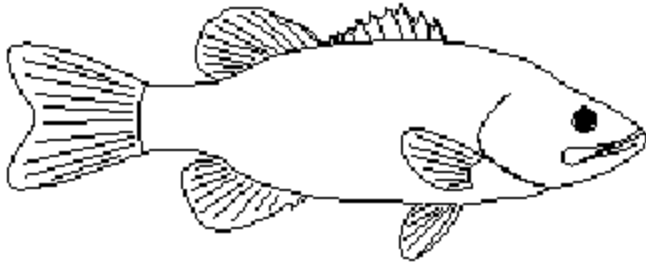
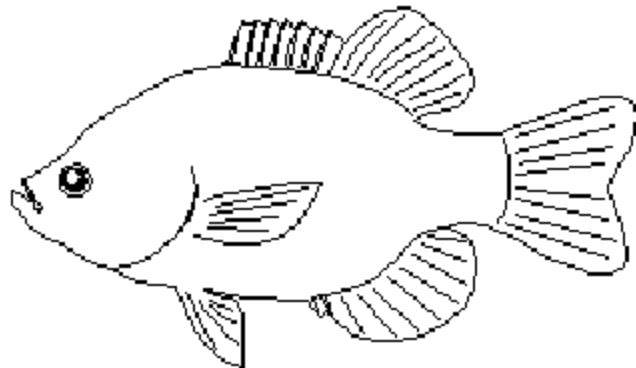


BASIC OUTDOOR SKILLS SERIES



FISHING



BASIC OUTDOOR SKILLS SERIES



**A Program of the
Alabama Division of Wildlife and
Freshwater Fisheries,
Alabama Department of Conservation
and Natural Resources**

**PREPARED BY:
DOUG DARR
AQUATIC EDUCATION
COORDINATOR**

FOREWORD

Fishing is one of America's most popular participation sports. "Basic Fishing" introduces fishing skills to the public. "Basic Fishing" is one of four skills taught in the Basic Outdoor Skills Series produced by the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. The other skills in this series include "Backyard Wildlife," "Basic Hunting," and "The Preparation, Care and Cooking of Wild Game and Fish." General tax revenues were not used to produce this series. License fees and excise taxes contributed by anglers, hunters and other lovers of wildlife made possible these courses for the public to enjoy. Designed to promote the ethical enjoyment of wildlife, the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries wishes you a lifetime of outdoor experiences that can begin with "Basic Fishing."

Fishing is enjoyed for many reasons. The joy of fishing is to successfully meet the challenge of inducing fish to bite. Fishing offers a chance to relax in the outdoors while simultaneously being a part of nature. For many, the greatest joy of fishing is being away from the fast pace of modern life so you have a chance to get to know your fishing partner better. Many fishing trips bring anglers together and last a lifetime through the memories they evoke.

I am thankful to all the artists whose illustrations were used. Copyright privileges were granted by the Missouri Department of Conservation for Figures 16, 20, 22-28 and 40-52. The Future Fisherman Foundation granted the use of Figures 12-14 from the *Aquatic Resources Education Curriculum* and Figures 10, 11 and 15 from the *Sport Fishing and Aquatic Resources Handbook*. Figures 1-9, 17-19, 21 and 29-39 were provided by C. J. Turner of the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. I am also thankful for Mr. Turner's assistance in editing the graphics and formatting this publication. Finally, thanks to Charles Kelley, Director of what was then the Alabama Game and Fish Division, M. N. "Corky" Pugh, Assistant Director, and Fred Harders, Fisheries Section Chief, who had the vision to see the need of providing the public with a short introduction to fishing. I appreciate them asking me to contribute to it and giving me the time to accomplish the task.

This material is only to be used in a non-profit setting.

Fishing

But if no fish I catch at all,
Successful I'll still be.
For I've been fishing, had a ball,
And for a day been free.

Anonymous

BASIC FISHING SKILLS

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BASIC FISHING SKILLS

Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Basic Outdoor Skills Series

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE

This short course is designed to give basic fishing knowledge to those with little or no fishing experience. This basic knowledge will help the new angler to have safer and more enjoyable fishing trips.

This handout will be a handy reference for the beginning angler. Numbered diagrams are presented with the text. A glossary of fishing terms is found in the appendix.

Fishery management and boating access programs are not funded through general tax money. Fishery management is funded by anglers through license fees and an excise tax on the purchase of fishing equipment. Boating access projects are funded by an excise tax on gasoline.

GOALS

Participants in this course will be introduced to the various types of equipment and tackle by demonstration. Participants will experience knot tying and other tackle techniques, and where possible, practice casting or fishing. Areas for good fishing will be described, and simple techniques used to catch common fish will be presented. Anglers will learn about laws and regulations used to maintain high quality fishing. Handling and preparation of the catch will also be discussed.

ETHICS

An ethical angler:

- Keeps only the fish needed ...
- Does not release bait into the water ...
- Properly disposes of trash and waste ...
- Observes all applicable laws and regulations ...
- Practices safe angling and boating ...
- Hones angling and boating skills and passes this knowledge on to others ...
- Respects other anglers' rights ...
- Respects property owners' rights ...
- Supports local conservation efforts.

SAFETY EQUIPMENT

When outdoors, safety equipment should be available nearby. Even when you are fishing from the shore, a life jacket is the most valuable piece of safety equipment. A **life jacket** should be worn when fishing near deep or swift water. Other safety equipment includes **sun blocking lotion** and **first aid equipment** for emergencies such as stings or bites. You should take **warm clothes** and **rain gear** when appropriate and take plenty of **water** and **ice** during all seasons.

SECTION 1. TACKLE

PURPOSE

Fishing tackle is the connection between the angler and the fish. The fishing tackle is necessary both to get the lure or bait to the fish and to get the fish to the angler.

GEAR TYPES

Fishing rigs are named for the reel (or lack of reel) that holds the fishing line. Each type of fishing reel has an appropriate fishing rod that goes with it.

1. Pole and Line. The simplest gear is a pole with fishing line attached to the end. It is used with a float and hook or lure (Figure 1). This gear is simple yet very effective for fish in shallow water. Crappie and white bass are taken in the spring, and bream are caught during the late spring and summer. An added advantage of this gear is that Alabama residents do not need a license to fish in their home county with a pole and line having no reel.

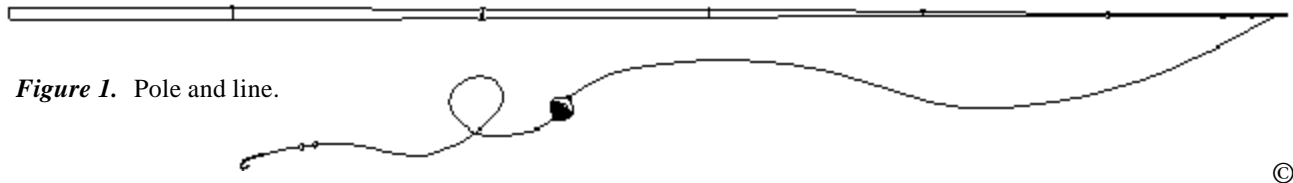


Figure 1. Pole and line.

2. Spincast Gear. Spincast is the simplest gear with a reel (Figure 2). Spincast gear is the appropriate choice for most beginning anglers. The fishing line comes out of a hole in the reel cover. During the cast, the thumb is used to release the line, and the index finger is used for control. Spincast gear is used to cast light to medium size lures. Spincast gear is not the best choice for using very light fishing line or heavy fishing line.



Figure 2. Spincast gear.

3. Spinning Gear. Spinning gear can cast farther than spincast gear (Figure 3). The fishing line in a spinning reel is exposed, and the index finger is used to release the line and to control the line. Spinning gear is used for casting very light to heavy lures.

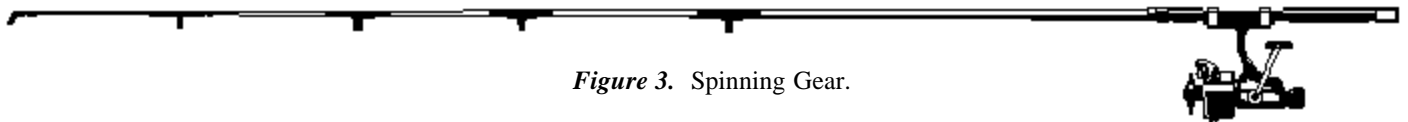


Figure 3. Spinning Gear.

4. Baitcast Gear. Baitcast gear has more control than spinning gear (Figure 4). The fishing line in a casting reel rotates the spool as the line comes off the spool. During the cast, the thumb is used to release the line and for control. Bait casting gear is used to cast moderate to very heavy weights farther than other reels.



Figure 4. Baitcast gear.

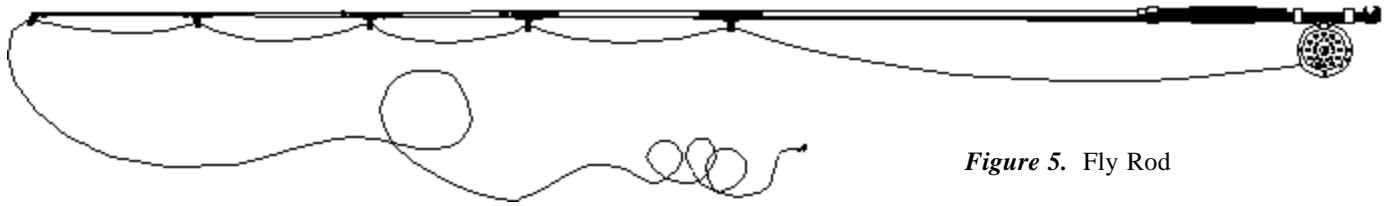


Figure 5. Fly Rod

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5. Fly. A fly rod works differently than other rods. The fly rod casts the line instead of casting the lure (Figure 5). The fly rod casts very light lures typically made of feathers, fur or fibers that will cast out with the line. Fly fishing is not difficult, but it normally takes training to learn properly.

