

4-H Fishing Club

Spawns Interest in Fishing

by Leah Farr

True to the old adage “the early bird gets the worm,” several aspiring young anglers were up early one Saturday on a tour of the Commission’s Huntsdale State Fish Hatchery. The 4-H Fishing Club met at the hatchery to hear a brief history of the hatchery and then participate in spawning trout.

The hatchery tour was led by hatchery manager Terry Farner. The tour was intended to show the youngsters how to spawn a trout. “We try and do field trips and events that coincide with the seasons,” Farner said. “It is the perfect time to come to the hatchery because we are doing spawning, so there is a lot more to see.”

The children learned the life stages of the fish, and then were given the opportunity to try spawning a male or female trout themselves.

Some children eagerly raised their hands when given the opportunity, while others looked on with cautious fascination. “It was slimy but it was fun,” said 12-year-old Ben Shugart, after he helped spawn a trout.

The 4-H club was created to instill a love of fishing in the younger generations, Farner said. Meeting twice a month on Tuesdays, the club features special guest speakers and field trips.

“We are losing a younger generation of hunters and anglers,” Farner said. “We’re trying to get them away from the television and into the outdoors.”

They do this by setting up fishing trips and excursions such as the one to the hatchery. “When kids are involved in the outdoors, we are also teaching them respect for property and the environment, not to mention the beauty of nature,” Farner said. Ranging from kids who fish all the time to new anglers, all the kids share a common interest in the sport.

“I go fishing about 35 to 40 times a year,” said 14-year-old Daniel Lehman, whose goal is to catch as many different fish species as he can. “When I am not

fishing, I can be involved in this club, so that’s pretty cool.”

Other activities in which the group has participated include fishing trips to farm ponds and listening to guest speakers, like “Mr. Musky.”

“Mr. Musky is known for catching more muskellunge in the Susquehanna than anyone else in the area,” Farner said. “He came and talked to the kids and then took me out fishing myself. I had never caught a musky before, but after fishing with him, I caught two.”

Those skills are precisely what the 4-H club wants to teach its members. “We want to teach them skills so they can go out and have fun and enjoy fishing,” Farner said. “We try to teach kids the basics and they can add knowledge and equipment as they get older.”

The lessons are tied to the season to help the kids relate to the material they learn in the club. “Whether it’s teaching them about fly-fishing or spawning trout, instilling a love of fishing is the important part,” Farner said.

Fishing is a sport that the whole family can do. It’s relaxing and it’s a great way to enjoy the outdoors,” Farner said.

The 4-H Fishing Club has members from Newville, Mechanicsburg and Carlisle, but it is looking to increase interest. “Fishing is handed down as a hobby through families, and we are seeing less of that. This club was created to instill that love of fishing back into the younger generation,” Farner said.

For more information on the 4-H Fishing Club, contact the Penn State Cooperative Extension-Cumberland County at 717-240-6500, or Terry Farner at 717-776-4224. ☐

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Huntsdale hatchery fish culturist and 4-H volunteer Rusty Garner shows a 4-H club member how to spawn a trout during a club field trip to the Commission’s Huntsdale State Fish Hatchery. The club is designed to instill in kids a love of fishing through field trips, seminars, guest speaker engagements and fishing excursions.

photo-Leah Farr