

# MECCAWE TROUT CLUB NEWSLETTER

SUMMER, 2022



## OPENING DAY APR 30

The Meccawe Club work day and opening of the season Saturday, April 30, was a great success. More than 30 members showed up to help get the docks in the water, the lawn furniture placed in conversational groups overlooking the pond, utilities turned on, boats

painted, and shared a pot-luck luncheon of gourmet food that would have been difficult to find anywhere else.

Lunch was topped off by the appearance of Corey Burleigh whose Pop-Up Oyster Bar was hired by Geoff Eckler as a donation to the club. Corey served icy cold raw oysters on the half shell as fast as he could shuck them. There were oysters from Damariscotta, Maine and more from a cove in New Brunswick, Canada. Guests were challenged to eat all they wanted of both varieties and to comment on the subtle differences. The Damariscotta oysters were tender and very delicate and mild tasting, the New Brunswick oysters were saltier and slightly stronger tasting, but both were judged “the best ever.” Several fabulous dipping sauces were spread out on the table, but Corey suggested we start with a straight oyster without sauce just to appreciate the taste. They were so good that way that many of us never got to the sauce. Thank you, Geoff! The other highlight of the day was the arrival of Matt Danaher of Danaher Trout Hatchery in Shrewsbury, VT., with a load of 30 trophy trout paid for by funds donated by members to the Trophy Trout Fund. The fish were outstanding rainbow trout ranging from 3 to 5 pounds, with broad red stripes and cheeks. The males are savage-looking fish with kyped jaws and big teeth. It is hoped that the lucky fishermen who catch these ‘monsters’ will kill and eat them, rather than releasing them back into the pond. There may not be enough natural forage in the pond to make these big fish grow any bigger, unless they become cannibals and feed on smaller trout

As a special gift to the club, Danaher Hatchery released a beautiful 19-inch brook trout, “To show you we have these, too,” said Danaher.

A total of 1,950 trout ranging from 8” to 14” have been stocked at Meccawe this Spring, plus the 30 trophy trout, and it is estimated that 750 trout held over from last year, so the fishing at Meccawe this season should be very, very good.

Several days after it was put in the pond, the Danaher 19-inch brook trout was caught by Joe Rog who released it unharmed for others to enjoy. Less than half of the 30 trophy rainbows have been taken so far but anglers have also caught several large holdover rainbows that proved to have been eating crayfish and had added length and girth since they were stocked. A 17 inch holdover rainbow whose stomach was packed full of fairly large (2-1/2 inch) crayfish was caught only a few days after the 2022

stocking and it is believed the fish had not been in the pond long enough to have learned to eat large crayfish. Its flesh was almost red in color and the fish gave an extra strong fight.

It takes trout some time to learn that pelleted feed will no longer be provided now that they have left the hatchery and to begin foraging for natural food items.

## STREAM IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Two winters ago Meccawe Club undertook a tributary stream improvement project which is now paying off in increased brook trout spawning success.

As part of the Meccawe Forest and Pond Management Plan, Redstart Natural Resource Management Consultants of Bradford, VT felled trees and dragged them to the streambeds where they were pushed into cross-hatched patterns so that the trunks formed self-locking dams about a hundred yards apart along more than 1.5 miles of the two main tributary streams. In addition, piles of other logs and forest debris were placed in the streambeds every 100 feet to help slow the current and provide additional sediment traps.

The self-locking dams trap sediment and debris washing downstream during periods of high water and help keep stream banks in place. Gradually the trapped sediment and debris build up behind the dams, forming beds of silt which are ideal burrowing areas for many species of mayflies and other aquatic insects which provide an additional food source for trout. Below the dams spillover creates deeper scour pools, oxygenates the water and creates gravel runs that are ideal brook trout spawning sites.



The effectiveness of this type of stream improvement, called Strategic Woody Addition, has been demonstrated this Spring when Meccawe members caught a substantial number of 4-inch and 5-inch brook trout near the mouths of the tributaries. These trout are smaller than those that are annually stocked in the pond, so it is surmised that they must have resulted from successful spawning in the tributary brooks.

In the early 1900s, when Meccawe Club was founded, brook trout spawning in the tributaries was so successful that it sustained an excellent brook trout fishery for many years. As more years passed, however, siltation caused by storms and old-fashioned logging practices, buried the natural gravel spawning beds in silt and spawning success declined. Oldtime loggers regularly cut trees away from the banks of streams exposing the streambeds to sunshine which raised the temperature of the water, further diminishing opportunities for successful spawning.

Now, however, the forest has grown back close to the streambeds, shading the streams once again, and the water is cooler as a result. Creation of many strategic woody addition dams along the lengths of the tributaries provides the kind of obstruction which Nature provides when trees are permitted to fall into the streams, rather than clearing the banks, which was the popular forestry practice during most of the 1900s.

The stream improvement work demanded more than 250 hours of manpower but luckily for Meccawe Club, the cost of the project was underwritten as part of an overall habitat improvement project by the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service.

