

ANGLING NEWS



In This Issue...

- EXCITING SEASON AHEAD
- WHERE TO FISH AND WHEN
- WOMEN ON THE FLY
- BACKCOUNTRY BUCKET-LIST
- ANGLING FOR WELLBEING

WELLINGTON FISH & GAME REGION

P.O. Box 1325, Palmerston North 4440
Ph: 06 359 0409 | Email: wellington@fishandgame.org.nz
Website: www.fishandgame.org.nz

SPRING 2021 - ISSUE 21

AN AWESOME SEASON AWAITS!

A cracking brown is brought to the net in a small Wairarapa stream by Peter deBoer.
Photo: Andrew Harding



In over a decade working for Fish & Game and angling far and wide across the lower North Island region in my spare time, I've seldom been as excited about a new fishing season as I am this year. Already 2021-22 has got off to a fantastic start with some epic trout being caught – and by epic I'm talking about the condition of the fish which is as good as staff have seen in years for the months of spring. It could be a feature of lack of large floods and plenty of food being around as a result... whatever the cause, there are some 'bricks with fins' swimming around our rivers at present.

Personally, I've already caught cracking browns in my local Wairarapa waters, far heavier than normal for early in the season. But my anticipation for what lies ahead has been piqued in numerous other ways too. First, lockdown has been frustrating – and that's an understatement. Put simply, it's bloody great to have the freedom to go fishing!

Second, the numbers and size of trout in some of our mainstay waters is exceptional. Anglers aren't shy about letting us know when the fishing is flat; normally, when it's good, we don't hear much. So, when we're regularly receiving positive feedback about the state of the fisheries, something pretty darn good is going on. Fair to say our mainstay fisheries are firing. The Manawatu and Rangitikei middle reaches have fished exceptionally well over the winter and, along with the Ruamahanga and Hutt, they have carried that form into the start of the 2021-22 season with prime conditioned trout in the 5-6lb mark already being taken. Little wonder people are happy!

Third, we're encountering anglers who are experiencing exceptional fishing in rivers I personally would never have considered. These 'overlooked' fisheries are now firmly on my to-do list this season and I can't wait for the adventures that lie ahead.

Finally, perhaps the only silver lining to come from Covid-19, there are no foreign fishers around. Lower North Island anglers have the place to themselves. You can head into the hills or your favourite secret spot with greater confidence that you won't be shadowed by another party or guides with clients in tow.

We hope you're equally as exciting about the season ahead. Tight lines!

Hamish Carnachan, Wellington Fish & Game

GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK

If you haven't had a chance to get out on the water this season, and are yet to grab your licence, now's the time.

Treat yourself to an early Xmas present or give yourself a well-deserved reward after another trying year of Covid uncertainty. Adventure or relaxation, your licence is a passport to escape the stresses of everyday life and immerse yourself in nature. Simply scan the QR code and follow the easy steps.

Alternatively, your local tackle and outdoor supplies retailers have been doing it tough too, so grab your Whole Season or Family Fishing Licence while you stock up on supplies.

Benefits of the Whole Season and Family Licence:

- Cheap thrills – fish all the way through to September 30 next year which, over the entire season, is less than 40c/day!
- Let your angling adventures take you anywhere... Fish unfettered anywhere in the country (except Taupo).



SCAN THIS CODE WITH
YOUR PHONE TO PURCHASE YOUR LICENCE

ACCESS INFO IN YOUR HAND

The Walking Access Commission (WAC) has launched a mobile version of its popular and ever-helpful Walking Access Mapping System. Pocket Maps, as it's called, is available now via the Google Play Store and iOS Apple Store and allows users to view accessible areas and public conservation land at the press of your fingertips.

Maps can be viewed online with a Wi-Fi connection or downloaded to be viewed offline making it super handy if you are looking for places to fish in the foothills or remote areas where you have no network connection. WAC acted on feedback that map users struggle to understand public access boundaries when outdoors – now, with the help of Pocket Maps, people can check their location and their access options.

Pocket Maps lets you search your exact location by region and, through the map layers, understand what type of access land you are currently on or looking to fish or walk through.



