



March 2010

The Conservationist

Potomac-Patuxent Chapter

Potomac Shad Fishing: The Rite of Spring

March 17, 2010

In Mark Binsted's own words - "For most of my life I have been fascinated by American shad. I grew up just minutes from the Potomac River near Fletcher's Cove and discovered the "poor man's salmon" as a teenager. Back then I spent much of my spring weekends on the water, learning from the great shad fishermen of the day and discovering plenty of the river's secrets on my own. These days I can see Fletcher's Cove from my house and still succumb to the run every year. For me it truly is a "rite of spring" more than any other custom in Washington. Sure, go see the cherry blossoms or fire up the barbecue, but wouldn't you rather be fishing for shad on the Potomac?"

Mark will cover fly fishing for both hickory and American shad on the tidal portion of the Potomac Gorge. This is a spectacular setting and fishery right in our (and his) backyard, and is arguably America's premier urban angling experience. Mark worked through his high school and college years at Fletchers Boat House and therefore has seen and experienced it all. He even writes the Shad Report for the National Capital Chapter – TU and is on their board. However he is going to share an infinite amount of information on the river, its shad, the flies, the times, the techniques, choosing the day, and 75% of the places - the product of which should yield an unforgettable fly fishing experience

Although in his other life Mark is a Master Architect with his own business, has three sons, and lives in the palisades, to me it sounds like Mr. Shad and the Potomac are the light of his fishing life. He promises to imprint at least 2 things on you:

1. Get your fly deep if you want to take on large roe American shad, and
2. Don't give up on the run when the hickories leave.

by Nick Weber

IN THIS ISSUE:

President's Column	Page 2	Early Segments	Page 3
Tackle & Tactic Tips	Page 4	Patuxent Report	Page 5

Monthly Chapter Meetings

Time and Day 7:00 PM, Third Wednesday except December, June, July, and August

Place Margaret Schweinhaut Senior Center, 1000 Forest Glen Road, Silver Spring, Maryland

Directions From Capitol Beltway: North on Georgia Avenue (Rte. 97). First right onto Forest Glen Road, then go past Holy Cross Hospital and across Sligo Creek Parkway. The Center is on the right.

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President's Column

Fundraising Events

With 30 plus inches of snow on the ground and another 10-20 howling down on us, as I write I can say this reminds me of home in Western New York State. Not only is it the winter season, but it's also the season for fundraising. We have just finished our Annual Fundraiser Meeting and Raffle. I send congratulations to all of our supporters and all the winners. I also wish to also thank those who contributed the time and effort during our fundraising activities and special thanks to Bruce Eberle for his yeoman's efforts on our behalf.

There are two additional important other fundraising events coming rapidly upon us. The first is the National Capitol Chapter of Trout Unlimited Angling Show. This event is the only fly fishing show in Maryland at this time. It will be held Saturday March 13, 2010 at the Georgetown Preparatory School in North Bethesda. Help support NCCTU and visit the show. While there, stop by our booth and say hello..

The other event is the Mid Atlantic Council (MAC) Conservation Banquet, being held at the BWI Marriott. This event will be on March 27, 2010. "Who is the Mid Atlantic Council?" you may be asking yourself. If you are a member of Trout Unlimited in Maryland you are a member of the MAC. Each chapter of TU is represented at the MAC meetings by delegates and Chapter Presidents. Some of the activities and/or accomplishments of the MAC include support of conservation of our streams and rivers such as the Gunpowder, lower Savage River, and Beaver Creek. MAC officials have persuaded Maryland lawmakers to adopt regulations to protect trout from habitat destruction and losses of their habitat; to increase the number of special trout streams; to adopt sound trout management policies; and to establish in-stream construction requirements to protect spawning trout and their eggs in trout streams. Many of the MAC's council-wide accomplishments are occurring on the chapter level as well .

At the Banquet Governor O'Malley will be honored with an award from the MAC for his efforts in protecting the Chesapeake Bay and Maryland's river's and streams.

