



record kurpers

The proud angler in the picture is Charlie Storm of the Berea Park Angling Club with two huge blue kurpers he caught recently in Loskop Dam near Middelburg. The fish on the right turned out to be a new South African senior record with a weight of 2,694 kg and a length of 454 mm. Not to be outdone, young Johan Dippenaar of the Pretoria District Angling Club last Easter weekend pulled out an even heavier blue kurper, also from Loskop Dam. His fish weighed 2,722 kg (6 lbs) and stands as the South African junior record. For almost two years now Loskop has been producing fine catches of kurper with bags of three or four 2 kg fish being fairly commonplace.



new rhino

Way back in 1964, on the 11th of April, history was made in the Loskop Dam Nature Reserve. It was on that day that *Primaria* arrived, the first white rhino' to be born in the Transvaal since the species was exterminated here in 1896. *Primaria*'s mother was one of the rhino's introduced to Loskop Dam from Natal to re-establish the species in the Transvaal.

Primaria was a female calf and we have waited patiently for her to grow to adulthood and perhaps produce a calf of her own. Recently the great day arrived after a wait of 7½ years. The rangers at Loskop were worried at first because *Primaria* disappeared into the thick bush in a hilly part of the reserve for two weeks. When she came out into the open again though, she had a healthy little calf with her and everyone could relax again.

Primaria's calf, Loskop's first second-generation rhino', has grown fast in the last few months. Sadly though, another rhino calf born recently in the reserve did not survive more than a day or two. Quite what happened nobody knows, but the little chap's body was found, head first, down an antbear hole. The rangers who found him about a week after the accident said the ground at the entrance to the hole had been torn up by the mother rhino' in her efforts to free the calf. When she failed, she must have paced around the hole for days because the entire area was worn smooth by her anxious feet. Even in nature it seems, accidents can strike at the cruellest times.

shell-ear breeds

One of the rarest fish in the Transvaal has bred in ponds at the Lydenburg Fisheries Institute. It is the tiny shell-ear which is found only in the headwaters of certain tributaries of the Crocodile River near Badfontein. With such a limited distribution, there was always the danger that the entire shell-ear population could easily be wiped out by some natural catastrophe. For this reason a few adults were netted and placed in specially prepared ponds at the Lydenburg hatchery.

Last summer, fisheries biologists were pleased to find schools of minute fry in the ponds. Only with the aid of a microscope could they be positively identified as shell-ears. The aim now is to keep a few thousand of these rare fish in the hatchery ponds so that their natural habitat can be restocked if the need ever arises.

Having shell-ears easily available at Lydenburg will also mean that we may be able to discover the function of the strange shell-like structure after which the fish is named. The shell, which also looks like a type of sucker, is found on the gill-cover but only among the males. It is said that it may be used for clinging to rocks in fast flowing water. Because its growth can be induced by hormones, it more likely has some sexual function, possibly during mating.

Another strange thing about shell-ears is that although they have gills, they can also breathe to some extent out of water. When their streams dry up, it is thought that they bury themselves in the mud and hibernate till the next rains. Although the shell-ear is of no interest to anglers, growing only to about 8 cm, there is no doubt it is a most unusual fish and worthy of protection.

