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Volume 23 Issue 2

Periodical Newsletter of the **Dame Juliana League**

Spring 2017

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## End of Season Review *by John Burgos, President*

We just completed another year of club events and are headed into a summer that hopefully brings a lot of us great fishing opportunities. At this point, it always helpful to reflect back on what we have offered this past year. As our mission statement reads, "To educate our members in the art and science of fly fishing and fly tying and to conserve and restore the trout fishery of French Creek in southeastern Pennsylvania". As part of our mission, we strive to bring instructive and informative speakers to our monthly meetings that cross many areas of fly fishing. This past year our line-up of speakers have offered fresh perspectives on some new as well as not so new techniques. Other presentations have exposed us to different target species and destinations. We also welcomed "homegrown" presentations such as **Pete Goodman's** talk on fishing the Katmai Park region of Alaska.

I would like to think we have again successfully followed our mission. Yet there is still work to be done. We are currently lining up a new set of speakers for the fall and spring seasons so if you, as a member, have a suggestion for a topic or speaker that you feel the club would enjoy, please let us know. Our Board and I feel it is important to understand and address the interests of all the members. Be assured, we want you to learn something new at each meeting and from every presentation. Even if you bring your war stories we would love to hear them.

Our **Learn to Fly Fish Course** had another excellent turnout this year with 31 students registered. We also had a few extra challenges as we had to move our venue from the familiar Phoenixville YMCA to the grounds of Warwick Park. The feedback was, as it has been in the past, exceptional. I would like to thank all the instructors and volunteers and especially **Bob Molzahn**. This was Bob's 24th year of running the course. The amount of planning and preparation that is required to ensure the course goes off without a hitch is off the charts. Bob and all the volunteers, once again, pulled off a masterpiece.

That being said, planning for our 2018 course begins almost from the time the last one has ended. We will always need volunteers and instructors to make this course run as well in the future as it had in the past. Even if the help amounts to setting up the pavilion in the morning, making food runs or setting up lunch, every bit of help is important.

As I have mentioned at our meetings, the proceeds of the fly fishing course provides funds for our sponsorship of the **Chester County Conservation Camp** (<http://www.chescocamp.org/>) with a cash donation sufficient to cover the costs for two camp-

ers. This camp continues to receive high marks for promoting values consistent with our club mission. As a parent of a child that attended this camp, I can't say enough about the program. If you know of a child 11-14 that might be interested in attending, have their parents check out their website. The camp does offer scholarships.

Looking forward, we have some unfinished business to attend to later this summer. In July, it is our turn to give back to one of our most reliable supporters, the **Kimberton Fire Company**. For three nights during July we support the Kimberton Fire Company in helping them raise funds for their operation at their annual Fair. We collect parking donations from cars as they enter the grounds. By giving back our time to the fire company, they give

us free use of their facilities for all our meetings. That is quite a trade off! This year, the dates we will be working are Monday-Wednesday, July 24-26. Donations are collected from 6:00 pm to about 9:30 pm. Our task is simple enough but it doesn't happen if we don't show up. That means you too because we need help from ALL our members! Consider volunteering for a night to help collect with collections. If you can volunteer, please send a note to our email address. It I fun and you WILL have a good time with your fellow club members plus meal tickets are provided to all volunteers.

Another activity that many of our club members get involved with is **Project Healing Waters** (<http://www.projecthealingwaters.org/>) (PHW). PHW is an ideal way to join the love of fly fishing with the satisfaction of giving back your time to our battle scarred veterans. If this activity might interest you, email us or talk with **Ted Nawalinski** or **Mike Ferraro** at one of our upcoming fall meetings.

Lastly, I'd like to make a call out to anyone interested in organizing stream improvement outings. Stream improvement projects and cleanup days are vital to maintaining both habitat and access to our home stream, French Creek. If you would like to get more involved in this or any of our club activities, or just have some great ideas, please contact any board member or send us an email. Contact information is on the last page of this newsletter.

Have a great summer. I look forward to seeing all of you at our **next meeting on Monday, September 25.**



*John with a King Salmon taken from Michigan's Pere Marquette*



## Finding Bite Windows, Fishing Through Them and Fishing Around Them

by *Domenick Swentosky*

Predicting when a trout will eat is about as difficult as predicting the weather. You get it right sometimes, but just as often you're dead wrong. Even experts with all the tools of observation and experience can't really crack the code. But we look at the weather report anyway, don't we? They get some of it right part of the time, and that's better than nothing, I guess. Correctly forecasting trout feeding patterns, and finding bite windows can turn lousy days into the most memorable ones.

