

# CATFISH NOW!

DIGITAL MAGAZINE

January 2018 - Issue #16



# Winter Cats

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by Ron Presley

California catfishing is a well-kept secret, but Steve Johnson is changing that. California catfishing is actually topnotch and Johnson wants other anglers to know it.



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by Ron Presley

Chris Souders credits his experience as a child for developing his passion for catfishing. He hopes to transfer that passion to others.



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Layla Ledbetter was happy catching bass and bream until she met Jimmy Holbrook. Now she's a seasoned catfish tournament angler.



### Alabama River Flatties.....31

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Two tournament anglers, Joey Pounders and Jay Gallop, made their first trip to the Alabama River. What they found was good news for other flathead anglers.



### Flatheads of the West.....38

by Eddie White

From California to Arizona, and up to Idaho, fisherman can be found chasing the wily flathead. All have different tactics and techniques for these monsters of the logs and ledges.



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Welcome to a new year and the January 2018 edition of CatfishNow (CFN) digital magazine and social media platform. January of each year brings the promise of new and exciting activities, and new beginnings.

I made my normal resolutions to lose some weight and watch out for my health. I hope I am more successful this year than last.

This month's stories include one from California and the great blue cat fishing they have. I had the privilege of interviewing Steve Johnson for the story. Still out in the west, Eddie White has a story on flatheads from California, Arizona and Idaho. Back in the east Terry Madewell offers a story from South Carolina featuring cat women Layla Holbrook. Add in the regular columns and this issue has something for everyone.

On a personal note, I am very proud to start off a new year of promoting the sport of catfishing. I sincerely hope that what we do through the magazine is a positive influence on both experienced and beginning catfish anglers. There are millions of stories to tell and we only scratch the surface, but over time we can tell a lot of them. If you know of a story that needs to be told we love to hear from you.

As always, I wish to thank the great sponsors that support us. It is because of them that we are able to offer the contents of CFN to our readers free of charge. I hope you will help me thank them by considering their products when you are in the market for catfish supplies.

We are extremely pleased to bring you this month's collection of catfish related content and ask you to share this issue with your friends, relatives and other catfish enthusiasts. By doing so you just might help them catch more CatfishNow.

Fish with passion,  
Ron Presley, Editor



**Front Cover:**  
Layla Holbrook caught this blue cat while fishing a King Kat tournament on Lake Wiley in South Carolina.  
Terry Madewell Photo

*California Dreamin’  
by Ron Presley*

# SURFACE

# BELOW THE

# SURFACE

*California catfishing is not for sissies*



“California Dreaming,” by The Mamas & the Papas, is #89 in Rolling Stone’s list of the 500 Greatest Songs of All Time. Dreaming of big blue California catfish is #1 on Steve Johnson’s top ten list.

“I fish for a vast variety of fish,” declared Johnson, “But catfish are my specialty and it brings me back to my roots and my family that is very dear to me.”

Fifty-seven-year-old Johnson is retired.

Johnson fishes for a variety of fish, including saltwater fish, but catfish are his passion.

He guides part time and works in retail bait and tackle part time. His schedule leaves him plenty of time to pursue his dream fish. His primary target is big California blues, but his passion for catfish didn’t start in the Golden



Katfish Posse is the team name for Johnson's tournament fishing.



## Katfish J on the Tournament Trail

Steve Johnson lived in Southern California for 15 years. If you went down there to his old stomping grounds and asked for him by name, nobody would know who you were talking about. But if you asked for Katfish J, they will know exactly who you were looking for.

Johnson readily admits to his passion. He has been fishing as long as he can remember. Fifty-two years at least, out of his soon to be 58. A lot of those years he has been tournament fishing.

"It never gets old," says Katfish J. "I'm always learning something new. I've been tournament fishing for 23 years and 20 of those years were fishing catfish tournaments. I fished my first catfish tournament in 1999 and won my first in 2001. I won a boat that year and it's been on ever since."

"In 2016 I started fishing catfish tournaments outside of California," continued Johnson. "We are the first team from California to compete back east. We have been to Texas three times and Kentucky twice. We will be competing in Winter Blues on Wheeler, in Alabama, in January 2018."

"Fishing never gets old," chuckled Johnson. "It keeps me young and reminds me of where it all started. Being outdoors with nature brings a freshness to my heart and mind. Fishing gives me peace and freedom from everyday issues and tasks. The challenge and the feeling of surprise when you catch a fish, or get a big bite, keeps me coming back for more, year-in and year-out. I fish for a variety of fish, but my specialty, and the fish I love to chase, are catfish."

***"...cats will hold to these deep-water structures as the water cools..."***

State.

"I got started fishing the banks of the Missouri and Sioux Rivers in Iowa," recalled Johnson. "My family also fished at Browns Lake and Yankton Dam in South Dakota. I really got my passion for fishing from my Uncle Dave. We would go down to the Missouri River, in the back waters, to shoot carp and buffalo fish. We also caught bullheads to use for big flathead catfish bait. Family and fishing go hand and hand. And family is everything to me."

"I moved to California at nine years old and brought my passion for fishing with me to the mighty California Delta. I continued to fish California through my youth, now I live there and fish there as an adult."

The adjustment to Northern California fishing was easy for Johnson. California had awesome catfishing and the methods used were similar to what he practiced in Iowa. The Delta has plenty of other trophy species, but catfish remains his passion.

The California Delta is located between Sacramento on the north and Stockton on the south. It includes about 1,000 miles of waterways for anglers to check out. The main rivers are the Sacramento River, coming in from the north, and the San Joaquin River, coming in from the south. Other rivers that feed the delta include the American River, the Mokelumne River, the Cosumnes River and the Calaveras River.

A lot of the catfish world is in the deepfreeze come January, but for Johnson it is a time when monster blue catfish are active in the Delta. Winter brings much needed rains and the winters are pretty mild in the desert regions of San Diego County. That's where California's largest populations of blue catfish live.

"I chase the big blues from November thru the spring," revealed Johnson. "January thru March is the best time to land a monster



in the 50- to 100-pound range. The daytime temperatures can still be in the high 70's, but 50- to 60-degree temperatures can show up."

"The rainwaters run down from the high desert mountains, filling the small creeks that fill the lakes and reservoirs. San Vicente Reservoir, El Capitan Reservoir, Lower Otay Lake, Lake Jennings, Lake Hodges and Lake Sutherland all hold a good population of blue catfish, and some hefty channel cats too."

Johnson uses suspend drifting or spot-locking over structure to target the blues. The structure he targets will be in the 50- to 100-foot depths. Safe fish handling and proper decompression techniques are very important to ensure a healthy release, since a lot of Johnson's fish come from deep water.

"I find the cats will hold to these deep-water structures as the water cools," instructed Johnson. "A big dose of patience is needed. The bite is not always fast and furious this time of year, but those who stick it out are usually

One of Johnson's clients holds a 60-pound blue caught on a guided trip.

rewarded with a fish of a lifetime."

Johnson suspends baits on either a drop loop setup or a Carolina rig. His strategy is to fish from 1 to 5 feet off the bottom.

"I use a 4- to 6-ounce bank sinker for the dropper rig and a 3- to 6-ounce egg sinker on the Carolina Rig. In either case I tie on a Back Stabber 8/0- to 12/0-circle hook from Hookers Terminal Tackle. I want enough weight to keep the lines straight up and down."

"If anchored up I like to tie the main line straight to the hook and pin on some heavy baits," added Johnson. "Just fish the weightless rig slacked line and wait for a run. When the rod loads up you can have fun just



trying to get the rod out of the holder,” joked Johnson.

Johnson's equipment includes his Deep V 1750 Crestliner I/O with Minn Kota Terrova iPilot trolling motor. For sonar he chose the Hummingbird Helix 7 SI unit. His rods include Larry Muse signature series Roller Rods from Warrior Cat Rods, in medium and medium/heavy action, and Warrior Cat 7'6" medium/heavy and heavy action E glass rods. His reels are ABU Garcia Ambassador 9000i Big Game and ABU C-3 7000, spooled with Power Pro 65- and 80-pound braid.

“The baits we use for the big Delta blues are pretty much the same as anywhere else,” said Johnson. “There are a couple saltwater exceptions.”

He uses threadfin shad and American shad, just like in other parts of the country, but his top choice for big cats surprises some anglers.

“One of the top baits we use for the blue cats and big channels is fresh or frozen mackerel or bonito,” offered Johnson. “Even fresh sardines will produce bites. These baits are very oily and bloody and have been catching catfish in California for many decades. I've been using these saltwater baits for 50 years, and have caught a couple of personal best with it.”

