

OUTDOORS

Tickets for Salmon Stakes tourney on sale

OUTDOOR INSIGHTS



BILL PARKER

away and the waters warm into the low 40s salmon anglers will be out in force trolling the old familiar haunts of southern Lake Huron in search of a chinook or coho salmon, steelhead or brown trout.

Because of the shallow water

Seems a little early to start thinking about salmon fishing on the Great Lakes. Heck, many of the bays are still covered with ice and ice anglers searching for perch and walleyes. But when the ice finally melts

in southern Lake Huron, the water there warms a little earlier than in other areas of the Great Lakes and the baitfish, alewives and smelt come storming into the warm water. Trout and salmon soon follow and provide us with one of the earliest salmon fisheries of the year.

As spring turns to summer and the rest of the Great Lakes warm, the fish begin to scatter as they move north. Decent fishing remains around the Thumb area, but nothing like it is early in the season.

Fishing clubs and civic organizations hold a number of fishing tournaments around the Great Lakes throughout the summer months that lure anglers from near and far. One of the earliest and most respected tournaments

is the River Crab Salmon Stakes, which is slated for Saturday, April 28, and based at the River Crab Restaurant in St. Clair.

While many anglers from the Observer & Eccentric! coverage area annually fish in the tournament, thousands of others support the tournament and its cause by purchasing \$10 raffle/entry tickets.

Unlike many tournaments that pay back entry fees to the fishermen, the River Crab pays back only a small portion. The rest of the money - raised through ticket sales and corporate sponsorship - is donated to charity and used to support family mental health and counseling agencies statewide. To date, the tournament has raised over \$1

million since its inception 23 years ago.

While the \$10 tickets are good for entry into the tournament, they also enter the bearer in a raffle, which will be held at the River Crab at the conclusion of the fish weigh-in on April 28. Raffle prizes include a grand prize of a five day, four night family getaway to Walt Disney World including hotel, airfare, park passes and \$300 in "fun money." Other prizes include a four day, three night getaway for a family of four to the Best Western Wheels Inn in Chatham, Ontario; Pistons tickets, Tigers tickets; \$500 in Chuck Muer gift certificates; and a sightseeing cruise for 10 aboard the Huron Lady followed by dinner at Chuck Muer's River Crab.

And that's not all. Each ticket is also redeemable for \$10 off dinner for two at any Chuck Muer Restaurant. Tickets are available at any Chuck Muer Restaurant including Muer's Seafood Tavern in West Bloomfield, Charles's Crab in Troy, Meriwethers in Southfield, Gandy Dancer in Ann Arbor, Big Fish in Dearborn, Big Fish Too in Madison Heights, or by calling 1-800-468-3727.

Fishermen can win big, too. A prize of \$500 will be awarded to the anglers who catch the biggest chinook, coho, steelhead and brown trout on tournament day. In addition, a specially tagged King salmon, dubbed "Slippery Charlie" will be released in the waters of southern Lake Huron in the week

leading up to the tournament and if an angler registered with the tournament catches "Slippery Charlie" they will earn a \$1,000 cash stipend. The skipper of the boat with the heaviest catch will also win \$500, and \$5,000 will be awarded to the fishing club with the heaviest catch.

It may be a little early to start getting ready to fish, but it's not too early to support this worthy cause.

(Bill Parker writes a weekly outdoor column for the Observer & Eccentric! Newspapers. Hunters and anglers are urged to report their success. Questions and comments are also encouraged. Send information to: Bill Parker, c/o Outdoors, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009)

Skunks on move this time of year

NATURE NOTES



TIM NOWICKI

It's not always easy to see wild animals alive. We know opossum, skunk, raccoons and other nocturnal animals exist because of road kills, but often they hide before we can see them alive.

That is why I was pleased to see two skunks waddling through yards on my way to work the other day. They were not in the same yard; they were separated by several miles.

Late winter is the time when winter sleepers like raccoons, opossum and skunks begin to arouse. They have not been hibernating like the woodchuck or groundhog. Their internal physiology does not change as drastically as deep hibernators.

But this winter's low temperatures kept winter sleepers snug in their nests all the time

it was cold.

While skunks are resting in dens they may have dug themselves but more likely confiscated from a woodchuck, they may have company. Cobwebbing the den may be the woodchuck that actually excavated the site. Typically, the skunk and the woodchuck are in two different sections.

In other cases, many number of skunks may be wintering together. Some congregations included females and young she raised during the year; other groups included several males and a batch of youngsters; another had 10 females and two or three males. Most of the time there is just one male and several females in the den.

As warm temperatures arrive in late February and early March, the sexual drive of the male and the warmth stimulates him to awake and leave the den in search of mates. Those females in the den may not be awake or receptive yet. The individuals I saw roaming the yards were probably males.

During spring roaming, males will sometimes encounter other males. These encounters can result in fights over areas in which to search for females. Males are promiscuous and will mate with as many females as they can find. Gestation for a female skunk is about 64 days.

