

TENNESSEE RIVER RESCUE, SNORKEL STYLE

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In 2018 the Tennessee River Rescue (TRR) celebrated its 30th year. People sign up for one of the 25 to 30 trash collection zones, which are scattered around the immediate Chattanooga area. Some 1,000 shirts were printed and given to the 2018 volunteers, which gives you an idea of how many folks come out for their community's betterment. The TRR is held annually every second Saturday of October. I am already excited and motivated for the upcoming 2019 Rescue.

In the past years, I had invited regional NANFA members to visit and show the TRR volunteers what lives in our local waters. We would seine a few species in the early morning, set up an aquarium with NANFA graphics and goods, and talk with volunteers as they came by. Several folks would visit, mostly as they gathered about and organized for the day. Soon however, most of the volunteers were gone, busy walking and wading the creek, mucking out trash and getting filthy dirty, while we were left standing alone at the display table. We had enjoyed the morning show-and-tell, talking with folks about what they were "rescuing", but after an hour or so we commenced to typical fishhead behavior: dipping and seining more exciting fishes and critters.

In 2016, I participated with a group of North Chickamauga Creek TRR volunteers, walking the banks and flood zones and picking up trash, as is the typical fashion. Several volunteers used canoes piling, them high, tipsy and top heavy, with all manner of discarded refuse. As the day progressed, I noted how reasonably clear the waters were, likely due to the lack of rain and any resulting runoff. I decided to return the next day to snorkel and look to see if much submerged trash was missed by the volunteers. A lot!

The next year, 2017, I had decided to snorkel for trash along a stretch of North Chick upstream, thus avoiding those wading and any canoes that would surely muck up visibility with their efforts. Bryce Gibson of Knoxville volunteered to assist and made the drive south. Saturday morning, we checked in with the zone captain and crew and enjoyed some volunteer donuts and coffee. We let the sun rise a bit higher and drove to a location where we had both snorkeled in the past. Parking at the TWRA site, we geared-up donning wetsuits, hoods, and gloves. We entered the chilly October water, which was refresh-

ingly clear and lush with plants and fishy critters. After a few hours, we had collected a good bit of assorted trash, first piling it into submerged tires scattered down the creek's length. This allowed us to consolidate the trash and then return with bags to fill. Tall, green mesh bags originally used to transport bone beans were provided by Linda's Produce. The bags were ideal



My logo design was selected for the 30th Tennessee River Rescue. 1,000 T-shirts printed for the nearly 1,000 volunteers.



Worn, weary, and content after a successful day of recovery with all our bags and vehicle mounded before us. Bryce and I with Jeremy behind the lens.

Casper Cox, aka The Snorkelmeister, NANFA Fellow, and all around nice guy, has been active for years promoting NANFA and its mission. He especially thrives in outreach events such as the one in this article. His volunteer work teaching young people to snorkel and appreciate the varied life beneath the surface of our streams and rivers is commendable. To quote Casper: "Water is life!" (Note: Casper did not write this bio.)



A Fishy Baby with a Redbreast Sunfish. Finding the doll stuck headfirst in the muck. I groomed her hair best I could and perched and left her among the fishes back in 2016. Will she ever be found again?



Contemplating road recovery options with Bryce. David Herasimtschuk's photograph who later provided the manual towing of the vehicle.



Snorkeling Bruce gathering up tires and debris.

as the mesh allowed water to flow through, obviously reducing the filled bag's weight, but we soon learned to only fill them halfway as when full they were near impossible to lug around or hoist up the steep creek banks. Jeremy Monroe and David Herasimtschuk of Freshwaters Illustrated arrived later and got in the water to photograph and video our efforts; they eventually assisted with the cleanup. My wife Connie and daughter Cyan arrived lastly, and all helped hoist the heavy bags up the steep bank while Bryce and I assembled and tied them from the water's edge. Hunting the trash is a bit like a treasure hunt with the finding of all kinds of old bottles and oddities. I made the mistake of throwing things of interest into the bags filled with shards so all was lost to the dumpster. This location had once been a roadside dumpsite with uncaring humans dumping all manner of household trash into the creek from the high road running alongside.

