

TWIN TROUT LAW VEXING ANGLERS

Confusion Worked by Jordanic Verdict That Steelheads and Rainbows Are Identical

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Consensus of opinion among trout anglers of experience indicates dissatisfaction with the present law, which in name applying to the steelhead variety only, in practice has amounted to a virtual opening of the general trout season a month earlier than conditions of water and size of fish would warrant, as judged by past experience.

The possession of rainbow trout is still a misdemeanor and punishable by prescribed penalties, such as attach to other breaches of the fish and game laws. While to a large extent frequenters of the higher tributaries of the streams above the range of the steelheads, there is in every tidal stream more or less water in which the two kinds to some extent at least commingle; and in view of the fact that no one as yet has discovered any lure that will attract the steelheads to the exclusion of their more handsome relatives, it behooves all who wish to conform to the letter of the law

to take a course in practical ichthyology, in order, that the permissible steelhead may stay, and the forbidden rainbow be slipped from the hook—uninjured, if such a thing be possible.

There are many places where the steelhead may be sought with every assurance that rainbow trout will be very infrequent incidents of the day's sport. At this early season particularly the latter are apt to put in an appearance when not looked for, in places where a month later they would not be, and compliance with the law requires that they be served just as any trout under five inches long must be treated when taken—returned to the water as nearly intact as possible. Wetting the hand and removing them carefully from the hook is, although satisfying to the law, a detriment to the fish supply. Fish culturists tell us that trout never were made to be handled, and that even the wetting of the hand is

only a lessening of the evil; the slimy coating once removed, a fungoid parasite takes advantage of the each thus made in the fish's armor, and that trout languishes to a lingering death.

However, such being the law, and no change being possible until the legislature meets this winter, if then, trout fishermen generally have decided that those who go first will have the cream skimmed off the sport ahead of the men who from reason of conscience wait a month later. So considerable fishing has been done, both on the northern streams and those nearer the city. It is not altogether pleasant to say that the results in the main have been better than might have been expected, although the water in most streams is lower than last year at this time, and the fish more concentrated, requiring less exertion and less of piscatorial experience to find. This of itself is a bad feature, meaning that the never too large supply is to be depleted even more speedily than usual. This applies in some measure to rainbow trout as well as to the steelhead. Many who think they know the difference in fact do not, and I have seen some who actually reversed the real state of affairs by calling the one fish the other. Consequently, with good intentions, these men may violate the law, and either never know it

or some day stumble onto a warden in all innocence and pay for their ignorance. Certainly no one who does not know the fish, and know that he knows them, has any business to go trout fishing before the general, trout season opens with the coming of next month, and if in doubt as to such knowledge the safest course is to wait. I much doubt if any description of common external characteristics would be of practical service. The rainbow trout—and for that matter the others, too—are so much influenced in coloring by their surroundings, and in condition by the state of food supply in their particular stream, that the average fisherman, with his eye sharpened for generalities only, would be very apt to find himself worn confused thereby. Number of teeth on the vomer, pre-opercle, gillrakers, caudal spines, scale row count, are Greek to most of the "garden hackle" fraternity. There is, however, one mark of the steelhead that seems to be fairly constant, and that is the five vertical bars along its sides, together with the general silvery aspect of fish that will be noticed whenever fresh-run from salt water, and even in the smaller specimens, which are the progeny of the preceding run into the stream. As a rule, but not without exception, the rainbow is a darker,

flatter, deeper trout, and shows more iridescence upon the gill-cover, and his mouth is bigger in proportion. The steelhead shows marked salmon characteristics even in its adolescence. But no such general description can be of much use.

One feature of the trout situation that has complicated matters is a letter by the eminent fish culturist and ichthyologist, Dr. David Stair Jordan, president of Stanford University, in which he reverses himself by declaring that steelhead and rainbow are the same fish. I have not yet found a trout fisherman who agreed with this view. The characteristics of the fish, externally, are different in the eyes of the expert. Their habits are sufficiently well defined so that an angler of experience generally can name with considerable accuracy their average range, excepting the common ground in which they to a greater or less degree commingle. To say that steelhead (*Salmo gairdneri*) and the rainbow (*Salmo irideus*) are the same fish is to claim that ichthyologists and fish culturists of the past, not excepting himself, are in error, as well as most of those of today. The law differentiates between them; and even Dr. Jordan's verdict hardly would be apt to exonerate the

angler who catches what passes for a rainbow trout in these waters before May 1.

Local fishermen who have visited the Ventura River and other large streams to the north have returned well pleased with their trips. The steelheads have monopolized the lower reaches of these rivers. In the Ventura River they show different characteristics than those taken in the San Gabriel about El Monte. and upward, being more silvery, but this probably is due to the closer proximity of the ocean, many of the Ventura river catches being made virtually in tidewater, while the San Gabriel estuary gets little fished. Catches of steelhead have been made there, however, and any of an inquiring turn of mind might do as well to take the Newport car to Las Atlas, and work up the bay to the mouth of the stream when the water clears a little, it having been muddy since the last rains in the lower part of the river. For this work an assortment of spoons, bait, and if possible small minnows, would be recommended. There should be a very fair prospect of success to a skilled trout fisherman. Virtually no prospect of catching a rainbow exists, the catch being steelheads if any, and of good size, if not as plentiful as higher up.