Also with great pride a member of our chapter, Dave Wittman, will also be honored with the MAC's Citizen Award. This award is being given posthumously to Dave's family.

Tickets for the banquet are \$75.00 per seat which includes a general raffle for the door prize. Come support Trout Unlimited. Tickets for this event will be available at the Chapter Meetings and from me.

Larry Vawter

Early Meeting Segments begin at 7 pm

Tying Bench

This month will find yours truly at the Tying Bench tying a few shad flies – what else? I have checked with Mark Binsted, our program speaker, and have zeroed in on some patterns that he says are winners. Most are weighted with cone heads or dumbbell lead eyes to get them down deep where the big Americans are. I will tie some red and white, chartreuse, and hot pink to have a selection. Then hope I can get the master to show me how to use them. Stop by the “Bench” and check out what should be an easy tie and an opportunity to get a head start on one of our area’s great spring sports – SHAD FISHING! I will try and have some tying packets available in case you may want to tie some yourself.

Angler’s Corner

Come by the Anglers Corner and check with Dennis Covert on the planned outing for the one fly contest scheduled for Beaver Creek on 3/20. You can also hear the tales in person from the recent outing to Big Hunting Creek. You can also check on the details for the April 18-21 outing to Pulaski, NY and the spring run steelhead trip to the Salmon River. Dennis Covert, our Outings Chair, and undoubtedly some of his cohorts will be telling all about what to consider in the way of patterns and gear. It should not take much convincing why you really should consider these fishing experiences with some of our fellow fishers. Have an idea for an outing, share it with Dennis.

Have an idea for an article, or something you'd like to share with other chapter members? Material is welcome (and cheerfully accepted). The deadline is the 12th of the month for the next month's issue.

Please send articles, ideas, etc, preferably in MS Word or in the body of the e-mail to earthmomjo@att.net.

*Thanks
Joanne Kla, Editor*

PPTU MENTOR PROGRAM BEGINNERS & BEYOND

Ken Bowyer and Tim Pawlowitz provide one-on-one streamside fly fishing instruction to PPTU members. Participants must show commitment by having waders or hipsters, a rod and reel outfit, and leader. Discussions will include equipment, knots, casting, flies, dry fly and nymphing techniques, entomology, reading water, conservation, etc. at nearby streams. Instruction will be tailored to individual needs.

Members who have not made an Annual Supporting Contribution will be asked to contribute \$20.

Contact:

Ken 301-627-7154

or e-mail kenbowyer@verizon.net.

Tim at 410-203-0369

or e-mail tpawlowi@msn.com.

Address changes? Moved?

Please keep us up to date on your addresses. We have saved a lot of money in recent years by using email to alert members that their Annual Supporting Contribution is expiring or some other important information. We frequently have the Post Office returning undeliverable copies of the Conservationist from members who have moved without letting us know. Send an email to Jay Sheppard (jmsheppar@aol.com) with any changes.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Existing members should renew their TU membership using any of the following methods:

Mail your Renewal Statement to TU National Call Customer Service at 1-800-834-2419

Navigate to www.tu.org. Click **Join/Renew** tab at top, then click on the “Renew Membership” link on the left. You will need your login name and password.

Tackle and Tactic Tips

Jay Sheppard

This may be a tough spring for trout fishers. The local streams are running at near record base flows for this time of the year (early March) from all our snow and rains of the past few months. The waters are at least off color and moving faster than normal. Trout will be more likely found in the deeper pools until the flows slacken and the waters warm substantially past the high 40s. This is especially true on streams with large numbers of fishers and large predators, such as herons and ospreys.

One of the areas in which I see a lot of trout fishers creating problems for themselves is their “streamside manner.” Just as doctors need training in how to deal with patients, fishers need to be aware of how they are perceived (or NOT perceived) by their quarry. Trout assume any larger animal is a predator looking for them and react accordingly. When the rivers are running fast and deep, the trout feel protected from fishers until they are very close. In shallow water with slow current, the trout will spook at just about the average maximum casting distance. Ever wonder why?

