

CATFISH NOW!

DIGITAL MAGAZINE

February 2020 - Issue #41



Late Winter Catfish

Features

Going Shallow for Winter Catfish.....4

by Ron Presley

Georgia angler Andy Cagle has caught the fever. Shallow Water Catfish fever that is. After fishing with a friend his whole attitude toward catfishing changed when he discovered the excitement of going shallow for catfish.



Presidents Day Catfish.....14

by Keith "Catfish" Sutton

This holiday weekend in February is a superb time to catch some farm-pond whiskerfish for the dinner table.



Standstill Approach for Cold-Water Cats.....20

by Jeff Samsel

Mid-winter catfishing calls for extra patience and a strategy shift. Cats tend to be concentrated, though, and proper adjustments can produce plenty of reward.



New National Catfishing Association Announced...24

by Ron Presley

On January 9, 2020, at 1:00 pm the formation of the American Catfishing Association was formally announced. This organization holds great promise for the future of recreational catfishing.



Departments

Catfish Basics #081....8

Catfish Basics #082....19

B'n'M How To....9

Catfish Conservation....26

Catfish Gear....10

Catfish Clubs....30

Catfish NOW How To....18

Catfish Calendar....31

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Front Cover:
Zakk Royce is known for
targeting big cats and a lot
of them come in the winter.
He routinely catches winter
blues like this, primarily in
North Carolina.
(Terry Madewell photo)

Catfish Connections

The winter of 2019-2020 can best be described as a roller coaster. The weather patterns changed from warmer than usual temperatures to cold and snowy and back again. This changing weather can confuse the fish and their normal seasonal activities and related fishing patterns. Normally, locating the food source will point to the catfish's locations.

In spite of radical weather swings, using the latest electronics can pinpoint the bait and catfish's locations. Find the catfish's winter-time food source for your local fishing lake or river and the catfish will be somewhere nearby. I like to use my Garmin echoMap's ClearVü, DownVü, and SideVü to locate the schools of bait and then zero in on the catfish with Garmin LiveScope. This technique/process can be employed anywhere and at any time.

The fish are lethargic due to the colder water temperatures but they still must eat to survive. Once found it is all about the barometric pressure, amount of current, and moon phase impacts as to when they will feed. If possible, fish on a falling barometer. The amount of current determines positioning and an increase in current can enhance feeding as will an increasing moon.

Don't give up on catching some trophy, personal best catfish in the winter. Bundle up and have some great fun on a beautiful winter's day in the great outdoors!

God Bless,

Dan Dannenmueller, Publisher



Going Shallow for Winter Catfish

by Ron Presley

Hurry up and wait.



Andy Cagle became a died in the wool shallow water catfisherman after fishing with a friend. Nowadays, if he has any choice at all he is going to be fishing shallow. And it might be any time of the year, day or night.

One of his favorite lakes is the Santee Cooper Lake system in South Carolina. Construction on the lakes began in the late 1930s and was named after its two major tributaries, the Santee and Cooper Rivers. The result is a surface area of 110,000 acres of nooks and crannies, flats and ledges, for anglers to explore. And, for Cagle's needs, plenty of shallow water. Cagle learned his shallow water fishing on Santee Cooper, but he also frequents his home lakes of Jackson, Oconee, and Sinclair, in Georgia, using the same techniques successfully.

Cagle credits his good friend, Monty Hill, for teaching him the tricks of the trade associated with shallow water catfishing. Although he will

Cagle and his fishing partner, Jody Day, caught these blues in 3 feet of water during the 2019 Black's Camp Big Cat Shootout in December. Shallow water cattin' is not just a summertime deal.

fish deep water haunts occasionally, he admits that he would rather be shallow. In a recent interview, he described the trip that turned the tide and lit his passion for going shallow.

"The first time I fished with Monty was August 2011," recalled Cagle. "It turned into a party weekend and we didn't fish much. The next time I came we fished hard! We went over to the hatchery and entered through a little cut in the swamp. There was a cypress tree there and Monty began to set up very near the tree."

"What are you doing," Cagle asked?

"We are going to fish," replied Hill.

"It ain't but 3 feet deep right here," doubted Cagle.



“Well it might be a little too deep,” shot back Hill. “But we are gonna’ try it. Just trust me.”

And so, the quest began. The fishing friends double anchored and set the rods. The next two hours produced Arkansas blues of 42-, 41-, and one just under 40-pounds in a matter of two hours.

“I have been shallow water fishing ever since,” revealed Cagle. “You might have to travel 200 yards through that shallow water stump bed, just bouncing off them stumps. But it’s worth it to go squirrel hunting (the term Cagle and Hill use to refer to their shallow water fishing exploits).”

Cagle reported that they lost a lot of gear and fish in the close quarters of the stump bed but Hill had a simple reply to the dilemma.

“If you ain’t losing equipment you ain’t fishing in the right places,” retorted Hill.

“I especially like to go out at night,” continued Cagle. “I like to anchor down, usually double anchored. I call it my hour of attack. I prefer to be set up on anchor about an hour before the sun goes down or comes up. I will set there

Santee can be a dangerous lake in the wind. The easily spotted power plant can be an indication of lake conditions. Locals say, “When that smoke is blowing horizontal it’s dangerous on the lake.”

for two or three hours afterward. Usually, it is right at sunup and sundown that the fish start moving into that shallow water.”

His standard rig is a Santee drift rig with a 3-ounce disc sinker. He normally rigs with a sinker slide so he can switch easily from a disc sinker to a slinky weight if he wants to go drifting. To avoid the float on the drifting rig from pulling the bait up off the bottom he will clip the sinker slide to the top of the swivel to keep the bait down while on anchor.

Cagle prefers larger cuts of bait to prevent catching the smaller fish. If the bait is very large, he adds a second circle hook to the rig to increase the hookup ratio. Once his rigs are baited, he transitions into what he calls, Military Fishing—hurry up and wait!





“Shallow water catfishing does not always produce quantity, but it does produce quality. As a tournament fisherman that’s what I’m looking for,” said Cagle.

Words of Warning

“You can be riding along out in the middle of the lake and all of a sudden the bottom will come up to three feet deep,” warned Cagle. “So, if you don’t know your way around you can knock the bottom out of your boat. You have to be careful.”

Santee Cooper has a reputation as a hard lake to fish in the wind. Combined with the lakes’ wide-open waters the wind can come up and create a situation that can get dangerous in a hurry. Anglers should favor safety over fishing and avoid the ocean-like waves that Santee Cooper can produce in windy weather. It is not unusual to see boats starting out of the canal only to turn around and return. There is a smokestack that is visible from the water and it should serve as an indicator as to whether to go out or not.

