

Fish Friends 2011 Education Coordinator's Report

In December of 2010, the Sackville Rivers Association Board of Directors voted to have me deliver the Atlantic Salmon Federation's Fish Friends Program to a maximum of 18 school classes (elementary).

Teachers at Armbrae Academy (1), Basinview, (1), Bedford Academy (1), Bedford South (2), Caudle Park (2), Hillside Park (2), John W Macleod (2), Millwood Elementary (2), Sackville Heights Elementary (1), Smokey Drive Elementary (1), Sunnyside Eaglewood (1), Sunnyside Waverley Road (4), and Sycamore Lane Elementary (1) were equipped with water chiller units, insulated aquariums, binders containing the Fish Friends Manual, additional materials and work sheets plus several DVD's that supported the program, and storage bins containing support materials (nets, thermometers, water test kits, etc.). (Yes, this adds up to 21, but that is covered in the section "Colouring Outside the Lines".)

Several other schools asked to be involved in the program but could not because we lacked the resources to take them on.

15 aquariums were set up in the schools, and a 16th in the SRA Office in January. In February 12 lots of eyed (fertilized) salmon eggs (250-300 per lot) and three of eyed trout eggs (250-300 per lot) were delivered by Lewis Hinks of the Atlantic Salmon Federation. A few salmon eggs were diverted from several of the salmon lots and placed in the SRA aquarium as "backup".

Over the next three months, every class was led through a salmon egg observation, a salmon alevin observation, and a salmon fry observation. These involved students being able to observe the egg / alevin / fry in a Petri Dish, using a high quality magnifying lens, and drawing and labeling what they observed (scaled up to about ½ page).

This was capped by the Fry Release Field Trip in late May / early June, where we offered a guided tour of the Sackville River Fishway, a supported release of the fry, and two field games that simulated how fry dealt with predators and with a lack of available food.

There were 14 field trips, with two of these having originally been postponed due to weather conditions. One of the 21 classes decided not to go on the field trip, and we released their fry for them.

Eight teachers participated in Fish Friends for the first time.

At six schools, the school administration actively supported and promoted the Fish Friends Program to their schools in particular, and their school communities in general.

11 of the field trips involved the stop at the fishway. The other three were accomplished by having the classes walk to a site on the Little Sackville River where they released their fry and then played the two field games.

Six of the field trips involved two classes at one time.

470 students and their 20 teachers went on the Field Trips.

101 adults (parents and other volunteers) attended the Field Trip sessions.

2483 salmon fry were released; 492 trout fry.

For 13 of the field trips, I took photos and videos of the activities, and provided this material on CDs or DVDs as a souvenir of their experiences. (I was not present at one of the field trips.) Teachers were encourage to share this material with their students, and to recruit a parent volunteer to make duplicates so that the students would have their own momentos.

A 15th Field Trip involved a Halifax school that was not officially a part of our program, but which was familiar with the opportunities provided by our approach to the session, so there was also St. Catherines Elementary, with 25 students, their teacher, 12 other adults, and 60 salmon fry released.

One Field Trip was covered by Global TV, and was broadcast on May 20:
<http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/bairdg/>

Another Field Trip was filmed and used in three major segments of Breakfast Television on May 27. I am attempting to get a DVD of this material from the television company.

The SRA Fish Friends 2011 program was staffed by Walter Scott (Education Coordinator; overall responsibility for all aspect of the program), Mike Mackasey (who took the lead with six of the classes and worked at the Field Trips) and Ron Duggan, who partnered with me to lead and support the other classes, and the field trips at the end.

I cannot overstress how critical the work of Mike and Ron was to the success of this program. Both contributed time, physical effort, and personal resources far beyond what most folk could observe, or were given in the "job descriptions" that were formally and informally agreed upon at the start of the program. In addition, they created meaningful relationships with students, teachers, and parents, while portraying role models that will, forever, be imprinted on those they worked with.

We were responsible for setting up all aquariums, and cleaning and putting away the aquariums at the end of the program. We led a minimum of four in-class sessions with every class involved. We responded immediately to all

concerns expressed by teachers and students, fixed what was broken, replaced what was missing, and carried out frequent “surprise” visits to the aquariums throughout the program to make sure that everything was working as it should.

Staff from the Sackville Rivers Association provided invaluable support by opening up the fishway in advance of the arrival of the students, interacting positively with the students on site, and putting everything away as the classes moved on to the Fry Release site.

