Pennsylvania ANGLER
The Keystone State’s Official Fishing and Boating Magazine
Watch This Space!

This is the 170th column in this space with the title “Straight Talk.” It is the last! Starting in 1968, then Executive Director Bob Bielo took over the inside front cover of Pennsylvania Angler magazine for a monthly message. At first, the column had no title of its own; each column had its own title. Director Bielo then changed the name of this page to “Conservation Viewpoint,” and he used that name until he left the Commission to become Executive Director of the Susquehanna River Basin Commission. When Ralph Abele succeeded Bob Bielo as Executive Director in 1972, the column was again published without a regular title. In July 1982, as part of a major facelift of Pennsylvania Angler Ralph assigned the name “Straight Talk” to this column and it has been used ever since.

Even though Ralph Abele didn’t call this column “Straight Talk” for the first 10 1/2 years he wrote it, the name reflected his unique style. The name “Straight Talk” is linked strongly to Ralph in the minds of his many friends and coworkers. For many, the name Ralph Abele and “straight talk” go together in the same way that fishing and boating are linked in name of our agency. When the Ralph W. Abele Conservation Scholarship Fund published a book of Ralph’s writings, they called it The “Straight Talk” Years.

This month the Fish and Boat Commission is observing what would have been Ralph Abele’s 75th birthday. Elsewhere in this magazine, you’ll see an article about Ralph and his many accomplishments. In addition, the Commission will be awarding the Ralph Abele Conservation Heritage Award later this month. As a further tribute to Ralph and his outstanding work, I have decided to retire the name “Straight Talk.” Does this mean that the columns that Executive Directors Ed Miller, Larry Hoffman and I have produced have not been interesting and informative? Of course not. The retirement of the “Straight Talk” name simply recognizes that no one could ever duplicate Ralph’s special style and perspectives. The name “Straight Talk” belongs to Ralph Abele, and I believe it is a fitting tribute to retire the name in his honor.

The upcoming change to this page is the first of many changes to Pennsylvania Angler that you’ll be seeing in the upcoming months. The Angler is an outstanding publication with many devoted readers. In the next few months, we will be making changes to try to build on the magazine’s strengths by adopting a new look and adding many special features. Our goal is simple: To provide more interesting articles, attract more readers and try to get the costs of producing the magazine more in line with its revenues.

The Angler will soon be sporting a new logo. There’ll be more regular contributors, and the magazine will place a new emphasis on some of our most popular features, such as “Notes from the Streams.” You’ll be seeing many new and updated publications incorporated right into the magazine, including the Pennsylvania League of Angling Youth (PLAY) newsletter and the very popular “Inseason Trout Stocking Schedule” next spring. We’re also looking at other possible changes to our flagship publication, including changes to the publication schedule and possible inclusion of limited advertising.

If you’re reading this article, it means you’re already a reader of Pennsylvania Angler. We need your help. First off, give us your ideas about changes to the magazine. The magazine will feature a “Mail” column, and we need to hear from you. Second, help us attract more readers. Give a gift subscription or encourage your fishing and boating friends to subscribe. Finally, watch this space and stick with us as we make the magazine even better.

Peter A. Colangelo
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission
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This issue's front cover was photographed by Soc Clay.

New Bass Regs

Anglers on the Susquehanna River should remember that Big Bass regulations are now in place for most of the main river. Last fall the Commission moved to extend Big Bass provisions from Harrisburg upstream to Sunbury. Previously, only the area of the Susquehanna between the Holtwood Dam in Lancaster County and the Dock Street Dam at Harrisburg was managed under the Big Bass Program. The new area to be regulated as part of the Big Bass Program begins at the Dock Street Dam and extends upstream to the Fabri Dam at Sunbury. It also includes the portion of the Juniata River from the confluence with the Susquehanna to the Duncannon Bridge.

The regulation change was made after the 1996 Summary of Fishing Regulations and Laws went to print, so the extension is not listed in the booklet. For this reason, the Susquehanna Smallermouth Alliance produced and placed these signs to help the Commission protect, conserve and enhance the river portions under the new regulations.

Anglers are still bound by the new regulations. Big Bass Program waters include a 15-inch minimum size/four bass (combined species) daily creel limit during the open season. The 1996 season began June 15.
Lord of The Fish

by Susan Q. Stranahan

On April 18, 1982, The Philadelphia Inquirer published the following profile of Ralph Abele in its Sunday Magazine. As part of its tribute to Ralph during the month of what would have been his 75th birthday, the Commission is reprinting extracts from this article.

If Ralph were alive today, he would take great pleasure in knowing of the success of efforts to restore American shad and other migratory fish to the Susquehanna River Basin. Philadelphia Electric has gone from being “the principal opponent of shad restoration” as it was described in the 1982 article to being one of its great supporters. The two fish lifts at Conowingo Dam in Maryland lifted more than 37,500 American shad last spring despite high water and difficult weather conditions. These fish were trucked upstream for stocking above the three other hydrodams on the lower Susquehanna. By next year, it is expected that new fish passage facilities will be in operation at Holtwood and Safe Harbor dams, thereby opening up even more of the Susquehanna to the passage of migratory fish. By the year 2000, we expect fish passage to be in place at York Haven Dam. Ralph’s dream that the major hydropower dams on the lower Susquehanna provide fish passage for migratory fish will then have been realized.

Ralph Abele and his waterways patrolmen want polluters to know that if they poison any streams, they’re going to pay.

Ralph Abele (whose last name, he tells new acquaintances, is pronounced “ah, bull”), has taken the fish commission, which used to be a sleepy little bureaucracy whose agents spent most of their time looking for fishermen with no licenses (or too many fish in their creels), and made it into the most militant and powerful agency still pushing to clean up Pennsylvania’s streams.

The commission is still carrying out its traditional duties, which also include breeding fish. This spring it released over five million fish in preparation for the opening of trout season yesterday. But because of important changes in the law and the new policies that Abele has established, the commission’s 436 full-time employees have been doing much more to keep the waters of the commonwealth clean for aquatic life—and while they’re at it, for everyone and everything.
else in the state. Last year, the commission's enforcement officers investigated 424 pollution cases, prosecuting 187 of them and settling 101 others. Those statistics have climbed steadily since Abele took over a decade ago.

There's a rationale behind the emphasis on halting pollution. After all, Abele says what's the point in raising all those fish if they can't survive when you put them in the water? In fact, Abele thinks it's more important to make the state's waterways clean enough for fish to live naturally than it is to stock the streams with hatchery-raised fish—a position that endears him to many conservation-minded fishermen, but has also put him on a collision course with many politicians and industrialists.

Abele is in many ways an unlikely savior of the state's gamefish. When he went to the University of Pittsburgh he planned to become a petroleum engineer. Today he's a political conservative who, on most issues other than the environment, would be on the side of the businessmen his commission is prosecuting. What's more, Abele himself is not much of a fisherman. "I don't bet you he has wet his line in a stream for more than an hour when I've been with him," one close friend says. "You look up and he's off roaming around in the woods looking at mushrooms."

"Ralph is an intensely impatient person," a longtime friend says. "I guess he just finds fishing dull."

Fishing, perhaps, but not the job of fish commission director. The commission just happens to provide the perfect vehicle for Abele, who is not at all that surprising when you learn that Abele helped create the legislation that gives the commission its current wide-ranging powers, and for someone who is working in government, he has an aversion to compromises—even diplomacy.

Ralph Abele is 60, trim with a thinning fringe of white hair. His very British mustache gives him the appearance of a devilish gentleman, which he is. Friends say Abele's every emotion is written on his face. A meticulous dresser—favoring tweeds and tartans—Abele is known to quietly despair about a colleague's scuffed shoes or untrimmed hair. But there are aspects of his face that are not disclosed by his appearance.

Abele was brought up in Pittsburgh (although he was born on a farm), and he is an enthusiastic bird watcher. (His conversation while driving will often be punctuated with sudden announcements such as "a red-tail, Bueto jamaicensis," and he'll point to a distant hawk while his car seems on the verge of careening into a gully.)

Abele says his environmental philosophy was shaped by reading Aldo Leopold's conservation classic, Sand County Almanac, and by the outdoor adventure books of Daniel Carter Beard, a national commissioner of the Boy Scouts. From Scouting, Abele branched out into volunteer work with a number of conservation groups in western Pennsylvania, and for a time even served as a volunteer deputy warden for the fish commission in Allegheny County.

For that, Abele worked as an executive of a Pittsburgh food brokerage firm until 1969. At that point he resigned, resolving to get a job that involved conservation. He went to Harrisburg and became executive secretary of the Joint Conservation Committee, created by the General Assembly to oversee environmental legislation and programs in the state.

"He didn't understand the [legislative] process but he understood people," said Larry Schweiger, who worked with him there. As a result, Abele proved a master at getting what he wanted from the legislature. His basic tactic was to compromise on items he didn't think were important, to get those provisions he saw as vital. Peter S. Duncan, now secretary of environmental resources and a protege of Abele's, put it this way: "Ralph knew how to give the opposition the sleeves out of his vest."

While working to obtain passage of legislation creating the DER in 1970 and 1971, for instance, he was able to reassure skeptical legislators a direct role in the policy-making of the new department, placing them on the Environmental Quality Board, which acts on all regulations proposed by the DER. At the same time he was able to accomplish his principal goal, which was to get citizen representatives on that same board.

When he was appointed executive director of the fish commission in 1972, he set out to use the lessons he'd learned in creating the DER legislation, so that what seemed to be a codification of fish-related laws dating back to 1866 actually transformed the little agency from one that managed the fisherman to one that managed a natural resource.

Abele carefully explained to his employees (almost all of whom he knows by name) his new vision for the commission. That vision was drawn from his conservation ethic that fish and the water they live in are but one part of the ecosystem; to manage and preserve that part is to significantly improve the whole. Abele encouraged his staff, some of whom were initially skeptical, to take an active role in the transformation process.

Under the fish code, a criminal charge can be brought against a polluter without first establishing intent. DER's enforcement powers, on the other hand, flow from state criminal statutes that require proof of intent. "It sounds mean," says Abele, who knew exactly what he was doing when that wording was slipped into the code. "But when Conrail spills something into our waters, they'll pay for it. DER pays a lot of attention to intent. How do you prove intent?"

