

THE GETTYSBURG CAMPAIGN

by Bruce Gebhardt

As you may know, John Eccleston is returning to England in mid-1984. This fact has led me to think of new species to see and new settings to catch them in. We had long talked of going west to Gettysburg, based on my seventeen-year-old nostalgia about collecting there. The two major creeks in that area are part of the Potomac drainage. That sounds exotically alluring to residents of the Delaware Valley.

There were two remembered species of particular interest in the Gettysburg area: the Greenside Darter (Etheostoma blennioides) and the Rock Bass (Ambloplites rupestris). Both species are widespread throughout the eastern half of the continent, yet neither is found in southeastern Pennsylvania, where we live. The Greenside Darter held special appeal; it's the only one of the supercolorful darters within a reasonable drive.

While motivation to find and photograph the darter and the Rock Bass had been building, a new, more urgent impetus had arisen: the early-July discovery of the Rosyside Dace (Clinostomus funduloides) in Deer Creek, York County, Pa. When caught, these fish had revealed brilliant streaks of red-orange on their sides. After I got the fish home, however, this blazing color had disappeared. While the fish recovered to the point of developing nice, rosy sides, the brilliant red-orange had never returned before the fish expired. Therefore, I had never caught the best color in a photo. Immediate streamside photography seemed to be the only answer.

Deer Creek, a little west of Stewartstown on Pa. Rt. 851, is perhaps 90 miles west of Philadelphia; Gettysburg is perhaps 35 miles west of there. This seemed like a natural parlay.

Susquehanna Diversion

On our way on August 13, we crossed the Susquehanna on Pa. Rt. 372. The scene below was incredible. There was a dam perhaps a mile upstream (still is, I imagine). Below it, the river itself, shriveled by drought, clung to the east bank. From the former west bank for about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile east, except for a small stream along the west bank, there was an expanse of rocks interspersed with small "tidepools." It looked promising. It wasn't.

We saw a young Smallmouth Bass in the west-bank stream. That was the only fish we saw. The "tidepools" were small, warm, and shallow, seldom more than a few inches deep. All were algous; the rocks were extremely slippery. Treacherous footing slowed progress across the rocks. Finding nothing, we abandoned the pursuit of fish. It took me fifteen minutes

to return the 200 yards or so to the west bank. It might still be worthwhile to work to the river from the west; but it would probably be more practical to approach it from a park on the east bank.

NOTE: Periodically, water is released from the dam. Signs assure that sirens blow and lights flash, but anybody caught way out on the rocks in slippery footwear might be in trouble! Secure-footed boots, galoshes, or shoes would be advisable to assure a quick, safe flight to the bank.

Down to Business

After this unplanned, unprofitable diversion, we reached Deer Creek, York County--not far on the map, but requiring a lot of zig-zagging on back country roads. (Note: we had originally planned to cross the Susquehanna at the Conowingo Dam in Maryland, over U.S. 1. That crossing is closed because of road repairs.)

At the Deer Creek site, John scotted from a bridge across the 15'-wide stream. I waded from downstream and stalked the minnows I could see in the 2'-deep main channel. Keeping the net as close to the bottom as possible (the bottom is rocky), one should advance slowly upstream, advancing the side poles abreast of and above the fish. Then, one moves the poles sharply upstream, upward, and inward, driving some of the fish into the net. That technique had worked the first time. It worked again. I yelled, "John, it's red, it's red," and, realizing we had not set up for photography, he ran for the photo tank. I opened the net a little as I fumbled for a bag. The color was still there, though it may have faded a bit. Then, when I opened the net again--nothing! Either they went over the slack sides of the net--which hung too loosely from the poles--or through the ends, like guacamole from a taco, since the net was new and didn't fold softly. Never again did I catch Rosysides as large as on that first pass. The same thing had happened in July; these fish don't give you a second shot, but leave the scene. They probably fled upstream, but I was inhibited in pursuing them, since the creek upstream from the bridge flowed between lawns. Below the bridge, the creek enters a long stretch of rapids. These rapids, however, yielded no Rosysides--just Rhinichthys atratulus. Later, I caught four small Rosysides where I'd caught the first, larger ones. They had no color on their sides, however. We left, defeated.