Anglers should note that throw nets or cast nets are illegal in California. Even bluegill are illegal in many lakes and rivers. That's the reason Johnson and other California catfish anglers have turned, successfully, to easily caught saltwater fishes for bait.

“I like to use big chunks of these baits,” instructed Johnson. “I'm talking 8 to 16 ounces, with no weight, when targeting the trophy blues. The fish will average in the 40- to 50-pound range, with 60- and 70-pound fish being common. Occasionally, 80- and 90-pound blues are caught, every year, in the Delta.”

“I don't want anglers to just think of California as a great place to fish for trophy largemouth bass, huge striped bass, monster sturgeon, king salmon, steelhead, trout, and the many exciting saltwater species. I want



Safe fish handling and proper decompression techniques are very important to Johnson. Many of his big cats come from deep water.

anglers to think of California as one of the premier catfishing destinations in the country. After all, catfishing in California is a year-round activity.”

Johnson's claim is backed by statistics. The state record Channel Cat is 53 pounds. Johnson reports channels in the 40-pound class are caught every year. In fact, he says most channels caught are in the double-digit range. Flatheads grow big too. The state record is 72 pounds. Most of the monster size flatties come from the Colorado River, which borders California and Arizona.

“The state record blue cat is 113 pounds,” concluded Johnson. “The big blue was caught in San Vicente Reservoir in 2008. That was the same year they closed San Vicente to raise the dam more than 60 feet. That job is complete and the reservoir opened back up in September 2016. There have been some monsters caught there this year and some believe it could be holding a new world record blue catfish!”



- Ron Presley





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## Catfish Basics #031

## Rattle, Rattle, Rattle Zakk Royce

Two years ago, I experimented with rattles for catfish, I knew that I had caught a lot on lures such as crankbaits, so it made sense that rattles could help attract a bite.

I rigged half my rods with and half without rattles. The rods with rattles out preformed the rods without. And, I had the same bait, rigs, etc. on all of them. However, to cover all the bases, I still usually have 1 or 2 rods rigged without rattles.

One thing I can tell you for sure, the rattles never hurt, and sometimes they help. I let the rattle sit directly on top of the hook, nothing fancy. Just the standard rattles from Hookers Terminal Tackle. I only use them drift fishing. I see no advantage to using them anchored unless you have a lot of current.





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# Catfish Profiles

## in Passion: Chris Souders

by Ron Presley

### *On the rope and loving it*

**If** Chris Souders has his druthers, he fishes on the rope. He does it for a very good reason, he's good at it. Like so many other avid catfish anglers his passion for catfishing comes from his youth.

"I love fishing because it is ever changing," stated 35-year-old Souders. "Each day is a new challenge with new experiences. I believe that my passion for fishing evolved from positive fishing experiences as a child."

"I live in a small village called Oak Hill, which is in Jackson county Ohio," said Chris. "I actually live on the same property my grandparents lived on and my father was born and raised on."

"Dad had to work every Saturday so when he would pick me up on Friday I would go spend the night and all day Saturday with my grandparents. I got to spend lots of time outdoors with my grandfather, hunting and fishing. After he passed away I was still too young to drive so I would walk a couple miles to Jackson Lake, after I got my work done around the house for grandma, and fish the rest of the day."

"My grandfather was a huge influence," recalled Souders. "I think it was his willingness to be patient with me and teach me fishing skills. As a young boy, like any child, I wasn't able to set around patiently waiting for any length of time, but he was fine with that. If I wanted to kick rocks and play with sticks it was fine with him. If we caught fish great, but if we didn't, hey that was OK too. I truly believe that attitude of just letting me be a kid, and just being there with me, is the reason I kept going and love it so much to this day."

Chris also believes that what he learned from his grandfather and his father helped hone

After winning his first AOY award Souders was welcome home by his daughter Kori.



his catfishing skills. One thing in particular stands out to him.

“My grandfather and my father taught me the basics of fishing,” recalls Souders. “I started fishing with my grandfather and father in small creeks and Jackson lake.”

“One thing that stands out to me from those early trips, more than anything is the importance of bait. Before he would go to the lake we would always go to the creek and get what grandpa Willie called big creek minnows. They were just creek chubs, but that lesson to always use fresh bait stuck with me. To this day it is one of the most important lessons anyone could learn.”

Speaking of lessons learned, Souders enjoys passing what he has learned on to others. He does so through his YouTube Channel, Slunger Cat Outdoors, at how-to seminars at various locations and through his social media sites.

“My specialty is catfish,” clarified Souders. “I have a love for the sport and a God given talent to enjoy it. I love to be out there anytime I can. But my expertise is anchor fishing. What I enjoy most, right now where I am in the sport, is teaching others how to catch these wonderful fish!”

The things he teaches others come from time on the water that included good days and bad days.

“I’ve had many great days on the water,” recalled Souders. “But one of the best times I’ve ever had on the water was with a coworker, that I’ve become good friends with, and his handicapped brother. They loved to fish and loved catfishing, but didn’t have the means to get out on the bigger rivers to fish.”

“We caught lots of great fish and made memories for all of us that will last a lifetime. We had a few doubles and some really good size fish. Neither of them had caught big catfish before so watching them have the opportunity to catch these fish just brought a great big smile to my face.”

“One of the biggest and most impressive things I remember about that day is the brother that was handicapped never complained about anything. Even though he was handicapped from

**“...setting good examples for others.”**



Souders is shown here with his tournament partner Nick Conaway at a Cabela’s King Kat event.

the chest down, he was always upbeat, positive, and happy. It didn’t matter if it was a 2-pound fish or a 20-pound fish.”

Souders learns from adversity as much as by success. In what he describes as one of his worse days of fishing he learned to make decisions in favor of safety over fishing. He and his partner were fishing an Ohio Hills Catfish club tournament in early April.

“It was very cold,” recalled Souders. “We had just got 4 inches of snow. My partner Justin (aka Red) and I decided that since it was so early in the year, and with cold water temperatures, we were going to fish for blue cats.”

“We thought we knew just where they were. At blast off we headed straight downriver. When we turned the corner where the river widens out the wind had picked up creating huge white capping waves.”

“Instead of turning around and taking the safer option, we decided to continue another hour downriver. Fighting wind and waves coming over the back of the boat, we anchored up. After 30 minutes we had no action and decided to move.”

“Red started pulling the anchor,” continued Souders. “As he reached down to grab the anchor we took a big wave from the side. It flipped him over board and under the boat in 40-degree water without a life vest on.”

“Thankfully, as the boat rolled the other way he came back up alongside the boat. After what





Fishing is always juggled carefully with family life. Souder's daughter Kori enjoys joining Chris in the weigh-in line at tournaments.

seemed to be hours, but was probably just a couple of minutes, we were able to get him in the boat and start getting dry clothes off me and on to him. Once we got back to the truck he was extremely red and cold. After a couple hours in the truck he started feeling his feet and hands again. It all ended up just fine, but that was scary."

Souders learned an important lesson from that experience. "I am much more cautious on the river after that day," Souders said.

Souders pulls no punches when talking about catfish conservation. He sees it starting with Catch-Photo-Release (CPR) and ending with catfish becoming a sportfish.

"My Philosophy on conservation starts with

## What is a Slunger Cat?

Chris Souders' nickname is Slunger Cat. That strange sounding word, "slunger," has been floating around the Souders clan for a long time. As a nickname it came from a conversation Chris was having with friend about starting his YouTube channel.

"We had gone over a bunch of names," offered Chris. "We were just brainstorming and got off track talking about big fish stories. I always called big fish slungers by instinct, because I had picked it up from my grandfather. I grew up hearing him call big fish and deer, slungers. For example, he would say, 'That was one slunger of a buck that got killed.'"

"I really didn't even realize I was saying it," continued Chris. "As Harley and I were talking he said, 'You know, I'm just going to start calling you Mr. Slunger Cat.' The nickname stuck, and, I decided to use it as a YouTube channel name."

When Chris looked the word up to see what it meant he found, "Slunger — An Appalachian noun describing a fish of very large dimension. That meaning definitely makes Slunger Cat an appropriate nickname for Chris and is the perfect name for his YouTube channel.

CPR," declared Souders. "We anglers need to educate people about the importance of CPR and the impact it can have on the fishery. We must set high expectations of ourselves, so that we are setting good examples for others."

"I also believe that catfish need to become a sportfish along with strict regulations. And not just on the catfish, but the baitfish they eat as well. We need to prevent over harvest of the bait fish to ensure that as the catfish fishery grows so will their food source."