Pete Duncan's Recollections

Pete's relationship with Ralph began in 1970 when he worked for Abele, who at the time was Executive Secretary of the Joint Legislative Conservation Committee. They became trusted colleagues. Pete eventually succeeded Ralph at the Joint Conservation Committee when Ralph became Executive Director of the Fish Commission. Their work together continued as Duncan worked at the Department of Environmental Resources, where he was agency Secretary from 1981-1983, and at the Pennsylvania Game Commission, where Duncan was Executive Director 1983-1994. Both resided in Millerstown, and their working relationship quickly became friendship. Abele and his wife Peggy were god-parents to Duncan's children.

"Some of the most exciting times I ever spent working in state government came when I was working with Ralph. You would come home at the end of the day completely limp, fatigued both mentally and physically when you were around Ralph. But you always had a smile on your face because you knew you were doing great things."
Leonard Green's Recollections

Leonard “Lenny” Green is one of Ralph Abele's oldest friends. A charter member of the so-called OB’s, Lenny has been leader of conservation in Pennsylvania as a member of the Fish and Boat Commission, the Citizens Advisory Council, the Environmental Quality Board, the board of the National Wildlife Foundation and other organizations. Lenny currently serves as chairman of the board of the Ralph W. Abele Conservation Scholarship Fund.

In 1964 Ralph W. Abele was living and working in Pittsburgh and I was living and working in Butler. One day he called and asked if I would meet with him and some Boy Scout officials. Ralph was on the Board and Chairman of the Conservation Committee for Exploring of the Allegheny Trails Council of Boy Scouts of America. It turned out that Ralph had organized an Explorer Post dedicated to exposing young men to the many fields of conservation careers. He wanted me to form a similar post in Butler County, so that we could organize joint field trips, making it worthwhile for the professionals who were meeting with us on weekends and volunteering their time.

I was already involved in youth work, so it was easy to see how my work with youth conservation camps and the explorer post would complement each other. It was through the summer conservation camps that I first met Ralph. He volunteered to teach classes every year at our camps and provided the leadership and encouragement that resulted in organizing 20 similar camps statewide.

"Ralph knows exactly what he’s doing all the time" says DER’s Duncan. "He’ll issue a broadside calling us that big monstrosity that’s so hard to get to move. He’ll send us a vicious letter, full of venom. He knows exactly the kind of reaction that letter will produce, knows it will go all through the bureaucracy and create all sorts of trouble and in the end, will get exactly what he wants. Ralph says constantly, "I'll be your conscience," and he is.

Abele belongs to an informal club of eight men that meets several times a year, often at the venerable Spruce Creek Rod and Gun Club in Huntingdon County, which owns what is considered one of the best stretches of trout stream in the state. The group calls itself the "Old Bastards," though Jeff Sink, former national president of Trout Unlimited,_the trout fisherman's fraternity, prefers that the group be referred to as just "the OB’s please."

Since its founding in the early 1970s, it has included among its members Maurice Goddard, retired head of DER, and the late John F. Laudadio, a state representative from Westmoreland County. These men, along with Abele, are considered by many to be the fathers of the state's environmental programs. "The group was formed because sometimes the structured conservation organizations were at each other's throats and weren't that effective," Abele says. "We could write a law and ram it through the General Assembly. Your soul would not want to let a group like that down. What days, what days."

Abele has one more great cause that he would like to see accomplished before he retires in about five years. It's a bit of unfinished business that has been hanging around the commission for over a century—restoration of the American shad to the Susquehanna.

Pennsylvania waters, including the Susquehanna, have historically been filled with shad—a fish that once sustained a profitable fishing industry here. Pollution, over-fishing and construction of dams blocking the shad's migratory trek from saltwater up the rivers to its freshwater spawning grounds resulted in the declination of the species in the last century.

Now, pollution control and other programs have made it possible to bring the shad back to the Delaware and Schuylkill (In Philadelphia, a $550,000 fish ladder was built around Fairmount Dam in 1979). Abele is sure that shad could now come back to the Susquehanna if there were fish passageways around the four hydroelectric dams on the river.

The commission, DER, the state of Maryland, the Susquehanna River Basin Commission, the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have filed suit to force the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to order the passageways built as a condition for renewing the federal licenses for the dams.

The principal opponent of the passageways has been Philadelphia Electric Co., which is co-owner of the Conowingo Dam, the tallest obstruction and the first one the shad would have to cross on the way to their spawning grounds. It argues that it has no business making its customers pay higher bills (even if it is only about $3 a year per customer as has been estimated) so that shad can go upstream and spawn.

Abele, for one, is not impressed with the counter arguments. "We are restoring a lost resource that belongs to the commonwealth," he says. "It's a mitigation that the utilities must restore without any more than a reasonable consideration for cost. Damnit, we were mandated in 1866 to do it—we're just a little slow getting around to it."

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Susan Q. Stranahan is a staff reporter for The Philadelphia Inquirer and the author of the book Susquehanna, River of Dreams.

Del Graff's Recollections

Del Graff is the Director of the Commission's Bureau of Fisheries. He worked closely with Ralph on numerous projects.

"Things that Ralph Abele said or did that inspired or left their mark on us fortunate enough to work with him would fill volumes, but two of my favorite pieces of wisdom from Ralph, advice I try to follow, were:

One, when we were dealing with a particularly contentious issue involving Fisheries, Enforcement and Environmental Services staff in a tough public/political situation, Ralph told us, 'Be courteous, be diplomatic, be conciliatory and be honest. If none of the rest works, then just be honest!'

Another of my favorites from Ralph had to do with dealing with requests from the public and from elected officials. Ralph said, 'Do the right thing, but never ever do anything for someone you like that you're not prepared to do for someone you don't like.'"
Crappie fishing on western New York’s Chautauqua Lake one recent May morning with Dave Peterson, I set the hook on what I assumed would be another slabside for the cooler. But crappies offer only routine resistance, and this fellow zipped off at sharp angles and bulldogged strongly.

“Smallmouth,” I guessed aloud. Unlike a smallmouth bass, however, my fish shunned the surface. It came to our net a silvery 13-incher—a nice match in size for our crappies, but as I said, much stronger on the line.

“Damn,” Dave muttered, eyeing my catch with contempt. Peterson lives on Chautauqua in Ashville, New York, and specializes in crappies. He clearly resented the new arrival. “These things are taking over.”

As someone who fishes throughout the Northeast, I’d met the fish before—in Lake Erie, the St. Lawrence, Connecticut and Delaware rivers, the Chesapeake Bay, and the cool lakes of Maine. It was a white perch. Peterson offered to toss it back.

“Keep it,” I countered. “They’re great eating. Add it to the crappies.” Regarding me with a frown, Dave tossed it in the box.

“I know exactly how your friend felt,” laughed Mike Kaufmann, Commission Area 6 Fisheries Manager. Mike has more white perch experience than most other Pennsylvanians. “It’s a sporty fish, I’ll grant you, but it’s also troublesome. Let me tell you about Lake Nockamixon.”

The Commission discovered white perch in Nockamixon in 1982, and by 1985 they had become so abundant that, according to Mike, “they had eaten themselves out of house and home. We assumed the population would soon crash, which is just what happened under the ice that very winter.”
But as they usually do, the white perch rebounded in Nockamixon to achieve an uneasy co-existence with the other species. Meanwhile, they showed up in Galena (locally known as Peace Valley) Lake, Lake Luxembourg, and tiny Levittown Lake. Mike guesses they’re also present in the large, private Van Sciver Lake.

To the south and west, white perch have established themselves in lakes Marburg and Redman near York, and Lake Ontelaunee, Reading’s reservoir. Schools of 11-inchers there promise a new state record.

“We also find incredible numbers of white perch in the tidal Delaware,” Mike observed. “But those numbers drop dramatically as you go upstream.” I mentioned taking a white perch on a shad dart once near Easton, which squared with Mike’s surveys.

Commission Fisheries Biologist Roger Kenyon, based along Lake Erie, also knows white perch. “I caught them in Lake Ontario 40 years ago as a kid. Our first Lake Erie record occurred in 1951. They remained scarce there until the mid-1980s when they exploded to numbers exceeding even yellow perch.”

Then, as Roger recalled, those numbers fell off to reach an accommodation with other fish—just as Mike Kaufmann described for Lake Nockamixon. But now, as yellow perch numbers dwindle, Erie restaurateurs sell “lake perch” rather than yellow perch sandwiches, substituting the more abundant white perch.

“It’s pretty good.” Roger Kenyon shifted from biologist to culinarian. “Yellow perch has a nutty flavor. White perch is fishier. I can tell the difference, especially if I take the sandwich apart and examine the fillets. But most people like white perch just as much.”

Farther south in western Pennsylvania, Area 2 Fisheries Manager Ron Lee and Area 1 Fisheries Manager Craig Billingsley report no sign yet of white perch in the big lakes like Pymatuning and Conneaut, and Pittsburgh District Army Corps biologist Bob Hoskins has found none behind Kinzua Dam.

“It’s fortunate,” Craig Billingsley remarked. “I agree they’re a sporting and good eating fish, but they’re just too prolific, and they compete with existing species. I don’t want to find them. But just between us, it’s probably inevitable.”

Craig’s worries are justified. In New England, white perch have reduced trout and bass populations, and they can indeed take over. On the plus side, though, they fight hard and are delicious. The late master
angler and gourmet A. J. McClane called
white perch New England’s finest food
fish, and our own vacations there always
feature white perch in the skillet and
chowder pot.

The case against white perch, apart from
their tendency to overpopulate, rests mainly
on the impression that they’re just another
small panfish. The white: “perch” is,
however, a true bass, a close cousin of the
white bass and striped bass, with which
it shares habits and habitat. Even though
it’s the smallest of the three, it grows quite
large and provides a sporting test for the
light-tackle angler. The current world
record is a 20-inch, 4 3/4-pounder taken
back in 1949 from Maine’s Messalonskee
Lake. But this is one world record ripe
for an eclipse.

For all their abundance, however, white
perch behave mysteriously. As ichthy­
ologist Edwin L. Cooper, who wrote the
authoritative Fishes of Pennsylvania, told
me, “We know surprisingly little about
Menhaden americanum. It’s a difficult fish
to study in the wild.” For example, their
large schools appear noisily on the
surface, and then seem to vanish. I’ve had
them cough up fresh rainbow smelt on a
pond that contains no rainbow smelt. But
a deep connecting lake does. In other
words, perch feeding at 60 or 70 feet
spontaneously rose up and swarmed across
a sand bar into shallow water—an amaz­
ingly quick adjustment to major depth,
diet, location and temperature changes.

More adaptability

White perch demonstrate still more
adaptability. In the spring, they spawn
on the fly, so to speak, a female spread­
ing thousands of eggs as she moves, es­
cort males adding their milt, and the
unattended eggs hatching into fry within
four days. They also enjoy long lives: One
14-inch specimen had lived 20 summers.

