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A FORMER U. N. B. PROFESSOR WRITES OF THE ATLANTIC SALMON; WORLD'S GREATEST GAME FISH

Prof. A. V. S. Pulling, a former professor of forestry at the U. N. B., in an article in Rod and Gun on "Inland Game Fish", has the following to say concerning the Atlantic salmon:

The majority of North American people are interested in some form of fish or fishing, and, of late years, the fine arts of fly and bait casting have become so perfected that the game fishermen are keenly working out new baits and systems; while, at the same time, they worry over the future fish supply and have to go farther and farther away from civilization to enjoy fine sport. In many places, game-fish are getting scarce. Why is it? And what can we do? Once game is gone, it is hard to bring back; but game-fish are easier and this article will consider possible means of saving what are left and bringing them back where they once abounded.

Every fisherman has his favorite quarry and his favorite place to catch it. If we discount sea-fish, however, game-fish on this continent fall into three general and much sought classes, namely; salmon, trout, and black bass. Nearly every sportsman who has taken any sort of a salmon on a fly, from the wiry little grilse or the leaping ouananiche to the great forty-pounders of the Saguenay and the Restigouche; that fellow will quite agree that salmon are the greatest fish in the world. Next to salmon, brook trout have the largest host of admirers. In fact, many more people fish for trout than salmon because there are more trout to catch. In many ways, the trout is the better fish. And it hardly seems fair to relegate the small-mouth bass to third place.

These, then, are the "Big Three," and the reasons for scarcity would be the result of overfishing, stream pollution, dams and poor restocking, due to no public interest. Only the salmon suffer badly from dams but all are affected by the other causes, especially poor attention from the public; perhaps because of no interest, perhaps through ignorance of the elements of fish culture. Man is so good a fish culturist, so much better than Dame Nature, that he can make fish plentiful every place where the water is more plentiful than in the wake of a street sprinkler. But more of that later as we consider the individual species.

The Salmon.

"Salmon" is a general term. There are several true salmon often called "trout" in the west. But we will narrow this discussion to fish that appear to be true salmon, that would normally go to sea if they got a chance and that will take a fly in fresh water. Of course, this eliminates the four or five famous Pacific salmon, the greatest food fish in the world, that will not rise to a fly and that only spawn once, dying on their way back to sea. They are no treat salmon anyway, belong to the genus *Oncorhynchus*, while the true salmon are the genus *Salmo*. We must stick to the Northern Atlantic for game salmon and the Atlantic salmon (*S. salar*) is the important member of this group, and was formerly abundant in Eastern North America. The European salmon, of Scotland and Northern Europe, I believe is specifically identical.

Just how far south this fish once spawned is an open question. Probably they ascended the Hudson. They certainly went up the Connecticut and all the other New England rivers. Now in the United States they are restricted to a few Maine rivers, but are still quite common in most of the rivers of Eastern Canada, Labrador and Newfoundland. Dams and stream pollution have been the worst exterminating factors.

The habits of the salmon are fascinating. There are many things not known. From consulting the available literature, from my own experience, and from information obtained from several fish culturists, I would say that the life history of the Atlantic salmon is about as follows:

The Black Salmon.

The adult fish work gradually up river during the summer. They may get to the headwaters by the middle of July and lie around until spawning time in October and November. They spawn in fairly swift, rather shallow water where the bottom is gravelly. The eggs of practically all fish, of course, are not fertilized until after they have left the body of the female. The salmon are typical. The sperm-bearing milt of the male is released in the water at the same time that the eggs are deposited. The proper element of luck favoring, a certain number of sperm cells come into contact with the eggs and these eggs are impregnated. The old fish are done with fresh water as soon as spawning is over. It is time they were done with

it, for they eat little or nothing from the time they leave the sea until they go back; they are frequently bitten, bruised and sore; the jaws of the males have become distorted into frightful looking hooks, in which the teeth are enormous; and the whole head has become an ogreish, snarling grin. Nature must be a master at maxillary surgery to get those jaws back into shape, but she does it some way. Many fish die, principally from water mold (*Saprolegnia* sp.) or fish fungus. Some adult fish, in certain streams, stay up stream all winter. They are known as "Black Salmon" or "Celts" and they take the fly, or even bait, quite voraciously the following spring. Some experienced fishermen say they are diseased. They are not very popular anyway, either for sport or for eating.



The above engraving shows a "celt" (right) contrasted with a bright salmon (left). The fish are the same length but the "celt" weighed only 5 1/2 pounds and the bright salmon 17 pounds. The Celt was taken on the Miramichi in May and the salmon on the Saint John River in July.

Hatch in March.

