

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Southern Appalachian Aquatic Diversity

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

The tiny fish in the water-filled plastic bag wouldn't catch the eye of the casual observer, but to biologists they were part of a great hope. The fish were spotfin chub, a tiny, threatened fish, and these were carefully reared in a fish hatchery and bagged for transport and release into the Cheoah River where hopefully they would thrive.

Think fish in the mountains and you probably think trout, however the Southeast is home to more than 490 fish species, and the Southern Appalachians are home to roughly 300 fish species. Why so many? The Southern Appalachians are part of several river basins draining to the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico. Also, the Appalachians are hundreds of millions of years old, and they've never been glaciated nor inundated with oceans during that time, giving evolution a long, uninterrupted period in which to work.

Most of these fish aren't game fish. While some of them are quite large, like lake sturgeon or paddlefish, many are in fact quite small and would easily be passed off as generic minnows by most people, if they were even seen at all.

Want to experience this diversity yourself? Take a mask and snorkel and visit a shallow river near you. Be still and watch for movement. Walk along the stream, then look behind you to see who's catching a quick snack from what you stir up.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peebles.