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President's Message



It seems like we've been in such a long summer but its only barely mid-summer. Our bass rivers are or will be badly affected in the next few months. Hardly a catchment between Gippsland and Queensland has been unaffected by the fires as well as the drought. For Bass Sydney, we have our February BassCatch this month. Interest in participating in the BassCatch may be waning in recent years, but I would think that the Hawkesbury-Nepean River will be one of the few rivers that should fish "normally" for the remainder of the season. That we will need to travel far & wide to find some good bassing water this season is a good reason to enjoy our local waters and, still contribute to the Angler Catch Database.

Our esteemed Secretary, Milton will be hanging up the pen & pad at the AGM this year. He has been doing this thankless task for a number of years and he's "retiring" from the job. To ensure the survival of our club, I hope someone else will put their hand up to take over from Milton. The same goes for other positions in the Club & Committee. Please attend the AGM in April and make sure our club survives.

HAWKESBURY/NEPEAN BASS CATCH

15 - 16 February 2020

Dear Members & Friends

It's that time of year! Bass Sydney's Hawkesbury-Nepean Bass Catch is on again!

The dates are February 15th and the 16th.

Camping from 2pm on Friday the 14th of February. It's always a fun occasion, so come join us and support our club and NSW Fisheries.

Please register via our website. This link is Live and ready:

<http://www.basssydney.com/index.php/bass-catch>

Campsite:

*Our campsite will be at Shaw's Farm in Yellomundee Recreational Park, Hawkesbury Road, Hawkesbury Heights. Turn left into a clearing just after Shaw's Creek and stop at the locked gate. A combo lock number will be provided upon registration. Please make sure you relock the gate behind you.

*If you wish to camp, please advise during the registration process. Details & directions will follow.

*Camping will be free of charge for those attending the Bass Catch

*Camping Friday and/or Saturday nights

*As always, camping is not mandatory

*Food and drinks are BYO. Please bring your own camp stove, utensils and water

Briefing & Catch Cards:

*Briefing for Bass Catch newbies will be conducted during our

General Meeting at Northmead Bowling Club
on Tuesday, 11 February 2020 at 7.30pm

in the meeting room, *or* at the campsite on Friday evening

As always, Catch Cards will be issued at either the GM or at the campsite. Have a great time and I hope to see you there!

Derek Sonter Bass Catch Officer, Bass Sydney



Shaw's Farm camping area and shelter along with toilets are shown above. Hawkesbury Road is on the left.

FLATHEAD OF A LIFETIME

Ryan Keith



Get a few beers in a fisho who lives on our southeastern seaboard and he'll probably tell you he's seen - or, if he's really drunk, caught - a "metry". Ask him for brag mat photos (i.e. proof) and you'll almost certainly receive an excuse in return. This ridiculous scenario is so common that it's spawned its own online meme: the three-metre flatty. Still, as a kid, I literally dreamed of catching and releasing a metre-long flathead, otherwise known as a "unicorn" or "crocodile" on account of their scarcity in our estuaries (in a 2008 study of 8000-odd flathead, the largest caught was 98.5 cm long). Though I've been toiling away with my flathead fishing ever since, I never thought this impossible dream could come true. That is, until a recent summer's afternoon.

For me, fishing at its best is a form of zen-like relaxation where I fully immerse myself in the task at hand: reading the water - and the ecosystem therein - to trick an animal into eating something it shouldn't. My cares melt away as I think of nothing else but the fish I am chasing: Where is it? What is it doing? What should I do next?... So it's no surprise that I found myself fishing on that fateful afternoon; I needed to take my mind off everything else for a few hours.

You see, I'd buried my grandpa the day prior. He was a truly great man who had a profound influence on my life, not least through being the person who most stoked my passion for fishing. In his final days, I spent many hours with my grandpa in palliative care, talking about life. He'd had a long one (91 years!) full of great moments, but it brought a tear to my eye when he said one of his favourite memories was grabbing a burger with me and my dad after we pulled the boat in at Pelican's Wharf, having just enjoyed a successful day chasing flathead on Tuggerah Lake. My grandpa's inevitable - and, thankfully, peaceful - passing meant we'd never be able to wet a line together again. I miss him a lot and think of him constantly, but seeking a temporary reprieve from that constancy, I decided to head for the water.

