facilities at the proposed new Australian Fly Fishing Centre

planning, it is now waiting on formal site approval and a land-use agreement from Parks Victoria, which owns and manages the land. Parks Victoria's internal capacity to progress land-use decisions has slowed significantly through 2025 and 2026, creating what the project team describes as a critical-path risk sitting entirely outside their control. A decision is needed within the next planning cycle to hold the current delivery timeline.

Australian Fly Fishing Centre – news article

Two parallel pathways are being pursued: (1) escalation through supporting state and federal ministers and (2) a request for an interim licence or staged land-use agreement that would let lower-risk works, lighting, pathways, begin sooner.

Other approvals are progressing. The site sits within a Public Park and Recreation Zone, falls under the Victorian Heritage Register entry covering all of Yarra Bend Park, carries a Significant Landscape Overlay, and is a designated Area of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Sensitivity. The trees requiring removal were planted by Red Tag members about 25 years ago and an arborist has confirmed that several

are already in fair-to-poor health. Red Tag have offered to replant elsewhere.

The Longer Horizon

Beyond the buildings sits a bolder idea – the Australian Fly Fishing Association. A national peak body representing fly fishing in Australia and formal recognition of fly fishing as a national sport. The project team argues that a national peak body with formal sport recognition will increase access to funding and improve advocacy for all fly anglers and casters and proposes the AFFC as the seed for an Australian Fly Fishing Association forming around the Fairfield hub.

The timeline they sketch runs to 2032, when the sport marks its centenary in Melbourne, and the precinct would host up to fifteen co-located clubs.

For now, the ambition rests on a 300-millimetre-deep pond, an unpowered shed, and navigating government agencies to establish a “Go” decision to realise a national opportunity to unite fly fishers and build a solid foundation for the future.

More information: affc.com.au

VFFA New Member Spotlight: Christy Taylor



Welcome to the VFFA, Christy!

We're delighted to have Christy as part of the club and look forward to seeing her on the water, around the fly-tying bench, and no doubt sharing plenty of fishing adventures in the years ahead.

Be sure to introduce yourself to her at the [Annual Dinner on August 20.](#)

A transport and logistics executive by day and an enthusiastic angler (now fly fisher) whenever she gets the chance, Christy Taylor is one of the VFFA's newest members. We caught up with Christy to learn how she discovered fly fishing, what she's enjoying most about the sport, and where she'd like her fly-fishing journey to take her next.

How did you get into fly fishing?

Like many good stories, this one started with a very persistent friend!

Scotty Raggatt ("Ragstar") kept insisting that I give fly fishing a proper go. As a member of the Werribee Fishing Club, it felt like a natural progression, and before long I was hooked on the challenge, the constant learning, and everything that comes with the sport.

I'm still very much at the beginning of the journey, but that's part of what makes it so exciting for me.

Why did you join the VFFA?

I wanted to spend time with like-minded people who share a passion for fishing, enjoy the outdoors, and are always willing to share a story, some knowledge, or a laugh.

I attended the VFFA New Members' Night back on March 18, hosted by Andrew Fuller and Scotty Raggatt, and had an absolute ball. The entire room was full of friendly people, plenty of laughs, and a genuine willingness to help newcomers. It was obvious from that evening that the Association has a fantastic culture, and joining the VFFA became a very easy decision.

Do you have a favourite species, or are you happy to chase anything that swims?

Like many newcomers to fly fishing, I've spent plenty of time chasing trout around Eildon Pondage and the surrounding rivers, and I can certainly see why so many people become obsessed with them.

That said, saltwater fly fishing has really captured my imagination. Again, my

Werribee Fishing Club patronage enabled me to spend a lot of time fishing Port Phillip Bay with conventional tackle when I was younger. So the idea of coming full circle and targeting those same species on fly really appeals to me.

It probably helps that Dad owns a boat too! What are you most looking forward to learning?

The Kiewa and Mitta Mitta Rivers are right at the top of my bucket list. Everyone talks about those beautiful High Country streams, and I can't wait to experience them for myself.