The best fishermen I know seem to have a theory for everything. Fishing success is so ephemeral that we need somewhere solid to drop an anchor. We want predictable things to believe in. So we search for events that are possibly repeatable and hold onto them. We look for bite windows — the times when trout eat with regularity and (perhaps) some predictability.

### **Bite windows happen**

There are undeniable periods of trout activity in a full day, and there are times when things slow down. It's easy to think that you're doing everything wrong for an hour, so the net is empty. Then you seemingly do something right for the next twenty minutes and quickly catch a handful of trout. But maybe you just fished through a bite window.

There's only one way to learn the difference: get out and fish — a lot. Anglers who cast through the slow times, who hang in there when catching trout is difficult, are often rewarded with a good bite window. Eventually you learn to recognize these times and make the most of them. The best anglers develop strategies for fishing through slow periods, and they capitalize on the fast times.

Bite windows happen when a group of trout recognize an ideal opportunity to feed on insects or baitfish. And most good windows are short.

### **The wisdom of the bait fishers**

When I was a kid, my uncle taught me to fish with live minnows. But we didn't sit on a five gallon bucket by the old bridge. No. We moved. We fished long days and covered miles of water. And in those hours my uncle would tell me things like, "They aren't bitin' right now, but they will." Our mantra was, *Just keep fishing, because they have to eat sometime*. And it was true.

My uncle taught me that luck was only part of the game. But fishing at dawn improved the odds, and finding the darkest corners of water throughout the day provided the best chance to hang a good trout in the afternoon. He showed me that luck and good fortune can happen at any moment — so just keep fishing.

When I picked up the fly rod (and especially when I learned to fish nymphs) I was able to catch more fish throughout the day

and under a wider set of conditions. With nymphs I could kind of make things happen on most fishing trips. But it took a decade of fishing nymphs and being too hard on myself before I finally relaxed and remembered that sometimes the trout are on, and sometimes they're not.

The point is, if you're not catching fish, it's not always your fault. Sometimes they just aren't bitin' right now. But when the action is slow, stay out there. Keep cycling through patterns, rigs and tactics until something works. You can make things happen while waiting and searching for the next bite window.

### **The (sort of ) Predictable Bite Windows**

These are the easy ones. Other bite windows happen for God-knows-what reason, and you can luck into them if you fish hard enough. But the following windows present a predictable opportunity for finding feeding fish ... sometimes.

#### **The low light bite**

Fish dawn and dusk especially. All fishermen know this, but try actually doing it. And on sunny days, expect a window just after the sun goes over the mountain.

#### **The good hatches**

Once a seasonal hatch settles in, things can become predictable and almost easy. That's why the parking lots are full during hatch season. It's a chance for anglers of any skill level to fill the net. My 7 year old son once got into double digits in the last hour of the day over a sulfur hatch — and then we did the same thing the next evening. With stable weather patterns and a good hatch in full swing, the timing of bite windows around a hatch can be consistent. On my waters



*Troutbitten's Pat Burke with Snaggletooth Brown and looking for the next bite window*



the Sulfurs in May usually hatch in the evening, and the spinners fall in the last hour of daylight. Good hatches make you feel like a champ.

Of course, dialing in the bug activity is not the same as dialing in how the trout respond to the bugs, and some days are better than others. But a reliable spinner fall during the last hour of daylight during hatch season is about as good as it gets.

#### **High water**

When rains come and waters rise, trout put on the feed bag. But timing it right is tough, and the bite window is often a short one, so it's best to get to the water before the rain and stay until the water turns muddy. Bring a raincoat — that's what you bought it for.

*Bites is concluded on page 3*

## Fun On The Little Juniata River-May 2017

by Joe King

The story begins at the April 2017 DJL meeting with Bill Anderson telling us about sulfur fishing on the Little J.

Skip Krause and I decided to go to the Little J on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday (5/3, 5/4, 5/05/2017). Even though the weather was rainy and the water was high, I thought we'd give it a try.

Wednesday, the water was running about 500 cfs; so, you had to pick your spots to fish. We saw sulfurs in the afternoon, but no rising fish.

