

We got rainbows too!

There is a lot talk about our wonderful wild brown trout fishery on the Chattahoochee but did you know we have a thriving rainbow trout fishery as well. There are four categories of rainbow trout in the Buford Dam tailwater “wild-stream-bred” “fingerling-sourced”, “stockers” and “hold-over-stockers”.

Wild-stream-bred rainbow trout in the river are fish that have successfully hatched from eggs laid by mature trout. Spawning sites are gravel bars either in tributaries and in the main stem. Typically, we see these stream-hatched fish in good numbers following a cold winter. Rainbow trout eggs require super cold-water temps during egg incubation.

Fingerling-sourced rainbows are hatched and reared to fingerling size by kids throughout the metro Atlanta area schools. This is a Trout Unlimited funded program where science teachers are furnished with a large aquarium with an elaborate filter/refrigeration system to keep the water cool and clean. Students receive fertilized trout eggs which they place in a submerged basket in a gravel nest. Students are responsible for monitoring water quality in the aquarium and raise the fish to about 4 to 6 inches then release them into the Chattahoochee. It is difficult to distinguish between “stream-bred” and “fingerling-sourced” rainbows as both have brilliant colors along with parr marks which is Mother Nature’s camouflage for young trout to elude predators.

Stocker and hold-over rainbows are trout raised and stocked by the Ga DNR at catchable sizes from 8 to 12 inches. Some of these fish will survive one or more years in the river and grow often taking on beautiful colors as they naturalize over an extended period with natural diet.