

EDITORIAL

Tell your children why its important

Remembrance Day is only three days away but we've been preparing around town for weeks with the Legion Poppy campaign to the parade and service. Just a small reminder of the importance of teaching our children about why we hold this day for veterans, what it means and why they should continue this honoured tradition.

Although this generation is well past being brought up with dinner-table stories of WW II, they should still know that it was the soldiers who fought and died in that war who brought us the freedom we have today. They should know that the war we are living with today may be a much different war, but is still a fight for freedom.

Children have the right to appreciate that someone else is fighting for their safety, their freedom, their country. Someone else cares, and that someone deserves to be celebrated.

So take the time this week to let your kids know, if you haven't already, what it means to honour our veterans and soldiers this November 11th. They'll appreciate it. We all do.

J.P.

Briefly...

As the weather gets colder, we are reminded that the busiest time of year is upon us once again. This weekend, there will be two Remembrance Day services held in town: one held after a parade that the Brownie, Guides and Scouts will all be marching in on Saturday from the Hide House to the Cenotaph and another service at the Cenotaph Sunday morning. The Christmas parade will be on November 17, and businesses, schools and organizations will be putting much time into planning and constructing their floats. On top of all of this, holiday shopping needs to be done and we may want to pull our hair out thinking about how we can do all of this and still attend to our daily responsibilities.

Although it gets hectic, we need to take the time to appreciate what this time of year is really about. Do we ever really take the time to enjoy the beautiful decorations the Town puts up every year along our streets? Take a drive and check out some of the elaborately decorated homes around town; residents of Acton really know how to do it. That also goes for Acton's business windows, they're always so festive.

Christmas in Acton can really perk up ones spirit, we just need to stop and enjoy it.

J.P.



CONTEST WINNER: Stephanie Critch was the winner of the "Beat The Construction Blues" contest held by the BIA. Critch's name was drawn from Top Nails in downtown Acton, where she was presented with her prize. Submitted photo.

Human hormones mess with fish

Most people alive today were born after 1950. To these people, our modern world is just the way things have always been. Imagining life without TV, radio, telephones and the Internet is next to impossible. Teenagers probably have a hard time imagining life without text messaging!

And it's true, human reach is now profound. We are the most integrated, interconnected and mobile species that has ever existed on this planet. Some of these interconnections produce marvelous results. We get to know other cultures. We understand more about history and each other. We can easily chat with friends and family on the other side of the world.

But we have to remember that, although we are connected with each other more than ever, we are also intimately connected to the rest of the natural world. These connections can manifest themselves physically, such as through global warming. But they can also manifest themselves biologically – and in some surprising ways.

Recently, researchers writing in the U.S. journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Scientists reported that male fish became "feminized" when exposed to human hormones. Some of the fish, a type of fathead minnow, produced early-stage eggs in their testes while others actually developed tissues for both reproductive organs.



How would fish be exposed to female human hormones? Through treated or untreated municipal wastewater, of course. It seems that widespread use of birth control pills has elevated the amount of estrogenic substances going into our waste stream. Remember, things that go down our toilets don't just disappear. They can actually survive simple sewage treatment processes and end up in our rivers, lakes and oceans.

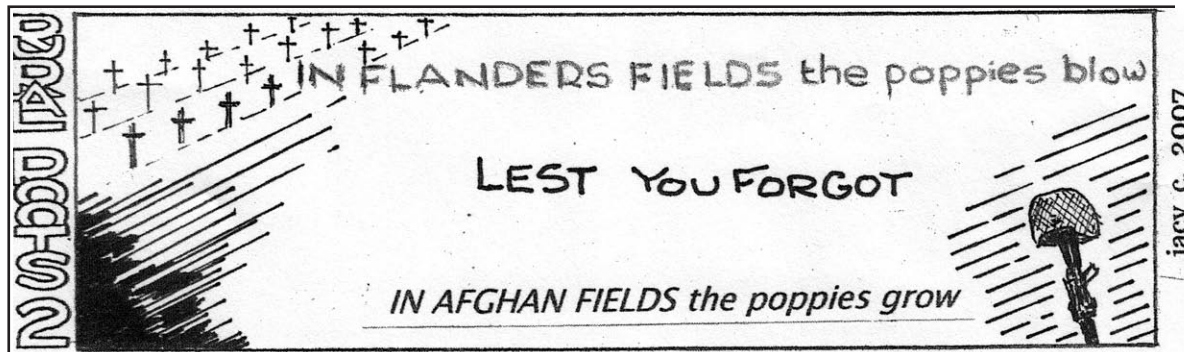
Reports of fish feminization due to human female hormones are today fairly well documented – but long-term studies of what impact this can have on fish populations have not been done. For this latest study, researchers actually added the synthetic estrogen found in contraceptive pills to a remote lake in northern Ontario in amounts that are normally found in human wastewater. They did this for three years, and monitored the results over a period of seven years.

The results were startling. As expected, the male fish developed some feminized characteristics, such as producing proteins normally synthesized in females. But what really disturbed the scientists was how populations of the fish crashed to near extinction levels by the end of the experiment. Feminization of the males combined with hormonal changes to the females apparently damaged their overall reproductive capacity to the point that the fish were unable to maintain their population.

Conclude the researchers: "The results from this whole-lake experiment demonstrate that continued inputs of natural and synthetic estrogens and estrogen mimics to the aquatic environment in municipal wastewaters could decrease the reproductive success and sustainability of fish populations."

This spells trouble. Most Canadians have probably never heard of the fathead minnow, but these fish are a vital food source for well-known and popular sport fish that people have heard of – such as walleye, lake trout and northern pike. They are also well-studied and often used in toxicology testing because they have short life cycles, adapt well to lab conditions and are representative of a large family of fish.

The report authors describe the fathead minnow as "a freshwater equivalent of the miner's canary." In other words, what happens to the fish, as with the bird, could happen to humans in short order unless we are very careful. Cell phones and the Internet aren't our only connections with each other and with the world. We are biological creatures too and we have to remember that these are the connections that ultimately matter the most.



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