TERMINAL TACKLE

Terminal tackle is the tackle between the fish and the reel.

1. Hooks. Hooks keep fish attached to your line. **Hooks must be kept sharp.** Hooks come in many sizes and types (Figure 6). Ask your bait and tackle dealer what is appropriate for the species you are trying to catch and the bait you are using. The size fishing line or leader you are using should be dependent on the size hook you are using.

2. Snaps and swivels. Most hooks and lures are more effective **without** snaps or snap-swivels attached (Figure 7). Crank baits (wobbling lures) are the exception. If you are trying a variety of lures, a small but strong snap will make changing lures easier. A swivel or three-way swivel can be used to attach a dropper that keeps bait or lures off the bottom.

3. Weights or Sinkers. Only enough weight should be used to cast the bait and keep it at the desired depth (Figure 8). More weight will be needed in windy weather or swift water. To prevent losing a fish, weights should be attached carefully, especially when they are on the fishing line directly between the hook and the angler.

4. Floats. Floats are used to keep baits off the bottom and to assist with detecting a bite (Figure 9). The float should be just large enough to do the job; if the float is too large, the fish will feel it and may not become hooked.

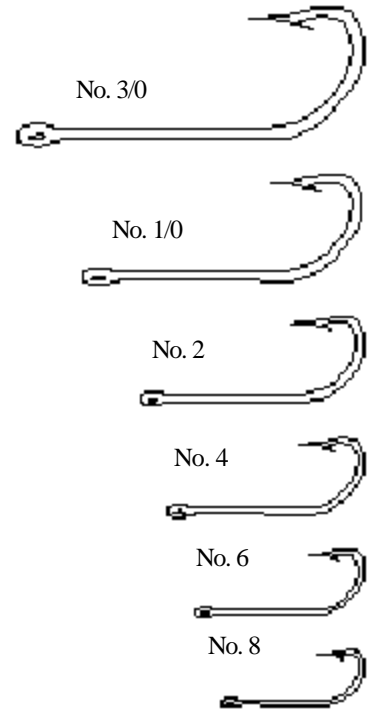


Figure 6. Commonly used hook sizes. ©

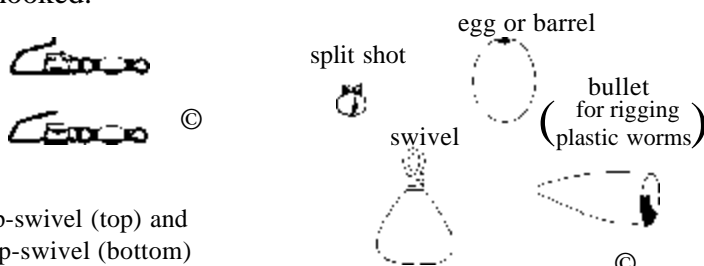


Figure 7. Locking snap-swivel (top) and common snap-swivel (bottom)

Figure 8. Common sinkers. ©

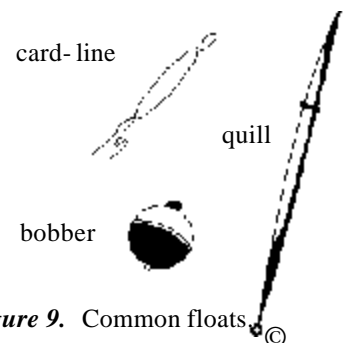


Figure 9. Common floats. ©

5. Knots. Knots connect you to your fish. **Tying quality knots is the single most important skill that should be learned.** A knot that connects the hook or lure to your line is the most important knot to learn. There are several that work well, such as the Improved Clinch, the Palomar, and the Duncan Loop knots (Figures 10-15). Try them all. You should pick a favorite knot and master the skill of tying it.

Other knots are used for special purposes such as connecting fishing lines together. When you buy fishing line, you should keep the manufacturer’s pamphlet in your tackle box. It will usually show what types of knots you may need and have diagrams for tying them.

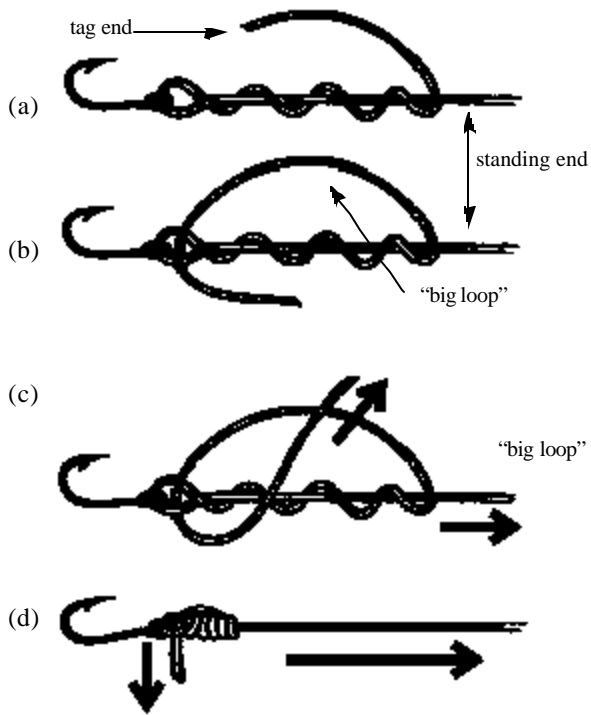


Figure 10. The *Improved Clinch Knot* (left) is a basic knot for beginning anglers to use with monofilament line.

To tie an improved clinch knot:

- (a) pass the line through the eye of the hook, then make several turns around the standing end of the line (more for lighter line),
- (b) pass the tag end through first loop above eye,
- (c) pass the tag end through the "big loop,"
- (d) moisten the line and
- (e) slide tight against the eye.

For light lines, such as 6 pound test, six to eight turns is required; for heavier line (10 to 20 pound test) 5 or 6 turns is sufficient.

Figure 11. The *Palomar Knot* (below) is also a good knot for beginning anglers, as it is strong and easy to tie. To tie a Palomar knot: (a) double about 4 inches of line and pass loop through hook eye, (b) tie an overhand knot with doubled line, (c) pass hook through line loop, and (d) moisten line and pull knot tight.

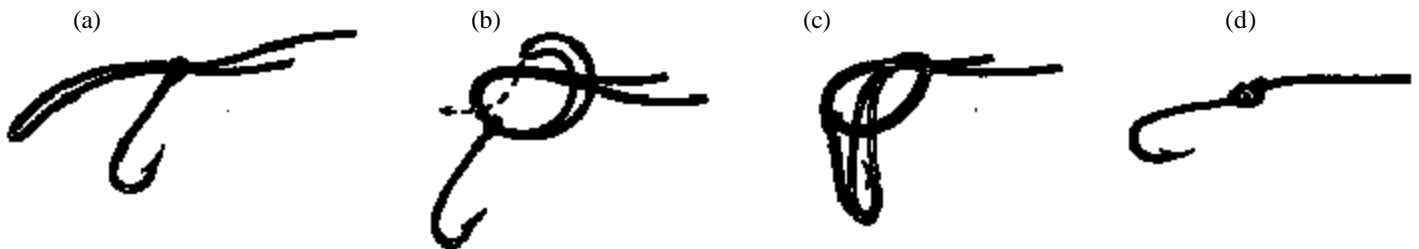


Figure 12. The *Surgeons End Loop* (below) is used to tie a loop at the end of a fishing line. To tie a surgeons end loop: (a) double about 4 inches of line and tie an overhand knot with it, (b) bring doubled end through the loop once again, and (c) hold both the standing end and tag end and pull loop to tighten knot.



Figure 13. The *Arbor Knot* (right) is used to tie fishing line to a reel. To tie an arbor knot: (a) thread the line through the reel's line guide, around the spool and back out the guide. Tie an overhand knot around the standing end and in the tag end, (b) tighten both knots and pull standing end until knot is snug against spool.

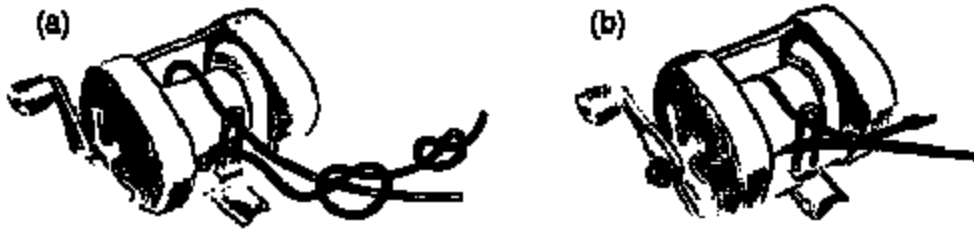


Figure 14. The *Surgeon's Knot* (below left) and the *Blood Knot* (below right) are used to join two lines together. The surgeon's knot is preferred when tying two lines of unequal diameter (such as tying a fly line to a monofilament leader).

To tie a surgeon's knot: (a) lay the two lines parallel, overlapping about 6 inches. As though the two were a single line, tie an overhand knot, pulling the entire leader through the loop. Pull both tag end of line and leader through again. (b) Moisten line and pull to tighten.

