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The hardest-working doodad

By HUNTER HILL

Fishing is one of those pastimes that comes with lots of accessories. LOTS of accessories.

If I had to whittle it down, I could confidently say that of all the gear and tackle and tools available, about 90 percent of it is largely useless, or at the very least redundant.

At its core, fishing requires just a few things. A rod/reel combo, a hook and bait. If you want to be technical, you could even reduce that down to a line and hook with some bait.

But even if you want to be as simplistic as that, you still need one tool. A nipper. I call it a nipper, but there are many names for it, depending on the iteration you choose. You can use a knife, or scissors, or a fancy multi-tool sold at the outfitters with a built-in compass, fish scale, toothpick and GPS with a British accent. I joke, but I think I've made my point.

The only useful part of what I'm talking about is the part that cuts fishing line. Perhaps you've seen the old timers cutting off the line with their teeth. Don't be that guy. There are also guys out there that open glass-bottle tops with their teeth, and crack air vents in their metal cans of soup with a canine. Have I shed any light on the issue?

You can get away with cutting line with your teeth in an emergency, but over time—or in any particular instance—it can really hurt you. Thus the nipper.

Nippers don't need to be expensive. In fact, they don't even need to be designated for fishing use at all. My favorite nipper on the market is none other than a nail clipper. It folds up and fits in a slot next to your fishing lures in the tackle

box. I keep one in my to-go box, I have another in my big box, and I have at least another three floating around with various piles of fishing gear.

No matter what rod you take, or cast net, or hand line or bait trap, etc., there will almost always be some string involved in need of nipping, trimming or cutting.

The reason I like nail clippers so much, other than that they're small and easy to pack in a tackle box, is that they are very accurate.

I've used line cutters that don't cut cleanly, or that require you to pull the blade through the string as you would with a knife. If this happens, you run the risk of cutting yourself, messing up your knot, sliding on the string and weakening it, or needing to cut the whole thing out and redo it anyway. Nail clippers can be lined up exactly where you want to cut and they pinch from both sides, making a clean and easy cut with little-to-no risk.

There is one small downside. Remember I mentioned what line can do to your teeth over time? Well, it does the same thing to nail clippers if you tend to use the same part of the blades over and over, especially with heavier-gauge line. After a while, it will dent the teeth, and you might need

to bust out the big bucks and replace your dollar-store nail clipper. But any line cutter on the market is going to be prone to this, so ask yourself: would you rather replace a nail clipper or the fancy GPS one you've grown close to and named Ernesto?

Bottom line and bottom dollar, take my two cents, add a few more, and go get yourself a couple nippers from the store. There's no better doodad for the money, and I promise you will use it a thousand times more than any trinket out there. And yes, your dentist will thank you.