Peter deBoer with a solid estuarine brown from the tidal reaches of the Ruamahunga River in mid October Photo: Andrew Harding



Cory Scott with not one, but two browns caught at the same time nyming the Hutt River recently!



LOWER NORTH ISLAND ANGLING SEASON GUIDE

There's a common pattern of angler movement in the Wellington Fish & Game region which invariably sees a mass migration of carbon-fibre wielding, Gortex-clad warriors heading into the hills as soon as Opening Day rolls around. For many it's a ritual of sorts and entirely understandable that they want to be 'first' to fisheries that have just opened and targeting trout that are naïve after a winter of respite.

Customarily, the remainder of the season revolves around fishing local water between opportunities to head back into the hinterland. All well and good, but anglers might not be getting the best out of their fishing season or the conditions and fish distribution which varies markedly at certain times of the year. Here's a seasonal guide based on our observations of where the best fishing is over the course of a calendar year (or whole fishing season).

October/November

- Head to the lower sections of the larger rivers and particularly estuaries where trout are chasing the whitebait runs.
- Explore the known spawning tributaries and small feeder streams of larger rivers where post-spawning trout will remain until low flows force them downstream.
- Strong spring winds and regular rain events can make backcountry fishing difficult and unpleasant.

December/January

- Middle reaches of larger rivers start to come into their own as trout move upstream with whitebait migrations and whitebait dispersal.
- Large rivers in the mid reaches like the Ruamahanga, Manawatu and Rangitikei start firing where trout will start to switch diet to terrestrial insects, especially caddis and brown beetles.

February/March

- High summer and low flows will see fish moving into deeper holding pools in the large rivers, feeding at cooler times of the day. Good hatches on main lowland rivers.
- Settled weather means excellent backcountry fishing conditions; water is also often cooler in the forested catchments and altitude of backcountry fisheries.
- Trout in the middle and upper reaches of the rivers are feeding well off the surface, with large terrestrial insects making an appearance.

April

- Pre-spawning migrations start; trout will start to congregate at confluences awaiting freshes and return of flow so they can run into smaller spawning tributaries.
- Target confluences, and small streams if flows are high enough; the backcountry will see a pulse of fish moving in for spawning.

May/June/July/August

- Winter season restrictions apply but there's still good fishing to be had in the middle reaches of larger rivers (where open).
- High flows and the resultant increase in suspended sediment (i.e., leading to reduced visibility) means streamers and spinners are more effective.

ANGLING FOR WELLBEING

Amid the tough time many people have been going through due to Covid-19 restrictions, it is encouraging to see so much emphasis around personal well-being and Kiwis looking after one another.

Given fishing is recognised by psychologists here and around the world for the positive benefits it brings to wellbeing, Fish & Game is right behind anglers getting out on the water to decompress and destress.

What we'd also like to see is anglers watching out for their friends and family and encouraging those who might be struggling to join them on a fishing outing – get them in nature, introduce them to the perfect antidote to a busy and complicated life.

SCAN THIS CODE TO
CHECKOUT OUR ANGLING
FOR WELLBEING PAGE



Photo: Andrew Harding

'WOMEN ON THE FLY' HAS HATCHED

Kapiti angler Leigh Johnson has made it her mission to get more women involved in fly fishing, a traditionally male-dominated pursuit.

Leigh was asked to join the committee of her local club – the Kapiti Fly Fishing Club – by members already engaged in promoting fly fishing to women and families.

From there she organised a casting tuition event which was held in July before lockdown prevented further follow up outings. With a little more certainty, Leigh is now starting to plan a schedule of regular women's events.

"Ultimately we want to grow the female angling community locally; we hope to run women-only trips, and build an environment for learning, support and friendship for women interested in fly fishing," she says.

Women On The Fly's (WOTF) goal is also to understand the barriers for other women entering the pursuit and work towards breaking those down. The concept came from a North American organisation – United Women On The Fly – focussed on encouraging greater diversity in angling. Leigh has reached out to them and is also

networking with women anglers in clubs throughout New Zealand.

One of Leigh's drivers for getting more women on the water is to use her own experience to educate others on the health and wellbeing benefits that flow from fly fishing.