To tie a blood knot: (a) overlap the two ends for about 6 inches, take tag end and make 6 turns around the other line, insert tag end between the two lines. (b) Repeat with other tag end so that the ends of both lines are drawn through the center loop. (c) Moisten line and pull tag ends to tighten knot.

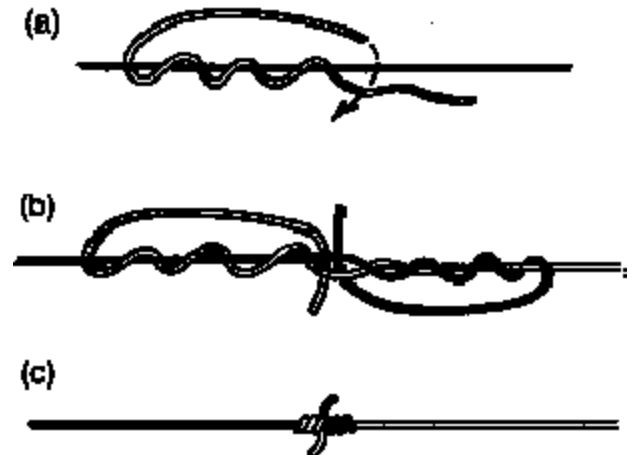
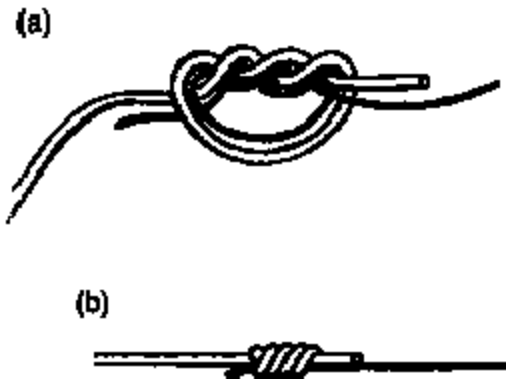


Figure 15. The *Duncan Loop Knot* (below), like the surgeons end loop, is used to tie a loop at the end of a line.



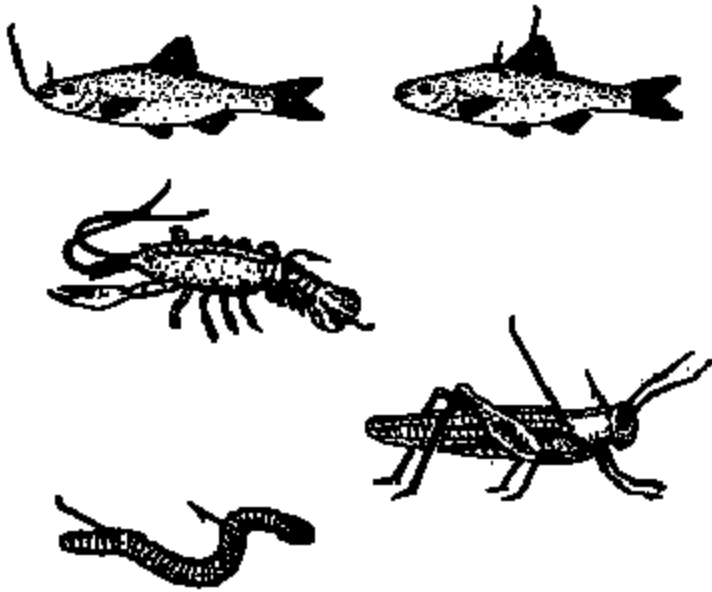


Figure 16. Methods of rigging live bait.

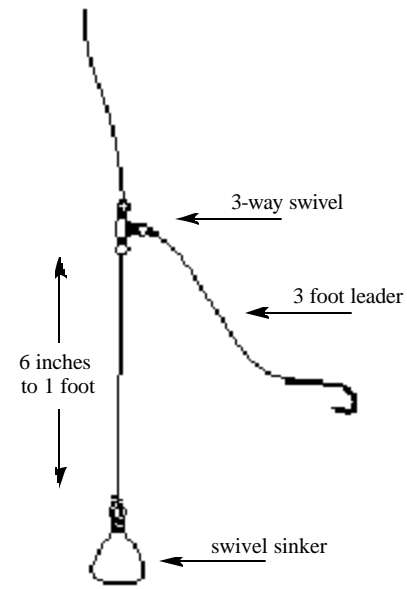


Figure 17. Method of rigging to keep bait near bottom.

6. Rigging. Rigging is how you hook your bait and where you put your hook, snap or swivel, weight and float. The type rig that catches the most fish is the best rig. Some common riggings are shown in Figures 16-19.

OTHER TACKLE

Other tackle helpful in fishing (Figures 20-21) includes a **tackle box** which holds all equipment. A **sharpening stone** keeps hooks sharp. A **lure retriever** frees lures. A **rag** keeps your hands clean. **Fingernail clippers** or **scissors** safely cut fishing line. A pair of **longnose pliers** with **wire cutters** is useful for holding and removing fish hooks. A **floating fish basket** keeps smaller fish alive until you finish your fishing trip. Some anglers land fish with a **net** after they are hooked; landing nets are more critical for large fish, fish with spines such as catfish, and fish with sharp teeth such as sauger and walleye. A **cooler with ice** keeps your catch fresh. A thin, flexible **fillet knife** makes it easier to clean fish. An inch **ruler** measures fish to verify their legal length. An **angler's diary** helps you be a better angler by reminding you of how fish were caught, what the weather was like, and what the fish were eating. An angler's diary also keeps the memories vivid.

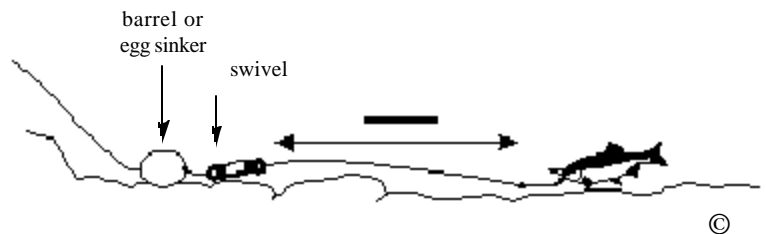


Figure 18. Bottom fishing rig. Fish can pick up bait and swim away without feeling weight of sinker. Swivel acts as stop and prevents excessive line twist. A floating jig head may be used to keep the bait off of the bottom.

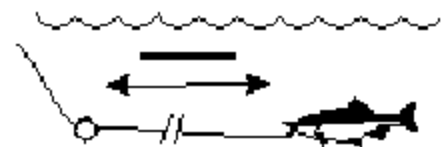


Figure 19. Fishing rig for shallow or moving water.

Figure 20. Tackle that is helpful to the beginning angler: (a) tackle box, (b) plug retrievers can save lures, (c) finger nail clippers for clipping line, (d) needle-nose pliers are a useful all-around tool, (e) stringers or floating fish baskets can help keep fish fresh, (f) a landing net is useful with large fish, (g) a fillet knife is designed specifically for fish.

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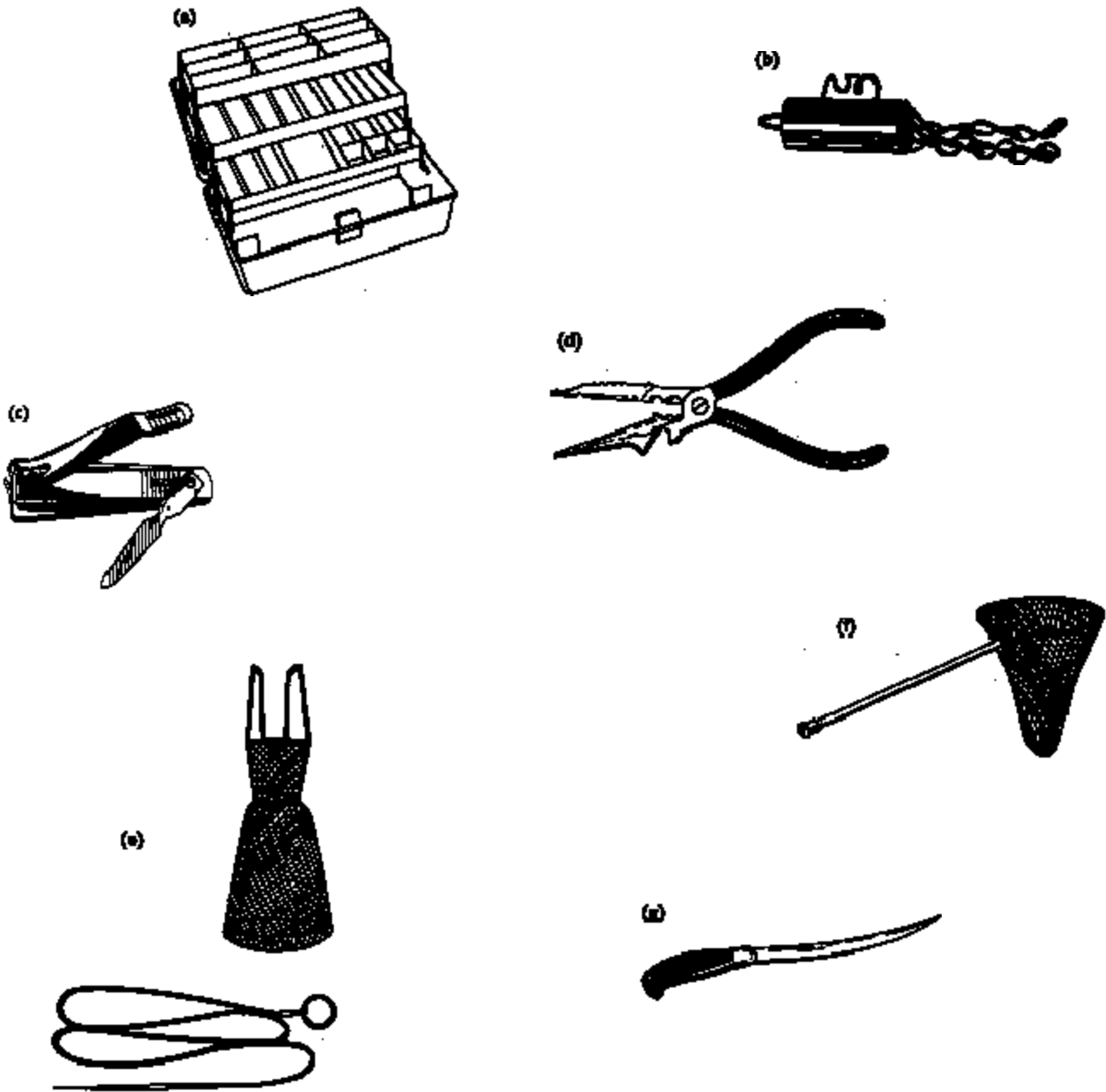


Figure 21. You can improve your fishing by keeping a record of your fishing trips.