In addition to catfish conservation, Souders cites introducing our youth to the sport as a key element in the sport of catfishing. He says to make each trip with a child a trip they will remember. Be



creative and let them have fun.

“Fishing with kids should be fun,” offered Souders. “Don’t worry so much about catching fish. Worry more about just making it a fun experience. If you happen to catch fish, well that makes it even better!”

On the tournament front Souders has been competing for 7 years. He obviously takes competitive fishing seriously, as witnessed by his back to back AOY crowns in 2016 and 2017 on the Cabela’s King Kat trail. He is a hardcore cat man, but considered a dependable and positive person by his fellow competitors.

Obviously, as a tournament angler he fishes for any catfish, but his competitors tend to think of him as a flathead specialist, and for good reason. They are his favorite to chase.

“I love the never quit fighting attitude of flatheads,” declared Souders. “To me flatheads are more of a challenge to catch because of the habitats they live in. You have to find the heaviest nastiest cover and either try to entice them to come out or go in after them. The challenge is addictive.”

On the personal front he just wants to be remembered as a great husband and father, and as someone who cares about others.

Given the success of his YouTube channel and personal appearances, most people would be surprised to learn that he has always had a phobia of talking in front of groups of people or on video.

Souders has a passion for flatheads because they are a challenge to catch.

Nevertheless, his future goals include growing his channel and continuing to teach other people how to fish and catch bigger fish. His dream goal is to have the opportunity to become part of an outdoors TV channel, whether it be catfish specific or just outdoors in general.

Chris Souders is a seasoned catfish angler, an accomplished tournament angler and a dedicated family man. He credits his passion for fishing to his positive fishing experiences as a child and he strives to pass that passion on to future generations. He faces each new day as a challenge full of new experiences and things to learn.

“I’ve been addicted to fishing as long as I can remember” concluded Souders. “Some of my first and best memories come from a river bank while fishing. From time to time I still visit those same places I fished in my youth, but now I mainly fish big rivers such as the Ohio River, Tennessee River, James River, Mississippi River and the Cumberland River. I plan on fishing, and teaching others to fish, for as long as I’m able to.”



# CATFISH CONSERVATION

Trophy Catfish for the Future

by Ron Presley

## *Blue Catfish Stocked in Ohio*



The blue catfish program of the [Ohio Department of Natural Resources](#) (ODNR) is based on stocking fingerling blue catfish at Hoover, Clendening, and Seneca lakes. Their goal is to provide trophy catfishing opportunities in Ohio reservoirs.

The ODNR Division of Wildlife started

This blue cat was caught at Hoover reservoir in central Ohio. The state has been stocking blue catfish in Hoover since 2011.





Yearling and fingerling blue catfish are transported from hatcheries to Hoover, Clendening and Seneca Reservoirs.

stocking yearling and fingerling blue catfish at Hoover Reservoir in 2011. Blue catfish are native to Ohio, but were not present in Hoover before this stocking.

Similar to their muskie program, blue catfish are produced in hatcheries at the Hebron and St. Mary's state fish hatcheries. They are then stocked to provide a trophy catfishing opportunity that would otherwise not exist.

Given the success of the stockings at Hoover, Clendening and Seneca Reservoirs also recently started receiving annual blue catfish stockings. The most recent stocking occurred at Ohio's Seneca Lake in September. The fingerlings came from St. Mary's Fish Hatchery.

The blue catfish is identified as one of the largest species of freshwater fish in North America. Only the alligator gar and a few species of sturgeon get larger.

Trophy blue cats are

projected in the stocked waters, because Ohio's fish are protected by size and bag limits, and blue catfish will grow very quickly in the right environment. They are expected to reach trophy size in five to seven years.

The ODNR reports that fish stocked earlier this decade in Hoover are already approaching 35-40 inches. If anglers will practice catch and release methods, these blue catfish have the future potential to exceed 50 pounds and more.

CatfishNow believes that the success of this program in Ohio is evidence that similar programs could be successful in other states. Congratulations

***"Blue catfish will grow very quickly in the right environment."***

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This fingerling blue catfish has the potential of becoming a trophy catfish in five to seven years.

to Ohio for recognizing the potential of the blue catfish and taking steps to increase the stock. A large population of trophy blues in Ohio waters is bound to attract serious catfish anglers and the revenue that will follow.

Click the link to learn more about [Ohio's fisheries management](#). You can also follow ODNR activities on the [Wild Ohio Angler Facebook page](#).

 - Ron Presley

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# Catfish Basics #032

## Finding the Right Bait Paul Blackwell

Paul Blackwell operates Fish On Guide Service on Santee Cooper. Blackwell targets trophy catfish with an emphasis on conservation thru catch-photo-release (CPR) fishing. He is quick to point out the importance of experimenting with bait cuts to find the one they want.



Baits can and should be cut in different ways. Heads, steaks, fillets, etc. Then use them all to begin your day. Using a variety of baits will help identify the best cut on any given day. Experimentation is the key.

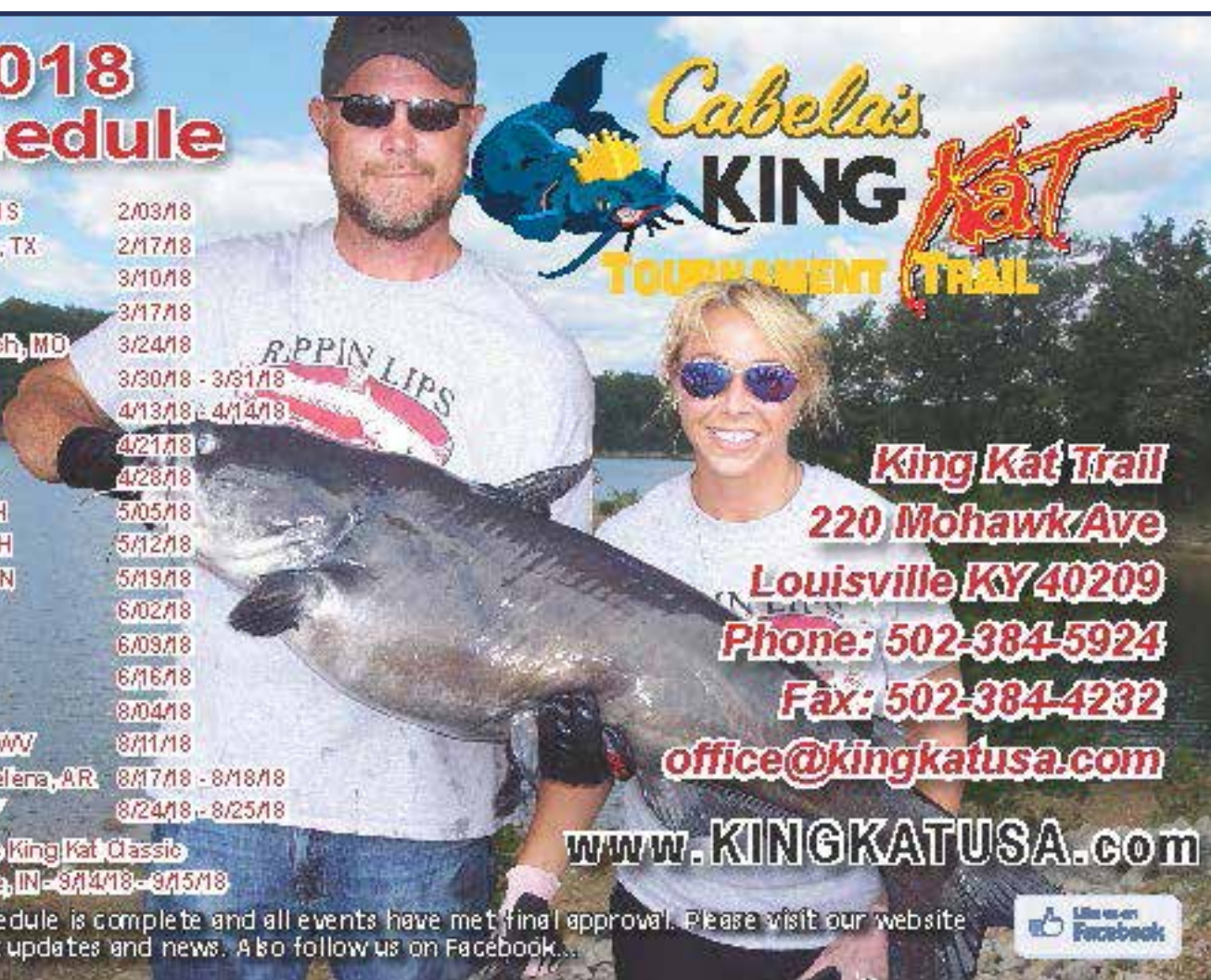
“I put out different cuts on different rods,” explained Blackwell. “For example, if I’m using 6 rods I’ll put 3 different cuts between the 6 rods. I use my Qwik 8 Bait Co. culling system to mark my rods with the different cuts of bait. I simply hook a different colored culling system on the rod holders. If I determine the fish are liking a particular cut, or one bait over another, I’ll switch all rods to that bait or cut of bait.”