After a double-anchor set, rods are fanned out around the boat and the wait begins. Don’t be surprised if you lose some terminal tackle, so be prepared.

“When the smoke out of that stack at the powerplant is blowing sideways its best not to go out on the lake,” Cagle warned. “At least not without a capable boat and an experienced captain to handle it. It can be very dangerous, especially for newcomers to the lake.”

Cagle ended with a statement about the reality of fishing and when to fish where.

“We all have our favorite lake, favorite spots in each lake, and favorite times to fish

“...it might be a little too deep...”

those spots,” concluded Cagle. “It’s the kind of things you learn by being on the water.”

Where to Stay

There are lots of lodging possibilities on Santee Cooper. Within just a few miles of each other and with easy access to the diversion canal and both lakes, are Hills Landing, Canal Lakes, and Black’s Camp and Restaurant. Most anglers have their own preferences and reasons for staying at their favorite. Cagle and Hill both choose Hills Landing. Other anglers choose the Canal Lakes site or one of many other fish camps on the lake.

Personally, I got started visiting the area at a writer’s camp that was conducted at Black’s Camp and have been going back for years. Like many of the camps, Black’s features fishing guides for about any species of fish you want, including catfish. There is a full-service onsite restaurant, Sunday buffets and a breakfast bar for a quick start in the morning. A campground with RV hookups is available as well as motel lodging and various cabin possibilities.

Black’s has about anything you need from gasoline to split shot. It is a full-service resort. Their outstanding service and friendly personnel have kept me coming back year after year.

Discovering Shallow Water Fishing

Monty Hill discovered shallow water cattin’ through observation and chance. As the story goes, Hill was watching bow fishermen targeting and successfully shooting big blue cats in shallow water. The bow fishermen were floating around in two or three feet of water using powerful lights to shoot blues up to 50 pounds or so. With that experience, he wondered if they can shoot them why couldn’t he catch them? So, he started fishing shallow and developed it into a successful technique.

Hill adds to the story by explaining that when the wind makes fishing tough on the main lake the angler’s only choice may be to tuck into the bank somewhere out of the wind. What Hill discovered and taught other anglers like Cagle is that the shallow waters are productive and offer more than a good alternative—they offer a good possibility.



- Ron Presley



Catfish Basics #081

Bait Right – Keith Parks

Bait is everything when it comes to catfishing but it goes a bit further than just having good bait. No matter what you use for bait NEVER fill the hook gap completely. You must always match your bait and hook so that you leave room for the fish to become hooked as he takes the bait.

Also, you should watch for scales on the hook. When you place a scaled cut bait on the hook it often penetrates the scales and that can become a deterrent to hooking up. One small scale on the point of your hook could be the difference between fishing and catching.

If you bait right and put the time in on the water to learn the reservoir or river you are fishing you will do better. Also, keep your tackle and boat in order (that's a tough one for me) and most importantly enjoy your time fishing with friends and family.

As I always say, if you're not fishin' you're not catchin'.

Note: Keith Parks is an avid catfisherman and guide on Lake Tawakoni Texas. He can be reached through his website, [Messin' With The Fish Guide Service](http://www.messinwiththefish.com).





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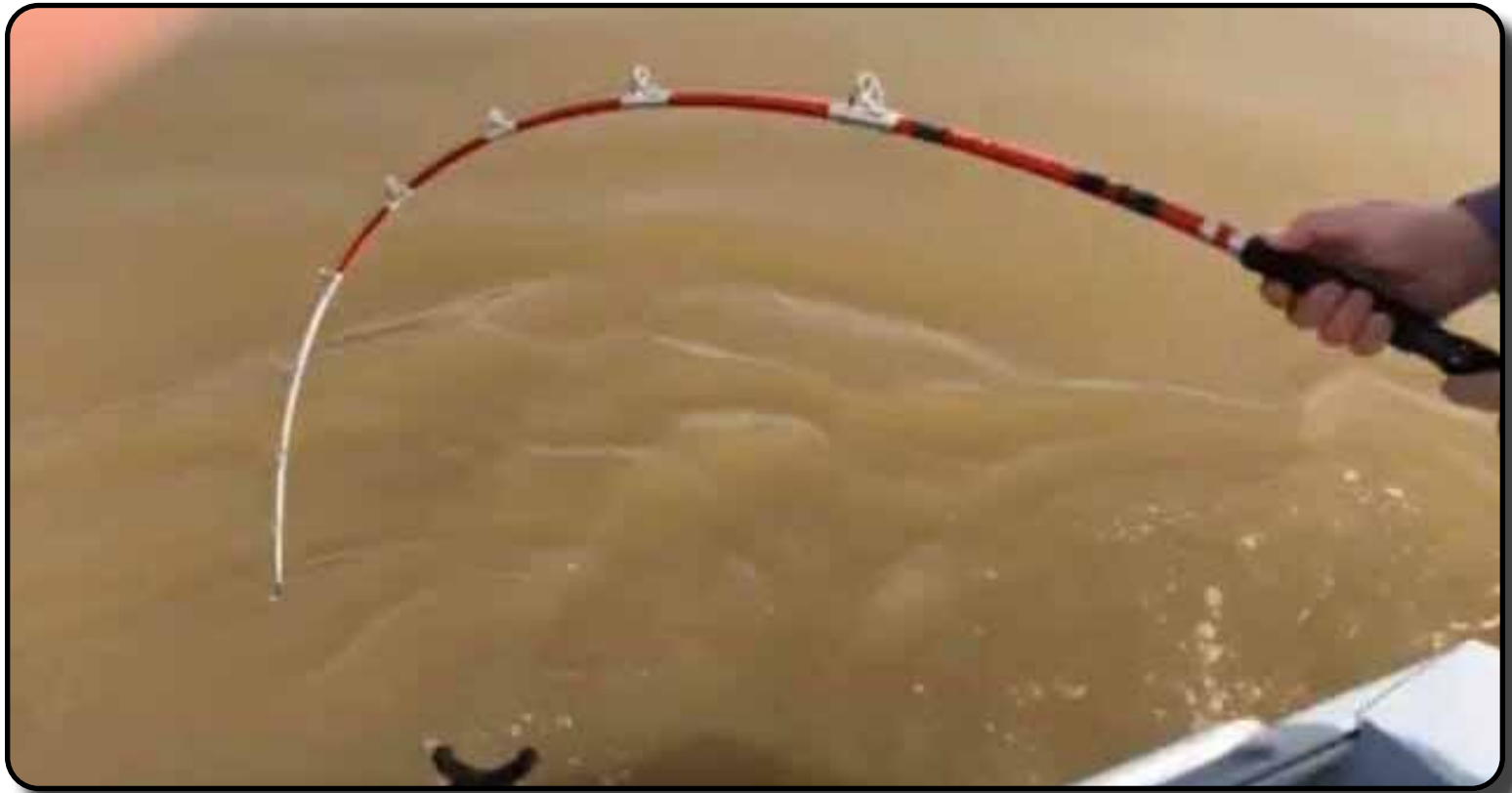
CATFISH GEAR