After travelling to my destination and spending a couple of hours casting in areas devoid of life - save a few stingrays - I found a sand flat onto which the run-in tide was pushing hard. I immediately started to see signposts of a fertile area: bulk whiting, mullet, and silver biddies flitted about in the current, searching holes in the sediment for nippers or worms. These fish are perfect food for the giants I was targeting. On about my fifth cast, the biggest flathead I'd ever seen homed in on my lure from maybe twenty metres away. Even if the water wasn't so clear, her prodigious bulk would have betrayed her presence. Pectoral fins were flared as she approached the plastic, apparently sizing up a meal. With

my heartbeat pounding in my ears, I paused the lure before continuing the retrieve. She moved closer. The fish came within two rodlengths of my position, and then... spooked.

To say I was disappointed would be the understatement of the century. I'd blown my once-in-a-lifetime chance at a metery. I would be doomed to roam the pubs of coastal New South Wales well into my grizzled twilight years, regaling all in earshot about the one that got away. "Yeah right", they'd say...

I continued casting until nightfall, desperately hoping the unicorn would return. I left with my tail between my legs.

The following morning, I awoke with one thing on my mind: that close encounter of the crocodilian kind. I wondered why on earth the fish - which appeared lit-up - failed to commit. Perhaps the lure sank too quickly? I shaved 50 % off the 1/8 oz internal weight. Maybe something looked "off"? I glued some eyes on the front. It's possible that the fish simply never got a chance to line my lure up for the kill, and my tinkering was for nothing. Still, I thought my modifications would be an improvement. I returned to the scene of the crime.

Again, the first couple of hours of wading were fruitless. I covered a lot of ground for not even a sniff. But I knew where I needed to be when the run-in tide started pushing. I positioned myself among the "baitfish" in the area where the monster had materialised. Half an hour later, my lure got absolutely belted. As I struck to set the hook, a shovel-sized head broke the surface, and the fish executed a thrashing leap. She was huge! "Was this the one?!" I thought during the slow-motion hangtime. When the flathead landed, I dropped my rod tip beneath the water, but that only temporarily prevented her from again slapping her tail against the bottom and shaking her head violently in the air. With a sickening twang, my lure popped out.



As the giant flathead sank calmly into the camouflaged depths beyond the drop-off, my heart sank along with her. This fish was hooked and lost not fifty metres from where I encountered the unicorn a day earlier. I had two shots at monster-class fish, and both ended in total despair. But I wasn't gonna give up that easy. I repaired the lure and geared up for round three.

An hour later, I was still flogging the area where I lost the jumping giant. The tide was rising fast, and I started casting more and more upcurrent as opposed to crosscurrent. When my cast landed beside a ribbon weed patch, I let the lure sink down along the edge before commencing the retrieve. After the first burn, my rod buckled. I'd hooked another one!

This fish rose to the surface quickly like the last, giving me a clear view of her impressive length. Luckily, she didn't go ballistic; there were headshakes, but the fight was fairly clean. It wasn't long until I was running backwards with her in tow, headed for a fast-disappearing sandbank. With the fish alongside me, my panicked brain was simply unable to process how big she was. I could see she was pinned by the front hook in the top of her

mouth, which was clamped down hard on the lure. Beaching this fish was my only option: a terrifying prospect, but I knew that trying to lead this monster into a little scoop net by myself would end in disaster. I called out to a couple of blokes pumping nippers in the distance to "come give us a hand", but knew the fish would be charging off by the time they arrived.

"Just stay calm and land the bloody thing like you've done your whole life", I said to myself aloud. Miraculously, I made it to the bank, turned the croc towards me, and pulled her halfway out of the water. SNAP! went my line, as it parted at the knot joining my bite leader to the main leader. I about died.