The four Rosysides expired rather quickly on being placed in an aquarium at home. Since this was the second time this had happened, I will no longer experiment with this species from this site. The species, however, is widespread to the south, especially in Virginia. It is very likely that the species occurs in slower, warmer water. It would be worth seeking out there.

On our way west, we came to Lake Marburg, an impoundment of the Codorus Creek just east of Hanover forming a sprawling lake. Since a sign at the park there advertised Northern Pike, bass, Muskies, Crappies, and Perch, we dipped a seine. We caught a Yellow Perch, always photogenic--yellowish ground color, vertical dark-green bars, bright orange ventrals. We burned a lot of film, then released him and proceeded west.

Gettysburg is about 10 miles north of the Mason-Dixon Line. Running through it on the northeast, on its way to Battlefield immortality, is Rock Creek. West of the town and flowing south of it is Marsh Creek. The creeks join just below the border and flow to the Potomac via a tributary (the Monocacy River).

Seventeen years ago, I'd collected at a place we knew just as "Marsh Creek." There were rocks and falls there. John and I did not find it east of Business Rte. U.S. 15; presumably it's west. The only species found there that we did not encounter, as far as memory serves, was the Hogsucker (Hypentelium nigricans). I've come close to catching them, but never been able to. They look like Plecostomus.

Ignore the site at Rte. 15 and Marsh Creek. The water's rather murky there (though there are some beautiful Myriophyllum plants there). We went a block north of the creek, turned right, then had a devil of a time finding an access, until we reached the intersection of Mason-Dixon Rd. and Natural Dam Rd. There was a bridge on Mason-Dixon that crossed the creek.

Marsh Creek flows rather placidly under the bridge, then enters a long series of rapids. Above them was an apparent cul-de-sac lagoon. I found only one kind of fish here, Fundulus diaphanus. Some seaboard killie collectors are surprised that the species ranges this far inland. The immature fish caught is different from coastal ones, having dark vertical markings.

The next catch was probably a Moxostoma, or Redhorse. It is a handsomely shaped fish, but unattractively colored--reddish brown above, slightly darker lateral band, slightly lighter belly. The head is short and the thick upper lip gives it the look of a parrot or F-86 Saber Jet. These fish were swarming in the rapids. Four to six inches long, they liked water only two or three inches deep. The way to catch them, as with other suckers or minnows that like to swarm upstream and downstream, is to charge them crossstream. (That seems a legitimate use of three s's in a row!) Some panic upstream, some downstream, some crossstream. One just presents a seine net and some dash into it. The net has to be raised very rapidly, however, since these are extremely rapid fish.

Paydirt

John then came up with our first darter, which I identified as a Greenside. At this time (mid-August), it was far from breeding color, though it was attractive--garlands of connected U's and W's in dark green on a yellowish background. There was a prominent dark red horizontal band on the first dorsal.

In late April or early May, breeding males develop green and blue-green patches and red spots on the sides. The margin of the first dorsal is bright green--a kid's-paintbox, primary green. It's hard to believe a fish could have such a color. Sometimes there is a bluish tinge to it.

The Greenside is the largest Etheostoma, reaching almost 5". Those we caught were between 2-3/4" and 4"--still larger than most Etheostoma that I have seen.

John was the most successful darter-catcher, accounting for four or five of the six we caught. His technique therefore merits study. He was using a 4'x4' seine on poles. When he saw a darter or a suspicious cloud of mud near a rock, he arranged the bottom edge of the netting around the rock's downstream edge or side. He then would either poke under the rock with the poles or lift the rock. With luck, the darter would dart into the seine.

Not up to such intellectually and physically demanding pursuits, I looked for fish willing to swim into my net without any effort from me at all. A 4" Rock Bass was willing. Unfortunately, it was hurt. Its mouth was fungused. Otherwise, it was a nice specimen. Its body was metallic green with only faint mottlings. The large eye was bright red. Unfortunately, this was to be the only Rock Bass we would see. Some young ones are especially photogenic, sometimes bearing Oscar-like vertical mottlings in maroon, brown, and olive. These markings usually recede with growth.

