

Fish conservation project progressing, Kiwanians told

Father Charles Brandt, is a man of many talents as members of the Courtenay Kiwanis Club found out at their regular meeting Oct. 9.

Father Charles resides at The Hermitage at Headquarters and took time out last week to give the Kiwanians an account, illustrated by slides, on the life cycle of the pink salmon, one of many topics on which he is an expert.

Born in Missouri of Danish parentage, Father Charles served with the United States Airforce bomber command til 1946, then took his degree in biology. Soon realizing that he wanted to become a priest, he again attended university working toward a degree in theology.

Father Charles came to Comox Valley four and a half years ago and makes his home within the Hermit colony near the once active town Headquarters, which served as central office for Comox Logging Company in earlier days.

Father Charles supplies at a number of Catholic churches on the Upper Island and has become well-known throughout the district.

A book-binder of wide fame, people came to him for help in repairing valued heirlooms from all parts of the continent. He uses Moroccan goat leather, specially designed tools, hand-made paper imported from England. His methods, his covers of teak, vellum pages of his trade date back at least 500 years in history. He is occupied in restoring the Woodward Medical Library books for UBC. He has completed restoration of a 1554 edition by Aristotle. His hobby has become

an avocation, in which he finds much satisfaction.

Last year Father Charles was approached by the Federal Fisheries department seeking his aid as a biologist in designing a hatchery and gates on the Tsolum River and Wolf Creek in a somewhat belated effort to conserve the traditional fish runs in the area.

The project has progressed well. There are now 10 local girls employed to count, clip and mark fish before returning them to the stream to run down to the sea. There are a number of qualified specialists on the staff at the hatchery located near where Headquarters once stood.

Father Charles must also admit to skill beyond the ordinary in the field of photography, including aerial shots which "I took myself."

The complete pink salmon cycle from sea back to the sea was illustrated in slides which must surely be unique for accuracy and beauty.

In addition Father Charles' love of nature and the outdoors was evident in scenes depicting the seasons around his Hermitage, a building which he built himself and which now boasts electric heat and running water, luxuries needed for his book-binding hobby. Pictures of fungi, mushrooms known to be deadly poisonous, spring and summer flowers in the near-by woods, a friendly pygmy owl only six inches high, passage of the fish through the trays and traps to the spawning grounds the methods used to count and tag the fish, the care evident in every op-

eration at the hatchery, the digging of nests deep in the river gravel in preparation for spawning, the means used to keep a constant supply of oxygen available to the fish, the early months of the tiny fry when each lives on the yolk sac attached to its body until all nourishment has been absorbed. Some of the pictures were taken when the fish were placed on a sprinkling of gravel inside a tea-cup and the photography demanded a high degree of concentration and skill.

In nature, Father Charles estimated that only 10 per cent of each spawning reaches maturity. Within the hatchery, survival rate is more nearly 98 per cent.

Pink fry migrate at night and the hatchery staff accommodate them by staying on the job through the night to aid in the migration from hatchery to stream to sea.

Our Pacific pink salmon die after spawning, whereas the Atlantic salmon spawns several times in its life cycle.

Last year about five and a half thousand pinks went up the Tsolum. Ten years ago the figure was an estimated 100,000. This year, 19, a comment on our way of life and seeming disregard for the laws of nature.

John Zacharias introduced Father Charles. He was thanked by Kiwanian Bob Poole, who expressed the hope that the speaker would be back at a future date to give more of a fascinating story.

Several guests attended the Thursday meeting and were welcomed by club president W. Lloyd Crabbe.

Jack Simpson gave the Kiwanis Education topic, stressing support of churches in their spiritual aims as an integral part of Kiwanis ideals. He suggested that Kiwanians attend churches as a group several times a year in addition to regular attendance at the church of their faith.

The regular meeting Oct. 23 has been cancelled and members will instead attend the installation and social evening set for Oct. 24 in the Elks' Hall.