

NANFA's Regional Chapters Open the Door to Increased Activity

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by  
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The creation of Regional Chapters by NANFA has done a great deal to increase participation, to give identity to members, and to provide more frequent activities in the form of meetings and survey field trips.

All of the advantages of belonging to a native fish study and collecting organization are magnified with the Regional Chapter concept. If one examines the purposes of NANFA as defined in its constitution, it will be readily apparent that active Regional Chapters can greatly facilitate achievement of all of those purposes, and provide even greater benefits, enjoyment and satisfaction for its members.

The Illinois-Indiana Regional Chapter has just completed its inaugural year. Our activities are included in our "Summary Report" (see below). At our Summer 1997 meeting, several Regional Chapter members explained the benefits they have gained in just a little over a year of the Chapter's existence.

### **"I couldn't imagine anything like it"**

Regional Chapter Treasurer Jim Evinger of Terre Haute, Indiana, discussed the benefits he has gained from his NANFA Chapter membership. "I enjoy meeting new people, the field trips, and new experiences. Every time we get together I learn something new."

Evinger was especially excited about the Chapter field trip to southern Indiana's Lost River watershed, a Karst region where the stream waters partially flow underground through limestone caves and passages. "I have never seen anything that compares to what I've seen

at Lost River. I couldn't imagine anything like it. I thought from reading about it that the river would very slowly dwindle down to nothing and disappear, but it is actually a wide stream with a fast current, and lots of fish species. It is only an hour-and-a-half from home, and were it not for our NANFA Regional Chapter, I would never have known it was there."

Evinger was most complimentary of the literature he receives from NANFA. "I get good literature specifically about Indiana and Illinois area fish, in which I am most interested. The articles are enjoyable to read and they have allowed me to get deeper and deeper into the species I enjoy."

Evinger has developed a very impressive transporting tank in the back of his Chevy Suburban. Chapter members who live near Jim are always happy to have him along on distant observation and collecting trips as he shares his tank for the homebound trip. The fishes are in excellent condition upon arriving home, even in very hot weather and for excessively long periods of time.

### **"It's a real privilege to see these rare fishes"**

Illinois-Indiana NANFA Chapter member Claus Sutor of Des Plains, Illinois, has been a great contributor to the success of the Chapter. He prepared a comprehensive database of commercial native fish hatcheries and rearing facilities in Illinois and Indiana with the help of his niece Julie McIlvenny. The information has been helpful for members who choose to obtain native species without removing them from streams.

Sutor enthusiastically explains the benefits he has enjoyed from NANFA and the Regional Chapter. “I get to talk to a lot of people who know a heck of a lot more than I do. It’s a really educational process. The people are very nice, and I value very highly the camaraderie that develops.”

The nature survey, observation and collecting trips are also important to Sutor. “They provide an opportunity for us to briefly observe and photograph endangered species, and then release them, at the same time we are collecting and studying other fishes. It’s a real privilege to see these rare fishes.”

Sutor believes all NANFA members have an obligation to educate the public and to assist others who are interested in native fishes. He is impressed with the City of Chicago’s “Bank Angling” program, which teaches youngsters the joys of fishing without expensive boats, rods, reels, and so forth. Sutor hopes a similar “native fish appreciation” program might be developed.

#### **“It’s just a lot of fun”**

Not every Regional Chapter has the privilege of having among its members someone like Larry Page of the Illinois Natural History Survey, and author of the Peterson *Field Guide to Fishes of North America*. Larry brings much to the Chapter, and has enthusiasm for what he himself derives from NANFA.

“Non-professionals often spend a lot more time working on behalf of the environment than do professional fish people,” Larry remarked. “They have more time, and they often have particular interests. I spend a lot of time trying to get people interested in native fishes—to get them to understand what native fishes require in the way of streams and so on. Developing awareness of conservation and of the environment is one of the main reasons I am involved.”

One of Larry’s contributions to the Regional Chapter has been his video presentations on native fish spawning behavior in natural streams. This allowed Chapter members an opportunity to observe behavior we otherwise would not have been able to see. One of Larry’s videotapes shows rosefin shiners (*Lythrurus ardens*) spawning over abandoned nests of hornyhead chubs (*Nocomis biguttatus*). We were fascinated with the detail and the scope of that footage, and on a subsequent trip to Lost River, we observed that same behavior in person.

Larry advises people, both professionals and non-professionals, to get involved in NANFA, especially in the Regional Chapters. “I think understanding the diversity of nature is great fun. With any group of organisms, it’s great fun to discover how many there are, going different places, doing different things. It’s just a lot of fun.”

Larry believes in “getting wet,” as he puts it. Anyone attending an Illinois-Indiana Regional Chapter field trip will easily recognize Larry. He will be the one on the “business end” of the seine or net, kicking and sloshing below snags and logs, all the while laughing and enjoying the experience to its fullest.

#### **“Get wet”**

Regional Chapter charter member Jeff Chynoweth is a professional ornithologist, but he enjoys studying native fishes as well, and has enjoyed being a NANFA member. His advice: “Get wet.”