Nymps, spinner-fly combinations like the
Roostertail and Joe’s Fly, small plugs, and
even plastic grubs and skirted tube lures.
Like panfish, they gobble up worms and
small minnows. My own favorite approach
is a compromise: A small single-hook
spinner with a piece of earthworm cov­
tering just the point and bend.

My wife, Cordy, and I fish white perch as
a team. I guide the motor, position our
boat, bait her hook, and net her fish.
Cordy’s happy task is to lay her casts along
a perch school and then hook and play
them one after another. She does her job
expertly on ultralight tackle that includes
a perch school and then hook and play
them one after another. She does her job
expertly on ultralight tackle that includes
a twelve-foot spinning rod and a reel with
a five-foot spinning rod and a reel with
a five-pound line.

Here in Pennsylvania, white perch could
sustain the kind of specialized sport fishery
now centered on crappies, and they al­
ready attract some attention. Kevin Strunk
of Bangor holds the current state record,
a comparatively small fish (no offense,
Kevin) of 1 pound, 7 ounces taken in 1991
from Munsey Lake in Northampton County.
But I suspect bigger white perch get
mistaken for white bass or small stripers.
Strunk’s record suggests that the fish
is poised to inhabit our larger lakes. It
seems certain to reach Lake Wallen­
paupack. I predict, as well, it will nego­
tiate the lower Susquehanna dams (it’s been
taken off Three Mile Island), and estab­
lish itself in the Allegheny Reservoir, in
Lake Raystown, and in the larger west­
ern lakes near Chautauqua.

Easily trapped, the juvenile fish make
ideal bait and hitch a lot of rides in buckets
and live wells. But remember Penn­
sylvania’s prohibition against spreading
alien fish, and consider Mike Kaufmann’s
expert appraisal: “The white perch com­
petes aggressively with established popu­
lations, and I’m not interested in seeing
it take over any more water.”

Besides, these tough, resourceful fish
don’t need a lift. They can travel great
distances on their own—for example, up
the St. Lawrence, through the Welland
Canal, and on into the Great Lakes.

Vacationing last August on a western
Maine pond, we arrived in the midst of
the hot, dry spell that parched most of the
East. We had promised pending guests
from Bucks County an authentic Down
East supper, but no surface activity bet­
rayed the presence of white perch. It
looked as though we might have to boil
lobsters or bake some salt pork and sol­
dier beans.

Then, at 5:30 on the misty morning of
August 6, with a gray sun rising behind
the red pines, the surface of our pond
erupted in white perch, flopping all around
us in a feeding frenzy.

The 30 perch we kept that morning
averaged a foot, and several reached 14
inches. To a fish, they slammed Cordy’s
spinner and fought hard in their angular
runs. (Like stripers and white bass, white
perch rarely leap, though sometimes they
surge partly out of the water.)

My wife boated several dozen of these
magnificent fish before she rested her
forearm and urged me to take a turn.
Hoping to fool the predatory smallmouth
that often follow white perch schools, I
threw a sinking crankbait in a yellow-perch
pattern and instantly felt a jolt. The fish
lunged powerfully enough to test my drag,
thrashed at boatside, and then entered
our net, a 15-inch white perch slightly over
two pounds.

Freshly caught like this, a white perch
rewards a close look. It’s a sleek, silver
fish with a single thin stripe down its lateral
line. In larger fish, the silvery scales flash
with gold highlights, and two iridescent
lavender patches decorate either side of
the lower mandible. A more respectful
and biologically correct name would be
“silver bass.” Finally, a mature white perch
carries a high forehead, which accounts
for its odd nickname, “humpy.”

Whatever authentic Maine supper our
Carversville friends, Chris and Steve Falk,
expected, when they pulled into camp the
evening of August 6, we sat them down
to a platter of white perch fillets dusted
in seasoned flour and pan-fried in olive
oil. Exclaimed Steve between mouthfuls,
“Swinton, this fish is terrific. Where’d
you buy it?”

A Unique Flavor

The old argument over the best tasting
fish usually pits freshwater walleyes and
crappies against saltwater flounder or
striped bass. Meanwhile, landlocked white
perch retain a hint of their salty origin.
So those who like a dash of the oceanic
in their blander freshwater fish will wel­
come the flavor of white perch, an ideal
blend of the two preferences.—JS.
Commission biologists use a device called a "gastroscope" (right) to identify the stomach contents of muskies without harming the fish. This study revealed vital information on how much muskies actually eat.
They are fierce predators of great digestive ability capable of eating twice their weight in food each day. They have reportedly "plucked" ducks from the surface of lakes and occasionally attack unsuspecting swimmers. These are just some of the descriptions and rumors that surround the toothy predators known to biologists as Esoxids and by anglers as muskellunge and tiger muskellunge.

Largemouth bass have their own history of aggressiveness, no doubt a result of television fishing shows. Who hasn’t been channel-surfing Saturday morning television and stumbled across a gentleman in his early 40s wearing a ball cap and fishing out of a sparkling, overpowered bass boat, hooting and hollering about a hawg largemouth that just engulfed his crankbait.

Reports, stories and programs like these are just one of the stereotypes that anglers use to their advantage to create the perfect excuse for a bad day of fishing. The excuse goes something like this: "The muskies and largemouth bass in the lake are eating all the trout the Commission stocks, and there aren’t enough left for anglers to catch."

Angler concerns regarding predator fish management in Pennsylvania waters are routinely voiced. However, the greatest concern seems to be on the management of muskellunge and tiger muskellunge in waters stocked with catchable trout. The Fish and Boat Commission, thinking that these concerns were worthy of a closer look, designed a study to determine the extant not only that muskellunge and tiger muskellunge predation has on stocked trout, but also that walleye and largemouth bass are eating stocked trout. The study was carried out by the Area 8 Fisheries Management office in Somerset.

The study consisted of collecting tiger muskellunge, largemouth bass and walleye large enough to eat a stocked trout and determining the percentage of these fish that actually had trout in their stomachs. Then, by applying known feeding rates and estimated predator population sizes in the study waters, Commission biologists could determine how many trout each species of fish could actually have eaten.

The predators were collected for two days immediately following pre-season trout stocking and one day immediately following an in-season trout stocking on two lakes (North Park Lake in Allegheny County and Keystone Lake, Westmoreland County) in southwest Pennsylvania.

Collecting the fish immediately following trout stocking allowed the greatest chance for a trout to be eaten by a large predator. Using a tool called a "gastroscope," the biologists were able to identify the stomach contents of the fish without harming the fish.

From the study it was determined that largemouth bass and walleyes needed to be 15 inches long and tiger muskies, 16 inches long before they could eat the typical catchable-size trout, which in recent years has averaged over 10 inches. Because there are relatively few large predators in any fish population, predation on stocked trout was expected to be low.

Through angler interviews and counts on trout stocked lakes, the Commission determined that it takes anglers about 19 days to harvest most of the trout from lakes of similar size to North Park Lake (75 acres) and Keystone Lake (78 acres). Through fish population and abundance studies on North Park and Keystone lakes, the Commission has a good "picture" of the sizes and numbers of predator fish in these lakes. By applying the known digestive and feeding rates of the predator populations, Commission biologists were able to determine the number of trout that were lost to predation in each lake.

What they found may surprise you. Following a fish population survey of North Park Lake, Commission biologists determined that although a good largemouth bass population existed in North Park Lake, there were approximately only 50 largemouth bass large enough to eat a stocked trout present in the lake at any one time. It was estimated that only 1.4 trout/day, or 26 trout in 19 days, are eaten by large-mouth bass in North Park Lake. This may seem low, but remember that unlike people, fish do not need to eat everyday, and when they do eat they do not actively look for stocked trout. They eat the first available source of food they encounter.

Only four walleyes large enough to eat a stocked trout were collected from North Park Lake during the study and all had empty stomachs. However, biologists think walleyes also prey on stocked trout. But like the largemouth bass and tiger muskellunge their numbers in a trout-stocked lake are not great enough and angler harvest is fast enough that they do not severely affect stocked trout numbers.

Keystone Lake has a dense largemouth bass population. However, the size structure of the largemouth bass population is strongly tipped toward fish less than 15 inches, which are too small to eat stocked trout. Of the few largemouth bass collected at Keystone Lake large enough to eat a stocked trout, none was found to have trout in its stomach. For this reason Commission biologists think predation on stocked trout by largemouth bass in Keystone Lake is extremely low.

Approximately 250 tiger muskellunge are stocked in Keystone Lake by the Commission every three years in a management approach designed to provide a variety of fishing opportunities and the chance to catch a 30-pound-plus fish. Biologists estimate that the tiger muskellunge population is reduced by 50 percent annually by predation, harvest and natural causes. This means that in any given year there are approximately 69 tiger muskellunge large enough to eat a stocked trout in Keystone Lake. Even with their more aggressive feeding habits, these large predators could still be responsible only for the loss of one trout per day, or 19 trout before anglers harvested the majority of stocked trout.

Even if every tiger muskellunge capable of eating a trout did eat a trout, the result would have been a loss of 93 trout to tiger muskellunge predation in 19 days, or 1.4 percent of the stocked trout. Given that these percentages were based on the actual stocking of 6,500 trout in each lake, plenty of trout would remain to provide good fishing opportunities.

The Fish and Boat Commission attempts to provide fishing opportunities for anglers with a variety of interests. One way to do this is to manage a waterway with a variety of fish. With so many different angling preferences, this sometimes becomes a difficult and challenging balancing act. With the recent fishing license fee increase, angler concerns that their license money isn’t spent to feed large predators with expensive stocked trout is certainly legitimate. The results of this study clearly show that this is not the case. The Pennsylvania angler is the most effective predator and benefits the greatest from the Commission’s stocked trout program. The bad news is that anglers will need to come up with another good excuse for coming home empty-handed. But knowing anglers, and as an angler myself, creating a new excuse should prove to be a simple, if not an enjoyable, task.

Dave Miko is the Commission Area 8 Fisheries Technician.
Maps Useful to Pennsylvania Anglers

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission does not sell these maps. For ordering and other information, contact the company or agency directly.

County Maps
Type 3, or the larger multi-colored Type 10 County General Highway Maps, show all public roads including state, township and forest roads. Lakes, rivers and streams in the counties are also shown. Contact PA Department of Transportation, Publications Sales Store, P.O. Box 2028, Harrisburg, PA 17105. Telephone 717-787-6746.

