



Salty Bytes

Newsletter of the Saltwater Fly Anglers of Delaware

Spring 2026

Editor Roy Miller

Club Website: www.sfaod.com

Our Club Facebook address is:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/sfaod/>

MEETING NOTES

The **March 11 Meeting** was convened at 7:00 PM at the Rolling Meadows Clubhouse. There were 29 members present plus the Board of Directors including: Bill O'Connor, Roy Miller, Hans Feindt, Loretta Smith, Ron Smith, Walt Clark and Joe Helbe.

Speaker – Our speaker was Captain Murray deMuth of TWT (Tidewater Tails) Fishing Charters. He has 55 years of fishing experience in the Chesapeake region. Captain Murray usually fishes from the Patuxent River down to Smith Island. His fishing season typically begins in mid-May. He prefers to fish the last two hours of the incoming tide and the last three hours of the outgoing tide. He uses a jon boat for fishing the back-country creeks and sloughs. He likes to fish the holes at each bend of the river. He finds more flounder around Smith Island than elsewhere where he fishes on the Chesapeake.

His charter season lasts from June 1-Oct. 31. He charges \$500 for a day of fishing, and he can only carry one client on his jon boat. He has a larger boat which he also uses for charters that is 28 ft. long. For fishing days on the larger boat he charges \$600 for a charter. His boat is tied up on Elliott Island. He typically employs smaller (sizes 2 and 3) circle hooks while fishing with live or even dead bait. For cobia he uses menhaden for chum and cut menhaden or eels as bait. He also does cobia and red drum trips out of Cape Charles and does ocean trips out of West Ocean City. Obviously he has to pick his days to go offshore since his largest boat is 28 ft. These offshore ocean trips cost \$2,000 for a charter. Captain Murray doesn't do many fly fishing trips, but he is not averse to taking fly fishermen.

Director Reports – Treasurer Walt Clark said the Club had \$5,447 in the treasury by the end of February. We have about 100 members. Our Club picnic this year is scheduled for May 9 at Cape Henlopen State Park. The Club will provide the meat for the barbeque while Club members will be expected to bring a dish to share. Ron Smith said he added 16 new sun shirts in all sizes to our for-sale inventory as well as a new shipment of Club logo caps. Hans Feindt reported that member Jim DiDonato will be our meeting speaker in April. He will talk about his recent trip to fish for salmon in Pulaski, NY. In June we will have a fly casting demo by Frank Danner in addition to outdoor casting practice and broiled hamburgers and hot dogs. Newsletter editor Roy Miller thanked Jim DiDonato for the new format for the club newsletters. Finally, Joe Helbe said the Club has saltwater flies to sell for \$1 each which is as cheap or cheaper than you can make them yourself.

Fishing Reports – Bernie Dormer went pickerel fishing today but had no luck. Jerry Groll and Steve Deathridge both fished Wagamons Pond, but they also landed none. Roy Miller fished Newton Pond with Bill Douwes and finally had some luck on rainbow trout by landing two on brown wooley bugger nymphs. Jim DiDonato fished in Puerto Rico and caught four species he had never caught before. These included red snapper, red devil cichlids, and red-bellied tilapia. He also hooked and lost a couple of small tarpon.

Raffle - The 50/50 Raffle was won by Bernie Dormer who donated the winnings back to the Club.

April 8 Meeting – There were 32 in attendance, including all Board members except Loretta Smith. Guests or new members present included Dan Powell who fishes with Bernie Dormer for shad in the Wicomico River. New member Jack Bailey lived in Milton, DE for a year and a half and in New Castle County where he was a member of the White Clay Fly Fishers before moving to Sussex County. Don Mobius has fished Alaska and Canada. He can't tie flies anymore for medical reasons, so he graciously donated some of his equipment to the Club. Mike Selby is from Alexandria, VA. He fished mostly out West, but will be in our area for the next 6 months. The membership welcomed back John Lupinetti, past Club President and former member of the Board of Directors. It was great to see John again and we hope he will be able to resume an active role in the Club. Bob Crofton of the Cape Henlopen Elks Club was here to see Jim DiDonato's presentation. He is a member of Project Healing Waters.

