

## OUTDOORS

James Drake

### Bass are in trouble in the Potomac

The Potomac River has been called our nation's river. From its source at Fairfax Stone, where it just bubbles up out of the ground to form a tiny brook, down to the mouth where it's over 10 miles across, is a total length of about 400 miles.

Fifty miles or so of that is largemouth bass territory stretching from Washington, D.C., tidal waters down to the area where it winds around the western edge of Charles County.

This part of the river has long been considered one of the top bass fishing destinations in the entire country. It's been featured in both national magazines and on national television.

The Bass Anglers Sportsmen Society has been rating our nation's top 100 bass fishing waters for several years. In 2011 and 2012, the Potomac was ranked 31st. In 2013, it moved up to 19th, but they left it off the list in 2014.

Did the people who compiled the list just make a mistake and somehow forgot about the Potomac this year? Nope, I don't think so. More likely, they didn't do enough homework when it was ranked so high in 2013.

Sadly, the Potomac simply doesn't deserve to be included with the best bass fishing waters of the country anymore. The reason or reasons for that aren't so simple.

For well more than a decade, local fishermen have complained bitterly about all the huge bass fishing tournaments coming to Smallwood State Park and more just across the river launching from Leesylvania State Park in Virginia.

Hundreds of fishermen take part in these big ones, held on many weekends from early spring through late fall. Almost all the fish are released alive but unfortunately, a lot of those tournament bass caught during the warmer months die soon afterward. That's called delayed mortality and we've been handed conflicting reports about how bad it really is and the effect it has on a fairly fragile fishery such as the Potomac.

Some of the studies done, and financed by the national tournament organizations, suggest it isn't bad at all. They cite numbers of around 10 percent or less. Others indicate it's much higher, especially during hot weather.

I've seen myself, and so have a lot of other local fishermen, uncountable numbers of dead largemouth bass floating on the surface a few days after one of those big tournaments has finished up their weigh-ins and left town in July and August.

That's terrible, and Maryland's Department of Natural Resources along with the Potomac River Fisheries Commission, the regulatory body for the main stem Potomac, have done pretty much nothing substantive to govern or reduce the numbers of these major tournaments coming to the Potomac River during the crucial spring spawn and again throughout the summer when delayed mortality is such a problem.

In some other states, these national tournament organizations aren't allowed to schedule big tournaments during the spring when the bass are spawning.

"Come on down, you're welcome here," has been our policy.

Some of the largemouth bass in the Potomac River are infected with largemouth bass virus. This is a real concern in many waters where it's found, for LMBV can kill fish. That's why anglers have been told not to transport Potomac River bass to their own ponds or other smaller waters. The experts tell us only about 1 in 5 bass studied from the Potomac have it, so it's not, at this time, thought to be a major threat.

However, other studies have demonstrated that up to 80 percent of the male smallmouth bass in the upper Potomac exhibit female traits. Many have been discovered with eggs inside their bodies. We think this is caused by a toxic mix of chemicals getting into the water from estrogen pills being flushed down the toilet to flame retardants and other noxious chemicals somehow getting into the water.

The largemouth bass isn't native to the Potomac, but we've sure grown to enjoy their presence. We absolutely should safeguard them. The tournament fishing part of the equation can be fixed, and it can be fixed right away. It's too bad, and really pretty sad, the people charged with protecting this so valuable largemouth bass fishery probably won't do it.

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## Enjoying the summer out on the water



Photo by PHOTOBOAT.COM

The Crocodile raced in the Governor's Cup yacht race on Aug. 1 and 2, finishing third in the A1 division and that was just one of many top finishes for the crew this year in continuing a successful year.

### ■ Crocodile shines at Governor's Cup, continues successful year

By JAMES A. McCRAY III  
Staff writer

Fitting that crocodiles, the animals, are nocturnal creatures with tremendous night vision.

Fitting because the local ship, Crocodile, the yacht, showed well in the recently run Governor's Cup Yacht Race which finished on the morning of Aug. 2 after an overnight voyage.

