

WHO'S AFRAID OF SPIDERS?

Collecting in the Niagara River

by Peter J. Mang, Kenmore, New York

Steve Argento arrived at my home five minutes late. Not bad for a guy who drove over 200 miles through the night and even got lost once! I was hoping he would be later; I'm always late, so I respect a guy who shows up an hour late with no explanation.

I gratefully accepted some Greensided Darters (Etheostoma blennioides) and Black-sided Darters (Percina maculata) Steve brought with him from Syracuse. I have never kept or collected these darters before and am really impressed by both species. The Greensides are almost 4" long and are the goofiest fish I have ever had. They have terrible aim when it comes to catching food, and when fed baby redworms, they perform a sort of mini "smash-up derby." The Black-sides spend about 40% of their time in the middle strata of the tank. This is because they have a semi-developed swim bladder. I had not been aware of this at all until Steve pointed it out.

Our meeting had originally been planned as a get-together, but it quickly became a collecting trip after I told Steve about some of the very productive collecting sites nearby. I had only taken a few people out collecting previously, and I welcomed a collecting partner.

We left my home about 10:00 a.m., and only a couple minutes later, we were collecting on Grand Island, a very large island surrounded by the upper Niagara River.

Steve had brought a 4' x 4' seine. I had never collected in still water with such a net before, and was very impressed by Steve's style. Collecting in a shallow, very slow stream, Steve would push the seine, which was mounted on two heavy-duty poles, through the plants and up onto shore. I was "armed" with my long-handled dip net which I use when collecting in still water.

After Steve had taken a couple runs with his seine, I knew his method beat mine. He came up with several small Bluegills (Lepomis macrochirus), Pumpkinseeds (L. gibbosus), and Rock Bass (Ambloplites rupestris). I caught the same kinds, but far fewer specimens.

Next we walked over to a medium-sized pond directly connected to the stream. Here we did better. Steve collected several Tadpole Madtoms (Noturus gyrinus) and one huge crayfish. We filled up the one five-gallon bucket we'd brought, and we had our first keepers. He then collected some 7" Common Shiners (Notropis cornutus) and a 4" Golden Shiner (Notemigonus crysoleucas). He liked the size of these shiners.

Next he asked me to walk through a small pipe while he held the seine at one end. Now this guy had come a long way to collect with me, but I kind of wondered if I was obligated to do this or not. He sounded serious, and who's afraid of thousands of spiders, anyway? Maybe the webs kept the bats out. I "ran" the pipe and we came up with six or seven 5" Gizzard Shad (Dorosoma cepedianum). Steve really liked these and now I was getting really pumped up. Next time he's running the pipe! I tried out his seine while he took a break. While trying to get the rhythm of this style, I netted a first, a 6" sunfish which I could not identify. I have decided it is a cross between a Pumpkinseed and a Green Sunfish (Lepomis cyanellus). While no Greens were collected that day, I collected one from this area in the past. Has anybody ever collected such a hybrid before?

We were on the verge of overloading our bucket, so we decided to return to my house, empty the bucket into a 29-gallon tank, and then go out and check one more spot, my favorite. It is in Beaver Island State Park on Grand Island. It consists of a long, horshoe-shaped inlet about a mile long and 100 yards wide. We brought along my brother Jake to help. He's a great bucket man and has collected some great specimens, while I never seem to collect anything when he's with me. This trip would break the "hex."

At this spot, we were after Iowa Darters (Etheostoma exile) and Brindled Madtoms (Noturus miurus). Steve collected quite a few 2" Iowas. We also collected Rock Bass, Largemouth Bass (Micropterus salmoides), Hornyhead Chubs (Nocomis biguttatus), Emerald Shiners (Notropis atherinoides), Brassy Minnows (Hybognathus hankinsoni), Bluntnose Minnows (Pimephales notatus), and one Brindled Madtom. Steve was disappointed that we had only collected one Brindled, so I decided I still had time to get my dip net out and save face. I have noticed that Brindled Madtoms usually can be found in 3'-5' of water among plants. They also show a strong desire for a medium current. This is the perfect type of situation for use of a dip net. Making sure Steve was close by, I waded out until I was on the edge of a deep, plant-laden channel. Pulling my net through the plants and scraping the rocks and sand brought the Brindleds out for a look after about the fourth pass. As soon as they came out of their hiding places, the challenge was over.

We checked one more spot in the park and Steve managed to collect a huge pair of Rainbow Darters (Etheostoma caeruleum) and one Hognose Sucker (Hypentelium nigricans)

I am looking forward to our next collecting trip, and hope to collect with other NANFA members in the future (anyone who will "run" the pipe).

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