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## How to Use This Book

Catfishing is an enjoyable sport for people of all ages. No one is too young or too old to try it.

If you have the drive, you can learn the same techniques that master anglers use to catch trophy-sized specimens from the country's various lakes and rivers. This book can be used as reference by anyone who wishes to start catfishing immediately.

Part 1 of the book covers the biology of the catfish. You will learn how catfish live and survive in the wild, as well as how these magnificent specimens are able to track down food and avoid predation.

The section *Catfish Species From Around the World* will show you just how varied this line of fish is. You'll meet the fierce Candiru and elegant glass catfish of Asia. Then you'll be introduced to the "Big Three" of North and South America: the flatheads, the blues, and the channels.

*The Big Three Catfishes* section of the book will give you a solid introduction to the three largest species of catfish in the United States.

You'll learn about the catfishes' biology, physical traits, habitats, feeding habits, and reproductive behaviour. There's also a special section under *The Big Three Catfishes* that will help you determine the age of a catfish that you've caught by simply looking at its length and weight.

Part 2 of the book focuses on techniques and strategies for catching catfish. The first section of Part 2, *Catfish Myths: Debunked!* will help clarify any misconceptions you may have had about catfishes in general and the sport in specific. You'll also learn how to *fish* for catfish and how to choose the right rigs for catching these magnificent fish. Everything you need to go catfishing is contained in this book. Happy angling!

## Part 1: Introduction

To people such as myself who have devoted countless hours in pursuit of America's precious game fishes, catching a big catfish is one of life's greatest pleasures.

People always ask me, why do I continue to hunt down the toughest game fish in the Northern and Southern United States? Why do I invest equipment and precious hours in catching and releasing these majestic creatures?

The answer lies in the *longing* and *desire*, emotions shared by thousands of other anglers in the world. The longing to find the best and feistiest game fish offered by the country's hundreds of lakes, rivers, and even ponds defines what we do best, and what many think may be life's greatest adventure. Each angler is different, but a dedicated group of anglers will have the catfish on top of their list.

When I was young and started angling, I would always feel a thrill that helped me overcome the difficulties of catching a truly magnificent specimen of a catfish.

I still experience this thrill today. I welcome you to the world of catfishing and angling. I sincerely hope that the experiences and friendships you gain along the way will help you sustain your love of this wonderful new activity, so that it becomes a life-changing and *life-long* passion.

### **What Makes Catfishing So Special**

Catfishing is one of many specialized types of freshwater angling in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere.

Practitioners of this art (and it really is both a science *and* an art) now realize that the catfish is not only a hardy and very

adaptable line of game fish, but that they're also living icons of the sport itself.

No other species of game fish has showed such adaptability and hardiness throughout the decades. In the uncharted wilderness where they are found, catfish remain steadfast symbols of the skilled outdoorsman's ultimate challenge.

Catfish found in freshwater channels are a great example. Consider these powerful fish that, under ideal conditions, can gain several pounds *per year* and tend to become more powerful and feistier as they age. In addition to being gastronomic delights, catfish are a breed of fish that continually challenge the skilled angler.

Two things stand out when anglers talk about catfish: power and availability. Catfish can be found almost everywhere, even in the worst water conditions.

But that doesn't stop these fishes from becoming supreme fighters in the water. Large catfish have been known to pulverize synthetic baits and to rip apart strong angling lines in fierce battle during capture. Few other game fishes can provide the same degree of power as flathead catfishes, channel catfishes, etc.

Another thing that makes the catfish stand out among the throng of other game fish is that *not all* anglers are attracted to the catfish. Some say this fish is ugly or that catfish are too powerful to bother with.

Although these statements may sound negative, these somewhat negative reviews of the humble yet powerful catfish reflect an important truth about catfish populations in freshwater bodies of water: people are not overfishing catfish.

That means you and future generations can still enjoy angling without having to worry about the availability of these freshwater warriors. They're here now, and they'll be here in the future!

## **Man, Meet the Catfish**

To better understand how to *catch* big catfish -- or "cats" -- one must be knowledgeable not only of the fish's usual haunts, but also of its *biology*.

The greatest catfishers in the world understand how a catfish senses its world and how it moves about in different environments. Believe me when I tell you this – you'll be able figure out *why* some fishing techniques aren't working based on your knowledge of catfish biology.

Let's tackle the catfish's physical appearance or *morphology* first.

All catfish species in the United States (at least in the Northern regions) have the characteristic *barbells* -- elongated appendages -- near the mouthparts.

These barbells are the *first sign* that a fish is indeed a catfish species. In fact, this is where the fish's moniker was derived.

Catfish appear to have long whiskers, similar to those of cats and dogs. That's how their name was born. The name stuck, because no other name fit these majestic animals more perfectly than the name "catfish."

The fish's barbells are not useless, extraneous appendages. These jutting parts of the catfish are actually *very important* for their survival. Barbells allow the fish to *feel* the external environment, and also allow the animal to *taste* the surrounding waters for food or signs of potential danger.

Barbells are highly specialized sense organs that can aid the catfish in its search for food, even in the darkest and muddiest water. Imagine a tasting organ so highly developed that it can pick up the chemical trail of potential food!

It's a common belief that the catfish's barbells can inflict great pain when the fish attacks with them.

This common belief is false. As we just mentioned, barbells are used for *tasting* and not for defense. But that doesn't mean that catfish are defenseless. On the contrary, these ancient fish are armed with *barbs* or spines on top and underneath their bodies – in their dorsal and pectoral regions, respectively.

The catfish's barbs are sharp enough to puncture human skin and cause a considerable amount of pain, especially if you're not careful.

A majority of catfish species have been known to develop venomous cells in addition to their pectoral and dorsal spines/barbs. These additional biological measures are part of the reason why the catfish are such a hardy animal and can live in seemingly hostile water conditions.

What about the catfish's scales? They don't have any!

So far, there are more than two thousand individual species of catfish throughout the world, comprising a staggering *eight percent* of the total number of species of fish... and not one catfish species has scales.

When you see a catfish, what you're looking at is naked fish skin. No hard scales at all. And yet, these fish survive murky rivers that fish with scales cannot tolerate! Indeed, one of the great paradoxes of nature.

Do not be mistaken, though. Catfish may not have been blessed with scales, but these awesome fish have developed something even *tougher* than naked skin – armored plates. Although not all catfish species have armored plates, the ones that do can even develop plates that overlap each other.