"I know how good being on the water is for my mental health. Even when I don't catch many, fishing is like a mental reset that helps me leave some stress behind and focus on the moment – I've learned the hard way that it's important to take these opportunities."

The success of WOTF, says Leigh, depends on help from the wider fishing community to achieve its kaupapa and goals.

"Fortunately, both the Kapiti Fly Fishing Club, and Wellington Fish & Game are already providing practical support to help take this nub of an idea forward to becoming a sustainable initiative."

More participants are welcome, says Leigh, even if they are from outside the area and looking for support. She can be reached via the 'Women On The Fly - Kapiti' Facebook page, or on 027 44 88 282.



HUTT RIVER LINK PROJECT

Wellington Fish & Game has opposed a consent for a large-scale infrastructure project in the lower reaches of the Hutt River until conditions are put in place to limit the impact on the fishery and wider ecology of the river. The so-called RiverLink project is a significant engineering initiative that aims to widen the flood plain in the lower reaches, build a multi-lane bridge at Melling and strengthen flood protection assets such as stop banks.

It is planned to take two years to complete, and Wellington Fish & Game manager Phil Teal concedes if it goes ahead as currently proposed it will mean significant disruption to angling in the lower reaches as well as taking a toll on the resident trout population. "While we accept the need to protect lives and livelihoods from potential flood damage, Fish & Game has signaled that we have a high expectation that every effort is made to avoid the adverse effects of the project.

"If these can't be avoided on the river, then we want to see practical mitigation measures put in place to reduce the impacts. As it stands, this has not been adequately considered in the consent application." Teal says Wellington Fish & Game is urgently working in with the applicants – Greater Wellington Regional Council, Hutt City Council and Waka Kotahi to achieve the best result for the trout habitat and anglers.

"We will be working hard for anglers to ensure the best possible outcomes for this regionally significant and world-class urban fishery. At least there's consolation in the fact that the works will only affect a relatively short stretch of the river – there are many miles upstream offering the same stunning fishing."

We'll keep you updated about any future developments.

Finn Harding firing out a cast in hope of a sea run brown from the lower reaches of the Hutt River. Photo: Andrew Harding



BOOK A GUIDE AND GO BACKCOUNTRY

Spare a thought for the local angling guides in the lower North Island who have all but had their industry and jobs destroyed by Covid-19. While some have been forced into other areas of income, there are a handful operating in our region.

Spending a day with a guide can significantly increase your skill level if you're a beginner or even an intermediate angler, and there are invaluable lessons to learn from practitioners who, in many cases, have spent years plying their trade on the water. Local NZPFGA guides include:

Glenn Beach (Wairarapa based but anywhere in central/lower North Island). Contact 021305219

Ben Ellison (Wairarapa and Manawatu). Contact 0278671554

John Gummer (Lower and Central North Island). Contact 0211494136



FISHERY FOCUS - RUAMAHANGA AND TRIBS

by Ben Ellison

The mid-reaches of the Ruamahunga - a sensational fishery and highly underutilised by local anglers. Photo: Andrew Harding

If last season was anything to go by, then this one is going to be something special! It's difficult to predict any consistent patterns, however, the Ruamahunga and its numerous tributaries look to be in the best shape I have seen for quite some years and this season should be no different.

The trout, although highly mobile, are everywhere in the system. Perhaps it's to do with more settled conditions over winter, maybe less instream engineering or even restoration work starting to pay dividends... Probably it's a combination of these factors and others that are providing stable substrate and habitat for trout, and the invertebrates on which they rely.

Anglers fishing the Ruamahunga can expect trout to be in very good condition, even in spring which coincides with the end of spawning and the start of the whitebait runs. If you're fishing the larger tribs or main river this time of year, try swinging a suitable lure through the faster runs and riffles on either a wet line with a short trace or use a floater with a long trace and split shot.

If targeting the smaller waters, nymphing with large stone flies and creepers is hard to beat. Either way you'll need to get deep and cut through the early-season flows. Typically, the start of the season can be marred by swollen or coloured rivers which can be frustrating. However, careful planning and timing should yield results as water levels recede.

