

Hey to all you fish enthusiasts out there. Whether you're an avid angler or just curious about fish, we'd like to welcome you to fish of the week. I'm Katrina Liebich with the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska,

and I'm Guy Eroh, an unaffiliated fish nerd.

It's Monday, February 22 2021. And we're excited to talk about all the fish. The fish of the week is the Dolly Varden. We have a special guest today, Matt Nielsen who hails from Cold Bay, Alaska and is the head of maintenance at Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. Hey, Matt.

Hello.

So we always like to start with a little bit about the fish. And for someone who hasn't seen a dolly varden before can you describe what they look like?

In the spring they can be a little darker in the rivers. When they come back in about June, they're bright and they've got very noticeable pink dots on them. And here they're everywhere. Nearly every cast probably 16, 18 inch average in length. And they're pretty good eating.

Or they're both sea run and resident dollies out on the Alaska peninsula and how do you tell the difference?

Yes, we do have sea run and they're typically a brighter fish, blue or green back on them. And then we do have a bunch of landlocked dollies as well. They're pretty dark and color. They get real rusty look out here. But all of them share the same dots on them. Pink to even an orange color. So it's pretty is pretty noticeable what you have.

So Guy, like how did that crazy name come about...the dolly varden?

Yeah, I believe that these fish get their name from a Charles Dickens novel. Barnaby Rudge. There's a character in this book named Dolly varden. She's known for wearing these bright colorful dresses spotted dresses and people were catching these Valley gardens down in California. And at one point they just picked up the name Dolly varden because they just like this character and her dress. They have these bright orange colors, these kind of cream colored spots and they are very vibrant, especially in the fall when they're going to spawn.

Awesome. In Cold Bay and around Izembek, are they a pretty popular fish for the community - both visitors and folks that live there year round?

They are quite popular to fish here starting in the spring. People go down take the kids take the family down to the creek are so plentiful here. You can make anybody seem like professional fishermen. They're in a lot of the streams and lakes everywhere. So depending on the weather, you can get to it a nice spot or calm spot. Yeah, they're really after the salmon row. And so fly fishermen with light tackle

do really well with them. And if you're in the spring gear, then real small spinners. You know, it's, it's pretty easy. A lot of the fish are seasonal. So when the bites on you gotta be there.

Hey everyone. One thing we want you to always keep in mind regardless of what you're fishing for is safety. Every week we're going to give you a tip or two that you can use to stay safe while you're angling. Last week we talked about keeping yourself warm on the ice by choosing proper clothes. Today I'm going to discuss another popular way of staying comfortable while braving the cold ice fishing shacks. These shanties vary in their structure and complexity from essentially large tents to miniature cabins. Winds can be strong out on large lakes and having a structure that acts to the brake can do a world of good to improve your fishing experience. First and foremost, make sure that the ice you intend to diversify will support the weight of your structure and the vehicle you will use to transport it especially if either is on the larger end of the spectrum. Many people also bring along space heaters to warm up the interior of their shack. If you plan to do this make sure that your Shack is well ventilated so that carbon monoxide will not build up inside. This last note is especially important for people planning to design and build their own shacks.

Okay, so Matt, you grew up around this area. What was that like when you were a kid fishing?

I did. My entire life. I grew up here you know within 100 mile stretch of this coast. It's great. I've been fishing since I can remember. Everybody of all ages joins. I have three kids we've been dragging them down to the creek since they were born basically.

Can you just describe kind of what the landscape looks like in that area of the state?

Yeah, so a lot of it is rolling hills or tundra, some grass you get down to the low winds marshes. You know that's, that's the grass and marsh mix there and then around the salmon streams. You know, it's pretty fertile areas so there'll be berries, including salmon berries and some mossberries in that in the tundra, and then it'll just go to alder thickets in some areas.

Yeah. Yeah, it's really it's a beautiful place. I mean, kind of the you've got volcanoes out there. Just you know, low low vegetation quite a lovely place for sure.

