

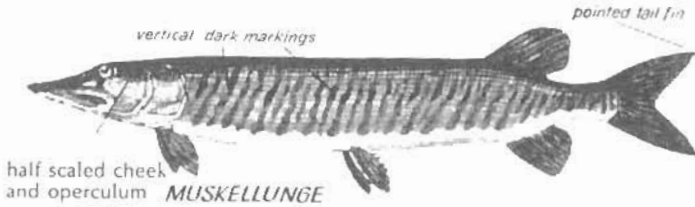
8/13/76

Natural History Notes

MIKE DOMBECK grew up in the Moose Lake area and graduated from Hayward High School and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. He has a B.S. degree in Biology and an M.S. degree in Aquatic Biology. He has taught Zoology at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and is presently a staff member of the University of Minnesota's Ball Museum of Natural History. Mike has also been an area fishing guide since his high school days.



"OLD FIGHTER"



MUSKELLUNGE

A fisherman once told of the fish he had lost, "... as big as a railroad tie, with teeth like ten-penny nails, and it snapped the line like thread." Fishermen's stories of the muskellunge are almost endless. Pursuing this moody, vicious fighter is one of the most exciting freshwater angling experiences known to man.

Biologists believe the musky came from the sea via the St. Lawrence River when the last glacier retreated some 10,000 years ago. Northern Wisconsin is the heart of the native musky range with the headwaters of the Chippewa River having one of the highest concentration of musky waters.

The muskellunge is the largest member of the Pike family, its name being derived from Cree Indian language meaning "deformed pike."

As a matter of fact, amateurs often confuse muskellunge with its close relative, the northern pike. The musky, however, can be quickly differentiated from the northern by noting the musky's more pointed tail fin and half scaled cheek and operculum.

Muskies inhabit rivers and lakes of all sizes and are usually found in water less than fifteen feet deep and near submerged weeds, bars, or other structures. Being the top predator in an aquatic ecosystem, the musky feeds on suckers, perch, and any other available fish. Muskies have

been known to attack small muskrats, ducks, and almost any other animal in the water. The newly hatched muskies, called fry, eat zooplankton for the first few days of life and gradually change to a diet of fish. A large quantity of zooplankton is essential for good fry survival.

The musky spawns from late April through May in waters from 49° to 60° F in shallow muddy bays from six inches to three feet in depth. From 20,000 to over 200,000 eggs are laid. A 40-pound female was known to produce over 225,000 eggs. The eggs hatch in eight to fourteen days and the fry are left to care for themselves. Diving beetle larvae, dragonfly nymphs, and back swimmers prey upon small muskies with devastating effectiveness. Out of 40,000 eggs, fewer than ten reach maturity. Survivors will reach a length of fourteen inches in their first year and thirty inches, Wisconsin's legal size limit, in three years. Most female muskies begin spawning in their fourth year. The record musky taken with hook and line was 69 pounds, 15 ounces. Surely many muskies larger than the present record are lurking in several of our musky lakes. You could be the lucky one.

Editor's Note: The largest Musky caught from local waters weighed 69 lbs., 11 oz., was 63-11% INCHES LONG. It was caught in the Chippewa Flowage on October 20, 1949, by Louis Spray, then a resident of Hayward.



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