### 2018 Schedule

Columbus, MS	2/03/18
W. Tawakoni, TX	2/17/18
Cross, SC	3/10/18
Decatur, AL	3/17/18
Sunrise Beach, MD	3/24/18
Gallatin, TN	3/30/18 - 3/31/18
Loudon, TN	4/13/18 - 4/14/18
Chester, PA	4/21/18
Camden, SC	4/28/18
Hillsboro, OH	5/05/18
Gallipolis, OH	5/12/18
Mt. Vernon, IN	5/19/18
Dixon, IL	6/02/18
Carlisle, IL	6/09/18
Pekin, IL	6/16/18
Tell City, IN	8/04/18
Huntington, WV	8/11/18
Helena-W. Helena, AR	8/17/18 - 8/18/18
Paducah, KY	8/24/18 - 8/25/18

Cabela's King Kat Classic  
Jeffersonville, IN - 9/14/18 - 9/15/18

The 2018 schedule is complete and all events have met final approval. Please visit our website for pertinent updates and news. Also follow us on Facebook...



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# CATFISH "SPEAK"

## Slunger:

An Appalachian noun describing a fish of very large dimension. Slunger Cat then, is a very large catfish.

Chris Souders – Slunger Cat Outdoor



## CatfishSpeak - The Language of Catfishing

Like any other sport, catfishing has a verbiage of its own. From catfish slang to useful phrases, catfish anglers communicate in a special language. CatfishNow plans to keep you up to date with this angler blending of the English language and catfish jargon that we will call CatfishSpeak. Send us your favorite.



# Layla Holbrook: Committed to Catfishing

by Terry Madewell

*Was that wedding cake a catfish?*



Layla Ledbetter grew up loving the outdoors. She fished extensively for bass and bream throughout her youth. But when she met a catfisherman named Jimmy Holbrook, about 10 years ago, she had no idea how her life, and journey into catfishing, would change over the next decade.

From a beginning of pond and occasionally lake fishing with her dad as a youngster, she's morphed into a serious catfish angler and now is a fixture on multiple catfish tournament trails. She and Holbrook took their catfish team "Slime Time" to the next level last October when they got

Whether prepping for a tournament or fishing for fun, Layla Holbrook maps out a plan for success.

married and she's now Layla Holbrook. Her commitment to the sport was evidenced by her catfish themed wedding cake.

The 31-year-old from Gibson, Ga. works as a member service representative at a power company and also is the Children's Minister at her church.

When talking about her passion for catfishing, she's quick to elaborate on the thrill of hooking big catfish.

“I love the excitement of catching big fish, that’s a major attraction of catfishing,” she said. “It’s funny now, but the first time I went catfishing with Jimmy, I didn’t think he knew what he was doing. All my life fishing for bream and bass was about casting out and reeling in, then repeating the process. With catfishing we’d anchor, cast out and wait. Or, we’d rig multiple rods and drift and wait. It seemed strange, but I learned catfishing requires a different approach. Early on we enjoyed excellent fishing on a big lake and that got me really hooked on catfishing. And I learned pretty quickly that Jimmy really does know what’s he’s doing.”

Since those early trips, she became passionate about the sport and while still learning some of the finer points she developed some strong concepts about catfishing in general.

“I’ve learned to really appreciate the thought process that goes into finding fish and that’s crucial, as is the time and hard work required to set up and fish properly for consistent success,” Holbrook said.

“The more I fish and learn the more I want to know. I think that being adaptable in terms of fishing techniques for different lakes and times of the year is part of the learning process. Even fishing by day or night on the same lake can create opportunities to fish different ways to be successful.”

Holbrook said both drift fishing and anchor fishing are part of Team Slime Time’s fishing techniques. But knowing when and where for each method is the key to consistent success.

***“The more I fish and learn the more I want to know...”***

“I think it’s pretty close to 50/50 in terms of employing the drift or anchor fishing techniques,” she said. “The fishing patterns on a given day play a big role in how I like to fish. Essentially if fish are scattered over a large area, drift fishing is the best



When your wedding cake is shaped like a catfish you are hooked on the sport! Leonna Chalker Photo

choice because we can cover a larger area effectively. When catfish are concentrated on specific targets such as humps, ledges or foraging in the shallow flats at night, the anchor setup will often produce best.”

She said some of her favorite catfishing time is at night when catfish move to the shallows.

“I love fishing the Santee Cooper lakes in South Carolina,” Layla said. “Although drift fishing by day can produce awesome results, one of my favorite ways to fish is to anchor up in shallow water at night. In one sense it’s relaxing, but it also gets really busy at times. Catfish seem to feed aggressively at night and we have a lot of success with this technique.”

Holbrook said that from April through September, they anchor fish a lot. From October through March, they are more likely to be drift fishing.

“The daily situation dictates what we’ll





do,” she said. “Using electronics, we’ll get a pattern on the forage as well as the fish and make a decision based on that particular day on any specific lake. Baits can vary daily, from live bait, to bloody cut bait, depending on the species and conditions.”

Holbrook said the past several years have had her on a fast learning curve and while hooking big fish is a huge thrill, she’s learned to appreciate the times when multiple fish are hooked.

“One of our best weekends ever, in terms of catching fish, was a weekend when we caught 52 catfish,” she said. “The average weight was over 24-pounds. It’s hard to beat the powerful feeling you get from having a huge fish hooked up, but multiple fish in that size class is special too. I get really pumped up for catfish either way.”

Husband Jimmy Holbrook said that Layla may seem relaxed and calm on the outside, but when a rod slams three eyes deep into the water she shifts into overdrive.

“When a big blue catfish slams a rod she’s on it in heartbeat,” said Jimmy. “Her nickname is the ‘Rod Slammer Assassin’

The fight from a big catfish is worth the waiting, according to Layla Holbrook.

and it’s totally true to her nature.”

Layla Holbrook said she enjoys all types of catfishing but probably enjoys catching blue catfish most because of their size.

“We’ve fished Clarks Hill Lake a lot in the past, especially several years ago because that’s closer to where we live,” she said. “But now our favorite lakes are the Santee Cooper lakes of Marion and Moultrie as well as Lake Wateree. It’s a smaller but highly productive lake in central South Carolina. All are full of big blue catfish.”

Her long-term goals are as diverse as the past ten years have been in terms of catfishing and life.

“In terms of catfishing probably my biggest thrill is catching huge catfish,” said Layla. “My current biggest fish is 52 pounds. One personal goal is to catch one that weighs more than I do. I’m not giving my exact weight, but a catfish in the 120-pound





The right rigging is crucial for either drift or anchor setups.



class would work out just fine for that.”

She and Jimmy have now taken competitive tournament fishing to a new level in their lives as well. Along with friends Chris and Mandy Gaines, they started a tournament of their own in 2017 dubbed the Santee Cooper Monster Cat Quest.

“We had a great first tournament with 77 teams representing 11 states,” she said. “The 2018 tournament is set for April 13-14, out of Blacks Camp on the Diversion Canal at Santee Cooper. We’re hoping to expand the tournament from last year. This is a real passion of ours right now. We want to make it the best event we can. With this event our involvement in tournament fishing is taking a new course.”

At 31 years of age, Holbrook said she is excited about what the future holds both in catfishing and her personal life.

Bloody baits make good ‘scents’ to Layla Holbrook.

“With recently getting married, fishing with friends and relatives, fishing the tournaments and now having a tournament we host, a lot is going on,” she said. “But I tend to think the best is yet to come.”

“My religious faith is strong,” concluded Layla. “I have felt for a long time one calling for me would be to do mission work. But I also believe I’m doing what the Lord wants me to right now. So, I’m enjoying now and looking forward to the future.”



- Terry Madewell



## Why Tournament Fishing

The journey to becoming a serious tournament catfishing competitor was a natural inclination for Layla Holbrook. It stemmed largely from playing various sports in her youth and some pretty good success in their first tournament.

