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Ready, set, swim!

By: GWEN SHRIFT Bucks County Courier Times

Some like it cold, like the 2-inch brook trout wriggling and flopping in Katie Fox's hand.

Katie and her schoolmates at William Tennent High School have known this fish since it was a pea-sized egg in a clutch of 200 delivered last fall to teacher Cheri Tenaglia's biology class by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

The project is sponsored by Trout in the Classroom, a national program run locally by the Bucks County chapter of the conservation group Trout Unlimited, many of whose members are fly fishermen.

The organization gave Tennent a grant that covered a 50-gallon tank, a chiller, related equipment and a curriculum to teach them broadly about conservation and stream ecosystems. Council Rock High School South students raised trout under the same program and released their fish on Friday.

Saturday, Tenaglia and about a dozen students and members of Tennent's environmental club brought their tiny fish to the banks of Watson Creek at a farm in Furlong owned by Buckingham Township. It was the culmination of six months of work and care.

When the fish eggs arrived at the school, "We have to put them in this little net (in a tank) and block out all UV light," said Katie, who is a senior and worked on a similar project last year.

The tank was insulated with foam blocks to keep the water cool - trout like it at about 50 degrees. The students monitored the temperature and water conditions and fed the fish once they emerged from the eggs.

The idea is not to stock streams so much as to teach students the importance of cold water habitats, said Barry Forgeng, Trout in the Classroom coordinator for Bucks County. Learning the conditions that foster wild fish is a complex biology lesson. "Releasing the trout is just a bonus," said Forgeng.

Tennent's fish rode to the release in two large buckets. Tenaglia set the containers on the ground a short distance from the stream as students and members of Trout Unlimited crowded in for a look. "See their pretty yellow fins!" said Tenaglia.

Joseph Mojica, a junior at Tennent and a member of the environmental club, snapped photos. "I may not know much about fish or breeding them, but I like going to help out," he said.

The teacher handed out plastic bags into which students scooped water from the buckets, transferring small groups of fish into the bags with nets. Then they placed the bags into smaller buckets and waded into the creek, quickly filling the buckets with stream water.

The idea was to gradually bring the water in the bags to the temperature of the water in the creek so the fish wouldn't be shocked by their new environment.

Aided by a friend, Josh Perry of Nicholson, Pa., Katie cradled a bucket of fish in the stream. After getting the go-ahead from one of the Trout Unlimited members, Josh tossed the bucket onto the stream bank and Katie carefully reached into the bag.

Extracting the fish out one by one, she released them near a shady, weed-draped bank, an area a brook trout will instinctively seek. "If there's a chance of survival, they're gonna survive here," said Steve Good, president of the Bucks County chapter of Trout Unlimited. "This is good habitat."

Buckingham

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