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Strains of Rainbow Trout Used in Stocking Lakes in B.C. (Part 4)

In Part 1, I gave an overview of trout stocking in B.C. and had a look at the various strains that have been used historically. There were up to a dozen or so different strains that have been used over the year for stocking, but this has been reduced to four strains (Fraser Valley, Gerrard, Pennask and Blackwater) with some work on developing a fifth strain from Carp Lake north of Prince George. In parts 2 and 3 I looked at the Fraser Valley and Pennask strains. In Part 4 we will examine the Blackwater strain.

Blackwater Trout



The fish in the photo above is probably a gravid female judging by the white tips on the fins and the swollen belly. I guess it also could be a fish that has been gorging on some abundant food supply for the previous few months! It shows very well one major difference from the Pennask strain fish and that is the much more abundant spotting above and below the lateral line and from the tail right up to the head. (Pennask if you remember . . . having read all the previous exciting episodes of "Strains of Rainbow Trout" . . . has very few spots near the front or below the lateral line). Blackwaters also tend to be more stocky than Pennask fish but that can depend of food supplies and conditions in the lakes they inhabit. From photographs I have seen, it

would seem that Blackwater trout are quite similar to Fraser Valley fish (stocky and well spotted) except in fighting qualities.

Blackwaters originate from a river with a marine connection so could be descended from trout which migrated up the Fraser and stayed in the Blackwater River or could have come from the stock which populated the northern part of B.C. from the glacial refugia after the last glaciations in B.C. The heavy spotting is typical of coastal strains of rainbow which could happen in either of the cases mentioned above. Something to keep in mind is that fish of the same strain will take on characteristics caused by their habitat in whichever lake they live in. That means that trout can look quite different depending on which water body you catch them from.

Because they have a tendency to migrate from their home waters, they are usually not stocked in lakes which have outlets. They prefer to forage along shoals in fairly shallow water and will feed on small fish of any species as early as 1 or 2 years old. Because of their feeding habits and a tendency towards a piscivorous diet they are often stocked in lakes with large shallow shoal areas which have a non-salmonid fish community present (suckers, shiners, dace, squawfish etc). Aside from small fish, these aggressive feeders will target larger prey such as dragon fly nymphs, molluscs, snails and the larger versions of the various invertebrate feed available. Blackwaters are also more willing to feed during the day than other strains. Their aggressive feeding habits make them popular with some anglers because they can be caught on a variety of gear and will take larger flies. They are considered to grow quite rapidly because of their targeting of larger protein sources. Blackwaters are preferred fish where there are many people using a variety of gear (including flies!) and where fishers prefer an easier fish to target. (studies suggest that Pennask fish will be caught more easily on the fly than on any other kind of gear).

This strain is stocked in a number of lakes on Vancouver Island (Quennell and Brannen in the Nanaimo area, Lois and Tadjess near Duncan, Elk near Victoria) and in suitable lakes in the Kootenays, Okanagan, Kamloops, Cariboo/Chilcotin and north as far as Fort St. John.

If you know that you are fishing a lake stocked with blackwaters you should concentrate more on the larger nymph patterns (Carey Special, Doc Spratley, Dragonfly imitations and various other large nymphs) and leech patterns. With their interest in small fish, they should be interested in taking various minnow imitations including small streamers and muddler minnows. (I am not speaking from personal experience here. The only Blackwaters I have caught (that I know of!) were from Quennel Lake . . . using leeches and from Premier Lake using micro-leeches and chironomids and Lois Lake using damsel imitations.

If my limited experience with Blackwaters is anything to go by, I would say they are definitely not on a par with the Pennask fish for jumping and fighting abilities!



A 20 inch Blackwater from Lois Lake caught by Andrew Cathers

To be continued with the Gerrard Rainbow in part 5!