Under direction of skipper Scott "Gus" Ward, Crocodile earned the Governor's Cup Alumni Trophy, awarded to the top-finishing boat with at least two St. Mary's College of Maryland alumni on board, and the The Patuxent Partnership trophy awarded to the top-finishing boat with at least two TPP-member employees, active duty military or Department of Defense civilian personnel on board.

And although having raced the Governor's Cup on Crocodile for the past three years, Ward and the crew were participating in the event for the ninth time.

"You start at a beautiful venue and you finish at a beautiful venue and you race overnight down the Chesapeake [Bay] with all of the dynamics," Ward said of the Governor's Cup. "The current, the wind and there are all kinds of different environmental dynamics there, then ship traffic on top of it. ... And it's all rolled into an overnight race with some good competition."

And as good as Ward and his core crew of seven additional sailors were in early August, they were even better in the Down the Bay race, from Annapolis to Hampton, Va., in May when Ward and his crew won the PHRF A division.

"We have a great crew," Ward said. "The team package and chemistry is all coming together. It takes a long time to get a boat up to speed with knowledge of the boat, how to set it up and the subtleties of speed and I think we've been tightening that up, slowly, but surely."

See CROCODILE, Page B-3

## Blue Crabs fall by a run twice

■ Team hopeful of remaining in division hunt while on 10-game road trip

By DALLAS COGLE  
Staff writer

A lot went right for the Southern Maryland Blue Crabs on Monday in their series opener at Somerset, which boasts the top overall record by far in the Atlantic League.

Starting pitcher Gaby Hernandez shook off a stretch of five struggling starts in a row to return to his quality form, yielding three earned runs on eight hits through seven innings. The right-hander, who owned a prolific run of eight straight quality starts from June 13 to July 18, retired nine of 10 Somerset batters from the first through the fourth before allowing all three runs in the fifth.

The Blue Crabs fought back to get within a run after falling behind 3-0, forcing former major leaguer David Purcey out of the game to start the seventh. Purcey pitched for the Chicago White Sox just a year ago with a 1-1 record and a 2.13 ERA in 25 1/3 innings. Though he yielded one run in six innings, Purcey pitched under pressure throughout the night against the Blue Crabs.

Infielder Amadeo Zazueta extended his hit streak to 13 games with a seventh-inning single. It was just the sixth time during the streak that Zazueta has not boasted a multi-hit performance.

Cleanup batter Jake Opitz also continued to swing a scorching bat for the Blue Crabs with his fifth straight multi-hit game, going 2 for 4 with a double and a run scored.

But despite all the positives as the Blue Crabs embarked on

See CRABS, Page B-3

## Working baseball men

### ■ Local league close to finishing up its 20th year

By JAMES A. McCRAY III  
Staff writer

Waking up and going to work every morning is an important aspect of life, especially when you have to get up the morning after nine innings of baseball.

For Southern Maryland Men's Senior Baseball League players, with players from Charles, St. Mary's and Calvert counties as young as 28 and as old as 67, the game of baseball is played with that very thinking in mind.

"It's a gentlemen's league," said seven-year league commissioner Mike Steinhauser of Newburg in Charles County. "There are other leagues that are competitive and they get the kids that come out of high school and college, some of them even [played] in the pros a little bit. But this league here is based around good sportsmanship and fun."

"We're still competitive, but it's more important for us to play well and be sure that we're able to go to work on Monday morning after a weekend of baseball."

Steinhauser, along with Carl Henshaw, now deceased, helped bring the MSBL to the Southern Maryland area in 1994 and the league has thrived ever since. The league has also instituted certain rules such as no running over opposing players and no blocking bases, among other rules and that helps promote a fun environment.

"When he called me up in that first phone call, I didn't know who he was," Steinhauser said of Henshaw. After a couple of teams already assembled around town joined up, a little publicity brought the league to life. "Through some newspaper articles, we got the rest of the teams to sign up and the league was born."

See BASEBALL, Page B-3



Staff photo by REID SILVERMAN

Orioles pitcher Daniel Sidorowicz in the top of the second inning during a Southern Maryland Men's Senior Baseball League matchup against the Athletics last month at Chancellor's Run Regional Park in Great Mills. The league is nearing the end of its 20th year.