Targeting the main river during the whitebait migration is as simple as driving to any of the access points, from Carterton all the way down to the mouth at Lake Onoke. Be prepared to walk up or downstream for a kilometre or so before you find fish. Being migratory, most trout school and follow the food source through their life cycle.

As the harsh Wairarapa heat begins to warm the waters, trout behaviour begins to change as they seek out cooler places to be. Also, be aware the large riverbed of the Ruamahunga really heats up and can keep the surrounding waters too warm for trout to tolerate. This is when early morning starts are necessary to beat the heat.

Evening rises are also another prime time to be on the Ruamahunga, with last summer and autumn seeing some incredible mayfly and caddis hatches. For many loyal Ruamahunga anglers it's been a joy to see such activity return.

My final tip for what's going to be a super exciting season ahead in the Ruamahunga River system – make sure you have some traditional style wee winged wets in your tackle box. When fish are fussy on the evening rise, as they can be, wee wets fished across and down just below the surface can yield rewards.

Ben Ellison is a Wairarapa-based fishing guide who owns and operates Trout Frontier Guiding - 0278671554

FISH & GAME REVIEW - WHERE WE'RE AT

The governance review of Fish & Game was released in April. It recommended improving governance, iwi relationships, encouraging diversity on councils, modernising administration and taking a strategic outlook on organisational management. The review does not and will not change the formal roles of Fish & Game. Nor does it change Fish & Game's political independence or the ability of the elected councilors to make decisions in the best interests of licence holders. It is not a takeover by the Department of Conservation.

The review made several recommendations, some of which were controversial, as ways of achieving the objective of making Fish & Game fit for purpose for the next 20 years. However, as usual with such reports, those recommendations were a starting point. There were a considerable number of submissions on the review from licence holders and Fish & Game councils. In almost every case, they support the same result but have recommended different ways of getting there. These submissions have been referred to the Review's Implementation Steering Group, which has a majority of Fish & Game appointees on it and is chaired by Ray Grubb, an elected Fish & Game governor. This group will recommend to the Minister of Conservation how the future shape of Fish & Game's administration should look. The Implementation Group is recommending adopting the common views that came through from consultation with the 13 Fish & Game councils. These include:

- There will be a majority of elected councilors on every regional council and the NZ Council.
- There will be some independent councilors appointed to bring in specialist skills and increase diversity.
- Independent councilors will be a minority on council and will be required to be committed to the political independence and role of Fish & Game.
- Councils will likely be smaller at perhaps eight or nine members in line with modern management practice.
- There will be an effective representation of iwi, as a Treaty partner.
- There will likely be fewer regions, through amalgamations, to be investigated by a Fish & Game project team.

In summary, collectively, the 13 Fish & Game councils have stated that they support the intent of the review in good faith. That said, Wellington Fish & Game has made it clear in its submission to the Minister that it has concerns regarding the workability of many recommendations, stating that: "Ambiguities and vagaries remain and there are concerns as to how these will impact Fish & Game's future."

Fortunately, there is a commitment by the Minister and time to work on the detail, and Fish & Game councils are currently being consulted.

FISHERY FOCUS - HOKOWHITU LAGOON



SCAN THE CODE TO
CHECK OUT SOME OF
THE EXCITING PERCH
FISHING ON OFFER AT
HOKOWHITU LAGOON



*Families enjoying the relaxed atmosphere
and high fish stocks at Hokowhitu Lagoon*

Every year the Manawatu Freshwater Angling Club and Wellington Fish & Game hold a family fishing event over two days at Hokowhitu Lagoon in the heart of Palmerston North. Around 750 two-year-old rainbow trout are delivered from the Ngongataha Hatchery in Rotorua especially for the affair usually held in early October. The event is tightly run, with bookings required for families interested in participating. However, once the weekend is over the remaining fish – usually numbering in the hundreds – are released from the penned area to swim free.

Any licensed angler is then permitted to target the liberated trout as well as the resident perch population, some of which are quite sizable. All legal methods are allowed but anglers seem to have most success with fly or spinners. Soft baiting can be effective too and early in the season (after the trout release) the fish are not selective and seem to be enticed by the jerky action of a good soft bait retrieve. Because the lagoon is public space with easy walking access and unhindered casting along the edge closest to the road, this is a great fishery for families, older anglers or those with limited mobility. There is also a high chance of success making it a place where kids – with limited patience – have a realistic chance of catching something.