Speaker – Hans Feindt introduced our speaker, Club member Jim DiDonato. Jim said that former Club President Shawn Rakes got him started in fly fishing. Jim told us about his experiences fly fishing for anadromous salmonids (trout and salmon) that run upstream from Lake Ontario. On this particular trip he stayed in the town of Breverton in a Quality Inn about 25 miles from Pulaski, NY which he found to be cheaper than comparable lodging in Pulaski. They fished upstream of the town of Pulaski. The Salmon River was running at 260 cfs on the day that they fished in early October last year. By comparison it was running at 3,800 cfs today. Effective flies for Jim and his companions included Estaz flies, Alaska buggers, and egg-sucking leaches.

Jim used 10 lb. fluorocarbon for tippet material. He said that the NY hatchery system stocks about 3.5 million salmonids (trout and salmon) per year. After showing us some of his catches of salmon (cohos and kings) from the Salmon River, he then shifted his narrative to south FL to describe a fishing trip with his son. They caught exotics like Mayan cichlid and peacock bass. He finished his talk with a non-fishing trip (which nonetheless yielded some time for fly fishing) in Puerto Rico. There he caught several species of tilapia on flies.

Director Reports – Walt Clark said that we had \$5,426 in our treasury the beginning of March and finished the month with \$4,789. Most of the recent expenses were for clothing purchased to sell to Club members. There will be no Club meeting in May, and instead the annual Club picnic will be held at the Cape Henlopen State Park pavilion on May 9. The Club will provide and grill the meat while Club

members will contribute a side dish of salads and desserts to share. Because the picnic tables are covered, the picnic will be held rain or shine.

Ron Smith mentioned that he purchased 18 sun shirts to sell to Club members and 25 Club logo hats. Hans Feindt listed the programs that are lined up for the rest of the year. The June and July meetings will feature casting practice by Club members followed by grilled burgers and hot dogs/and or brats, as well as short business meeting held in the Club house. Frank Danner will be providing casting instruction for any members who feel they can use it. Club member Ted Morlock will give a presentation on fly fishing for Northern snakeheads at the August Club meeting. In September Adam Burtson will talk to us about his business of rod building and rod repairs. We don't have a commitment yet for speakers in October and November, but we are hoping to engage Bob and Heather Palmer in another talk about their adventures fishing the Bahamas and the Caribbean. In December Roy Miller will provide an update on important regulatory initiatives by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, followed by some slides of fly fishing excursions he made in 2026. Lastly, Bill O'Connor said that our Club website is up to date. The target deadline date for 2026 membership renewal is this coming May.

Club Raffle – Joe Helby won the 50/50 raffle and donated his winnings back to the Club.



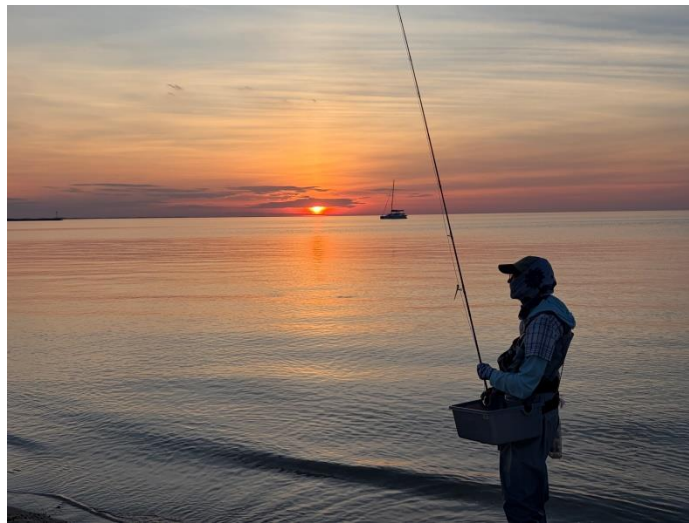
John McMinn caught this huge smallmouth bass (left) and the nice steelhead (right) from Lake Ontario tributary waters on a trip to New York State this spring. Thanks for sharing these pictures John.

Annual Club Picnic – On the morning of May 9, we invited anyone who planned on attending our annual club picnic to do a little fishing next to the Cape Henlopen Pier and to drink some coffee, eat doughnuts and share stories. None of the Club members in attendance that morning elected to try the fishing and there were no guests. Morning winds would have made fishing a bit uncomfortable, but it didn't impact the consumption of coffee and doughnuts. Beginning at noon the Club's Annual Picnic was held at the

Oceanside pavilion at Cape Henlopen State Park. The Club provided hamburgers, hotdogs, and brats which several Club members cooked on the charcoal grill provided at the Park pavilion. Attendees also brought salads, other side dishes, and desserts to share. The afternoon rain prevented the usual game of horseshoes, but at least the rain held off until all had eaten their fill, and we were protected from the elements by the roof over the picnic area. All in all we had a good turn-out of Club members and guests.



