

A LOCAL CHAPTER OF
AMERICA'S LEADING NONPROFIT
COLDWATER FISHERIES
CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION

Meanders

**A few thoughts from
the president**
Laurie Seibert



Laurie Seibert, chapter president



THE MERSHON MUDDLER

♦ *Newsletter of the Mershon-Neumann Heritage Chapter of Trout Unlimited* ♦

1989, 1996 & 1997 RECIPIENT OF THE MICHIGAN COUNCIL TU CHAPTER OF THE YEAR AWARD

My fly boxes are organized (at least until the Sunday after opening day), we have two new rods built and ready for action, and I got that funky smell out of my waders. I'm ready. But what really gets me excited to start fishing is my grandkids . . . Nothing makes me want to get out a rod more than having one of them say “member when I caught that fish bigger than yours Grandma? Can we do that again?”

I know you think this is a shameless way to show off my adorable family (somewhat true...), but it's more than that. I've been told every president has a “thing” they think is important, and the presidency is a vehicle to get it done. Mine is getting younger people involved.

As an educator by profession and a mom and grandma by luck, I am privileged to see how the energy and passion of a kid can turn a job into an adventure. My dream is to get a few dozen of those types of kids addicted to fishing so they will work to protect the places they love to be. I am blessed to have many people behind me, setting up situations for that to happen.

All winter, members of our chapter have been helping the Saginaw 4-H–sponsored Fish Academy. Twice a month, kids learn about different aspects of fishing, from ice fishing to stream health. It is expected that by May more than 70 kids will access the program.

On May 12, 2022, we will be exchanging our traditional, more formal banquet, for a family-type event to raise funds. This year seems the perfect time to host an event outside; indoor events have not been popular due to COVID. I hope you will bring the entire family out to enjoy the Rolling Smokehouse BBQ food truck, bid on some prizes, and have some fun playing some games. Meet us at shelters 1 and 2 at the Bay City Recreation Area. Even if you don't have kids, there will be speakers and plenty of grown-up fun.

Youth are the focus as we join the Saginaw County Parks and Recreation department for the Catch Me If You Can Family Fishing Festival at Haithco Park the morning of June 4. It will be a morning of fun and education—and it's free!

A more structured way to engage 14–17-year-olds in conservation and fishing is the Michigan Trout Unlimited Youth Conservation and Trout Camp, held in Roscommon June 19–23. If you know of anyone interested, please contact me at president@mershon-neumanntu.org.

This summer we hope to be able to use Gamble Creek as a real-life lab for teens as we collect baseline data for the stream restoration project. Training in the River Steward Program will be provided by MITU biologist Kristen Thomas, so the data we collect can be used by Trout Unlimited to prioritize projects. Let us know if you are interested in learning how to take data or in participating with the teens later in the summer.

I am proud to see what is happening. It's a good thing. I hope my grandchildren know when they ask, “Can we do that again?” the answer will always be yes. ♦

Many hands make light work

by Laurie Seibert, chapter president

A person I greatly admire has often said to me, “none of us is as smart as all of us.” Those words have been resounding through my head frequently as I look at what is happening in our chapter.

Over the past few months, we have had several people contact me to ask what they can do—and there are jobs for all of them! Here is what is happening because of a few people going above and beyond.

Rachael Cull, mother of two great kids at one of our events, offered to take on the task of trying to set up an online store for our chapter, as well as “whatever else needs to be done.” Taking her at her word, I mentioned we were trying to find a venue for our next Family Fly Fishing Fun Festival. Within hours, she wrangled a contact in the Saginaw Parks and Rec with an invitation to join an event much like ours. We welcomed the idea of sharing in an already established and successful family day at Haithco Park! So, please look forward to bringing your children, grandchildren, and neighborhood children out to Haithco Park on June 4 to enjoy some fishing and fun. More details will follow.

Randy Hayward has agreed to chair the newly formed Rifle River Restoration Committee (RRRC). I imagine as I write this he is looking at tree catalogs, trying to figure the best price and type of tree to use in the tree giveaway program the group wants to sponsor. He has a

river clean-up on the upper branch of the Rifle River on the calendar for Jun 11, 2022, and is planning to visit the county drain commissioners to find how we can work together to keep the river clean and flowing. He is just getting started.