## MECCAWE HEXAGENIA HATCH

The giant mayfly *Hexagenia Limbata* is the most widespread mayfly in America, hatching in slow moving streams and in silt bottomed lakes and ponds all across the country. The biggest trout, which usually feed deep down, come to the surface when the hex hatch is on the water. Yet, it is an underfished hatch because it only happens in the dark.

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Luckily, at Meccawe we have an annual hex hatch that fulfills its reputation for bringing up the big ones.

It happens throughout the second half of June, just at dark, when you can no longer see to tie on a fly or change fly patterns. You're well advised to select your fly in advance and to rig two rods in case of a tangle that you won't be able to see and fix in the dark.

The hatch happens close to shore, so you don't have to make long casts. In the dark, during the frenzy of the hatch, trout are not leader-shy; you don't need a long leader or a very fine one. Six feet of 4x will do the job. Casting from shore is just as effective as casting from a boat.

Even though it's dark, you can often see rises that are within short casting distance. What you can't see, you will hear, great sloshing slaps and rude slurping sounds surround you. It is tempting to cast into the rise rings, and sometimes that is successful, but remember the rise ring is where the fish was a few seconds ago; now he's someplace else.

Trout responding to the hex hatch cruise a few inches below the surface, grabbing flies that come up close to them. For that reason, random casting is just as effective as targeting rise rings.

Just cast your fly out there and let it float for a few seconds, then shake your rod tip slightly to make the fly wiggle on the surface. Hexagenia limbata have a hard time getting out of their nymphal skins, and do their wriggling on the water just after popping to the surface. If a wiggle or two doesn't bring a strike, begin a jerky retrieve of the sunken fly with occasional dead stops. This doubles the chance that the fly will be encountered by a cruising trout.

When the strike comes it may be a resounding slam in which the fish hooks itself if your line is tight, or it can be a silent heavy weight that is suddenly felt when a cruiser just sucks your fly in and continues cruising. Either way, sock it to him. You're using a heavy leader that won't break easily and it is best to have the hook well set before the fish reacts to it in the moments to come.

Netting a fish in the dark is part of the challenge. You can't see him unless he is thrashing on the surface and making a visible commotion. It helps to be wearing a

headlamp at this juncture. Make sure your batteries are good before the fishing gets underway.

The worst part of fishing the hex hatch is the inevitable line tangles that happen in the dark. You can't see your backcast and things happen when your line is flying through the air, out of sight. You can avoid most tangles by keeping your casts short, not more than a few boat-lengths, and try not to change the direction of the line at mid-cast. If you have a cast in progress and a fish rises closer to you in a different direction, finish your planned cast rather than turning to divert the cast to the closest fish. Keeping the line going in one direction avoids the spaghetti-in-the air effect that causes the worst kind of line tangles.



There are many fly patterns intending to represent *hexagenia limbata* and they have all worked for someone, or they wouldn't have become famous. Basically, you want a big #10 or #8 fly with lots of light-hued hackle, a long, thin yellowish body and three extra long tails.

White Wulffs and yellow or Grizzlly Wulffs also often work. Or you may have great success with a totally different fly -- one long-time Meccawe member uses a little size #14 Pale Evening Dun fly with white wings, a primrose body and regular length tails, and he probably takes more trout than anyone else during Hexagenia hatches.

The hex hatch is not referred to as the Hexxed Hatch without good reason.

## BEST FLIES FOR MECCAWE

Our survey of trout flies used successfully at Meccawe so far indicates that, while there are certain most-popular flies, there does not seem to be one pattern that everyone agrees has extra special magic

Flies that were most successfull in May included the yellow Stimulator Size #12, Bead Head Black Wooly Bugger Size #10, Muddler size #10, Hendrickson size #14, Red Quill size #12 , Black Maribou Muddler, Hornberg and gold-ribbed Hare's Ear nymph.

## GRILL MOVED FOR SAFETY

The outdoor gas grill has been moved to a new safer location on the gravel pad beside the kitchen door several feet away from the side of the clubhouse. The move was considered necessary after several members reported that dangerous flare-ups had occurred when the grill was left unattended while lighted.

The grill will be moved again shortly to a concrete pad with a roof over it which will be constructed later this summer farther from the building but close to the picnic



area under the trees. The grill will be detached from the main propane gas feed line and will operate separately on its own small propane tank.

Anyone interested in helping design or work on the proposed grill shed is invited to contact the directors,

Fire is the greatest threat to the Meccawe clubhouse. An unattended grill placed close to the building was considered too risky, so the Directors directed that it needed to be moved to a safe location.

## NEW BOATHOUSE STEPS

A handsome set of stone steps has been added to the boathouse, making entry much easier. And they look good, too. The project was directed and overseen by Geoff Eckler using stones donated by Jeff Sailer of Sailer Construction, Plymouth, VT. Stone work was done by Geoff Eckler's son Erik, his nephew Nic and Nic's dad, Jon Cameron. Geoff and his friend Kip Bruyn did the raking and seeding. The excavator was provided by Erik Tobiason.

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