

SALTY BYTES

Newsletter of the Saltwater Fly Anglers of Delaware



Writer/Editor:

Roy Miller

On the internet at www.sfaod.com, our club message board is at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/sfaod/> For club-related questions, inquiries and suggestions, here is the **Board of Directors** contact information:

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A Note from the Editor:

As always, contributions of articles, comments, or pictures that I can include in subsequent newsletters are welcome. You can reach me at the above number or send them via email to Bill O'Connor at sfaod@outlook.com



SFAOD Meeting March 13, 2024

Attendance: Board Members present included Loretta Smith, Ron Smith, Ed Hill, Roy Miller, and Walt Clark.
Absent: Shawn Rakes.

Board of Director's Reports: Loretta Smith reminded the membership of the Bass/Crappie Fishing Tournament to be held Saturday May 18. The tournament is open to any member with access to a boat and will be conducted on public ponds in Sussex and Kent Counties. (Note, this tournament was later cancelled for lack of sign-ups among Club members.) Loretta also reminded everyone of the Club picnic scheduled for May 11 at the pavilion in Cape Henlopen State Park and of the scheduled Pickerel Fly Fishing Tournament on Oct. 26.

Program – Our program that night was presented by Club Member Tyler O'Neill. Tyler's topic was Fly Fishing in Iceland and was entitled: "Fire, Ice, and Trout." Tyler said that Iceland is a 6 hour direct flight from Baltimore to Reykjavik. Any fishing gear you bring into the Country of Iceland has to be sanitized before it can be used. His targeted species included brown trout including sea run trout and arctic char. For the trout he favors 5-6 wt. rods in 9ft. and also a 10 ft. 5 weight. For char and throwing streamers, he used a 9 ft. 8 wt. rod. He used lines with an aggressive taper because Iceland is windy. He says a 2-handed rod also would work fine. For the trout he used 3X mono and fluorocarbon tippets. For streamer fishing he used a 15 lb. tippet. Apparently there are no mayflies in Iceland, although #10-16 nymphs worked. For char he liked large, bright, and heavy nymphs like squirmies, green weanies, mop flies, and large foam terrestrials. For streamers he likes zonkers, game changers, and the Kelly Gallup streamers. He went to Iceland the first week of June, and the air temperatures were in the 40s and 50s. He caught sea run arctic char in the Lonsa River. Because of the arctic sun, you can fish 10-12 hours a day if you want. There is no public access to the streams, just beats available to guides and their clients. He paid \$5,563 for six days of guided fishing that included everything but tips and airfare. There were 8 people in his group and he said the accommodations were excellent. They had to hop another short flight north from Reykjavik to reach their target fishing locations.

When Tyler is not fishing in exotic locations, he is a member of the Professional Saltwater Guides Association. Tyler is the son of Tim O'Neill of O'Neill's Fly Fishing. Tim is no stranger to our Club, and has given us one or more programs over the years. I believe this is the first occasion when we have had both a father and son give separate presentations to our Club.

Additional Board Member Reports – Ed Hill, with help from Shawn Rakes, has invited a professional chef who happens to be a fly fishermen to give a talk to our Club in June. Ed also is trying to line up a professor from Salisbury State U. to talk to us about snakeheads. Mike Selenski will give us a future presentation on tight line Euro-nymphing. Ron Smith urged attendees to visit his Club merchandize table. Ron said that his plans to begin a Fly Fishing School will have to be postponed until the fall or next year. Bill O'Connor said that we had 50 paid-up members before tonight. Roy Miller invited all to check out the Club newsletter that was posted last month on our website.

Fishing Reports – Shawn Rakes fished with Club member Rich Seagraves on Concord Pond in late Feb. and they took one big pickerel. Shawn and son Ethan fished the Everglades in FL last week and caught 9 species of fish between the two of them, including peacock bass and Florida gar. They used Justin Nguyen as their guide. Steve Halstead also fished with Justin a few weeks ago. Morgan Krell reported that there are some stripers being taken at the Routes 90 and 54 bridges in MD adjacent to deep structure. Loretta fished Millsboro Pond with Jerry Groll and each caught a pickerel and Loretta caught a 12" crappie. Tyler O'Neill reported fishing the James and New Rivers in VA but had no luck on muskies.