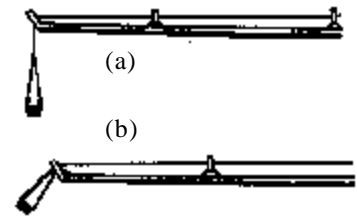


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SECTION 2. USING YOUR TACKLE

CASTING

Casting is the skill of propelling a lure from the angler to the water. For spincasting, spinning and baitcasting, the overhead cast is the easiest. First your lure should hang one to three inches from the tip of your rod (Figure 22). Then point your rod where you intend to cast (9 o'clock position; Figure 23 and 24). Check to be sure the area behind you and above you is clear of anglers and obstructions. In one fluid motion, move the rod to the 1 o'clock position and bring the rod forward releasing the fishing line at the 12 o'clock position, continuing your follow-through to the 9 o'clock position pointing at your target (Figure 24). If the lure went too high and fell short, you need to hold the fishing line a little longer. If the lure went too low and fell short, you need to let the fishing line go sooner.



©

Figure 22. The lure should hang 1 to 3 inches below the rod tip (a). Do **not** reel it completely to the top guide (b).

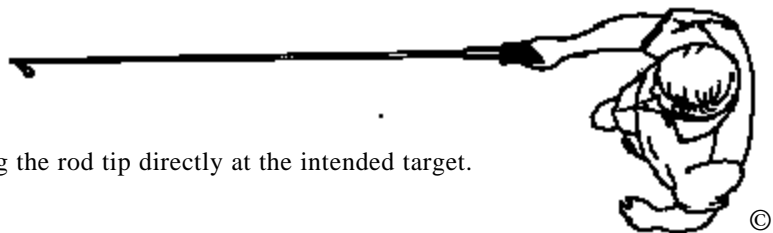


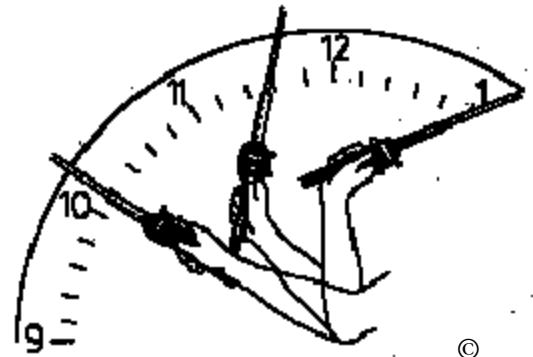
Figure 23. Begin the cast by pointing the rod tip directly at the intended target.

RETRIEVING

Retrieving is the act of bringing a bait or lure back to the boat (Figures 25 and 26). After casting, live and prepared bait are often left in one spot until retrieved. Some baits and most artificial lures are most effectively presented while retrieving. The retrieve can be slow or fast; it can be steady or erratic.

SETTING THE HOOK

Once the fish bites the lure, the hook must be pulled into the fish to hold the fish. Then the fish can be brought to the angler (Figure 27). When the fish bites, the fishing rod should be quickly pulled up to force the hook into the fish. The force needed to set the hook depends on the rod, line, species of fish, and the lure or bait used. For example, a crappie caught on a light multifilament line and minnows will need only a gentle lifting of the rod to set the hook. A bass angler fishing with monofilament line and the hook buried in a plastic worm will need a vigorous rod sweep to force the hook through the worm and into the bony mouth of a bass.

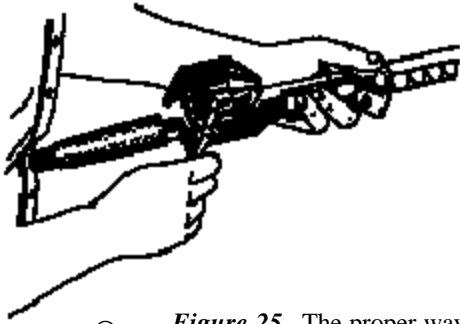


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Figure 24. Proper spin-casting technique carries rod from 9:00 o'clock position to 1:00 o'clock and back to 9 o'clock. Line is released at approximately 12:00 o'clock.

PLAYING THE FISH

After setting the hook, **the line should be kept tight** so the fish will not shake the hook loose. The fishing rod should be held between a 10 o'clock and a 12 o'clock position. Large fish must be pumped; a large fish is repeatedly pulled toward the angler with the rod. Pulling is followed by reeling the fishing line when the rod is lowered slightly (Figure 28).



© *Figure 25.* The proper way to hold the rod when retrieving.

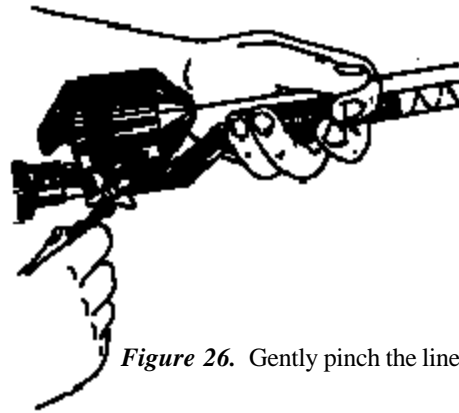


Figure 26. Gently pinch the line as you retrieve it. ©

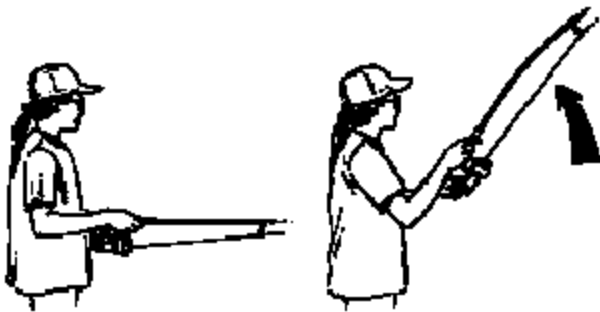


Figure 27. Setting the hook. ©



Figure 28. Pumping the rod. ©

PREPARING YOUR CATCH

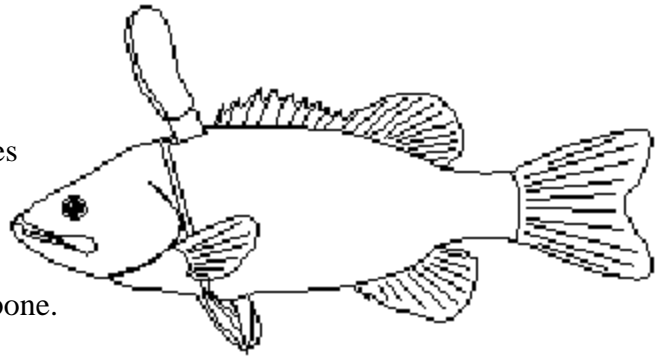
Before your fishing trip begins, you should plan how you will care for your catch. Many fish are kept in floating fish baskets or stringers. These may work pretty well in cooler weather, but fish die quickly in warm weather. Fish are best kept fresh on ice. To keep your cooler clean and to keep fish out of the water, use a plastic bag to isolate your catch.

Preparation of your catch for eating is called cleaning your catch. There are two different ways to clean your catch: filleting and dressing. Filleting (Figures 29-32) involves cutting the edible part of the fish away from the inedible part (no bones are left). Dressing (Figures 33-36) implies taking off parts that cannot be eaten, with most bones left with the edible portion. Some fish, like catfish, have a skin that must be removed (Figures 37 and 38). Other fish have to be scaled with a knife or a spoon. Filleting is a little more difficult, but filleting yields a more visually pleasing product to most people. In Alabama, you may not fillet your catch while fishing on public waters; the total lengths of fish are needed for length limit regulations. Fish may be dressed and gutted, if the heads are left on the carcass. Be sure to dispose of the wastes properly.

