



Hatchery Raised **CHANNEL CATFISH**

by Jared Sayers

Linesville State Fish Hatchery Manager

photos by the author

“Dad, it’s a huge catfish!” As my 7-year-old son dragged a 28-inch Channel Catfish onto the banks of French Creek, Crawford County, his excitement assured me that he was going to remember this day for a long time. After I helped him remove the hook and provided a short lesson on how to handle Channel Catfish, we released the fish to fight another day. As the catfish slowly disappeared into the murky waters, my son asked, “Do you think he came from the hatchery, Dad?” I smiled and replied, “could be.”

As a Hatchery Manager, I frequently get questions from visitors who are shocked to learn that the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) raises and stocks Channel Catfish. They often ask, “Aren’t catfish in all the lakes already, why do you need to stock them?” Generally, when a water

requires hatchery stockings to sustain the population of a species, it is due to some combination of high fishing pressure and lack of spawning habitat. According to the 2013-2017 PFBC Channel Catfish Management Plan, about half of the Channel Catfish populations in Pennsylvania’s waters are sustained by natural reproduction. Some of these waters had historically good Channel Catfish populations and others were created by hatchery stockings. These waters do not require hatchery stockings to sustain populations. The other half are not sustained by natural reproduction, because the habitat is not suitable for the spawning of these fish. In these waters, hatchery stockings are needed to maintain the population of Channel Catfish.

Channel Catfish are continually among the most targeted species by Pennsylvania anglers according to surveys completed by PFBC and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Channel Catfish are a popular species to target, because fish grow to a large size, are relatively easy to catch, offer a considerable fight and are delicious. Fishing for Channel Catfish is an ideal activity for family outings, picnics or for anglers who are looking to spend quiet time relaxing in nature. Channel Catfish are also active at night, which provides anglers additional opportunities.



Channel Catfish egg mass

How do we raise Channel Catfish?

In early June, when the water temperatures sustain in the upper 60s to lower 70s, staff at the Linesville State Fish Hatchery start collecting Channel Catfish eggs. The Linesville State Fish Hatchery has four, 1-acre ponds that hold adult Channel Catfish. When the timing is right, Fish Culturists place 10 to 12 spawning structures in each of these ponds. These spawning structures are constructed from 20-gallon plastic jars with the open end covered with plywood. Then, the plywood is cut to give the Channel Catfish a small half-moon-shaped opening to enter the jar. Fish Culturists check these structures for eggs once every 3 days, because these eggs hatch in only 5 to 6 days from being laid at typical temperatures. When the eggs are found, the eggs are in a sticky egg mass—not a pile of loose individual eggs. The slimy clump of eggs are about the size of a thick 10-inch pancake. Egg masses are removed from the structures and placed into a cooler that is designed to keep each egg mass separate. Once all the egg masses have been collected for a given day, the coolers of eggs are transported to the hatch house for incubation.

When the eggs are brought into the hatch house, each egg mass is weighed before it is placed into a container with a solution to dissolve the “gooey” part of the egg mass. Once dissolved, the individual eggs are separated from each other. This allows hatchery staff to measure the size of the eggs and inventory the amount of eggs in each mass. On average, these egg masses weigh just under 1½-pounds and contain about 16,000 eggs. The eggs are placed into egg battery jars with flowing water for incubation.

The eggs are left in the jars until hatching is complete. Then, fry are moved to small, circular fiberglass tanks that are about 10-inches deep. The freshly-hatched fry have a yolk sac attached

to them to provide nutrients for the first 5 to 6 days. When the yolk sac is completely absorbed, the fish will begin swimming and searching for food. The staff at the hatchery start these fish on small amounts of high protein dry fish food. These small Channel Catfish are then distributed between the Linesville State Fish Hatchery, Union City State Fish Hatchery and Pleasant Mount State Fish Hatchery for grow out.

All three facilities are constantly trying new methods to grow fish to a stockable size, which is generally about 3- to 5-inches by fall. The focus is always on how to raise these fish in the most efficient and cost-effective manner, while providing anglers with fish that give the best opportunity to expand fishing opportunities. Some of these fish are stocked into ponds where food is available daily. Some fish are raised in large concrete tanks or raceways where feed is distributed by automatic feeders. In the last 3 years, PFBC has annually stocked an average of 118,000 Channel Catfish. These fish are annually distributed to 35 to 40 lakes across Pennsylvania.

If you have children interested in fishing, if you have been thinking about getting back into fishing or if you are an avid angler for other species, I encourage you to give Channel Catfish fishing a try. Take a look at the list of lakes below where PFBC Fisheries Biologists have identified the largest populations of Channel Catfish. Channel Catfish are managed as “panfish” in all Pennsylvania waters, which means there is no closed season and no minimum size. You can keep up to 50 fish per day. Some of these fish get quite large, and one or two fish provide a great meal. The current Pennsylvania State Record Fish was caught in the Lehigh Canal, Northampton County, and weighed a whopping 35-pounds, 3-ounces. Visit www.fishandboat.com for information on upcoming catfish festivals. ☐

Pennsylvania Lakes with Abundant Channel Catfish Populations	
LAKE	COUNTY
Blue Marsh Lake	Berks
Crooked Creek Lake	Armstrong
Foster Joseph Sayers Lake	Centre
Green Lick Reservoir	Fayette
Lake Arthur	Butler
Lake Galena	Bucks
Lake Luxembourg	Bucks
Lake Nockamixon	Bucks
Lake Redman	York
Lake Wallenpaupack	Pike
Loyalhanna Lake	Westmoreland
Octoraro Lake	Chester/Lancaster
Ontelaunee Lake	Berks
Pymatuning Reservoir	Crawford
Shenango River Lake	Mercer
Struble Lake	Chester

Pennsylvania ANGLER & BOATER



Get the complete story and read what you've been missing!



Do you like what you're reading? Do you find *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater* online articles a valuable resource? If so, why not become a regular subscriber to *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater* and receive the entire magazine delivered to your doorstep. With each printed issue, we place only a small portion of our feature articles on our website. If you fish or boat in Pennsylvania, you shouldn't miss a single issue, or even a single article! It's been the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission's (PFBC's) premier, award-winning magazine since 1931.

Print out this page and mail the form below with your payment to begin your subscription. Or you can subscribe online through PFBC's Outdoor Shop. **CLICK HERE!**

6 Issues per year!

Subscribe with this form today or online at www.pa.wildlifelicense.com.

SUBSCRIBE TO *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater*

Payment must accompany orders. Use your credit card, check or money order made payable to the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission. Return this form with payment to: **PA&B Circulation, Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, P.O. Box 67000, Harrisburg, PA 17106-7000.** Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone (include area code) _____

E-mail (optional) _____

Account # if renewing or extending _____

One year (6 issues) **\$20** Three years (18 issues) **\$48**

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$

Credit Card Purchase: VISA Mastercard Discover

Credit Card # _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

Phone _____ Email (optional) _____

Since 1931, Pennsylvania's official fishing and boating magazine.