

The Art of Duane Raver, Jr.

BY BRUCE B. COLE



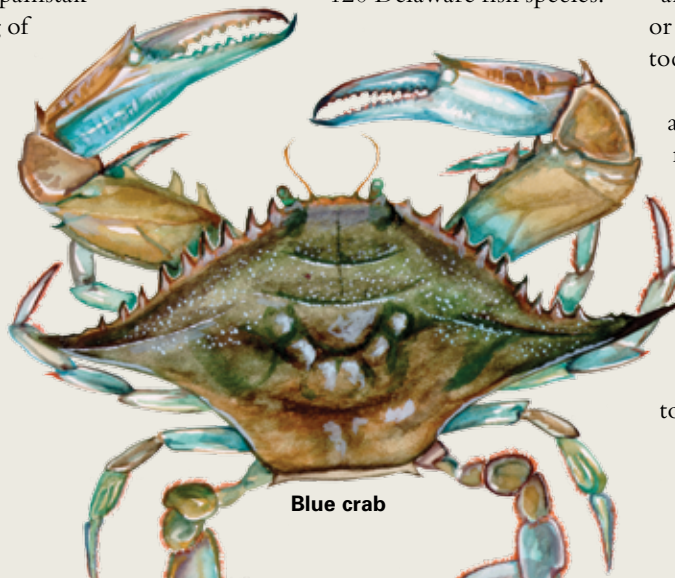
FOR MANY YEARS, DNREC's Division of Fish and Wildlife has used a small number of fish images painted in meticulous detail by artist Duane Raver Jr. His collection of mostly freshwater species, commissioned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, has been used in a variety of applications, ranging from the annual Delaware Fishing Guide to documents on the division's web pages.

The paintings met the division's high standards and were crafted in painstaking detail, from the glistening of each fish's scale to the semi-transparency of each fin. It was apparent that Raver had a talent for accurate detail and a gift as a painter.

The division recently initiated development of a free smart phone app that included a section for anglers depicting more than 150 different fish species, ranging from bluegills to blue

marlin. But during the process of collecting the images, it became obvious that additional artwork was needed – illustrations of about 100 more fish, the vast majority of these being saltwater species. So the division immediately turned to Duane Raver Jr.

That initial contact developed into a friendship between Raver and division staff that allows for unrestricted use of high resolution artwork for more than 120 Delaware fish species.



Blue crab

This collection is the most complete of any East coast state, and will be a helpful tool for Delaware anglers to identify their catch.

The Development of an Artist

In addition to being an amazingly talented artist with a biologist's eye for detail, Raver has a very interesting life story. He was born on May 4, 1927, and raised in central Iowa, where he loved to fish, hunt and enjoy everything nature had to offer. "My folks were very active and often went down to the lake so I fished from a very early age. In those days, we fished small ponds, lakes and rivers for small and largemouth bass, northern pike, panfish, walleye and channel catfish," Raver said.

It was evident at an early age that Raver had an artistic gift. As his artwork progressed, he began to illustrate the fish he often caught. "Finally I flopped some fish on the kitchen table to paint," Raver said. He spent many hours intently studying his subjects, learning the lines of the mouthparts of each fish, examining the subtle differences in the eyes, counting fin rays and scales and then trying to recreate them in sketches and watercolor paints. "I still have some of those watercolors dated 1947-1948," Raver said, "and I still refer to them for proper scale or ray counts when doing those species today."

In high school, Raver took his first art class. The class was given an assignment to do a watercolor painting of anything with which the students were familiar. Inside an old hunting camp, he placed the stock of his model 12 shotgun that his father had given him next to an old hunting cap. Raver painted this still life in great detail as he was accustomed to doing. "My teacher said, "Duane,



Atlantic mackerel

don't pursue art as a career, you will never amount to anything." Little did she know.

That was the first and last art class Mr. Raver ever took. "Over the years I learned mostly by trial and error," he said.

Raver's love of the outdoors and fishing led him to pursue a degree in fisheries management at Iowa State University. He worked in a fish hatchery at Spirit Lake during his summers

He graduated in 1949 and worked as an assistant fisheries biologist with the Iowa Conservation Commission, as it was known at the time.

North Carolina's Wildlife Resources Commission

In January of 1950, Raver accepted a position as a fisheries biologist with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. So he loaded up his 1948 Ford and moved there.