Catfish Gear #025 — Angler Driven Rods and Accessories – B'n'M Poles



B'n'M knows rods. They should, since they have been building them for years, first in the crappie market and now for catfishing. The design staff keeps current with what anglers want by communicating with a carefully developed pro-staff who advises the company on how to build rods that help

Rodney Crimm prepares a cut bait to put on one of his favorite Silver Cat Elite rods. He says it is the perfect rod for suspend or anchor fishing from a Driftmaster Rod Holder.



everyday catfishermen catch more catfish.

The original Silver Cat is still available and in widespread use in spinning and casting models. The two-piece construction remains popular among anglers that want to take their rods down for storage. These 100 percent fiberglass rods provide sensitivity for bite detection and a glow in the dark tip to help see those night bites. They are built with ceramic insert guides and are designed for 15- to 30-pound line.

The Silver Cat Magnum is built on a 90% carbon, 10% fiberglass blend to provide sensitivity and extra backbone for trophy catfish anglers. The magnum series retains the two-piece construction and ceramic insert guides for smooth line flow. They come in a 10-foot model for when those longer casts are needed.

As bumping became a favorite method of catching big cats by river fishermen, B'n'M went to the pro-staff for advice on what kind of rod was needed. The result is the Silver Cat Magnum Pro-Staff Bumping Rod. There is only one model and that's all you need. It went through several versions in the developmental stage and the result is a top-

David Magness (Cat'n Aroun' Guide Service) knows the strength of the Silver Cat Elite. He got a pic of this one hooked up to a 56-pound Mississippi River Blue.

notch bumping rod used by many top pros. This rod has a stiffer blank than the original and is fitted with stainless steel guides and tip. It is built with sensitivity in mind and designed to battle the swifter current and those big catfish that bumping produces.

Michael Haney and Rodney Crimm are long-time fans of B'n'M Rods. They enjoy fun fishing with their B'n'M rods but they also use them on the tournament trail. They added the new Silver Cat Elite to their arsenal of rods.

"One of the first features in the Elite that appealed to me was the new textured foam grip," Crimm said. "It still gives you some grip when you have fast action and haven't had time to get all the slime off your hands from the previous fish."

Night fishing adds a few more challenges for the angler. Being a team that enjoys fishing at night, Crimm and Haney praise the Elite here too.



"The next improvement, in my opinion, was the addition of the white tip," added Crimm. "That white tip really helps to detect a bite in low light or in nighttime conditions. We do a fair amount of night fishing and have thoroughly enjoyed this change."

Saving the best for last, Crimm noted the improved blank with a faster action tip combined with plenty of backbone.

"For me the best improvement is the faster action tip," concluded Crimm. "I have caught several fish on it in mid to upper 40-pound range. The rod delivers plenty of strength for big fish but the fast action tip seems to take some of the pressure off my arms and back during the fight. I can definitely say the Silver Cat Elite has quickly become the rod I place my prime pieces of bait on hoping for that big bite!"

The Silver Cat Elite features an E-glass composite blank and a non-parabolic action for the strength and durability needed for catching big cats. It has a double-nut locking reel seat, Hi-vis tip, and a high-quality X-Grip handle that looks good and provides extra grip.

Where ever fishing takes you, B'n'M has been there. For information on B'n'M Catfish Tackle visit the website at www.bnmpoles.com or call at 1-800-647-6363. How-to videos and how-to articles are available on their website where you can download a current catalog that includes the complete selection of products. Remember, they also offer replacement parts, just give them a call.

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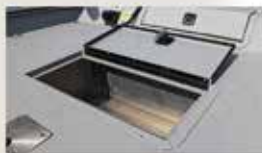
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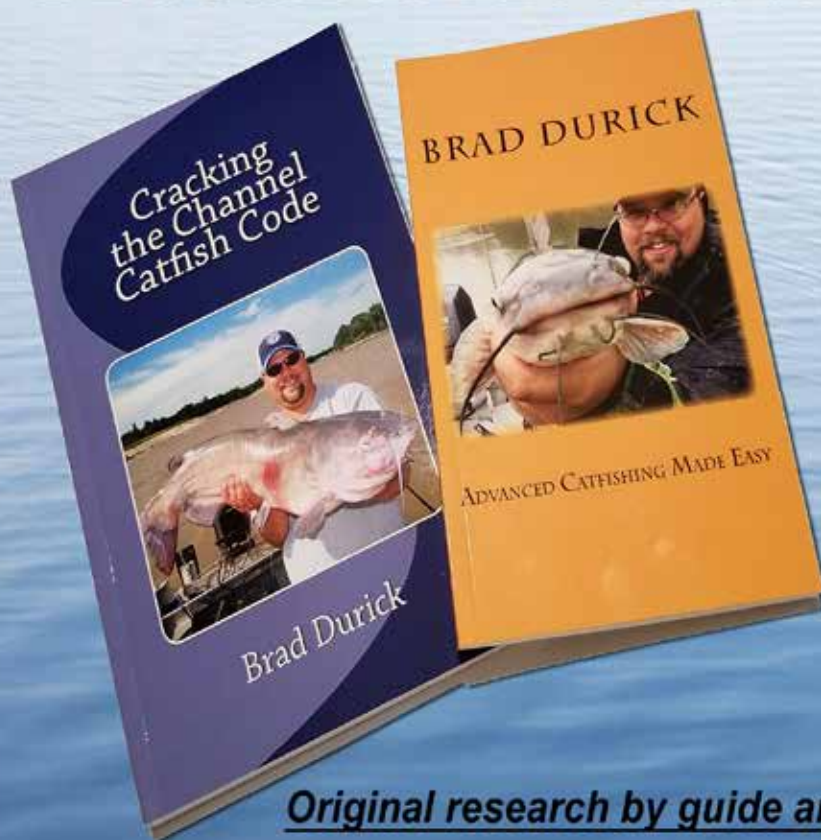
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Presidents Day Catfish

by Keith "Catfish" Sutton

Don't overlook this mid-February holiday as a great time to get outdoors and catch some catfish to eat.



