

FISH GUTS

In late August, I saw an unusual thing, but the explanation may take some time. I had been fishing, and fortunately had caught a quantity of perch, enough for a good meal. I cleaned them on my special Fish Cleaning Table, a metal topped table with the legs extended with 2 x 4's so it is about a foot taller than a normal table. Tables, kitchen counters, toilets and the like are at a height suitable for short women. For a man, working on one of these counters or tables will soon cause an excruciating dull ache in the shoulders and back. I get these back pains when shopping with my wife, too, but I think in that instance they're psychosomatic.

OK, I had finished the cleaning job on my custom table, my back didn't hurt, and now I had a big bag of fish heads, skins and guts. I had caught these wily perch on a Thursday. I don't know about your neighbourhood, but in mine they pick up the garbage on Wednesday, a full week away. I didn't want to put them in the garage because I've done that before and, after a while, the garage smelled like an abattoir specializing in over ripe road kill.

When I was a kid, the rule was to take the fish guts well down the beach and bury them. Before I inherited the fish cleaning responsibilities, my grandfather would saunter down the beach, purportedly to bury the fish guts, and surreptitiously toss them into the woods. Then, around 5:30 in the morning we would be wakened by the frenzied calling of crows, fighting over the remains. My mother would be furious, but it was her father doing it so he could get away with it. I never could. He also peed in the sink, but he would have received an early pass to the cemetery if my mother found out about that.

Anyway, I had this bag of Smith's Bay fish guts and calculated I could put them in my utility trailer in back of the garage. The vile odour of rotting fish would be lost in the gentle winds of the South Marysburgh Vortex, and the trailer would protect them from the coons. You know what? This actually worked. There was only one small problem. After a few days in the heat, the odour was so strong that Diane figured the neighbors would complain. After all, the rotting remains were closer to their house than ours, and we could smell them in our house. Since that unfortunate episode, I take the remains, bag them, and put them in the freezer of the beer fridge. Yes, I know beer fridges are horrible wasters of power and those who still have them are sinners and will go to hell, but the guy on TV that David Suzuki berates for having a beer fridge has about four beers in it. That will do me for only one stint at the BBQ, and what do I do with the fish guts? I'll risk eternal damnation.

I told you the explanation of the unusual thing would take some time and I'm finally there. On garbage

day, when I carefully picked up the plastic bag holding the reeking fish remains, from underneath scuttled half a dozen really beautiful beetles. They were half the size of your little finger, with a shiny black carapace highlighted with bright orange racing stripes. They scuttled away, looking over their shoulders like patrons of a bathhouse during a police raid. They were burying beetles.

These guys fly low to the ground, around dusk, antennae extended, sniffing for dead stuff. If the dead thing is little, like a chipmunk (hooray!), they will dig out under it until it sinks, and cover it over. Then Mama lays her eggs on the dead thing and when the babies are born the parents feed them bits of putrefying flesh (as any caring parent would). You may find this repulsive, but robins feed their babies worms and I wouldn't care for that either.

These poor burying beetles were trying to bury my bag of fish guts, but they were in a plastic bag resting on the wooden bottom of my trailer. They couldn't bury them and they couldn't eat them, they could only bathe in the utterly repellent moisture that had collected beneath the bag. How frustrating.

I wish there was a variety of dung beetles that would bury Bob's deposits for me. He's a large golden retriever and a huge golden reliever. There I am, relegated to disposing of dog poop and fish guts. After a lifetime of

Continued on page 7



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