Thursday was still a little rainy but pleasant. Skip and I decided to fish some Class A brown trout water. Looking at the map and referring to Gilmore's book, we found several Class A waters nearby. We chose Pine Creek to fish, and we both caught brown trout. Skip even caught a small-mouth bass because we were fishing close to the Juniata River.

That evening we were back at the Little J for the afternoon and evening hatch. We were fishing at the quarry section of the Little J. Skip was at the top of the pool and had some action with rising fish on the far bank. I was at the bridge pool, and

there were a few small fish rising. So, I put a Grannom Caddis and a Compara Dunn Sulfur but no takes.

There was gentleman fishing the far bank, who came over on his way out of the water, and we started to talk. It turns out that he was Bill Anderson who presented at our April meeting. He was kind enough to give me one of his Cripple Emerging Sulfur flies. I quickly tied it on and right away I had fish take to the fly. Didn't land the first one, nor three others, but they sure did want that fly!

Finally with my legs frozen from the cold water, I landed a 10-inch brown trout. So, I can say with confidence this fly really works. Bill told me that day in one hour around 3:00 pm he landed about a dozen brown trout! I can't wait to get back to the Little J with some freshly tied Cripple Emerging Sulfurs.

(Friday was washed out; raining really hard; so, we took a ride to Raystown Dam just to do some exploring on the way home.)



### Bites *is continued from page 2*

I've had the most repeatable luck with summer thunderstorms, when there's a quick rush of cool water into the low flowing rivers. With just enough sediment to turn clear waters cloudy, action can be fantastic.

After the rains, as waters clear and levels drop there are usually more bite windows. Again, high water windows can be tough to dial in, but they can also result in the biggest fish of the year.

#### The other stuff

There are probably a hundred more causes for bite windows. Sometimes the whole stream just turns on, and a trout that refused to eat your fly ten minutes ago will now move great distances for the same presentation.

Some guys swear they can predict success through moon phases and barometric pressure systems. I'm not yet convinced, but I have an open mind.

The more time you spend on the water, the more you learn to recognize these events. Keep your eyes open too. Bite windows can happen around stoneflies migrating to the banks to hatch, tailwater releases, or suckers dropping eggs for the spawn. They can happen in the riffles as trout feed on nymphs before a hatch or on streamers in the shallows. Experience is the only real teacher for this sort of thing, and predicting a repeat occurrence is hit or miss — just like the weatherman.

#### Seize the day. The best bite windows are special.

Most bite windows are short, anywhere from fifteen minutes to a few hours. The good ones leave you with an experience that becomes part of you forever, and you'll recount the story hundreds of times to anyone who'll listen.

The best fishing I ever had was around the Cicada hatch in the summer of 2008. Everyday — all day — after 9:00 am the largest trout in the river came up for size 6 dry flies. It was just that predictable for seven weeks. If I covered enough water, fishing the prime slots and pockets that held big fish in low water, I caught one large trout after another with dry flies.

The Cicada madness was memorable because it was so unusual, and I doubt I'll ever see such a thing again. Even 17 years later, the weather and water will likely not cooperate like it did that summer of 2008. About one week into the madness I realized what kind of window was in front of me, so I stepped through it. I fished every single day for the next six weeks.

When you are in a bite window, keep fishing. Do what is repeatable. Give 'em what they're taking, and trust your instincts.

#### Fish hard

When you're not in a bite window, that's the time to experiment. Find the water type where at least some fish are feeding. Change flies, rigs and tactics to keep yourself in the game. Keep searching for something that works. Keep your eyes open for the next bite window and remain flexible.

Some anglers miss their chances by packing it in too early. Within every bad day of fishing, there are great bite windows to be found. Arrive early and stay late. Push through the slow times and find the next window. Then do something with it.

Good luck out there.! Enjoy the day.

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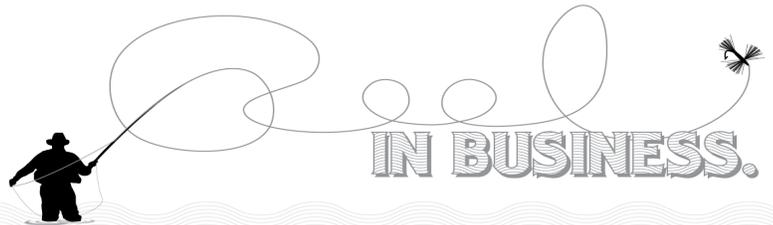
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