To return to the eggs that are down in crannies of gravel. They hatch, in this cold water, sometime in March. The little fish is known as a "parr" and is so called until he starts to sea when between one and two years old, and when he is between six and nine inches long. The young parr is a peculiar tadpole-like creature, with a blunt head, stringy body, large eyes, and an enormous food-sac that contains the yolk of the egg from which he was hatched and on which the fish lives for some time. Gradually his food-sac belly gets smaller and smaller as he cowers among the stones. Presently the spring sun warms the stream a little, and his development speeds up; he gets hungry, and about that time of year the water begins to teem with small crustaceans and minute insect life. The parr begins to eat, and he eats with a vengeance. He may increase his weight forty times that first summer. His teeth are good, and he will tackle any insect smaller than himself. I have caught parr barely two and a half inches long on a trout fly with a No. 5 hook. They are a nuisance when casting for trout, and they strike so savagely that it is usually impossible to return them to the water without injury.

A Beautiful Fish.

As soon as he begins to feed, the parr becomes a beautiful little fish. He is mottled, much like a young rainbow trout, with a number of dark bars or "parr marks" on each side and several brilliant red spots. They have fewer and larger red spots than the trout. I would say there are no fish and few land creatures as pretty as small brook trout, but the parr is also jewel-like in his beauty and retains his red spots until he first goes to sea. On the way to sea he is known as a "smolt" and during his first trip to sea, which, perhaps, lasts two years, he ceases to be a "smolt" and becomes a "grilse" for his first return trip to the rivers. The grilse is also a pretty fish; slender and more graceful than the adult salmon. From two to six pounds is perhaps the extreme range of grilse size. Most grilse that I have weighed have been between three and five pounds. They go up river farther than salmon. The male grilse are mature and mate with adult female salmon. Female grilse are not common, but they produce no eggs and apparently go up stream just for the sport of it. Grilse, like salmon, eat little or nothing. I have examined very many and the only things I have found in their stomachs have been bits of sticks, a few gravel stones and a little yellowish slime. I have heard that they will occasionally take bait and that insects have been found in their stomachs. This is not common. I have heard grilse separated from adult salmon on a basis of the hardness of certain bones and fins. I have been unable to find sufficient evidence to substantiate this system of differentiation. It seems logical to separate

them through their smaller size and the immaturity of the females.

The Finest Sport.

Taking grilse with ordinary heavy trout tackle is the finest angling known, unless it be fishing for landlocked salmon. It seems cruel to the delicate little grilse to take him on a big salmon rod, with a windlass like reel and a cod line. I have killed grilse at the rate of about two minutes to the pound on a cheap old five and a half ounce split bamboo rod. My line was tested to fifteen pounds, my leader was an ordinary rather heavy single gut trout cast, and I used ordinary trout flies. One does not need salmon flies in the headwaters of streams where grilse only are found. Number 4 or 5 hooks will hold any grilse if a little care is used. I have had best luck with the Brown Palmer and Brown Hackle, with the Silver Doctor as a close third. But grilse are not as fussy over the fly as adult salmon. In New Brunswick, I caught a number in 1920 on a nondescript fly with a big head and a long tail, that I tied myself, using a bit of red yarn and a couple of bluish brown feathers from the tail of a spruce grouse.

A five pound grilse attached to trout tackle will give you ten minutes of as concentrated angling as you wish. A three-pounder will make plenty of fun. But a light grilse on the whale tackle used by salmon fishermen is about as exciting as catching a lake trout on an Old Lady troll. Of course, a grilse has such a tender mouth that too sudden yanking with a big rod may tear out the hook. Besides, it is tame and hard work, to cast with a rod that weighs a pound, with a caustic at the butt and a trawl wallowing around from the tip. In big water, with heavy fish, strong tackle is necessary, but ten-pound salmon can be handled, on a pinch, with trout tackle. In many streams, a ten-pounder is a monster and a heavy salmon rig sloshing around in such a stream is a monstrosity.

Landlocked Salmon.

A word about landlocked salmon. They were, or are, the same as Atlantic salmon, only they cannot or will not go back to salt water. They probably learned to eat fresh water food a good many generations ago and gave up the perilous journey to the sea. They are smaller than the sea-going fish. Ten pounds is near the limit of size as far as I can find out. And heavy trout tackle is used in their capture. The ichthyologists claim two species, *Salmo sebago* in Maine and S. ouananiche in the Lake St. John country of Quebec. I doubt if they are more than fresh water variations of the sea fish, but they are gamier and easier bred in captivity and thus should be extended far beyond their present range. Chinook salmon from the Pacific have been tried landlocked in the East. The only place I know off where they were even a semi-success is Sunapee Lake, New Hampshire. I tried to raise a few in a couple of troughs at Lake Tartelet, also in New Hampshire, in 1916. They were the heartiest feeders and fastest growers of any young fish I ever saw, but were sensitive to warm water. I put them in the lake when they were about four and a half inches long, but whether the bass ate them or they died, we never caught any or heard of any being caught.

Some Suggestions.

How can we keep our salmon and bring them back where they once did abound? There are several ways, all easy to talk about but requiring money, care, and a favorable public (Continued on Page Three.)



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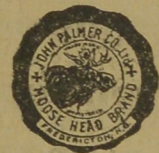
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