I see many fishers who simply do not take the time and effort to approach potential or actual trout holding positions. They walk briskly across the cobble stone to the bank and expect the trout to sit tight just a few yards away. Other fishers literally splash into the stream and start walking up it like it was a stroll on a street in any city. We must take care in our approaches.

First, sound travels very well through rock and water. The trout become attuned to those sounds most fishers make and avoid feeding when they suspect a fisher may be nearby. Take slow and careful steps as you approach a stream bank that may have trout feeding nearby. Stay low, since any visual miscue is going to ensure a trout will flee. Trout can see lateral movement extremely well. That is, movement at right angles to their line of sight to the object. If you have to move closer to a trout, try the direct approach. Then the only dimension that is easily detected by the fish is your changing height as you get closer. Therefore, try to become lower and lower as you slowly get closer and closer.

You also want to avoid facing the sun and the trout at the same time. A well lit moving human is far easier to see by a fish when the sun is behind it. At the same time avoid casting your shadow over holding trout. When at all possible approach a trout from the rear, avoid head-on approaches. Try to keep the number of false casts to a very minimum; rod, arm and body movement may be detected by the waiting trout.



When wading fishers send a series of ripples across the pool, a lot of trout stop feeding. To avoid this I employ a “heron stalking” mode when moving on a stream. I am almost constantly but slowly shuffling my feet several inches forward at all times. I avoid large, quick steps; I may move only 3 feet in twice as many minutes. If I send any ripples out across the stream they are constant but at a very low intensity; most do not travel more than 15–20 feet on a glass smooth surface. I also try to avoid the shallowest water to walk through, as the energy from each movement of the foot is amplified—just like talking into a megaphone.

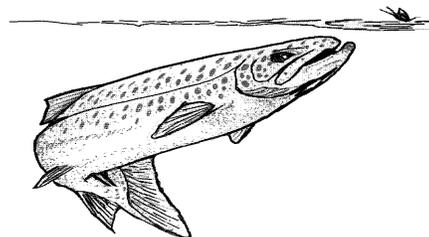
So in our streams, move slowly like a heron and avoid making sudden movements. Keep your rod and body as low as possible when near a trout. Minimize the sound you make while walking in a stream or along its bank. To paraphrase a famous President: Walk softly and carry a long rod.

Patuxent Report

Jay Sheppard

As we go to press the State fisheries folks have not fully completed their planning for stockings this spring on our local waters. Further, with the massive snows of February we are not even sure when the stream will be safe enough to float stock. We will post the information as we learn it on the PPCTU list serve (visit our web site to learn how to get onto this service).

We do expect to stock slightly fewer trout in the upper Patuxent River above Rt. 97 than in recent years and stock more fish in the river below Brighton Dam (Flies Only section). The reduction will take place by not float stocking part of the more remote sections of the upper Patuxent River. The upper No-Kill area has become increasingly filled with large quantities of gravel. What were long, large and very deep pools of 20 years ago are now mostly shallow runs over gravel. Simply stated, the amount of deep water in the river has been significantly reduced. At the same time, the fishery below Brighton Dam is showing some signs of respectability. A very large brown was shocked out of the river last fall.



Home Waters

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I didn't get to fish the Yellow Breeches. Poor weather and minimal water conditions postponed my day with a guide on those stories waters. I'll get there someday, but until I do, I'll content myself with casting over my home waters.

Not that that is a bad thing. I regularly fish the Patapsco River. It's not the haven for trophy trout like Boiling Springs' famous "Run", but the Patapsco has evolved into a first rate fishing experience, increasing in popularity with each new season.

