

Finding Delight: An angling year in review



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THE NATURAL WORLD

A recently published book by the award-winning poet Ross Gay puts an ever-changing world into proper focus. Ross's recent collection of essays, titled "The Book of Delights," captures moments of delight in the people and places he encounters over the course of a calendar year. Inspired by his writings, I leafed through a bedside journal to revisit angling highlights from this past year.

The year 2021 began with high and roily water on my home stream, the Walla Walla River. After the flow dropped and the water cleared, two trips yielded the catch (and release) of four large adfluvial rainbows, two bull trout, and three wild steelhead. Ain't life grand?

Early February yielded my largest walleye ever, a spawn-swollen 17-pounder, caught trolling a deep-diving Bandit plug at night. This accomplishment I expect to savor for more than a year and a day.

March finds me in a pontoon boat, trolling Woolly Buggers and Leeches for stocker trout on a Central Washington desert seep lake. Meanwhile, my boat trailer sits in a shop waiting for repair. Elation best describes the feeling when I am told a new axle is not required.

Vaccination provided newfound protection from COVID-19 and the freedom to once again share motel space with fishing buddies. An April trip to Lake Rufus Woods brought home a mixed grill of red-meat triploid rainbows up to 8 pounds and a stringer of 20-inch walleye from Banks Lake. Can you say, "Hold up those fish and smile at the camera?"

Anglers flock to flooded backwaters from the Columbia and Snake rivers when bass move in to spawn in late spring. No different for this busy retiree who shared a "40 fish" day in May with a friend who couldn't stop grinning during a non-stop evening bite.

Spending quality time in June with two long time pals on the Little Naches River made up for only raising one 6-inch cutthroat to the fly. Moments of levity included watching hungry robins dive-bomb chokecherry trees for ripe fruit and a side trip to a local brewpub.

The summer of 2021 brought triple digit air temperatures and a strong run of upriver-bound sockeye salmon to the Hanford Reach of the Columbia River. Consider this scenario: Anchor your boat along a shoreline current seam, place gear loaded with spinner and shrimp rigs in rod holders, and wait for a pod of sockeye to swim by. Laughter pierced the air when rods bent double and mint-bright "sox" were led to the net.

There's more. I ended July on the South Fork Walla Walla River during "hoot owl" closure with my 16-year-old grandson. In his first trip to these hallowed waters, he hooked and released over a dozen wild rainbows and stuck a bucktail fly in his lower lip. The latter challenge was removed with a minimal amount of pain and suffering.

What could be better than harvesting a limit of 12 Dungeness crabs from the Pacific Ocean on a blue-sky



Dennis Dauble/Contributed Photo

The author shows off a handsome 3-pound bass caught trolling a deep-diving plug in John Day Reservoir on a cool November day.



Dennis Dauble/Contributed Photo

This two-angler limit of sockeye salmon ranging from 17 to 23 inches in length was caught along the Hanford Reach shoreline in early July.

day in September? Not getting seasick while doing so, for one. The chill of autumn also meant return of upriver-bright fall chinook salmon to the Hanford Reach, hours of mindless trolling, and finally, fish on!

My angel card read "contentment" on the balmy October day I returned to the South Fork of the Walla Walla River for a solo trip that capped off stream trout season. Cottonwood leaves flutter down to coat the bottom of the river, wild rainbows rise eagerly to the fly, and the softness of a woolly bear caterpillar in my hand.

According to a fishing buddy, "Bass go deep when water temperature drops below 50 degrees." A brace

of 3-pound smallmouth caught with deep-diving plugs in John Day Reservoir validated his prediction. Mid-November also brought mountain whitefish to fall chinook salmon spawning areas. An ailing friend's spirits lifted when he reeled in a female "white" that weighed less than pound short of the state record!

Rather than mope because the Hanford Reach and tributary streams within 100 miles of my front porch remain closed to steelhead angling, I find a weather window in December to try for yellow perch. Anchored in a backwater of the lower Snake River, my neighbor and I fill the bottom of an 80-quart cooler with these tasty mid-western transplants. An hour's worth of filleting led to enough fish tacos for merrymaking.

That's the feel-good version of 2021. My angling life once felt complete when aspirations focused solely on fly fishing local streams for trout and steelhead. However, I now find delight in the full range of fishing opportunities that regional waterways present. This year-long affliction leads to an annual New Year's resolution: organize the ever-growing collection of rods, reels, and accompanying gear in our badly cluttered garage.

Dennis Dauble is a retired fishery scientist, outdoor writer, presenter and educator who lives in Richland, Washington. For more stories about outdoor adventure, including fish and fishing in area waters, see Dennis-DaubleBooks.com.



Luke Ovgard/Contributed Photo

Macyn Nagao and I first met in Hawaii, where we bonded over our shared love of food and fishing. Macyn caught this beautiful yellowtail coris from the Kailua-Kona Pier.

Whipping it in Hawaii



LUKE OVGARD
CAUGHT OVGARD

KAILUA-KONA, Hawaii — "Whipping, huh? Howzit?"

"Pretty slow," I replied.

"I've caught some big omilu here whipping. Keep on 'em!"

My first trip to Kona, Hawaii's "Big Island" had been productive by all measures but one: whipping. Here on the mainland, we call it casting lures, but in Hawaii, it's whipping.

I spent about five minutes whipping every hour. Whipping was also the method of choice at sunset. Tragically, I just had little to show for it. I'd taken the kind of whipping no angler wants to endure almost every time I tried, landing just a single orangemouth lizardfish for all my troubles. It was a unique fish, but it was overmatched by my gear, and I definitely whipped it before it knew what happened. I snapped a quick picture and let it swim into the twilight sea.

Having struck out trolling for spearfish (hebi), wahoo (ono) and yellowfin tuna (ahi), I even tried whipping from the boat on the open ocean, but to no avail. Once again, my spirits took the whipping.

Local expertise

Despite my failures whipping, I'd done very well for reef fish and morays while sitting on bait. It required constant attention, quick reflexes and a soft touch but it was still bait fishing. I wanted to catch a gamefish on a lure, and I refused to admit defeat even as my time in Hawaii drew to a close.

Enter Macyn Nagao.

Though we'd never met in person, my brother's friend from college, Macyn, lived in Kona. I'd long admired his spearfishing posts, and I figured spearfishing would be fun to try if he was teaching. He offered to show me his ways. Alas, the weather was not cooperative for someone with my complete lack of diving experience, so we opted to just fish with rod and reel. We started on the pier, grabbed some lunch then moved to the rocks behind his apartment complex as the sun began to set.

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Luke Ovgard/Contributed Photo

The bluefin trevally, or omilu, is one of the most beautiful fish I've ever seen. Add to that the best per-pound sport value I've experienced, and this just might be my favorite catch of 2021. It crushed a Rapala CD-9.



Dennis Dauble/Contributed Photo

Bull trout move from headwaters of the Walla Walla River to the lower mainstem to forage during winter flow conditions.