

Gone Fishin'

Angling for some outdoor family fun this summer? We've got a line on Canada's top fishing holes, equipment essentials, and the scoop on how fishing as a family is helping conservation groups keep tabs on the health of Canada's lakes and rivers.

By Kylie-Jane Degeling

It can be smelly, slimy, and you may sit around for ages waiting for something (anything) to happen. But for those families throughout Canada who enjoy fishing together, it's a bonding experience like no other. It's also a great opportunity to rediscover the environment through the eyes of your children, while sharing learning experiences that could inspire them to make environmentally-conscious decisions for the rest of their lives!

What's UP caught up with a dad who appreciates fish and the environment so much, he has dedicated his life to them. Dr. Chris Bunt is the founder of Biotactic Fish and Wildlife Research (www.biotactic.com), an internationally-active environmental consulting firm focused on fisheries conservation, fish and aquatic wildlife habitat protection, and natural habitat restoration. Within seconds of talking to Chris, his enthusiasm for aquatic conservation and fishing is obvious. This is a father who proudly remembers



“fishing family,” says, “It gets the kids out of the house and away from the electronics. It teaches them about responsibility (rules/regulations, environmental issues, ethical fishing).” But most importantly, Tracey says, they fish because it’s fun! Summer or winter, they’re wherever the fish are biting.

“We’ll either go just the four of us or with other families and it is always a blast!”

The environmental issues that Tracey mentions are close to Chris’s heart. “I think the awareness that is generated for the children about the environment is priceless, particularly the impact that we have on the environment as humans. Jacob is a four-year-old

the initial thrill of catching his first fish and wants to watch his own sons (four-year-old Jacob and one-year-old Sam) experience the same exhilaration. Chris gained both his Masters and PhD in studies relating to fish, and has numerous research papers published and cited throughout the world. But his extensive qualifications aside, he’s a dad who loves to grab a rod and reel, and immerse his kids in the wonders of the aquatic environment.

Fishing for information

Unlike many scientists, Chris doesn’t conduct his research projects in a lab. Instead, his take place outdoors and often involve children and families! “Some of our research has involved having kids catch and tag fish—we have had kids help us track movements of all sorts of species of fishes since 2001. Family Fishing Week is when we kick it off each year. We tag fish and have children release them on different ends of barriers for fish migration. Later, we have the children recapture the fish that they put tags on so that we can see where they’ve moved to, and the kids capture this data. The children are around five, six and seven years old and their eyes light up with excitement.”

Why fish?

Tracey Neufeld of Edmonton, mom of a self-proclaimed

environmental activist already—he loves sharks. He is very upset about what some people are doing regarding unlimited exploitation of marine resources, and is constantly asking me ‘What are we going to do?’ This is one of those things where a father, mom, son out fishing together can talk about ecology and the interaction of the organisms and their environments. How they shape the world that we’re in. How we can respect and be responsible for the environment. A family fishing adventure can do so much to mould a child’s brain about the world.”

Fishing for equipment

“Many lures are designed to catch fishermen, not fish!” says Chris. Fish don’t read the price tag before deciding whether to bite, so try these economical options before considering expensive tackle.

1. **A stick.** “Seriously—a line attached to a stick can work!” says Chris. “I used one to catch minnows by the house when I was a kid.”
2. **Spincasting reel.** “It has a little button on the back and is simple for kids to use, as it doesn’t tangle.” This reel can be attached to most rods of your choice.
3. **Sharp hooks.** “Keep the hook sharp. Once I started using a hook sharpener, it really increased my success!”
4. **A good line.** “If the fish see the line, they’re not going to bite!”

5. **Lures.** These can be live or artificial, and you can even make them yourself. The type of lure you use is going to vary depending on where you are fishing, and the types of fish you are seeking.

Don't forget your camera!

While a camera won't help you reel in a live one, it can certainly help your child document their 'big fish stories.' Chris talks excitedly about the day he caught a 23-inch largemouth bass. "It was the first day of fall, 2002 in Eugenia Lake in Ontario. I caught it on a lure called a Hula Popper, a very cool lure that makes a gulping sound, followed by what seems like an explosion as the fish latches