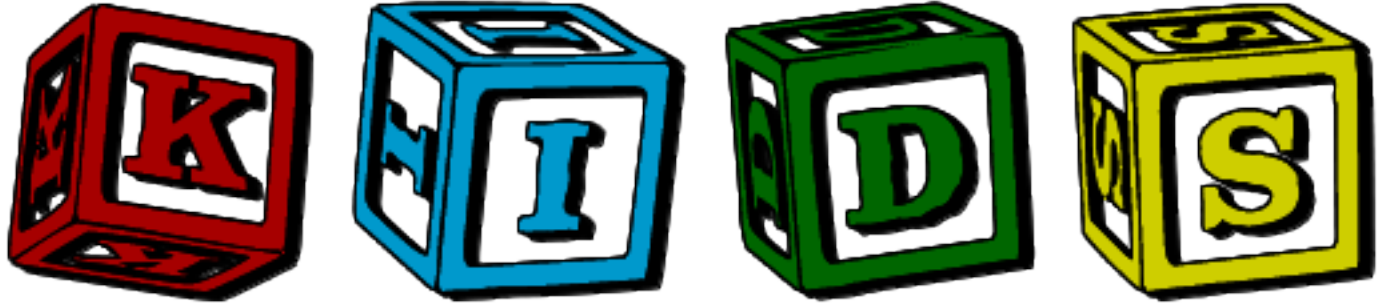
“I grew up playing baseball and other competitive sports and I’ve always had that competitive edge,” she said. “Taking catfishing from a recreational opportunity to tournament fishing was really an easy choice. I caught a 43-pound fish the first tournament Jimmy and I fished together. He had a 38-pounder and with our other fish we finished in 9th place. So yeah, we got into tournament fishing seriously after that.”

She said they’ve enjoyed considerable success since that time and while fishing catfish tournaments is fun and fuels her competitive spirit, it’s much more than just the competition that makes it enjoyable.

“To a large extent it’s the people we’ve met and friends we’ve made,” she said. “Certainly, when in a tournament competition, everyone is doing their best to win, but at the end of the day we’re friends and fellow fishermen. I really enjoy the fellowship with other catfishermen and we’ve made some great friends along the way over the past several years. So it’s really a great opportunity on both the competitive and personal levels.”

Team ‘Slime Time’ is now into hosting catfish tournaments as well as competing. They will be partnering with Chris and Mandy Gaines to present the 2018 Santee Cooper Monster Quest in April.

# CATFISH



by Ron Presley

## *Creating anglers for the future*

**K**ids living in Georgia have a multitude of opportunities to fish and learn about the outdoors. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources,

Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) has a section on their website dedicated to kids fishing and outdoor activities.

Georgia officials obviously believe that fishing together with your child and



family can build memories that will last a lifetime. Usually kids are introduced to fishing by a family member. However, not all kids have a fishing parent in the household. Georgia wildlife officials seems to understand that, so they identify volunteer type programs to help make it happen.

On-site volunteers provide assistance at many statewide kids fishing events (KFE) scheduled in spring and summer. It appears that rule number one is to stage the events where the likelihood of catching fish is high. It doesn't really matter how big the fish are, but you do need to catch something. If you have ever been involved with a kid's event, you realize that they are just as rewarding for the volunteer as they are for the kids.

Knowledgeable instructors provide fishing lessons to both children (under age 16) and the parents attending the KFE. The WRD co-sponsors many events



## Tips for Fishing with Kids

1. Keep it easy. Choose simple tackle, bait and techniques. Fish for a species that is plentiful and easy to catch. Your goal should be to keep their rod bent as much as possible. Don't worry about catching a fish that YOU will be proud of...catch anything! The more interesting, colorful and unique the fish, the more excited they will be.

2. Keep it short. Marathon days are not what they need. Try to find fishing spots VERY close to home that that don't require long car or boat rides.

3. Keep them covered. Use plenty of sunscreen and protective clothing. Try not to make anything about the experience painful or unpleasant.

4. Keep them happy. Take lots of snacks including a treat that usually is not allowed at home. Snacks can help break up moments of frustration and will keep the kids interested.

5. Keep your cool. Expect to re-bait hooks and take out line tangles and knots all day. This is their day, not yours. The quickest way to turn children off to fishing is to get frustrated with them. Teach them what you know—tell them about birds, plants, or fish. Kids remember these things and find it interesting. Read to them about fish.

6. Keep a few fish for dinner. Keep fish within the legal catch limits and never keep more than you plan to eat. These lessons mold responsible and conscientious anglers helping to ensure the future of our fishery resources.

More information on fishing with kids in Georgia can be found at [www.georgiawildlife.com/KidsFishing](http://www.georgiawildlife.com/KidsFishing).

by providing channel catfish or trout to improve fishing, educational materials for participants and guidance for sponsors. In fact, their website provides step-by-step instructions to help interested sponsors create an event.

The website also provides information on where to take kids fishing. Specific locations are recommended by our WRD Fisheries staff. They are listed alphabetically by the general region of state where they are located. Once a location is determined additional information, directions and maps can

***“It doesn’t really matter how big the fish are...”***



also be found on site.

WRD also offers a handy guide that helps understand the necessary components of a successful fishing trip with kids. The guide is specific, it emphasizes the kids, and if followed is likely to keep em’ fishing for a lifetime.

 - Ron Presley



# River Rumors

Alabama River  
Flatties

by Ron Presley

*One of Alabama's best kept secrets*



It would be hard to find a more beautiful place. The Coosa River and the Tallapoosa River come together near Wetumpka, Alabama to form the Alabama River. It is a meandering river around Prattville in Elmore County Alabama. The river offers plenty of nooks and crannies for serious catfish anglers to investigate.

The river includes a series of locks and dams that form various pools to fish. It is a nutrient rich river that supports rapid growth of local fishes. Depending on current,

Gallop like the depths and structure he found on the Alabama River so much he is ready to return.

power generation, river stages and weather, numerous catfishing techniques will work on the river.

The river can have strong current when power is being generated or when the river is being pulled down for flood control purposes. Tributary creeks like Swift Creek and places





Spinning rods are the preferred gear to get a soft presentation that is easy on the bait. Lively bait produces nice flatheads.

like Cooter's Pond give Prattville area anglers easy access to the river and it's accompanying pools.

B'n'M prostaff anglers, Joey Pounders and Jay Gallop, made the trip to Prattville to check out the river. Both are serious and well-known flathead fanatics with a fondness for anchor fishing. It was the tournament partner's first trip to the Alabama River.

"I have only fished the Alabama River once, said Gallop. "But based on what I found, I am ready to return. It is perfect for targeting flatheads. The river is characterized by depths

and structure that we like to target. I have a second trip scheduled in May."

"I am with Jay," said Pounders. "I am ready to return. We were getting trophy cat bites in mediocre spots. Jay and I didn't have a lot of time to scout the river, but still had some good action. I believe that place may be on fire throughout the year and nobody truly catfishes it enough to know."

### **Anchor Fishing the Alabama River**

Flatheads are occasionally caught using dragging techniques, but Pounders and Gallop advise that fishing on the rope will outperform other techniques if you are targeting flatties.

"When looking for an anchor spot just keep in mind, trees, bridges, and any structure that breaks the current," advised Pounders. "These are good starting points."

"We all know that most fish like to hang





out in deep holes,” offered Pounders. “But that’s not the only place to catch them. I always look for trees in the water that were washed out when the water was high. I also look for eddies near the bank. Fish love to hang out around the seam of the current. I also like points in a section of the river where another source of water is being fed into the channel. Bait fish tend to hang out in these areas and catfish will follow them in there at times.”

“Picking out the perfect spots on a river takes a lot of homework,” added Gallup. “It helps to have a decent sonar, one that will at least show you structure. The time you spend riding around and scoping out the area can pay big dividends. It also helps you choose the spot that will allow you to pull in and tie off so you can get your baits in the perfect location.”

“For anyone fishing it for the first time, I’d choose that portion of the river right below the Coosa River,” offered Pounders. “That would will eliminate a lot of water. That area is

**Pounders and Gallop look for trees in the water eddies near the bank to target flatheads.**

narrow and tends to have continuous current. Find some deeper holes and fallen trees. You would be likely to find plenty of action, especially in the winter and spring.”

Once a fishing location is found, Pounders and Gallup like to nose the boat right into the bank and tie off. Then they set their rigs out the back and to the side of the boat.

“I actually use old excavator teeth that come off the bucket as throw weights to tie off with,” explained Gallop. “I am using 16 to 20 feet of small rope. “I throw them at the bank, in the bushes, over logs and trees and pull the boat into the bank, and tie the loose end to the boat. The teeth are really easy to retrieve





Pounders and Gallop prefer nosing the boat up to the bank, tying off, and fishing out the back and to the sides.

when you're ready to move. Just jiggle it and shake it a little and they usually come right off whatever you threw them in."

