

On Wisconsin Outdoors

With the Dick Ellis Experts

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River Run

From the Root to the Brule, rainbows migrate, spawn

By Dick Ellis



Anglers using flyrods and spinning gear claim their spots on the Root River in Racine Saturday and work for Lake Michigan steelhead moving upriver on their annual spawning run. Great Lakes rainbow are just starting their runs on tributaries further north with the Brule River and other tributaries off of Lake Superior opening in late March. (Ellis)

With the forecast promising temperatures in the upper 70s by week's end, I continued to 'shoot' the meandering line of trout fishermen working for steelhead on the Root River in Racine, their trout rods and spinning gear moving up and down to ask the current for just one rainbow. From the Brule feeding Lake Superior to the Pike in Kenosha, steelhead runs mean spring.

It was difficult to believe just a few

weeks before I had been on hardwater around the Apostle Islands targeting lake trout. Or that by mid-April I would be following a turkey hunt in Grant County with this same shutter-gun. Wisconsin was once again showing us four seasons and all the reasons not to wander too far from the Badger State.

Below my bridge camera-perch, I looked down and quietly talked with my friends Dave Sura and Bob Merriman.

Downstream, I could count maybe 10 other "steelheaders" until the Root turned in the distance on its journey to Lake Michigan. Warm weather was still several days off, and I pulled my coat up against a cold breeze coming off the big lake and continued to talk steelheading like a professional outdoor writer does.

"Come on you idiots....how do you expect me to write a story on steelheading if you don't catch me a photo fish?" I asked gently. "Dave, why did you release that rainbow before I got here?"

Sura puts a dent in Lake Michigan fish, almost exclusively from shore and had already taken six fish a few days before and a lonely steelhead at first light. He had come to fish the Root after a reliable friend's report that in this very spot beneath the bridge, almost a dozen trout moving upstream on their annual spawning run had fallen to spawn sacs just the morning before.

"It's just about the peak of the run right now," Sura said. "They're moving up to dump their eggs in the shallows. They can't naturally reproduce here like on the Brule off of Lake Superior, so they have the Wehr egg collection station and the DNR hatcheries to help reproduction. They stock the tributaries off of Lake Michigan and the adult fish return to those same streams to spawn."

According to Sura, the fighting steelhead average about five to six pounds. Al-



Dave Sura finds steelhead fishing on the Root River hitting its peak last week, catching about 10 rainbows in two days. Weather slated to hit 70 degrees in southern Wisconsin this week could end the run quickly, but the spawning migrations are just beginning on Great Lakes tributaries further north. (Katie Sura)

though the run on the Root, the Pike and other southeast streams like the Menomonee in the Shadow of the Milwaukee Brewers Miller Park are well underway, northern tributaries off of Lake Michigan are just beginning. The famous Brule and other beautiful Lake Superior tributaries don't even open annually until the last Saturday in March with the season continuing through November 15.

"The runs are triggered by water temperatures with the more northern streams starting later because of the colder water," Sura said. "Usually, the fish are staging with ice-out and move upstream into the deeper holes with the first rain. When the water temperatures reach the low to mid-40s, the fish move up and make their nests (often referred to as "redds") and lay their eggs in the shallow water."

With the reporter's curse shutting off all additional activity, I watched Merriman and Sura fish the Root to no avail. My friends were float fishing and recommend 9 to 11 foot medium rods with a medium

action spinning reel. Sura prefers a 10 pound power pro fireline because "super-lines" float and allow the angler to easily lift the line to remove any bows on the surface that form riding the current. They used 10 pound fluorocarbon leaders and presented twister tails tipped with wax-worms. Spawn sacs, hair jigs, tube jigs, flies and a variety of other baits work too.

Disgusted with such a poor performance, I left those so-called anglers by late morning for a George Webb's breakfast that I knew I could catch. Before I made the 45 minute ride home, the phone was ringing.

"As soon as you left I caught two steelhead," Dave said. "Katie (Sura) is going to come down and take some photos for the papers."

See? Dave Sura is a great friend...and one heck of a fisherman.

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Spring is a Very Loud Season

By Diane Schauer

Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator, Calumet County



Tundra Swans calling in the Killsnake Wildlife Area on March 27. (Photo by Ken Koehler)

It's easy to tell the arrival of spring. First, the sandhill cranes and red-wing blackbirds arrive. Simply close your eyes and listen; you will know when they have come.

Next you'll hear the wave of tundra swans and waterfowl. This week on the Killsnake Wildlife Area in Calumet County, the tundra swans visited in impressive numbers, more than 750 swans at once. Nestled in among the swans are the waterfowl; the redheads, the canvasback, pintails, shovelers, widgeon, teal, scaup and more.

The nice thing to know is that once the tundra swans move north to spend their summer in the arctic, more waterfowl will follow. The massive waves of ducks have only begun their migrations. Mergansers, coots and buffleheads have only begun their trips.

Over the next few weeks, near waterways throughout the state, the osprey will return and begin building their nests in trees and on the platforms erected for their use. The sandhill cranes will become even more raucous as their mating dances and calls intensify. The frogs and toads will sound out, chorus frogs will sing in vast numbers while the trill of the toads is yet another welcome sound of spring.

Take time to wander about in the wildlife areas near you. ^{OWO}



Shovelers in flight above the Killsnake Wildlife Area. Spring means wildlife migrations and Wisconsin's wildlife areas offer some of the best viewing. (Photo by Ken Koehler)