



SALTY BYTES

The quarterly newsletter of the Saltwater Fly Anglers of Delaware

November, 2021 – January, 2022

Writer/Editor: Roy Miller

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*In December 2021 Ron Smith was elected to the Board of Directors. He had been serving in an appointed capacity since the fall of 2021 when Ed Barry stepped down. This is a return engagement for Ron as he served on the Board of Directors for many years, and we are delighted to have him back on the Board. Bernie Stasko served out his term on the Board of Directors through December 2021 and then stepped down.

**In December Shawn Rakes was elected to the Board of Directors. After his election, the Board of Directors appointed Shawn as Club President for 2022. Shawn had previously served as Club President but had to step down in 2018 because of his overseas deployment. After Shawn, John Lupinetti served as President until October 2019 when he was replaced by Ed Barry who then served as Club President until early this fall. The Board and Club membership welcome Shawn back. Board member Bill O'Connor had been serving as Club President since Ed Barry stepped down. The Club owes Bill a debt of gratitude for serving so ably in this capacity as President, and the Board and membership are fortunate that Bill will remain on the Board as our Membership Chair.

On behalf of the Board and membership of the Saltwater Fly Anglers of DE we would like to sincerely thank both **Ed Barry** and **Bernie Stasko** for their long and unselfish service to the Club. Both men have indicated that they intend to remain active in our Club, and we look forward to having access to their wisdom and experience for many years to come. Best wishes and may you both continue to have good fishing.

A Note from the Editor

As always, contributions of articles, comments, or pictures that I can include in subsequent newsletters are welcome. You can reach me at home (see above) or by email.

SFAOD Meeting November 10, 2021

The meeting in the Rolling Meadows Development Club House in Lewes was called to order at 7 PM by Club President Bill O'Connor. There were 21 members in attendance including Board of Directors members Loretta Smith, Bernie Stasko, Roy Miller, Jim DiDonato, Ron Smith, Walt Clark, and Bill O'Connor.

Board of Directors Reports:

Club Treasurer Walt Clark said that we have \$6,670.33 in our Club account and that our membership rolls include 152 including Honorary Members. The Club took a moment to welcome Ron Smith back to our Board as a temporary appointment until the December elections. Ron will handle merchandizing for the Board. The Club has the following for sale: t-shirts from size small to XX large, two styles of Club hats, and Club Fishing Guides. Ron is looking into Club jackets for sale, but they will only be available for special order and will not be on the Club inventory.

Our events coordinator, Jim DiDonato, currently has no Club trips on tap, but he has prepared a Zoom presentation for our Club on November 17 that will detail the recent Club fishing trip in October to Corson's Inlet in NJ. In addition Jim's new friend Scott Graham will give a Zoom presentation to our Club that same night. Scott is not only a Tampa FL area fly fishermen, but he is an accomplished artist who will share some of his art work with us that night as well. Jim also indicated that John McMinn is scheduled to be our speaker at the Club Banquet on January 7. **(Note, because of COVID health concerns, the January Banquet was subsequently postponed until April, 2022).** Hopefully the Omicron and Delta Variants will have loosened their grip on the Country by then. Roy Miller gave a brief report saying that the latest Club newsletter will be coming out soon. Loretta Smith has Club flies for sale. Loretta also reminded everyone of the Club Pickerel Fly Fishing Tournament scheduled for Saturday November 13 on a State-owned pond in Kent or Sussex County, DE of your choosing.

Bill O'Conner accepted nominations from the floor for membership on the Board of Directors for 2022. John Lupinetti nominated Shawn Rakes, seconded by Ed Barry. In addition the present slate of Directors including Ron Smith who has been serving on the Board in an interim capacity to fill the vacancy created by Ed Barry was nominated by John Lupinetti and Ed Barry for re-election in 2022, minus Bernie Stasko who will serve out his term until the end of 2021. These nominations were accepted without dissent.

Bill reminded everyone that in addition to Club elections, in December we also will be judging the entries for the John Meaghre Fly Tying Contest. Those wishing to enter a saltwater fly in the contest were urged to bring their best fly to the December meeting. The flies will be judged impartially after the meeting.



At times, the fishing was good this fall for small stripers under the lights in Roosevelt Inlet. Here is Jim DiDonato's brother Mark giving it a try.