Ted Lind, a member for a few years, has given us so many great ideas for future events. If you were at F3T, you might have noticed his other claim to fame. Ted is the father of three pretty spectacular children. Ted is already working on ways to make F3T even more spectacular next year.

George Buehler, Rifle River property owner, spent a considerable amount of time last year stocking and monitoring mailboxes to make sure they are full of onion bags. And he’s ready to go again this summer.

Not all the people stepping forward are members. Dave Neal is a member of the Ann Arbor Chapter of TU but still finds time to attend meetings with us because he believes in the work we are trying to do on a river where he owns property. He is organizing the Clear and Open Cutting Workshop for April 25 in addition to all the work he does for the RRRC.

Todd Golebiewski, owner of River View Campground and Canoe Livery, is working to make the transition from the previous organization to the new Rifle River Restoration Committee flow seamlessly. He offers a great deal of experience and strong connections to the property owner along the river.

April Simmons, DNR, will tell you it's part of her job to keep track of what we're doing, but she takes it to a whole new level. She is attending meetings, answering questions, helping us network, writing articles, and will be speaking at our May 12

fundraising picnic—all with eagerness that is contagious.

Huron Pines has connected us with another area professional, Samantha Nellis. Samantha is also attending meetings and linking us with other conservationists. Again, although it's part of her job, she seems to put a bit extra into it. And, it is appreciated.

Stacie Gath, 4-H Program Coordinator for Saginaw County, has formed a strong collaboration with our chapter, helping educate us on how we can get more families and kids involved in fishing and conservation.

There have been many, many times I have relied on the staff at EGLE to walk me through the permitting process as we complete the application for the Gamble Creek project. Katie Blodgett has been an excellent resource in teaching me how to measure for the OHWM (for those of you who are not hydrologists, that is the Ordinary High Water Mark), as well as how to determine the area of land that may be affected by any stream work we do. Kind and gentle instructions given along the way have made what could be an overwhelming task not only manageable but actually satisfying! Again you could say this is her job. Again, I would say, she is answering questions morning, noon, and night, seven days a week.

The above list is only the people I have had contact with just this past week—there are many more people doing what they can to make our chapter strong. On behalf of the board, all the members, and myself, thank you. ♦



2022 Fundraising Picnic



COVID has changed the way we do many things. And our annual Spring Fundraising Banquet is one of them.

This year we hope we have your support as we move from a more formal event in April to a family friendly casual event May 12, 5-8 at the Bay City Recreation Area, shelters 1 and 2. You can still look forward to raffles and games. Your friends and fishing buddies will still be there to share stories.

This year Bryan Burroughs (MITU) and April SImmons (DNR) will speak on how TU has made an impact on Michigan waters. Food will be available from Rolling Smokehouse BBQ food truck; offering a wide menu.

One thing remains the same; this is our main form of fundraising- attending this picnic helps us with funding the projects our chapter works on each year. Thank you for your support. ♦

Raffle tickets arriving soon

by Nick Thomas, chapter vice president

This year instead of having our Annual Banquet we will be having a Family Picnic Fundraiser to raise money for chapter projects. In the near future you will be receiving a mailing of raffle tickets on the below 2 prizes. In the mailing we will be asking members to either sell or buy the raffle tickets to support your chapter's continued efforts to fund stream improvement projects on both the AuSable and Rifle Rivers. Please help us make this a successful raffle!

ORVIS HELIOS 3D BLACKOUT 5-WEIGHT OUTFIT

9'5" 5-weight Orvis Helios 3D Blackout fly rod,
Orvis Mirage LT II Blackout fly reel,
SA Amplitude Smooth Infinity fly line,
Backing, rod tube, rod sack and reel case.