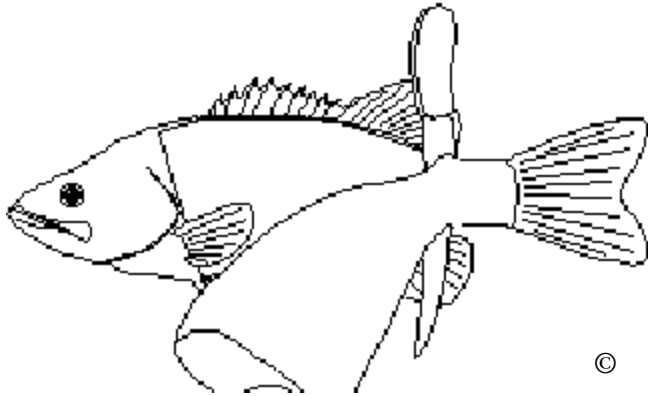
Once fish are cleaned, they should be frozen immediately or prepared within three days. Frozen fish may develop freezer burn unless they are tightly wrapped or unless they are frozen in water. When freezing fish in water, you should use just enough water to cover them. Plastic freezer bags work well for fillets, if they can be sealed without leaking.

Fish may be cooked by baking, boiling, broiling, frying, grilling, microwaving, and poaching. Three preparation methods are also preserving methods: canning, pickling and smoking. Fish are often cooked too long. Fish should be white and flaky, not dry and brittle. Some species cook more quickly than others. Thicker pieces of fish take longer than thinner. Trial and error is the best way to learn to cook fish. The Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries offers a game preparation class.

Figure 29. Filleting fish, such as bass, removes all bones from the meat. To fillet a bass, place the fish on its side on a firm, flat surface. Make a cut behind the gill plate from the top of the fish to the belly and into the flesh to the backbone. Do not cut through the backbone.



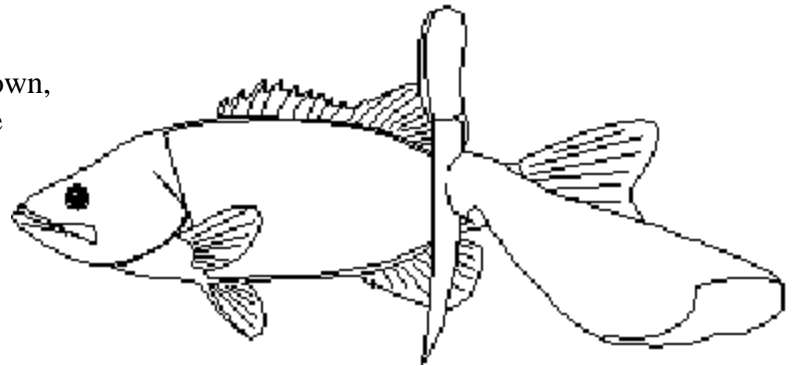
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Figure 30. Without removing the knife turn the blade toward the tail, cut through the ribs, and continue on the tail, closely following the backbone as a guide. Do not cut through the skin completely at the tail, but leave a half to one inch intact.

Figure 31. Flip the fillet over, skin side down, and insert the blade between the skin and the meat. With a sawing motion, follow the inside of the skin closely with the blade and cut the meat away from the skin.



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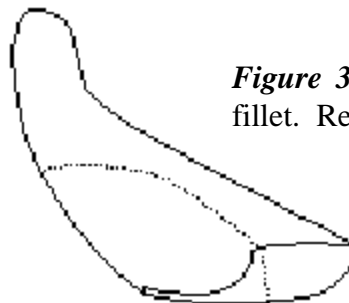
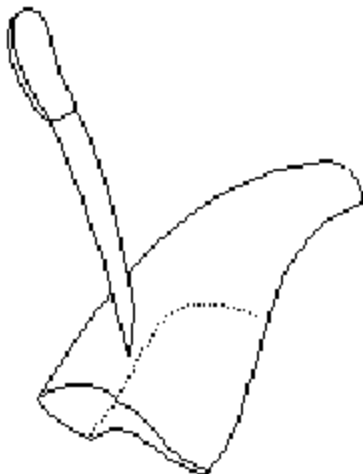
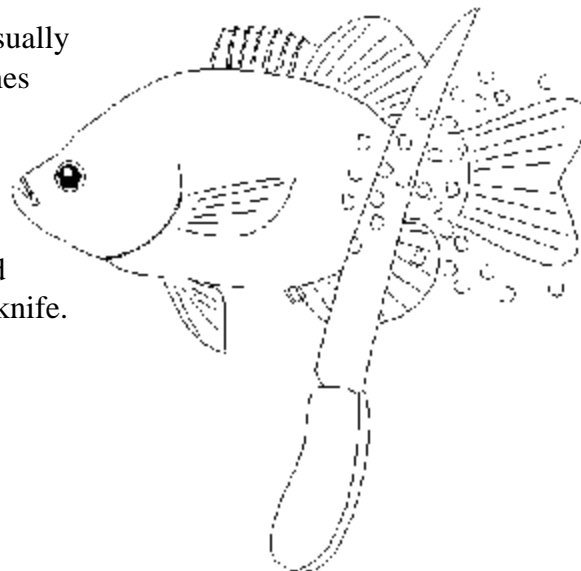


Figure 32. Cut the ribs away from the skinless fillet. Repeat the steps for the other side of the fish.

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Figure 33. Small fish, such as sunfish, are usually dressed. Dressing a fish leaves some of the bones in the meat, but less meat is lost during the cleaning process. To dress a small fish, place the fish on its side on a firm, flat surface. Use one hand to hold it in place by the head. Scrape the scales from the tail toward the head by using a fish scaler, spoon, or dull knife. Remove the scales on both sides of the body.



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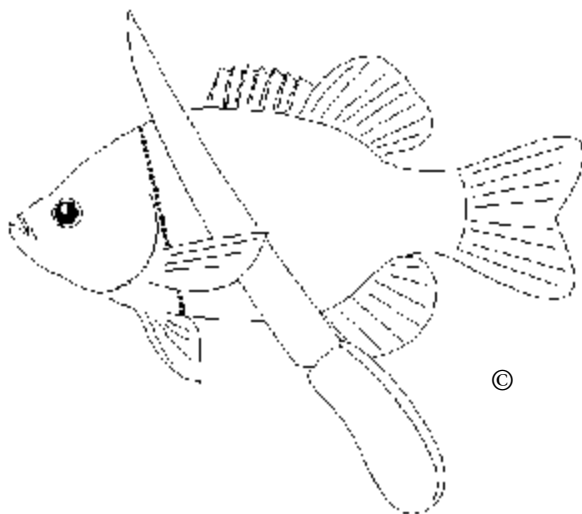
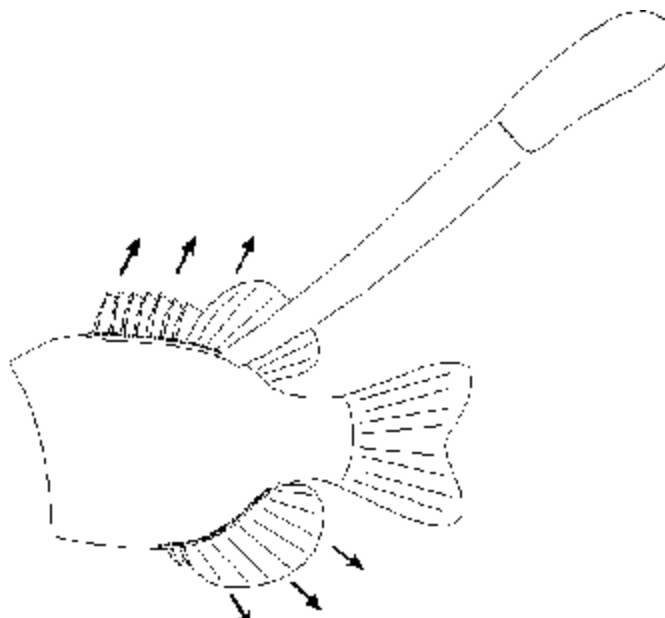


Figure 34. Cut off the head immediately behind the gills and remove the viscera.

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Figure 35. Use a fillet knife to cut along both side of the dorsal fin. Grasp the dorsal fin and pull forward to remove. Spines should pull out with fin. Repeat process to remove the anal fin and spines.



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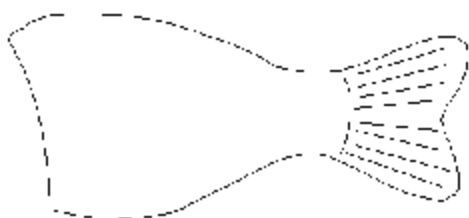


Figure 36. Wash in cold, clean water. The fish is now ready to freeze or cook.

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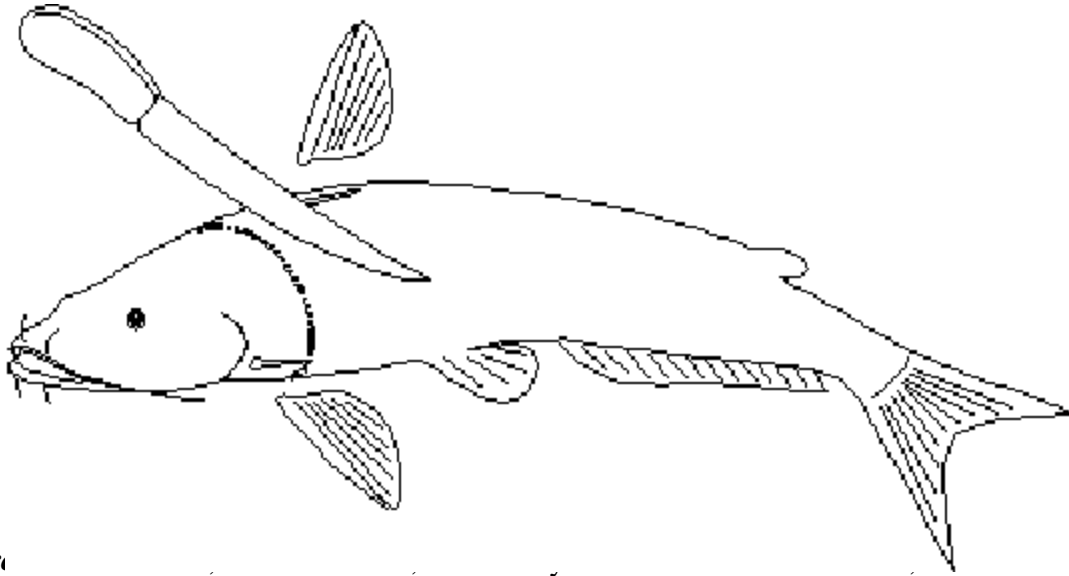


Figure 37. first remove the spines to prevent puncture of a hand or finger. Cut through the skin around the head and pectoral fins. Do not penetrate the body cavity.