Program

Our program that evening was presented by Club President Bill O'Connor. Bill researched the Club files and archives and gave a Power Point presentation on the history of our Club, dating back to its inception in 1999 under the leadership of Club founder, Don Avondolio. The title of his talk was "The Beginning and Early Days of the Saltwater Fly Anglers of DE." Don Avondolio, who was a past President of the Salty Fly Rodders of NJ, arranged for the new Club to meet in the Quonset Hut in the back of R&R Bait and Tackle in Lewes in 2000. There were 23 attendees at this first meeting, including Bill. In the fall of 2000 there was a tournament in conjunction with Chuck Furimsky of the Somerset, NJ Fly Fishing Show. These early tournaments were held in Wildwood, NJ through 2003. In May of 2002, Bob Popovics was our speaker in Lewes. Club members held fishing trips in 2003 to Cape May, NJ and to Cape Cod, MA. In September 2003, the Club moved the meetings over to the upstairs of the Lewes Library. Don Avondolio served as the first editor of the Salty Bites Newsletter, followed by Bill O'Connor, and in 2008 Roy Miller took over the newsletter as editor.

In April 2004 we held our first meeting in the Rolling Meadows development thanks to member Ron Smith who lives in that development. In August 2004 we held our first Club picnic at Indian River Inlet. Our last trip to Wildwood, NJ was in Sept. 2004. In 2005 our Club started annual attendance at Tie Fest in Grasonville, MD. In 2005 we had our first camping trip to James Island in Chrisfield, MD. Our Club held casting and fly tying demonstrations at Coast Day in Lewes beginning in October 2004. That same year we held our first conclave in Dewey Beach, DE at the Sand Palace Motel. December 2006 was memorable because we hosted a program by Lefty Kreh, an old friend of Don Avondolio's, in Newark, DE. In 2007 a few Club members fished with Mason Crosby on the Transquaking River on January 1, a ritual that continued for several of years until Mason finally closed his fly shop in Snow Hill, MD.

After Bill concluded, there being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

SFAOD Pickerel Fly Fishing Tournament – November 13, 2021

The Club Pickerel Fly Fishing Tournament was kind of a bust because only two 2-person teams signed up to participate. Team Esox It To Me, consisting of Loretta Smith and Roy Miller, elected to fish Millsboro Pond. In spite of strong competition for good spots on the pond with a local bass club, Loretta and Roy managed to catch and release 10 chain pickerel and 1 yellow perch. Shortly after 1 PM strong winds chased them off the water. The second team of Walt Clark and grandson John fished Wagamons Pond without much success. However, both teams did enjoy a nice lunch at Grottos Pizza in Lewes after a hard morning of fishing. They were joined for lunch by Ron and Lorraine Smith.



Here's Roy (left) and Loretta (right) with some of the pickerel they caught on Millsboro Pond

Special Zoom Presentation to the Club, November 17, 2021

Jim DiDonato gave a presentation on the October 5, 2021 Club excursion to Corson's Inlet, NJ. Three vehicles holding Club members crossed the Bay by ferry that morning and met Joe Gerace of the South Jersey Fly Anglers after a 45 minute drive to Corson's Inlet from the Cape May Ferry Terminal. Fishing success on the beach was modest, but Bernie Stasko caught a small black sea bass and a Northern puffer. Bill O'Connor also caught a summer flounder. Club members returned to DE on the last ferry back that same day.

Jim then introduced Scott Graham from Ridge Manor FL who presented a PowerPoint talk about fishing on the Withlacoochee River, about 40 miles north of Tampa. Scott fishes both that area and on the Tellico River in Tennessee. On the Withlacoochee he fishes in Yankee Town near Ocala where the river meets the Gulf. He said that snook congregate in the passes to spawn in the spring. He likes to wade belly deep and cast upstream to get his fly down to the fish. Scott also showed us examples of his excellent paintings of FL fish and wildlife and wild places in FL. The Club is very grateful to Scott for his willingness to take the time to present a Zoom talk to us.

SFAOD Meeting 12/8/2021

Start: 7:09 p.m. Attendance: 25 members.