Club members were there, but the fish reportedly were absent on May 17 on the Henlopen Flats.



Loretta Smith stayed until sundown on May 17th, but still had no luck.

June 10 Meeting – The June Club meeting kicked off at 6 PM next to the Rolling Meadows Clubhouse. Club member Frank Danner set up the usual casting targets of hanging hula hoops to encourage Club members to strive for tighter casting loops. Frank provided a short course on fly casting mechanics to the assembled group of Club members, both for accuracy and for distance, and many tried their hand

under Frank's and Joe Helbe's watchful eyes. By shortly after 7:00 PM hunger pangs took over and the group settled inside the Clubhouse to consume the burgers and dogs grilled by Ron Smith with help from Walt Clark, Roy Miller, and Bill Douwes.

There were 17 in attendance that night, plus all 7 of the Board of Directors. Walt Clark gave the Treasurer's update on the state of Club finances. We had accumulated \$5,834 by the end of April and this had grown with membership renewals to \$6,089.94 by the end of May. Our only major Club expense in May was for \$155 to the Division of Parks and Recreation for the use of the State pavilion at Cape Henlopen Park for our picnic on May 9. Ron Smith noted that no one indulged in fishing at Cape Henlopen next to the Pier during the morning of May 9. The weather wasn't the best and that probably was responsible for the lack of fishing participation. We extended an invitation to the members of the White Clay Fly Fishers, but none came down for the fishing or the picnic this year. Hans Feindt outlined the programs lined up for the remainder of the calendar year:

Aug. Regular Club Meeting – Club member Ted Morlock will talk about fly fishing for snakeheads.

Sep. Meeting - Adam Burtson will speak about rod building and fly rod repairs.

Oct. Meeting - Speaker to be determined. We will extend an invitation again to Bob and Heather Palmer to hear about their latest adventures in do-it-yourself fishing in the Bahamas and Caribbean.

Nov. Meeting – Member Jim Page will talk about fly fishing for redfish.

Dec. Meeting – Member Roy Miller will give an update on recent fisheries management decisions by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. As is customary, Roy will finish with a Power Point talk on fishing trips he took in 2026.

Bill O'Connor said that we currently have 89 paid-up members. He also gave a few tips on use of our Club website. Finally, Joe Helbe noted that he has Club member donations of saltwater flies for sale at the bargain price of \$1.00 each.

Fishing Reports – Harry Glacken said there are sheepshead to be caught at Indian River Inlet, although it would be notable if any were caught on fly fishing gear instead of the usual baited hooks on conventional tackle. Bernie Stasko related Jim DiDonato's experiences of fly fishing this spring in the Brandywine River in Wilmington. Jim has taken 4 species on flies thus far, including fallfish, redbreast sunfish, and smallmouth bass. He saw big carp and snakeheads, but did not catch either one. Another Club member had some luck fishing for American shad in the Delaware River at Easton, PA. He did not fish with a fly rod there because higher flows would have made effective fly casting difficult. Another member reported fishing the Mahanoy Creek and French Creek in PA and having some luck fly fishing with nymphs under the guidance of a guide named Justin from Blue Sky Outfitters.

Our remaining Club fishing nights next to the Cape Henlopen Pier are the 14th and 28th this month. These nights were selected because the tide will be high shortly after dark, and usually the fishing is best during the in-coming early evening tide.

Jim Page reported that he hired a guide out of Oregon Inlet Fishing Center to fish the Outer Banks on the Bay side. His guide struggled with the prevailing southwest winds and Jim did not land any redfish on this trip.

Several members noted that Ice House Bait and Tackle is now closed and that the number of bait and tackle shops in our area seems to be dwindling. Steve Deathridge fished the upper end of Red Mill Pond from Sweetbriar Road where the late Clyde Seibert and other Club members have fished in the past. Steve cautioned anyone who intends to fish there because of the heavy vehicle traffic on the roadway. Fly reel makers haven't devised a drag that will stop a moving vehicle hooked on a backcast.

The monthly raffle of a donated portable fly tying station was won by Roy Miller. The meeting adjourned around 8:15.