Because the previous year's (2017) cleanup was successful and enjoyable, I decided to give it another go, and I invited others. NANFA's Associate Editor Bruce Bauer had almost come the previous year, and with a bit of urging he came down three weeks before the 2018 event to provide an advance run. We spent a productive day gathering trash into piles, again centered over submerged tires, in order to fill the bags later on the TRR day. I had scouted the site a week or so earlier, also gathering trash in advance, and found a mesh bag that we had missed the year before. It was still filled with bottles, shards, plastics and castoffs. So, together Bruce and I assembled several piles in advance of the rescue. Then the rains came!

On the day of the 2018 Tennessee River Rescue, we gathered at the North Chick zone about noon. Those volunteering included myself, returning Bruce, future NANFA member Bradley Pruitt, and Johannah, a young lady we gleaned from the main group of volunteers. After reviewing plans and chatting a bit over Moon Pies and water, we caravanned to our snorkel site where thankfully the water had receded and was reasonably clear. When looking for our piles, I soon realized that they had been dispersed downstream by the rain event: oops! Lesson learned: bag the piles of trash soon after piling! We did some retrieving, then hunting and gathering, and soon we had many bags half full and piled at several steep access sites along the creek. The water was comfortable in our wetsuits, but after an hour or two, suitless Bruce and Johannah had the shivers and thus they did the wading and fetching of the bags.

Tires: I had considered trying to remove tires, but when embedded, they are heavy and difficult to pull out, not to mention the difficulty of hoisting them up the steep bank. And dislodging the tires creates a cloud of silt that obscures all downstream snorkel views. Bruce and I had done some experimenting three weeks before and found that flipping them perpendicular to the current's flow would flush out most of the silt from the inside of the tire. We had perched several of these flushed tires in log jams but after the higher waters of the recent rain event, only a few remained in the trees. I had brought along ropes with snap hooks to make the "tire hoisting" easier. My daughter Cyan and her friend Julie arrived, so they and Bruce went up to the road and tossed down the rope. From the water's bank I wrapped the end through and hooked the rope. Pulling the tires up the steep bank went well enough, except when catching on overhanging

roots. In the end, we retrieved, loaded and trucked out 19 tires along with 18 bags of trash. Jeremy and David, returning for more video work this year at another zone, arrived and helped us in the final hour or two.

Bruce and I had an interesting experience when we first started gathering tires and bigger trash. A pair of bass started following us, watching our every move. They were eager to rush in and grab any critters disrupted by our efforts. We did not see them catch

anything but they were quite attentive and persistent. I have seen this behavior before and on this day, I bet they stayed with us over an hour.

To celebrate our efforts, we rinsed off, putting on dry clothes, and we rendezvoused at J. Gumbos for a fine Cajun meal, sans Bruce, Johannah, and Bradley who had to leave earlier. The meal was funded by a gallon jar of coinage found in the Tellico River a year before.

Table 1. Fishes seen by the author in North Chickamauga Creek.

PETROMYZONTIDAE	
Lampreys	<i>Ichthyomyzon</i> spp.
LEPISOSTEIDAE	
Gars	<i>Lepisosteus</i> spp.
CYPRINIDAE	
Stonerollers	<i>Camptostoma</i> spp.
Whitetail Shiner	<i>Cyprinella galactura</i>
Common Carp	<i>Cyprinus carpio</i>
Bigeye Chub	<i>Hybopsis amblops</i>
Striped Shiner	<i>Luxilus chrysocephalus</i>
Warpaint Shiner	<i>Luxilus coccogenis</i>
River Chub	<i>Nocomis micropogon</i>
Golden Shiner	<i>Notemigonus crysoleucas</i>
Tennessee Shiner	<i>Notropis leuciodus</i>
Bluntnose Minnow	<i>Pimephales notatus</i>
CATOSTOMIDAE	
Northern Hog Sucker	<i>Hypentelium nigricans</i>
Spotted Sucker	<i>Minytrema melanops</i>
Redhorse	<i>Moxostoma</i> spp.
SALMONIDAE	
Rainbow Trout	<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss</i>
FUNDULIDAE	
Blackspotted Topminnow	<i>Fundulus olivaceus</i>
CENTRARCHIDAE	
Sunfish	<i>Lepomis</i> spp.
Redbreast Sunfish	<i>L. auritus</i>
Bass	<i>Micropterus</i> spp.
PERCIDAE	
Greenside Darter	<i>Etheostoma blennioides</i>
Rainbow Darter	<i>E. caeruleum</i>
Fantail Darter	<i>E. flabellare</i>
Blueside Darter	<i>E. jessiae</i>
Redline Darter	<i>E. rufilineatum</i>
Tennessee Snubnose Darter	<i>E. simoterum</i>
Banded Darter	<i>E. zonale</i>
Yellow Perch	<i>Perca flavescens</i>
Logperch	<i>Percina caprodes</i>
Dusky Darter	<i>P. sciera</i>

