

I have been contemplating sharing my reflections on the previous season but never managed to put finger to keyboard. But there was a call for a fluff piece in the newsletter, so this is just about my fishing journey this year...

I moved back to Canberra about two years ago. One motivation was to fish more, and particularly to develop a river skillset. I had almost exclusively fished the lakes and have developed sufficient proficiency not to be a fish-whisperer but was able to put everything together sometimes in a good-enough way to be successful. And I was relatively relaxed about doing so. Any fanciful thoughts of doing any river fishing were quickly extinguished by memories of my first attempts – if my line wasn't tangled in the tussock and sticks at my feet, they were stuck in the tree behind. 'Where am I casting? I don't know, just get it in'. If I got the fly in the water, it would get wedged behind a rock. Tie a new one on, only to lose it two casts later in another tree that I swear wasn't there before. It was a nightmare. I would occasionally try again but proficiency always seemed to be beyond reach. Nevertheless, the quest for personal improvement and skill development can be a great motivator and last season (2021) I sucked it up and tried again.

The Jindabyne trip was an early venture and a satisfying one for me. Bill and I had a short session on the first day before anyone else arrived and that turned out to be a lucky thing as I caught my first river fish of 'reasonable' size.



The fly boxes came out that night and I was fascinated at everyone else's exquisite candy – "Hey, I don't have one of those, or that, and what's THAT?!" I have a brown one, a small one and a dry one. That will just have to do. Next day, different setting, more walking, smaller water and smaller fish. But the walk up the valley was pretty and catching feisty little fish on dry and nymph was a lot of fun. And then on the last morning, went exploring and caught a couple by myself before heading home. What was most satisfying for me on this trip was

confirming which parts of the water held fish and why 'there' and not 'there'. And that simple strategy guided my approach for other trips.

Cut to the end... I also fished this year's spawn run. I usually cringe at this because I prefer to avoid certain behaviours of others during this event but I remain nevertheless, curious. I forced myself to do it and convinced myself that it would serve me well to notch up more on-water time for skill and knowledge development and so, went but walked away from the crowds. This was astonishing, previous attempts – zero but plenty this time. I had caught enough to feel sufficiently satisfied to not bother about catching more which allowed me to experiment with flies. By the way, they all work. Claude reckons I'm some lucky rabbit's foot but I'm not a magical fisherman and my flies aren't that special either. The real eyeopener was finding groups of fish and watching their behaviour. They'd chase and bite each other, shove each other out the way and jockey for position. And when the mood music was just right, they'd turn on their side, dig up the redds and do their spawning thing. It was fascinating watching them all day. I've heard the argument against disturbing them when they're spawning but I think that's overestimating our powers of influence. From what I saw, they are completely task oriented and couldn't care less. A few dragged me up and down river for a few minutes before getting released, and then just slot right back into position in the queue, barely a few metres from you as if nothing happened. So that was all very interesting and a good bookend to my year on the river.

*I caught little fish...*



*...and big fish.*





As for the lake, it had been a while since I fished Eucumbene regularly so the radar was a bit wobbly and skills a bit rusty. Nevertheless, it was pleasant simply to revisit an old habit more regularly than I've been able to in recent years.



Admittedly, the early season was difficult. The rising water had flooded new ground and drowned these grubs who would float out of ground looking for air and then get helplessly picked off one by one. Food everywhere but it seemed that no one could actually create a reliable imitation. I only had limited success with mine but you tell me, is there much difference between mine and the real thing? Perhaps it was the wriggling that set them apart or maybe the natural was floating up as opposed to sinking down. Who knows but with similar rising water again this season, it's another opportunity to experiment.



Thankfully, they switched to another food source and sometimes that made it easier, sometimes harder. All that rotting junk on the edges meant it was only a matter of time before the midge started balling up and that meant fun time ahead. This rarely lasts long so I was lucky enough to jag a couple of trips to coincide with this and ended up having one of my best sessions with a midge ball ever. You can barely see your fly in the fading light but you hear the 'bloop'.



And then there's this. Does anyone have any idea what these critters are? Jaime? I've previously heard that there are clouds of daphnia out in the middle of the lake and if so, that's a pretty hard thing to imitate. Whatever they are, the fish were stuffed with them.



I didn't fish much of the mudeye season or hear that there was much of that happening. I'm still hoping for a return of good muddler season.

I have however been hearing that it's been harder to catch fish in the lake over the past few years, and that too has been my lived experience. Everyone tells me miserably that the fish are gone. This is not comforting news when you've driven all the way from Sydney or spent a precious leave pass to go fishing. Admittedly, I grew increasingly tired of this narrative. 'They are not there, they've all died, there's no fish here' and the list of excuses goes on. Maybe true but I am surprised at the lengths we sometimes go to to explain why we fished all day and didn't even get a touch or see a rise. I was even told that thousands of fish were taken by pelicans and all the yabbies eaten by foxes so the fish starved to death. That's creative stuff. A more measured reason might be we were in the wrong bay, at the wrong part of the bay, in an unproductive part of the lake. We might have a good fly but not fishing it at the right depth or action for that time of the day or year. We might have persisted too long in the same area using the same method that was successful 'last time' but not now. Why don't we use those excuses? I've blanked out more than I would like to recall but I also did catch fish and they are there, even in recent years.

So to sum up my previous season very simplistically, I caught little fish and big fish. I bagged out and not bagged out. Much to my delight I seemed to have crossed a point with river fishing. I have also not caught fish and blanked out in previously productive waters more often than I would like. There were important lessons learnt, didn't always catch fish but did have a number of highlights, good to be doing it again and a good season to get things going again. However, I am reminded that 'one swallow does not make a summer'. The test for me is whether this can be repeated again and again. However, my point of all this, if you haven't noticed, is that as an average fisherman with average flies, if I can catch them, anyone else can, pelicans or no pelicans.