



TFFC NEWSLETTER

FROM THE CHAIR

TFFC- DECEMBER 2009 NEWSLETTER

Hi All,

Another year has passed us by and I guess will all reflect on not having utilized our fantastic fishing and relaxation facility enough during the past year.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking Kevin Knight for his ten years of hard work, dedication and preservation of the TffC ethos during his tenure as chairman.

We had a fantastic turnout at the AGM in October and thanks to all who attended. The following committee members were elected for the 2009-2010 period. Vic Dean - Chairman, Sheila Brittain - Secretary and booking officer, Hugh Dean - Web master, Stephen Meyer - News letter editor, Michelle Ziemons - House manager and the newly elected committee members Cameron Steele and Mark Blamire. I would like to thank the members of the committee in advance for the work that they will carry out and the contribution they make to the club.



In addition a word of thanks to the shareholders for making Middelpunt a premium fly fishing venue. Len has built a new walkway

over the spillway at dam 7. I think some of us oldies have avoided this route in the past.

Many of our members know Sheila's parents Doris and Norman Brittain. They will be celebrating their 70th Wedding Anniversary on the 23rd December. Sheila please convey our best wishes and congratulations to your parents on

achieving this remarkable milestone.

In conclusion, best wishes over the festive season and a prosperous 2010.

Regards,
Vic

Editorial

I extend my good wishes to you all over the festive season. Please travel safely and enjoy the break, if you are taking one.

I have to say that my family thoroughly enjoyed the AGM this year. My thanks to Kevin for buying all the raffle prizes and to the shareholders for the venue and the R6,000 for the prizes. I am sure that you will agree with me when I say that the Shareholder's do an extraordinary amount for the club.

Please note that at this time of year the water is particularly warm and the fish get incredibly stressed when caught. It is therefore imperative that great care should be exercised when returning fish. If there is any doubt please do not release the fish!

*Regards,
Steve Meyer*



Following the DTF directors meeting in November I have been asked to raise a couple of matters of importance :

1. The White-winged flufftail: The Middel-punt Wetland Trust lease from us 60 hectares of the vlei above No 3 dam. This is to protect the white-winged fluff-tail, a highly endangered intra-African migrant. **Kindly note that the vlei itself is strictly out of bounds to everyone year-round.** Between 1st November to the end of March when the bird is visiting, programmes are run by the MWT and if you want to join one you will have to join one of the MWT's guided tours. Phone Malcolm Drummond at 082 5512919 or go to the White-winged fluff-tail section on our website. You may hike on the dry ground around the vlei but **DO NOT disturb the vlei itself.**
2. Stompies: Have you noticed the large number of stompies that are being left at the dams and near the house? Not only are littered stompies distasteful and unsightly to non-smokers but they also pollute the walls and dams. They can even be eaten by fish and always represent a major fire hazard in the dry season. Will the guilty parties please take their stompies away from the dams and grasslands and dispose of them in



New walkway over Dam 7 Spillway

an acceptable manner.

3. Catch & Release: Until about 10 years ago we had a daily limit of 2 for the number of trout which could be released in a dam, the same as the kill limit per dam. In other words if you did not want to kill any fish, after returning 2 you walked on to the next dam. The problem was that float tubers found this impractical when they had released their 2 fish within a short time. They then had to come ashore and haul their equipment to another piece of water. This limit was then removed from the rules.

Unfortunately we have found that catch and release is now being abused by a few individuals who are returning large numbers of fish, particularly in Dam 1. This might not be too serious in winter, but in summer once the water temperature has reached 20° C it can be lethal. Please be sensible. If you are releasing fish in summer move on to a more difficult dam once you have returned a couple of fish. We do

not wish to re-impose the old rule against everyone because of the inconsiderate actions of a few.

4. Weighing trout: For management purposes we need about 10% of the catch weighed and recorded correctly. Please weigh and record **ONLY** ungutted fish. Do not try to guesstimate the weight (stomach contents may vary from 13-25% depending on age, sex etc) and if you use your own scale please check against one of the weights at the club house and recalibrate if necessary.



5. Legislation: Despite all the rumours and reports in the popular press there **IS NO** plan on the part of the authorities to eradicate trout. What is underway is a plan to manage all alien species by zone or geographic area and this mapping of the country is virtually complete. At this stage it appears that the area zoned for trout in Mpumalanga will be at least as large or maybe even larger than the area where trout have been present for the last 50 years. There will be several biodiversity hotspots like the upper Blyde and the Treur River which will be excluded which is under-

standable but otherwise it will be business as usual for most of us. There has been a delay in KZN where they are debating a number of contested areas but the other provinces seem to be reasonably happy with the progress.