Some of the trout liberated for the events are still being caught almost a year later, demonstrating that the lagoon environment has improved following the city council's efforts to keep the water cleaner with water levels topped up. So, next time you're at a loose end or looking for something to do to entertain the kids, or if the rivers are up and dirty and you need to go and cast a line, check out Hokowhitu – an awesome urban fishery the whole family can enjoy.

SMALL STREAM SPIN FISHING

At the start of the season when there are still plenty of fish holding in their natal waters after spawning, and when rain fronts are regularly rolling across the region making the larger rivers dirty, it makes sense to target the small streams. An overlooked technique for this environment, however, is spin fishing. While we've regularly advocated that anglers should be targeting these areas early season, invariably it is the dedicated fly anglers who hit this water.

There is no reason why spin fishing can't be equally as effective though, provided you get a few basics right. Indeed, spinning can be an advantage, particularly during periods of high flow and when the water is carrying more colour. So, here are some tips to help you succeed when spinning on these challenging, but very rewarding, small streams.

- Light lures are all you need. Because the streams are small you generally don't need to attain great depth to be in the bite zone. Lighter lures also generate less splash and are less likely to scare fish in tight confines. Soft baits can be very effective too.
- By fishing upstream you're less likely to spook trout. Cast up into likely looking areas such as undercut banks, drop offs or around overhanging vegetation and retrieve the lure back just marginally faster than the current.
- When the small streams are clear, camouflage is critical. Because of the reduced depth, the trout have a much wider 'window' through which they can see approaching danger – even from behind. Use any available streamside cover and wear dull coloured, mottled clothing.



Photo: Andrew Harding

ANGLING FOR INFORMATION?

The more you can learn about freshwater fishing, the more success you're likely to enjoy. At Wellington Fish & Game we want to ensure we're doing everything possible for our anglers to help you get maximum value out of your fishing licence. And we realise one of the best ways to do this is by helping you get maximum success from the time spent on the water – i.e. catching more fish!

We've identified that one of the main barriers to novice anglers going further in freshwater fishing is that they often spend futile hours casting in the wrong places. That's why we've developed the 'Reading Water – Finding Fish' pamphlet to show you some of the key places to cast your flies or lures to give you the best chance of catching more trout.

You can download a PDF version from the website (www.fishandgame.org.nz) or check out a short video tutorial on finding fish on our YouTube channel.

Wellington Fish & Game has also got a number of other resources to help you with your angling, including:

- Lower North Lowdown – Our weekly fishing report is emailed out every Thursday throughout the fishing season. It's a short round-up of fishing action in the region along with weather outlooks, live flow reports and links, a weekly notice board and tips.
- Facebook – Fish & Game is an active user of social media. If you want to know what's going on in the world of freshwater fishing or game bird hunting, friend us on Facebook.
- Instagram – Find out what the team at Wellington Fish & Game is up to as we're out and about in the field, check us out at [wellingtonfishgame](https://www.instagram.com/wellingtonfishgame).
- Angler access pamphlets – We've got a full range for the most popular rivers in our region. Easy to follow maps and instructions so you can enjoy your angling experience with peace of mind that you're in the right place.
- How-To Guides – As well as our Reading Water brochure, we've produced several other resources including an introduction to Spin Fishing, Advanced Spin Fishing and the Lake Wairarapa Fishing Guide.

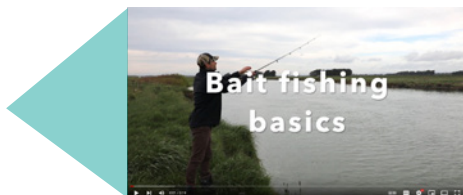
If you'd like to receive any of the information we've detailed above, check out the main Fish & Game website – www.fishandgame.org.nz – or contact us at the Wellington Fish & Game office.



Photo: Andrew Harding

FISH & GAME VIDEOS

We've recently updated our catalogue of instructional videos, including the following new additions: Scan the codes to view.



