

FRINGE BENEFITS

by Richard C. Stober, Semmes, Alabama

A while back, Bill Ballard of Fairhope, Alabama called and invited me to go on a collecting trip with him and Mike Lucas of E. Rochester, N.Y., both NANFA members, in search of the Bluenose Shiner (Notropis welaka). My immediate response was, "No way," as, during recent years, I've been up to my neck in domestic responsibilities, with my wife working and attending the University of South Alabama, leaving me with the care of four daughters, a home, ten acres of land--in addition to holding my own job. Then I began to think about it. I started to realize that what I really needed was some sort of recreational break or I might just blow a fuse.

Maybe it's time to get back in the swing of things. Recently I've even noticed that during phone conversations with fellow NANFA members, my memory was beginning to fade as I struggled to recall the names and distinctive markings of some species which I used to be quite familiar with a decade ago. So I reversed my decisions and elected to grab a little more of that gusto. Besides, it would only be for three days.

Since Bill and Mike wanted some N. welaka and I was getting anxious to pick up some Sailfin Shiners (N. hypselopterus) for myself as well, I figured that the most suitable collecting area would be to the north of Panama City, Florida.

By the way, the Sailfin Shiner has been one of my favorite North American fish, for these reasons: it adapts easily to the community tank; it is beautifully colored, maintaining that color year-round; it is active; it spawns as easily as a White Cloud; it eagerly takes flake food; and its fry can be raised without trouble. When we left for a two-year tour in Saudi Arabia a few years ago, my third generation N. hypselopterus were thriving,

Well anyway, I dusted off the collecting gear. With the exception of my waders, which had holes in them, everything was in pretty good condition. Even managed to pick up a second-hand oxygen bottle, which is definitely good to have. In the past, when I collected with my ol' buddy Mike Stegall of Jackson, Mississippi, we used his tank, and there's no telling just how many fish were saved as the result.

Our trip turned out to be a good one; but there were times while I was searching for familiar landmarks when I could sense that my companions were getting just a bit anxious. We did manage to find what we were looking for, and all were satisfied. The young Bluenose males were just starting to develop; an untrained eye might pass them off as just another shiner. Some of the Sailfin Shiners came down with ich, but fortunately the ones I selected for breeders were unaffected.

Bill and Mike said that they were going to collaborate on writing an article on our fish-collecting trip, so I'm just going to trail off on another tangent. What were some of the fringe benefits we managed to pick up along the way? On this trip, for example, I found some beautiful Giant Sagittaria, two types of Nitella, and a very small amount of Riccia at the site where we caught N. hypselopterus. This told me that the water was definitely alkaline. Also, I picked up a couple of those plant-eating Apple Snails and freshwater clams at this locale. While collecting at the N. welaka site, I managed to find a few beautiful pieces of driftwood with lots of "character," a good bit of willow moss (ideal spawning medium), some mermaid grass, gorgeous Giant Ludwigia, and some snails that live in the gravel.

Travelling to the west of Tallahassee, we happened upon access to Lake Talquin, where Bill and Mike caught some Fundulus seminolis (first time I've seen this species), while I gathered some Broad-leaf Sagittaria and Water Hyacinth. I like to use Water Hyacinth in my refrigerator liners as they tend to maintain the clarity of the water and provide good cover. I place rooted plants in sand-filled pots which are positioned on the bottom of these liners. Back when I first started using porcelain-coated refrigerator liners to hold fish, I would place a couple inches of sand over the entire bottom. This looked good, but catching fish in a well-planted liner or repairing leaks was a real chore. If you wish to catch a fish or two, the task becomes a lot easier after removing the flower pots, which then can be easily returned without disturbing the roots of the plants.

Getting back to my original tangent, at some of the other spots I picked up two types of hornwort, several different forms of Ludwigia, and a good bit of hair grass.

When making preparations for this trip, I completely renovated my fish yard, attempting a

massive clean-up and repair job. By the time we left on this trip, five bath tubs which I had used to water some cows and 16 of the 22 liners ranging in capacity from 50-150 gallons were full of water, with the remaining ones in process. As a result of this trip, I had enough plants to fill up five liners. Three of these were set up as spawning tanks for the N. hypselopterus and welaka, and for Lucania goodei. I increased the pH of several liners to accommodate those creatures which prefer alkaline water. At each site along the way, I searched in vain for daphnia*, but I did pick up some Fairy (Ghost, Seed) Shrimp which were loaded with young. When my set-up is in full operation, I try to maintain a couple of liners full of daphnia at all times. Had to resort to that old trick of sprinkling dried daphnia in a liner in hopes that some of the dried eggs will hatch after soaking in the water. We'll see how that works this time.

Be aware of what's available at your fishing sites besides fish. Here's a listing of some of the things which I normally look for:

- (1) aquatic plants (known to prosper in the aquarium);
- (2) live food (harmless to fish);
- (3) snails and other mollusks;
- (4) gravel (sandy-bottom streams with eddies);
- (5) driftwood (hard and stream-worn);
- (6) rocks (decorative, fossils, gemstones);
- (7) turtles/snakes (harmless varieties); and
- (8) yard plants.

Take a little extra time to explore your collecting environment. It may be well worth your time.

*After writing this article, I made a short trip across town in search (now that I have the fever again) of some anacharis which used to be plentiful in an outfall of a small spring-fed lake at Springhill College, but there wasn't a single strand to be found there. Strangely enough, the dirt road atop the beam alongside the water had some tire ruts full of rainwater and daphnia. Also caught a nice slider turtle for my younger daughters. So you see, this too was a successful outing.