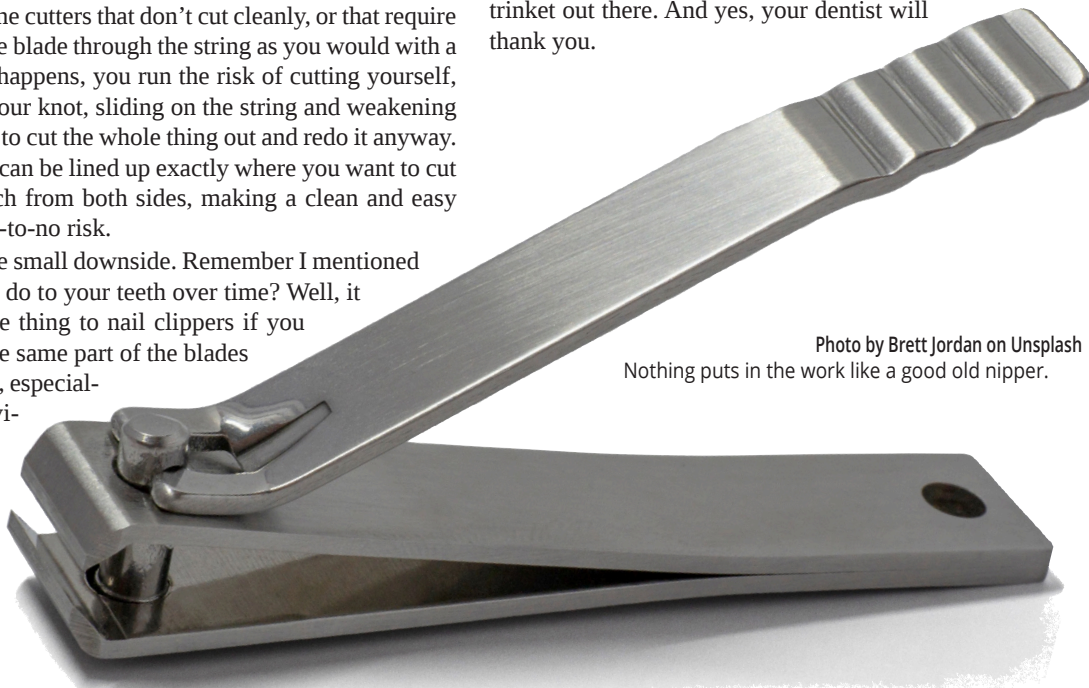


Photo by Brett Jordan on Unsplash
Nothing puts in the work like a good old nipper.



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Trout-stream fisheries management in the Catskills

By TONY BONAIVIST

Soon after the glaciers receded from the Catskill region, about 12,000 years ago and long before the first white settlers landed, the area was inhabited by several tribes of Native Americans.

The archeological record documents Indigenous culture near the current location of Cobleskill, around 9,200 years ago.

It was during that period, as the ice shield receded, that Eastern brook trout followed the melting glaciers south. As a result, brook trout were and are the only native salmonid fishes found in the rivers and ponds of the Catskills.

While many anglers are aware that a number of Catskill headwater streams hold good populations of brook trout, I believe few are aware that several ponds in the region also support wild fisheries.

Brook trout populations lost

Over time, some ponds evolved their own strains of brook trout, as did Tunis Lake, which is private. Several ponds that contain self-sustaining populations are Balsam Lake, Echo Lake, Trout Pond and Huggins Lake. There are others.

Once fishermen learned about the excellent brook trout fishing in the Catskills—it started in the late 1850s—the onslaught began. Anglers from New York City took river boats to Kingston, then made their way inland to fish the various headwater streams, which at the time supported excellent brook trout populations.

If there were any size or bag limits in place at the time, they were minimal. As a result, anglers caught and creeded hundreds of fish a day. Meanwhile, thousands of hemlock trees were cut for the tanning industry. The hemlocks provided shade, which kept the brook trout tributaries cool in the summer. That shade also protected those tributaries from predation by eagles, hawks and other animals.

The result was that brook trout populations were decimated in the Catskills.



RR photos by Tony Bonavist

The DEC's fishing access sites provide parking and a path to public fishing rights.

Trout on the lower reaches

While the headwaters of the BeaverKill, Willowemoc, Neversink and Rondout, as well as the Delaware and the Esopus and most of their tributaries, all supported wild brook trout populations, the lower reaches of those rivers did not. Summer flows were too low and water temperatures

Brook trout were and are the only native salmonid fishes found in the rivers and ponds of the Catskills.



Headwater brook trout streams provided the bulk of the trout fishing in the Catskills until the introduction of brown trout in the 1800s.

too high to satisfy the needs of brook trout. As a result, the species composition in the lower reaches of those rivers was made up of warm-water fishes, including suckers, bass, assorted panfish and minnows. In the spring, there were runs of American shad and lamprey eels.

Back in the mid-1800s there was no trout fishing in the lower reaches of Catskill rivers. Fisheries management and trout fishing in those sections came years later.

The arrival of brown trout—

The introduction of brown trout into Catskill rivers changed the dynamics of trout fishing in the region dramatically, and forever. Browns tolerate higher water temperatures than brook trout do, and are harder to catch.

According to the historic record, the eggs of brown trout were imported from Germany by the New York State Fish Commissions in 1883, and brought to the Caledonia State fish hatchery. Brown trout from those eggs were stocked in the Beaver Kill about five years later.

The introduction of those trout likely began the first fisheries management efforts in the western Catskills.