I'm also fascinated by the growing number of anglers chasing Australian salmon, pinkies, and other saltwater species on fly around Port Phillip Bay. Watching what people are achieving has definitely inspired me to give it a crack.

Another area I'd love to explore is fly tying. I've always admired the craftsmanship that goes into creating flies, and I'd really enjoy learning how to tie a few patterns of my own.

Outside of fishing...

As the beanie in my photo reveals, I'm a passionate fan of the mighty Sydney Swans and love just about anything that

gets me outdoors - road trips, hiking, exploring the beaches and high country, catching up with friends at the pub, and spending time with family.

That family also includes my two beautiful feathered companions, Django and Akira, who keep life entertaining and never fail to make me smile!

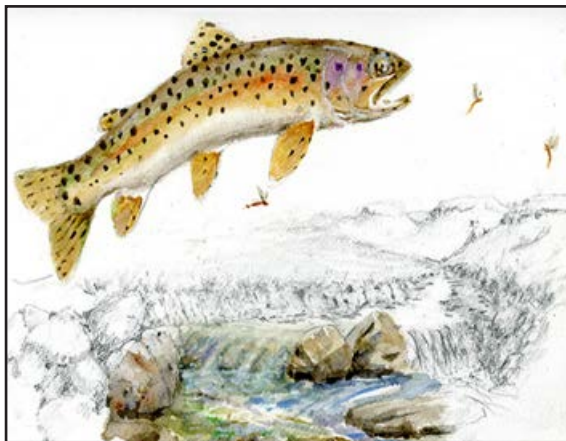


*Those two beautiful feathered companions,
Django and Akira*



Nymphing Freestone Streams

... some extracts from Tom Sutcliffe's very popular *Hunting Trout*



Tom Sutcliffe had many talents, including the capacity to create some very attractive sketches of fishing-related images

Nymphing can be as easy as pouring water from a jug, but then again it can be about as difficult as trying to answer a cellphone call whilst peeling a banana. As always, the difficulty depends on conditions, which sounds vague I know, but it's accurate. Conditions, in this case, meaning things like the type of river you're fishing, the speed of the current, the depth of the water, its temperature, what the insects are doing, how tight the trout are holding - or how loosely.

Then maybe it might be a few less tangible things none of us anglers really understand all that fully but still appreciate are real, like the mood of the fish, your own disposition at the time or, who knows, maybe even where the planet currently happens to be in relation to the moon.

There is also talk about nymphing being something of a transcendental art in some people's hands, in that there are anglers who regularly seem to catch fish on nymphs when no one else can. At times

they seem almost to take them by magic, in that there appears to have been no obvious reason for them to strike in the first place. But the truth is there's nothing transcendental about nymphing - ever. In fact it's about as straight up and down as a starched shirt, though when you see a real master at work I'll give you it can occasionally look as if there was something divine or otherworldly about it.

As you'd expect there's also no single conveniently simple formula for catching trout on nymphs, because each circumstance brings its own

demands. Sometimes, for example you want no weight in your fly - as in where nymphs are emerging at the surface, but at other times you want enough lead to roll the fly along the riverbed in four feet of water because that's where the fish happen to be holding, and unless you get your fly down there, most days you won't interest them. Then again sometimes the fish don't seem to care a blind fig how or where your nymph lands, they'll take it anyway, and maybe even travel great distances to fetch it.

You don't want to bank on days when the trout go silly though, because it's never long before they revert to type and become as difficult to extract as impacted wisdom teeth. You don't know they're down there, sure, which adds to the frustration and maybe to the mystery, but you just can't get one, and even if the masters around you are you will never notice even they aren't taking them easily.

Nymphing also has the reputation of being somewhat more effective than dry

fly fishing, and I think this is so for most freestone streams. I guess we do get more days that are better for nymphing than days when dry flies rule and I suppose you'd have to say nymphing is the more productive way to fish at least, in this country of South Africa.