Want to catch a mess of good-eating catfish for your next fish fry? Load up your tackle and head for the nearest farm pond during the Presidents Day holiday weekend, February 15-17, 2020.

A friend and I have been doing this for years. A pond near his home holds scores of 1- to 5-pound channel cats. During February, they stack up like cordwood in the deepest water, making them easy to find and catch.

Some might think it's futile to fish for farm-pond catfish in winter, but Alex Hinson of Paron, Arkansas shows what often results after just a few minutes of fishing on a cold February day.

Having an extra day off work allows us time to catch dozens. Some we keep to eat. Some we release. Always we have fun. Here's how



we do it.

The first order of business is a trip to our local grocery store where we buy fresh, not frozen, chicken livers, the cheapest and best channel-cat bait you can find. On a typical outing, each of us will use a pound or more. Five bucks will buy plenty, which we store in a cooler on ice. You can keep the liver in the tub provided by the store or in a zip-seal plastic freezer bag.

When we reach the pond, we find a comfortable sitting spot on shore adjacent to the deepest water, which is usually near the levee or dam. Cold water temperatures this time of year push catfish into the depths, so placing your bait in the deepest hole is important. If you don't know where that hole is, take time to ask the pond owner when obtaining permission to fish. He or she will undoubtedly be able to point you in the right direction.

A simple fishing rig works great. Place a 1/2-ounce egg sinker on your main line and

Fresh bloody chicken liver attracts cold-water channel cats and bullheads better than almost any bait.

tie a barrel swivel at the line's end. Tie a 2-foot-long leader to the swivel's other eye. To the end of that, tie a snap swivel. Run the eye of a 3/0 treble hook through a piece of liver and snap it onto the swivel. Or, if you anticipate releasing some of the fish you catch, use a similar-sized J-hook instead of the treble, and run it back and forth through the toughest parts of the bait several times.

A 7- to 8-foot, medium-action spinning combo spooled with 8- to 10-pound-test mono works great for lob-casting the liver. If you put too much "oomph" into your cast, the liver will fly off. But if you side-arm it with an easy throw, the bait will stay on and sink to the bottom where hungry cats lurk.

You may be tempted to use frozen liver





to prevent fly-offs, but I've learned during years of fishing this way that fresh chicken liver exudes more of the tempting proteins catfish like, creating a blood trail that leads fish right to your fishing rig. Frozen will work in a pinch, but not nearly as well as fresh.

Once we've started fishing, my friend and I expect almost immediate action. Winter pond cats typically are ravenous and ready to eat, so if we haven't had a bite within five minutes, we know we missed the mark. This calls for another cast to another spot, but always to deep water. We'll keep changing our target area until we get the results we desire.

If necessary, we'll sometimes shift our activity to the pond owner's johnboat, which is always there for guests to use. Paddling the boat out onto the water allows us to fish vertically so we can easily detect even

Bullheads, like channel cats, often are stocked in ponds and provide great winter action for the catfish fan.

the lightest-biting fish. The bait is lowered straight down into the hole, and when it reaches the bottom, we turn the reel handle a few cranks so the liver is a foot or so above the substrate where cats can better detect it. When bank fishing, adding a small bobber on the line between our hook and sinker accomplishes the same thing.

If we hit the strike zone and the cats are hungry (they usually are), we'll be reeling one in soon after the liver reaches the bottom. When that one's unhooked, we place our enticement in the same spot and repeat. It's not unusual to catch two to three dozen

hard-fighting, cold-as-ice channel cats from a single wintering hole. And coming from that frigid water makes them taste extra delicious.

“Winter pond cats typically are ravenous and ready to eat ...”

Fortunately for us, the ponds we fish also have healthy populations of smaller bullhead catfish, too. Bigger specimens have no trouble swallowing the baits intended for channel cats, but if we decide we'd like to catch more of the little ones to eat, we may downsize our tackle and target these bantam brawlers specifically. Chicken liver entices bullheads just like channel cats, but you'll often hook more of these diminutive fish if you use smaller pieces on smaller hooks and line. An ultralight spinning outfit spooled with 4- to 6-pound-test mono and rigged with a size 6 or 8 long-shanked cricket hook beneath a split shot works wonderfully.

Will you have some time off work during this year's Presidents Day holiday? If so, follow our lead and head to the nearest farm pond for some great winter catfishing action. You'll be glad you did.



- Keith Sutton

Arkansas-Style Fried Catfish

Looking for a great way to cook those winter catfish you caught? Use this tried-and-true recipe that gives mild-tasting catfish a little extra twang!

2 pounds catfish steaks and/or fillets
 1 (3-oz.) bottle Louisiana hot sauce
 4 cups milk
 1 cups yellow cornmeal
 1/3 cup flour
 1 tablespoon salt
 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
 Peanut oil

Marinate catfish 1 to 2 hours in a mixture of hot sauce and milk. Remove fish and drain.

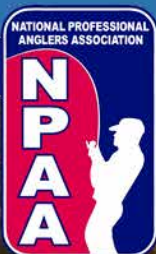
Combine the dry ingredients in a large plastic bag. Add the fish a little at a time and shake to coat.

Cook the fish in 2 inches of peanut oil in a deep fryer heated to 365 degrees. Fry until the thickest part of the fish flakes easily with a fork, about 5 to 6 minutes. Remove and drain on paper towels. Repeat with remaining fish. Serves 4-5.





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Catfish Basics #082

Be Humble – Joe Ludtke Tangling with Catfish

Success is so much fun and can be so addicting! Whether the success that we are experiencing is in our fishing, sports, our careers or our relationships, success doesn't always last forever. It is easy to become a little too proud of ourselves and our accomplishments when times are good. We need to enjoy our success but remain humble.

We love the days when no matter what we throw at the fish we cannot keep them off our hooks. We can begin to fool ourselves and think—man we've got this figured out. We go home and brag to our friends and share our success on social media sites.

The next day we take one of our friends out to show them what a great fisherman we are and guess what? We do not catch a fish all day. This is what I love about fishing, once you think you know it all and are pretty good, fishing will humble you!

Unless you are Daryl and Jason Masingale it seems, success in fishing will most likely happen in small doses. You may go on a hot streak for a month, a couple of months or even a year, however, do not let your success go to your head.

Never be too cool to talk to the new guy or new team to help them get better. There is nothing more rewarding than helping someone out with a couple of tips and then see the joy on their faces as they experience success!