Baby skunks are born with wrinkled skin that is practically hairless, though the striped pattern can be identified at this time; they are blind and toothless. In eight weeks they will be following the female on hunting trips.

Many people become aware of skunks only when they discover small holes in their lawn that were not there when they went to bed the night before. Skunks eat a variety of foods; one summer tidbit are grubs of June beetles that live in lawns.

Each hole in the lawn was probably where a grub got grabbed.

In late winter grubs are not readily available in the cold, if not frozen ground, so skunks

Please see NOTES, B5

OUTDOOR CALENDAR

ACTIVITIES

OAKLAND COUNTY SPORTFISHING ASSOCIATION

The Oakland County Sportfishing Association meets at 7:30 p.m. the third Wednesday of every month at Sante Hall, 1965 Cass Lake Road, Keego Harbor. Call (248) 693-4389 or visit the club's web site at <http://go.to/ocsa> for information.

DETROIT AREA STEELHEADERS

Detroit Area Steelheaders, Inc. membership meetings are held the last Tuesday of each month at Knights of Columbus, St. Pius X, 6177 Chicago Road, in Warren. The public is welcome. More information can be obtained by calling Ed Wilczek at (810) 757-7365 or club President Ray Banbury at (810) 598-0310.

METRO-WEST STEELHEADERS

Metro-West Steelheaders meets at 7:30 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month in the cafeteria at Garden City High School. Call Dominic Liparoto at (248) 476-5027 for more information.

MICHIGAN FLY FISHING

The Michigan Fly Fishing Club meets at 7:30 p.m. the first and third Wednesdays of each month at Livonia Clarenceville Middle School, located on Middlebelt Road between Seven and Eight Mile roads. Call (248) 478-1494 for more information.

FOUR SEASONS

The Four Seasons Fishing Club meets 7:30-9:30 p.m. the first Wednesday of each month at the Civic Park Senior Center, 15248 Farmington Road, in Livonia. Call Jim Kudej at (734) 691-0843 for information.

HURON VALLEY STEELHEADERS

The Huron Valley Steelheaders meets the third Thursday of each

month at the Knights of Columbus Hall, 27600 Hall Road, Flat Rock. Call Carroll White at (734) 285-0843 for more information.

BASS ASSOCIATION

The Downriver Bass Association, a non-tournament bass club, meets at 6:30 p.m. the fourth Tuesday of every month at the Gander Mountain in Taylor. Call (734) 676-2863 for information.

SOLAR

The School for Outdoor Leadership, Adventure and Recreation (SOLAR), a non-profit organization interested in promoting the appreciation of outdoor activities, meets at 7:30 p.m. on the first Tuesday of each month at the Colony Hall in Southfield. Call (248) 988-6668 for more information.

METROPARKS

METROPARK REQUIREMENTS

Most Metropark programs are free while some require a nominal fee. Advanced registration and a motor vehicle permit are required for all programs. Call the respective parks toll free at the following numbers: Stony Creek, 1-800-477-7768; Indiana Springs, 1-800-477-3192; Kensington, 1-800-477-3178; Hudson Mills, 1-800-477-3191.

STAYIN' ALIVE

Learn to be prepared for a wilderness emergency at this class scheduled for today 1 p.m. at the Nature Center of Kensington Metropark near Milford/Brighton. Several aspects of outdoor survival will be covered to make your unexpected stay in the woods more comfortable. For more information or to register, call 1-800-477-3178.

TRAVELS WITH A NATURALIST

Karen Bates, SOLAR Club member and outdoor enthusiast, traveled the mighty Colorado River by raft. Her photographic journey will take you through ancient rock layers revealing mysterious American Indian pictographs, fossils, canyon wildlife and spectacular natural beauty. This program is set for 7:30 p.m. Friday, March 9 at the Nature Center of Stony Creek Metropark near Rochester. For more information, call (810) 781-4621.

CREEK FESTIVAL

Come and take a peek at what's living in the creek. See how a river cuts a channel, learn your creekbed address, watch live indoor demonstrations, and learn how the critters in the creek predict your future during this program scheduled for Sunday, March 11 from 1 p.m.-4 p.m. at the Nature Center of Kensington Metropark near Milford/Brighton. For more information, contact the Kensington Metropark Nature Center at 1-800-477-3178.

OAKLAND PARKS

COUNTY PARK REQUIREMENTS

Advanced registration and a motor vehicle permit are required for all nature programs at Oakland County Parks. Call (810) 625-6473 to register.

PERMITS

The 2001 Oakland County parks motor vehicle permits are now on sale at all county park offices and many parks and recreation and township offices. Cost is \$20 through April 30, 2001. After May 1, 2001, the permit cost will be \$25.



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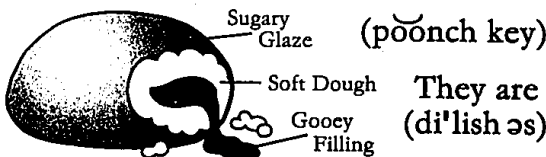
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