To reach this stage has taken over 5 years of hard negotiation primarily due



to the ignorance and incompetence on the part of DEAT (Environmental Affairs) and not with the provincial officials who we deal with on a daily basis. In theory the mapping and proposed regulations should be acceptable to all, but Environmental Affairs has recently been restructured, top officials have moved on so there is still the possibility of a foul up at the final stage. We will keep you posted but in the meantime it is **vitaly important that the fly-fishing community supports FOSAF who have shouldered the responsibility for most of the negotiations under very trying conditions.**

The White-winged Flufftail

Dullstroom Trout Farm (Pty) Ltd and Middelpunt Wetland Trust share a catchment and wetland that has created an environment that is most unusual in South Africa. The Middelpunt Wetland is one of only nine known in South Africa that is visited in our summer months by an enigmatic and secretive bird, the White-winged Flufftail (*Sarothrura ayresii*).

This bird is one of five given the highest category of threat – ‘Critically Endangered’ - in the *Eskom Red Data Book of Birds of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland*.

When Deon Coetzee, together with Warwick Tarboton, found the flufftail in the marsh at

Middelpunt in 1992, there were only three known sites in South Africa. Deon was concerned about the condition of the wetland, especially the drainage ditches down each side.

Together with Malcolm Drummond, he formed Middelpunt Wetland Trust. One of the Trust’s first actions was to negotiate a lease of the 60-hectare wetland from the then owner, Michael Jansen. Shortly thereafter, the five kilometres of trench were filled in, allowing the wetland to revert to its natural state. Subsequently Dullstroom Trout Farm purchased portion 9 of Middelpunt which included this valuable wetland from Michael Jansen.

Little was known about the flufftail and so the Trust decided to send a scientist to Ethiopia (where the bird was known to breed) to undertake research. In 1997 he made the first-ever scientific recording of the White-winged Flufftail’s nest and eggs.

Conservation work for the bird in South Africa has been centred around discovering more wetlands where the flufftail visits, and then attempting to maintain or improve their conservation status.

Six more wetlands have been identified, one of them being a wetland at the site where Eskom wanted to build a pumped storage scheme. Environmentally based objections were sufficiently worrying for the then Minister of the Environment (Valli Moosa) to insist on various conditions before Eskom was allowed to continue with the scheme.

It is with this background that the Trust is doing its best to ensure that the diamond prospecting and mining, currently threatening Middelpunt Wetland, is prevented from any further activities.

The major threat to the flufftail in Ethiopia is damage to the vegetation in the wetlands where it breeds. Ethiopia's population has more than doubled to 85 million in the last 35 years, with a corresponding increase in the number of livestock: cattle, horses, goats and sheep. The wetlands provide suitable grazing and, rather than the knee-high grasses and sedges needed for the flufftail to build its nest, the wetlands look more like a billiards table.

Conservation work by the Trust in Ethiopia has been focused on supporting an educational initiative for the community living on the edge of the main breeding wetland for the bird. Six years ago, the Trust was approached to help fund a schoolroom for the six-year-olds in the village, who had to walk eight kilometres, and back, to the nearest school.

A happy coincidence brought the flufftail to Middelpunt at that time. We were keen to allow 'twitchers' to see the bird, without damaging the wetland. Three groups were invited and we were able to show the bird to two of the groups. Their donations amounted to R25 000, which we gave to the school project. Sixty children use this schoolroom.

The community soon recognised the value of local schooling and, in the past five years, have built seven more classrooms. There is a subsistence farming community, where cash is a scarce commodity, and so the Trust has supported their efforts by paying for sand and cement for the floors, and for doors and windows. Today, 580 children receive schooling from eight teachers.

They are well aware of the value of the White-winged Flufftail, naming the school after the bird and patrolling the wetland for three months, over the breeding season, to prevent grazing and other disturbance.

Middelpunt Wetland Trust will continue with its efforts to conserve the White-winged Flufftail and its habitat and is happy to have environmentally aware and responsible landlords in Dullstroom Trout Farm (Pty) Ltd.

Trustees of Middelpunt Wetland Trust are:

Deon Coetzee (Chairman)

Sandra de Witt

Malcolm Drummond

Dr Warwick Tarboton

Professor Les Underhill

More information may be found on the Trust's web site at <http://whitewingedflufftail.adu.org>, or by contacting Malcolm Drummond at malcolmd@metroweb.co.za or on 082-551-2919.