Obviously any hatch will temporarily swing things in favour of the dry fly, and we do get some good hatches at times. However, the absence of a hatch doesn't necessarily swing things in favour of a nymph. What I mean is that you can sometimes find yourself wading knee deep through any one of our pretty streams, never see a rise all day, and yet still find fish coming to the dry fly quite briskly from mornings through to evening. Or more commonly, you spot odd rises and the occasional flying insects all day, yet for reasons that don't exactly get up and hit me in on the nose, dry flies work better on one outing and nymphs on the next, and so on. Or sometimes both are about equally effective, or equally ineffective, on the same day.

On balance though, because South African drought streams aren't exactly known for their predictable hatches, anglers tend to fall back heavily on nymphs.

I like fishing nymphs, but I prefer the dry fly if I have the choice. On my home streams I usually start with a dry fly because trout in the Western Cape are free rising (though there's plenty of days when they need some reminding), and you can take it as read that you're always in with a chance starting with a dry fly, rise or no rise.

I also happen to think using dry flies is a shade more artistic than nymphing, and maybe a little more visceral, which I like. But it's a close call.

But then on any of our clear, fast, mountain streams like the ones I frequently fish here, I prefer to start with a dry fly, to work it around a bit, keep watching for rises, dipping swallows (early signs of surface activity, in other words), and just see how things go.

If fish are scarce, or if they take short, or just poke at the fly, I'll maybe switch to a nymph after first trying a dry fly a size or two smaller, or maybe just a different pattern. But I never rush it.

But when it's clear that dry flies aren't working, I go over to a small lightly weighted nymph and pick the pockets in likely runs, which often gets the scoreboard rolling. My good friend Ed Herbst does much the same, though he slips into nymphing less easily than I do, even on lakes. As far as he's concerned, you *resort* to nymphs, you don't *change* to them. He just has a thing about dry flies I suppose, and that's that.

On our more pastoral streams, in fact on the middle reaches of almost any South African trout stream outside the Western Cape, I start with a nymph and only move to a dry fly when I see fish rise. It's the reverse however of my opening bid on any mountain streams - and it's driven purely by the likely incidents of free rising trout.

The Essence

If dry fly fishing is mainly about being on the surface with no movement in the drift, nymphing is mainly about being under the surface with the right movement and at the right depth. Of course, being able to interpret the subtle takes is a requirement of both, except that interpreting takes on a nymph can be infinitely more complex.

The way I see it then, any basic discussion on nymphing must address three key issues: the behaviour of sub-aquatic

insects, getting nymphs down to fish (which includes using weighted flies and fancy presentations) and then finally detecting the takes.

Once we've covered these, we'll consider the different techniques for fishing quick-flowing freestone streams, slow-flowing rivers and backwaters, and pocket water. Then I'll finish with a word or two on patterns.

Applying the behaviour of sub-aquatic insects to nymphing

There's a case for dry fly fishing being a study in avoiding drag and delivering pinpoint feather-light presentations - and it's an unshakable case. Any induced movement that you give to a dry fly - as in the odd twitch you might add to a floating hopper or caddis pattern, remains a minor part of the dry fly strategy.

Nymph fishing, on the other hand, is a study in getting the fly to the right depth and, unlike dry fly fishing, induced movement happens to be a major part of nearly all strategies. Gentle presentations don't really come into it, though accuracy does.

Natural nymphs move around underwater, either drifting freely or crawling or swimming or rising to the surface to hatch, and the point of any nymphing exercise is to imitate this behaviour. Essentially, all natural nymph movement is slow, the possible exception being insects rising to the surface to hatch. The essence of all this, if you relate it back to applied fishing, is that the sub-aquatic insect world is essentially slow-moving, and that's how our imitations should be fished.

Detecting Takes

Detecting takes is as important to catching fish on nymphs as sugar is to shortbread.

And detecting takes with anything like consistency isn't easy. The theory and practise of indicator nymphing works on the simple principle that by mouthing the fly the trout momentarily stops its drift, while the leader carries on until if the fly is static for long enough the nylon straightens and tugs the indicator.

