

Fish stickers!

Archers enjoy honing skills before hunting season

BY JOHN N. FELSHER



Above: Polly Dean takes aim at a fish while bow fishing on Lake Eufaula near Eufaula.

Right: Joella Bates, a world champion archer, shows off a large carp she shot while bow fishing on Lake Eufaula.



Photos by John N. Felsher

Out of the gloom, a large, scaly creature materialized at the water surface in the transition zone where a bubble of light merged into clutching darkness. Suddenly, a heavy barbed projectile flashed through the thick, humid air, smacking into the beast. Water churned as the creature went through its death throes. Another very large carp met its demise.

Many sportsmen begin bow fishing because they want to extend their hunting opportunities. Shooting various fresh or saltwater fish helps them tune up their archery skills against something more challenging than a static target before deer season begins.

“Bow fishing is kind of like bird hunting, but combined with the thrill of big game hunting and sight-fishing,” explained Mark Malfa, a veteran bow fisherman. “There’s a lot of shooting and at any time something big can come along.”

In Alabama, archers can shoot many non-game species in both fresh and salty waters. In fresh water, the list includes various species of carp and garfish, plus bowfin, suckers, freshwater drum and other rough fish. A few popular salty targets include stingrays and other rays, flounders, gafftopsail catfish, sheepshead, black drum and some sharks.

Along the coast in places like the Mobile-Tensaw Delta, archers can sometimes shoot both fresh and saltwater species in the same areas at the same time. Garfish and mullets readily enter both sweet and salty environments. Except for flounder, maybe sheepshead, most of these species see very little pressure from rod-and-reel anglers.

An archer could use the same bow that brings down deer, but probably should get equipment specifically designed for fishing. For sticking fish, sportsmen don’t need a bow powerful enough to knock down a monster whitetail at 50 yards. Most fishing shots occur at less than 10 yards, frequently less than 10 feet. Bow fishermen normally don’t need anything stronger than 40

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