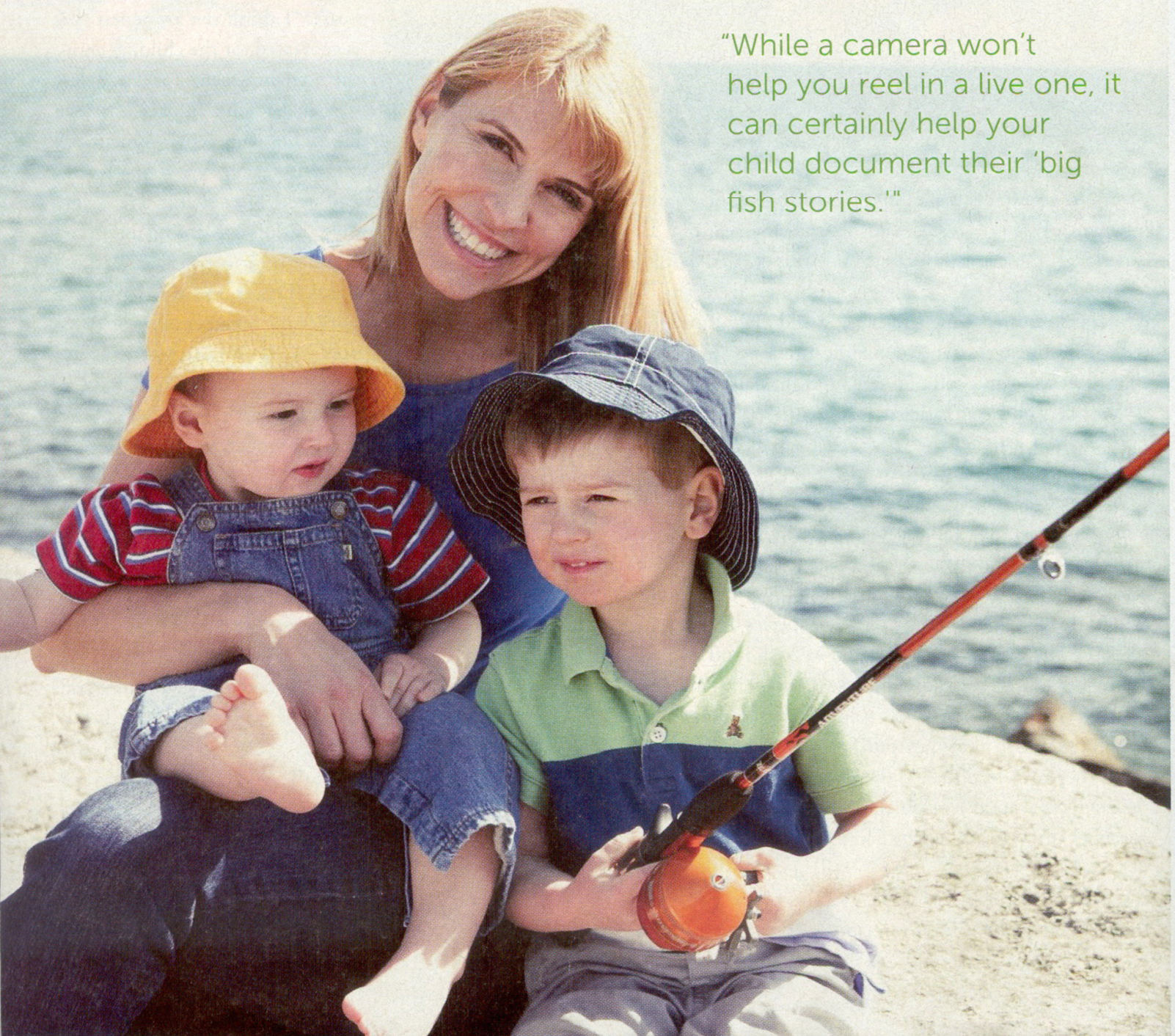
on! When I looked down, I thought I had caught the world record. We pulled it in, took a bunch of pictures, and then we let it go. We estimated that fish must have been 16-17 years old. It was the biggest bass I'd ever seen, likely around seven pounds. And I caught it with a basic fishing rod in a little nondescript lake in Ontario!"

Lively lures and fabulous fakes

According to Chris, often the best lures can be found right in the waterway itself.

"Basically, what are the fish feeding on? If you and your kids can catch some yourself, put it on the line and you may have some luck." Easy live options to find or purchase can

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include worms, bugs, and minnows. "I don't recommend using live frogs," says Chris.

If the idea of using live bait makes you or your children squeamish, there are plenty of fabulous fakes available and you can even make some of them yourself. "My favourite lures are the inexpensive red and white daredevils which are basic 'spoon baits' useful for catching pike—you just reel them in! They've worked well for decades," says Chris.

He also uses an economical lure called the Five of Diamonds (another spoon bait) which is great for catching northern pike. When catching bass, Chris swears by the lure called the Jitterbug. "They're really exciting as they make a gurgling noise as they go across the lake. When the

fish hits it, it makes such a splash and the fight begins!"

