

# Sampling New York State's Bashakill Marsh and Stream

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On November 13, 2004, Matt Draud and I left Long Island for the first field trip of NANFA's New York State chapter. We went to the Bashakill Marsh and Stream in Sullivan County, about 80 miles from New York City. If you're not familiar with the area, the marsh is about 2700 acres of wetlands and associated uplands owned by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The marsh is on the southern edge of the Catskill Mountains.

Matt is a professor of biology at the C.W. Post of Long Island University and had arranged the use of a university van for the trip. Not knowing what the weather would be like after we reached the Bashakill, and not being sure of how many people would attend, we thought the van was a good idea. If the weather was bad, we could always hold a meeting in the van. As it turned out, only a few brave souls came out to face the elements, so we could have held a meeting in almost any car.

The trip from Long Island to the Bashakill usually takes a little over two-and-a-half hours. Matt and I left C.W. Post at 8 a.m. thinking we had three hours to do a 2.5 hour trip—plenty of time to make an 11 a.m. start at the marsh. Well, it didn't work out that way. A light snow fell that morning and a car accident in New Jersey tied up traffic on the Palisades Parkway for an hour, delaying our arrival at the marsh.

At about 11:30 am, Matt and I arrived at what is called the causeway, located approximately in the middle of the marsh. There, we met Dick Manley and Mike Lucas. Both Dick and Mike had had pleasant rides from their homes and had been at the causeway since the elusive scheduled 11 a.m. meeting time. The weather was nice and warm for that time of the year, topping out at about 45°F. We talked about a few

things for a while and then started to sample the fish and other life along the causeway.

Mike used a large dipnet while Matt and I used a 10-foot seine. We caught many bluespotted sunfish, a few ironcolor shiners, a few small chain pickerel, a brown bullhead or two, a small madtom, and many different types of aquatic beetles and other invertebrates. One of the most notable memories of the trip was the dozens of large newts we captured. Nearly every dipnet and seine pull turned up more than one newt. Mike also managed to catch a tiny hatchling musk turtle.

While enjoying the fish collecting, we were fortunate enough to watch both a juvenile and adult bald eagle flying together just to our west. To see if we could find any other species, I decided to try my backpack electrofishing gear, for which I have a New York Department of Environmental Conservation collecting permit. I wasn't all that successful, but I did manage to catch a few more bluespotted sunfish, a larger brown bullhead, and, one of the highlights of the day—a five-inch long bowfin. He had been lurking near one of the large culverts that distribute water flow evenly through the marsh under the causeway.

Satisfied that we had a representative sample of species at that site, we went south to the stream that leaves the marsh and leads to the Delaware River. We anticipated finding a few other species that we had not captured at the causeway. Mike, with large dipnet in hand, started into the stream. Matt, Dick, and I followed shortly after with the electrofishing gear. Within a few moments, we found more madtoms, bluespotted sunfish and ironcolor shiners. New to the species list for the day were both shield (Fig. 1) and tessellated darters, common shiner, redbreast sunfish, fallfish (Fig. 2), white sucker, and a few small largemouth bass and brown trout.

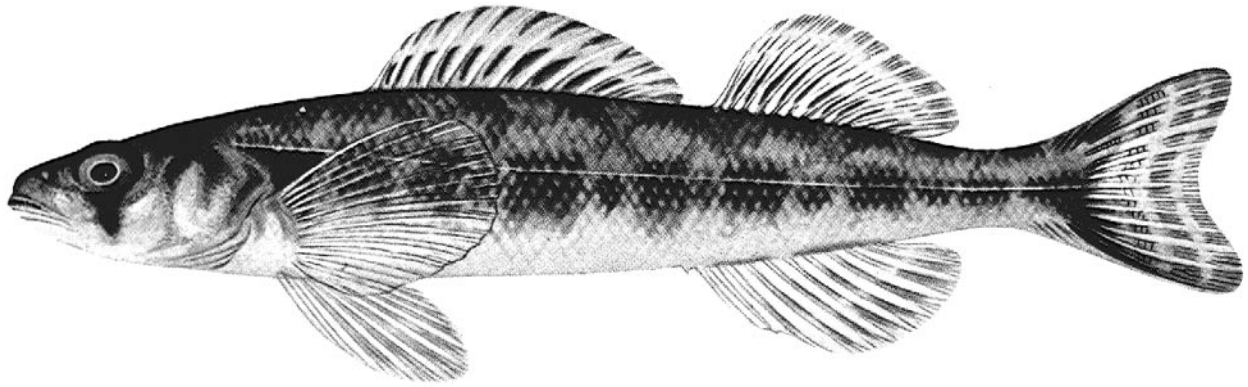


Fig. 1.