Pennsylvania: County Maps and Recreational Guide provides a handy guide book for the traveler and sportsman. The easy-to-use reference guide contains maps of each county showing roads, parks and wilderness areas. Available from: County Maps, Puettz Place, Lyndon Station, WI 53944. Telephone 608-666-3331.

Five-color, full-topographic county and county region maps are also available from: Modern Explorer Products, P.O. Box 588, Hopwood, PA 15445. Telephone 412-438-7686.

Topographic Maps
Topographic maps are published and sold by the U.S. Geological Survey. An index showing the topographic maps for each quadrangle of the state is free. The index includes the area covered by each quadrangle map, its name, scale and year of survey. Address of local map dealers and federal map distribution centers are also provided. Contact: Map Distribution Center, U.S. Geological Survey, Box 25286, Federal Center, Denver, CO 80225. Telephone 303-236-7477.

In Washington, D.C., over-the-counter sales (no mail orders) are available from: U.S. Geological Survey, Main Interior Building, 1849 NW "E" Street. Hours 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Telephone 202-208-4047.

The Pennsylvania Atlas and Gazetteer is a comprehensive guide with topographic maps that list roads, mountains with elevation contours, forest areas, marshes, waterways, boat ramps and dams. Contact: DeLorme Mapping Co., P.O. Box 298, Freeport, ME 04032. Telephone 207-865-4171.

Waterproof Rough Country Topos are available for all field-use scale topographic quadrangle map areas in Pennsylvania. Raised relief maps and regional topographic maps can also be purchased from: Modern Explorer Products, P.O. Box 588, Hopwood, PA 15445. Telephone 412-438-7686.

The U.S. Forest Service publishes a map of the Allegheny National Forest, detailing all the forest service roads, as well as the locations of the region's trout waters. The map costs $3.00 plus tax. Contact: U.S. Forest Service, 222 Liberty Street, Warren, PA 16365, or call 814-723-5150.

Lake Structure (Hydrographic) Maps
These maps show "structure" (depths, bottom contours, dropoffs, etc.) and are available for several lakes.

International Map Co., 547 Shaler Boulevard, Ridgefield, NJ 07657. Telephone 201-943-6566 or 943-5550.


Modern Explorer Products, P.O. Box 588, Hopwood, PA 15445. Telephone 412-438-7686.

River, Stream Maps
The Delaware River and Outdoor Recreation. Series of 10 maps of the Delaware River. Waterproof maps showing physical characteristics and recreational facilities of the river from Hancock, NY to Trenton, NJ. Contact: Delaware River Basin Commission, Box 7360, West Trenton, NJ 08628. Telephone 609-883-9500.

Howard William Higbee's Stream Map of PA (includes a free location guide). Shows 45,000 miles of Pennsylvania waterways, including the locations of 900 trout streams and 300 lakes, dams, reservoirs and ponds. Identifies "Class A" limestone streams, bass waters and trophy fish waters. Contact: Vivid Publishing Co., 347 Rural Avenue, Williamsport, PA 17701. Telephone 717-322-1167.

Schuylkill River Users Guide. Series of eight waterproof maps. Identifies public access sites, stream flow characteristics and dams and pools, from Port Clinton to Fairmount Dam. Obtain from the State Book Store, 1825 Stanley Drive, Harrisburg, PA 17103. Telephone 717-787-5109.

Susquehanna River Map. Detailed canoeing map of the Susquehanna River through the Endless Mountains of northeast Pennsylvania. The map shows towns, highways, access areas, camping areas and major islands. Endless Mountains Tourist Bureau, RR 6, Box 132A, Tunkhannock, PA 18657-9232. Telephone 717-836-5431 or 1-800-769-8999.

Navigation/Nautical Charts
Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio Rivers Navigation Charts are available for the Allegheny River (mile 0-72), Monongahela River (mile 0-128.7) and Ohio River (mile 0-172.7). Contact: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1000 Liberty Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15222. Telephone 412-644-6872.

Nautical Charts of Lake Erie and the Delaware River are available from Distribution Branch (N/C/CG33), National Ocean Service, Riverdale, MD 20737. Telephone 301-436-6990. Lake Erie charts are in Nautical Chart Catalog 4; Delaware River charts, Catalog 1.
Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

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Species Profile: Channel Catfish

General Information

Scientists know the channel catfish by its Latin name *Ictalurus punctatus*, which means “spotted fish cat.” This fish belongs to the Catfish family, known as Ictaluridae.

Range

In Pennsylvania channel catfish are found in all the major river basins, but they are more common in the Susquehanna and Delaware River basins.

Identification

The channel catfish has that typical catfish look: A wide, flat mouth with barbels, or whiskers, on the top and bottom, and spines on the dorsal fin and pectoral fins. However, the channel catfish has a deeply forked tail, unlike the bullheads, which have a rounded tail. Channel catfish also have a dark-gray or olive back with a light belly. Young or small channel catfish have dark spots. The barbels are dark. The white catfish also has a deeply forked tail, but it has light barbels.

Habitat

They prefer moving water, so they are found in Pennsylvania’s large rivers such as the Susquehanna, Juniata, Delaware and Lehigh. They need water temperatures warmer than 75 degrees to successfully reproduce. In these rivers they are often found at the end or head of riffles near deep-water cover. They also inhabit the brackish tidewater, found in the Delaware and Chesapeake bays. They can also be found in some lakes and reservoirs.

Reproduction

Channel catfish mature at age 3. By that time they are about 8 to 11 inches long. Spawning begins as water temperatures warm above 75 degrees. These temperatures are necessary for the eggs to develop. The male selects and maintains the nesting site. Old stumps, culvert pipes, rock outcrops and even tires are used by spawning channel catfish. The female enters the nest site and deposits a portion of her 2,000 to 70,000 eggs. The male fertilizes the eggs and begins his watch. The fertilized eggs are sticky, and a whole mass of eggs is about the size and shape of a pancake. The male remains at the nest site, defending it against other males and predators. After the eggs hatch, he also defends the fry. For part of their first summer, the young channel catfish are guarded by one of the parents.

Food

Young catfish eat mostly aquatic insects like midges and caddis larvae. They also eat other aquatic invertebrates like crayfish. When they mature they prefer fish, although judging from some of the baits anglers use, they will eat anything. During the incredible hatches of white flies on the Susquehanna River in August, adult channel catfish eat the nymphs as they swim to the surface. Channel cats also rise to the surface and sip on the dead adult white flies.

Size

The current Pennsylvania state record catfish weighed slightly more than 35 pounds. That fish came from the Lehigh Canal.
BANTAM BOXERS:

Bluegills and Redbreast Sunfish

by Vic Attardo
With light spinning tackle or a fly rod, bluegills and redbreast sunfish are powerful bantam-weight fighters and I am always happy to take one on. Though shaped the same and sharing the same physical characteristics, they are quite different—particularly when it comes to habitat.

Bluegills prefer a life spent in farm ponds and lakes. You can find them around some moderate flows, but their ideal abode is a quite, stillwater home. Bluegills move back and forth from shallow to deep water depending on their mood, but they are primarily a fish that likes a low ceiling over its head. Redbreast, on the other hand, prefer a running stream or speedy river. Yet on the highway of life, redbreast swim in the right-hand lane, such as a bankside eddy or shallow pool, and leave the passing lane to other species, like trout and smallmouth.

**What's my line?**

It surprises me how many experienced anglers can't distinguish a bluegill from a redbreast, and I wish I had the proverbial penny for all the times I've heard fishermen misidentify a hefty, broad-sided redbreast as a bluegill.

When told it's not a 'gill but a horse of another color, most anglers respond by saying they never heard of a redbreast before. I have nothing but admiration for the colorful redbreast, so I like to give these fishermen a short lesson in sunfish identification.

At the same time, fishermen often call a bluegill, "some kind of sunfish." In Pennsylvania there are five members of the sunfish family of which the bluegill is only one. Other members of the group are the green sunfish, which frequently forms hybrids with other sunfish, the redear sunfish, and every kid's favorite, the pumpkinseed. In the southern states, redears are called shellcrackers.

In body style, redbreasts and bluegills closely resemble each other because both are stubby and dish-like. But the two species differ in color and other physical attributes. The bluegill is noted for its black earlobe, which is actually an extension of its gill cover. But it's the redbreast that has by far the longest gill flap of the two. The black earlobe of the redbreast is thin and flexible and narrower than the eye of the fish. It can extend nearly to the midpoint of the abdomen. On the bluegill, the gill flap is short and stubby and as wide or wider than the eye.

The difference in coloration between the two species is also distinctive. The bluegill has six to eight broad vertical bars on its side. These dark bars extend from the dorsal fin to the belly. The redbreast has no such vertical bars, but its face is streaked with wavy aqua-blue or green lines. Even though the throat of the bluegill is bright orange in summer, the colored belly of the redbreast is more expansive.

The color values of each fish can be altered according to habit. I have caught bluegills in tannin-rich Pocono ponds that are as black and coal.

If you are trying to determine whether you have caught a redbreast or a bluegill, look to the gill flap. It is the best way to distinguish the two species. But if you can't distinguish between the two, don't feel like you're a piscatorial dummy. Last year in a story on the Delaware River, a national fly fishing magazine mislabeled a photo of a redbreast as a bluegill. I waited for months for someone to write in and correct the editors, but no one did.

For years I've been telling my friends that I'm part of a two-man campaign to raise the status of the obscure redbreast. The other guy who has sleepless nights when anglers incorrectly identify the two fish is the Fish and Boat Commission's, Area 6 Fisheries Manager Mike Kaufmann. In his fervor for the redbreast, Kaufmann makes a bold statement about the fighting qualities of both species.

"Redbreasts fight better than any bluegill every did," he once told me.

Kaufmann gives high praise to the sunset-colored redbreast, and he knows what he's talking about. On his days off during the summer you can frequently find him fishing the waters of the Delaware around Riegelsville. Kaufmann finds the largest redbreasts in his entire region in the mighty Delaware. And because that region runs roughly from Philadelphia to Easton and west to Lancaster, that's high praise for the river.

**Early spring**

As the warmwater season begins soon after iceout, bluegills are usually the first fish I target. In early to mid-March, the weatherman sometimes offers up a gloriously sunny afternoon in the upper 50s or 60s, and that's when I rush to a local farm pond and start hunting for 'gills.

There's little weed growth in my favorite three-acre pond at this time of year and the water temperature is still chilly. But under a cloudless sun, the water temperature usually climbs a
few degrees and this spark of energy really turns the bluegills on. The shallow water around the edges of the pond are where the sun’s warmth has the most effect, so I concentrate my efforts in the shallows.