Since small ones seem to spend a lot of time hiding under rocks or in impenetrable weeds when available, a good way to catch young ones is to set a trap upstream from likely stretches. I didn't recall that until too late, however.

The R.B. appeared in a stagnant tributary, possibly an outflow of the "cul-de-sac" described above. Near the mouth of this little stream was an ill-assorted "school" consisting of Largemouth Bass, 6"-8", and large American or Common Shiners (Notropis cornutus), 5"-7".

Another "common shiner" has been agreed by John and me to be Pimephales notatus, the Bluntnose Minnow. The distinguishing mark of the genus Pimephales (which includes the well known

Fathead Minnow, P. promelas) is that the first dorsal spine is about half the height of the second, and somewhat merged into it. P. notatus is much slenderer than promelas. The background color is nondescript yellowish tan; there is a dark, thick stripe along the side. At its end, at the extreme of the caudal peduncle, there is a heavy black spot. The scales seem clearly outlined; there is overall a reticulated effect. The fish is a rapid swimmer, found in slow and fast water alike. We also found this species at Lake Marburg. In this case, and with most of the species described in these articles (and a few not described), I have photos. These could be provided to anyone willing to take a stab at ridiculing the IDs suggested here.

Another type of shiner caught in the creek was most likely Notropis amoenus, the Comely Shiner. This widespread species, very similar to the Emerald Shiner (N. atherinoides), is platinum silvery when flat, in the net. When seen from above and to the side, it will sometimes show a green metallic stripe above the center. In a tank, these fish are unlikely to exhibit the silvery armor; perhaps direct sunlight would produce this effect. They may exhibit the green line, however. These fish are attractive swimmers. Young ones may turn up anywhere in their extensive range, but adults seem to prefer the surfaces of large lakes and streams, where they school. Some of these silverside-like fish may reach 4" to 5". They evidently require a lot of oxygen. They die if packed too densely for the trip home; ice helps. Once acclimated in an aquarium, however, they do well.

We may have caught a few more species of Notropis, but I can't remember them.

After a photo session, we then moved on to a site where Taneytown Rd. crosses Rock Creek. The sides were deeply muddy, but the creek bottom was generally quite workable, mostly smooth gravel with some stones and rocks. There weren't many types of fish, however. Most fish caught were Common Shiners or the ubiquitous Pimephales. John came up with two more Greensides, however, using his patented method. In my recollections, Marsh Creek had yielded Greensides but not Tesselated Darters (Etheostoma olmstedii); Rock Creek the opposite. Now John had toppled the latter. I dipped my seine once more and came up with the day's only Tesselated, about 1".

(A further note on Greensides. My seventeen-year-old experience had tabbed them as fastwater fishes, found only below the waterfall at the old site. In both sites discussed in this article, while the fish were caught in flowing water, they didn't seem to hang out in the fastest rapids.)

The day was not a total success--defeat by the Rosysides, failure to find photographable Rocks or to catch any other types of sunfish. We caught some interesting fish and saw some new stuff, though.

Notes & references next page.

References, THE GETTYSBURG CAMPAIGN

Lee, D.S., et al., Atlas of North American Freshwater Fish,
Raleigh: North Carolina State Museum, 1980.

Eddy, Samuel, How to Know the Freshwater Fishes, Dubuque:
Wm. C. Brown Co., Publishers, 1957.

Gebhardt, R.B., "Bypassed Member of a Bypassed Family,"
Tropical Fish Hobbyist, July, 1971, p. 11. This is about
the Rock Bass. It's cited here because I always wanted
to footnote myself. What an ego trip.

-----."Dace Caught, Darters Naught," American Currents. As
these references are typed, that article is typed but
not yet published. It will appear within a year either
way of the article you are reading. It gives more details
on the Rosyside Dace and the site. Incidentally, the only
reason for the initial trip to Deer Creek was to see if there
were any Maryland Darters there (Etheostoma sellare). Although
one possibly odd one was seen on that first trip, the only
darters caught then were Tesselateds. On the second trip --
the subject of this article--no darters at all were seen at
Deer Creek. With Rosyside Dace available, who cares?