With the reflexes of a cat - or a fisho who'd already blown two chances of a lifetime in as many days - I dashed behind the fish, wrestling her massive girth onto the sand. Turns out it was third time lucky! Only when I slid her onto the brag mat could I comprehend just how large this fish was: 26 cm across the head, 38 cm across the pecs... 100 cm in length! She looks 99.9 in the photo but clearly isn't totally straight on the brag mat. I didn't think to double-check this at the time: the clock was ticking, and there was no way I was keeping the fish out of the water any longer than she needed to be. I handed my phone to a random passer-by who'd responded to my cry faster than the nipper pumpers, snapped a couple of shots, and then filmed the release. It was all a blur!



To land the flathead of a lifetime not far from Sydney, in an estuary not renowned as a trophy flathead fishery, on a busy Saturday arvo, in a metre of water, on a lure, by myself, wading, after blowing two other chances, after decades of trying... two days after laying my biggest fishing influence to rest... makes this my greatest ever catch by far. My family is convinced that my grandpa pulled some strings on high, and I won't begrudge them of that opinion. I certainly reckon he's smiling down on me. This one's for you, boss.



A QUICK FLICK

I haven't been fishing much lately, but had a chance to get out on Lunar New Year. An early lunch was planned, so it was going to be a short fishing session. I launched at Bobbin Head just after a very low tide so dragged the kayak for a while to get into deeper water.

I was there later than I would've liked, but hoped the fish were still on as usual.

Not much for the first hour, so changed my plan and cast on some boat pontoons. I heard the bream were on and every now and then they showed their sides. Had the Sugapen on and it got a few bow waves following it. Pause, but nothing, twitch twitch, nothing.

They say have to have long pauses with bream, but this didn't seem to work either so I just kept the walk the dog motion going.

A bream turned from the pontoon and a bow wave hit my lure. I was on, nice little bream to start the day with, 29fl. I got a few more hits, but no hook ups.



Changed location as it was well and truly light now and the surface bream had shut down so I tried the flats for Whiting.

Lots of casting and an occasional hit kept me going, but the water was a bit murky after the rain and that's what stopped it from being a good day. Well at least that's what I'm blaming it on!

I heard a big splash and suddenly out of nowhere I was on. A nice fat Whiting was in the net 34fl.



After that it went quiet so I paddled back to the ramp for the long drive home.

If work doesn't throw a spanner in the works, I might fish again soon, but it's been a bit hectic for the last three months so I need something to keep my sanity.

Cheers, Rico.

LARGE MOUTH BASS

Bass Sydney member Matt moved back to his native US mid last year for a two year stay and whilst his wife toiled away at work Matt decided he'd eventually like to try his hand at the US Bass Pro Circuit. However, at first, he needed a boat, spend some time sorting out tackle and techniques as it's a highly competitive sport. A good income earner if you can crack the big-time tournaments.

From Matt: The boat I chose was a Vexus AVX1980, a stretch formed aluminum Bass boat 6 metres long by a 2.4 beam powered by a Mercury 150 four stroke, fitted out with fiberglass console and live bait tank, Minn Kota trolling motor, Power Pole Blade shallow water anchor and 15" Hummingbird



Solix sounder front and back. A real weapon allowing fast travel maxing out around 100 kph. The secret being, to beat the opposition to the good spots. Just waiting on a 360-degree Mega transducer and the boat will be complete for a while, but I'm going to fit a second Power Blade pole and after that I won't need much else.

I fished a big tournament as a non-boater so I could get a sense of the logistics and some time on the water allowing myself to pick up a lot of the techniques, but I'm still miles away from being truly competitive.

I went away for three weeks on a New Hampshire Trout and Small Mouth Bass trip and it was excellent with a great end result finishing up second so that was a good start. Also had an enjoyable day on the Cumberland River which is a local waterway where I caught three species of Bass, Spotted, Smallie and Large Mouth, great stuff.

