

## **Trout Stocking in the Wissahickon for Opening Day in 2007 and 2008**

*by Debbie Carr, Director of Environmental Education, Fairmount Park  
Photos by Doug Wechsler, nature photographer*

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I am not a fisherman. I don't grab my fishing rod, bait and waders and head to the Wissahickon Creek in the early hours every summer weekend hoping to catch "the big one." Still, I remember fondly a day in March 2007, when I accompanied the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and 12 volunteers as they stocked the Wissahickon Creek in preparation for opening day.

Our stocking group convened at Northwestern Avenue and Forbidden Drive and caravanned down the gravel path, still covered in snow. As a driver, I had the opportunity to chat with some of the fishermen throughout the day. I learned that stocking the creek for opening day is an annual tradition among these enthusiastic volunteers. John Flack, an avid fisherman, has been helping with the fish stocking for many years. "I grew up in this area and enjoyed fishing in the Wissahickon," said Flack. "Helping stock the creek is my way of giving back." Like him, many of the volunteers have been fishing in the Wissahickon since they were kids and want to provide the same meaningful experience for others.

For some, fishing is simply a means to enjoy the beauty and tranquility of the Wissahickon gorge. "A lot of the time I don't even care if I catch something," said Shawn Fisher, a long-time fisherman from Germantown. "I just like being in the stream." Flack said that many of the fishermen in the Wissahickon practice "catch and release," leaving the fish for others to find.

As we drove along Forbidden Drive, Fisher and Flack pointed out their favorite fishing holes. “The best spots for catching trout,” they revealed, “are in the riffles where fish can get plenty of oxygen.”

When we reached our first stocking spot we gathered around a hatchery truck equipped with oxygenated tanks that hold the trout; each truck holds about 3, 200 fish. Standing on top of the truck and clad in serious wet-weather gear, a hatchery specialist from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission scooped trout out of the tanks with a large net and transferred them, wriggling, into buckets filled with water. The talk of the afternoon among the volunteers was that the trout were larger that year . . . appreciably larger, they grinned.

Throughout the afternoon, volunteers carried twenty-pound buckets of trout from two hatchery trucks to the stream, stopping at 22 stocking sites along the creek. In the early spring sun the trout flashed brightly as they cascaded out of dozens of buckets into the water. Getting the trout to the water quickly, before the fish run out of oxygen, is critical. “You don’t want to delay too long,” explained Rich Kessler, a Pennsylvania Fish and Boat deputy for Philadelphia. “In warm weather, when the oxygen gets depleted faster, it’s even more critical.”

At one point, Nicholas Deluca, a volunteer from Roxborough, shouted to his son, “Nick, did you see the palomino?” A second shout was heard a little further down stream as another volunteer found another palomino in his bucket. Joe Perillo, a fish expert with the Philadelphia Water Department who has been surveying the fish in the Wissahickon as part of an ecological approach to improving the water quality, smiled at me. “So many fishermen will waste all their time trying to catch that one fish.”

Looking at the yellow, cream, and orange palomino I could understand why. Of the three types of trout being stocked—rainbow, brown, and palomino—the palomino is the standout. And relatively few of the palominos are stocked. “It’s more of a prize fish,” explained Kessler, “something fun for the fishermen to go after.” Noticeably absent from the stocking was Pennsylvania’s beautiful native brook trout (Pennsylvania’s state fish), which requires colder waters than those of the Wissahickon.

This year’s trout stocking for opening day was held on March 26, 2008. John Pedrick, Philadelphia Waterways Conservation Officer, said that he and his volunteers stocked 6,330 trout along 5.2 miles of stream, including 4,410 rainbow trout, 1,890 brown trout and 30 “trophy” palomino. And how did opening day of trout season go on March 29? “It was another great day,” said Pedrick, “although it was cold in the morning. People were looking for a place to warm up by lunch time.” Cold weather is no deterrent to those determined to catch the “the big one.”

*\*After opening day this year, the Wissahickon was stocked with trout two additional times in April, and will be stocked again on October 1, 2008 (although with less fish). For a longer version of this essay, visit [www.fairmountpark.org/pdf/trout\\_stock.pdf](http://www.fairmountpark.org/pdf/trout_stock.pdf).*