A 50/50 raffle was held at the end of the meeting which was won by Ron Tatman.



This nice yellow perch was caught by Roy Miller from Red Mill Pond in March

SFAOD Meeting 4-10-2014

Board Members Present: Loretta Smith, Bill O'Connor, Ron Smith, Ed Hill, Roy Miller, Loretta Smith, Walt Clark, Shawn Rakes. There were 28 total in attendance.

Board Reports – The Club picnic will be held at one of the pavilions just off the beach at Cape Henlopen State Park on May 18. There will be no other regular Club meeting in May because of the picnic.

Program – Shawn Rakes introduced our speaker for the evening, Chef Matt Hern. Matt owns the restaurant One Coastal which is located in a small strip mall on Fenwick Island next to Fenwick Tackle. Chef Matt has been nominated as a finalist for three years for a James Beard award which is the equivalent of an Academy Award for cooking. He's also a fly fisherman who likes nothing better than to stalk wild brook trout in his home state of PA. Chef Matt believes in farm to table and using local watermen to provide the freshest possible food in his restaurant. He does not freeze fish that he serves and feels that fish is best if kept on ice no longer than 24-48 hours. If you must freeze the fish, discard the bones, and then it is better to batter it and fry it.

To sear his fresh fish, he uses a cast iron skillet which he demonstrated to us that night using fresh steelhead and striped bass that he filleted for us. He uses extra virgin olive oil or unsalted butter for his pan searing. After preparing the fillets, he seared them on an iron skillet heated on a portable gas grill that he brought with him for the demonstration. He then offered a taste to all present. Some, including me, felt that it was some of the best fish we had ever tasted. His presentation held us all in rapt attention, and the time passed swiftly.

After the cooking demonstration, there were no further Board reports as our normal quitting time was approaching. A 50/50 raffle was held which was won by Bernie Dormer.



Chef Matt Kern demonstrates preparing and cooking fresh fish to our Club at the April 10 Club meeting.



Jim DiDonato made a visit to White Clay Creek in May and caught a brown trout.



Fishing at the Concord Pond spillway in April. That's Roy Miller on the left with a nice American shad. In the center Dick Stiefken from Utah with a striper and moral support from Bill Douwes, and that's Bill on the right with his own American shad.

Annual Picnic at Cape Henlopen State Park 5-11-2024

Club members convened shortly before noon at the ocean pavilion in Cape Henlopen State Park. Everyone enjoyed a fine meal of grilled burgers, hot dogs, and bratworst plus side dishes, salads, and desserts brought by Club members. Roy Miller brought his horseshoe set from home so a lively game of horseshoes ensued adjacent to the picnic tables. The picnic broke up about 3:00.



Club members convene for a picnic at Cape Henlopen State Park. A few of the guys engage in a horseshoe pitching contest.



Striper action at Cape Henlopen on May 7 & 10, 2024. That's Roy Miller on the left, Loretta Smith in the center, and Bill Douwes on the right.



This is Loretta again with her big bluefish that she caught on May 10.



Here are two more shots of John McMinn with a big jack (left) and a roosterfish (right) he took off of Baja this May on fly gear.

SFAOD Meeting 6-12-2024

The June meeting was preceded by outdoor fly casting practice and casting lessons from Joe Helby and Frank Danner in the parking area and adjacent lawn of the Rolling Meadows Clubhouse. While folks were practicing their casting, Ron and a helper prepared the grilled burgers, hotdogs, and brats which were put out for everyone in the kitchenette of the Rolling Meadows Clubhouse. After the food was consumed, an abbreviated business meeting was held.

Board of Directors present: Loretta Smith, Bill O'Connor, Roy Miller, Ron Smith, and newly appointed Board Member Hans Feindt.

Reports: The Board and the Club membership sincerely thanks long-time Board member Shawn Rakes for his previous service to the Club where he served as Board President for several years. Shawn's past deployments with the Army National Guard, coupled with his frequent Army-related travel have limited his ability to participate fully in Club functions, so he offered to step down from the Board. He will continue to be a Club member and will attend meetings whenever he can, although his home residency has changed to the Baltimore area. At the May meeting of the Board of Directors, the Directors nominated and approved Hans Feindt to replace Shawn on the Board as allowed in the Club procedures and covenants. Hans will assist Ed in program planning and other duties as assigned by Club President Loretta Smith.

