FBFlyer for November

This is the time of year, when, without watches, calendars, GPS or Google Maps, salmonid species follow their genetic programming to the streams of their birth and spend the last days of their lives recreating the egg-filled redds that they left two, three, or four years before.

The pink salmon came back to creeks like Wilfred, Cowie and Waterloo in September and the chum showed up in Rosewall Creek’s estuary early in October. The coho were in thick clumps in the deepest pools in Rosewall in mid month, waiting for more rain and deeper water to let them fight their way to the perfect spot for reproduction.

At Fanny Bay Salmonid Enhancement Society, our ‘log’ books, diaries really, track our activities and those of the fish that dictate them over the years. Through them, with their varied handwriting and levels of detail and completeness, the patterns of nature in our area are revealed. Go back in the Wilfred Creek book for example and September 9, 2018 records “pinks in side channel”, the same date as 2016 and 2015. There were coho and chum in that same side channel on October 8, 2016. The side channel at Wilfred Creek is one of the oldest enhancement projects in FBSES’ collection, dating to the early 90’s.

At the main hatchery on Rosewall Creek, vast amounts of hours and effort are summed up on paper by numbers of fish collected. They are male and female chum and coho, our clipped hatchery coho males and females, and the unclipped but likely once salvaged, fed and protected and then released wild salmon that are mixed in with them. FBSES volunteers, supplemented lately by staff from the Big Qualicum Hatchery, go out into Rosewall repeatedly to bring in brood stock, both chum and coho, for our licensed quota of eggs. Because the Berray Road hatchery has a fish ladder leading to a brood holding raceway, spawning coho can follow the scent of their home waters right into our hands. This year, Fanny Bay volunteers will again be going out into Rosewall to net wild salmon to add to the brood stock.

The wild fry salvaged in spring from drying creeks are now logged as being released into their natal streams. On the same November 10, 2017 that we brought in 16 male and 9 female chum, we released the last of 3,764 McNaughton creek salvage. By Nov. 29 all of the 29,233 fry rescued that year were again in their home streams. Water levels, rainfall and volunteer time and numbers all determine when rescued fish are released and when brood fish are trapped.

Our log books also record the fate of some of our salmon that didn’t return; because the Department of Fisheries and Oceans now tracks hatchery salmon by their DNA, the labs can tell us where three of our 2014 brood were caught in 2017 by recreational fishermen in Georgia Strait.

Other notes record how nature works with us, sending rain for example, or against us, sending three otters to feed happily at the foot of the fish ladder, or our current pest, a large and loud kingfisher trying to figure a way through the netting over two raceways.

Salmon show up when they please, but Rosewall, at the provincial park on Berray Road, and Cook Creek, at the bridge, has parking and trails where you may see fish at this time of year. And they are in all the other creeks, just harder to see and in smaller numbers. But it’s always worth your while to take the grandkids out into the great outdoors and hope the cellular signal is low and the creeks high.

In other news, the annual Pacific Salmon Foundation dinner auction and dance in Courtenay raised $45,000 that will be distributed to regional enhancement groups, FBSES included, to help keep the work going. You can see salmon every Wednesday and Saturday morning at the hatchery and find us at www. fbses.ca