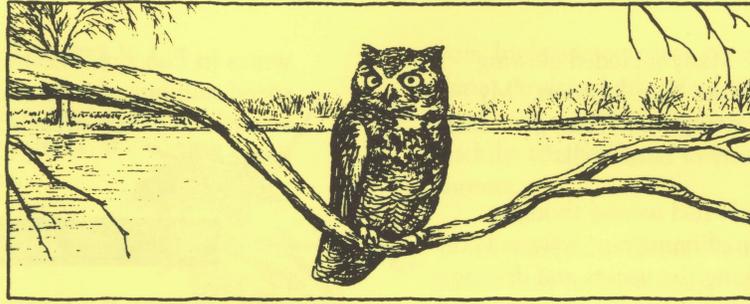


STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



©SUMMER 1998

No CARPIng Zone

--Mark Spreyer

Normally, in this space, I feature an animal or plant that can be found here in Stillman. To this date, I have never seen a carp in either our lake or marsh. However, since this fish is so common in nearby lakes and rivers, I thought you might be interested in learning more about it. Even though I'm a Barrington native, I did not truly appreciate carp until I lived in Minnesota, near the famous northern lake country, home to popular fish species such as the walleye or northern pike.

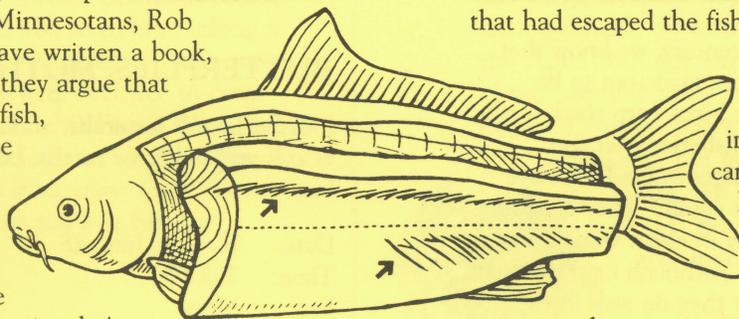
There, I met pair of Minnesotans who, despite their proximity to pristine lakes, were dedicated to convincing anglers that the much-maligned carp is the REAL challenge for fishermen. These Minnesotans, Rob Buffler and Tom Dickson, have written a book, *Fishing for Buffalo*, in which they argue that many overlooked species of fish, including the carp, should be appreciated and enjoyed rather than ignored or shunned.

Before proceeding to the carp's conquest of North America, let's take a closer look at this remarkable fish. The common carp, a thick-bodied fish with an arching back, can reach four feet in length. It has a brassy olive back, lighter sides, and is yellowish below. The carp is one of the larger members of the Minnow Family.

Carp have a rather unusual mouth. Two pairs of barbels are found at the corner of the mouth. In the carp, the rear pair of these fleshy projections are more noticeable and suggest the fish is wearing a droopy moustache over its protruding, down-turned mouth. In its throat, it has

pharyngeal teeth that allow it to grind up molluscs, crustaceans and other invertebrates that are protected by crusty exoskeletons.

So, how did the non-native carp arrive in North America? After the Civil War, the federal government turned its attention to the country's natural resources. Thanks to unregulated commercial fishing operations, fish were becoming increasingly scarce at East Coast markets. In addition, garbage, sewage and the other by-products of human settlements were simply flushed into the nearest river. The waters' increased turbidity, temperature, and bacteria levels made existence precarious for those fish that had escaped the fishermen's nets and seines.



How to fillet a carp.

At the same time native fishes were disappearing, human immigrants were asking that the carp be brought to America. Because of its widespread popularity in Europe; Germans, Scandinavians, French and other nationalities had all grown

accustomed to consuming carp. When they learned that this country lacked carp, they did what concerned citizens often do, they wrote the government. Their letters landed on Spencer Baird's desk.

