

'First fish' still thrills

Channel catfish are plentiful in Alabama and offer big sport



Photo by John N. Felsher

A young angler shows off a channel catfish he caught in a park pond. Channel catfish are often the first fish young anglers catch.

BY JOHN N. FELSHER

Many people probably start fishing by catching channel catfish. Unfortunately, most grow out of chasing channels as they turn to other species, but this fish can still provide incredible excitement and excellent tablefare.

One of the most numerous gamefish in North America, channel catfish occur in practically all Alabama rivers and lakes, including Big Creek Lake and the Alabama River system. The state even stocked channels into many public fishing lakes, including Washington, Escambia and Monroe county lakes.

Although they can't reach the size of giant blues or flat-heads, channel catfish can top 50 pounds. Most run in the 1-to-5-

pound range, but Donald Cox set the Alabama standard with a 40-pounder.

"Channel cats can be found almost everywhere and are not shy about biting," advised Brian Barton, a professional catfish angler (www.brianbartonoutdoors.com). "If they're in an area, they are going to bite. Channel cats tend to like shallower water than blue cats and usually seek out shoreline structure, like logs, stumps, weeds and shallow water rock piles. Channel catfish usually school in small numbers, so if you catch a fish off a piece of structure, continue to fish the area."

With about 10,000 tastebuds per square inch in its skin, a

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