—and rainbow trout

Rainbow trout were first introduced into the Catskills in two watersheds. As with brown trout, rainbow trout eggs were sent to the Caledonia fish hatchery. Those eggs were sourced from California's McCloud River stocks, and arrived in New York in 1878. (See note on page 5.) Some have said that trout from those eggs were stocked in the Beaver Kill and on one of the branches of the Delaware.

According to the background data, none were ever caught from the Beaver Kill, but some were collected or caught somewhere in the Delaware system.

Later, across the mountains in the eastern **- Page 5**

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Catskills, rainbow trout were planted in the Esopus Creek, through a private stocking. Rainbows from that stocking soon spread into the tributaries and the Ashokan Reservoir.

It appears that the conservation department stopped stocking rainbows in the Esopus in 1952. The construction of the Shandaken tunnel, which linked the Schoharie Reservoir and the Ashokan Reservoir, provided a large flow of cold bottom water for the Esopus Creek. As a result, the Esopus between Shandaken and the Ashokan Reservoir has cool water temperatures throughout most summers. There are turbidity issues, however, due to the deposits of red clay in the upper Schoharie watershed.

For years, wild rainbows outnumbered brown trout by a large margin. Special regulations were implemented on the Esopus from the Five Arches Bridge to the Aston Reservoir sometime in the mid-1970s. Those regulations were put in place to protect the brown trout fishery. The regs were removed after three years because the desired results were not obtained. But surveys conducted in 2012 found a ratio of 147 rainbows to 962 browns. Biologists do not know why this dramatic shift has taken place.

Managing the fishery

In 1911, the New York State Legislature formed the Conservation Department. The establishment of the department brought together in one agency the Divisions of Fish and Wildlife plus Lands and Forests.

The Division of Fish and Wildlife, and specifically the Bureau of Fisheries, was charged with managing the state's fisheries resources.

Although background data is lacking, the Conservation Department began a variety of programs to evaluate the fish populations in the state's lakes, rivers and streams. To accomplish that goal, the agency undertook a series of detailed and broad-based studies.

In 1935, the department completed a survey titled the "Biological Survey of



RR photo by Tony Bonavist
Special fishing regulations limit harvest and provide excellent angling opportunities on some Catskill rivers, like the Beaver Kill.

the Delaware River and Susquehanna Watersheds." It included all the rivers that fed the Delaware River, including the Beaver Kill. A year later in 1936, the department completed the "Biological Survey of the Lower Hudson Watershed," which encompassed the eastern Catskills and the Esopus Creek. Both of those comprehensive surveys provided detailed evaluations of the water resources, the fisheries and the stocking that had been undertaken up until those dates.

Up until the 1960s, most fisheries management programs in the Catskills were limited to trout stocking. Trout were stocked for anglers to catch, in what biologists denoted as "put and take" fishing. There were, of course, size and bag limits in those days.

Later, in the mid-1960s, fisheries managers found through field surveys that sections

of the Beaver Kill and Willowemoc could support better angling opportunities if regulations were implemented that would protect trout populations.

Special "no kill" regulations were put in place on both rivers in the mid-1960s. The trout responded dramatically, and fishing improved significantly. Because no trout were harvested, they survived the season, carried over and grew, so fishing for larger fish improved a great deal.

Sections of both the Beaver Kill and Willowemoc are still managed with no-kill regulations. Only single-hook pointed artificial lures and flies are permitted. Since natural reproduction is limited in both rivers, the fisheries are supported through annual plants of brown trout.

Up until the 1960s, most fisheries management programs in the Catskills were limited to trout stocking.

In recent years, offspring of the rainbow trout, stocked in the Delaware system so many years ago, have spread well into the Beaver Kill, and to lesser degrees the Willowemoc and lower East Branch. That rainbow trout population is maintained through natural reproduction, not stocking.

What began as initial stockings of rainbow and brown trout, a series of biological surveys, size and bag limits and the implementation of special regulations on key Catskill rivers, has resulted in vastly improved fishing opportunities. The lower reaches of the Beaver Kill, Willowemoc and other Catskill rivers, too warm to support brook trout during the summer, now maintain excellent, if seasonal, fisheries due to the introduction of brown and rainbow trout.

