

Wildlife Afield

By Jim Dean N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission

The hunter does not suffer spring gladly. He sees the first crocus as a threat. Each early daffodil is a jaundiced insult. Balm days at the end of February are outrageous, intolerable. Where, he cries in anguish, are the snows of yesterday?

But finally, when the dogs are penned at the end of the season, the hunter's real world is shouldered aside by an enveloping fantasy. The withdrawal symptoms appear, and the hunter becomes an unwilling blood brother of the man with the golden arm.

"No, I'm not ready to go fishing," said my bird hunting buddy over the phone yesterday. He was barely civil. "I'm not ready to go fishing today, and I won't be ready to go fishing tomorrow. Do you realize that the quail season has only been closed for three weeks? Where is your sense of respect, man? Fishing, indeed."

My friend is in his annual agony. After the close of the bobwhite season, he walks around in a daze. For awhile he still takes the dogs to the fields, leaving his gun behind. It is a noble gesture, but only a charade.

He cleans his guns for the last time at least 15 times. For the first time in six months, his English setter is bereft of cockleburrs. Each burr is extracted gently and counted. All 432 are in a bowl on the gun cabinet. Memories.

One day in mid-March, my friend drags his gear out again for one last sentimental romp through ritual. His keen nose locates the liverwurst sandwich that has been in the hunting coat since early December when he sat on it accidentally while taking a short break at the old well.

"Ah yes," he thinks to himself as he sniffs the wounded liverwurst. "that was the day Miss Cindy found the tobacco barn covey for the first time this past season," pointing them high and proud in the bean stalks.

His memory drifts back and he sits in a trance for 30 minutes until the sound of hyacinths popping out of the greening lawn breaks the spell. "Don't grow grass," he pleads pitifully. "please don't grow."

He takes a lingering sniff of the liverwurst, starts to toss it into the trash then stops. With profound respect, he carefully places it back in his hunting coat. A souvenir.

My friend's misery is so complete that it rubs off on the dogs -- or vice versa. They lie at the fence with their noses sticking through the chicken wires. Their hair is falling out. They think it's caused by a severe deprivation of bird scent.

Everytime someone opens the gate, they race to the truck and hop into the back where they sit for hours surrounded by the banners of spring, unfurling treacherously everywhere.

For some, withdrawal lasts only a week of two. For others, despair is more tenacious, lasting well into summer. But finally, yielding to fate, the smell of Hoppes No. 9 powder solvent fades, and the hunter can be found sadly spooling

new line on his reels. Thanksgiving is a million years away.

If you regularly fish for wild, streambred trout in western North Carolina, your overall success last year was probably about the same as usual. But depending upon where you fished and how observant you are, you may have noticed one difference.

Think back for a moment. Did you catch as many trout in the 10- to 12-inch class as you normally do? Does it seem that you caught both smaller and larger trout, but not many in that range?

There's a reason. At least two biologists, working independently, have discovered this gap as a result of studies and surveys. The loss of trout in the 10-12 inch class represents the loss of one or more crops of trout as a result of severe and untimely flooding during 1972 and 1973, particularly the May Memorial Day Flood in the spring of 1973.

"It's not an unusual occurrence," explained Dr. Tom Harsbarger of the Southeastern Forest Experiment Station at Bent Creek. "It happens to some extent almost every year somewhere in the western part of the state. A local, heavy rain can cause problems on a certain part of a creek, but have no effect in another nearby creek. The Memorial Day Flood, however, affected a lot of creeks, especially east of Asheville. We also found effects in Macon County where flooding was severe."

"What happens," explained Harsbarger, "is that when a severe flood hits at the peak of the spawning season, or shortly after, it can seriously hurt the survival of the spawn or the young fry (baby trout). The adult trout can, for the most part, take care of themselves during a serious flood, but the tiny trout are often lost."

This is what happened in 1972 and 1973, and the result is that trout in the 10- to 12-inch class simply weren't available in great abundance in some streams during the 1975 season. Of course, this was not true for all streams. Some were hit pretty hard, while others were not affected at all.