My wish for all of us in 2020 is that the successful days on the water are more fruitful than the days that we are humbled!



Standstill Approach for Cold-Water Cats

by Jeff Samsel

Don't stop fishing. Just stop moving when you fish.

“I can summarize that in one sentence,” Brian Barton replied when asked about his cold-water approach to catfishing. “When the water temperature reaches 45 degrees, you are in anchor mode.”

Barton (brianbartonoutdoors.com, 256-412-0969), a veteran guide on Alabama's Wilson Lake, uses a mobile approach for most of his catfishing by drifting or slow trolling to find the most active cats. When water temperatures drop into the upper 40s early in the winter, he slows his boat to .2 or .3 miles per hour. When it reaches 45, he slams on the brakes. The catfish will still feed. In fact, fishing action can be outstanding. They become less active overall, though, so a stationary approach produces the best fishing. Let's look more closely at the strategies Barton employs.

Set Up Shop

Because Barton's mid-winter approach is stationary, and because catfish tend to congregate during the winter, setting up in a good spot is critical. Therefore, he spends extra time searching with his sonar, seeking big concentrations of cats. Prime mid-winter areas virtually always offer plenty of woody cover. On Wilson Lake, that means submerged standing timber, often in 70 or 80 feet. On other waters, it might mean fishing around the ends of large laydowns that fall into deeper water.

“Wood is the key during winter,” Barton said.

Assuming at least a bit of current, which is the norm on all the Tennessee River impoundments, Barton uses Spot-Lock on his trolling motor to hold the boat upstream of trees and the best concentration of fish. He then puts out a spread of lines, casting two lines off the back of the boat and two off each side to cover a broad area.

“...when that happens, you want to be on a big school”

If the current allows, Barton uses weightless rigs for the most natural presentation, and he has found that to make a huge difference in his success rate. He fishes with cut bait on 7/O or 10/O Daiichi Circle Hooks, with 80-pound braid as his main line and a 24-inch 50- or 60-pound mono leader. He uses baitcasting gear, with medium heavy rods.

Wait and Wait Some More

Waiting might not sound like much of a catfishing strategy, but when the water turns cold, it is a critical element that must be intentionally heeded. Barton has



learned through years of record keeping that cold-water cats feed in bursts. He has often sat in a spot, knowing his baits were among plenty of catfish, and had zero action for a very long time before the fish suddenly turned on and fed well for quite a while, with absolutely no conditional changes.

"There is a time when those fish will feed best, so when that happens, you want to be on a big school," Barton said.

He'll commonly look at multiple areas that are likely to hold fish before starting, but once he's in place, if he has marked plenty of fish, he'll stay in place and wait for the catfish to bite.

Barton believes the feeding periods are

When water temperatures dip below 45 degrees, Wilson Lake guide Brian Barton abandons his normal mobile catfishing strategies in exchange for a stationary approach. Photo courtesy of Brian Barton.

moon related, but he has not found one table that consistently pinpoints when the best action will occur. He simply knows from experience that fish not biting does not mean those fish will not bite or that it is time to move. Therefore, he waits and waits some more!





Downsize

One of Barton's most basic cold-water adjustments is to universally downsize baits. He uses the same cut skipjack (clear first choice, when available) or gizzard shad as he does at other times. He simply cuts it into smaller pieces, because experience has taught him that mid-winter catfish will much more readily take a smaller piece of bait.

"Of course, it depends on the size of catfish I'm targeting," Barton said.

If he is after trophy fish, instead of the normal 4- to 6-inch strip, he'll use a piece

Two keys for Brian Barton during mid-winter are downsizing baits and waiting out the catfish when he knows his baits are around plenty of fish. Photo courtesy of Brian Barton.

that is about two fingers wide. If fast action is the main attraction, he'll use a piece that's golf ball sized or smaller.

Watch for Dead Shad

If the water temperature fall dips

beneath about 40 degrees in waters where threadfin shad are plentiful, a shad kill sometimes occurs. When that happens, the fishing can be exceptional for a few days, Barton said. When thousands of shad minnows, which are 2 to 4 inches long, suddenly become readily available, fish go into glutton mode. If you don't initially notice the dying or dead shad along a lake's edge's, gulls and other birds feasting on the same massive buffet will likely clue you in on what is happening.

A shad kill is the lone occurrence that causes Barton to stray from cut skipjack or gizzard shad as bait. In this situation he wants to give fish what they are keyed in on, so he'll find an area where freshly dead shad are gathered and scoop up as many as possible. He then baits each hook with four to six whole shad.

Threadfin shad mostly stay shallow at that time, so shad kills commonly occur next to or near the bank. However, Barton has found that when he can present the same baits around the deep cover where the catfish congregate during the day, they can't resist biting. The most productive holes, not surprisingly, tend to be close to shad kill concentrations.

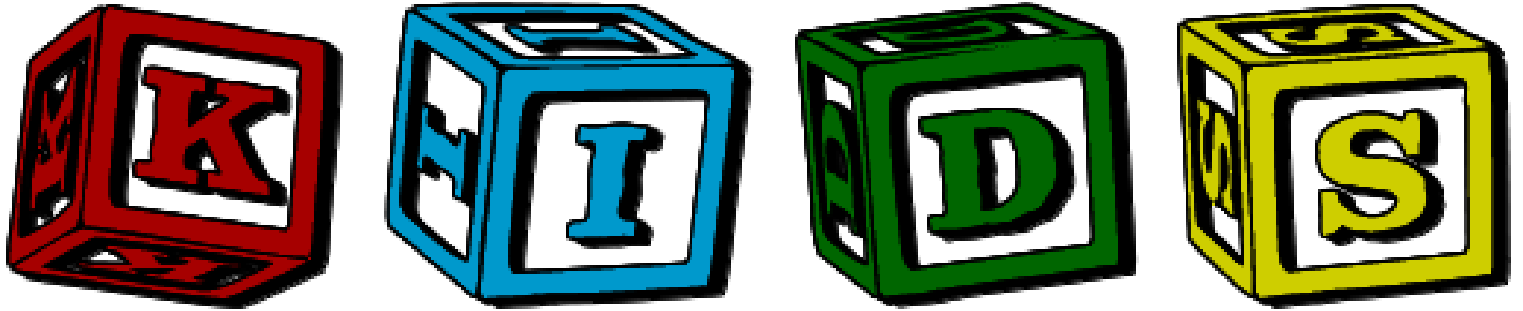
With or without a shad kill, winter catfishing can be outstanding, as long as you're willing to adjust strategies for the water temperature.



