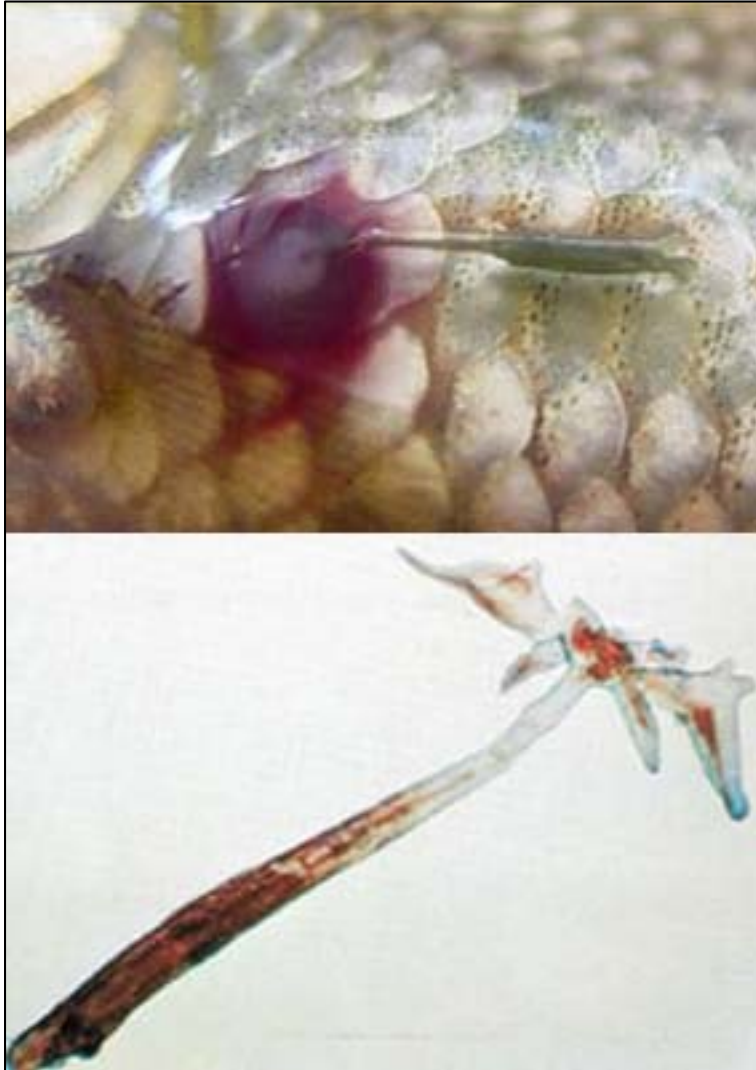


Anchor Worm

Fish like many other animals are often host to many internal and external parasites. We need to make TFFC members aware that our waters have recently been invaded by a new one commonly known as anchor worm. The term 'worm' is a misnomer as it is actually a crustacean with the scientific name, *Lernaea cyprinacea*. We must assure you that this organism poses no threat to human health and fish may be cooked and eaten without any danger.



It was probably introduced with the importation of koi from Asia where it is a common parasite of the cyprinids (the carp family which include goldfish, yellowfish etc) and has been present in the koi and goldfish populations in SA for at least 20 years. What is particularly disturbing is that this organism appears to also parasitise other fish species including trout in addition to amphibia (frogs, toads) and other crustacea. The young anchor worms are free swimming and the females bury themselves into the fish's skin. It takes several months before the worm becomes visible in the form of holes or small abrasions in the skin, gills or fins. The lesions caused by the infestation may also be invaded by secondary infections and if they do not die they take some time to recover after the parasites have detached. Needless to say sick fish are very susceptible to predators such as comorants. The female parasites may eventually grow to an inch in length and these greenish 'worms' may be seen dangling from their hosts. Infestation is much more common in summer and early autumn but is much less marked in winter and in fact any fish stocked from late autumn will not be parasitized as the water is now below 15 C.

We had one or two cases in early 2008 although we did not identify it as anchor worm at that stage. However, in January this year we saw a number of parasitized trout in Dam 7 and since then there have been reports from most of the other dams. We therefore have to accept that we have a significant problem which now has to be dealt with.

1. Although you may see trout with small lesions this winter the parasite will only become active again in early summer.
2. The parasite is no threat to human health and lightly infested fish may be cooked and eaten.
3. Do not return fish with adult worm like parasites to the water but these will not be present again until next summer. If you do not want to eat it kill it and throw it into the veld well away from the water.
4. Record the number of fish you have had to destroy at the bottom of the record page and not in the main section.

There is probably no quick fix to this problem which may take several years to resolve, but at least we are entering winter when trout are not susceptible. We have also accepted that we may have lost a significant number of fish in late summer and we have therefore increased the stocking to 800 trout weighing 675 kg between March 19 and May 18 with further stockings ordered for May and June. If at any stage we feel we are short of fish this winter we will increase the monthly stocking

We will keep you posted as more information becomes available. If you have any queries or useful information you are welcome to contact me at mwardern@mweb.co.za.

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