"Once you are tied up be as quite as possible so as not to disturb the fish under the boat," continued Gallop. "Noise travels thru water really well. When I'm swimming and I drive under water I can still hear a lot of what is going on up above. If I can hear I know the fish can too. Ideally you want to tie up between 25 to 50 feet from the structure your trying to fish. That will make it easy to place your bait where it needs to be."

## Equipment and Rigging

Pounders and Gallop agree, when targeting monster flatheads, that a good spinning outfit is best. They just want to hold the line, flip the bale and let it fly for a smooth and easy cast. It is all about presenting fresh, live bait to the flatties.

They choose the 10-foot B'n'M Silver Cat Magnum for its backbone and soft tip. They add vintage model Daiwa Silver Series saltwater reels spooled with 80- to 100-pound braid.

"I like using a long rod," explained Pounders. "I throw a lot of live bait and you can use the length of the rod to toss the bait, instead of having to sling it hard like you would with a 7-foot rod. That soft presentation from a long rod and a spinning reel translates into longer bait life and more fish."

"I like the Silver Cat Magnum for its heavy

action back bone,” added Gallop. “You gotta’ have it to haul in that trophy fish. The soft tip is just as important, because it will allow you to see the bite a lot easier. And, if you’re using live bait it gives some peace of mind to know that your bait is still alive when you see that tip wiggle.”

According to Gallop the line strength is not necessarily for the 80- and 100-pound fish, but for its abrasion resistance. If you’re fishing in trees and structure your line can take a beating. It can rub up against a lot of things before you land the fish. In fact, it is a good idea to check the line periodically for wear and tear. If it looks fatigued you may want to cut off a few feet and re-tie your rig.

Pounders and Gallop agree that a three-way swivel rig is the way to go for anchoring near structure.

The strongest line in their preferred rig is the mainline which they attach to a three-way swivel. A sinker drop is tied to the side of the swivel and a hook drop is tied to the bottom. The sinker drop is the weakest line so it can break in case of a hang up.

“An example of our rig is 80-pound main line, 15 to 18 inches of 60-pound hook line, and 48 to 60 inches of 25-pound sinker line. This long weight line will help elevate the bait above structure so the fish can see it better,” Pounders said.

### Water Depth and Fishing Time

Water depth is another important variable when looking for flatheads. A lot of anglers don’t realize just how shallow a flathead will feed. If the bait is shallow the fish are shallow. It is not unusual for them to move several times during the day to fish different depths. Regardless of depth, fishing near cover is a must, according to both Pounders and Gallop.

“Fishing early morning and late in the evening tends to get better results,” said Pounders. “I’m not sure if they are shallow because of the shad or because of the thermocline. Either way, if shallow doesn’t work I usually try to find something a little deeper.”

“If they aren’t coming to you, then you have to go to them,” declared Gallop. “You

may have to change how deep your fishing. If you’re not getting any action, try a lot of different depths. I have caught flatheads anywhere from 10 to 60 feet of water.”

The B’n’M team likes to change depths 10 feet at a time, going from shallow to deeper. They keep doing it until they find the best bite. They recommend giving a spot about 30 minutes at most. They believe that if there’s a big cat in there, chances are he will take the bait in that amount of time. When the bite is really tough, they spend even less time. If you

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stay longer, they say you are just wasting time.

“When we first start fishing in the morning I like to fish anywhere from 15 to 40 feet deep,” instructed Pounders. “Later in the day, if the sun is bright, we fish 30 to 50 feet. We always save deep holes for later in the day. If it is overcast or raining, then all spots and depths are on table.”

## Bait

Deciding on what bait to use will depend on the location. Whatever is natural to the area should be high on the list. The Alabama River has a good population of shad and that is Pounder’s and Gallup’s choice.

“Being a flathead fisherman, I usually try to catch some shad everywhere I go,” instructed Pounders.

They have perfected a team approach to catching shad. Gallop runs the boat forward while Pounders “speed casts” a net, usually in a body of water that ends back off the river. It is an unbelievable cast net technique that allows them to push bait to the back of a slough with rapid fire casts. Once the back of the slough is reached a good number of shad can be netted together.

They also have a well aerated tank on board to be sure the shad stay lively.

***“... getting trophy cat bites in mediocre spots.”***

## Fighting Flatheads

“Although they can be very aggressive when they first hit, blues tend to be more short-winded, offered Gallop. “I’m not saying the blues don’t fight hard, but it’s kind of like they give up at times. Flatheads have a steady pull about them the whole time. After you hook into them they are steadily trying to go back to the bottom or to some nearby cover or structure. They will definitely test you, especially if they are able to make it back to the tree or ledge. At times I have had to untie from the bank and actually go to whatever I was hung in to get the fish out.”

“We are usually fishing trees,” added Pounders. “Our first thought is to get them out as fast as possible for the first 5 to 8 feet of reeling. After that the key is keeping pressure on the fish, but not jerking or fighting him too hard. Anglers should use steady pressure and definitely use your drag.”

“We set the drag at around 5 pounds, but also work the spool with our fingers to apply more drag if needed. The key is not to allow the fish to rip the hook out of his mouth by you having to much pressure when the fish makes a sudden move or dive.

“It is also very important to keep its tail from hitting the line,” continued Pounders. “Tail slapping is the best way for them to attack the line and possible dislodge that hook. Tail slapping can’t always be prevented but by keeping good pressure and the rod tip high it gives you the best chance. Finally, having a partner to shuffle rods around and dipping the fish is not to be underestimated.”

## First Time Anglers

Pounders and Gallop have some advice for anglers new to the flathead game. They have invested plenty of time into learning what they share and serious flathead anglers would be wise to listen.

“First, find some heavy structure and fish directly in the middle of it,” advised Pounders. “Don’t worry about getting hung, just worry about what may bite. Second, use a good 7/0 to 10/0 hook so you can have plenty of room for bait on it and have enough hook left to stick the fish. Third, don’t spend all dang day in just a few spots.”

“Putting in time on the water and doing you home work is going to pay off,” added Gallup. “You have to get out there for a couple of hours and just use your eyes and your sonar to look around. Make sure you are fishing the best holes on the stretch of river that you are fishing. That is necessary requirement for fishing any new location.”

Pounders and Gallop are sponsored by B’n’M Poles, Driftmaster Rod Holders, Vicious Fishing, Betts Nets, Team Catfish/TTI Blakemore, Bottom Dwellers Tackle, Harvest

Clean Soap, Krusher Marine Products and Barnes Marine.

**Epilogue:** There is a lot more to do in Prattville than fish for crappie. Old Town Prattville is full of history. It is known as being one of the first planned communities in Alabama. The architecture features graceful arches, soaring ceilings and vast open spaces. It is hard to miss the interesting brick and stonework that characterize the buildings, all set in a picturesque site alongside Autauga Creek.

Other interesting attractions include the Capital Hill Golf Course at Prattville/Montgomery. Capital Hill was designed by Robert Trent Jones, arguably the premier golf course architect in the world, as part of the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail that currently consist of 468 championship holes at eleven sites it the state of Alabama. Capital Hill is a breathtakingly beautiful course and currently host to an event on the LPGA Tour.

The Alabama Wildlife Federation operates a unique and amazing educational facility where kids and adults can learn about Alabama's vast natural resources. Visitors can explore 5 miles of trails with experienced ANC naturalists. There are ponds, creeks and woods to investigate. Visitors can picnic on the grounds and check out the educational movies in the hands-on Discovery Hall.

The area just off Interstate 65 is full of shopping, eating and lodging opportunities. We stayed at the Hampton Inn & Suites, just a stone's throw from the Interstate; the Hampton offers clean and comfortable rooms, great Wi-Fi, and efficient workspace in every room. If you prefer you can use their computers and printers in the Business Center and get your daily exercise in the handy workout room. I like to eat a good breakfast before fishing and the free hot breakfast was excellent every morning. They describe their facility as "Small town charm meets big city convenience." It couldn't be said any better!



Fresh live shad, netted the same day as the fishing is a favorite bait for flatheads.

Visitors to the area can fish for crappie, catfish, or other species. They can play golf, engage in other water based activities or simply enjoy a restful family vacation from a base camp in Prattville, AL. It is definitely a location to put on your bucket list of places to visit.

For more area information visit the Prattville and Elmore County websites at <http://www.prattvilleal.gov/visitors/attractions.html>, and <http://www.visitelmoreco.com/index.aspx>.