Baird was in charge of the United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries which was formed by President Grant in 1871. After a few fish fact-finding tours in Europe, Baird arranged for a shipment of carp which arrived on our shores in 1877. By 1883, 260,000 fish were distributed to almost every one of the country's 301 congressional districts. After the carp arrived at their various destinations,

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Baird continued to get letters. Many included glowing endorsements like this from Texan Sam Johnson, "My carp which you sent me... are doing well. They grow like China pigs when fed with plenty of buttermilk."

As the years went by, people had second thoughts about their carp. The once-prized immigrant was, and continues to be, accused of muddying the waters and driving off more desirable species of fish. One might wonder, though, what came first, the carp or the mud? Water pollution was not in the vocabulary of nineteenth century America. Had it been, people might have recognized that the carp was not the cause of the country's declining water quality. On the other hand, the carp was new, it was foreign, and it did have some messy habits.

Whether in streams or lakes, carp activities had an impact. Their constant vacuuming for food would sometimes cause aquatic vegetation to be uprooted. This combined with their vigorous spawning action could result in a muddier or more turbid lake. To the human European immigrants, it was an open and shut case. As Buffler and Dickson write, the settlers "saw carp swirling happily in the mess humans had created, and made a correlation--albeit the wrong one-- between the rise of carp and the fall of game fish."

Now, as we approach the 21st century, we know that the carp is not the villain it has been made out to be. Buffler and Dickson state, "In most lakes, carp reach a balance with other fish species. Most fisheries scientists who've studied carp agree that changes in land use have hurt game fish more than carp ever could." They continue, "We've seen carp swimming happily in clean wilderness streams and in smelly urban rivers. Although carp thrive in turbid, polluted water, the fact that they do well in the waters where humans store their garbage reflects the species' tolerance, not its preference."

Furthermore, carp are helping to control another exotic species, the zebra mussel. According to the National Biological Survey, 26 of 31 carp recently taken from the Mississippi River near St. Louis, had zebra mussels in their stomachs. One of the carp contained 204 mussels! Thanks to the carp's pharyngeal teeth, the mussel shells found in the fish stomachs were crushed and well-fragmented.

Promoting carp may sound difficult but it is the pragmatic way to proceed. The only way to effectively limit carp would be much too expensive. As George C. Becker

writes in *Fishes of Wisconsin*, "Unless we are willing to spend millions of dollars to pull out dams and restore the watersheds of our streams... we will have carp in abundance."

PROGRAMS

BIRD BANDING OPEN HOUSES

Watch Mark Spreyer (a licensed bird bander) measure, weigh and record data about our resident and migratory birds. Catching birds is not always predictable, so come prepared to hike the trails. If it's raining, the activity will be cancelled.

Date: Sundays; June 7, July 5 & August 2
Time: 9:00AM to Noon
Fee: None

SUMMER SOLSTICE CELEBRATION

The summer solstice marks the beginning of summer and is the day with the most sunshine. Join us as we lead you and your children in activities designed to celebrate the sun's role in fueling life on planet earth.

Date: Sunday, June 21
Time: Noon
Fee: None

BUTTERFLIES, MOTHS & CATERPILLARS

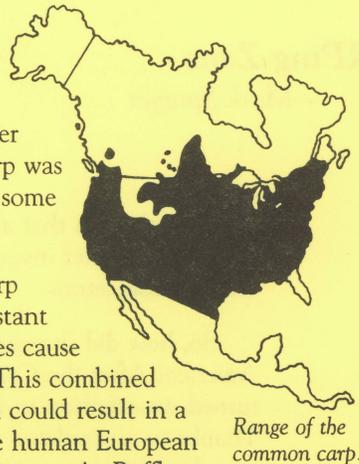
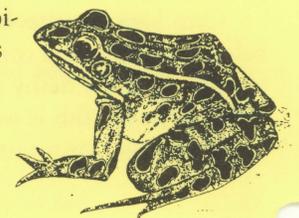
Join Stillman's naturalist and search the nature center's woods and fields for moths, butterflies and their caterpillars.

Date: Sunday, June 28
Time: 2:00PM
Fee: None

POND LIFE: From the Bottom Up

This afternoon, with the help of long-handled dip nets, visitors will scoop into our pond in hopes of catching crayfish, dragonfly larvae, tadpoles and other rarely seen pond inhabitants. Dress in clothes and shoes you don't mind getting muddy.