Board members present: Walt Clark, Jim DiDonato, Loretta Smith, Bill O'Connor, Bernie Stasko, Ron Smith and Roy Miller.

Board of Director's Reports-

Pres. Bill O'Connor convened the meeting at 7:10 PM in the Rolling Meadows Clubhouse. Walt Clark gave a treasurer's report. The Club had \$6,029.60 at the end of the month. So far Walt has 38 signed up for our Holiday Party in January. (Note, this party was subsequently postponed until April 1, 2022.) Bill O'Connor will send out an email inviting members to vote on the election of Board of Directors members for 2022. We did not have a quorum tonight (31), so no vote could be taken at the meeting. Bill will solicit votes by email subsequent to this

meeting. In November all existing Board members were re-nominated for 2022, except for Bernie Stasko who is stepping down from the Board after this month.

Jim DiDonato wants ideas from the membership on Club trips to be taken in 2022. Ed Barry suggested we try to line up a bus to go to the Fly Fishing Show in Edison, NJ the last weekend in January. Either that or we should set up car pools if we cannot fill a bus.

Loretta Smith will start selling raffle tickets for 2002's Grand Raffle. Ted Morlock offered to include another guided snakehead fishing trip as a prize. Last year his party caught no snakeheads, but they did catch some nice largemouth bass.

Our membership is up to 153 for 2021 according to Walt Clark. Six are signed up so far for the New Year. Dues will not change at \$25/yr. Loretta has Club-tied flies for sale at the meeting tonight.

Fishing Reports-

Ed Barry did well at Cape Hatteras in October and November, but only on conventional tackle. It was too windy for fly casting to be comfortable. Jim DiDonato and brother Mark, and Bernie Stasko caught 5 pickerel in the Upper Nanticoke at the "secret spot." Jim tried some fishing for bass in a housing development stormwater pond but had no luck. Roy Miller reported that Red Mill Pond has been drawn down for the winter by the pond owner, Joe Hudson and his grandson Christian. It is unfishable for now.

Bill O'Connor mentioned that the Board discussed varying our 2022 fishing trip schedule to include new shoreline locations instead of always going to the Cape Henlopen parking lot. Suggestions included Broadkill Beach as far south as the closure at Beach Plum Island and also at the radar station at the tip of Cape Henlopen. Ed Barry announced that he has an 18 ft. long composite boat for sale with no outboard, only a trolling motor and regular electronics. He said he will sell it cheap if anyone is interested.

Program-

Board Member Roy Miller was the invited speaker. Roy's topics included an update on the recent decisions and meetings of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, especially concerning striped bass, bluefish, summer flounder, black sea bass, and a number of other species of interest to Club members. Roy has been serving as the DE Governor's Appointee to the Commission since 2009. Look for public hearings to be conducted on draft Amendment 7 to the Striped Bass Plan in early 2022. No comprehensive amendment has been considered since Amendment 6 passed in 2006. Since striped bass are currently overfished and overfishing is still occurring, look for additional catch restrictions over the next several years as the Commission attempts to end overfishing and rebuild the stock. Bluefish are currently overfished, but the current rate of removal is not excessive. There will be more decisions reached at meetings next week concerning summer flounder, black sea bass, scup, and bluefish when the Commission meets in conjunction with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

Roy then presented a slide talk on a vacation he and his wife made to Glacier National Park and nearby Whitefish, MT. He also presented slides on American shad fishing in DE last spring and a summary of the recent (November) Club pickerel fly fishing tournament.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM so that our team of judges could pick out the winners of the 2021 John Meaghre fishing contest. The winners will be announced at our annual holiday dinner.

SFAOD Meeting January 12, 2022

Because of COVID concerns, the January meeting was held virtually on Zoom. There were 25 members including seven Board of Directors members in attendance that evening.

Board of Directors Reports-

Shawn Rakes, our new Club President, convened the meeting at 7:05 PM. Our Treasurer, Walt Clark, said that we had an opening balance of \$7,021 this year, as opposed to \$3,725 last year at this time. This is due to 36 more new members plus the fact that we haven't been spending much money for over a year due to restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Members should let Walt know what they want done with the banquet money that Walt is holding as a result of the postponement of the holiday banquet. Participants can request a refund or let Walt hold onto their funds until the postponed banquet which is now tentatively scheduled for April 1, 2022. Walt plans on using the same caterer that he originally scheduled for January 7.