One factor that dictates my fishing technique is the color of the water. Even in farm ponds, the water is likely to be off-color from snowmelt and early rains and you must choose your offering to match that condition.

Generally, I want to crawl something small and dark slowly across the bottom. For a fly selection, this means a black or black/brown Woolly Bugger in size 8. For lures, a small black jig with a plastic tail is a front-row ticket. It need not be more complicated than that.

Along the shoreline, look for small points that extend out a few feet into deeper water. Also look for the edge of a flat with a bit of a dropoff in deeper water. Fish the flat, the dropoff and the hump of the point. You find good fishing under these early spring conditions, but don’t be surprised that when a cold front comes along the action stops.

Early spring redbreasts are not as cooperative as bluegills. Generally, I’m not very successful catching a bunch of reds in water under 45 or even 50 degrees. The exception is in a shallow stream stocked with trout, after opening day, of course.

John Sordo, another redbreast aficionado and Area 6 Fisheries Biologist, catches plenty of redbreasts in Tobiickoh Creek and in the East Branch of the Perkiomen while gra fishing for trout.

“They start harassing you about the last week of April,” he says. “If you are using mealy worms, the trout sometimes have to beat the redbreasts to the bait.”

Late spring to early summer

When bluegills move into shallow water to spawn, you’d be foolish to fish for them anywhere else. At this time they take a wide assortment of flies and lures. A small floating crankbait retrieved with a short jerky movement—bringing the lure just under the water and letting it slowly rise to the surface—drives the little scrappers batty. Try fluorescent greens and yellows and wildly colored sunfish patterns.

For flies, I like small, weightless streamers made of Fishhair or bucktail. A high-contrast color combination such as black over white or yellow over white is all you need. Add red or pearl Krystal Flash to a size 6 or 8 streamer hook and that’s it.

As for redbreasts, late spring and early summer are also a juicy season for battling these wonderful fighters.

With water temperatures in the upper 50s and low 60s, the reds gang up in the eddy-riffle interfaces where they can be taken with size 8 nymphs, small, in-line spinners, jigs and small crankbaits. Again pay attention to water color and match your offerings accordingly. The exception is crankbaits. For some reason those fluorescent green/yellow/red fat-belly sunfish combinations outfish dark crankbaits even in dark water.

Presentation consists of carefully working the eddies, casting to the upstream side and drifting your flies and lures through the deep holes. When you catch one redbreast, beat the area to death because there’s a good chance there’ll be plenty more in the same place. Last year it wasn’t until early May that I hit my first really good day of stream redbreast fishing with flies.

---

**Eastern PA’s Sunfish Hotspots**

**Redbreast**
- 1R. Delaware River
- 2R. E. Branch, Perkiomen Creek
- 3R. Tobiickoh Creek below Nockamixon
- 4R. Schuylkill River south of Reading
- 5R. Manatawny Creek

**Bluegill**
- 1B. Upper Delaware River
- 2B. Long Pond, Wayne County
- 3B. Miller Pond, Wayne County
- 4B. Duck Harbor Pond, Wayne County
- 5B. Hidden Lake, Monroe County
- 6B. Lake Minsi, Northampton County
- 7B. Bruce Lake, Pike County
- 8B. Pecks Pond, Pike County
- 9B. Lake Warren, Bucks County
- 10B. Speedwell Forge Lake, Lancaster County
In less than an hour I took about 15 fish from an area no bigger than a pool table.

Mid-May to late May is also when you should be looking to the wider rivers for excellent redbreast fishing. There, again, fish the eddies and slower currents off the main channel. Probe, probe, probe until you find the honey hole.

Like his co-worker, John Soldo also knows how good mid-spring redbreast fishing can be in the Delaware. "If the shad aren't around, you can switch over to redbreasts and have a ball," he says.

John's fishing technique is quite simple. A small weighted spinner such as a Beetle Spin is his favorite lure choice. Down-and-across casts are the norm.

"Chartreuse is always pretty hot. Yellow, too. I never really had to experiment much with colors because they're pretty eager fish," he says.

Mid-summer to late summer

Surprisingly, bluegills can get downright difficult to catch during this period. After spawning, when water temperatures in our small lakes and farm ponds climb above 75 degrees and even the deeper lakes turn steamy, bluegills can get scarce. Under these conditions, they tend to disperse into the deeper holes making midday fishing quite dull. When this occurs, fish the mornings and evenings.

While your catch rate may suffer, this is the time to use those exciting surface poppers. Gills go ape for things colored black and yellow, white and black, yellow and green and gray and white. With my trusty S wt. fly rod I walk or wade around the banks of a small lake using first one color, then another, then another. Many times the 'gills rise to the fly like surfacing submarines, puckering their fat lips around the popper without getting hooked. If this happens to you, don't get frustrated; it's pretty typical of them. Besides, they keep coming back again and again and it's a blast.

With redbreast, I've probably come off the small streams, especially from mid-July to mid-August, and I'm working the larger rivers. At this time, I look for reds on the deeper edge of their favorite eddies and shoreline pockets. Pay particular attention to large rocks just off the current. You'll either catch a redbreast or a smallmouth.

If the water gets to around 80 degrees in the river, it may not be the best time to catch a mess of reds. However, I've accidentally found a few cool springs in these larger waters where a bunch of redbreast will congregate when the sauna is on. Shore fishing is spotty but vertically jiggling from a boat over these deep holes produces fish. Evening popper fishing in the shallows also attracts some reds, but since the fish are scattered you have to drift into a lot of pockets to catch a lot of fish.

Early fall to mid-fall

Boy, where do I start. To paraphrase the English bard. "Get thee to the waterway."

Both bluegills and redbreast are on the feed at this time and you can find them in their most feeding-suitable habitats - shallow water, small pockets, receding points for bluegills; eddies and moderating-paced pools for redbreast.

Bluegills will take poppers in mid-afternoon but they prefer nymphs, streamers, spinners and small crankbaits. Reds will take nymphs, spinners, jigs, and small spoons. For both species, I love to fish various ant patterns on or just under the surface at this time. Try both black and red ants.

One other note, you can motor your lures at a good clip while the water temperature is still in the low 70s. In fact, I probably put more retrieval speed on my offerings in early to mid-September than I do at any time of year. The panfish generally catch up.

Where to go

Area 4 Fisheries Manager, Dave Arnold says there are number of places in his northeast region where anglers can find good bluegill fishing. The section of the Delaware River around the Water Gap has some nice size 'gills and there are redbreast in the Easton to Portland area. Other than the river, however, that's about it for reds in his region. A list of some of the smaller lakes where bluegills can be found includes Long Pond, Miller Pond and Duck Harbor Pond, all north of Honesdale in Wayne County; Hidden Lake in Monroe County; Bruce Lake and Pecks Pond, both in Pike County and Lake Minsi in Northampton County.

In the southeast corner of the state, redbreast are the big attraction with most tributaries of the Delaware and Schuylkill rivers holding fishable populations - surprisingly, redbreast are not as well established in Susquehanna tributaries. Soldo recommends the East Branch of the Perkiomen, the Perkiomen Creek, Tohickon Creek, the Schuylkill River south of Reading, and the Manatawny Creek for redbreast.

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Flies

There are times when you might wonder what fly will not catch a bluegill or a redbreast - both fish can be that eager to bite. Nevertheless, a haphazard use of patterns and techniques may result in some poor fishing. My own selection is based on what has worked for me in the past, but I know there are other good patterns out there.

My favorite summertime bluegill fly in ponds and small lakes is a Simplified McGinty. The original McGinty was a wet fly tied for trout. Angling lore claims the fly was created in 1833 by a Chicago bartender named Leonard S. McGinty who mixed drinks and fly tying in his tavern. The classic McGinty was tied with a wing of mallard quill and a yellow and black striped body, which many have said resembles a bumble bee. I can't remember if I've ever seen a bluegill take a natural bee, but I know they relish the imitation.

I tie the Simplified McGinty with a tuft of red acrylic fibers for a tail, then wind alternate bands of yellow and black chenille along the body, usually two yellow and one center black band is enough. I collar the fly with an oversized yellow saddle hackle twice as wide as the hook gap. A size 8 nymph hook (Mustad 3906B) is perfect.

The water-absorbing chenille does not float but since I don't weight the fly its fall from the surface is slower than butter off a pancake. I add life to the pattern by retrieving it in short, six-inch strips followed by long pauses.

Early in the season when the water is still in the low 60s I prefer to go right to the bottom. A size 8 Gold Ribbed Hare’s Ear is one of my two best spring offerings while the other is a size 6 black Woolly Bugger with a dark purple tail and six strands of pearl Krystal Flash, three on each side of the tail. Also try a Green Weenie if the water is clear.

In the fall, I like a minnow fly, like the Heavy Metal Minnow or Chaz’s Pearl Jam in size 6 and 8. The Pearl Jam is made with pearl chenille, a white marabou tail and palmered white or dun hackle.

Use a small popper on warm summer evenings when the breeze is light. More than any other sunfish, bluegills will chase surface lures. They cruise around looking for surface disturbances, hoping to find a fallen insect or some other careless creature. When the water is clear and my fly is not too far away, I can see them rise slowly behind the popper than suck it down in a lip smacking smooch. They can be tough to hook when they act like this, but neat as heck to watch. Just before the sun sets, you’re going to have the time of your life with bluegills.

My favorite poppers are dark green, chartreuse and a light gray popper with a red face. A McGinty colored popper is also a real winner but I have to keep on reminding myself to make a few of them.

Like bluegills, my fly selection for redbreast is based on what has worked for me in the past but I’m sure that other anglers are successful with a whole different line-up of patterns.

My best nymph pattern is a variation of a weighted Bitch Creek Nymph. Perhaps it’s the rubber legs, but this size 6 chenille-body fly is tops at producing stream and river redbreast. The pattern is tied with two pairs of legs, a body of fluorescent orange chenille and a wing case of black chenille. Some anglers have expressed puzzlement about how to get the black chenille over the body and I tell them to simply think of binding the chenille as they would a wing case over any nymph. A couple of years ago I started making my Bitch Creek nymphs with a variegated chenille – a cord alternately dyed black and orange. The wing case is unnecessary with the twin-color material and the flies tied with the variegated chenille caught just as many reds as the flies which featured two, single-colored chenilles. Just don’t forget the white rubber legs.

In small streams during the spring, the same size 8 Gold-Ribbed Hare’s Ear that works on bluegills is dynamite on thin water redbreast.