- Ron Presley

# FLATHEADS OF THE WEST

by Eddie White

## Monsters of logs and ledges



**F**rom California to Arizona, all the way up to Idaho, flathead fisherman test their fishing skills on the wily flathead. These western catfish anglers use many different tactics and techniques to seek out these monsters of the logs and ledges.

With the availability and option of using live baits, California and Arizona anglers have an advantage over those in the northern state

Kris Joshu caught this trophy flathead in Arizona while anchor suspending. The method is similar to spot-locking over fish, but uses an actual anchor.

of Idaho. Live bait is not allowed in Idaho. However, anglers in all three states have

plenty of opportunities for flathead success.

Studies of tagged flatheads in Arizona lakes have shown that a majority of the cats return to their initial tagging location. These flathead catfish generally do not migrate, but rather they move out of their main staging area to eat, and move back shortly.

All catfish, whether flats, channels, or blues will have a typical water temperature or seasonally established pattern. While you can fish for them year round in the southern states, waters like the Snake River eventually freeze or become very cold. These colder temperatures trigger lethargic behavior and catching these beasts can be a chore.

The winter thaw starts a spawn migration and heavy feeding. These western rivers tend to exhibit a pattern of three locations through the migration cycle. Cats will move from winter holes, to spawning grounds, and finally into summer haunts. Then, season by season the pattern repeats itself.

**Arizona**

Several lakes and reservoirs, as well as parts of the Colorado River, hold good populations of catfish. Most anglers will look for the night bite, though some prefer the challenge of fishing during the day.

Hand sized bluegills, and carp up to a pound, dominate the live bait scene. They are readily available in most locations. However, state law does not allow transport of bait from one body of water to another, so anglers must go out and catch bait prior to fishing.

There are many lakes and rivers in the area that hold flatties, but ten of the best are: Roosevelt, Apache, Canyon, Saguaro, Horseshoe, Bartlett, Pleasant, and Patagonia along with the Verde and Salt River.

The desert lakes are dominated by rocks and boulders, making it a bit more of a chore than the sit-cast-wait method that many anglers prefer. The anglers in these areas have perfected their own unique ways to be successful.

One of the most common techniques among boat anglers in the southwest is anchoring and suspending off the side of the boat. By keeping the rig just off the bottom of the rocky structure, anglers can avoid constant



**Lisa Ritter hoists an impressive Idaho flathead. Despite not being able to use live bait, Idaho anglers are still able to land impressive flatheads.**

snagging. A basic Carolina rig with live bait seems to be the favorite presentation for this style of fishing.

Many Arizona anglers utilize the balloon rig, from both boat and shore. Another group of anglers are combining this rig with kayak fishing. While often a lot of work, kayak fishing is gaining popularity and offers a great way to put the bait of choice in the face of an aggressive fish.

Most anglers use the same approach in the river as in the lakes, as rocks are still a dominating factor. Some anglers take a different approach. One I was not personally familiar with covers a lot of water and finds hard hitting, active fish.

Because flatheads are known for their aggressive nature, these shore anglers are using a split shot rig, with a Comal or poly





ball float on a leader line. They add an 8/0- to 10/0-hook, baited with the live bait of choice. Just enough weight to keep the rig right above the river bottom will help prevent snagging and produce a more natural action and appearance.

Anglers cast up to 30 times on the same location. If a flattie is not found they move on and repeat the process at a new location. Using this approach, rather than sit and wait, the angler benefits from the aggression of the fish and the natural presentation. Fresh-dead bait appears more lively and desirable to hungry fish.

## Idaho

Now, here is a new one for you hard core flathead anglers. NO live bait in Idaho.

Morgan Blake has put himself on the map with his consistency in catching flatheads upwards of 60 pounds in the California river systems.

The Snake River runs north through Idaho and Oregon before finding its way to the bordering state of Washington. Without the use of live bait, Idaho anglers have it a little tougher, but still seem to figure out ways to be successful.

After lengthy talks with local anglers I've found that a lot of different methods are used to chase the beasts of the deep. While some anglers key in on standard methods, others are adaptable and change it up.

All of us have caught a flathead while



fishing for other species. Knowing that, Idaho anglers have used that knowledge to their advantage and have modified other fishing techniques to target flatheads.

Rat-L-Traps have become a go-to hard bait for some. Anglers use slow trolling and rip jigging techniques, while staying on a slow downstream move to cover water.

Deep diving crank baits have also found their way into many tackle boxes. Anglers run them up current, similar to trolling for any type of fish on a river. The fish seem to come few and far between, but when they hit, they hit hard.

Spin & Glows, up to 00 size, tipped with whole dead bait fish, imitates the live pattern and movement that will attract a large flatty. Comal floats with rattle beads will also sway in the current creating a live bait style imitation.

Baits of choice change based on what is running at the time. Suckers can be good in the spring, crappie and bluegill in the summer. No one focuses on any one bait in particular, as the runs change with the rise and fall of water level and temperature changes. With the abundance of a certain run, flatheads will key in on that specific species. So, even though anglers cannot use those baits alive, it pays to identify what the current forage may be.

## California

While flathead waters are as sparse in California as they are in Idaho, large fish up to 60 pounds can be found. The two main waterways are the Colorado River and the Alamo River. The Alamo has more of a congregated area due to irrigation diversion dams that stop the fish from moving up or down river. Often no wider than a two-lane highway, the ease of access on the Alamo outweighs the Colorado.

Winding its way through the desserts of California, the Colorado is taken over by fields of tules overgrowth. Tules are a large bulrush that is abundant in marshy areas of California. Since location is a big part of a successful day of fishing boat anglers gain an advantage over shore bound anglers because of the tules. Most pleasure anglers do not want to put in that

extra work, preferring instead to pull up and fish. Putting forth that little bit of extra effort has paid off huge for anglers that are willing to travel the distance and put in the time.

***“NO live bait in Idaho”***

A simple Carolina rig works well in the tules. Bait choices match that of Arizona. Carp, live bluegills, and surprisingly tilapia are favorites. Tilapia, not typically thought of as a fresh water fish, are readily available in most areas. Bait cannot be transported live from the Colorado River, so catching bait prior to fishing is essential. Once the bait is secured, the search for the BIG yellows of the tules is on.

Tules, tules, and more tules. Anglers do not seek the flatties in the main channel as a first choice. The abundance of tules, on shore and in the main body of water, provide prime locations for flatheads to hide during the day.

Flatheads also use the tules as highways which are followed as feeding paths. These highways are also found through the root ball systems of this overgrowth.

Finding a tule highway through the main channel and into the backwaters is where most flathead anglers find the best success. Often they will be fishing as shallow as 4 feet, especially in the evening hours when the flats come out of their haunts and go on the feed. Evenings are also when bait fish move into the tules to prevent these predators from finding them.

The overgrowth and root balls of the tules also challenge anglers after hook up. As fast as a fish is hooked, it can also be lost. Putting the brakes on these giants within seconds of a hook set, before they reach the tules, is vital and a key component of a successful trip.

Most of the county is unaware of how many opportunities there are available throughout the western states for prime flathead fishing. Now that you know, it may be time to go.



- Eddie White

# Why We Catfish

A Guest Editorial by Eric Carlson

*The tug was the drug*



**T**he truth of the matter is, fishing has saved my life. Most of my childhood was a bit rough. A lot of my friends are dead, in jail, or on the way. But catfishing and fishing in general, big or small, bluegill to catfish, and everything in between has always intrigued me.

My father, grandfather, and great-grandfather all loved to fish. It's probably because of them, I have been fishing since I could walk.

It doesn't matter if its late at night or early morning; spring or fall; hot or cold;

Carlson's enjoyment of catfishing increased when Crystal Mannella became a regular catfishing partner.

Being able to hunt down a big catfish helps me put everything into perspective. Whether there is positive or negative in my life, I am spending time doing something that makes me happy and helps me forget about life's troubles.

Honestly, after catching almost every fish possible, I got to a point where



I recognized that catfish was the biggest baddest freshwater fish I had around me. So, I decided, at a young age, that I was gonna' catch the biggest catfish in my local rivers and lakes.

With that realization, I was hooked. I caught my first near 20-pound flathead before I could drive. It was a positive addiction that grew. All I could think about was catfishing. I began to concentrate on getting more gear and better boats to help

Eric likes to fish for anything, but his passion is catching the big catfish that prowl his local waters.

me catch bigger fish.