Fisheries management has come a long way in the Catskills since the 1880s. That's why Roscoe is called "Trout Town USA."

Note: There is information on the internet indicating that a train proceeding along the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware had mechanical issues. According to the story, that train was carrying a large number of rainbow trout.

It is said that the train master decided to release those fish in Callicoon Creek, because he believed the trout would die, due to the heat. I have it on good local authority that entire episode is a tall tale, and not true.

Tony Bonavist writes the *Ramblings of a Catskill Fly Fisher* column for the *River Reporter*. He is a retired fisheries biologist and a former fly fishing instructor. Read more of his work at bit.ly/3kJTssX.

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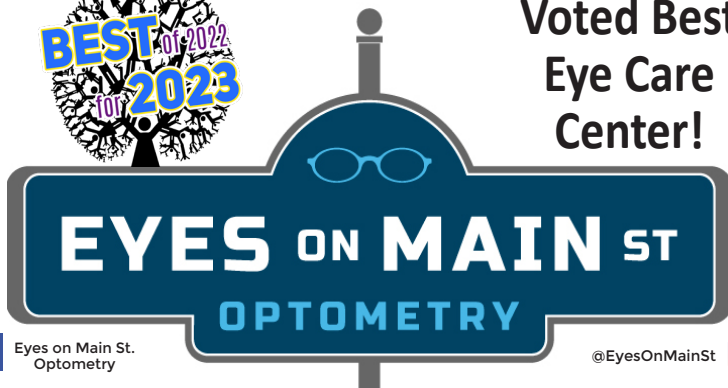


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Here, fishy fishy fishy!

'Here, fishy, fishy, fishy'

By AMANDA REED

When I was a kid, we got one channel on the TV in the living room. Our house was positioned in the bottom of a valley in the mountains, blocking the other signals. The antenna on the pole diligently pulled in channel 44 (WVIA).

The public broadcast station in the '80s played a variety of amazing and iconic TV

shows, of course. There was plenty of Bob Ross, and "Little House." The Waltons were there all the time too.

During the day, children's programming reigned supreme: "3-2-1 Contact," "Reading Rainbow" and, of course, "Sesame Street."

Big Bird and Oscar and the letter Muppets were a crucial part of an '80s childhood. The Count always made me laugh; however,

in all the episodes of the Muppets that I watched, one particular scene still pops into my head today. ("Rubber Ducky" comes in second.)

"Here, fishy, fishy!"

Bert and Ernie go fishing. They're sitting there in the boat, a pole in Bert's hand. Ernie catches fish, sans pole, by yelling "Here, fishy, fishy, fishy," and fish come flying to his boat. Bert is perplexed, but then gives it a try. He gets a bit of coaching from Ernie, and then his rendition is good, but not great. To his chagrin, he only catches a shark.

Armed with the great knowledge that Ernie had bestowed upon me, I began saying it each time I went fishing.

My father and grandfather would laugh, until they didn't. Of course, the laughter may have turned into snickers and slight confusion each time I pulled in a fish.

The tradition continued through my child-

hood. Even my mother would use it when she went fishing with my father, much to his chagrin.

It got to the point where if one of us said the magic words, everyone else would be assured they wouldn't be the ones catching the fish.

When I got older and had my own daughters to take fishing, I bestowed the magic words upon them. Teaching them much the way Ernie tried to teach Bert.

I assume I was a much better teacher than Ernie was, because the magic passed along, and both girls were bestowed with the gift of "Here, fishy, fishy."

I've said the phrase fishing everything from bluegills and catfish in the lake behind the office, to 10 miles offshore in the Atlantic. I may have even amused neighboring fishermen in Pulaski, standing in the Salmon River at 6 a.m. on mornings while snow flurries softly pelted my face.

The magic seemed to work each and every place I went. Pulling in a striper here, a sea bass there. Causing smiles for me, and head shakes from much more serious fishermen.

Perhaps the next time you're out with a pole in hand, you could take a moment and listen to Ernie.

"And so you have to call real loud so they can hear you through the water, you know?"

Here, fishy, fishy, fishy, fishy, fishy!"



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