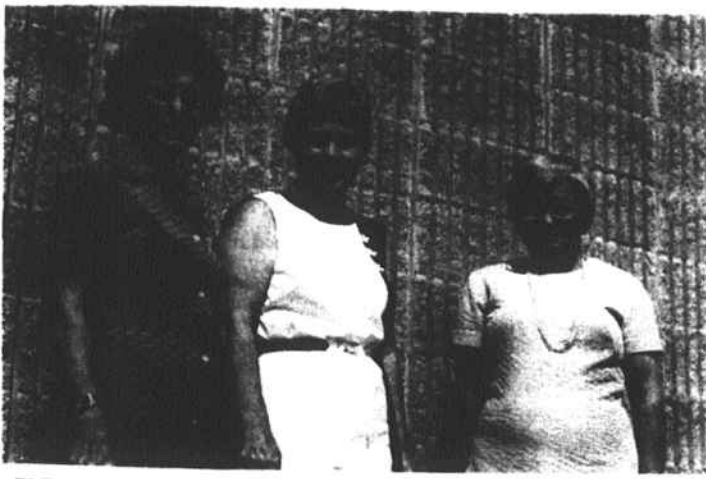
Bob Brown, a fisheries biologist for the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, found evidence of the loss of part of the 1972-73 year classes of trout shortly after the floods, and has been studying the effects.

"Chances are that this missing year class will not be noticeable this coming season to any great extent," said Brown. "For one thing, these trout would now be 12 to 14 inches long and not as many trout of that size are caught anyway. Also, we've had good reproduction in our wild streams since the spring of 1973, and this has pretty well filled the gap."

Brown pointed out that there are some fishermen who believe that the drop-off in 10-12 inch fish in some streams last year was caused by opening the streams to year 'round fishing. However, Brown believes that opening the streams has had no adverse effect and that last year's missing year class was due to the 1972 and 1973 floods.

Fortunately, losses as a result of flooding are not usually disastrous, nor are they unusual. But when severe flooding strikes at the worst possible time, it can hurt the trout population for a year or two. Most trout fishermen -- particularly those who fish streams where wild trout populations are supplemented by stocking -- would never notice the loss of a year class. On streams managed for wild trout reproduction without stocking, the gap may be more noticeable, although it will have no long-range effect of any significance.

One interesting sidelight concerns the way adult trout survive severe floods. The trout do not attempt to hold their positions in the current.



ELECTED - Three county women were elected officers during the business session at the South Central District meeting of extension homemakers on April 22. Pictured, left to right, are Lillian Wood, Raeford club education chairman, Frances Woolley, home economics vice-chairman, and Bertha Hendrix, citizenship vice-chairman.



VISITING - Raeford native Preston C. Jones, pastor of Cokesberry United Methodist Church in Raleigh, is greeted by Rev. Kelly Wilson, host pastor for an annual Tri-District workshop on Racial Understanding at the Raeford United Methodist Church Tuesday.

Holiday Safest Since '63

The Highway Patrol reported that the Easter holiday weekend this year was the safest Easter since 1963.

Colonel E.W. Jones said that 14 persons lost their lives on the state's highways during the long holiday weekend this year. He said that some had estimated that as many as 21 persons would lose their lives during the weekend. 25 persons were killed during the same holiday in 1975.

Colonel Jones praised the troopers for their efforts during the weekend and said that all men available were on duty and performed their duties and responsibilities well. He also commended the driving and walking public of the state. Although the first long holiday weekend of the year coupled with beautiful weather created a heavy volume of traffic, he said that most drivers and pedestrians displayed safe driving practices.

School Menu

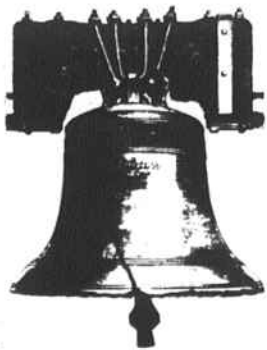
Friday, April 30
Managers Choice

Monday, May 3
B-B-Que Beef in Bun
Slaw W/Carrots - A.C
French Fries, Catsup
Applesauce Cake
Milk

Tuesday, May 4
Chicken Pot Pie
Buttered Broccoli - A.C
Rolls
Peanut Butter Delight
Milk

Wednesday, May 5
Ravioli
Tossed Salad -A.C
Rolls
Green Beans
Raisin Cookie
Milk

Thursday, May 6
Smoked Sausage
School Cooked Beans
Steamed Cabbage -C
Apple Crisp
Milk



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NOTE
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