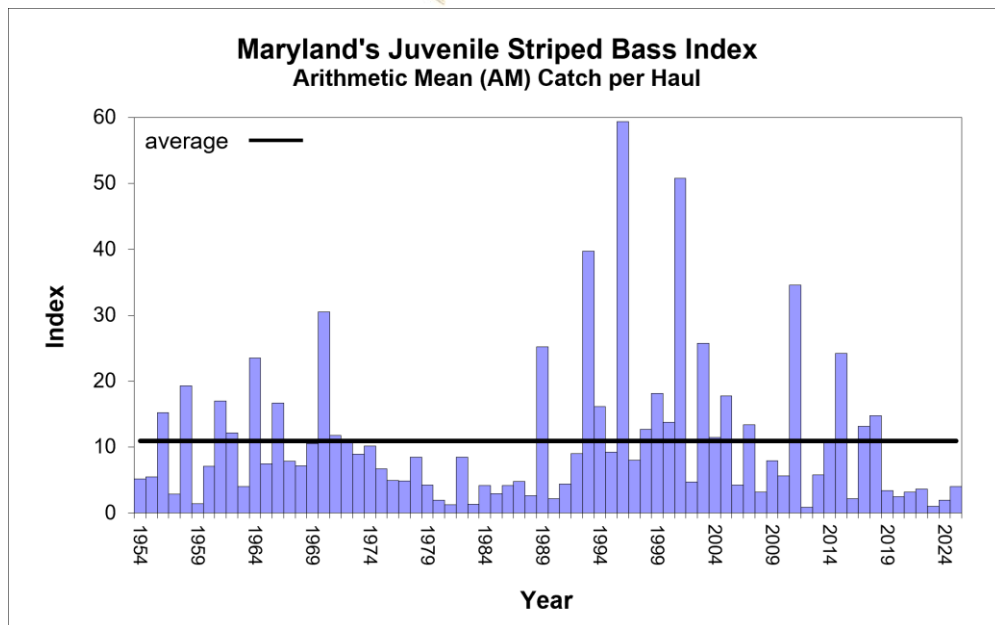
BIOLOGIST CORNER

Where have the fish gone? Does it seem to you that the fishing along the beach just north of the Cape Henlopen fishing pier has been less productive this spring? I have to admit that it has been a disappointment to me the few times I tried it in May. Others I have talked to have suggested the same thing. Usually I could count on hooking a few schoolie-size striped bass on evening beach outings, and with luck, perhaps even a big bluefish, in May and early June. But not this year. On an evening high tide in late May I was high hand among 8-10 Club members with two horseshoe crabs snagged on the same cast, and that was it for me that evening.

Others had similar luck, or lack thereof. The one fly fisher I know of who managed to catch a couple of decent size striped bass and summer flounder from the Henlopen Flats this spring is Lloyd Purcell. If you know Lloyd, you know he is a persistent fisher from the beach at Cape Henlopen, just like his buddy and former fishing partner, the late Clyde Seibert. Lloyd's persistence apparently paid off this spring, but I don't know what his relative score was per outing. On the evenings he fished near me, he didn't do any better than the rest of us.

So what is to blame for this slow start to the 2026 beach fishing season? Is it just a localized phenomenon, or is it symptomatic of a regional downturn? Weather always is a factor in measuring fishing success in a particular spot on evening high tides. If it is a relatively cold and windy spring, that can really depress shoreline fishing success. Sure the wind has blown this year, but wind in the spring is pretty much of a given.

Are stocks of our spring targets like striped bass and bluefish becoming scarce? That issue is worth exploring a bit.



There is no question that striped bass reproduction in the Maryland portion of Chesapeake Bay has been down in recent years. In the above graph you can see that reproductive success has been below average since 2018, or 7 years in a row. Striped bass reproduction has not been much better on the spawning grounds of the Delaware River and the Hudson River either the past few years. Still, larger striped bass are being caught, particularly from NJ up to ME. That is because the older year classes have been protected by increasingly conservative harvest limits which presently only allow harvest in the legal size slot of 28-31", and one fish per angler per day in ocean waters as per measures taken by the coastal states in compliance with the revised Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Striped Bass Plan. Only in the Chesapeake Bay (and for two months in the Delaware Bay) are smaller striped bass allowed to be taken. In the Chesapeake Bay, the legal slot is 19-24" and one fish/person/day may be taken during the open seasons, which vary between MD and VA. In Delaware there is a different slot limit in effect during July and August of one fish/day between 20-24 inches, but only in the Delaware Bay and its tributaries. The rest of the State remains one fish/day between 28-31 inches.

