

An Observation by Wilton Corkern, April 21, 2006:

Speaking of Fish Stories. Last week I mentioned that a nine inch Yellow Perch is definitely a keeper, but Vittorio Hurey and his daughter, Shapre Jennings, took the term “keeper” to a new level this week when they landed a Catfish that will definitely punctuate the family conversation for years to come. If it hadn’t been so big, I would have said it is a White Catfish, the large catfish that is native to the Potomac. It had the characteristic massive head and rounded tail of the White Cat. However, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources says “a 20-inch White Catfish would be considered large.” This one was a good three feet long.



bulky fish for quite some time on his relatively light tackle, eventually coaxing it into the shallow water near shore before descending the stairs and beaching the fish. In the process he drew a crowd of advisors and well-wishers. Aware that the Maryland Department of Natural Resources advises anglers to limit their intake of Potomac River catfish because of the risk of PCB contamination, Mr. Hurey calculated that his family could freeze this fish and enjoy occasional meals from it for many months.

So maybe it was the more common Channel Catfish. These fish were introduced to the upper Potomac in 1899 and spread downstream slowly. After Hurricane Agnes in 1972, Channel Catfish disbursed through the Chesapeake drainage and have become the principal commercial fish in the Potomac River. The Maryland record for Channel Catfish is just over 28 pounds, and was caught right here in Piscataway Creek. He didn’t weigh it, but I am certain that Mr. Hurey’s fish was bigger than that.

Another possibility is that this was a Blue Catfish, the biggest of the Potomac’s catfish species, which was also introduced in the upper River beginning in 1899. It is native to the Mississippi River drainage, where specimens sometimes exceed 100 pounds! The Maryland record for a Blue Catfish is 53 pounds, caught just downstream from us in Charles County, and the previous record is 39 pounds, caught in the Potomac at Fort Washington. It would possibly take a wildlife biologist or ichthyologist to know for sure which species this one was, but there is no doubt it was a big fish.

The Hurey family was fishing from the Saylor Grove Pier, enjoying a mild, sunny afternoon. Shapre saw the rod bend and alerted her dad, who said he wasn’t really paying attention. He fought the