Were that always the case nymphing would be easy. In practise, whether or not the indicator moves depends on the nature of the take, how long the trout holds on to the fly before releasing it, and the depth and speed of the water. Consequently, and probably as you expected, there are endless variations on the theme. For example:

a) The fish hits the nymph while moving and with enough force to straighten the leader before it lets go, and you see obvious indicator movement. This is typical of rainbows in quick streams and, of course, fish feeding strongly in lakes.

b) More commonly, trout swim slowly onto the nymph, mouth it gently, taste it and immediately spit it out (probably in the space of one or two seconds). In slow moving water they will mostly have held the fly for less time than he takes to straighten the tippet and transfer movement to the indicator, so you see nothing. In faster water the leader drags and you may be lucky enough to see brief movement. Usually a momentary slowing or a brief stop or a short sideways tweak in the indicator.

c) Browns seemed to take more time tasting a fly (don't ask me to explain why) and they rarely pounce on a nymph, so indicators are less reliable. Characteristically they wait for food to come to them. When an artificial nymph drifts past they lean across, mouth it gently, taste it, then release it. What

you see then is first just a slowing in the speed of the indicator as the tippet and leader pick up drag, followed by a sudden acceleration back to the speed of the current if the fish let's go without being hooked. Rainbows more commonly swoop into a take, and indicator movement is therefore a more reliable signal with them.

The Important principle to understand is that when any artificial nymph stops drifting, a degree of drag is immediately set up in the leader, and this drag slows the indicator's drift speed. It's only when a fish moves off with a fly, or when the nylon between the fly and the indicator straightens completely, that movement comes into the drifting indicator.

All these principles of strike detection are magnified in fast water because the current straightens the leader faster when trout mouths a fly and stop its free drift.

Put in take-detection into practise

Let's work on the hypothetical assumption that you're on an average freestone stream fishing through pocket water, riffles, glides, That sort of thing and that you're new to nymphing. The water is clear and you have an indicator on. Around you is a moving river, a tapestry that unfolds and changes constantly as you wade upstream. A tapestry of alternating highlights, dancing shadows places where currents break in curling waves the white water, spots that are flat and glassy, places that are smooth and still and darkly inky with shadows (say under branches or near the bank) - in other words nothing different to any average freestone river on any average day anywhere in the world.

You struggle to see into the water, try hard to look beyond the wink and spin on the surface, try to get your eyes to pierce the twists and curls as your nymph drifts

through good looking runs and glides. In the deep stuff you can just make out the shapes of stones on the bottom, and the flat water in the shallows is clear enough that you imagine you'd see any fish if it moved. For the rest you just accept trout will be tough to spot and tell yourself to watch the indicator and keep faith.

Your nymph drifts through countless runs, but in a solid hour of fishing the indicator hasn't moved, or at least not that you noticed, and you begin to wonder if the fish aren't maybe off, or more sinister whether something fundamental isn't missing in your technique. But we fish on, keeping the bright orange indicator in sight, sprinting to pick up any sign of a fish, and you've heard that can be pretty cryptic.

Then your mate arrives. He's been fishing downstream and has a reputation as a crack nymph fisherman, so you're keen to hear how he has got on. He says he has got four fish on the nymph, and missed some others. You invite him to try the run you've just fished unsuccessfully for the last 10 minutes, so he hauls line off his reel, lifts his rod, and lays a casual cast across the river. You notice his line speed is maybe a little slower than yours, that he throws an almost loose cast (certainly not perfectly straight), but otherwise you see no great revelations.

He gathers his line in evenly and quickly as his fly drifts back. He gets nothing on his first cast, or his second, but his third goes a yard further out, nearly to the opposite bank, though it's still a loose cast. Suddenly his rod lifts sharply into a good fish. "Had to be a fish in there," he shouts, which under the circumstances you consider mildly discourteous, but you're glad anyway to at last see a trout come out.

You wonder what made him strike - which boils down to what he saw that you didn't. I suspect this is one of the keys, maybe the key, to the art and science of nymphing fast water, certainly on difficult days.

It's different when fish are popping. Then nymphing is about as complicated as entry level dominoes, and anyone can catch them. To get back to our phantom angler and what made him strike - the truth is he's likely not that sure himself. If questioned he'd probably have to think about it a little. He might have registered a sudden shift in a linear shadow on the riverbed, as these often equal fish. Or maybe he saw a brief shimmer of silver or gold somewhere deep in the run - telegraphing the sign of a trout twisting to intercept a fly.