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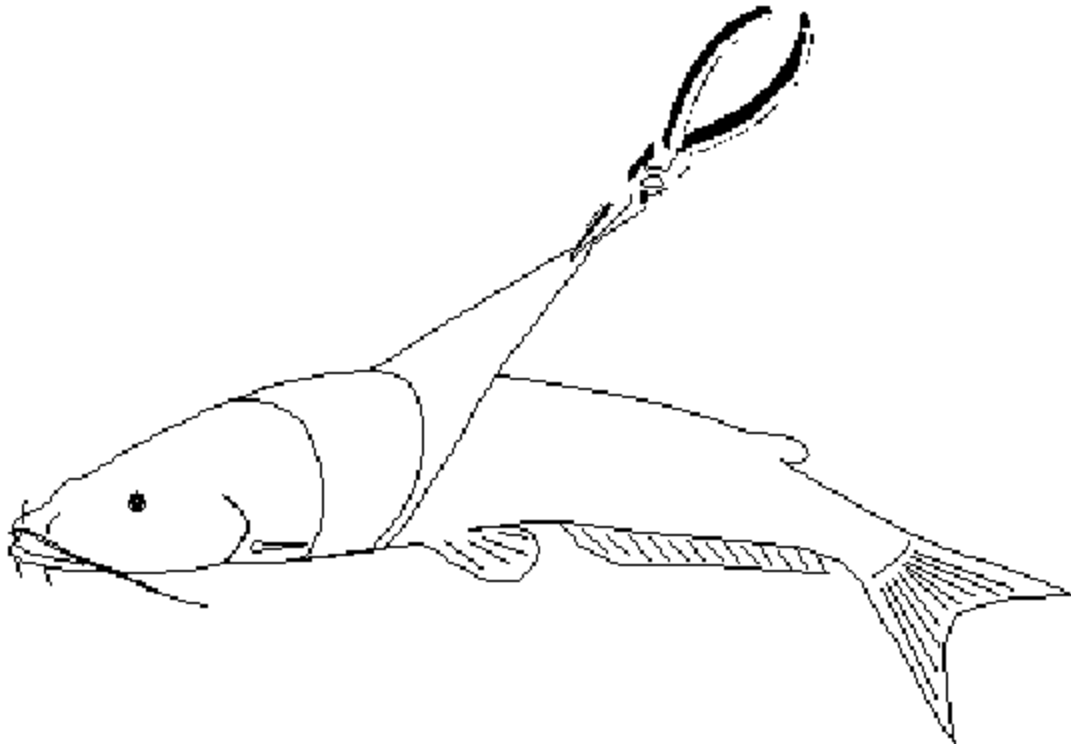


Figure 38. Using a pair of pliers, pull the skin away from the meat, working from the head toward the tail. Break or cut the head away from the backbone and remove the viscera.

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SECTION 3. TECHNIQUES - WHERE AND HOW TO FISH

HABITAT

Some fishing areas are better than others. The **quality of fishing** depends upon the **water's productivity**, the **fish species present**, and the **size of the fish present**. Productive water has more fish than unproductive water; up to a point, the greener the water, the more productive the water. In some waters, undesirable fish compete with desirable fish. Fishing is better in a lake with a high proportion of the right size fish.

1. Private Waters. Private ponds are often excellent places to fish. **The permission of the owner is required to fish private ponds.** If you desire to keep any fish, ask how many, what species and size fish you may keep. Ask the pond owner if they would like any of your catch. Ask before you bring anyone with you. Do not litter. Close all gates behind you. Report any problems immediately to the owner.

The right balance of fish species must be present to have good fishing. Usually only the following combinations of fish work well in a pond: channel catfish only, bass and bream, or channel catfish, bream and bass. The Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries has a program to check ponds for balance. To request such a check, call your local fisheries biologist at the telephone number listed in Figure 39. Ponds with green sunfish, crappie, bullhead catfish or common carp may need to be renovated to make fishing good again. Some ponds work on a pay-to-fish basis. Ask your local Conservation Officer or your local Chamber of Commerce if they know of any such ponds in the area.

2. Public Waters. Alabama is blessed with an abundance of water. Since closed seasons are ineffective at reducing harvest, there is no closed season on any freshwater game fish in Alabama. To fund the management of fishing in public waters, fishing licenses are required for anglers 16 and older. There are two exceptions. If you fish with a pole and line only (your pole does not have a reel) in the county in which you reside, you do not need a fishing license. Alabama residents 65 and older also do not need a license; however, a Senior License is available to them which allows the Division to collect additional federal funding.

Most of Alabama is blessed with clean water, and the fish in these waters are safe for eating. There are a few water bodies, however, where the Alabama Department of Public Health advises that fish not be consumed. You should obtain the latest information by calling 1-800- 201-8208.

a. State Public Fishing Lakes. The Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries operates 23 State Public Fishing Lakes at 20 sites around Alabama (Figure 39). Each of these lakes is managed specifically for fishing. All lakes were originally stocked with bass, bluegill and redear sunfish; channel catfish are now stocked on an annual basis in most lakes. In addition, hybrid striped bass, rainbow trout and crappie are available in some lakes.

A manager maintains the facilities, including rest rooms and boat rentals, and provides concessions. An inexpensive daily permit is required for anglers 12 and older. These areas are ideal for beginning anglers because fishing is good, advice is available, and fishing boats and gear can be rented. All lakes have a fishing pier and shoreline access for all anglers. Creel limits (harvest limits) for each species are posted at the lakes.

b. Streams and Rivers. The fast portions of streams and rivers bring food into the deep, slower portions. Fish feed anywhere fast water meets slow, deep areas. Also you should try areas that fish use for resting; fish rest in areas where the current is slowed by rocks, trees or other structure.

c. Reservoirs. The Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries publishes the Bass Angler Information Team (BAIT) Report that tells the results of bass tournaments during the previous year. The BAIT Report may be used to predict chances of black bass fishing success in a reservoir. Fisheries biologists also study each lake on a rotating basis, and they can give you an idea of fishing quality for many species (Figure 39).

Current attracts fish in reservoirs as well as in streams. Current flow rates are higher under bridges; therefore, bank fishing off highway causeways can be good. Safety should be a top priority in these areas, including the use of life jackets.

Figure 39. District Offices and Public Fishing Lakes of the Alabama Fisheries Section. District Fisheries Biologists provide free consultation and information about the fishing in Alabama and may be contacted at the addresses and telephone numbers listed below.

Administrative Offices

64 North Union Street
Montgomery, AL 36130
Phone (334) 242-3471

DISTRICT I

Swan Creek Mgt. Area
P.O. Box 366
Decatur, AL 35602
Phone (256) 353-2634

DISTRICT II

Eastaboga Fish Hatchery
P.O. Box 158
Eastaboga, AL 36260
Phone (256) 831-6860

DISTRICT III

P.O. Box 305
Northport, AL 35476
Phone (205) 339-5716

DISTRICT IV

64 N. Union St.
Montgomery, AL 36130
Phone (334) 242-3628

DISTRICT V

P.O. Box 7245
Spanish Fort, AL 36577
Phone (334) 626-5153

DISTRICT VI

P.O. Box 310292
Enterprise, AL 36330
Phone (334) 347-9467

STATE LAKES

64 North Union Street
Montgomery, AL 36130
Phone (334) 242-3471

MARION FISH HATCHERY

Route. 3, Box 85
Marion, AL 36756
Phone (334) 683-6550



- Barbour County Lake
Clayton, (334) 775-9595
- Bibb County Lake
Centreville, (205) 938-2124
- Chambers County Lake
LaFayette, (334) 864-8145
- Clay County Lake
Delta, (256) 488-0038
- Coffee County Lake
Elba, (334) 897-5465
- Crenshaw County Lake
Luverne, (334) 335-3550
- Dale County Lake
Ozark, (334) 774-0588
- Dallas County Lake
Selma, (334) 875-6959
- DeKalb County Lake
Sylvania, (256) 657-3000
- Escambia County Lake
Brewton, (334) 809-0068
- Fayette County Lake
Fayette, (205) 932-1939
- Geneva County Lake
Geneva, (334) 684-6488
- Lamar County Lake
Sulligent, (205) 695-6317
- Lee County Lake
Opelika, (334) 749-1275
- Madison County Lake
Gurley, (256) 776-4905
- Marion County Lake
Guin, (205) 921-4747
- Monroe County Lake
Beatrice, (334) 789-2597
- Pike County Lake
Troy, (334) 484-9610
- Walker County Lake
Jasper, (205) 221-1801
- Washington County Lake
Millry, (334) 846-2512

d. Tailwaters. The areas below dams are called tailwaters. As fish migrate up river to spawn, they sometimes encounter a dam. Since many fish are migrating together, fish are concentrated. Fishing can be very good at specific times of the year. Caution should be used in these areas, including the use of life jackets. are most likely to feed, and general regulations governing their harvest.