A BIT ABOUT NORTH CHICKAMAUGA CREEK:

I have snorkeled several sites on this creek over the years, from the Cumberland Plateau, down through the steep and large-bouldered gorge, into the meandering valley, past several springs, two old mill sites and several bridges before the flow becomes more lake-like as it arrives at Chickamauga Dam. The headwaters are usually clear, especially in the spring, but I have found that during ummer periods of drought the creek downstream offers many clear and convenient snorkel sites, the clear water being largely due to no nutrient-heavy runoff and the many clear cool springs feeding the creek. River Chub mounds are often encountered, though I have yet to see one active with pulsing-orange Tennessee Shiners. Striped Shiners seem to be the more common species and are in great numbers spawning over the River Chub mounds in late spring.

All the typical and common darters for this region are seen in this stream (Table 1): Tennessee Snubnosed, Redlines, Logperch, Rainbow, Greenside, Banded, Fantail, Blueside, and even Dusks, but I have yet to see a Snail Darter *Percina tanasi* though they are found in South Chickamauga Creek just across the Tennessee River behind my home, Hooters, and Gooney Golf.

Also found are Yellow Perch, Warpaints, Whitetail, Striped and Golden Shiners, Bluntnose Minnows, Bigeye Chubs, Blackspotted Topminnows, Hog Suckers, redhorse, and Spotted Suckers, all the common sunfish and bass, Common Carp, and gar are found in these waters. TWRA even stocks Rainbow Trout upstream for fishermen so inclined. Of course, the ever-present stonerollers travel in grazing herds. Lampreys travel up the creek from the reservoir in the Spring. I caught one by hand years ago and I tell you that is no easy feat. The North Chickamauga Creek is both a ru-



Cans and old bottles, produced before the age of plastics, gathered for a later bagging.



A springtime pair of Blueside Darters displaying in their favored sand substrate. A third male was just off to the left.



A colony of Logperch, very common in the long gravel runs. It is good to see so many of them active in this creek.



Another pile for the dumpster. David and I returned Sunday to pick up more trash and to take additional photos and videos. Have I seen that fishy baby perched somewhere before?



Sunlit Rainbow Darter.

ral and an urban stream, lush with various plants and filled with boulder riffle runs at many sites. The substrate is surprisingly firm and cobbled with gravel while sand banks are scattered along its length. The stream is lush with *Vallisneria*, milfoil, pondweed, and green growth unknown to me. I particularly enjoy exploring the two mill sites and various bridge crossings, returning often over the seasons and years to different sights and experiences. Some of the bottles and glass found are quite old and unusual. Last year I retrieved one embossed with "Stone Fizz," which according to research, is a soda bottled way back when in Chattanooga. Several years ago, I found a pineapple-textured barrel bottle, wedged deep down in a spring crevasse. It was embossed with "Double Strength Sugar Beverage," which is not found in any convenience store I am aware of. It is interesting tracking down these unique bottles on the Worldwide Web.

Conditions permitting, I plan to participate in the rescue again in October 2019 with another run of trash collecting by mask and snorkel. If advance scouting does not yield much trash, I will move our snorkel gang a bit downstream, to the mill site and bridge. I feel fortunate to have contributed to the Tennessee River Rescue in such a unique and fulfilling way. I very much appreciate those who have shared in this endeavor, and I hope that others will also participate in the future.

I was able to revisit the site with a friend on June 15, 2019, the first time since the clean-up in October 2018. More trash and tires had been exposed by the Winter rains, and I gathered most into three or four piles. I hope to visit, scout and bag trash during the Summer.



Most of our 2018 crew (missing Johannah and Bradley who had to leave earlier). Jeremy taking the photograph from above.