There are some summer flounder around to be caught, even on fly fishing gear. The most recent assessments show that summer flounder are not overfished, nor is overfishing occurring. However, since the most recent estimate of stock biomass is still below the target level, no liberalization in recreational fishing regulations was approved for 2026. For Delaware that means the minimum sizes are again 16 inches from Jan. 1-May 31, and 17.5 inches from June 1-December 31. During these open seasons, an angler may keep 4/day.

There are other species that historically are available to fly fishermen at the Cape Henlopen Flats in the spring. Unfortunately weakfish continue to be scarce, and bluefish cannot be counted on to be present on any given day, even though coastal bluefish stocks appear to be in good shape. Bluefish normally make an appearance in April and May in Delaware and then move further offshore until the fall when they may or may not re-appear in inshore waters of DE Bay. If you are fortunate enough to be on the flats on the right evening, hooking a good size bluefish on a fly rod can be an exhilarating experience if you had the foresight to use a protective wire or heavy monofilament tippet on your leader. Otherwise your fight probably will be of short duration before their sharp teeth cut you off.

For the rest of the summer, Atlantic croaker and spot can almost always be counted on to provide some inshore action. However, expectations of catching anything sizeable on a fly rod in the summer at the Cape Henlopen Pier beach are pretty low unless you like being towed around by a ray that accidentally ingested your fly or was foul hooked. It certainly would be nice to see some spotted sea trout or redfish show up in our inshore waters, but don't count on it.

Post-script – I should note that I fished on the flats at Cape Henlopen near the State pier two evenings closer to the end of June and had good luck on spot and croaker. The croaker averaged around 7-9 inches and the spot were typical adults. I caught them all on a Clouser tied on a number six hook. On those two evenings, there were small bait fish in evidence and it looked like the spot and/or croaker were chasing them.



An average size spot caught caught by Roy Miller on June 29, 2026

rwm

Fish illustration by artist Dwayne Raver, courtesy of the DE Div. of Fish and Wildlife.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| July 8 | Meeting at Rolling Meadows, featuring outdoor casting and grilled food. 6:00 PM |
| August 12 | Meeting at Rolling Meadows, Ted Morlock, speaker, snakehead fly fishing, 7 PM |
| September 9 | Meeting at Rolling Meadows, Adam Bursin rod building & repair, 7:00 PM |
| Sep. 21 | Club day trip by ferry from Lewes to Cape May, NJ to fish Corson's Inlet. |

- Oct. 3** One Fly Fishing Tournament for Club members.
- Oct. 4** Coast Day at U of D campus, Lewes. The Club will be doing casting demos.
- Oct. 14** Meeting at Rolling Meadows, speaker TBD. 7:00 PM.
- Oct. 24** Fall Pickerel, Bass, & Crappie Tournament week with new rules, state-owned ponds only.
- Nov. 11** Meeting at Rolling Meadows, Jim Page, flyfishing for redfish, 7:00 PM.
- Dec. 9** Meeting at Rolling Meadows, featuring Roy Miller, speaker, 7:00 PM.

PROJECT HEALING WATERS FLY FISHING

Jim DiDonato reports that he has turned over the leadership of the Dover Program to David White. The program, one of more than 160 in the country, has grown to more than 20 active participants. Project Healing Waters is a 501-c-3 non-profit organization that exists to assist disabled military veterans in their recovery. Programs have limited budgetary funding, but they largely benefit from both cash and in-kind donations. He encourages club members to keep them in mind as they look for donation opportunities.



The Dover Program's regular meetings are the first and third Wednesday of each month in Dover. Participants generally fish during warm months and tie flies when it's cold outside. They also occasionally make overnight fishing trips; recently they've fished the upper Delaware River for brown trout, and the Salmon River near Pulaski NY for steelhead. Though the Dover Program has no official connection to the SFAOD, over the years several club members – Roy Miller, Bill Douwes, Steve Tracy and the late Paul Dolbec to name a few – have provided expert instruction on fishing, tying and casting.

In addition to Jim, club members Joe Helbe, Bernie Stasko and Mike Nichols also are active volunteers with the group.

CLUB DIRECTORS

Loretta Smith, 302-236-0894
 Bill O'Connor, 302-530-8253
 Hans Feindt, 410-736-2723

Ron Smith, 301-213-7637
 Roy Miller, 302-381-3760

Joe Helbe, 610-310-9793
 Walt Clark, 610-937-9535

Editor's notes:

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.





Jim DiDonato and Loretta Smith
fishing the flats near the Cape
Henlopen Pier on May 28.

Photo by Roy Miller