

Lake Purrembete

The cool, clear and deep waters of Lake Purrumbete provide great habitat for brown trout, rainbow trout, Atlantic salmon and Chinook salmon, which are all stocked annually. The lake also supports a good redbfin population, which are regularly targeted by recreational anglers.

One of the keys to the productivity of the salmonid fishery is the extensive shallow margins of Lake Purrumbete. The warm waters of the lake margins, which are often less than a metre in depth, provide an important link in the aquatic food chain. There is plenty of sunlight for the growth of aquatic plants, habitat and food for macro-invertebrates (including crustaceans and insect larvae), along with breeding sites and refuge for many forage fish, including the common galaxias (minnow) and Australian smelt. These species are key components of the salmonid's diet and their abundance is the primary reason behind the excellent growth rates.

Forage fish make up a large component of the diet of all species stocked in the lake, so for active forms of fishing like flyfishing or lure casting, even casting and retrieving baits such as scrubworms can be an exciting way to catch a big fish. You don't need deep water to find good fish.

Lake Purrumbete usually retains its water clarity through the cold, wet and windy winters. Even when the lake fills rapidly, water quality is often only locally compromised. Occasionally, strong winds cause some temporary discolouration on the edges but this often helps to draw the fish in closer to the shore where, with luck, they'll bravely hunt down a lure or fly. The best times of the day to fish in clear water are dawn and dusk, however polarising in the daylight hours can be very rewarding, particularly along the eastern and southern shorelines.

Casting from the boat and shore are both options. Boat anglers have the opportunity to move around, casting towards the shore and fishing back over the drop-offs, which enables them to target ambush feeders. The downside is that the fish can be spooked more easily, particularly during the day. If this is a problem and the fish are in close, just pull up on the shore, get out and walk.

Species on offer

The diversity of salmonids in the lake provides a variety of opportunities. I'm often unsure what may be on the go on any given day. It's certainly a great buzz to catch several species from the shore on a good day though.

Atlantic salmon are not often encountered, but are usually a good size when captured, much like the Bullen Merri scenario. These fish were stocked when Chinook salmon were unavailable from the hatchery and although they lack the return rate to anglers that the Chinook provide, they fight exceptionally well.

Lake Purrumbete browns are quality fish! They are well fed and rather selective, particularly the big ones. It is rare that you will catch small, new-release browns as they sink off into the depths for 12 months. The next time you will see them is as well-conditioned 1.5kg browns the following spring.

Flyfishing

Having a selection of smelt patterns is important. Murray Wilson's BMS flies have been developed locally and are a spot on match for the local forage fish. The flies impart a bit of flash and the body dubbing looks strikingly similar to the baitfish, which makes them great to use on a sunny day. Size 2-4 Matukas and Woolly Buggers in olive green and black are also great flies for low light and discoloured water.

A 7wt fly rod and 8-10lb tippet are a good idea for the big fellas! A floating fly line will suffice in the shallows, but if you are fishing from a boat, pack the sinking line. There's nothing worse than being able to see the trout but not get your fly down to them quickly.

It is the extensive shallow weedy margins that are vital to the fishery.

These lake margins, which are often less than a metre in depth, provide an important link in the aquatic food chain. There is plenty of sunlight for the growth of aquatic plants, habitat and food for macro-invertebrates (including crustaceans and insect larvae), along with breeding sites and refuge for many forage fish, including the common galaxias (minnow), gudgeon and Australian smelt.

These species are key components of the diet of the angling species and their abundance is the primary reason behind the excellent growth rates they can obtain. Purrumbete once held world growth records for rainbow trout and has long been renowned for producing trophy size trout. Another great draw card is the possibility now of catching 4 different types of salmonids, brown and rainbow trout, chinook salmon and brook trout. Atlantic salmon have been stocked in the past but not recently.

Brown trout

Brown trout would be the main target species for anglers fishing Lake Purrumbete. The fact that they can be taken by a myriad of different techniques, from fly, lure and bait fishing in the shallow weed-beds to trolling and down-rigging the deeper waters, makes it an appealing brownie fishery.

Add to the fact that most fish average 1.5-2kg and you have a place keen trout anglers want to spend time. This past season has seen an abundance of fish in the 4kg bracket being taken. They have been no means easy but their presence has drawn anglers from far and wide.

Chinook salmon

The twin crater lakes of Purrumbete and nearby Bullen Merri are the only reliable waters chinook salmon in Victoria that are capable of supporting a high quality fishery.

Returning a quality chinook fishery is a result of significant efforts over the past five years, particularly through improved fish production at Fisheries Victoria Snobs Creek Hatchery. Bullen Merri has perhaps been the most successful of the two recently with the chinook but Purrumbete has produced some good fish to 4kg this season. Fisheries intend to stock 10,000 chinook into Purrumbete in 2016.

Rainbow trout

Whilst not as consistent as the brown trout fishery, Purrumbete still receives plenty of rainbow trout. Most seem to come out at the 500g to 1kg size but the odd trophy fish

over 3kg does show up. They tend to be more prevalent in the deeper areas of the lake but can also be captured fishing the shallow weed-beds.



Brook trout.

Brook trout have been released into Lake Purrumbete in 2016, the first official release of the fish in Victoria. 5000 of this species of fish have been injected in what is the first of a two year trial stocking into the lake. The brook trout although it is called a trout, it is actually a char.

They are a striking looking fish, with a dark green to brown colour, with a distinctive marbled pattern and a sprinkling of red dots on its back, surrounded by blue halos along the flanks. The lower fins are often reddish in colour with white leading edges.

Anglers have already begun to encounter a few of these fish feeding in the shallows and they appear to be growing well.