

## THE OUTDOORS PAGE



# Bite-size fish

By STEVE POLLICK  
and JEFF BASTING

**L**ittle fishes can sympathize with the late comedian Rodney Dangerfield, whose trademark gag-line was “I don’t get no respect.”

Little fishes so often are dismissed with a casual glance as “just minnows.” Big fish regard them as mere bite-sized morsels — as do fishing birds from kingfishers to the herons.

Yet, on a closer look, little fishes of rivers and streams are a wonder-world unto themselves, one rich in diversity and a riot of color. They are a keystone of aquatic ecosystems, fascinating once you get to know them. And they wear such captivating common names — stonecat madtom, stoneroller minnow, topminnow, fantail, logperch, and orangethroat darters, among others.

During spring spawning season, the males of the various species are brightly colored in exotic patterns that rival the most outlandish combinations seen in fishermen’s artificial lures, according to Todd Crail, a University of Toledo doctoral candidate who studies little fishes.

The darter species represented on this page, for example, all males in spawning prime, demonstrate as much. “They are just like [the males] of birds when it comes to breeding and bright, attractive colors,” he added.

Importantly, “they are the forage base,” the researcher said. “If you don’t have the small fish, you don’t have the big fish.”

Mr. Crail, whose scientific work investigates the family known as darters, said that he has been intrigued by little fishes since boyhood. “My initial interest in fish was in catching and eating them. But then I found out that the bait was far more interesting.”

He often works with Jeff Grabarkiewicz, who is in charge of the Toledo-Lucas County Sustainability Commission and is equally enthusiastic about streams and the little fishes that live there.

Mr. Grabarkiewicz noted that the 6,350-square-mile Maumee River watershed is home to an amazing 94 species of fish, most of those being little fishes. “There are probably 10 species big enough to eat and that we like to eat,” added Mr. Crail.

The Maumee’s diversity is more than twice that of the Rocky Mountains’ famous Colorado River, which harbors 36 species in a sprawling 629,100-square-mile watershed, and more than

the mighty Columbia River of the Pacific Northwest, 87 species amid 258,000 square miles.

The explanation for the local river’s great diversity in such a relatively small space is that its fish stocks derive from both Indiana’s Wabash River and the Great Lakes. That fact is owed to the unique connecting water-bodies after the Ice Age, which reversed the flow of the Maumee from southwest [Wabash] to northeast [Lake Erie].

The little fishes of the Maumee in a way are a plea to protect the watershed and its amazing diversity. “The places where the greatest aquatic diversity occurs are the places that we have not given much attention to protection,” noted Mr. Crail.

Perhaps, he added, it is because the land is low-lying and fertile, developed for agriculture and other human expansion, and lacks striking mountain scenery and vistas seen on the Colorado and Columbia. That, however, is no reason to ignore conserving the many little fishes and the healthy diversity they represent.

To learn more about little fishes, visit the following Web sites:

Guide to Ohio Streams at [dnr.state.oh.us/tabid/11879/default.aspx](http://dnr.state.oh.us/tabid/11879/default.aspx).

Guide to the Common Fishes of the Toledo Area at [farmertodd.com/fishguide/](http://farmertodd.com/fishguide/).

Partners for Clean Streams at [partnersforcleanstreams.org/](http://partnersforcleanstreams.org/).

Toledo Sustainability Commission Local Streams at [lucascountygreen.com/local-creeks.html](http://lucascountygreen.com/local-creeks.html).

For a field experience into little fishes, Mr. Crail is leading a Big Day with the Toledo Naturalists’ Association to tally species in waterways of Lucas County on June 5. He hopes to find 60 or more species in the day.

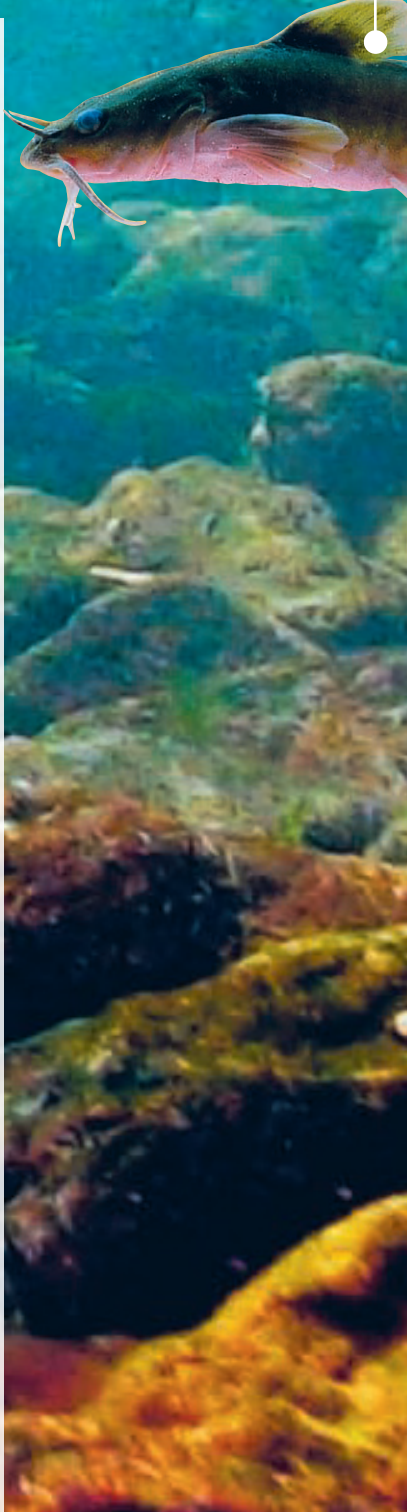
The search begins at 9 a.m. at the Riverview Area of Side Cut Metropark and continues at 1 p.m. at Highland Park, the baseball parking lot off South Avenue; 4 p.m. at Harroun Park, Sylvania, the parking lot off Main Street, and 6:30 p.m., Secor Metropark, the Meadowview parking lot.

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Stoneroller minnow



Stonecat madtom