The light reflecting off a turning flank would be glinted brightly off a shallow fish, and would have been a more diffused glow for fish was lying deep. Maybe he saw the fleeting pearly gleam of a turning trout's belly or an opaque whiteness as it opened its mouth - like a scrap of white paper turning somewhere deep in the thread and tangle of the run. Or maybe he saw the surface bulge slightly as the fish moved under it, or a smooth patch appear for an instant on a cobbled run. Who knows.

What we do know is that these are all valid signs of a take, albeit some of the less obvious ones. So here's your first problem solved, whatever the sign was - you missed it and our angler didn't, and you likely missed it not because you weren't watching the indicator, but because you were watching it to the exclusion of everything else.

Which sounds Irish, but I'll explain. Watching only the indicator means your eyes focus only on the surface, and you

see little else. You also need to watch the constantly changing 'window' drifting over the riverbed around your indicator. In other words, look through the window into the water beneath it, and if possible bring the river bed into focus. That way you might have seen the telegraph sign of a fish, and struck before the fish had the chance to let your nymph go.

Frequently trout show clearly enough on the take for there to be little doubt. But nearly as often they don't, especially when they're deep or not feeding strongly. When they're really on the prod, they often take up a feeding station in shallow water, and you can easily see them going for your fly, or spot them outright beforehand. But whatever sign a trout shows, it's never as obvious as the nose on your face, and it lasts only a fleeting fraction of a second. And the actual take often and doesn't register on the indicator at all. In fact movement in an indicator is invariably not the first sign of a fish, but the last.

(And so this delightful and very instructive chapter continues. This is the introduction to a very long and detailed chapter on nymph fishing in Tom's book. He also spends lots of time and space on fishing dry flies - of course, heaps of invaluable and immensely readable material on fishing lakes and stillwaters, fishing emergers, perfecting your presentations and thus your casting, tying flies, and fishing his home waters in autumn. When I've finally finished cruising through *"Hunting Trout"* I'll pull out the other book of Tom's I purchased - *"Yet More Sweet Days"*. I enjoy Tom's writing immensely and can strongly recommend his books.

This Month's Yarn



Harold and his catch

... from March 1956

Several anglers had hooked and lost a shrewd old stager that lurked under a bank in the Delatite, near Merrijig. Its usual tactic was to go straight downstream past the angler and, making use of the strong current, break the line (and sometimes the rod).

Harold had not heard of this particular trout when he was fishing in the spot where it was located, and he hooked it. It came straight at him like a small torpedo. Harold got such a surprise that he lost his foothold in the slippery stream, and after doing a sort of Cossack Dance in the water, finished up with only his head and shoulders above the surface. And a broken rod!

Ruefully clambering ashore, he decided to start off on his road to recovery by emptying out his completely filled thigh-length wading boots. One seemed especially heavy. When he upended it, out came two gallons of water - and a pound and a half trout.





**We aren't the oldest shop
around - so we try harder.**

- and our core staff have over 100 years
of fly fishing experience. So we can help.

PRICE MATCH - OR CHEAPER

We try and price match, so if you find an
identical 'in stock' item advertised cheaper
elsewhere - it is worth giving us a call.

www.essentialflyfisher.com.au 03 6331 8944

THE FLYFISHER

•THEFLYFISHER.COM.AU•

Since 1967 we've set the standard.

Others came later — we just kept getting better.

With the most vibrant, fish-obsessed team in the country,
a massive range of the world's best gear, and near 6 decades
of helping Aussie flyfishers... we don't need to try.

We just deliver.

Find it cheaper somewhere else?

We don't "try" to match it — we match it. Every time.

211 MORAY ST. SOUTH MELBOURNE

PH: (03) 962 11246

**The VFFA thanks our
loyal sponsors in 2025**



THE FLYFISHER

FLY OF THE MONTH

The F Fly

What does the 'F' stand for? Fantastic, or perhaps Fabulous? The F Fly is one of the simplest flies to tie. It also travels under a few different names. In the June 2008 issue, John Philbrick gave details of a very similar fly – the CDC San Classic. Before giving the tying details of the F Fly, it might be worth reading some of the history and properties of CDC. (A recent issue of FlyLife – number 55, Autumn 2009, carries a useful article on CDC feathers.)