Retail Price \$1,487.45

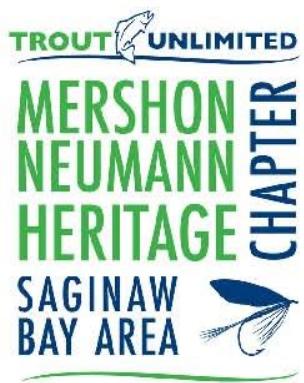
Thank you to Little Forks Outfitters in Midland

TRAEGER PRO SERIES 34 WOOD PELLET GRILL BRONZE

- Digital pro controller with New Advanced Grilling Logic that keeps the internal temperature within +/-15 degrees F for precision grilling
- Two meat probes let you monitor multiple cuts of meat without needing to lift the lid
- Fueled by 100 percent pure hardwood pellets. Real wood, real flavor
- Electronic auto-start ignition
- Easy to clean porcelain grill grates
- Powerful steel construction and durable powder coat finish
- Versatility to grill, smoke, bake, roast, braise and BBQ

Retail Price \$ 749.99

Thank you to Woodside Hardware in Essexville



FUNDRAISING PICNIC MAY 12, 2022

Raffles

Prizes

Auctions

Games

Activities



***Everyone
Welcome!***

*Speakers
addressing
the impact
of Trout
Unlimited's
work on
Michigan
waterways.*

**Bay City State Park
Shelters 1 & 2
5:00 pm**

**Food Truck
Available**

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
VISIT Mershon-NeumannTU.org
OR FACEBOOK.COM/MERSHONTU

Trout Unlimited Fly- Fishing School

Since 1971 the Michigan Trout Unlimited Fly Fishing School (TUFFS) has been teaching people to fish, and teaching those who think they already know how to fish better.

The School is held annually at Ranch Rudolf near Traverse City during the second weekend in June. In general the school hosts 75 students with 30 instructors, all of whom are volunteers, and many are certified fly casting instructors and guides. Since the instructors are volunteers the tuition only pays for room and lodging and school costs. Many people have said it is the equivalent of 5 to 10 years of figuring it out yourself. Instruction is offered at the beginning,

intermediate and advanced levels. It is a great place for a parent and child or spouses to attend together. Because there are different levels of instruction, families with different experience levels can find the training they need.

If you are interested, check out tufts.org for pricing, what to bring lists, and registration options. ♦



Michigan Trout Unlimited Youth and Conservation Camp

The Mershon-Neumann Heritage Chapter is proud to participate in the MITU Youth Conservation and Trout Camp. Hosted by the Kalamazoo Valley Chapter Trout Unlimited, the camp is held **Sunday, June 19–Thursday, June 23rd, 2022**, at the Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center, Roscommon, in the heart of Northern Michigan trout country.

The four-day Camp is designed to educate our 14–17-year-old boys and girls. No previous fly fishing experience is necessary! In the

evenings, the students will get to test their new skills on all three branches of the famous Au Sable River, casting to beautiful brookies, spunky rainbows, and big brown trout. All of this will be under the guidance of local experts and Trout Unlimited

volunteers. This camp is educational, but it is also designed to be fun!

The deadline for registering is April 30. If you are interested, please contact us at Mershon-neumanntu@mershon-neumanntu.org. ♦



MICHIGAN TROUT UNLIMITED

Youth Conservation and Trout Camp



Open to everyone 14-17 years of age

When: June 19th Through June 23rd 2022

Where: Ralph A. MacMullan Conference Center
104 Conservation Dr.
Roscommon, MI 48653



For Applications go to:
www.KVCTU.org
Click on the "2022 Youth Camp" icon

For More Information Email:
Char Hammond: CharHammond@KVCTU.org
Jon Chizmadia: JonChizmadia@KVCTU.org
Andy Pokorski: AndyPokorski@KVCTU.org

MDNR Spring Report

by April Simmons, MDNR Fisheries Biologist

As ice melt and spring arrives, the streams throughout the southern Lake Huron watershed come alive with both warm and coldwater species. The last Saturday of April marks the opening of trout fishing and possession in all designated trout streams. It is no secret that the Rifle and Au Gres Rivers and their tributaries offer a variety of trout fishing opportunities throughout the year. However, you might not have to travel hours north to find success this spring. Over 20 streams in the Midland, Gladwin, Isabella, and Clare County area support Brook and Brown Trout.