I'm curious real quick did you find when you're fishing for dollys are there usually a lot of other people out there when they're coming up falling the salmon. I know when I was out in Anchorage working with Katrina, and you're fishing some of these urban streams, these streams near cities, you'd be there with 50 of your closest friends trying to catch fish. Based on the bite that you're telling me it sounds like, lots of anglers would want to be out there, but I'm not sure what the populations like. Are there a lot of people out on the water or do you usually have the stream to yourself?

Well, Cold Bay, there's only about 50 resident people here year round. And like I said, there's Dolly fishing is a little bit in the offseason kind of before the salmon really are truly here. So we go down to the creek and there might be a family or group of people fishing in one area but go to another area there's absolutely nobody so it's even go to places that you know are nearly deserted and nobody's around. Definitely can't hear seeing anybody else and fish in nearly privacy is really great.

So thinking about that area of the state. You guys have a lot of bears out there. How do you enjoy the bears looking through the bushes at you while you're fishing?

Oh, bears can be absolutely terrifying there. Yeah. extremely quiet for how big they are. It's definitely always on your mind when you're outside. And then the spring the bears are their mating. So they're not necessarily huddled up on the rivers, but they're always around.

And for the people who aren't up in Alaska, we are talking mainly about Grizzlies. Correct not not just black bears.

Yeah. So here there are no black bears. It's all just coastal brown bears. And they're massive. Yeah. Absolutely massive down here.

Some of the biggest in the world, right? I mean, kind of Izembek area and Kodiak, probably in Alaska. What are some tips you have in terms of coastal brown bear safety for someone fishing the refuge or their surrounding community? What do you carry? What are you always thinking about when you're going out into bear habitat?

Number one is situational awareness. Always, always pay attention to what's around you. And as far as caring anything like that, people have had success just packing pepper spray or some kind of protection for with the firearm, is whatever people prefer. It seems to be effective, even down to air horns. So you know, just pay attention.

Right on. I'm curious if I assume that when the salmon start to come up into the rivers, it probably is paired with a little bit of a miniature bear migration down into the valleys down into the rivers to be efficient as well. And it sounds like that's probably a good time to be catching valleys because they are also migrating to feed on the salmon. They're coming in, specifically the eggs. Do you see more bears when the salmon are spawning? And the dollies are really doing good?

Oh, yeah, there's a lot more bears, they'll start really coming down the creeks and probably July, and then it gets pretty furry down around the stream. So try to keep it during daylight hours. Most the bears, you know, the hottest part of the day. The Bears don't seem to be as active. They're kind of seeking that shade. But always remember that they're just that bush away from me. So open areas, middle of the day, and just pay attention. But most of them don't want anything to do with you anyways, we're there. So we've had some trouble, but not a whole lot.

So Matt, it's always it's fun talking with you. And we're hoping to make it out that way soon. So thanks again for being on the show. That was great.

Thank you very much, and we'll talk to guys later.

Dolly Varden feat. Matt Nielsen February 22, 2021

Okay, so that's a wrap y'all. This week's fish of the week is the Dolly Varden a fish you can currently find in open water and under the ice out on the Alaska Peninsula. And we hope if you're listening you find some time to get out enjoy all the fish.

and your mammal of the week, the coastal brown bear.

Don't cuddle them.

Do not cuddle them.

Thanks for listening to fish of the week. My name is Katrina Liebich and my co host is Guy Eroh. This show is produced by David Hoffman of citizen racecar assisted by Garrett Tiedemann. And Kelsey Coors. Fish of the Week! is a production of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Region Office of External Affairs. As the Service reflects on 150 years of fisheries conservation. We honor thank and celebrate the whole community, individuals tribes, the state of Alaska, our sister agencies, fish enthusiasts, scientists and others who have elevated our understanding and love as people and professionals of all the fish.