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# 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 Bell Museum of Natural History. Mike has also been an area fishing guide since his high school days.

## KING OF THE TROUTS



The more ardent and meticulous anglers have probably spent a greater number of hours in search of a trophy rainbow than any other fish. Many diehard fishermen have researched scientific publications, studied particular streams and spent many days planning their strategy in pursuit of a giant rainbow. Of all the game fish, few surpass the rainbow in its ability as a fighter and its skill in eluding the fisherman. The first art an angler must master is to entice the rainbow to hit the bait. When they do, they usually hit very hard and fight a swift and challenging battle. They are especially skilled at leaping and hurling themselves out of the water, shaking their head vigorously in an attempt to free themselves from the fisherman's line.

Unknown to most anglers, all of our true trout are native to the Western United States. The rainbow was introduced into Wisconsin in the 1880's from California. Other trouts are the brown, introduced from Europe, and the Atlantic salmon from the East Coast. Technically the brook trout and lake trout are not true trout, but are char. The easiest way for the fisherman to distinguish the trout and salmon from the char group is by general body markings. The char have light markings on a darker background and very small scales, whereas the trout and salmon have dark markings against a lighter background and larger scales.

The rainbow trout is bluish to olive green on top with silvery sides and a deep pink lateral stripe. Rainbows of some deep inland lakes often reach 15 pounds. Inhabitants of streams and rivers are usually less than 3 pounds and rarely over 5 pounds. The rainbow trout has the ability of surviving in abnormally warm water. They have been known to survive temperatures up to 85°, which is well above the lethal temperature for the brook and brown trout.

At spawning season both the male and female move onto sand and gravel areas. The males develop a kype or protruding, hooked lower jaw. The female fans out a depression or redd where she deposits her eggs while accompanied by one

or two males who then shed milt on the eggs to fertilize them. The female then covers the nest and abandons it.

Trout eggs are large compared to many other fish eggs. A female rainbow deposits from 400 to 3,000 eggs, depending on her size. Rainbows may spawn in either the spring or in late fall and some females occasionally spawn twice a year. If spawning occurs in late fall they are referred to as "fall-run" and their eggs hatch in early spring. When spawning occurs in the spring the fish is referred to as "spring-run" and the eggs usually hatch by early July.

The steelhead, also known as sea-run rainbow trout, is a rainbow trout that migrates after it hatches to the ocean or a large body of water such as Lake Superior. Other rainbow trout remain in the same body of water where they were hatched. Before spawning, steelhead will return to the streams, spawn and then go back to the ocean or lakes where food is abundant and easily available.

For the true sportsman there is no greater challenge than pursuing a rainbow trout with a fly-rod. Streamers, wet and dry flies are popular lures for this fish. Spinning tackle may also attract a rainbow using various spoons and spinners. What could be more challenging and relaxing than sneaking down to your favorite trout hole in pursuit of a lunker rainbow?

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