I was out walking my dog Charlie recently and did not intend to fish that day as it was 5 degrees, but the sun came out and the temperature started to rise around to 13 degrees, so why not. I decided to make a go of it, so went home, hooked up the boat and headed out to J Percy Priest Dam in Central Tennessee about 20 minutes from home. Good breeze, good sun and good water clarity were waiting for me.



The dam is in winter pool which means it's drawn down about 15 feet. The water temperature is below 10 degrees C, which is the temperature fish get more dormant there.

I was looking for channels with a least six metres of water close by. Fish here want to be able to move up and down the water column with as little effort as possible. There were two patterns during the day that produced a Crawfish Crank bouncing off the rocks in 1 to 2.4 metres and a Micro Finesse Swim on a jig head. I got my first fish of the day in 2.4 metres at the end of a channel.

From here I focused on what worked and it turned out a great day. The big Smallmouth Bass was over 2kg and the biggest in Tennessee so far. I didn't expect a day like this in the dead of winter.

Cheers, Matt.



BIRD OF THE MONTH

By Alan Fowkes

In past columns we’ve talked about the importance of grasses as a food source and the potential of weed stacks as habitat. These musings have partly told the story of structural complexity and its importance to wildlife. To add to that story, it’s time to talk about a true survivor – the Brown Quail.

Many club members who’ve worked at our Russell Street site will have come across these birds - but the sightings are typically brief!

Brown Quail are masters of disguise. Usually, the first you know of their presence is when you unwittingly get inside their comfort zone and the family group explodes from ground cover in a whirl of beating wings and urgent chattering. They’re gone before you can blink!

That we have these birds on site is something of a minor miracle given the array of predators they must face. For a start, this is a popular dog walking site with many owners not being of the responsible “dog on a leash” (or pick up your poo!) types. Given the proximity to housing and Australia’s lax attitude towards cat control I can only wonder at how many of these present a threat each night and I know for a fact that foxes are an issue – I’ve seen a massive one on site.

The quail survive through instinct and complex ground cover. Dense thickets of bush, tussocks of grass and fallen logs all provide protection for this vulnerable species.

The message for us as bush regenerators is that we have to provide all this complexity. Our planting and weeding activities often remove cover but this must be temporary and we must resist the temptation to make our worked areas look like manicured gardens.

Dense plantings of shrubs and grasses will help the quail (and other ground-dwelling wildlife like the various skinks on site). The weed stacks we talked about last month will also help and if a shrub or tree falls, as we’ve seen even amongst our plantings, then this all adds to ground cover complexity – it’s a good thing so embrace the mess and leave it there.

One of the rare times I’ve found a quail in the open was on a cool winter morning when the bird at right was performing a parental duty – waiting for a chick to catch up as the family bolted. The photo opportunity didn’t last long and focus on the eye was missed as the bird did its best to hide behind a grass stem.

Yesterday, I experienced what I think was more family loyalty as one quail kept my attention by darting back and forth across a walking pad before the family group exploded from an apparently bare patch of ground!

This took another ten years of my life but made my day. The group was larger than usual so the quail appear to be doing well.

Long live the mess!

Till next time.