The Pine River originates in southeastern Mecosta County, flows through the southwestern part of Isabella County, dips through Montcalm County and Gratiot Counties, and then flows northerly into Midland County where it empties into the Chippewa just southwest of Midland. The Pine

River from Lumberjack Road (43.372238, -84.835810) upstream to 10th Avenue (43.568863, -85.105601) and is a designated Type I trout stream that has been stocked with Brown Trout by MDNR at multiple access locations annually since 1979. A survey conducted in 2015 found a healthy Brown Trout population that is growing above state average. Past reports indicate that anglers may even be able to land a Brook Trout periodically within this system. Public access can be gained at road crossings throughout the stream reach.

Just a hop over into Gladwin and Clare County, hundreds of trout can be found in the North and Middle Branch Tobacco River. MDNR has been actively managing the North Branch since the mid-1930s, but the trout here are solely the product of natural reproduction. In 2021, MDNR captured 37 Brook Trout ranging from 2-9 inches and 386 Brown Trout ranging from 2-20 inches. MDNR has had success partnering with property owners to reduce habitat degradation and have seen an increase in trout abundance over time ensuring a bright future for this trout stream. The Middle Branch Tobacco River is a transitional coolwater stream offering the opportunity to fish for trout and

panfish in the same trip. Brown Trout in this branch are growing above state average and up into harvestable sizes.

MDNR can't protect this state's stunning natural resources without the support of the public. If you wish to partner with MDNR to develop best management practices for your waterfront property or have questions about trout designations or fish management in general – don't hesitate to reach out to MDNR Fisheries Biologist April Simmons (simmonsa14@michigan.gov or 989-220-8688). As always fishing reports are greatly appreciated. May your days be sunny, and your line stay tight! ♦

Editor's Column

by David Oeming, Muddler editor

Time to stop writing and start organizing gear, right? The ditches are full, I can see at least two inches into the stream, and there oughta be a confused bug and a hungry trout somewhere

Not quite yet. Time to get the Spring Muddler out to the masses.

Our industrious President Laurie Seibert's contributions to this issue are timely and informative. President Seibert illustrates the Chapter's efforts to maintain our fundraising and education events viable even as COVID restrictions

are easing. All members and families may enjoy taking advantage of these programs.

We have a new regional DNR Fisheries Biologist for our portion of the Lower Peninsula: April Simmons, working out of the Bay City DNR Customer Service Center. Ms. Simmons, an engaging young lady, has graciously prepared an article about trout fishing activities close to our Chapter's venue. I understand she will be present for our May outdoor event, and I recommend that you make her acquaintance.

Larry Brown's insightful contribution "Pride of Man" manages to wrap philosophy around a steelhead fishing trip gone terribly awry. One wonders

how Larry can catch anything; it appears he spends most of his time on the water thinking instead of matching wits with a trout.

For my part, I am currently working on my PhD (Piled Higher and Deeper) in the esoteric discipline of BS (Basic Science). In this issue of the Muddler, I offer an exhaustively researched sample of my academic endeavors.

Tight Lines! ♦

The Pride of Man

by Larry Brown, chapter board member and trout savant

Winter steelhead fishing is always a risky endeavor, especially when the air is cold and the water is making lots of ice. "Who cares about the weather? I need to get outside," he told his spouse as he headed to the car. He also knew that fishing alone at his age was an added risk. Yet, he had too much stubborn pride to accept this. The drive was uneventful. The oldies station played a song he had not heard in a long time called, "Pride of Man." Soon he was hip deep in the river, the old lyrics coursing through his head. He felt better already. It was time to find the fish.

The first hole held no takers. The second hole showed a dark deep pocket below a broad gravel bar. A big spruce sweeper pointed downstream, covering the bend of the pool. He thought this looked like a good spot. The first cast was swept into the bubble line near the sweeper. The side of a large fish flashed as it took the fly and plunged deep under the sweeper. The jolt of the strike caught him off balance. He struck back hard. The fish shot downstream, dragging him into the deep, cold pool. His waders quickly filled with water. When his head went under, he let go of the rod. Flailing his arms proved futile. As soon as he exhaled his last breath, the cold water filled his lungs. He struggled in vain to get his head above water. In desperation, he stretched his fingertips above the surface of the deep pool, reaching for the Sky. His life passed before him. Then he knew no more.