SPECIES OF FISH

Fishing is most effective when a specific species is targeted. However, most fish will eat insects and other invertebrates, so fishing insects or worms can successfully trick most species. Common sport fish are listed below with a brief description, preferred food, where they are found, when they are most likely to feed, and general regulations governing their harvest. **Before fishing**, you should check rules specific to the waters you will be fishing. A fish should be measured with its mouth closed and stretched to its maximum length. Local information is available from outdoor magazines, bait and tackle stores, fishing guides, local fisheries biologists and local outdoor writers.

1. Bream. “Bream” is a term used for both bluegill and other members of the sunfish family in the *Lepomis* genus (Figures 40-42). The world record bluegill was caught in Alabama. Bream are deep bodied fish that feed primarily on insects. Some bream are present in most waters of Alabama. They are easily caught when fanning gravel beds during spawning in late spring and all summer. Bream often feed all day. Anglers can keep up to 50 bream in most public waters (20 per day in state public fishing lakes).

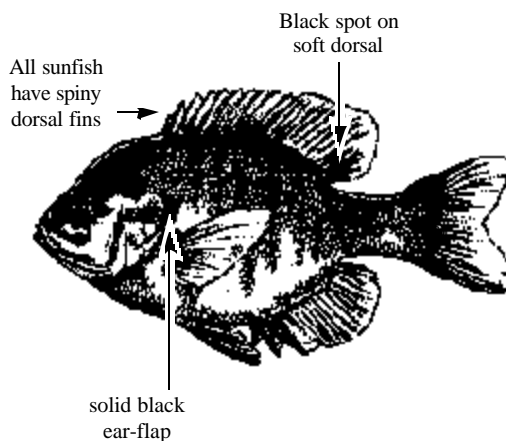


Figure 40. Bluegill are a good choice for beginning anglers; they are very common, easily caught, and excellent table fare. Bluegill are most often caught on live bait such as worms and crickets.

Figure 41. Redear sunfish are another sunfish common in Alabama. Redear sunfish habits are similar to those of bluegill, and they are frequently found, and caught, together. Redear sunfish often grow to a slightly larger size than bluegill.

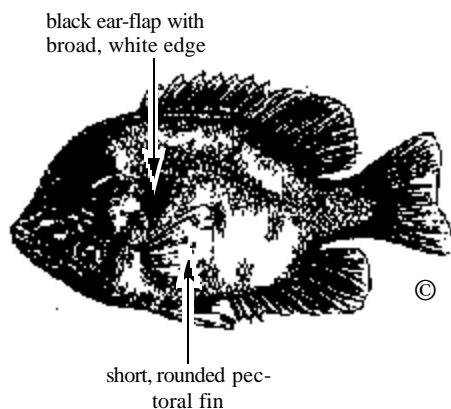
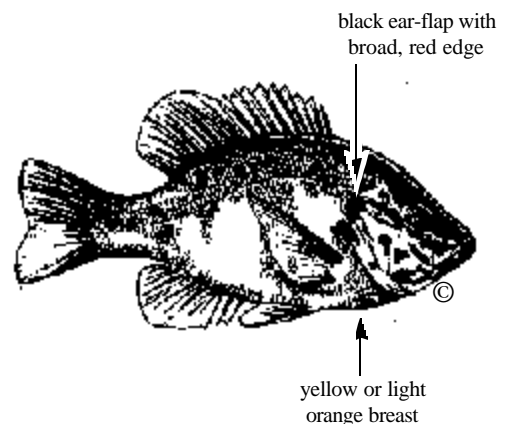


Figure 42. Longear sunfish are stream fish; they are seldom found in ponds. Longear sunfish are very colorful, particularly the males when in spawning condition. Longear sunfish are very aggressive and easily caught, but they seldom grow to a large size.

2. Crappie. Also members of the sunfish family, black crappie and white crappie are less colorful (Figures 43 and 44). Young crappie feed on insects, and larger crappie feed more on small fish. Crappie populations are often cyclic, so ask local anglers for the best crappie waters. Spring is the best time to crappie fish. Crappie are most commonly caught near brush and trees, but they can be attracted to the surface with lights at night. Most public waters have a nine inch minimum length limit; check local regulations.

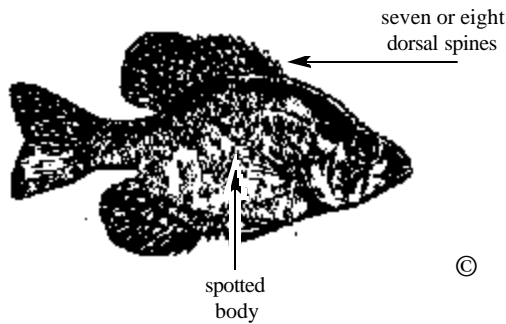


Figure 43. *Black Crappie*

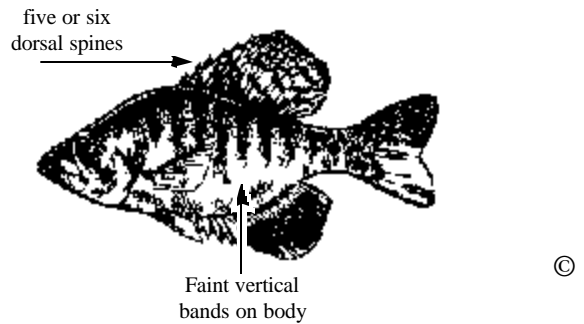


Figure 44. *White Crappie*

3. Black Bass. In the same family as bream, largemouth bass is the state freshwater fish. Also in this popular group are smallmouth bass, spotted bass (Figures 45-47), redeye bass, and shoal bass. Less deep bodied than bream, they are often a shade of green or brown. These fish have relatively large mouths that they use to ambush fish or crawfish. Bass are found in all but the smallest creeks. These fish hide and feed near obstructions and structure. Bass see well in low light conditions, so fishing is best at dawn and dusk.

Some bodies of water may protect bass of a certain body length, so check the regulations for the body of water you plan to fish before keeping bass. In waters that have restrictions on keeping medium size bass (for example: 13" to 16"), you may keep small bass and large bass. This is referred to as a slot limit. **Keeping small bass from waters with a slot limit will help improve fishing in those waters.**

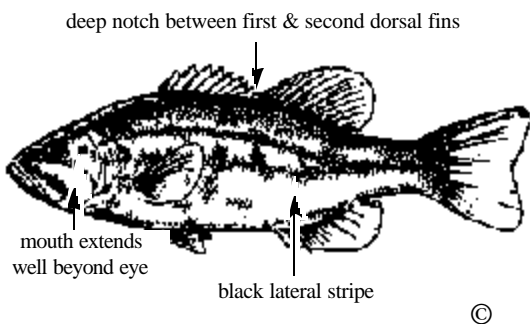


Figure 45. *Largemouth bass* are common in lakes and ponds. Largemouth grow larger than other black bass species. Fish for them around weeds, brush, drop-offs and channels.

Figure 46. In Alabama, *smallmouth bass* are found mainly in the Tennessee River system. Alabama's best smallmouth fisheries are the tailwaters of Wilson and Wheeler dams.

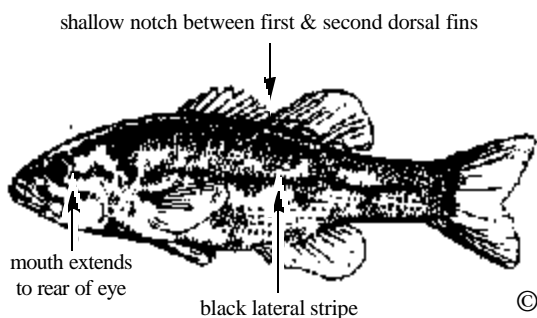
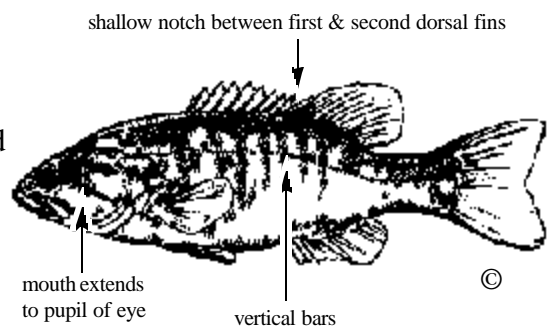


Figure 47. *Spotted bass* are common in flowing streams and deep, clear lakes. The *Alabama spotted bass* is a subspecies that grows larger than other spotted bass. Fish for them around boulders, brush, deep holes, or current. In lakes, fish for them with the same lures and in the same locations as largemouth bass, though spots may be deeper.

4. Catfish. Catfish are easily identified by the many barbels or “whiskers” (Figures 48-51). The world record blue catfish, 111 pounds, was caught in Alabama. Catfish feed on insects when small and switch to fish as they get large. Most moderate to large rivers have catfish, and many ponds are stocked with channel catfish. Catfish feed well after a rain or at night. May is the peak month for catfish, and a good location is below a dam. Except in state lakes, there are no legal limits for catfish, however, keep only what you will eat.

