

Desert Springs Action Committee Moapa Spring 1999 Trip Report

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by

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Tax day '99 was followed by a welcome change in scenery. On the night of April 15th and early on the 16th, a group of eight volunteers of the Desert Springs Action Committee met at several places in Nevada to combine learning and habitat work. Joining us were Peter Unmack of NANFA and Arizona State University, and Jim Heinrich of the Nevada Division of Wildlife.

Our work took us to four different environments: the Moapa River, ponds at a nearby power plant, the springs of the Moapa FWS Refuge, and, several hours north and a few thousand feet higher, at springs in Preston, Nevada.

On Friday we set traps on a section of the Moapa River containing Moapa dace (*Moapa coriacea*) and springfish (*Crenichthys baileyi moapae*). Our objective was to return the fishes to another branch of the river, where poisoning had been conducted to remove unwanted exotics. At the power plant near Moapa we set gill nets in the ponds to remove exotics. On Saturday, the Moapa FWS Refuge was our focus, clearing a cattail-choked spring and ditch to provide better habitat for the Moapa dace, which need clear, fast, running water. This was brutal, muddy work. Fortunately, some Nature Conservancy volunteers finished cleaning the rest of the lower creek, giving us a chance to move on to other tasks.

Of our 11 traps set in the upper Moapa, we managed to catch only one dace, which was subsequently moved

to the section without tilapia (*Oreochromis aurea*). We moved on to the power plant to check the gill nets we had set to catch and remove tilapia, and to see if any Virgin River chubs (*Gila robusta seminuda*) were present. We didn't see any on our previous visit. This time we saw fewer large tilapia, although the ponds had a lot of juveniles. Fortunately, we saw a number of chubs as well.

We folded our warm, comfortable camp on Saturday afternoon, to head north to Preston, to help Peter with a research project. Two small springs right in town hold incredible guppy populations, and a few (very few) springfish (*Crenichthys baileyi albivallis*, shown

here). These individuals were larger and much deeper-bodied than those we see at Moapa, with bright yellow coloration on their unpaired fins.

Camping at over 5500' in the desert can be mighty chilly, but catching almost 3000 guppies in just about three hours warmed us up! We only caught 15 springfish, both adults and juveniles, which were all carefully returned. Peter preserved the guppies for further study.

It was a most successful trip, and we were mighty tired but satisfied when we reached home. While we learned a lot about the fishes we saw, it's the subtle, on-going improvements that are beginning to show at Moapa that provide the greatest satisfaction to all us volunteers. It's great to see fewer exotics and strong populations of the natives starting to come back. Let's keep it up.



Photo by Tom Webster