- Jeff Samsel



CATFISH



by Ron Presley

Kudos to Go Fish Georgia: It's never too early to start fishing.

Toddlers are introduced to the great outdoors at Go Fish Georgia. Parents, grandparents, and toddlers are welcomed each month to an educational program that explores different topics each month. Their programs typically include a brief lesson, sing-along songs, storytime, animal encounters, hands-on activities, and crafts. It is a perfect example of the old saying, "It's never too early to start."

By targeting kids at the youngest ages, the program is sure to develop a connection between toddlers and the great outdoors. This program is designed for ages 2 to 4, but siblings are welcome to attend. There are modest fees for participation but well worth the cost. View the schedule of upcoming events and costs by clicking here.

Remember that space is limited and pre-registration is required. To register for this program, please visit their page at <https://gofisheducationcenter.com/calendar-gfec>. Choose the program you are interested in on the calendar and click on it to register. Siblings of toddlers are welcome to attend. Those under the age of one or over the age of four do not need to register.

CatfishNOW applauds Georgia Go Fish Educational Center for introducing the great outdoors to kids. It is a stepping stone to building a relationship with nature that hopefully grows stronger as they get older.



"...a stepping stone to building a relationship with nature..."

The following programs are already scheduled for 2020:

January 24, 2020 – Under the Sea
 February 28, 2020 – Animal Actions
 March 27, 2020 – Weather and Water
 April 24, 2020 – Terrific Turtles
 May 22, 2020 – Fish Senses

If you have any questions about the program or registration, you can e-mail them at gofisheducationcenter@gmail.com.



- Ron Presley

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CATFISH CONSERVATION

Trophy Catfish for the Future

by Ron Presley

CatMasters Texoma planned well for fish care.

As the sport of catfishing grows and larger tournaments become the norm more and more attention needs to be given to the details of taking care of the fish. The Catmasters Lake Texoma tournament was supported by SeaArk Boats and B'n'M Poles, two companies that strongly support the catfish industry. The January 24-25, 2020 event was the first of its kind in the Texoma area. The organizers approached it with one goal in mind—conservation.

The Catmasters organization has been producing big tournaments for several years and conservation efforts have always been at the forefront of their plans. Nevertheless, at Texoma, they wanted to go that extra mile.

“We wanted to ensure that our first time at Texoma left an educational footprint,” stated tournament co-director, Bryan St. Ama. “We wanted first-time spectators and anglers to be fully aware of this growing sport and our dedication to the catfish species.”

It is unlikely that those first-time spectators and anglers he mentions fully understand the importance of fish care when it comes to tournaments. So, from the first stages of planning the Catmasters were building fish care into their weigh-in strategy.

That strategy started with the rules. A maximum of three fish per boat was allowed at the weigh-in. Two fish over 30 inches and one under 30 inches. This immediately cut down on the number of fish to be handled and contributed to a faster weigh-in.

They also had a livewell requirement of a single 50-gallon tank or two 40-gallon tanks minimum. The tanks were required to



A 1000-gallon nursery tank was located near the weigh-in, inside the convention center.

have adequate aeration and be capable of freshwater recirculation. The tournament director had the final call on all livewells with the right to remove a team from the tournament

if specifications were not met.

"Meticulous planning resulted in physical equipment to care for the fish at the weigh-in," reported St. Ama. "CatMasters Texoma was equipped with three quick-release tank trailers and a custom-built 1000-gallon nursery tank inside the convention center."

Additionally, Biologists were available to conduct on-site monitoring of a couple of catfish that displayed sluggish and stressed behavior. These fish were held for 24 hours in the nursery tank after which they were fully active and released.

"By tournament day two the amount of praise we were receiving from biologists, spectators, and anglers alike was encouraging," continued St. Ama. "The level of catfish care our CatMasters team had displayed had achieved its intent; change catfish fishery views and bring a new and positive outlook to the future of catfishing."

"During the two days of tournament fishing the anglers bought approximately 3,300

pounds of fish to the scales," recalled St. Ama. "One hundred percent of those fish were successfully live released."

"CatMasters would like to thank Oklahoma biologist, Matt Meur, for all the many phone calls these last 11 months," concluded St. Ama. "And for sharing his education, helping with the care of these fish, and for allowing us the use of the State of Oklahoma fish release trailer."

Catfishing tournaments have become a powerful tool to educate the public, anglers, and fisheries managers about the sport of catfishing and the need for excellent fish handling procedures. With unity and a common purpose in the catfish community, tournaments can contribute to future endeavors related to the sport including possible protections for trophy catfish fisheries.



- Ron Presley



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River Rumors

by Ron Presley

New National Catfishing Association Announced



Many believe that the formation of the American Catfishing Association (ACA) will be a true turning point in the growth and unification of recreational catfishing in American. The sport of catfishing continues to exhibit growth overall, but similar to bass and other species-specific sports, the lack of organization and the divisive actions of some anglers have slowed its growth.

As I write this piece and ponder the possibilities the organization has just been announced and there are many questions that remain unanswered.

Legendary angler Bill Dance is an avid catfish angler. He has lent his celebrity to the cause represented by the American Catfishing Association.

But that is no reason not to support the intent. It appears to be a forward-looking entity with the best interest of the catfish community at heart.

I believe that the ACA holds great promise for the growth of recreational catfishing if given the chance. It is an

ambitious effort based on the premise that it will be member driven through a committee structure based on various areas of interest like conservation, tournaments, catfish related legislation, etc.

Given the many issues that need attention a set of priorities will need to be determined with maximum effort aimed at the most important ones.

The committee structure will be crucial to the overall success of ACA and the formation of committees are among the first tasks to be tackled. By dividing the organization's work into manageable tasks progress is likely to follow as volunteers focus on a particular issue.

Interested anglers can get on board by joining and can, at their choice, be active on committees of their interest. As this committee structure develops and goals are set, it will serve to give the organization its greatest chance for success.

If given the chance, the new ACA can be a unifying force for the sport of catfishing.

By joining the organization anglers will be providing financial support. By volunteering for committee work anglers will be lending their particular expertise to the cause and helping to create the direction of the effort.

The committee structure will result in a coming together of the catfish community and a solidarity that can be used to get the attention of legislators in various states in a way that will positively influence the long-term health of the resource.

As the organizers rolled out the announcement of its formation the naysayers were quick to surface. Keyboard warriors on social media jumped at the opportunity to bash



something else. Others fought back and defended the birth of the ACA and the opportunities it offers. These groups should be on the same side. The divisiveness needs to stop and we all need to team up as one.