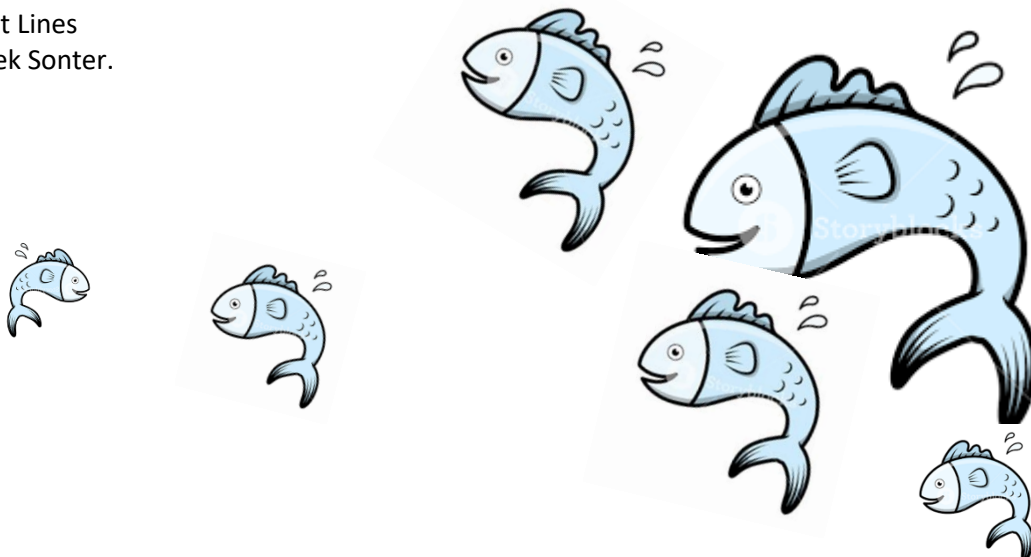
POINTSCORE

PERSONAL STATUS		POINT SCORE	LARGEST FISH	
1.	DEREK SONTER	178	1.	HS THAM 363
2.	HS THAM	164	2.	HERIF 361
3.	MATT McHUGH	144	3.	DEREK SONTER 344
BEST 5 FISH			SMALLEST FISH	
1.	DEREK SONTER	1427mm	1.	DENNIS HILL 130
2.	GARRY BLOUNT	1403 mm	2.	DEREK SONTER 134
3.	SHERIF	1355mm	3.	DAMIAN BALFOUR 135
TOTAL OF FISH			AVERAGE SIZE	
1.	HS THAM	44	TIE FOR 1 ST	GARRY BLOUNT 211.2
2.	DEREK SONTER	39		SHERIF 211.2
3.	MATT McHUGH	38		DEREK SONTER 209.3
				MATT McHUGH 198
			FISH OVER 300	
			8 TOTAL CAUGHT	232
			AVERAGE LENGTH	199

Very interesting - looking at the statistics, Is that Garry, Sherif and myself fished together and between us not only the average size was higher, then the rest we managed 5 fish over 300 - 2 for Garry (313-324) and 2 for myself (312-344) and 1 for Sherif (361).

As a note, the water below the Grose River is brown as brown still, hopefully it clears up for some who like boats.

Tight Lines
Derek Sonter.





BlazeAid – a volunteer-based organisation that works with families and individuals in rural Australia after natural disasters such as fires and floods. Working alongside the rural families, our volunteers help to rebuild fences and other structures that have been damaged or destroyed.

Equally important, volunteers also help to lift the spirits of people who are often facing their second or third flood event after years of drought, or devastating losses through bushfires. BlazeAid volunteers work in a disaster-affected area for many months, not only helping individuals and families, but also helping rebuild the local communities.

BlazeAid volunteers:

Not just rebuilding fences, but helping rebuild lives.

"We asked you to come help us rebuild our fences but you guys have done way more than that, you have helped us rebuild our broken community. For that we are forever grateful to you and all the amazing volunteers."

Maree Perkins, Monto, Qld, 2013 Flood

BlazeAid Patron



Ian "Macca" McNamara is the Patron of BlazeAid. We thank him for his wonderful support in helping BlazeAid find volunteers to help with our fence rebuilding. ABC radio and TV have been invaluable in their support of BlazeAid since its inception in 2009. Hundreds of our volunteers have heard about BlazeAid through the ABC, especially on Macca's *Australia All Over*. We look forward to a long ongoing relationship with the ABC, especially with Macca on Sunday mornings.

PHOTOS FROM DOUG CHANG'S DIARY



Doug has completed two stints in Wingham at the BlazeAid camps and at present is at Milton Camp.

Anyone interested in potentially volunteering, go to the BlazeAid website



FEBRUARY 2020 BASS SYDNEY GENERAL MEETING

our next meeting will be held at

Northmead Bowling, Recreation & Sporting Club,
166 Windsor Rd Northmead



7 -30pm on 11 February 2020

in the Board Room if available.

**if not, it will be somewhere
in the general club area opposite the bar.**

SOCIAL MEDIA



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