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Science students raise fish for release



Larry Roberts/Post-Gazette

Savannah Craig, an eighth-grade student at Butler Junior High School, transfers a fingerling brook trout into Connoquenessing Creek.

Butler Junior High School students released 156 brook trout into Connoquenessing Creek last Thursday in the second year of a program that introduces youngsters to freshwater conservation as well as one of Pennsylvania fishermen's most-prized catches.

The release was the high point of the Trout in the Classroom project for science teacher David Andrews and his students. The program is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited.

The class of 49 received more than 700 eggs in November, double last year's tally. So far, the students have released 294 fish into the creek, school officials said, even though some rough weather delayed the release. Mr. Andrews said no more trout would be released this year, but that about 43 percent of the eggs made it to the creek.

"That number is phenomenal. It's almost unbelievable," he said.

Typically, about 1 to 2 percent of eggs in the wild make it to the adult stages, he said.

When the eggs arrived in the fall, about 50 of them could fit onto a tablespoon, Mr. Andrews said. Last Thursday, the fish were 3 to 4 inches long, and could grow to be 15 inches long.

The teacher and his students raised the fish in two 55-gallon tanks, one in his classroom and another in the school's science lab.

The class, one of the more popular ones at the junior high school, came from interest in the school's trout fishing club. Students between ages 12 and 14 take part in the class and form a bit of an attachment to the fish, Mr. Andrews said.

He added that students recognize abnormalities and unique markings and try to name the fish.

"They become part of the family," Mr. Andrews said.

-- *Jon Offredo, freelance writer*