An organization like ACA, in a committee environment, offers the opportunity for all sides to be a part of growing something really good for the catfish community. CatfishNOW supports this new endeavor and hopes that all truly dedicated catmen and catwomen will get on board and work with each other towards a common goal. If the catfish community will come together and pull together the ACA can be the unifying force needed to grow the sport of catfishing and let the world know how special it is. Let's give it a chance.



- Ron Presley

CLUB**Link**

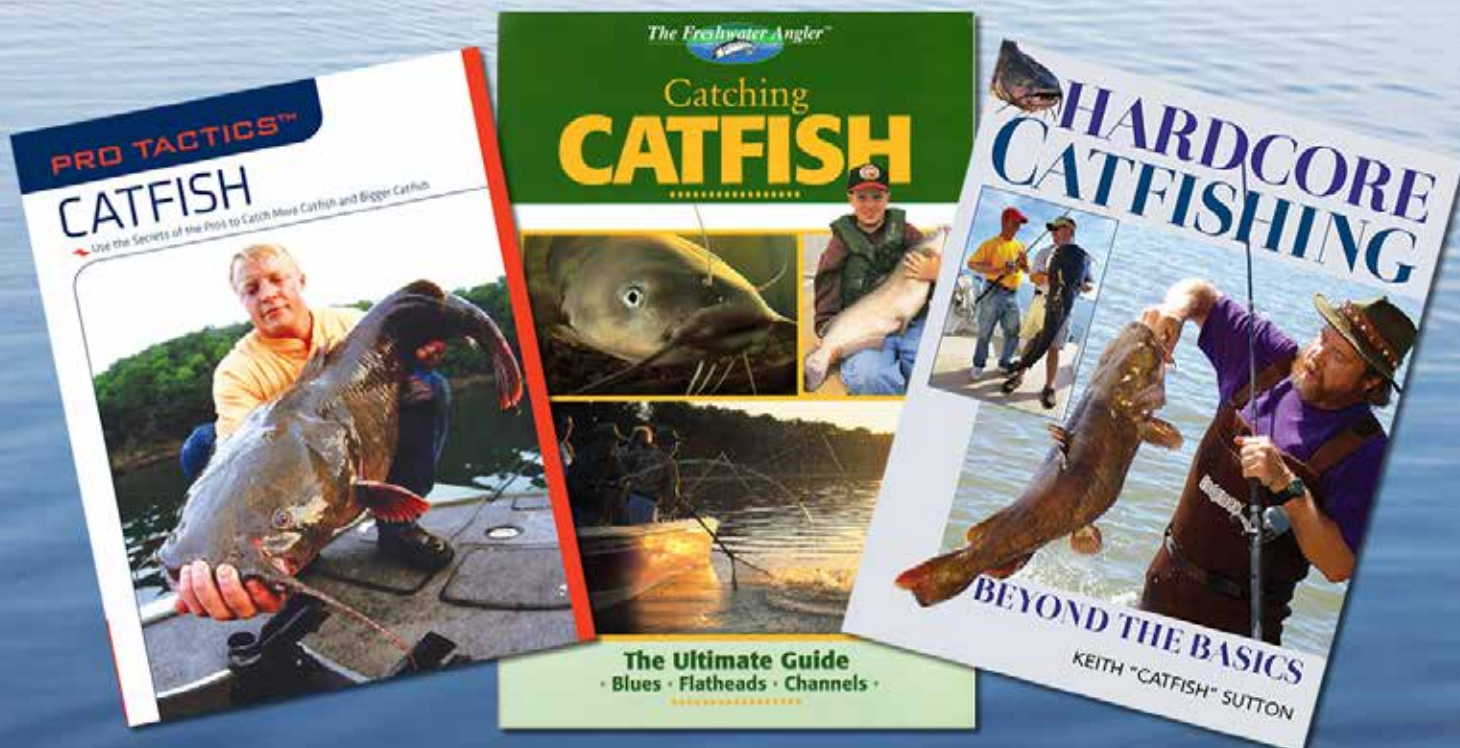
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BIG SIOUX CAT ANGLERS	FACEBOOK
BASS PRO CABELA'S KING KAT TOURNAMENT TRAIL	FACEBOOK
CATFISH CHASERS TOURNAMENT SERIES	FACEBOOK
CATFISH CONFERENCE	FACEBOOK
CATFISH NATION OUTDOORS	FACEBOOK
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CENTRAL MISSOURI CATS	FACEBOOK
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(Fishermen, check with club/association for exact dates, changes, cancellations and rules.)

FEB	15th	ALABAMA CATFISH SERIES	LAY LAKE	SERIES
FEB	15th	M&J CATFISH WAR	GORDON BOAT RAMP	TRAIL
FEB	22nd	KERR LAKE MADKATTERS	STAUTON VIEW BOAT RAMP	DAY
FEB	29th	HOLD'EM HOOK CATFISH TRAIL	INGALLS HARBOR	TRAIL
MAR	7th	CABELA'S KING KAT TOURNAMENT TRAIL	LAKE TAWAKONI	TRAIL
MAR	7th	INDIANA CATFISH ASSOCIATION	TANNERS CREEK	OPEN
MAR	7th	OLD DOMINION CATFISH CLUB	HOPEWELL MARINA	CLUB
MAR	7th	SOUTHEASTERN CATFISH CLUB	FISHING CREEK RESERVOIR	CLUB
MAR	13th	CATFISH CHASERS TOURNAMENT SERIES	MILFORD LAKE	CLUB
MAR	14th	CABELA'S KING KAT TOURNAMENT TRAIL	WHEELER LAKE	TRAIL
MAR	14th	CATFISH MAFIA	GOLDSBORO	CLUB
MAR	14th	CUMBERLAND RIVER CATMAN'S ASSOC.	DOVER COURTHOUSE RAMP	TRAIL
MAR	14th	M&J CATFISH WAR	PARRAMORE BOAT RAMP	TRAIL

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CENTRAL TEXAS CATFISH TRAIL

LAKE WHITNEY

JANUARY 11th

1. John Speer/Larry Johnson	89.29
2. Cindy Houston/Michael Houston	81.29
3. Devin Hogan/Kylea Sterner	81.22
4. Jerry Dillard/John Dillard	68.2
5. Kevin Green/Keith Green	67.55

BIG FISH

1. John Speer/Larry Johnson	23.89
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HOLD'em HOOK CATFISH TRAIL

INGALLS HARBOR

JANUARY 25th

1. Chris Fuller	84.3
2. Melinda Folsom/Bryan Fulsom	82.1
3. Chad Bryant/John Hoagland	64.6
4. Daniel Mata	46.9
5. Anthony Rowe/Andrew Bradford/Josh Hubbech	36.8