As a fisheries biologist, he was responsible for surveying dozens of North Carolina lakes and reservoirs, which allowed him to pursue his art hobby. "I was a biologist by day and an illustrator in the evenings and weekends," he said.

Once his colleagues discovered his artistic talent, he was asked to do a cover for the Commission's magazine, *Wildlife in North Carolina*. "That was the start of a two-pronged vocation," Raver said. "The more I did, the more they wanted."

In 1960, after doing much of the artwork and some of the writing for *Wildlife in North Carolina*, Mr. Raver was asked to transfer to the Education

Division full time. He was very reluctant to leave the Fisheries Division, since he enjoyed being a biologist in the field, managing the fish hatcheries and serving as the North Carolina Fish Division's first federal aid coordinator. Raver laughed and said, "As the old saying goes, old fish biologists never die, they just smell that way."

One thing leads to another

As managing editor of *Wildlife in North Carolina*, he continued to do many of the magazine's covers and other illustrations as well as other features. He progressed from managing editor to editor of the magazine, which included layout and design duties.

On nights and weekends, Raver painted many illustrations for several southeastern states' publications including some for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, educational and commercial books, as well as magazines. His specialty of fish illustrations soon gained national attention.

He also gained the prestigious honor of being the first artist selected for the Delaware Trout Stamp in 1977 with his rendering of a leaping rainbow trout.

Retirement...well kind of...

Raver retired from the North Carolina Wildlife Commission in 1979 to devote all of his time to a career as a freelance wildlife illustrator. Through the years, his subjects have included fresh and saltwater fish, turkeys, quail, waterfowl,





Black crappie

off. "If I wasn't working with fish or fishing, I was at the hatchery illustrating fish," he said.

Artwork was always a strong hobby during college, again with the fish he caught as subjects.

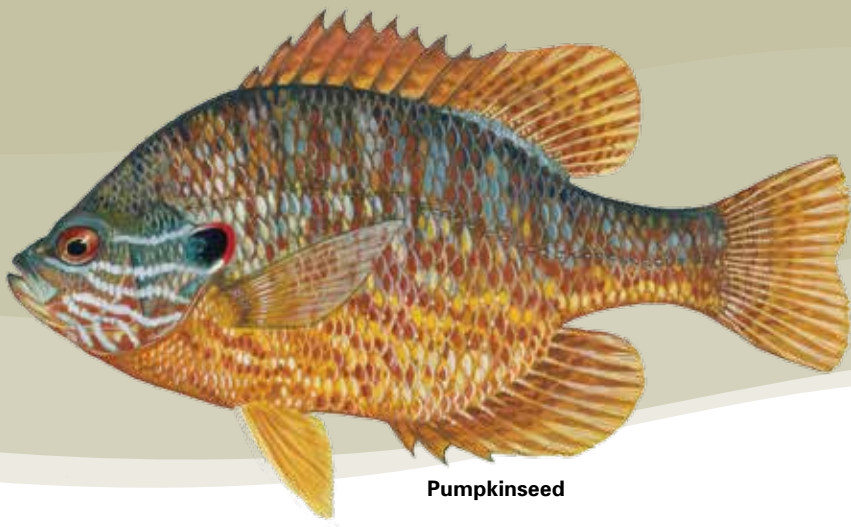
DUANE RAVER

Duane Raver is a native of Iowa where he received a degree in fishery management from Iowa State University in 1949. He was a fishery biologist with the N. C. Wildlife Resources Commission from 1950 to 1960 and Editor of "Wildlife in North Carolina" from 1960 until his retirement in 1979. Raver has received the N. C. Wildlife Federation "Artist of the Year" award three times, and is now doing full time wildlife illustrating in his Cary, N. C. studio.



Largemouth bass



Pumpkinseed



Weakfish

songbirds, deer, fox, reptiles, insects and more. But fish were always his favorite subjects. “It was more an issue of supply and demand,” Raver said. “As people wanted more things I had to learn how to do them but I was always more interested in fish.”



Summer flounder

As a freelancer, Raver’s paintings have appeared in books and magazines, on posters and throughout numerous publications. He has painted covers for outdoor and wildlife magazines across the country and illustrated fish guides for several states. He was given the honor of painting numerous wildlife stamps for various states. His paintings have been selected for the North Carolina Sportsman Stamp and associated prints in 1984, 1986, 1988, 1992 and 1997.

