

COLLECTING IN THE ALLEGHENY RIVER SYSTEM IN NORTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA by Peter J. Mang, Kenmore, NY

The Allegheny River system stretches from southwestern New York to Pittsburgh, Pa., where the Allegheny joins the Monongahela to form the Ohio River. The Allegheny contains 15 species of darters, numerous game species, and many chubs, minnows, and shiners. To date, the author has collected on the Allegheny River between Salamanca, N.Y. and Oil City, Pa., and French Creek between Wattsburg, Pa., and Oil City.

The Allegheny is deeper and larger than the tributary French Creek, unsurprisingly. Seining areas on the river are harder to find than on the creek, but they nevertheless are present. French Creek could be classified as a large stream. It contains many sluggish areas together with many riffle, chute, and run areas. Both the Allegheny River and French Creek contain darter species in about the same proportions. The four most common species, in descending order, are Banded Darters (Etheostoma zonale), Greenside Darters (E. blennioides), Fantail Darters (E. flabellare), and Rainbow Darters (E. caeruleum). Additional darters collected during 1984 and 1985 include Variegated Darters (E. variatum), Spotted Darters (E. maculatum), Tippecanoe Darters (E. tippecanoe), Logperch (Percina caprodes), Channel Darters (P. copelandi), Gilt Darters (P. evides), and Bluebreast Darters (E. camurum).

The water level in French Creek of course fluctuates greatly according to rainfall. It is not a good idea to try collecting after heavy rains. The water level in the Allegheny River fluctuates not only because of rainfall, but also because of water release at Kinzua Dam. The best time to collect darters is during dry spells.

It is advisable to bring waders and a full change of clothes. There are many large, fast riffles to challenge. Many are deep and treacherous, but they also contain large, mature male darters holding top breeding and feeding territories.

Equipment should consist of the following: one 4'x4' minnow seine (the maximum permitted under a Pennsylvania fishing license) on two broom handles, a five-gallon bucket, and as many styrofoam fish-shipping boxes as are available. Bagging fish at this point should not be attempted. In my opinion, native fish do not fare well if bagged before tank-acclimated.

There are at least 78 species of fish known to exist in the Allegheny River. Collections may include Ohio Lampreys (Ichthyomyzon bdellium) and the Allegheny Brook Lamprey (I. greeleyi). The latter species can and will spawn in aquaria, though there is no published information documenting successful raising of the ammocoetes.

Also present, but distributed sparingly, is the Hellbender (Cryptobranchus alleganiensis), the giant salamander. Hellbenders make a fantastic addition to anybody's fish room.

A Pennsylvania fishing license is required to collect anything from Pennsylvania waters.

See you in northwestern Pennsylvania in '86!

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