Shield darter, *Percina peltata*. Illustration courtesy New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Mike made out just as well with the shield darters using just the large dipnet as I managed with the electrofishing gear. And he collected more small ironcolor shiners than I could. In the shallows—and because of the shiners' small size—the electric current had little effect. But by kicking around and herding the shiners, Mike managed to catch some. It was now about 3 p.m. and Mike and Dick had to leave to make it home at a reasonable time.

With some daylight left, Matt and I tried the electrofishing gear in a large spring that flows into the southeastern side of the marsh. In this isolated spring I had hoped to find long-tailed salamanders, a species that I have never seen in the wild—or even alive, for that matter. But the amphibian and fish life in the spring turned out to be less diverse than we had hoped. We did catch amphibians, but only bullfrogs. The fish species were even less impressive—only a few largemouth bass and a 12-inch brown trout. We're planning a trip this

spring in warmer weather, as I believe more species may be present in the warmer months.

At this point, it was dark enough to cut our visibility, so we stopped collecting and started the long ride home. This time there were no road delays and the trip took just a little over two hours. We arrived at C.W. Post to pick up my truck and to drop off Matt. We split up the few fish that we kept and I headed home. The next day I spread the fish into several aerated coolers. After waiting for the water temperatures to come up over the next three days, I put the shield darters into the New York Stream Exhibit at the Cold Spring Harbor Fish Hatchery & Aquarium. Other fish found new homes in other exhibit aquaria.

I hope that this won't be the last field trip for this chapter and am planning another one this summer at a stream or lake suggested by another member. 🐟

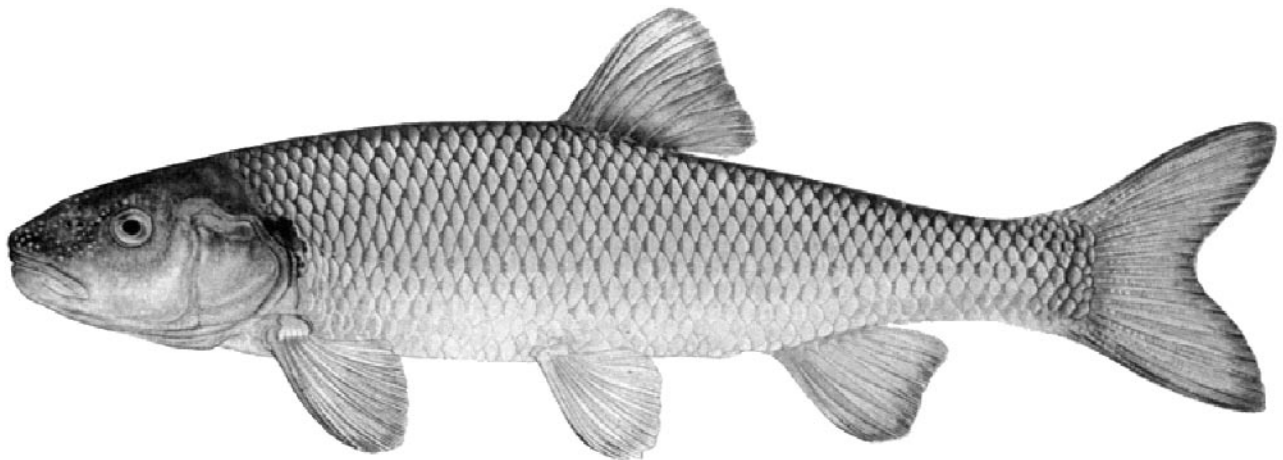


Fig. 2.

Fallfish, *Semotilus corporalis*. Illustration courtesy New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.