Looking up, he was startled by a blinding white light shining directly into his eyes. A long strong arm went over his shoulder and under his arm, pulling him to the bank. He coughed out water amid sputtering raspy gasps. Finally settling down,

he looked at the stranger and said, "Thanks Man, you really saved my bacon." The stranger replied, "Well, you have left one World and entered another." He took a closer look at the stranger. His appearance was odd, yet somehow familiar. He wore a thick green and black checked wool shirt with suspenders. His canvas waders were spotless. He sported a very long white beard and a weather-beaten face, topped with a large fur hat. He looked like he had stepped out of another century. In many respects, he had. So he asked him directly, "Who are you anyway?"

"My name is not important. Look around you, do you notice anything different?" As his foggy mind cleared, he did notice that his surroundings had drastically changed. The trees were mostly conifers of tremendous size and abundance. One white pine appeared to be about eight feet thick and over two hundred feet tall. There were other trees of equally large size as far as the eye could see. Intermittent stands of giant hemlocks made the forest look deep and forbidding. Fir, cedar, spruce, and tamarack grew next to the river. The bleached skull of a large antlered Moose sat on the streambank. Off in the distance, a loon made a loud eerie call. It was answered by the beautifully harmonized howls of several nearby wolves. The river itself coursed a serpentine route of pools and riffles, loaded with sweepers and fallen timber. Occasional flashes of fish shown throughout the river. Everything looked so pristine.

He felt very small and insignificant. "Now where am I," he asked?

"Where you are is not important. The point is how did you get here," said the wise old sage. He begged him to continue. The sage took a deep breath, then he began his tale, "There was a time in this world when humankind sought to reshape their surroundings to suit their every need. They procured food, clothing, and shelter in great abundance. They found time for scientific inquiry. They made great advances in technology and the arts. Soon, they multiplied rapidly, far outstripping the Earth's resources.

Even the four horsemen of the apocalypse (war, famine, disease, and pestilence) could not check their advance. Humankind had chosen to ignore the tenants of natural law to their own disaster. The ecosystem of Earth was fouled to the point of collapse, thus leading to mass extinction of flora and fauna. Widespread famine, loss of forests, polluted water, poisoned air, accelerated climate change, were all symptoms of ignoring natural law. The leading cause was human overpopulation based on conquering nature rather than living within the limits of nature. Natural Law dictates that over-population by any species, including humans, is corrected by emigration, increased predation, outbreaks of disease, or mass starvation. Something had to be done."

He continued on," Artificial Intelligence was a human invention that took many forms. One of these forms was applied to the population problem. The basic program was this: whenever the human population exceeded the carrying capacity of an ecosystem, the excess humanity would be removed. This was more efficient and effective than the slow, cumbersome workings of natural law. At first, Artificial Intelligence was the servant of the people trying desperately to diffuse the population bomb. It all began with the best of intentions, aimed at preserving the human race through a measured application of natural law. However, soon after the global nuclear holocaust, the situation got out of hand, the servant became the master." The sage stopped and took a deep breath.

Then he finished. "Yet, there were obvious benefits. With the human population now well under control, natural ecosystems rebounded in both numbers and diversity. The Great Lakes rebounded with a multitude of species to fill every niche. Great forests cleansed the atmosphere and moderated climate

(See **Pride**, page 9)

Pride, continued from page 8

change. What you see around you is a rich, diverse, example of nature reasserting itself. Multiple species evolved around the World to restore ecosystem strength through a diversity of interdependent life forms. The age of Man was finished, a new age had begun."

"But wait! I am a fisherman. What happened to the fish?" he asked? The sage carefully replied, "Fish are only one species among many. As I just said, once the meddling hand of Man was removed, native species returned and flourished. No more exotic species, invasive species, or dangerous hybrids. Only those native fish best suited to the local ecosystem were allowed because they were uniquely suited to best survive in that habitat. Would you like to see an example?" "Of course," he replied. To honor the request, the sage lay down on the riverbank above an undercut. He hung his bare arm in the water, feeling around underneath the bank. Soon he began to move his arm back and forth in a slow stroking fashion. A large trout rolled up from the bottom and lay on its side. He slid his thumb under the gill-plate and inserted his index finger into its mouth. Carefully, the sage lifted the fish from the water. It was one of the largest trout he had ever seen. Yet the fish was somehow unique and different. The body looked stocky and well-muscled. The top coloration was a perfect match for the stream bottom. The large spots on the sides were black, yellow, and red with a blue background halo. The tail was square with no fork.