The Patapsco is often disparaged by Baltimoreans who remember it as a blackish flow, heavily polluted and laced with trash. Today's Patapsco is a far different. Since the floods of 1972, 35 miles of the river's valley have been incorporated into the Patapsco Valley State Park. The river's South Branch rises at Parrs Spring, where Howard, Carroll, Montgomery, and Frederick Counties meet. It flows eastward through Sykesville to Marriottsville where it joins the North Branch coming down from the Liberty Dam. From Woodbine down to Elkridge, only the one-mile stretch through Ellicott City lacks public access.

The lower 10 miles forms a large tidal inlet of the Chesapeake Bay. Baltimore's famed Inner Harbor is actually the river's Northwest Branch, while the Middle Branch washes past Locust Point and Fairfield. This lower end is big water, supporting fish species found throughout the Chesapeake.

Above the tideline, the Patapsco averages about 50 feet wide, shallow and rocky, with a low gradient, scattered deep pools, and sandy runs. Many boulders create pocket water that provides excellent habitat for stocked trout and smallmouth bass. The river also offers good populations of rock bass, redbreast sunfish, hog suckers and white suckers.

Breaches and fish ladders on the old dams have opened the river to restoration of anadromous fish runs. Gizzard shad, hickory shad, American shad, river herring, striped bass, and white perch once again migrate up the Patapsco during early spring. American eel are found throughout the river. Biologists anticipate an approximate target of 16,000 American shad and 160,000 river herring.

Maryland's Department of Natural Resources stocks trout—mostly rainbows from nine to 20+ inch brutes—into three sections of the Patapsco: The upper area begins at Main Street in Sykesville (Carroll County) or West Friendship Road (Howard County) and extends downstream 6.45 miles to the confluence with the North Branch Patapsco River within the McKeldin Area of Patapsco State Park. A middle section extends 3.6 miles from Daniels Dam downstream to the Union Dam site in the Hollofield Area of the State Park. The lower area stretches from Bloede Dam downstream 3.52 miles to the B&O Viaduct.

The trout can't survive the river's warm summer temperatures; prime months for taking the "stockers" are October through early June. Because the State publicizes the stocking dates, the first few days afterwards see crowds of anglers at the favored spots. After a week or so, the pressure eases a bit and it's not difficult to have a stretch of water to yourself.

All of the waters are put-and-take, with a five-fish limit on the upper and lower sections, and a two-fish limit in the middle. The upper and lower sections are closed during the stocking. There are also catch-and-return black bass regulations from Interstate 70 downstream 3.75 miles to Frederick Road (Route 144) in Ellicott City.

Fly fishing the Patapsco is a simple pleasure. The broad and shallow flow offers easy wading and ample room for backcasts. The wooded banks shade cool pools. A variety of pockets and structure can call for precision casting and occasional rapids and "bomb holes" add excitement.

Nymphing with bead heads works well for trout. Surface fishermen try darker caddis flies, royal humpies, and terrestrials in the warmer months. Surface poppers can entice bass.

Though hardly a wilderness, sections of the Patapsco are surprising pristine. Even those stretches that were once industrial have returned to a natural aspect. The Henryton and McKeldin areas offer forested expanses as well as good fishing. Reaching some of the prime angling areas may require a considerable hike.

So, I didn't get to try my hand at the Yellow Breeches, but I had a great day pulling fat sunnies from a secluded hole on the North Branch. The river was generous that day and I had it all to myself.

For More Information:

Patapsco Valley State Park 410-461-5005, www.dnr.state.md.us/publiclands/central/patapscovalley.html

Reed Hellman is a freelance writer living in Alberton, Maryland. Visit his Website at www.reedhellmanwordsmith.com. or E-mail your questions and comments to RHFishing@yahoo.com.

New Membership Secretary Needed

The chapter still needs help from someone familiar with MS Access to assist us in maintaining our membership/ mailing list. If you are familiar with that software and want to help us, please contact Jay Sheppard (jmsheppar@aol.com) for more information. This database is one of the main tools of the chapter in keeping in touch with our 400–500 members. Simple data entry and some simple edit checks are about all that are required to do this invaluable work for the chapter.



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