



Hook, Line, and Sinker

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The Official Newsletter of The New Ulm Area Sport Fishermen

The Sturgeon

Chris Kavanaugh

I have had many a sleepless night wondering what kind of sturgeon that was caught at the SCCMR convention in September. I didn't get real good look at the beast and I must admit I had blind faith in our leader (that would be Scott Sparlin for those who were wondering) identification of the critter as a shovelnose sturgeon. However, as time passed it dawned on me that shovelnose sturgeon rarely exceed 5 pounds and that there might be something fishy about this fish.

There are seven species of sturgeon found throughout North America. A couple species are found only on the Atlantic or Pacific coast. In the Mississippi River basin there are three species (shovelnose, lake, and pallid). From the Minnesota River, only shovelnose sturgeon have been recorded in recent years. The pallid sturgeon has only been found in the Missouri River and the Mississippi below St. Louis. The lake sturgeon has never been recorded from fish collections on the Minnesota although there are old timers who remember catching them long ago.

Sturgeons are truly dinosaurs of the fish world, a leftover from times way past. They are covered with bony plates rather than scales, their tails look more like a shark than freshwater fish. Their skeletons are more like that of a shark, mostly cartilage rather than hard bones.

Sturgeons are long lived species. Lake sturgeons are known

to have reached ages in excess of 150 years. Shovelnose sturgeon don't appear to live that long, perhaps up to 40 or 50. This is really amazing considering there are very few other fish that live more than 10 years. The sturgeons ability to live so long is in part tied to its requirement to be in relatively clean, unpolluted water. This is also why the abundance of those fish is severely depressed and they are listed as a species of special concern in Minnesota.

I looked at the pictures taken by Dave Harmening the other day and had the rest of the fisheries staff in Hutchinson look at them. We are not 100% positive but feel very confident that the fish was in fact a lake sturgeon. The pictures did not give us a clear look at the definitive characteristics to positively identify the fish. I spoke to Dr. Bob Bellig, a biology professor at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, about the fish. He also thinks it is a lake sturgeon and said he is somewhat surprised that one had not been recorded from the Minnesota yet.

Some of the deciding factors we used to arrive at the lake sturgeon was the size of the fish. The largest shovelnose recorded from Minnesota is 4lb. 13 oz. The largest shovelnose record I could find was a 13 lb. specimen caught in the Missouri River in Montana. The color of the fish, although not a definitive characteristic, was very dark like other lake sturgeon rather than the light, golden yellow of shovelnose sturgeon. The shape of the snout and the shape of the area by the tail look more like that of the lake sturgeon than the shovelnose sturgeon.

Dr. Bellig will be getting back to me with his identification of the fish after he has a chance to carefully review the pictures. I will report his findings a talk a little more about sturgeons and offer some speculation as to where this fish came from.

EDITORIAL

The following ia taken from an article by well known out-door writer and avid fisherman Bill Heavey. I felt I should share it with you because it sums up, I feel, the way a large segment of todays anglers look at fishing. He also has a realistic idea of what fishing really is and should be to all of us. I hope you enjoy it as much as I have.

In a country where fishing, like Mid-east politics or women's fashion, has been taken over by extremists, guys who take the middle path--the way of discount tackle shops, wet tennis shoes, poison ivy, and spinning gear--are accorded all the respect of carp



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chum.

Every so often, I venture out to see what the modern American bass and trout boys are up to. It nearly always confirms my opinion that if Missing the Point were a criminal offense, most of these guys would be making license plates.

My last excursion with a local bass fisherman illustrated this perfectly. I sank into the upholstery of his \$22,000 raspberry flake rocket sled, outfitted with a trolling motor the size of my car's engine and 3D forward-looking sonar so sophisticated you can't sell one to anybody from Libya or France. My host wedged me in tight, looked over at me like you would at a baby in a car seat, and hit the throttle. The big outboard exploded like hell had opened a drive-thru window just behind us, the G-forces flattening out my cheeks. I realized we weren't on the so much as above it, descending occasionally to punish it for getting in our way.

My host carried his own personal thicket of bait-casters, graphite broom-sticks spooled with 20-pound test so he could yank 3 pound bass out of the rivet's dense hydrilla. Once he-I hooked one, he brought it in so fast it looked like the fish was water-skiing headfirst toward the boat. He stopped casting only once in nine hours, to wolf down a pack of peanut-butter crackers. I was surprised he took the time to unwrap them. Then I made the mistake of asking if he ever used spinning rods. "Hell no" he growled. "I call those things fairy wands."

Now call it dumb luck or call it fate, but on that particular day the biggest bass, a 41 pounder, fell to a pumpkin tube on a 1/8-ounce slip sinker cast by yours truly, Tinkerbell. With his fairy wand.