“It’s great to get out on field trips,” Jeff said. “The fact that NANFA covers a lot of different states means you can contact other members from the Directory, and learn about fishes and sites in their area. The fish are beautiful, and it’s fun to get out in the water on a hot summer day and see nature.”

#### **“Fish are wonderful”**

Another Regional Chapter charter member is Eric Jensen, a graduate student who plans to teach high school biology. He explains his enthusiasm for NANFA with a lively voice and a sparkle in his eyes. “NANFA allows you to come together with other like-minded fish enthusiasts and enjoy the outdoors, observing, and sometimes catching, fish. Fish are wonderful, in my opinion. They are definitely an under-appreciated fauna that deserve more attention.”

Eric plans to share his NANFA experiences with his students. “I hope to be able to bring some of the outdoors into the classroom and show the kids some of these great things we see on the outside.”

All of the Illinois-Indiana Regional Chapter members are grateful for the efforts of NANFA to promote the Regional Chapter concept. In our two states, the idea behind the Regional Chapter has opened the door to increased NANFA activity, and it promises to do so in the future.

# Illinois - Indiana Regional Chapter Inaugural Year Summary Report

The inaugural year of the Illinois-Indiana Regional Chapter of NANFA has been a fruitful, exciting, and busy one. Chapter activities have included three regional meetings, field and collecting trips, and a visit to a commercial and research facility.

## May 11, 1996 ~ Terre Haute, Indiana

Topic: *Status of Wabash River Fishes* by Dr. Jim Gammon. A presentation featuring Dr. Gammon's extensive experience along the Wabash River, including a "slide photo quiz" challenging us to identify rare and unusual freshwater native species from the Wabash River. Members got "close up" with *Moxostoma erythrurum*, *M. anisurum*, *Carpiodes velifer*, *Cycleptus elongatus*, *Alosa chrysochloris*, *Lepisosteus oculatus*, *Hiodon tergisus*, *Ictalurus punctatus*, *Morone chrysops*, and others. Attendees received two comprehensive texts and study reference on the Wabash River ecosystem and its fishes.

A tour of Aquatic Technologies/Inland Aquatics' 35,000 gallon research and production facility featured algal turf scrubber water filtration technology in both commercial and hobby applications.

## September 21, 1996 ~ Champaign, Illinois

Topic: *Breeding the Northern, Mountain and Southern Redbelly Daces* (Phoxinus) by Jim Sternburg, Professor Emeritus of Entomology, University of Illinois. A most enlightening and helpful presentation with lots of "hands-on" tips to help Chapter members with their own fish breeding projects.

Topic: *Spawning Habits of Darters and Minnows* by Larry Page. A most interesting presentation featuring videotapes of actual structures and spawning activities in North American streams.

Topic: *Fish Photography* by Phil and Carie Nixon, Regional Chapter members, who specialize in topminnows and killifishes. They displayed close-up photos of aquarium subjects and discussed photography techniques.

A collecting trip to Middle Fork provided members the opportunity to get a rare glimpse of the bluebreast darter (*Etheostoma camurum*), an Illinois endangered species, and over a dozen other species, including rosy-face shiner, madtom, stonecat, stoneroller, Northern hog-sucker, johnny darter, rainbow darter, and stickleback.

## July 12-13, 1997 ~ Lost River, Southern Illinois

Topic: *Discovering the Lost River* by Bob Armstrong and Dee Slater. On Friday evening, Chapter members enjoyed a 3-D photo slide presentation; on Saturday morning, a Lost River field trip; and both day and midnight collecting trips along the Lost River and other cave-originating streams in the Lost River Watershed.

Brant Fisher of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and Steve Olson of the National Forest Service, were present for the Lost River Tour. Four students from the Illinois Natural History Survey joined the weekend activities and demonstrated collecting techniques, and shared information on their graduate projects and studies.

Members observed first-hand over a dozen blind cave fish (*Amblyopsis spelaea*) and blind crayfish in the Twin Caves, located at Spring Mill State Park, headquarters for the Regional Meeting.

Daytime collecting trips took place at various stops along the Lost River tour, and at collecting sites on Carter Creek, Clifty Creek, Blue River, Lick Creek and Twin Creek—all originating in caves. Chapter members were also able to compare different flora and species diversities in stream stretches with varying temperatures and conditions. Several species of fully colored spawning shiners and darters were seen, and large longear sunfish (*Lepomis megalotis*) were observed on nests.

A midnight collecting trip was made to the upwelling orifice of a Karst spring in Pioneer Motters Forest, part of the Hoosier National Forest, where many species were seen, including exceptionally large mottled sculpin (*Cottus bairdi*). Dr. Don Ash, a Lost River caver now deceased, once saw blind cave fish emerging from this orifice after dark.

## Other Activities and Projects

- Creation of a species distribution database to help Chapter members locate species and obtain specimens.
- Creation of an information database on Chapter members, including the species they've kept and bred, their interests and needs, and biographical information.
- Sharing of "best books" and references.
- Initiation of a "cookbook"-style pharmacopeia on fish diseases, parasites, quarantine dips, etc.