In 1984, he teamed with fisheries scientist Dr. Charles S. Manooch to

produce the book, *Fisherman’s Guide – Fishes of the Southeastern United States*, which has been reprinted four times, most recently in 2007. The 150 full-color fish paintings in the book have formed the basis for many fish identification posters and publications nationwide.

Honors

During his career, Mr. Raver was named Wildlife Artist of the Year four times by the North Carolina Wildlife Federation and, in 2003, he was inducted into the Federation’s Hall of Fame. He has won numerous art awards and recognition from various sporting and conservation organizations for his artwork. In 2009, Raver was awarded The Order of the Longleaf Pine by the State of North Carolina, which recognizes North Carolinians who have demonstrated exemplary service or made exceptional contributions to the state.

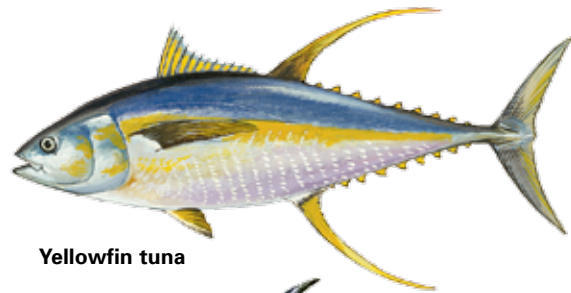
Now 85, Raver still paints on a daily basis in his studio located in his daughter’s taxidermy shop near Clayton, N.C. “I’m surrounded by a swan coming in, a wild turkey flying, numerous deer heads, a pintail drake, two fox squirrels and more,” he said. “I painted her fish mounts for years with a brush. She discontinued

doing fish mounts because she is too busy doing wildlife mounts now.”

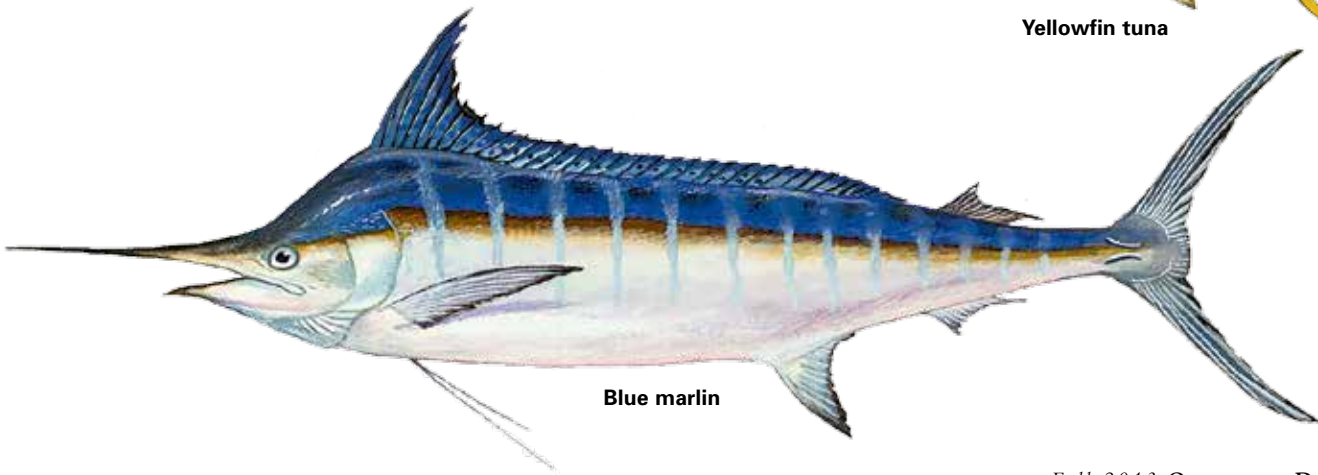
Besides painting commissioned pieces and original artwork for sale, he has turned his talent to painting fish and wildlife images on collectibles such as Christmas ornaments, boat paddles and more. “I am still learning, painting on canvas, wood, glass, whatever,” Raver said.

Seventy or more years of painting by trial and error have gained Mr. Raver the reputation as one of the best fish and wildlife artists working today, and the Division is proud and honored to consider him a friend and conservation partner. **OD**

BRUCE B. COLE IS AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTIST WITH DNREC’S DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE, IN THE FISHERIES SECTION.



Yellowfin tuna



Blue marlin