Ron Smith has our clothing line of shirts and hats for sale, as well as our booklets on fishing spots in DE. Loretta Smith examined our inventory of trophies and has Club flies for sale. Bill O'Conner says that we had 153 members on our roles, including honorary members, as of the end of the calendar year. He has received 19 new members or renewals so far this year. We are going to have a grand raffle in June of this year. We have added a Renzetti vice to our list of prizes and a bobbin kit for the Norvise system. We have two complete rod and reel outfits because one was subsequently donated to us in addition to the Orvis Clearwater outfit we purchased. We also have an Orvis stripping basket for the raffle.

Roy Miller said that we have newsletters posted on our website that are complete through October. He will start on a new one this month and into February. Jim DiDonato requested that people contact him for ideas on speakers at our future meetings.

Fishing Reports-

Ron Smith fished small ponds near Marco Island, FL this month. His fishing success for snook was poor. Jim DiDonato fished Tampa Bay for redfish and snook, but only caught puffers. Shawn Rakes fished in FL as well and did well under the lights for snook and even caught a lookdown. He also fished freshwaters in south FL and caught peacock bass and even a new species for him, the spotted sunfish.



This is a blue tilapia caught by Jim DiDonato at Wesley Chapel, FL this January on a white Clouser. Tilapia can be hard to take on a fly.

Program –

Our speaker that evening was Club member John McMinn. For this talk John concentrated on fishing for false albacore, also known as albies or little tunny. John said that these speedy gamesters average 5-15 lbs. with a maximum size of about 20 lbs., making them a perfect size for fly rods in nearshore coastal waters. Albies range from Florida in the winter to New England in the summer, appearing off of Montauk, NY in Sep.-Oct. and off of Cape Lookout, NC in the fall. These fish are fast swimmers, up to 30 miles/hour. They feed on silversides and bay anchovies up to 5" in size, but will take even smaller baits more like 1-2" in the early fall. If fishing behind

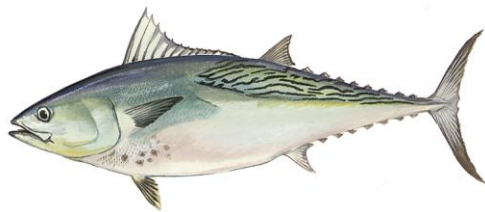
shrimp trawlers that dump their by-catch, larger flies will work. John recommends a 2-handed retrieve when fishing for albies using a 9-10 weight rod so that you can control the fish better and get it back in the water quicker. Albies are not particularly good eating so most are released. You might need a bigger rod if there are sharks feeding on trawler discards. Occasionally you can even take albies on top with a quickly retrieved popper.



Here is John holding a false albacore. It was the lead picture in his presentation to our Club.

In the fall, John likes to fish around Cape Lookout, NC. He has used heavier sinking lines like 450 grains up to 650 grains, but he prefers intermediate sinking lines for most of his fishing, especially if the albies are busting on bait at the surface. For NC guides he likes Brian Horseley, Sarah Gardiner, Tom Roller, and Rob Pasfield, but there are others in the area. In NY/RI areas he likes Christian Awe and Greg Snow. In FL he likes Ron Doerr or Scott Hamilton.

The Harkers Island Fishing Center caters to hard-core anglers if you like those sort of accommodations, but you can stay in Atlantic Beach, Beaufort, or Morehead City if you want more choices in accommodations.



False albacore illustration by Duane Raver, courtesy DE Div. of Fish and Wildlife

Events scheduled for 2022. All outdoor and indoor events are subject to future COVID restrictions.

Jan. 7 – ~~Club banquet and program at Lewes Presbyterian Church.~~ Postponed until April 1, 2022 because of COVID concerns.

Jan. 8 – Resumption of Saturday of morning fly tying, 0900-12:00. For the first month at least, the tying sessions will be hosted on Zoom instead of in-person at Lewes Harbor Marina.

Feb. 9 – Regular Club meeting.

Mar. 8 – Regular Club meeting.

Apr. 1 – Holiday picnic postponed from January 2022.

