

Boyd Creek, Upstate New York

by Michael J. Lucas, East Rochester, New York

Boyd Creek is part of the Genesee River subdrainage, which in turn is part of the St. Lawrence River system. It runs alongside Boyd Park, a small historical park on Rt. 39 southwest of Geneseo and just east of Cuylersville.

My introduction to Boyd Creek occurred in the early seventies on a field trip with my ichthyology class from Geneseo State College, definitely one of the highlights of my college career. Every Saturday, some body of New York State water would be invaded by 10-15 crazed, hung-over college students, led by that veteran fish-finder, Professor Roecker. I can still picture Professor Roecker tripping over unseen rocks as he enthusiastically rushed to shore to display some scarce or unexpected species. This regular entertainment was usually complemented by some mishap involving class members.

At Boyd Creek, two students took a large seine to sample one of the larger pools. They each started on opposite banks and began to work up the pool. Leaning on the pole to keep the net on the bottom, one student found his pole sliding quickly down the steeply sloping mud and clay bank. In a matter of seconds, he was almost prone and in immediate danger of flooding his waders. Unable to right himself but unwilling to surrender, he decided to buy time by pushing off the bank with his feet while in the same motion righting the seine pole and perching himself atop it. Somehow this actually worked! Unfortunately, he was now about 6' from shore sitting on the pole as it slowly sank into the silt-and-mud-bottomed pool.

His classmates laughed raucously. They teasingly held out too-short sticks or offered such sage advice as "Do the dog paddle" or "Quick, blow up your waders." Even the cows from a nearby farm had gathered on the higher bank to hang their heads over the fence. They voiced their amusement by unison mooing. The prospect of facing us and the cows may well have been what caused him to remain atop his perch as the pool engulfed pole, waders, and student. Finally, anoxia forced a hasty retreat to the shore and further belittlement.

This incident illustrates one of the idiosyncrasies of this creek--that is, many of the pools have one steep, nearly vertical bank. The water is often too deep to block the pool crosswise with the seine; by the time you get to the net, most of the fish have gone over it or turned back upstream. The best method is to start opposite the deep bank with your seine paralleling that bank. Slowly work

across the pool, pushing the bottom of the seine slightly ahead; when it hits the bank, quickly lift the poles to the surface, scraping the net bottom up the steep bank. Using this method, one collector can do quite well, though he will tire quickly.

The fish I usually find here are: Johnny Darters (Etheostoma nigrum), Greenside Darters (E. blennioides), Blackside Darters (Percina maculata), Northern Hog Suckers (Hypentelium nigricans), Common Suckers (Catostomus commersoni), Shorthead Redhorse Suckers (Moxostoma macrolepidotum), Central Stonerollers (Campostoma anomalum), Creek Chubs (Semotilus atromaculatus), Bluntnose Minnows (Pimephales notatus), Rock Bass (Ambloplites rupestris), Largemouth Bass (Micropterus salmoides), Smallmouth Bass (M. dolomieu), Central Mudminnows (Umbra limi), Brook Sticklebacks (Culaea inconstans), and an assortment of silver minnows.

#### Catostomids

In late March of 1985, NANFA member Steve Argento, E. Syracuse, N.Y., myself, and another enthusiast joined me for some collecting at Boyd Creek and a couple of other Rochester-area sites. On that trip, we collected some suckers which we thought were a cross between a Northern Hog Sucker and a Shorthead Redhorse Sucker. The fish had the head shape and smaller scales of the Redhorse Sucker but the dark bars of the Northern Hog Sucker. After getting them home and in a tank, the bars faded away, leaving Shorthead Redhorse Suckers. Perhaps the bars only show in colder water, as I've never collected here that early in the spring.

#### Green Sunfish

Twice I've caught Green Sunfish (Lepomis cyanellus) at this site. The first time, I caught four 3/4" specimens. Having never seen Green Sunfish before, I had no idea what they were. Their coloration and pattern resembled a combination of Pumpkinseed Sunfish (Lepomis gibbosus) and Smallmouth Bass. They had a larger mouth and more bass-like body form than the various sunfish I'd previously collected. They were very attractive, but the coloration changed as they got over an inch long to a darker green with blue spots. They proved very aggressive, more so than the their local sunfish such as Pumpkinseeds and Bluegills (Lepomis macrochirus).

I kept them in a ten-gallon tank where the male grew to all of 2 1/2" long and the female 2". The pair dug a shallow pit in the gravel and spawned. They both also guarded eggs and fry, frantically chasing the other fish from the nest site. This was the first time I'd actually seen sunfish pairs appearing to cooperate and the female actively participate in excavating and guarding. This may have been brought about by the small tank.

Unfortunately, I had no space to separate the Green Sunfish from the other inhabitants. Thus, before the young were free-swimming, they were eaten by the parents. This pair spawned a few more times in the same spot over the next few months, but the eggs were eaten sooner each time.

#### Gizzard Shad, Crappies

On October 7, 1984, I caught Gizzard Shad (Dorosoma cepedianum) and Black Crappies (Pomoxis nigromaculatus) for the first and only time I've ever found either of these species. The Black Crappies were small, about an inch, and a light blue on top fading to a very pale ventral area. They darkened up at home and were easily identified by the black and pearl pattern as well as their shape--sunfish-like, but more concave in profile from the dorsal fin to the head. They also differ from other sunfish by having a shorter dorsal-fin base. White Crappies (Pomoxis annularis) are very similar, but more elongated.

#### Carp

Carp (Cyprinus carpio) are sometimes found here. I've noticed from my collecting records that I've never found them here when the water was below 50°F. When found, they are abundant. I enjoy having a few young Carp in my tanks. Small ones, 1"-3", are excellent scavengers, very active and mild-mannered. A rare find among the Carp collected on one visit was a Leather Carp. This variety has no scales, giving it a reflective sheen which can be quite attractive.

#### Trout Perch

Another fish caught here occasionally is the Trout Perch (Percopsis omiscomaycus). I have only found them in the medium to deep pools. The fact that I catch Trout Perch is proof that they cannot read; The Inland Fishes of New York State says that they are intolerant of clay-bottom habitat. That is exactly where I've caught them in this creek. I also noticed that the times when I've found Trout Perch, I'd started collecting late in the day and finished just after dark. This supports references describing Trout Perch as nocturnal, retreating to undercut banks or deeper water during the day.

I guess the reason I enjoy visiting Boyd Creek even though there are no "glamour" fish (the Greenside Darters here are subpar) is the wide variety of interesting common fish species along with the occasional surprise. Just enough to keep me coming back for more.