A Few of Highlights

At one school, the 2-3 split class did a hallway display of drawings and questions/answers about the program. They also put up a web page featuring this display, as well as the video from coverage by Global TV of their Salmon Fry Release in late May: <http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/bairdg/>

At another school, a grade three student who spends some of his time in the Learning Centre (behavioural issues), was one of several students who were encouraged to develop some leadership skills by doing presentations to grade two classes. His theme was to be that of giving these younger students an idea of what they could expect in their next year. He chose to talk about the Fish Friends Program and the Sackville Rivers Association.

He compressed my five months worth of classroom sessions into 20 minutes. The Learning Centre teacher was overwhelmed by the factual content generated by her student, as well as his demeanor. This was a shy and often unresponsive student who, in that moment, demonstrated a confidence and authority that was beyond his grade level.

The grade two students bombarded him with questions; in particular, what the fish ladder was, how it was constructed, and what its purpose was. He had them all drawing fish ladders at the end.

The SRA office was contacted, mid-June, by one of the students who had been on a field trip that had started at the Sackville River Fishway. At all of these sessions, it had been emphasized that not only was the fishway “HRM’s Best Kept Secret”, and that it was a great place to visit on a hot summer’s day, and a place to take visitors from out-of-province. The student had called to ask for directions to the fishway so that he could go there with his parents once the school year was over.

I received a phone call on Saturday evening in June. It was from a student and it involved a problem with unhooking a catfish so it could be released. This was a student who was in Fish Friends and had noted my phone number from a "Who To Contact" poster in the school. I returned the call, and spoke with the student. Her best friend was the one who had hooked the catfish, and wanted to release it back into the lake, but the hook was still imbedded. Her mother then came on the line with more questions, and I provided my best ideas of what to do. The operation was a success.

For me, this was a case where student empathy for local fish had been enhanced by her involvement in Fish Friends, and she had an awareness of resources that were available (me) to help deal with concerns involving fish.

Colouring Outside the Lines

(Some of the things that were not in the Job Description)

St. Catherines, an elementary school in Halifax, has contacted us three years running to assist them with their Fry Release. This has evolved to the point where they get the "full treatment" of fish ladder and field games in addition to the actual release of their fry.

Because of concerns noted by me two years ago, when the school showed up with their fry in containers with water that was nearly opaque (and this year only had 60 surviving fry), I asked Mike Mackasey to do a school visit and check out their system. He noted discolouration in the tank water, and was concerned about the state of the filter inserts, and took it upon himself to provide support to the school (which does have an ASF Volunteer). Mike will continue to offer his assistance, whether or not the school accepts or even appreciates it.

Grosvenor Wentworth School in Halifax contacted SRA and asked for assistance at the Fish Ladder on the day of their Fry Release. Their ASF Volunteer of several years is moving on and a new Volunteer is working on taking over. Through the contact with the new Volunteer, I was invited to visit the class at their school and provide a slide show on the history, construction, and function of the Sackville River Fishway. And, on the day of their Fry Release (which they did on their own), I was present at the Fishway and provided commentary and explanations to students, parents, and the teacher.

Sunnyside Waverley Road Elementary in Bedford is a four-classroom school with about 70 students, and the grades P-1 split, 1-2 split, grade two, and a 2-3 split class. The ages represented by the student body were well below that of the typical grades of 4-6 for Fish Friends.

However, one of the teachers had been at a different school the previous year (grade four), had done an outstanding job, and had asked if her school could be included in Fish Friends 2011.

The clincher was that she had spoken with the other three teachers, impressed upon them the value of the program, and they had all expressed a desire to have a school-wide Fish Friends program. This was an opportunity for

me to try to deliver the program at a much different age level than previously, and there was the promise of ending up with resource materials produced by the teachers that were age-appropriate to their students, and could be used by me should such an opportunity arise in the future.

While this added three additional classes to the 18 that had been authorized by the SRA Board of Directors, Ron Duggan was willing to take on the extra workload along with me.

With advice and support from the four teachers, we were able to conduct the three salmon life-stage observations, and all four classes went on the full Fry Release Field Trip (two classes per Field Trip).

This was an overwhelming success (...and I still have a lot to learn about working with such young students), and the feedback from students, teachers, and parents was all positive and supportive.

Respectfully Submitted,

Walter Scott

Education Coordinator, Sackville Rivers Association, Fish Friends 2011

(Teachers were asked to complete an end-of-program questionnaire. The questions, and all teacher responses, are compiled in Appendix A to this document. All teachers responses have been included, without any editing – aside from some formatting changes on my part.)