Apr. 2 – Club Pickerel fly fishing tournament

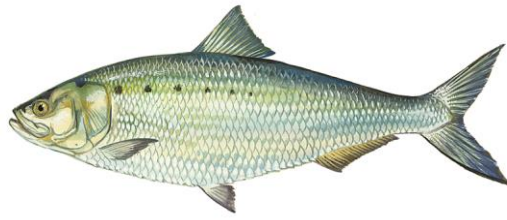
May -- Club picnic at Cape Henlopen State Park

June 8 – Regular Club meeting at Rolling Meadows Club House

July 13 – Club outdoor casting and barbeque at Rolling Meadows

Aug. 10 -- Club outdoor casting and barbeque at Rolling Meadows

Sep. 14 – Regular Club meeting at Rolling Meadows Club House



American shad

With spring 2020 on the horizon, I thought it appropriate to bring our readers up to date on those migratory spring favorites, the shad. In Delaware we have fishable populations of both hickory shad and American shad. Of the two species, American shad, *Alosa sapidissima*, are the largest and most glamorous. Both species are what biologists refer to as anadromous species, meaning they spend most of their lives living in marine environments, but return to freshwaters for spawning purposes. The two species can be a little difficult for the average angler to tell apart, but there are anatomical differences to look for, in addition to the fact that American shad get much larger (the world record American shad is 11 lbs. 4 oz. from the Connecticut River and the Delaware record is 6 lbs. 12 oz. Hickory shad (*Alosa mediocris*), on the other hand, seldom exceed 2 lbs). When the mouth is closed on a hickory shad, the lower jaw (mandible) projects beyond the upper jaw, while on the American shad the lower jaw meets the end of the upper jaw. In addition the hickory shad is a slimmer fish than the American shad and the American shad clearly has a deeper body and profile.

Just to confuse things a little further, there are other members of the alosid or shad family that can be found in the same freshwater spawning rivers as American shad and hickory shad. All members of the shad family have scutes or rough scales along their bellies. The others include the two river herrings, alewife and blueback herring, and the semi-anadromous gizzard shad. The river herrings seldom exceed 12 inches, even when mature. Mature alewife generally appear first in the spring in our tidal tributaries, and they have a larger eye and deeper body than the blueback herring, which appear a few weeks later on average. If you examine them internally, the alewife has a pinkish or pearl gray interior stomach lining (called the peritoneum) while the blueback herring's lining is dusky or black in color. Gizzard shad do not migrate out into the ocean unlike the shad and river herring and are capable of completing their life cycle in freshwater. Gizzard shad have a deeper body than the river herring and reach 15-16 inches in size. Gizzard shad seldom take a fly, but I have caught a few over the years. Gizzard shad are also inedible.

Getting back to the two shad species, in Delaware American shad leave the ocean in the late winter and ascend spawning rivers typically in April and stay until finished spawning in May or the latest, in early June. After spawning American shad adults make their way down the spawning rivers and estuaries and back into the sea. They migrate as far north as Nova Scotia where they feed until reaching maturity in their third or fourth years. Unlike Pacific salmon, American shad are capable of returning and spawning for multiple years. In Delaware American shad are known to spawn successfully in the Delaware River, generally upstream of Trenton, NJ; in the Nanticoke River system; and, most encouragingly, once again in the Brandywine River system in Wilmington. American shad are now abundant in the Brandywine as far up as the second City Dam upstream of the I-95 bridge near the Brandywine Zoo, thanks to the removal of a barrier dam further downstream a few years ago by a consortium of river restoration enthusiasts, with the backing of DNREC and its Division of Fish and Wildlife, and the City of Wilmington. A sport fishery for shad has developed recently in the Brandywine that rivals some of the action not seen there since the late 1960s. Historically there may have been American shad spawning in other Delaware River tributaries in Delaware like the Broadkill River, but it is likely that spawning in these lower Delaware River tributaries is minimal recently compared to the spawning in the mainstem of the Delaware and the larger Delaware tributaries upstream from Delaware like the Schuylkill and Lehigh Rivers.