Into the fall I prefer a deep-riding minnow fly, particularly the Heavy Metal Minnow.
Making and Using the Spiralator
by Chauncy K. Lively  photos by the author

I have had a lifelong addiction to gadgets. Over the years I've accumulated quite a few, some of which have found their way into my fly tying kit and still others serve to add weight to my angling apparel. Some years ago, at a program at a Pittsburgh Fly Fishers meeting, I was asked by my colleagues to empty my pregnant fly vest—item by item—and explain the purpose of each gadget. The program lasted a full hour.

Some of my gadgets are store-bought and others are homemade to accommodate a particular need. The Spiralator fits the latter classification.

In 1970 I developed a tool and a procedure with which I could wind a hackle on a length of 6X or 7X monofilament and tie it off without the use of thread. It was the result of a long quest to try to find a way to wind a dry fly hackle completely independent of the hook. Now I had the flexibility of several options. I could pre-dress a hackle and attach it (via the monofil) to the hook parachute-style, either above or below the hook's shank. And I could attach it either before or after the wings were in place, or I could divide the hackle fibers into two parts, bunch them and tie in the divided fibers as spent wings on spinner patterns.

I had a lot of fun with the new methodology and used it as an adjunct to more conventional styles of fly dressing. In 1975 we fished the Battenkill River in Vermont with Hoagy Carmichael and Sam Melner, then the owner of Fly Fisherman's Bookcase and Tackle Service. During an evening fly tying session Sam became interested in the new hackling method and subsequently engaged a manufacturing firm to produce a commercial version of the tool to be marketed by Fly Fisherman's Bookcase. For want of a better name, we named the tool the Spiralator because of the hand motion involved in its use.

In the late 1970s Sam Melner moved his firm from New York to Oregon and not long afterward, a computer breakdown effectively wiped out his business. That ended the short commercial life of the Spiralator. During those years a number of friends and correspondents asked me why I didn't write a piece about the new tool and its use. Actually, I had thought about it but abandoned the idea because of the possibility it might be perceived as commercialism. However, over 15 years have passed since the demise of the store-bought Spiralator and I believe I can now, without qualms, describe how to make and use a homemade version of the tool.

Please retain these pages for future reference. You'll need them next month when we dress an Isonychia Spinner with spiralated hackle wings.

Materials required for Spiralator:
Epoxy putty
Plastic soda straw
1/4-inch wood dowel
Size 7 sewing needle (or approximate size)
1/4-inch furniture tip (optional)

Constructing the Spiralator
First, we need to forge the eyed end of the needle into the shape of a question mark without a dot at the bottom. Keep a small container of water handy. Grip the needle with pliers and hold it over a flame until it is red-hot. Bending should be done in several small steps. If the needle is bent too sharply it will break. After each shallow bend, dip the needle in water. Then re-heat and bend a little more. I like to use a 3/8-inch steel rod as a form around which the needle may be bent in a uniform curve. When you have completed about a half-circle, make a 45-degree bend in the opposite direction to form a straight shaft about 1/2-inch long.

Of course, remember to take appropriate safety precautions with this project.

For a handle, cut the soda straw to a length of 3 inches and the dowel to 2 1/4 inches. Insert the dowel into the straw until the end of the dowel is flush with the end of the straw.

Mix the epoxy putty and fill the upper 3/4-inch of the straw not occupied by the dowel. Insert the pointed end of the needle's shaft into the epoxy and prop the handle in a vertical position. After the epoxy has hardened, slip the furniture tip onto the end of the handle. Your Spiralator is now ready for use.
Making and Using the Spiralator

1. The making of the tool.

2. Cut an 8-inch length of fine monofilament (7X for flies of size 16 or smaller; 6X for larger than 16) and tie a slip noose with the free ends rather long. Keep the noose open and clamp one of the free ends in the jaws of your vise. Tentatively, exert gentle downward pressure on the noose to determine if it slides down the clamped strand. If it doesn't, clamp the other free end instead. As shown, with the left hand insert the tool's hook through the noose. With the right hand insert the hackle stem in the opposite direction, over the curve of the hook.

3. Exert downward pressure with the Spiralator, closing the noose firmly on the hackle stem. Hold the hackle pliers stationary, with just enough tension on the hackle to avoid slack. Now, rotate the Spiralator counterclockwise, spinning the hackle around the monofil beneath the hackle stem. Guide each turn underneath the preceding turn. Don't overhackle. Generally, three or four full turns are ample.

4. After the last turn, allow the hackle tip to hang under the weight of the pliers on the far side of the hook, out of the way. Then thread the monofil's free end through the eye of the Spiralator hook.

5. Hold the pliers lightly. With the other hand, back the Spiralator hook out of the tightened noose and pull the end of the monofil through. This snubs the wound hackle and knots the monofil.

6. Trim off the unused hackle tip and stem. Then remove the monofil from the vise. Grip the strand between the fingertips and press against the hackle's dull side to flatten any barbs out of plane.
This is the story of two cats from out east. One is a native, the other moved there at a very young age. Both wear slick suits and stylish whiskers. They are welcome guests at fancy dining tables, but both are scrappers. They usually hang out at the bottom of society, and do most of their prowling at night. If you're looking for a good time, these are the cats to catch.

You can catch these cats—the native white catfish and the exotic channel catfish—at several rivers and lakes in eastern Pennsylvania. Neither gets the fanfare of more glamorous gamefish. Yet, they provide a lot of quality relaxation and recreation, plus some excellent meals.

White catfish are the native catfish of eastern Pennsylvania. Their native range, to which they are still limited, is the Delaware River and lower Susquehanna River drainages. Stocking has spread them to some manmade lakes within this range with limited success.

"White cats tend to be intermediate in their habitat preferences between channel cats and bullheads," says Robert Lorantas, Commission Warmwater Unit Leader.

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In rivers, white catfish tend to occupy rocky bottom areas out of the main current. In the Susquehanna, look for them along the bedrock ledges. Finding them in lakes is generally more of a random hit or miss process.

White cats tolerate more salinity than channel cats. They can be caught in the tidal portion of the Delaware River, and they might be more active in cooler water.

White cats eat a variety of foods, similar to many of their kin. “I do know that they consume some small quantities of vegetation,” says Lorantas. “But invertebrates and fishes comprise the bulk of their diet.”

Maximum size for white cats in Pennsylvania is about 23 inches. A 22 1/2-inch, 7 1/2-pound white catfish was collected by Commission biologists from Lake Ontelaunee. They mature at 7 to 8 inches in their third or fourth year. The average size caught by anglers is less than 13 inches.

White cats are not as popular with anglers as are channel cats anywhere both occur, which includes most of the waters where white cats occur. Many anglers do not even know what they are. In parts of the Schuylkill River near Pottstown and Phoenixville, they are called blue cats, though the nearest blue catfish are in the Ohio River. Often they are confused with bullheads.

The native channel catfish range in Pennsylvania is the Ohio River and Lake Erie drainages. However, now they have been introduced to most of the state with sometimes exceptional results. In fact, the channel cat is more common than the white cat in most of the white cat’s native waters.

“White catfish are kind of a rarer species,” says Lorantas. “Why they tend to predominate in some reservoirs and not in other parts of their drainage is something that has puzzled us, and we are still surveying. I don’t know that we’ve put our finger on what would cause the channel catfish to dominate.”

At least one explanation is that the habitat has changed in the lower Susquehanna River, where several power dams have created lake-like environments. However, white cats also inhabit lakes, and this does not explain the success of channel cats in other waters.

Few anglers regret the channel cats introduction to our eastern counties. They are the targets of nearly all catfish anglers, with white cats incidental catches.

“I don’t know of anyone who would say white cats are a targeted species,” says Kaufmann. “Although, I’m sure there must be some people who do go specifically for them.”

In addition to being generally more abundant, channel cats get appreciably larger than white cats. The average size caught by anglers varies considerably from place to place, and from year to year, at least partially because of stocking. You may get into channel cats that average 1 1/2 pounds in one part of the Susquehanna River, and then the next night a mile downriver you might catch nothing smaller than 6 pounds. Ten-pound channel catfish are quite common.

Our state record channel cat is 35 pounds, 2.5 ounces. That might be exceeded considerably because the North American record, according to the National Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame, is 58 pounds. Several line class records are reasonable goals for eastern Pennsylvania anglers.

Channel cats eat just about anything they can catch, it appears, and some vegetation. The strangest things Kaufmann has found in their stomachs were a rat, a cardinal and a chunk of styrofoam.

Like other catfish, channel cats might be just about anywhere in lakes. In rivers they seem to prefer the main river channel, often at the bases of riffles and rapids. The tailwaters of dams are usually channel cat hotspots.

### Hotspots

Kaufmann, who cheerfully admits to being a catfish enthusiast, suggests several eastern Pennsylvania rivers and lakes for better than average catfishing.

Among the better white catfish waters are Lake Ontelaunee, Green Lane Reservoir, and Chester-Octoraro Reservoir. Watch out for Lake Luxembourg, too. Recent stocking appears to have been quite successful. White cats are common in the Susquehanna and Delaware rivers, but only in the upper Delaware is the white cat more common than the channel cat. They are in many other lakes, rivers and creeks, but generally they are overshadowed by channel catfish.

Some of the finest channel catfishing in the northeastern states is in the Susquehanna River, particularly in the power company lakes. You can expect to see lanterns along the shoreline on summer evenings. Even though the white cat is the native here, and the channel cat the intruder, channel cats are much more abundant.

“At the fish lift at Conowingo Dam,” says Kaufmann, “only one out of every six catfish is a white cat, about 18 percent.”

Channel catfishing is very good in the Delaware River from above the tidal water up to at least to the Delaware Water Gap. The Schuylkill River is good, as are Chester-Octoraro Lake, Blue Marsh Lake, Lake Nockamixon, Green Lane Reservoir, Lake Galena, Lake Luxembourg and Lake Redman. Struble Lake, in Chester County, might be an up-and-coming channel cat fishery based on a biological survey done two years ago.

The biggest channel cats in eastern Pennsylvania, some in excess of 12 pounds, are most often caught in the rivers, Lake Nockamixon, Blue Marsh Lake and Lake Galena. However, big channel cats sometimes show up in surprising places.