For avid fly fishers, nothing beats making your own bait. "Fly fishing combines my appreciation for insects and fish. It takes a long time to make the flies, but there's an extra magic of making the very thing that you've fooled the fish with! You can spend the winter making your flies while anticipating fly fishing season."

Excellent Canadian Resource: One Fish At A Time

A new and exciting not-for-profit website was launched in April by Chris to encourage children to get excited about the environment and, in particular, aquatic ecosystem



Finding the best places to fish

It can be very tricky to get an avid fishing enthusiast to reveal their favourite spots. "**Basically—if they tell you, they run the risk of their tranquil spot being overrun with other people.**" That said, Chris enjoys fishing so much, he wants to encourage other families to give it a try, so he reluctantly reveals some of his favourites:

1. Thirteen Island Lake, Ontario

"I grew up going to my kindergarten teacher's cottage, and took my kids there last summer. The lake has changed very little—it's a tiny lake and just like I remembered when I was a kid."

2. Grand River (flows from Dundalk to Lake Erie)

"I did my graduate work there and lived in a tent! A lot of stuff that fish do happens at night, on weekends, out of office hours, so I really immersed myself. Grand River has more than 80 species of fish. There are huge trophy-sized fish like pike, bass, and brown trout. It's very clean, and Node 1 of our underwater monitoring system is in that river. I've been fishing there for 15 years."

3. Prince Edward Island

"As a young boy, I went charter fishing for cod—those days are long gone! I remember seeing vast schools of mackerel."

4. Indian Pond, Newfoundland

"Fishing in Newfoundland was fantastic. Not far from Cornerbrook in Newfoundland is a place called Indian Pond, which was a truly wonderful place to fish."

5. Kananaskis and Spray Rivers in Alberta

"I did a tracking study of brown trout there by helicopter and on foot. We ended up fishing for bull trout in a place called Spray River. It's a beautiful, scenic area of the Rockies with plenty of fish."

To find the perfect fishing spots for your family, Chris recommends talking to people, reading fishing guides, and checking the Web. "When I was a young boy I was hooked on the Ontario Fishing Guide. It was my favourite book for around 10 years. In the back of the book were maps of lakes around Ontario. I used to get my dad to take me to those lakes where there was some mystery! A pond with just carp in it will pale in comparison to a place like Thirteen Island Lake where you could catch so many different types and maybe even a world-record fish. Now with the Internet you have an amazing resource for finding fishing spots."

Handy packing list

In your enthusiasm for getting out the door with your tots and a bucket of squirmy worms, you might forget some essentials. Here are a few must-haves (in addition to your fishing equipment and a cooler to store your catch) for your next trip:

1. **Insect repellent.** Where there are fish, there are usually bugs!
2. **Full change of clothes.** You may fall in the water or get pulled along by a big fish. You may even become covered in fish slime, mud, or bait. Your kids may think this is marvelous, however the upholstery of your car may not.
3. **Yummy food.** A delicious picnic lunch can make the difference between feeling cranky, cold, and impatient while waiting for fish to bite, and feeling relaxed, content, and pleasantly full. Sure, it would be great to eat your catch for lunch, but a peanut butter and jelly sandwich tastes amazing when the fish are rudely ignoring your bait.
4. **Hat, sunblock, and sunglasses.** Depending on where you're fishing, you may be exposed to the elements. A red nose can be easily avoided.
5. **Sense of adventure.** Fish are wild, the terrain is wild, and you really don't know what you are going to encounter. Encourage your kids to observe the environment around them. You may be hoping to find trout, but might instead encounter some colourful birds, fascinating insects, or unusual plants! Your kids may even want to bring a sketchbook to draw what they see, or their own cameras to capture the magic.
6. **Cell phone.** This is an essential piece of equipment, needed for ordering a pizza (with anchovies) to pick up on the way home after a tranquil but uneventful fishing expedition.



conservation. One Fish At A Time (www.onefishatatime.com) is full of bright ideas for children, parents, and educators. Here, children can watch live videos of fish swimming in various waterways, play games and puzzles, learn environmentally friendly fishing tips, learn about habitat issues, discover fish facts, create pictures, design funky cards for friends, and even ask questions! Educators can download free lesson plans to help children throughout Canada learn about conservation and the environment, and there is even a parents' section with awesome tips and activity ideas for families to enjoy. This website is new and Chris would love to hear from users, so be sure to click on the "contact us" section of the site so that you can send him your comments as well as any questions!



Get more of Kylie-Jane's summer activity ideas on whatsupfamilies.com