Cul de canard, or CDC, feathers may be used for the tying of tails, bodies, wings and legs of an insect as no other single material may. Their versatility, and therefore their use to an enterprising tier, is unmatched. CDC feathers have inherent qualities that make the artificial fly look alive. By careful use of CDC the imitation fly will have wings that flutter, legs that tremble and gills that move within the current.

The first CDC flies were tied back in the 1920s, but it wasn't until the 1980s that real international interest in the material was stimulated when the Slovenian, Marjan Fratnik, introduced his revolutionary F Fly. In the late 1950s, the Frenchman Henri Bresson coined the name 'Cul de Canard' (duck's bum) for his fly pattern tied with duck preen gland feathers. Some thirty years later, Anglo-Americans adopted the abbreviation CDC, and the new appellation has stuck and the term CDC has become almost universal.

Birds living near water have a preen gland, and the secretions from this gland, which are strongly water-repelling, are spread through the plumage when the birds preen themselves. Thus as well as being very light, CDC feathers are very buoyant, and flies tied with CDC do not need floatant. In fact, treating CDC dry fly patterns with floatant can ruin their properties and buoyancy.

So how do we tie the F Fly?

Materials:

- Hook: Size 12 – 28, fine wire dry fly hook.
(Sizes 14 – 18 are a good starting point)
- Thread: Any colour to suit local mayflies or caddis flies.
Colours used in descriptions given in textbooks and magazines include black and various shades of grey, brown and olive.
- Body: In many references the body is simply the tying thread covering the hook shank. In other references dyed pheasant tail feathers or very fine dubbing are used.
- Wing: Natural grey, white or brown CDC feathers.

Tying Instructions: (for a body of pheasant tail fibres)

1. Fix the hook in the vice and run the tying thread along the shank from the eye to a point opposite the barb. Catch in four pheasant tail fibres with firm turns of thread.
2. Allow the waste ends of the feather fibres to lie along the shank and cover them with thread to create an even base for the body. Apply a drop of clear lacquer.
3. Leave the lacquer to dry until it is slightly tacky. Wind the feather fibres along the hook shank, keeping the turns even.
4. Continue winding the fibres to form an even body. Secure the loose ends with thread just behind the eye and trim off the excess.
5. Take two or three small CDC feathers and place them together so that their tips are level. Catch them in as a wing with three firm thread wraps behind the eye.
6. Position the wing low over the body, then trim off the excess feather with scissors. Secure with further tight thread wraps before tying off with a whip finish.

VFFA 2026 meetings & other activities

*(Unless otherwise notified, all meetings are at The Kelvin Club,
14 - 30 Melbourne Place)*

August

- 13 Thursday** Council Meeting – 6:30 for 7:00 pm
20 Thursday Annual Dinner at Cricketers Arms, Port Melbourne
30 Sunday Cane Rod Casting Day, 11am, Red Tag Pool

September

- 5 Saturday** Trout Season opens for Victorian rivers
17 Thursday Annual General Meeting (virtual)
21 Sunday President's Casting Day at the Red Tag pool, commencing 10:30 am (TBC)
24 Thursday Council Meeting – 6:30 for 7:00 pm

October

- 4 Sunday** Annual trip to Thorpdale to fish the Latrobe Valley's stocked dams as guests of the Latrobe Valley members Contact – John Spragg
15 Thursday General Meeting – 6:30 pm at the Kelvin Club
21 Thursday Council Meeting – 6:30 for 7:00 pm

November

- 6 Friday – 8 Sunday** Annual Trip to Warrnambool
Contact – Hugh Maltby
12 Thursday Council Meeting – 6:30 for 7:00 pm (last Council Meeting for the year)
19 Thursday General Meeting – 6:30pm at the Kelvin Club

December

- 1 Tuesday** Christmas Dinner at Albert Park Yachting & Angling Club

January 2027

- 27 Wednesday** First Council Meeting for 2027 – 6:30pm at the Kelvin Club