**Shrimp makes a great catfish bait. Other proven baits include chicken livers, live minnows, cut bait, night-crawlers, crayfish and commercial “stink” baits. Cut bait is pieces of fish. They don’t provide the vibration that live minnows produce, but cut bait puts a lot of “smell” in the water, which attracts catfish.**
Fishing tactics

One of the nice things about catfishing is that you do not need a lot of specialized or expensive fishing tackle. Any fishing outfit you currently have should be adequate. The only critical requirements on tackle occur when you tangle with a big channel catfish. A channel cat that weighs 20 pounds, maybe even twice that much, is a load. Forget any nonsense about other, more glamorous gamefish fighting harder. It simply is not true. Channel cats fight with the best of them. They do not go airborne, but they make strong runs, and their bottom-hugging tactics quickly abrade line.

A basic terminal rig for catfish consists of a hook, a sliding sinker and a swivel. Tie the hook to the end of the line, then cut the line about two feet above the hook. Next, slide the sinker onto the main line, and then tie a swivel to the end of the line. Finally, tie the leader with the hook at the end onto the swivel.

This sliding sinker rig lets the catfish move the bait without dragging the sinker. Catfish are not terribly fussy about such things, but dragging the sinker is liable to get it snagged on the bottom. Then the catfish will drop the bait, and you might be out a terminal rig and a nice fish.

Anchoring the bait on the bottom in a stiff current is the primary objective of the sliding sinker rig. You might also need a heavier weight for making long casts. Carry an assortment of sliding sinkers from 1/4-ounce for milder current, to 2 ounces for stronger current and deeper water.

White cats and smaller channel cats often feed aggressively in the tails of riffles. A simple hook and splitshot rig may be best in this situation. Use an appropriate bait hook at the end of the line, and pinch a splitshot on the line about 18 inches above the hook.

This rig should drift along the bottom. Instead of carrying several different sizes of splitshot, just carry a couple of shot sizes, and add or remove shot to get the drift you want. You should feel the shot dragging along the bottom. If the shot hangs, just lift the rod tip to free it, and to resume the drift.

A popular rig below the power dams on the Susquehanna River consists of a 2-ounce sinker at the end of the line, and two hooks on leaders attached to the main line. This setup, a high-low rig, can be constructed in several ways. Try this one. Tie a swivel at the end of the main line. Tie another swivel into the line about two feet above the end swivel. Tie two bait hooks onto 12-inch leaders, and tie one
of these leaders to the lower end of each swivel. Finally, tie the sinker to the end of a light leader, something that will break easily before the main line. Then tie the other end of that leader to the end swivel.

Two things are accomplished with this version of the drop sinker rig. The swivels reduce line twist. Otherwise, catfish can twist your line into a mess. Also, the light sinker leader will break before the main line, so if you get hopelessly snagged you lose only the sinker. This saves both time and expense. Losing two hooks, two swivels and a sinker with each snag can get into an uncomfortable amount of money in snag-infested tailwaters.

Most of the time, catfishing means still-fishing, particularly when big channel cats are the target. You want to give catfish a chance to find your bait by odor, or by the vibrations live minnows create. But still-fishing does not mean throwing out the bait and forgetting about it until a catfish finds it. Give the catfish time, but not an eternity. After 20 minutes or so without action, move the bait.

Most serious catfish anglers have their favorite baits. The list may be endless. Some proven baits are chicken livers, live minnows, shrimp, cut bait, nightcrawlers, crayfish and commercial “stink” baits.

Cut bait is pieces of fish. This offering doesn’t emit vibrations like live minnows, but it does send out more odor.

As a final thought, the best catfishing is usually at night. What better way to spend a summer night than reclining on a boat seat or lawn chair along a cool river or lake, in the balmy dark air! Catfishing is one of the more relaxing kinds of fishing. Isn’t that exactly what you need after a hot, sweaty day of work?

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Recent History of Catfish Stocking in Eastern PA

Catfish stocking in eastern Pennsylvania has been a very productive venture. The only native catfish large enough to be of interest to anglers are the white catfish, brown bullhead and yellow bullhead. These species are fine panfish, but the channel catfish, which has been introduced through stocking, is a gamefish in every sense. Channel cats are now more abundant than the native white cats.

Both channel cats and white cats are typically stocked every other year in any given waterway. This is done at the request of the various area fisheries managers, according to Lorantas. Usually the goal of stocking catfish is to establish a self-sustaining population, but most lakes must be stocked periodically to maintain a fishery. Channel cats have not demonstrated much natural reproduction in Pennsylvania lakes.

“In many instances, particularly in lakes, stocking is a put, grow and take scenario,” Lorantas says.

The Commission began large-scale channel cat stocking in 1960, though some were probably stocked before that. Here is a list of eastern Pennsylvania lakes where channel catfish were stocked last year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Waterway</th>
<th>County</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conewago Lake</td>
<td>York County</td>
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<tr>
<td>F.D.R. Park Lake</td>
<td>Philadelphia County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanover Dam</td>
<td>York County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaser Lake</td>
<td>Lehigh County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Struble Lake</td>
<td>Chester County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Towhee Lake</td>
<td>Bucks County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuscarora Lake</td>
<td>Schuylkill County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mauch Chunk Lake</td>
<td>Carbon County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miller Pond</td>
<td>Wayne County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neshaminy Creek</td>
<td>Bucks County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nockamixon Lake</td>
<td>Bucks County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pine Run Reservoir</td>
<td>Bucks County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promised Land Lake</td>
<td>Pike County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompton Reservoir</td>
<td>Wayne County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speedwell Forge Lake</td>
<td>Lancaster County</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

White Catfish/Channel Catfish Identification

Many of the largest white catfish caught by anglers are mistakenly identified as channel catfish. The two species are similar in appearance. Both vary considerably in color. Both can be distinguished from bullheads by their forked tails. Though channel cat tails are generally more deeply forked than those of white cats, they become more rounded as they mature.

The easiest form of identification between the white and channel cats is the number of anal fin rays. White cats have 22 to 25 anal fin rays. Channel cats have 23 to 29, but usually more than 26 anal fin rays.—MB.

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White Catfish

Channel Catfish
Around the Island

Just about in the dead center of the southern Erie County glacial pothole called Lake LeBoeuf, there is an island of sorts. Its sparse crown of willows and drying snags is often inundated to ankle level by the freshets from LeBoeuf’s three strong inlets, and dry ground is a sparse commodity there in any season. Still, we called it “the island.”

Off the edges of the island were the places that held the fish. A major sandbar extended off the island’s west side, and it hosted a weed bed rich in minnows and other aquatic life. From the southernmost point of the island, a single finger of a weedline extended out to touch and intertwine with a like protrusion extending from the lake’s southwest shoreline. The dense weeds drew the minnows, which drew the panfish, which drew the bass and muskies.

It was here, in these places around the island, that we most often saw him. He was a fixture on the little lake—well past retirement age, a solitary figure in a weathered cap and light windbreaker. Two rods extended from the rear of the boat and the outboard coughed the staccato rhythm of trolling speed. Round and round the weedbeds and the island he would go, winding through the channels of open water, searching for big fish.

Every once in a while he would pause in his travels and stop and talk for a moment. We would show him the good stringer of crappies the morning had brought, and he would smile and nod. But the crappies weren’t his thing. When asked how he was doing, as often as not he would shrug and say that he had “something” on at first light this morning. It had seized his Creek Chub or oversized Rapala, been there for a second, and then was gone. Big fish. Likely a muskie. That was what brought him out on the lake every day just as the new light was beginning to touch the water, and that was what made him troll the endless loops around the island and along the adjoining shoreline.

More often than not, though, he would just wave as he passed. A single hand flashing in greeting while the other grasped the handle of the outboard to steer the boat along the weedline. And then he would be gone.

His name was Fred Koehler and we thought of him as the wisest of the wise in the ways of Lake LeBoeuf. He had retired and moved from Pittsburgh up to Waterford to be with the lake always. We venerated him, and always watched for him when we were anchored off the island filling the bucket with crappies. We wanted to know what he knew, because we knew he knew it all.

One bright Saturday morning in June, Fred paused from his trolling to talk for a moment. I was maybe 12 or 13 years old at the time. With the brashness of youth, I asked him what was the best way to catch the walleyes that lived in the little lake. He explained about a technique involving a big bobber with a 5- or 6-inch chub hooked lightly through the lips suspended below. He told us where to fish—it just off the island on the south side along the edge of the weeds. He told us this was where the walleyes were early in the morning, but not to be surprised if we came up with a big bass or even a musky in the bargain. They were there at that time, too. We nodded and thanked him. He moved on.

I spent most of the next week peddling papers, chasing lawn mowers and yanking weeds out of the garden, all the while thinking about big bobbers, first light and the weedbed.

Saturday morning finally arrived, and while there was a growing glow around the treetops to the east, it was still dark when we approached the weed bed. The chubs had been collected the evening before. I slipped the big bobber to the line just about at the depth that Fred had suggested. Then I reached into the bucket and grabbed one of the wriggling chubs and baited up. In the half-light, I cast the whole thing as close to the edge of the weeds as I could, just as Fred had said to do. My Dad and brother followed suit. The daylight grew stronger. The morning mist rode low on the water. We sat back and waited.

I had the only take of the morning. The bobber jiggled and then darted to and fro frantically. Then it began to move, cutting an inexorable “V” across the flat surface of the lake. “Let him run with it,” my Dad said. I did the best I could. I was only 13, after all.

Just as I thought I was going to pop from anticipation, my Dad said, “Hit him!” I hauled back on the rod with both hands and dug my feet into the bottom of the boat. The rod arced and the line began to melt from my reel. The bobber disappeared. We couldn’t see it, but we could see the mighty wake it was leaving as it was towed toward the weeds by whatever was on the other end.

In a few seconds it was over. The line went limp, and the bobber popped through the surface and just sat there. Gone... We spent the rest of the morning filling the bucket with crappies.

Later, we saw Fred. But he didn’t stop. Just a wave and the passing rumble of the motor. I wish he would have hauled up and talked just for a moment. I would like to have had the chance to thank him for the advice and tell him that crappies were OK, but that I was after big fish now. Just like him.

August 1996 Pennsylvania Angler
Patch complaint
I recently went to purchase my 1996 Trout Stamp and at that time was given a summary of the 1996 fishing regulations and laws. Having read the summary I immediately became interested in the first Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission Patch. I promptly called your office and was informed that only 5,000 were made and that they were all sold. I was greatly disappointed, as were many other fishermen and boaters who wanted this patch.

We know of a scalper who was selling them for $35.00 at the Hamburg Sport Show.

Angry, I had prepared a letter to send to you, but then first decided to call Commissioner Lacy. I was boisterous, but he was very polite. He explained that the Commission had nothing to do with this scam. I apologized.

The way this was offered made many of us feel misinformed.