JOIN AN ANGLING CLUB

The Wellington Fish & Game region is fortunate to have a number of excellent angling clubs, with a good even spread around the lower North Island meaning they are accessible to most. We can't speak highly enough of the clubs in our region – they are great advocates for angler access and maintaining high water quality, and they are strong supporters of the Fish & Game system. Some of the clubs also provide a significant volunteer effort, which is a huge benefit to us.

Clubs are a great way of meeting experienced anglers who have a wealth of knowledge to share, including some secret spots if you're lucky! They also organised mentoring for new anglers, great outings and trips to other regions, competitions and regular events like fly-tying evenings. If you're interested in finding out more about a club in your region, get in touch!

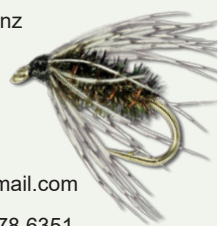
Hutt Valley Angling Club - www.huttvalleyangling.org.nz
Al Markham: 027 345 3383

Kapiti Flyfishing Club - www.kapitifyfishing.org.nz
Malcolm Francis: 027 384 6596

Manawatu Freshwater Anglers Club -
Email Doug Kidd: manawatufreshwateranglersclub@gmail.com

Wairarapa Fish & Game Club - John Pansters: (06) 378 6351

Wellington Flyfishers Club - www.wellingtonflyfishers.org
Email Strato Cotsilinis: strato.cotsilinis@gmail.com



WORKING FOR OUR ANGLERS

Photo: Andrew Harding



Here's a very brief overview of what we've been doing for the fishery and anglers in the Wellington Fish & Game region over the past year:

SPECIES MONITORING -

Counting and measuring

- Research into spawning value of tributary streams and recruitment in key river catchments.
- Adding research data into National Freshwater Fish Database.
- Drift diving over 80km of river to help ascertain trout populations.
- Ongoing peer review of Greater Wellington Regional Council's (GWRC) sport fish removal trials to keep the scientists honest.

ADVOCACY -

Enlightening others about our issues

- Attending meetings with regional council and other local authorities.
- Highlighting the adverse impacts of engineering and irrigation on fisheries and water quality.
- Working with GWRC to try and minimize the impact of their river bulldozing activity.
- Engagement with catchment groups to achieve outcomes that benefit fisheries and the wider environment.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACT -

Protecting trout habitat

- Attending hearings and submitting on regional plans.
- Overview of Horizons Regional Council's implementation of the One Plan to improve water quality while also protecting livelihoods.
- Submitting on GWRC planning processes to ensure positive outcomes for our fisheries and the environment, including opposition to the planned removal of trout in the upper Wainuiomata catchment.
- A recent submission on the RiverLink project jointly proposed by GWRC, Hutt City Council and Waka Kotahi, to ensure mitigation of effects on lower Hutt River fishery.

ACCESS -

Maintaining access for angling

- Working with Walking Access Commission to better deliver access information to anglers, including promotion of new tools.
- Keeping a watching brief on overseas sales of land to ensure access to public fishing and hunting resources is maintained.
- Producing access pamphlets and maintaining angling access signage throughout the lower North Island.
- Working with landowners to maintain and open access to fisheries.
- Ongoing dialogue with NZ Defence Force surrounding helicopter access impasse to upper Rangitikei River.

INFORMATION TO LICENCEHOLDERS -

Keeping you informed

- Newsletters like this one as well as our weekly fishing report – the Lower North Lowdown.
- Producing resources each year, such as the Lake Wairarapa Fishing Guide and 'How-to' pamphlets to help you catch more fish!

JUNIOR/NOVICE PARTICIPATION -

Getting others involved

- Assisting clubs with recruitment and retention.
- Educating about the importance of water quality and introducing junior and novice anglers to fishing.
- Assisting with funding and management of Family Fish-Out Days in Manawatu and Wellington.

COMPLIANCE AND REGULATIONS -

Keeping everyone honest

- Checking licences and, where required, prosecuting offenders.

More details of Wellington Fish & Game's work stream and achievements can be found on our website under the 'Council Downloads' section where meeting minutes and end of year reports are published.