The belly was a deep blood red. The fins were the same deep red, front edged with white, then black. He inquired, "Hey, what kind of a trout did you say that was?" The sage slowly answered, "I couldn't say what kind, but I can tell you how it got here."

"This fish is a new species among many other new species. They resulted from rapid mutation due to the last nuclear holocaust," the sage replied. "You mean accelerated evolution, like what occurred after the Chernobyl Accident," he inquired? "Yes," he replied. "But this holocaust was much larger- truly a global catastrophe. Most of the human race was annihilated. Those species that were left, rapidly mutated into new life forms. The human survivors had no choice but to perfect and implement the artificial intelligence system to prevent further disaster. What you see around you grew from that decision. Humankind finally learned how to give back," he stated with finality. "But wait, I have more questions," he pleaded. "Too late for that. You have seen enough." the old sage retorted. Turning swiftly, the old sage looked straight into his eyes, holding him spellbound with a piercing gaze. There was a blinding flash of white light followed by a jolt of hot lightning that shot through his chest. The pain was sharp and intense. He slipped into shock. Then, he knew no more.

Later he awoke in a brightly lit room full of blinking, beeping, machines. Bags of fluids hung from metal stands feeding him through intravenous tubes. He could feel his limbs, but he could not move. He looked down at the IV tubes attached to his feet. A beautiful woman with long curly red brown hair

sat looking at him. "Are you an Angel," he asked? "No, I am your wife," she replied. "What am I doing here," he asked. "You went wading in the river, took a swim, and almost drowned. Fortunately, somebody saw you go under. The EMT's brought you here when you were still unconscious. You have been in a coma for several days," she paused, then continued, "A few minutes ago, you went into cardiac arrest. They used the defibrillator to bring you back. You just woke up." "Why am I strapped down," he asked? She slowly answered, "You kept pulling out your IV tubes, so they strapped you in and stuck them in your feet." "Do you remember anything," she inquired? "I remember having the wildest dream, very vivid, very real. You would not believe it," he exclaimed. "Where is the old gent with the white beard," he asked? "Nobody like that has been here," she replied. He slowly laid back and remembered the chorus to a rock ballad from his youth, "Oh God, the pride of man lies broken in the dust again." ♦

RECOMMENDED READING

- *The Forests of Michigan*, by Donald Dickman and Larry Leefers
- *The Life of the Lakes, A guide to the Great Lakes Fishery* by Brandon Schroder, Dan O'Keefe, and Shari L. Dann
- *The World without Us*, by Alan Weisman

FAVORED LISTENING

- "Pride of Man," performed by Quicksilver Messenger Service, via YouTube



Hands-Free tickling of trout is beneficial for both Tickler and Ticklee

By David Oeming, editor of the Muddler and chapter advisor

Editor's Note: Fishing with hands (also called "noodling") is legal only in the southern U.S., and (oddly) in Illinois and Wisconsin. For example, the rule in Michigan provides:

"It Is Unlawful To:
Fish with your hands, firearms, explosives, setlines, poisons or methods other than lawful fishing methods." 2021
Michigan Fishing Guide, p. 11.
 (emphasis added).

The tickling of fish involves the use of hands for fishing, analogous to illegal use of hands in a football contest. For this reason, should a trout be tickled as described herein, the law will impose a penalty if the trout is handled or possessed manually or by any other method than those enumerated for lawful fishing. If the goal is to possess trout thus tickled, the fisherman is well advised to attempt fish tickling in a jurisdiction where such activity is not specifically prohibited.

It may be noted, however, that there is no reference in the Michigan regs to the use of feathers and fur to tickle a fish.

SCENARIO

You know this spot. There is a good trout lurking under that log; a good trout is always there. You've missed big fish on this stretch before, but not this time; the piscine gods are smiling, the spinner fall is just starting, and you are ready!

First cast: nothing, but you are just getting the range.

Second cast: still nothing, but decent fish are rising upstream, and it will only be a matter of patience.

Third cast: still no action. Better re-dress the fly to get the presentation just right.