Will you please help clean up the cynicism and hostility that is out there by writing an article in the next issue of your magazine? Explain this matter, informing all that the Commission is not involved.

By the way, my grandson is looking for me to sew a patch on his jacket.—John D. Whitmyer, West Lawn, PA.

Thank you for your letter regarding the availability of the Harvey's Creek Patch. I would like to apologize for any misunderstanding about these patches. Commissioner Lacy's response to you was accurate, and after considering your suggestion, I have asked the Director of the Bureau of Boating and Education to prepare a short article in Pennsylvania Angler to explain that these patches were sold by the contractor for the Trout/Salmon Stamps and not by the Fish and Boat Commission.

Enclosed you will find a 1996 Pennsylvania League of Angling Youth (PLAY) patch that you will be able to sew on your grandson's jacket. I know this doesn't replace the patch you were unable to obtain, but I am sure it will be appreciated by your grandson.

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission is committed to serving the anglers and boaters of this Commonwealth, and we appreciate receiving comments and suggestions from dedicated conservationists like you.—Peter A. Colangelo, Executive Director.

From the patch publisher:
The PA Fish & Boat Commission's 1996 Patch was produced and distributed in conjunction with the 1996 PA Trout/Salmon Stamp Print Program by the official publisher, Wilderness Editions.

The prints and patches were sold through direct mail and advertising. The ads and press releases were in PA magazines and newspapers, beginning in October 1995. Brochures describing the prints and patches were sent to art galleries and limited-edition art collectors.

The amount of patches (5,000 available) was determined by Wilderness Editions after researching the amount of patches produced and sold in previous years. The quantities were made public through sales information and press releases, making a second run impossible. The response to the program was overwhelming and the patches sold out quickly.

Wilderness Editions is reviewing ideas for the series to make future patches available to more collectors.

The PA Stream Series, featured on the PA Trout/Salmon Stamp, will highlight Mercer County's Neshannock Creek in 1997. The winning painting will be produced as a limited-edition print and patch, available in October 1996. For more information contact: Wilderness Editions at 814-632-7645.

Pontoon boat suggestion
With the increasing popularity of pontoon boats, I believe there is a need to evaluate the safety of operating these boats with a 10-horsepower engine. Pontoon boats in the 21- to 28-foot range can weigh 1,000 pounds, and because they make good fishing boats, we will see more of them on lakes in years to come.

Because of the greater weight of these boats, a 10-horsepower engine does not have sufficient power to control the boat safely in close quarters such as docking and retrieving operations—especially when wind or current is a factor. The 10-horsepower rule serves a good purpose and should be maintained, but with the increasing popularity of the heavier pontoon boats, perhaps the Commission should look into the possibility of assigning horsepower by weight. This limit could be high enough to allow safe operation, but low enough to make speeding unlikely.—Thomas C. Llewellyn, Pittsburgh, PA.

I understand your point concerning larger craft on limited horsepower impoundments. Unfortunately, there is no way to be totally fair in regulating these waters. Specific regulations pertaining to each impoundment are the only equitable method because each waterway has its own characteristics. The intent of limited horsepower is to reduce the speed, and on some waters, the size of boats. Larger pontoon boats and large runabouts are not very maneuverable with small outboards.

I am the boating accident review officer for Pennsylvania, and to date I have not received any reports of accidents caused by insufficiently powered pontoon boats. It is difficult to comment on a specific area without knowing the impoundment to which you are referring, but horsepower regulations are usually based on the specific characteristics of the resource.—Daniel G. Martin, Boating Safety Program.

Pine Creek proposal
I am writing in regard to the enclosed article, printed in the Williamsport Sun-Gazette, suggesting a Delayed-Harvest Area on Pine Creek near Slate Run. My beliefs lead me to be completely opposed to this proposal.

First of all, Pine Creek's summer water temperatures are not conducive to good conditions to sustain a viable trout population except at the mouth of feeder streams. Thus, the June 15 opening date does not indicate an area suitable for angling.
Secondly, this area has plenty of restricted areas including Slate run, Cedar Run and a section of Little Pine Creek. This Delayed-Harvest Area would only benefit the fly fishermen who currently may fish anywhere on Commonwealth waters. This proposal is designed to prevent bait fishermen, who buy the bulk of fishing licenses, from utilizing another section of a popular stream.

Thirdly, at a time when the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission is attempting to encourage young anglers to participate, this idea will not benefit young or new fishermen. Many of the visitors to the Pine Creek area are family groups looking to fish in a convenient location. The creation of this area would deter many persons from using Pine Creek, thus resulting in fewer license sales.

I believe most anglers are not looking for more restricted areas. Fly fishermen have no restrictions placed on them. Please do not permit another injustice to be served on the anglers of Pennsylvania.—Jeff Raitsch

The reach of Pine Creek near Slate Run does not meet the current Commission policy criteria for a Delayed-Harvest Area. Pine Creek in this area is about twice as wide and also too warm (although cool-water refuge is provided by tributaries) to qualify. In addition, guidelines stipulate that there should not be other special regulation areas like those on Slate Run, Cedar Run, and Little Pine Creek in the immediate area.

The purpose of Delayed-Harvest is to provide year-round angling opportunities with high catch rates to the broadest cross section of anglers while promoting catch and release and recycling of stocked trout. All recent Delayed-Harvest areas in northcentral PA have been established as artificial lures and flies to allow both fly and spin angling (bait is excluded because of its higher hooking mortality). Over the years, anglers have told us the key factors attracting them to use Delayed-Harvest areas were the year-round fishing opportunity and higher than normal catch rates because of recycling of trout under catch and release for much of the season.

With Delayed-Harvest areas available, young or new enthusiastic anglers who often acquire fishing equipment at Christmas or in the first warm weather of early spring can fish Delayed-Harvest areas because they are open year-round when other stocked trout waters may be closed. Also, Delayed-Harvest areas usually provide a higher catch rate because up to June 15 all trout must be released to be caught again. Thus, Delayed-Harvest areas are less restrictive and allow broad participation by young, old, experienced and novice anglers.

Thank you for your comments and interest in this program. If you have any other comments, do not hesitate to contact my office.—Bruce Hollender, Area 3 Fisheries Manager.

An acrylic painting depicting Neshannock Creek, Mercer County, has been named the winner of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission’s annual Trout/Salmon Stamp & Print Art Competition. The image, painted by Christopher Leeper of Youngstown, Ohio, will appear on the 1997 Trout/Salmon Stamp. Shown with the winning artwork are judges (left to right) Al Mayhew, retired Bureau of Administrative Services Director; Del Graff, Bureau of Fisheries Director; Commissioner Enoch S. “Inky” Moore, Jr.; Commission Deputy Executive Director/Chief Counsel Dennis Guise; Trout Stamp Publisher George Lavanish, of Wilderness Editions; and Graphic Services Section Chief Ted Walke.

The winning picture was judged best by a six-member panel from a record 135 entries. Some 107 artists competed in the contest, also a record high. For his work, Leeper will receive a $3,000 prize as well as royalties for signed prints, stamps and mini-prints.

Luther Hall of Mystic, Connecticut took second-place honors for his painting of Loyalsock Creek. Bob Anderson’s (Volant, PA) rendition of Neshannock Creek came in third.

The 1996 stamp features Harvey’s Creek in Luzerne County. The first series of stamps, those issued in 1991 through 1995, displayed various species of trout found in Pennsylvania.

Leeper’s piece, in addition to appearing on the stamp, will be available as a limited edition art print and as a collector’s patch. Both the patches and the prints are available only through the Commission’s endorsed publisher: Wilderness Editions, RD 1, Box 73, War-riors Mark, PA 16877, or call (814) 632-7645.

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**LIFE JACKETS.**

*They* Float. *You Don’t.*
One Teen Replaces Another in Record Books

Tom Illar, Jr., of Apollo, was trolling a Northern King spoon on May 19 when a monster fish took off with the lure. When the battle was finally done, Illar was holding the biggest trout he’d ever caught. According to the Commission, the fish was actually the biggest lake trout anyone has ever taken in Commonwealth waters. Illar’s lake trout, 27 pounds, 13.9 ounces, broke the former record of 27 pounds, 10 ounces, set last year by another Erie lake trout. Ironically, that mark was established by another teen—Timothy Strobel of New Stanton, who was only 14 at the time of his catch.

“There are really two things noteworthy about this turn of events,” said Commission Executive Director Peter A. Colangelo. “First, we’ve had two lake trout records in as many years. That’s encouraging for anyone who fishes Lake Erie. Even more important is that these catches were made by youngsters. Youth participation and success is exciting news for all anglers and for the future of fishing itself.”

Angler’s Notebook by Seth Cassell

Many anglers use some sort of sunscreen while fishing in the summer sun. Although this is a good idea, make sure you rid your hands of it before you handle lures. The smell of the lotion on them may dissuade fish from striking. Apply sunscreen and insect repellent from the back of your palms so that you don’t spread these items from your fingers onto tackle, line and lures.

When fishing for river bass during August, when water levels are usually low, use smaller, less aggressive lures. Also, use lower pound-test line than normal. Concentrate your fishing during periods of low light intensity. These adjustments in tackle and tactics will increase your summertime success.

If you enjoy eating panfish, here’s a good way to preserve them if you do not wish to prepare them the day of the catch. Get a gallon-size zip lock bag or a small plastic container. Put the fish in it, and then fill with water. Place in the freezer. When you are ready to prepare and eat the fish, simply thaw out the ice block. By doing this, you eliminate freezer burn.

Muskellunge are such temperamental fish that it can be difficult to find one that is willing to take your lure or bait. Anglers should try to cover as many areas as possible. In impoundments, troll in known musky haunts. In rivers and creeks, drifting with a canoe or john boat is often the best method. Use big baits. Muskies don’t think twice about taking a 6-inch sucker.

“Trout” are actually not native to Pennsylvania. Rainbow trout were introduced from the West Coast, and brown trout were introduced from Germany. Contrary to common belief, brook trout are not true “trout.” They are actually char, which are characterized by a dark body with light spots. “Trout,” on the other hand, are identified as having light bodies with dark spots.

By now, most hatches on Pennsylvania trout streams have subsided. But flyfishermen can still have plenty of surface action using terrestrials, land insects that accidentally end up on the water’s surface. Imitations of crickets, grass hoppers, red and black ants, inch worms, and even bumblebees all produce wonders on summer trout streams.
Richard Snyder, Chief of the Commission’s Division of Fisheries Management, and the Commission’s Area Fisheries Managers suggest the following waterways for going after our state’s biggest channel catfish.

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