At the other end of the scale are my yuppie friends who have taken up fly fishing with all the gaiety of Jehovah's Witnesses. Where did these people come from? I think what happens is this: If you make over \$80,000 a year and drive a Saab, somebody from the Fly Fishing Bureau of Indoctrination shows up at your house and teaches you to false cast in your living room. If you also wear steel-rimmed glasses and have an untrained golden retriever with a red bandanna tied around its neck, they immediately present you with a Tonkin bamboo rod (two tips), a spin surgeon's headlamp, and a leather leader wallet embossed with Izaak Walton's profile. At a party one of these instant experts actually sniffed "Of course, you can catch more fish on a spinning rod..." leaving the sentence unfinished, which is a clever way of saying, "...if your a total moron" without moving your lips. I just nodded my head as if he had a good point and stuck my fist in the yogurt dip. Then I got a little testy. "Wait a minute," I said as evenly as I could. "Did I miss something while I was in the bathroom? Was there a moment when catching less fish became more fun? I love catching more fish! Some of my best times fishing have actually occurred when I caught a lot of fish! What happens when you catch a lot of fish? DOES IT MAKE YOU SAD? By now he was backing up as if held hooked a big gar in a small pool, and my girlfriend was rattling the car keys.

I'm standing waist-deep in a Potomac River rock garden 23 miles from where Bill Clinton ties up traffic for 15 minutes every time he goes to the McDonalds on 17th Street. The star grass is tugging at my legs in the current as I cast to the ancient ambush stations behind boulders, the ledges I know from years of donating lures there, the seams where



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Send all correspondence and submissions
to: Mike Deinken, Editor
1022 N. Spring St.
New Ulm, MN 56073

NUASF Board

Pres. Scott Sparlin 359-2346
V.P. Jerry Carlson 354-8869
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dead water meets quick. I am the only person out here, and behind me a blood-red sunset is pulling mares' tails west over the roof of the world, the swallows have come to wheel and sip bugs from the air. I cast a silver Rapala-no satellite uplink, no quadrasonic propeller, no phosphorescent Hawg Scent into an eddy, where it spins all woozy in the foam. I twitch it once, wait, then make it wobble like a drunk performing for the police. You know the rest. Then comes a dark shape rising, a concussion, the electricity in the rod that says, I think somebody's home.

He leaps twice, all shivering gills and anger, pulls line, and surges toward an undercut. I turn him and he heads right at me, thinks better of it, and makes a last run downstream for heavy water, where I turn him again. What finally comes into my hand is 14 inches, maybe a pound, nothing to brag about. But this is not about bragging. This is about something else entirely. I lower him back to the water. He snaps from my hand and is gone. The river shoulders past, a busy man with other things on his mind. I fish on, catching several more. I don't even remember to keep count. Suddenly it's dark and I realize for over an hour I've thought not once about my car's transmission, or that my boss came into my office this morning to brag about his son putting an entire pizza in his mouth, or the women I'm seeing says sometimes that she feels alone when she's with me. Guys need this. It's sort of what we have instead of a book club. I suddenly have the momentary and surprising feeling that at this moment I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be. I'm calm. I'm happy. I'm happier here than any place I can think of.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Our membership continues to grow, and why not, this is a great group. With recent additions we have gone well over the century mark and don't be surprised if this jumps a great deal during the next year.

Our deepest sympathies go out to the Henry Nupson family at the passing of Carol, our hearts and prayers are with all of you.

This is a good time of the year to reflect and set some time aside to count the many ways in which we have been blessed with the gifts of our natural world that have been given to us by our creator. These indeed are sacred and deserve the best possible care and wise use we can humanly give. Never doubt that we profoundly affect the course of that which sustains all life as we know it. With this in mind, it makes the choice of priorities in ones life a little bit easier and justifies what seems to some to be rigid, harsh, or unforgiving action.

May the new year bring the best to us all, and good fishing to at least some of us.

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

You still have until our December meeting to sign new members. The person who signs the most new members at this time will win a Club jacket donated by Printwear Graphics. You are more than welcome to bring prospective members along to the meeting. So far we only have seven new members for this years drive, so bring a couple of friends along to the meeting.

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TIP LINE

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If you have a small aluminum canoe, use it to drag ice fishing gear onto the lake. It slides easily over packed or crusted snow, and holds a lot of gear. Also it can be a lifesaver if someone breaks through thin ice.

Golden rod grubs make excellent bait for winter bluegill fishing. After the first frost, look for stalks with balloon like bulges and collect them in bundles for storage in the garage or basement. When you need bait, slice open a swelling and extract the grub.



MILLE LACS TRIP

The time for departing on our annual trek North to Mille Lacs Lake is drawing closer. The bus is more than half full. We still have room for about twelve people. It is time to make the decision. This is truly a trip that you will not forget, and once you have gone, you will want to go every year. The houses are all very comfortable and warm. There is also the possibility of hooking up with that once in a lifetime walleye, or maybe a mess of jumbo perch. No matter what the fishing has been like we have always managed to have a good time. We are scheduled to leave early on the afternoon of Friday, January 21st. We will be returning late afternoon of the 23rd. It is a reasonably priced weekend getaway. For more information, come to the next meeting, or contact Mike Deinken at 359-9650.

(picture)

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CLEAR LAKE UPDATE

The ice has come. There is not a whole lot of it, but is here. Some brave souls have already ventured out on it to try their luck at fishing. From the anglers I talked to, the bite had not yet started. There was only about 3 inches of ice, which is not enough as far as I am concerned. This is a dangerous time of the year for fishermen. When you go out, be sure to take precautions and check the ice as you walk out. The aeration system has been overhauled this past fall and is ready to go if needed this coming season. It won't be long before the fish are biting at Clear Lake and we will all be able to enjoy the action again.

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