The two best places to fish for American shad in Delaware (and also for spawning hickory shad) are the Brandywine River in Wilmington and in Broad Creek at the Concord Pond spillway. Neither place is exactly a secret and both are popular with fly fishermen as well as the more traditional spin fishermen employing small lead shad darts in a variety of bright colors. When fishing in the Concord Pond spillway, I will use a variety of shad flies tied on #6-10 hooks. I'll try them in chartreuse, pearl, white, yellow, and gold, with some red color behind or on the head. I prefer to use marabou feathers for the tail, but you can use calf tail or buck tail as well. For weight, I will use brass or tungsten beads in gold, silver, or other colors, and I will switch colors until I find what is working on any given day. Some like to use weighted jig hooks, but if they are too heavy it can make casting challenging or even a little dangerous with a fly rod. I could say a lot more about this fishing, but much of what it takes to be successful is a result of trial and error and watching your fellow anglers. I like to use 5-7 weight rods for my shad fishing, coupled with sink tip lines, with the emphasis on the larger rods for the bigger river systems. In recent years two-handed fly rods have appeared on the Brandywine and they are most useful when the shad are holding in deeper currents well away from the shoreline. My friend John McMinn demonstrated their effectiveness to me last spring on the Brandywine.



That's Roy on the left and Jim DiDonato on the right with American shad taken from below Concord Pond spillway last spring.



Bernie Stasko (left) and Bill Douwes (right) with shad caught and released at Concord Pond spillway.



Roy fighting and landing a nice shad on the Brandywine River in Wilmington. That's DF&W Fisheries Manager Mike Stangl on the left with the landing net. Mike was tagging and releasing shad we caught that day.

Mature hickory shad appear at the same locations on the Nanticoke system and in the Brandywine and Christina River systems around the same time as mature American shad. Unlike American shad, adult hickory shad drop down into nearshore coastal waters after spawning, but do not migrate far, typically remaining at the mouths of major tributaries all summer. Adult hickory shad can be caught at the mouth of the Broadkill River and Roosevelt Inlet in Lewes and at Indian River Inlet nearly all summer long on lightly weighted flies on number 6-10 hooks. Use colors that will mimic the smaller bait fish in the area like juvenile bay anchovies and silversides. In the summer, the hickory shad are holding at the mouths of rivers in order to feed, and the fishing can be especially fast at night under the shoreside lights.

If you want to keep a shad to eat, be aware of two things. The limit on American and hickory shad in Delaware is 10/day, combined species, except that none may be kept in the Nanticoke system or its tributaries like Broad Creek. The other thing to be aware of is that both species are bony, and with the hickory shad that means they are almost too bony to be worth bothering with. Boning an American shad is an art form, but once so rendered, the flesh is very tasty. One other note of caution. American and hickory shad are rather fragile creatures, even though they often jump and fight hard when hooked. Hickory shad, although small, will fight like miniature tarpon. Please take care to release them as quickly and painlessly as possible, particularly if you are fishing from the Concord Pond spillway. Don't just heave them back in the water from 10 feet up and assume they will be fine to participate in the spring spawn. These shad may have migrated all the way from Maine or Canada to do their thing, and we want to give them every chance to complete their lifecycle. I will even use a long-handled dip net to lower them back down from the top of the spillway if I can't walk them back to river level from where I am fishing.

rwm



Hickory shad

Illustrations of shad courtesy of the DE Div. of Fish and Wildlife and artist Duane Raver.

PHWFF

Club member Jim DiDonato is the manager of the local chapter of Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, an international charitable organization that uses fly fishing as an outreach to assist disabled military veterans. At one point, PHWFF was sponsored by our club, but now there is no formal connection – although several club members continue to volunteer their time.

Veterans don't need to have any fly fishing experience; PHWFF provides expert guidance and equipment. The camaraderie these veterans share through PHWFF is just as important as the fishing skills they acquire. The local chapter usually meets on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month in Milford. In addition, fishing events are held in local waters. Jim invites all SFAOD members to become involved as volunteers, and also to refer disabled veterans to him for possible participation in the program. His email is didonato57@gmail.com, and his phone is 302-270-4884.

Please Stay Safe

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The lead beautiful picture of Delaware Bay near Cape Henlopen Point was taken in October by Club member Steve Halstead. The closing photo of Millsboro Pond was taken by Roy Miller on Nov. 13, 2021.