Date: Sunday, July 19
Time: 2:00PM
Fee: None



Range of the common carp.

MORNING BIRD WALK

Mark Spreyer will lead a morning bird walk. Binoculars and field guides are a must. If you don't have any, don't worry, Stillman does. *Please call 428-OWLS to make reservations.*

Date: Sunday, August 23
Time: 8:00AM
Fee: None
Age: 10 years and up

FOR MORE PROGRAM INFORMATION
OR TO MAKE RESERVATIONS,
PLEASE CALL (847)428-OWLS.



from Ingleside courtesy of wildlife rehabilitator Andrea Kane. Andrea had hoped to return this orphaned owlet to its own nest but the nest had been destroyed. Luckily, the Stillman owls proved to be excellent foster parents.

In 1997, the Great Horned Owl returned to the basket but, unfortunately, somebody got the eggs and she did not re-nest. Keep in mind that the female owl rarely leaves the nest while she incubates her eggs. The male regularly delivers food to her during this time. An owl mother is a formidable opponent. My best guess at what occurred is that something happened to the male owl, which forced the mother to fend for herself. While she was hunting, somebody, perhaps a raccoon, helped themselves to an owl omelet.

My speculation seemed to be confirmed this February as the female bird returned to her laundry basket. The old male used to perch in a visible location across the pond keeping a watchful eye on things even as I came and went. This year's new stud is much more careful about humans, flying out of sight as soon as one of us is spotted. Such behavior, I imagine, will prolong the owl's life.

This past March, I'm pleased to report, mother owl hatched two eggs. The owlets, which dined on rabbits and other fare, developed quickly. With the help of their publicist, yours truly, the owls got their picture in the April 28th edition of the *Chicago Tribune*. The photo inspired many visitors to come to Stillman in hopes of seeing owlets who were quite cooperative, although not appreciative of all the attention.

The last owlet left the nest tree on May 11. Both have been sighted subsequently and appear to be doing well.

As the young owls were leaving their nest, another raptor, a Cooper's Hawk, was building a new nest elsewhere on the grounds. This is the second year for the Cooper's here at Stillman. For details about this bird of prey, keep an eye on "The Conservationist" column that appears in the *Barrington Courier-Review* or read the "Raptor Update," that ran in this newsletter last summer.

SPECIAL VOLUNTEERS AND MEMBERS EVENT

Regular readers of this newsletter have seen the name Roger Laegeler in all of our "thank you" columns. Roger Laegeler continues his persistent and personal battle against the aggressive European buckthorn. Without his years of service, Stillman would be a buckthorn monoculture.

So, in honor of Roger, we are hosting a casual outdoor get-together. We'll provide the main course and beverages. We'd like you to bring along a side dish. ALL of Stillman's members, volunteers and their families are invited. Feel free to come any time between 4:00 and 7:00PM. If it's raining, we'll reschedule this picnic to an autumn date. *Please call 428-OWLS to let us know if you plan to attend and what kind of dish you'll be bringing.*

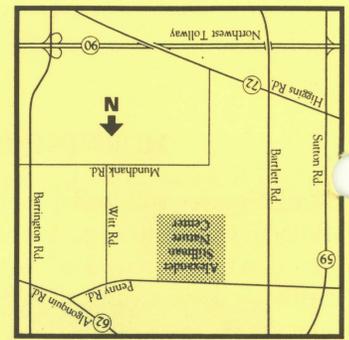
Date: Sunday, June 28
Time: 4:00 - 7:00PM

RAPTOR UPDATE

Owls in a Basket: Part III

As some of you will recall, in 1996, we had a Great Horned Owl who successfully nested in our laundry basket nest. She raised two chicks. One she hatched herself. The other was a foster owlet that came





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STILLMAN nature center



Open Sundays 9-4

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If you aren't already a member, please consider joining us.

- Yes, I'd like to become a member of the Stillman Nature Center. I enclose my tax deductible contribution of \$_____.
- I'd like to help as a volunteer with programs or land management at the Stillman Nature Center, please call me.
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