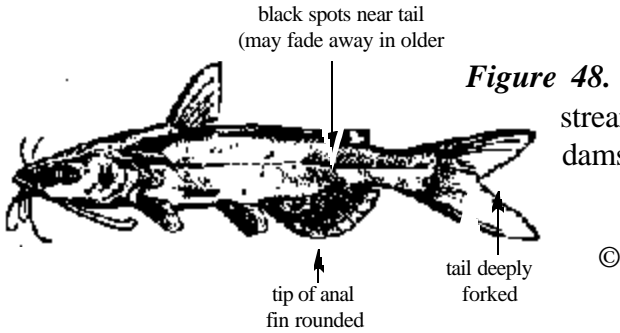


Figure 48. Channel catfish are common in streams and lakes. Tailwaters below dams are good places to fish for them.

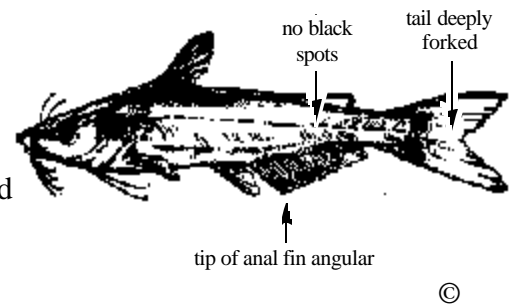


Figure 49. Blue catfish are Alabama’s largest catfish. They are found in large rivers. Deep holes and tailwaters are good places to fish.

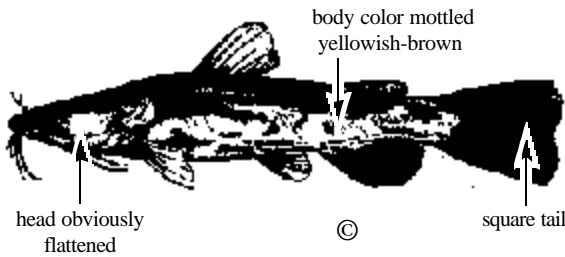
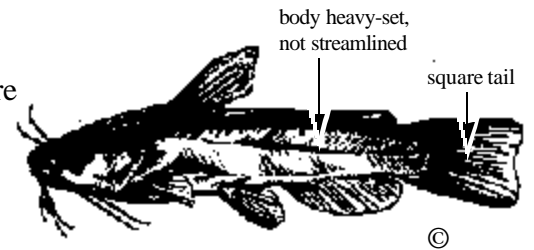


Figure 50. Flathead catfish are large catfish that also prefer large streams. Live bait is preferred for flatheads, as they do not scavenge as much as other catfish.

Figure 51. Yellow, brown, black bullhead are three species of bullhead catfish. Bullheads seldom grow larger than 2 pounds. They are usually in lakes or sluggish streams found around heavy cover, such as weeds and brush.



5. Rainbow Trout - Rainbow trout do live in Alabama (Figure 52). Rainbows are regularly stocked in the Sipsey Fork below Smith Lake dam. Trout feed most actively before dawn and at dusk. The regular fishing license requirements apply to this fishery. The limit is five trout.

Rainbow trout are also stocked three times each year in Madison County Lake. The lake is open during posted hours in November, and on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday during December and January. A five-dollar daily permit is required in addition to regular license requirements. The limit is five trout.



Figure 52. Rainbow Trout

6. Striped Bass, White Bass and Hybrid Striped Bass. These fish are mostly white with black lines, but they are less deep bodied than the crappie (Figures 53-55). These fish feed on insects and shad. They are caught in open water. Hybrids and striped bass rarely reproduce in our waters, so check with your local fisheries biologist to see where these fish are stocked. These fish see well in low light conditions, so fish at dawn and dusk. Regulations vary so check the rules for the water body you plan to fish.

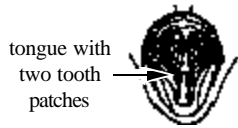
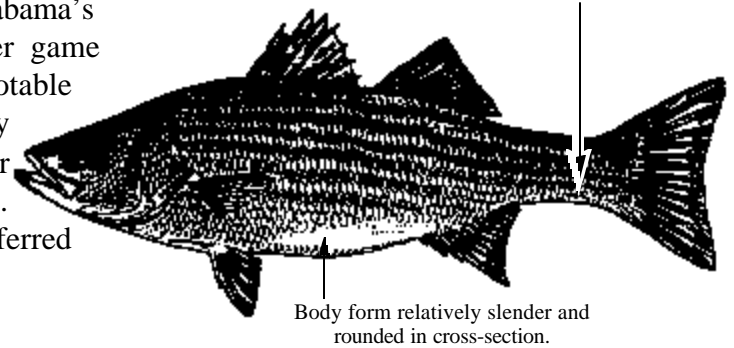
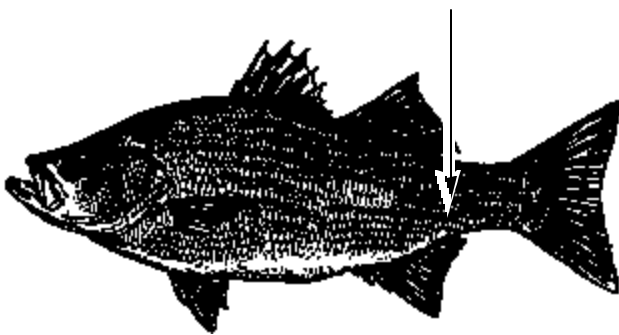


Figure 53. *Striped bass* are Alabama's largest (over 50 lbs) freshwater game fish. Lewis Smith Lake has a notable striped bass fishery. These wary fish are difficult to catch under even the best of circumstances. Live shad bait is usually the preferred bait.

All stripes boldy colored and distinct; few if any broken.
First stripe below lateral line complete to tail.

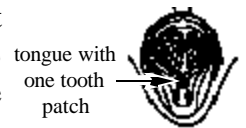


First stripe below lateral line not complete to tail; stripes below lateral line are not distinct.



Body form deep and compressed, flattened in cross-section.

Figure 54. *White bass* are very common in most Alabama's reservoirs. They do not grow to extremely large sizes; 2 or 3 pounds is considered large. White bass are easily caught in early spring (late March in south Alabama; early April in north Alabama) when they make a spawning run.



All stripes boldy colored and distinct; but many broken.
First stripe below lateral line complete to tail.

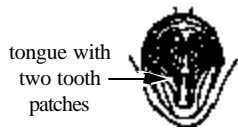
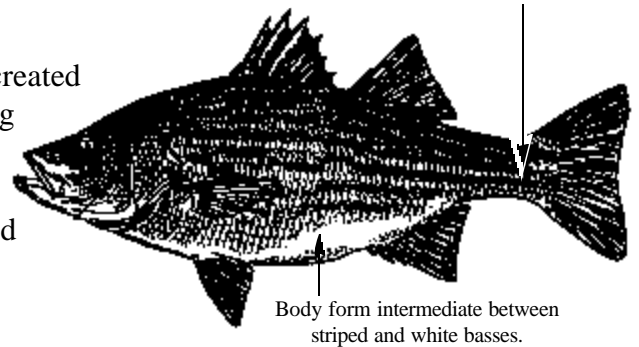


Figure 55. *Hybrid striped bass* are created at Division hatcheries by crossing striped bass with white bass. Hybrid bass are stocked in most of Alabama's major streams and reservoirs. They grow to large sizes.



7. Others. Other species may be popular in your area. Talk to your local bait and tackle dealer about species, techniques and locations.

GLOSSARY

bait - something used to attract fish to bite; the terms bait and lure may be used interchangeably, but bait often refers to something natural or live.

bite - when a fish takes or tries to take a bait (or lure).

black bass - a largemouth bass, redeye bass, shoal bass, smallmouth bass or spotted bass.

bobber - float.

casting - the skill of propelling a lure from the angler to the water.

cleaning - preparing your catch for eating.

conservation - the wise use of natural resources.

cork - float.

creel limit - the number of fish an angler can keep in a day.

dressed - fish prepared for eating with the backbone and ribs attached.

dropper - a separate line tied onto the main line near the hook. It is used to attach a weight to a separate line or to fish two hooks.

fillet - cleaning a fish by cutting the edible portion from the rest of the fish.

fishery - a situation where anglers are trying to catch a species of fish.

fishing line - special flexible fiber that connects the fishing reel to the hook.

float - used to keep baits off the bottom and to assist with detecting a bite.

land - bringing the fish to the land or to a net for capture.

lunker - a large specimen of a species of fish.

lure - something used to attract fish to bite. The terms bait and lure may be used interchangeably, but lure most often refers to something man-made used to entice fish to bite.

monofilament - fishing line that is one piece; opposite of multifilament.

multifilament - fishing line that is several strands woven together; opposite of monofilament.

playing - the time from setting the hook until the fish is landed or gets away.

reel - a device that holds and retrieves fishing line.

renovate - with respect to ponds, getting rid of the fish present and starting anew.

retrieving - the act of bringing a bait or lure back to the boat.

rigging - how you hook your bait and where you put your hook, snap or swivel, weight and float.

rod - a pole that is used to cast a lure or bait.

selective harvest - keeping fish that will help the fish population reach its maximum potential; sometimes a fish population is helped when an individual fish is kept and sometimes the fish population is helped when the fish is released.

setting the hook - pulling the rod up sharply so that the hook will stick in the fish's mouth.

sinker - a weight.

snap - a small metal device tied onto fishing line and used to quickly attach lures to the line.

snap-swivel - a snap with a swivel connected to it to keep line from twisting.

strike - when a fish takes or tries to take a lure (or bait).

structure - any change in an area that causes fish to be concentrated (change of depth, tree, rock, etc.).

swivel - allows the lure or bait to twist but reduces the twist of the fishing line; also used to keep weights from sliding near the bait or lure.

tailwater - area below a dam.

terminal tackle - tackle between the fish and the rod.

weight - something used to help cast or help sink the bait or lure; sinker.