Fourth cast: maybe you'll try the shallow run on the other side of the stream, just to see if the fly looks OK. No takers there either, but you don't want to disturb the moment with a dinky fish anyway.

Fifth cast: zilch. What can you do if the trout simply will not cooperate? Perhaps you should consider inducing surrender of the trout by tickling.

ABSTRACT

Catching a fish (usually a trout) by manually stroking the animal ("tickling") is an ancient practice that is currently disapproved in most jurisdictions, including Michigan. This paper describes the physiology involved in this method of catching fish, and argues that if feathers and hackle are stealthily placed in contact with a trout, the fish will enter a transformed state of consciousness leading to a state of "tonic immobility".* This is the functional equivalent of the fish being hooked by an artificial fly the angler has tied on a hook; however, the fish has not been and will not be assaulted by hook, net, or hand except as later chosen by the angler. The difference is that a fish caught on a hook and handled by the fisherman is thereby possessed, whereas a tickled fish is not brought under the fisherman's control in any substantive way. That is the entire point of using hookless fly imitations to fool trout: the less damage to the quarry, the better for both predator and prey.

ARGUMENT and AUTHORITIES
 The ancient practice of "trout tickling" involves catching a fish by hand (as noted, generally legal only below the Mason-Dixon Line.) This method can

*As Muddler readers well know, fisherman can be and often are placed in a state of tonic immobility by the addition of a generous shot of decent gin, a twist of lime, and a few rocks.

be traced at least to the writings of the Greek writer Aelian from the Third Century A.D as quoted in the *De Natura Animalium* (English translation circa 1565): "If men wade into the sea, when the water is low, end stroking the fish nestling in the pools, suddenly lay hands upon and secure them."

A modern description of trout tickling is "the art of rubbing the underbelly of a trout with fingers. If done properly, the trout will go into a trance after a minute or so and can then easily be retrieved and thrown onto the nearest bit of dry land" ("Trout Tickling: Catching a Fish with Bare Hands," *FlyFishingLines.net* (2014); Brian Morgan, "Story of the Virgin Soldier," *Trout Tickling*, May 12, 2005).

Current scientific thought is that fish sense touch from an external object or force experienced through a fish's "lateral line", a patch of neuromasts (sensory receptors) located just under the skin. This organ assists the fish in determining water currents, finding direction in dark water, and sensing nearby objects (Parmly Hearing Institute of Loyola University Chicago. "Lateral Line Physiology and Anatomy." 10 October 2008).

Trout tickling may produce an immediate changed condition in the affected animal described as "tonic immobility". An example of this phenomenon includes "hypnotizing" a chicken by holding its beak to a line drawn on a surface. Experienced trout ticklers can paralyze a fish by stroking its belly. It is thought that this reflex state is a response to perceived threat of trauma.

Tonic immobility has been observed in both cartilaginous and bony fishes. Despite the fact that few if any of us fly-fish for sharks or rays, let alone engage in flipping them or tickling their noses, this state of tonic immobility can be induced by

(See **Tickling**, page 11)

Tickling, continued from page 10

turning the animal on its back (www.iflscience.com/plants-and-animals/shark-slapping-how-researchers-paralyze-huge-sharks-with-a-nose-tickle, November 03, 2021). Many bony fishes also exhibit this condition, including goldfish, tench, trout, and others (“Fishes feigning death,” Stéphan G. Reebs, Université de Moncton, Canada (2007)).

Fortunately, the affected fish quickly recovers from this altered state, which may last for several hours. The revival is instantaneous, and the fish seems no worse for the experience (“Fish hypnosis: Induction of an atonic immobility reflex,” March 2005, *Marine Behaviour and Physiology*, 38(1):71-78).

As noted above, “Fishing with your hands” is specifically listed as an illegal fishing method in Michigan and most other states above the Mason-Dixon line. Readers of the *Muddler* in fact fish for trout with flies and would not consider even for a moment engaging in any “illegal fishing method”, let alone tickling or noodling a trout manually. Our readers use flies, dry or otherwise, made by skilled craftspersons using natural and synthetic materials, including feathers made into hackles used to make ties or wraps around a hook. Some of the most common types of fly-tying hackle are saddle feathers, hackle feathers, cul de canard and more. Examples of flies that are likely to induce tactile excitement in a trout include palmered patterns, caterpillars, and stoneflies (Troutster.com/types-of-hackle-and-fly-tying-feathers, October 03, 2014).