Bill O'Conner noted that our present membership now stands at 98 individuals. **Ron Smith** has Club merchandise for sale including Club hats, shirts, vests, jackets, and the Club booklet on fishing locations. **Roy Miller** pledged to start working on a new Club newsletter shortly. There was some discussion on future speakers and **Ed Hill** promised to have an entertaining assortment of programs for future meetings that will include snakeheads from the perspective of a Delmarva scientist who is studying this invasive species, and another by a professional fly fisherman proficient in the use of the so-called Euro-nymph fishing system.

Following these short Board reports there was a rather lengthy informal discussion of recent fishing trips by Board members. Bernie Dormer, who has a 23' Parker boat, reported that the fishing around Fox Island and nearby Chrisfield, MD has been kind of slow this spring so far. A few speckled trout have been taken by spin fishermen, so perhaps fly casting for this species will pick up some since the inshore striped bass fishing has been slow. Mac McNaught fished the West Branch of the upper Delaware River near Hancock, NY with a guide. Although only seven trout were landed, Mac said they were all between 18 and 22" and fought as only wild trout can. The March Browns were hatching while he was there.

Jim DiDonato fished the Brandywine River in downtown Wilmington. He didn't do great, but still enjoyed the fishing.

Morgan Krell fished the classic streams of the Catskills, especially the Willowemoc, and caught browns up to 16 inches. He also fished the Indian River Inlet on the north side and caught a 30 inch striper on a weighted green and white hollow fly. He said there are still a few bluefish around, and he has heard reports of some weakfish being taken. He typically uses an intermediate line when fishing from the rocks to avoid the hang ups that can occur when using a fast sinking line.

Jim DiDonato reported that he, Ed Hill, Bill Douwes, and Roy Miller fished the North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac River in WV recently. Roy and Bill did especially well on good-sized stocked rainbow trout. There

were some Light Cahills hatching in the evening. Jim will present a short program on this trip to Harman's Cabins at another meeting.

Loretta Smith reported that she caught two flounder in two nights from the beach next to the Cape Henlopen Pier, as well as some spot, and even a skate. Club member Lloyd Purcell caught a 20 inch flounder on a fly at this same location.

Jim DiDonato gave a short report on the Project Healing Waters group who visited the shad hatchery on Broad Creek that is run by biologist Johnnie Moore of the DE Division of Fish and Wildlife. Some members expressed an interest in engaging Johnnie Moore for a future Club program.

The evening ended with a 50/50 raffle won again by Bernie Dormer which he kindly donated back to the Club. Our speaker in July will focus on the techniques of Euro-nymphing.



Loretta Smith with a nice flounder released at the Cape.on June 4.



Bill Douwes with a small one on the hook June 6 at Cape Henlopen. Spot and croaker made their appearance in early June.

Club Schedule of Events in 2024

- July 10** – Regular business meeting at Rolling Meadows Clubhouse
- Aug. 14** – Fly casting practice and grilled dinner at Rolling Meadows Clubhouse
- Sep. 11** – Regular meeting Rolling Meadows Clubhouse
- Sep. 13** – Club fishing trip to Corson's Inlet, NJ
- Sep. 21** – Club One-Fly Fishing Contest
- Oct. 6?** – Coast Day Lewes campus
- Oct. 9** – Regular meeting Rolling Meadows Clubhouse
- Oct. 26** – Club Pickerel Fly Fishing Tournament
- Nov. 13** – Regular meeting Rolling Meadows Clubhouse
- Dec. 11** – Regular meeting Rolling Meadows Clubhouse, Roy Miller speaker



Biologist Corner:

Changes Over the Years

Although we didn't move permanently to Delaware until 1975, I spent part of my childhood summers in Rehoboth since my parents inherited a beach house from my great aunt. My parents held onto this beach house until the early 1960s when they sold it to finance my brother's and my college educations. Whether that was a good investment or not is a matter of perspective. On the one hand are the obvious benefits of higher education. On the other hand, the price of beach real estate has done nothing but climb over the years. Nonetheless, it gives me some perspective because I remained an avid fisherman through all of those years, leading up to the present.

When I was a boy in the 1950s, my Dad twice engaged an old charter captain to take the family fishing on Delaware Bay from Lewes. And on most other days we fished from the surf.

