

# Shad, the poor man's salmon, put up a thunderous fight



**JOE FITZGERALD  
CHASING PISCES**

The rain held off all day, but it began to spit as I pulled into the Elmsdale Legion parking lot and eyed the river.

Earlier that day, on the way to the tackle shop, I'd met two girls I knew who asked what I was up to. Going fishing, I replied. One told me to be careful, because a thunderstorm was forecast.

I'd heard the shad were running in Nine Mile River, so I went to Fishing Fever fly and Tackle Shop on Agricola Street in Halifax, to pick up the appropriate gear and tap my angling intelligence source.

Graham Greene, the shop's owner, gave me sage advice on fishing shad. As he showed me some shad flies and shad darts for spin gear, other patrons and employees weighed in on what was working.

"Red and white is the traditional colour," said Greene, "but you never know. Have an assortment, and if you don't get anything after 20 casts, change it up."

Later, as the long, steady croak of a frog signalled the approach of

dusk, I heard a splash downstream. Swirls and eddies were stirring the water.

I tied on a neon green fly and jogged toward the movement, when there was a splash behind me. Looking back, I saw a dorsal fin knifing through the water in zig-zags, like a miniature shark. I stepped into the water between the two disturbances, and began casting.

Far from being spooked, the fish continued to swim right in front of me, and I began to make out the dark shapes under the swirls. I expected a strike right away as I dragged my fly through the school of shad. Nothing. I cast again, my adrenaline pumping as the big fish plowed through the shallow water all around me. Still nothing. Thunder rumbled in the distance.

Remembering Graham's advice, I changed my fly after 20 casts. While I tied on a neon pink one, the sky flashed with lightning. The rain and thunder intensified.

I thought of packing it in when the school of shad surged past my legs in daring mockery. I pursed my lips and cast again, taking their

challenge while lightning flashed overhead.

The first cast with the new fly brought a surprisingly light tap, then another, but no takers.

I cast again through the driving rain, and again felt the tiny taps. I was snorting my frustration when suddenly the reel screeched like a tortured banshee. Line ripped off the spool as the hooked shad crisscrossed the river. When it approached I reeled feverishly, and then

watched helplessly as it ran again. I held on as thunder boomed like exploding artillery shells, my reel screamed in agony, and the frenzied shad raged through the water.

It took more than 10 minutes to land the shad. It weighed at least five pounds. After the spectacular fight, I understood why the shad is sometimes called "the

poor man's salmon."

I released the fish and thought about another cast, when a jagged bolt of lightning tore the sky, and the ensuing crack of thunder made me cower. My daring evaporated, and I left the shad in the arms of the tempest.

**Joe Fitzgerald is a freelance writer living in Halifax.**

## SHAD BUT TRUE

- The American Shad is part of the herring family, and spends much of its life at sea. It migrates into rivers in late spring to spawn. In Nova Scotia, shad can be found in the Shubenacadie, Nine Mile and Annapolis rivers.
- Shad can reach 10 pounds and more, but they do not strike hard. Although you would normally use heavier gear for such large fish, lighter gear is more effective for detecting strikes.
- Lures and flies must get down near bottom to entice shad. If you are using fly tackle, a weighted fly and/or a sinking leader is most effective.