The addiction was real. The tug was the drug. I love the habits of the flathead, the way they fight and the way they look. I love the different colors of camouflage, their amazing ability to heal, and how they



# WHY WE CATFISH

breed. Catching them can be so easy and yet so hard. And, when you lose a few giants that felt like 100 pounds, it makes you want to come back and try again. These are all reasons that contribute to why I catfish.

My enjoyment of catfishing grew more when I convinced my girlfriend of almost 19 years, the love of my life, Crystal Mannella, to join me in catfishing. It's been over 10 years now. Instead of one, we have two addicted minds thinking about how to catch catfish. And, it's getting more and more serious everyday. She helps me so much with social media and is my fishing partner too. For that I'm grateful, even if we bicker like a old married couple sometimes.

I decided to do as much as possible to make this hobby my job. I believe in Catch-Photo-Release (CPR) and I want to share that belief with others. As a result, I created Hells Anglers Fishing Club, American Flathead Anglers, and CPR Catfishing N Conservation on Facebook. I want these pages to help promote the sport and teach anglers the importance of CPR. I do the same thing locally when I talk to other anglers.

I also release a lot of giant fish of all kinds. And, I clean up my local waterways almost daily. I also rehab/rehome rescue pets that have been a part of the pet trade and otherwise forgotten like trash.

I saved a baby flathead from death the other night. The fish was less than 12 inches long and had been on a stringer for God knows how long. Crystal and I also

remove jugs, limb lines, or any other way of fishing that's not legal. I figure every little bit helps.

In addition to just liking to fish, I love the camaraderie and sportsmanship that exists in the catfish community. I witnessed more examples of it at the September Mississippi River Monsters Tournament in Memphis.

I was fortunate to represent St. Croix Rods and Glenn and Sandy Flowers in the MRM Angler Round Up. Most of the catfish community is truly like family to me.

It's hard to say, in a short article, but the reasons why I catfish, include the reasons expressed above, but mainly it's being out of the house, off the internet, away from the TV, and enjoying the great outdoors. I think that is what attracts people to fishing. For me it gets much deeper than that. Fishing is a part of who I am.

## Epilogue:

Eric plans to take his passion a step further in 2018. His River Rats Guide Service will become reality. Eric will be the first catfish guide on his local Fox River. He will also do some guide trips at other locations during early spring and late fall for crappie and bass. But during flathead season it will be on the Fox River. Anyone wanting to book a trip can find his River Rats Guide Service page on Facebook.



- Eric Carlson

Practice Catch Photo Release

CPR

It's for the Future

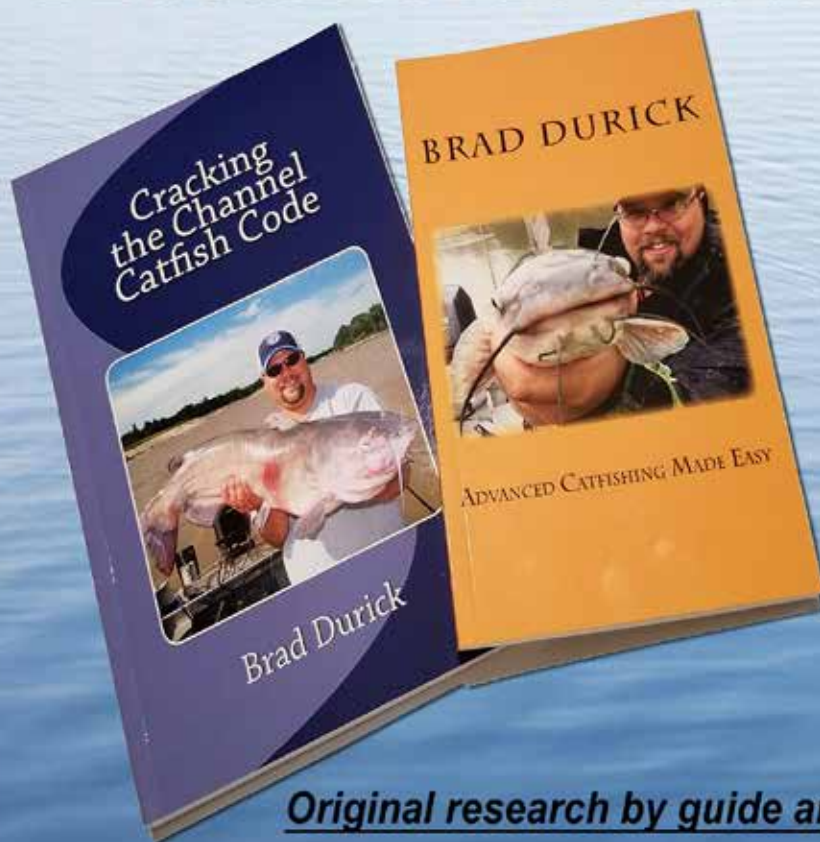
## Why We Catfish Guest Editorial

This column is provided for reader submitted editorials on Why We Catfish. If you have a short story related to why you catfish, you may submit it for consideration and publication in a future issue of CatfishNow. Send submissions of 500 words or less and one or two photos to Ron Presley at [presleyr@bellsouth.net](mailto:presleyr@bellsouth.net).

(Fishermen, check with club/association for exact dates, changes, cancellations and rules.)

JAN	20th	CATFISH MAFIA	LOWER POTOMAC	CLUB
JAN	20th	FISHIN BLUES	ELLSWORTH	SHOOTOUT
JAN	27th	JKV CATFISHING	GREEN RIVER	CLUB
FEB	3rd	CABELA'S KING KAT	TENN/TOM WATERWAY	CLUB
FEB	3rd	SOUTHEASTERN CATFISH CLUB	LAKE WATEREE	CLUB
FEB	10th	WEST TN CATFISH ANGLERS	MEMPHIS	CLUB
FEB	17th	CABELA'S KING KAT	LAKE TAWAKONI	CLUB
FEB	17th	CATFISH MAFIA	LOWER POTOMAC	CLUB
FEB	17th	GET-N-HOOKED	THUNDERBIRD	CLUB
FEB	17th	JKV CATFISHING	CUMBERLAND RIVER	CLUB
FEB	24th	FISHIN BLUES	WAURIKA	CLUB
FEB	24th - 25th	CATFISH CONFERENCE	ELIZABETHTOWN KY	2 DAY EVENT

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***Original research by guide and educator, Captain Brad Durick***

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BIG SIOUX CAT ANGLERS	<a href="#">FACEBOOK</a>
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WHISKY CITY CATFISH CLUB	<a href="#">FACEBOOK</a>
WICKED WHISKER TOURNAMENT TRAIL	<a href="#">FACEBOOK</a>

## DECEMBER 9th

1. Cody Forshee/Andrew Melendy	107.38
2. Rollin Flatties	64.3
3. Catch and Release	51.1
4. Steve Johnson	44.46
5. Suki	41.86

### BIG FISH

1. Cody Forshee/Andrew Melendy	53.74
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## GET-NOHOOKED

SOONER LAKE

## DECEMBER 9th - 10th

1. BLUECAT BANE	130.64
2. TEAM HOOKED	117.52
3. SHOCK & AWE	79.41
4. STUMP JUMPER	68.92
5. HOGAN/LOWRANCE	60.69

### BIG FISH

1. BLUECAT BANE	43.97
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## CENTRAL TEXAS CATFISH TRAIL

LAKE O.H.

## DECEMBER 9th

1. Charlie Hudson/Chris Sisk
2. Austin Pierce/Carson Pierce/Cye Pierce
3. David Magness/Rusty Jackson
4. Doug Jolly/John Howard
5. Jared Roberson/Bobby Chilcutt

## MISSISSIPPI CATFISH TRAIL

MISSISSIPPE RIVER

## DECEMBER 16TH

1. Jason Pope/Bubba Bryant	120.12
2. George Dehner/Petey Borne/James Dehner	97.25
3. Bill O'Beery/Chris Davis/Destiny Davis	80.5
4. George Isley/Claude Finlen	68.74
5. Josh Smith/Holly Highfill	67.05

### BIG FISH

1. Jason Pope/Bubba Bryant	69
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## OLD DOMINION CATFISH CLUB

HOPEWELL MARINA



## CATFISH MAFIA

LOWER POTOMAC

### DECEMBER 16TH

1. Roger Saunder/Glenn Sauder	102.2
2. Robert Hildebrand/Rob Hildebrand	86.2
3. Mark Christman/Dion	76.4
4. Andrew Lentz/Cody	68.8
5. Steve Fraddosio/Chad Shade	58.8

### BIG FISH

1. Roger Saunder/Glenn Sauder	51.8
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**CATFISH NOW!**  
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***Wishing you a Happy New Year and many CPR's***

