

INTERVIEW: ROUGHFISH.COM FOUNDER COREY GEVING



Jenny Kruckenberg

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Despite this being the 15th annual Roughfish Roundup, this was the very first time I was able to attend. Usually I'm too busy doing my annual darter hunts during any given weekend in the month of May in Minnesota, but this particular year, the weather was NOT cooperating on May 14th. I grew up in this state and I'm no "wienie" when it comes to cold weather, but asking folks to get out in the creek collecting darters when the high temperature is in the mid-thirties... sorry, it's just not gonna happen.

I had such a wonderful time!

Other NANFA members in attendance included Greenwood Champ, Gary Dienerberger, Tyler Goodale, Eric Kolcinski, Olaf Nelson, Abe Otten, Evan Poellinger, and Konrad Schmidt.

I've always wanted to know more about the history of the Roundup, so in June I contacted Corey for an interview over the phone. He's a friend of mine and works at the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR).

Jen: I assume you started roughfish.com first and then wanted to give users a place to meet physically so the Roughfish Roundup was born. Is that correct?

Corey: Yes, roughfish.com began in 1998 and the first Roundup was in 2001.

Jen: How many users do you currently have on your site?

Corey: I'll have to check... 1,490 "unique" users.

Jen: Is there a mission statement? In other words, why rough fish? Had you and your brother Andrew always fished for rough fish?

Corey: The idea was to foster an appreciation for these fish. The first fish I ever caught as a boy was a redhorse out of the St. Croix River. It fought hard and was very athletic. My dad and his family harvested suckers for food. Going way back in Minnesota history, Native Americans had always caught redhorse, buffalo, and sturgeons.

Jen: How has the Roundup grown through the years?

Corey: The first few years, we had a half dozen people (6-8)

participating. By the fourth year, we had grown to perhaps 20 persons. This year, we attracted at least 80 participants.

Jen: Why did you choose the Root River [for the location of the Roundup]? Has it occurred there every year? What



Roughfish.com co-founder Corey Geving with his derby-winning sudden death Brown Trout (the five species he caught during the derby to tie for the lead were White Sucker, Smallmouth Bass, Northern Hog Sucker, Brown Trout, and Golden Redhorse) and (bottom) holding the traveling Silver Redhorse trophy awarded to each year's champ. (Bottom photo by Konrad Schmidt)



Tyler Goodale with his 4-pound, 4-ounce pending world record (and Minnesota state record) Golden Redhorse. To the right are fellow NANFA members (from back) Evan Poellinger, Konrad Schmidt, and Abe Otten.

about the time of the year [during this particular weekend in May]?

Corey: We've always gone to this spot. Originally, we were in the area turkey hunting near Lanesboro in the spring, but we soon realized Eagle Bluff was a beautiful campground which we essentially had to ourselves at that time of the year. We could congregate as our "own group" plus the number of fish species in the Root River is very diverse.

Jen: A state record for Golden Redhorse (*Moxostoma erythrum*) was set this year at the Roundup. Have other state records been set in past years? Silver Redhorse and such?

Corey: The records broken have only been for Golden Redhorse. Seven years ago, my brother Andy broke the state record. Then three years ago, Chad Wentzel broke the record. Two years ago, he broke it again. This year, the honor went to Tyler Goodale from Missouri. The fish



Jenny Kruckenberg and Evan Poellinger seine the Root River. (Photo by Konrad Schmidt)

was verified by a noted redhorse expert, Dr. Robert Jenkins of Virginia, and has been registered with Mike Kurie of the MNDNR.

Jen: In the three-hour period [of the fishing derby, which is won by the angler who catches the most species of fish] this year, three persons each caught five species and the contest had to go into "sudden death mode." How common is this? Do you allow micro-anglers to count small species of fish such as darters and minnows caught on small Tanago hooks?

Corey: Going into "sudden death mode" is becoming more common now. The first time it happened, there was no winner for three hours! This year, it was over much quicker. To qualify as part of the regular contest, species need to reach at least one pound so no, we don't count the little guys.

Jen: It's neat that Roughfish.com attracts persons from all over the country. Can you elaborate on this? Are there



The Root River. (Photo by Matthew Williams)



Greenwood Champ with a Fox Snake. (Photo by Gary Dietenberger)

people all over the world fishing for rough fish? Can you talk a bit about a “life lists”? Also besides *Fishing for Buffalo* by Rob Buffler and Tom Dickson, can you recommend other books of interest to rough fish anglers?

Corey: It’s funny because in other parts of the globe like England and the Netherlands, there’s no distinction between “game fish” and “rough fish.” People show just as much of an interest in catching them as they do any other

fish. The only group that seems to be singled out are trout. Another book I would recommend is *American Coarse Angling* by Brook Landis. As for life lists, there’s [an annual] contest on roughfish.com for the month of June. Currently “Moose” (Alexander Orr) leads with a total of 63 species. [He ended up winning with a record-high 68 species caught in June.] He’s traveled from Florida to California catching suckers and more! Again, they count as long as they weigh one pound [i.e., if the species can reach at least one pound]. There’s a handy checklist at the end of the *Fishing for Buffalo* book. This has inspired many anglers to show interest in these “other” fish and on roughfish.com we challenge the users to try their skills then post the results.

Jen: As for this particular year, has it ever been this cold before? Did anyone go floating?

Corey: A couple did go kayaking! It’s a Roughfish Roundup tradition!

Jen: I feel good knowing that fish such as sturgeon and gar are ancient fish on the evolutionary time line and that many can reach a very old age. I understand that most roughfishers use catch and release methods. Is that correct?

Corey: Yes, most everyone does. I’m pretty sure someone may have caught a state record Northern Hog Sucker, but they’re just so cute, back in the water they go! At the Roundup, we do keep some of our catch so we can whip up a batch of deep-fried sucker balls.

Jen: They were delicious! I had a chance to discuss the recipe with one of the chefs and he revealed a few secrets. The fish are ground, there’s spices and herbs involved, including Old Bay seasoning, and the oil used for deep frying them is peanut oil. Mmmm...tasty!

I am curious to know what the roughfish.com opinion is of current MNDNR bowfishing regulations.

Corey: Many people on roughfish.com were opposed to the MNDNR allowing persons to bow fish legally during the night time using lights. There is no differentiation or protection for rare species (e.g., Blue Suckers [special concern] vs. Common Carp or Black Buffalo [threatened] vs. Bigmouth Buffalo). These and other rare rough fish come to the surface to feed at night or move into shallow water. There were lots of signatures on a petition that was circulating, but the MNDNR has not added any protection language to the rules and regulations. I (and others) suggested they have a limit on how many fish are taken on a given night. Perhaps five.

Jen: Maybe some day the regs will be changed. Thank you for this interview!

Corey: You’re welcome and I’m glad you could make it to the Roundup this year!



Gary Dietenberger (top) preparing deep-fried sucker balls (containing Silver, Golden and Shorthead Redhorse, White Sucker, and perhaps a trout or two), which are frequently devoured by waiting roughfishers before making it all the way from the fryer (bottom) to the table.