So what did we catch back then, or at least what do I remember catching? In the surf just north of the Henlopen Hotel we caught silver perch and small weakfish, locally known as sea trout even though they are not trout, but instead members of the drum family. These we took on natural bait, usually peeler crab, using a double hook rig that had a smaller hook for the silver perch and a larger hook for the weakfish. For reasons not well understood, silver perch virtually disappeared from the surf fishing scene. In the 1960s, kingfish and blowfish (Northern puffer) made up the majority of the fish we caught from the surf in the summer.

Out on the Delaware Bay charter boat we caught lots of weakfish, although nothing much larger than 2 pounds, a few good size kingfish, and some hardheads, or what we now call croaker, and a mix of other fish. I especially remember catching small hammerhead sharks which the captain distained and killed before throwing them overboard. Naturally the hammerheads fascinated a small boy who later in life would study biology in school and eventually spend a career as a fishery biologist. We also caught winter flounder on blood worms at Indian River Inlet, particularly in the spring. When was the last time you caught a winter flounder in Delaware?

Jumping ahead to 1975 when I moved with my young family to Delaware to pursue a long career with the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife, what species did a life-long avid fisherman find to catch? By this time weakfish had become the catch of choice in Delaware Bay and along Delaware's ocean coastline. Oh there were a few striped bass around, but they were not a common catch in Delaware Bay, at least during the daytime. At night and from the rock piles you could catch some stripers, but not just drifting bait or bucktails on the Bay fishing grounds accessible from Port Mahon, Bowers Beach, and Cedar Creek. There weakfish were king. Through the 1970s the weakfish just got bigger and bigger until by the mid-1980s, the Division of Fish and Wildlife kept increasing the minimum size for a fishing citation size for weakfish from 2 lbs. to 7 lbs. to eventually 11 lbs. We never caught or even saw weakfish this large when I was a boy. There were some rumors of tiderunners as the old-timers called the large weakfish, but I never saw a true tiderunner until the early 1980s.

Delaware Bay became famous around that time because of the abundance of weakfish. There were so many boats showing up at Bowers Beach and the Cedar Creek ramps that the Division of Fish and Wildlife had to employ boat ramp attendants just to keep order and prevent fights among those dying to partake in this fantastic fishery. The Milford Chamber of Commerce jumped on the bandwagon and organized the World Sea Trout Fishing Tournament with lucrative prizes awarded for the largest weakfish taken.

Just when you thought the amazing fishing would continue forever, the large weakfish disappeared and by the early 1990s were all but gone. Instead of issuing over a thousand citations annually for 11 lb. and larger weakfish, the number plummeted to zero, and the Division had to drastically reduce the minimum entry weight for the State Sport Fishing Tournament. Fortunately, as the weakfish waned, striped bass numbers and size picked up considerably.

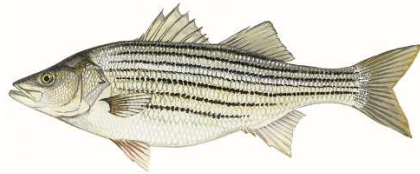
There were several years in the mid 1990s that weakfish stocks appeared to be once again increasing like they did in the early 1970s, but this resurgence proved to be temporary, and true tiderunners never again appeared in any numbers.

By 2009, in a move to enhance the chances of restoring weakfish to their former abundance in the mid-Atlantic area, the recreational harvest limit was lowered to one per day with a minimum size of 13 inches. Unfortunately this did not have the desired effect, as weakfish continue to be classified by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission as depleted. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, fingers were pointed at the commercial fishing industry for the collapse of weakfish populations, but even with the imposition of stringent coastal commercial

catch quotas of 100 lbs per day per commercial license holder, the weakfish have failed to come back in any real abundance.

Striped bass have also waxed and waned during the 1990s through 2024. This fishery peaked around 2003 and has more recently entered a period where the stock was declared overfished and very strict recreational and commercial catch limits have been employed in recent years in an effort to bring this species back to the abundance we took for granted at the turn of the new century. Today, the harvestable slot for coastal striped bass has been constrained to 28-31 inches, and only one per day in this slot may be taken home.