Thus, the question: Might dubbing and feathers adorning a hookless trout fly tickle a fish to the point of inducing a state of tonic immobility without the fisherman touching the fish at all?

For purposes of this discussion, “tickling” refers to production of a sensation called “knismesis” which may be described as the tickling feeling experienced when something lightly touches skin, causing an itchy sensation. Knismesis is a protective reflex to stop an individual from being harmed (scratched, bitten, eaten, otherwise injured). The reflex is commonly observed in mammals and is also noted among fishes (*Scientific Scribbles*, The University of Melbourne, October 10, 2019).

Gentle contact with a feather is generally accepted to cause a tickling feeling in the ticklee, and for the wary trout, it certainly can cause a protective reflex reaction to a perceived threat. This is the referenced “tonic immobility” reaction that becomes activated when circastrike defenses prove ineffective in the face of continued threat (“Understanding Peritraumatic Dissociation: Evolution-Prepared Dissociation, Tonic Immobility, and Clinical Dissociation,” p. 56. Laura A. Halvorsen, Antioch University - New England (2014)).

The brain of a fish, including the trout you are certain is residing in a lie within your easy casting distance, includes a hypothalamus, an important regulatory center for food intake. This part of the brain also influences instinctive reactions to situations -- such as fight or flight (*Daily Mail.com*, May 27, 2013). The trout cannot accept interference with its eating behaviors and is on high alert during such periods (“Hypothalamic Integration of Metabolic, Endocrine, and Circadian Signals in Fish: Involvement in the Control of Food Intake,” *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, 26 June 2017).

You don’t have to caress the trout manually, utilize firearms and traps, or employ explosives if the fish are not feeding. Stealthy and adroit application of sufficient feathery hackle to a trout *sans hook* can overstimulate the hypothalamus inducing a protective reflex in the fish, leading to tonic immobility. It’s only a question of proper placement of a hook-less fly. Skillful presentation

will produce an entranced fish and you won’t have to touch the trout at all.

DISCLAIMER: *A common reaction to being tickled is laughter, albeit nervous and even self-defensive with no mirth experienced by either party to the tickle. Trout laughter is a complex subject for another research project, which will require significant effort, time, and funding. Empirical evidence collected by your author indicates that trout in any given stretch of stream giggle, snicker, laugh, and even exhibit signs of hysteria when observing our flyfishing practices. It is unknown whether the fish enjoy the show, but it certainly seems so.*

CONCLUSION

If everything works properly, the feathered offering to the trout will gently, seductively, purposefully, and thoughtfully caress your quarry without damage or even threat of a puncture wound. The trout will be overcome by a wave of emotions; without defense to your entreaties the target will become immobile, and thus succumb to your siren song. No untoward actions, and certainly no “illegal taking of fish with hands” (or net, firearms, etc.). The satisfied fisherman’s quiet observation of *le petit mort* will be sufficient to complete this natural tableau. Research has shown that the trout will fully recover in due course and swim off to regale its mates with a glorious tale of requited romance (“Catch and Release” at its best!).

And you, gentle fisherman, will be able to report that the fishing was as good for the fish as it was for you. ♦

Author’s Note: Your author’s exhaustive review of the literature has not located a reliable interview with a trout or any other fish for comment regarding the subjective experience of the trout while being tickled, or an objective description of the behavior of a tickled trout.

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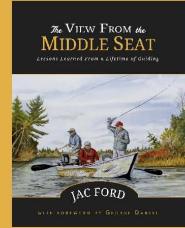


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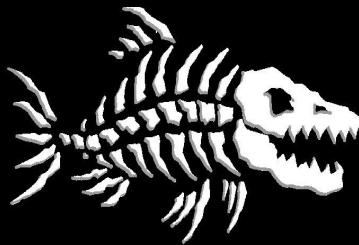
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April 6, 2022
May 4, 2022
June 1, 2022

—No meetings during summer months—

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Your input is an invaluable resource in our efforts to serve the resources we enjoy.

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