BIG FISH

1. Chris Fuller	53
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M&J CATFISH WAR

FLORANCE MARINA

JANUARY 25th

1. Caleb Downing	56.2
2. Ronnie Dixon	42.15
3. Curtis Thomas	41.45
4. Jody Atkins/Brandy Atkins	40.65
5. Joush Gillis/Matt Gillis	31.35

BIG FISH

1. Ronnie Dixon	21.1
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OLD DOMINION CATFISH CLUB

HOPEWELL MARINA

FEBRUARY 1st

1. Thomas Richie/Cody Griswold	131.88
2. Mark Smith/Bryan Gillos	102.42
3. Adam Cook/Melissa Cook	93.26
4. Bruce Connor/James Keatts	89.81
5. AJ Christian/Thomas Mallory	87.47

BIG FISH

1. Shane Farrar/Mark Rice	68.75
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SOUTHEASTERN CATFISH CLUB

LAKE WYLIE

FEBRUARY 1st

1. Team Just Keep Reelin'	85.35
2. Team Sparky	81.7
3. Team Fish Bite Rod Holders	76.8
4. Team Lip Snatcher	76.45
5. Team Polebender	72

BIG FISH

1. Team Just Keep Reelin'	55.25
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BASS PRO/CABELA'S KING KAT

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FEBRUARY 8th

1. Jim Page/Rich Page	157.2
2. James Weshey/Craig Shirey	142.2
3. David Kingsmore/Mark Coburn	132.7
4. Larry Mazalatis/Chucky Ourvry	132.3
5. Wayne Estes/Alan Kerley	128.4

BIG FISH

1. Jim Page/Rich Page	60
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**2020
Schedule**

2/08/20	Cross (Santee Cooper), SC
2/14&15/20	Lake Ray Hubbard, TX
3/07/20	Lake Tawakoni, TX
3/14/20	Wheeler Lake, AL
3/28/20	Milford Lake, KS
4/04/20	Old Hickory Lake, TN
4/11/20	Lake Wateree, SC
4/18/20	Lakes Pikapik/Wilson, AL
4/18/20	Tuttle Creek Lake, KS
4/25/20	Lake Wylie, NC
5/02/20	Watts Barr Lake, TN
5/09/20	Gallipolis (Ohio/Kanawha Rivers), OH
5/16/20	Truman Lake, MO
6/13/20	Carlyle Lake, IL
8/01/20	Dixon (Rock River), IL
8/08/20	Helena (Mississippi River), AR
9/12/20	Pekin (Illinois River), IL
9/19/20	Jeffersonville (Ohio River), IN
9/26/20	Grand Rivers (TN/Cumberland Rivers-KY/BKLY Lakes), KY
10/03/20	Grafton (Mississippi/Illinois Rivers), IL
10/10/20	Williamsburg (James River), VA
10/17/20	Caruthersville (Mississippi River), MO

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Editor's Note: *Forty-one-year-old Kosciusko, Mississippi angler Robert Dickerson has a real passion for catfishing and everything that goes with it. The more he does it the more he enjoys taking other anglers that otherwise might not have the opportunity to fish for catfish.*

The first person that I remember fishing with was my granny. She took me to a friend's pond in Brooksville. She knew how much I wanted to go and that's how grannies are. I remember catching a bass on that first trip and being so excited.

Targeting catfish came later. David Woods taught me how to fish the Yazoo River and other anglers like David Magness, Larry Muse, Stacey Gaston, and plenty of others have taught me about other waters.

Now I can share what I know about catfishing and I don't mind who goes with me. I would rather take someone that might not get to go, because that is all I wanted to do growing up. Fishing with friends is part of the attraction of catfishing.

I spend a lot of time keeping up with catfishing friends and family on social media. It has given me a chance to meet many people from all over the country that share my passion for catfishing.

I've also had the opportunity to share with people that follow me on social media about my catfishing adventures. People see my posts on both my own and my wife's page. Then, I get stopped when I am out in public and ask about the posts. Local people will stop me in restaurants or Walmart to ask me where and how I am catching these huge catfish. I love sharing my experiences with them.

On one recent trip, I had taken a good friend, Jonathon Hewitt, fishing. We had partnered up for a South Mississippi Catfish Trail tournament. He had tournament fished with another



Dickerson's personal best 40-pound blue cat was caught on Wilson Lake, AL. He was fishing with his friend, Stacey Gaston.

friend a good bit and had not caught any fish in the tournaments.

We tried the Mississippi River first but couldn't get a bite. So, we went up the Yazoo. It is a smaller river but has some good catfish in it.

We were standing beside each other in the boat and he said, "I haven't caught anything." And literally, the rod in front of him got hammered. I said, "Well you better get that one."

We were screaming with joy and partly in shock when I netted it. The fish weighed 18.5 pounds. He also



caught one about 16 or so pounds.

I caught one about 4 pounds and my main partner, Johnny Rainey, caught some fish from the front of the boat where he also hooked good one that just pulled off as he was reeling it in. It was an exciting time.

We had 47-plus pounds in 5 catfish. It was good enough to get second place on an awesome day with friends. Afterward, we went to eat at a seafood restaurant that was decked out in fishing stuff on the inside. It was Johnny Rainey's birthday so he had a good birthday with us.

Catfishing is like a puzzle and a challenge. You can study a place and learn about all the contours and structures where you are likely to find fish. You can try different bait and different setups, but with all the

Dickerson gets great joy from putting someone else on fish. That was the case on this trip with his friend Jonathon Hewitt. The fish helped them earn second place in the South Mississippi Catfish Trail.

strategy that we put into it, sometimes it just comes down to chance. I love the challenge that catfishing presents.

I try to set myself up to create the best possible chance to catch some big cats and the anticipation is almost too much to take. But then you see that rod start to wiggle or bend. It's almost like being a kid waking up on Christmas morning.

The excitement sometimes just takes your breath. Feeling the fight of a big cat as you try to get it to the





boat is incredible. Catfish are amazing beautiful fish and there's not much that compares to getting one of them in the boat. It's like a reward for all the work you put in to find, feed, and fight with them.

Catfishing gives me the opportunity to spend time doing what I love while meeting great people along the way. They are people that share my passion for the sport and feel as strongly as I do about the practice of ethical fishing habits so we can enjoy the sport for years to come.



- Robert Dickerson

Dickerson is known as "Big Blue Hunter," but he likes flatheads too.



***Dress for success.
It's cold outside.***