So clearly over the years, change has been the rule, rather than the exception. Few would deny that our climate and our marine environment and habitat are changing rapidly, and this is having an effect on our fish stocks. I could go on and on when discussing abundance and former abundance of our most popular sport species, but I'll save additional thoughts for future columns.



The lead picture of a weakfish and the closing picture of a striped bass, both by artist Duane Raver, are courtesy of the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife

The following message is from Club member Jim DiDonato:

PHWFF: Fellow SFAOD members, this message is to provide you with a very brief summary of what's been happening with Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing (PHWFF) in Delaware, and to solicit in-kind donations to support our mission.

Hopefully, you're already aware that PHWFF exists to support the emotional and physical healing of our nation's disabled military veterans, and it uses fly fishing to do that. Almost three years ago when I assumed leadership of the Dover Program – the only PHWFF presence in Delaware – there were only four active veteran participants. Today there are 14, and I believe that number will continue to grow during 2024.

We meet twice monthly in the Dover area, and sometimes we do additional special activities. Some of our "special" activities would be very familiar to SFAOD members. Those include fishing local ponds, helping DNREC stock trout at White Clay Creek, and taking a daytrip to Cape May to fish the shoreline there. Good things are happening, and I sense that the lives of our disabled veterans are better for their participation in the program.

Where the Dover Program was once sponsored by SFAOD, there hasn't been a formal relationship for several years. Several members of SFAOD have volunteered – and continue to do so – over the years to make the program a success. The one major thread that bonds our groups is our love of fly fishing. Because our budget is small, in-kind donations (donations of items rather than money) are very helpful. I've only been a fly fisherman for about six years, but my experience has been that there is a special community among fly anglers, and they truly enjoy helping each other.

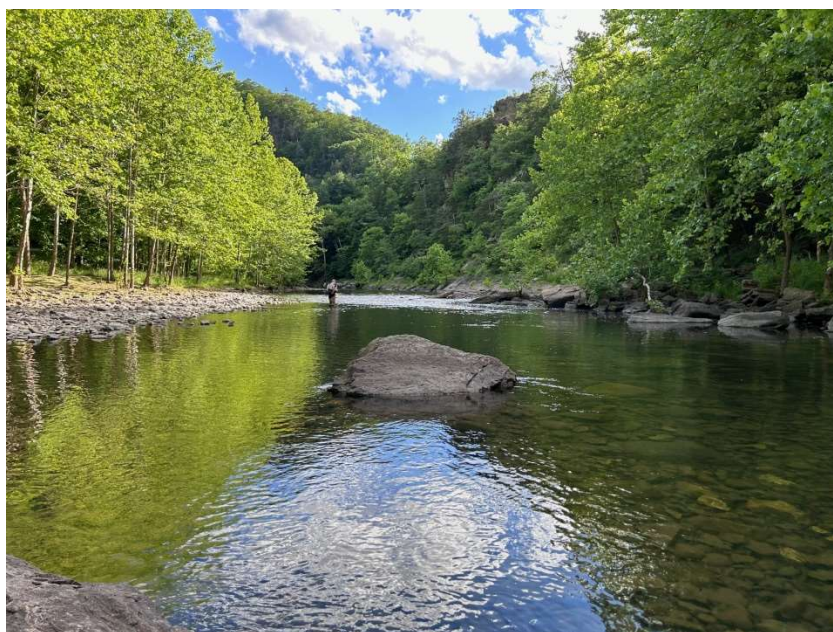
So, my purpose with this message is to raise awareness among SFAOD members of our existence and mission, and to put PHWFF on your “radar” for possible in-kind donations. While all items are appreciated, those related to fly tying – hooks, beads, marabou, etc. – would be useful, and tying vices (with metal bases) would be of particular value. For what it’s worth, PHWFF is a 501-c-3 non-profit organization. That means that money and in-kind donations are all tax deductible, and PHWFF headquarters will provide you with a helpful tax form.

Given the chance, I’ll repeat most of this during our next SFAOD meeting. But, with this message I’m hoping to reach the entire membership, including those who might not be there on meeting nights. Whether F2F or via email, I’ll gladly answer questions you might have about any facet of our program. Thanks. Jim

James DiDonato

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The closing photo was taken on the North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac River in WV on June 9 by Roy Miller. The opening photo is of Club member John McMinn with a beautiful dolphin (dorado) he took on a fly off Baja this May.