

8.—THE HABITS AND THE VALUE FOR FOOD OF THE AMERICAN CHANNEL CAT-FISH (*ICTALURUS PUNCTATUS*, RAFINESQUE).

By DAVID S. JORDAN.

The channel cat reaches a length of 2 to 3 feet and a weight of 15 to 20 pounds or more. As usually seen in the markets it ranges from 1 to 5 pounds in weight, and those exceeding 5 pounds are not common.

It is handsomer, more graceful, and more active than any other of our catfishes. It is light olivaceous and silvery in color, covered with small brown spots when young. The skin is thin and translucent, much less thick and leathery than in our common catfishes (*Amiurus*). The head is small, the mouth small, and the body slender. There is much less waste in the body of the channel cat than in other catfishes, as the latter lose more than half their weight by the removal of the head, the entrails, and the skin.

The flesh of the channel cat, when fresh, is very superior; it is white, crisp, and juicy, of excellent flavor, and not tough. It is much more delicate both in fiber and in flavor than that of our other catfishes. When well cooked, I consider it superior to that of the black bass, the wall eye, the yellow perch, or any other of our percoid fishes. Among our fresh-water fishes, it is inferior only to the whitefish, the trout, and other *Salmonidæ*.

The channel cat abounds in all flowing streams from Western New York westward to Montana and southward to Florida and Texas. It is, perhaps, most common in Tennessee, Arkansas, and Missouri. It seems to prefer running waters, and both young and old are most abundant in gravelly shoals and ripples. The other catfishes prefer rather sluggish waters and mud bottoms. I have occasionally taken channel cats in ponds and bayous, but such localities are apparently not their preference. They rarely enter small brooks, unless these are clear and gravelly. Whether they will thrive in artificial ponds we can only know from experiment.

The channel cat is much less tenacious of life than the "bull-head" (*Amiurus nebulosus*) and other *Amiuri*. It is a carnivorous fish, although less greedy than its larger-mouthed relatives. It feeds on insects, cray-fishes, worms, and small fishes, and readily takes the hook. It spawns in spring, but its breeding habits have not been studied.

As a food fish, the channel cat is certainly better worthy of attention than any other American catfish. If once introduced, it ought to thrive in the rivers of the Middle States, of Southern New England, and of California. It is also to be commended to the attention of European fish-culturists. In the streams of Western Europe, which are not cold enough for clear enough for the trout, the channel cat ought to thrive, and there is no fish native to those waters which is as valuable for food.

INDIANA UNIVERSITY, BLOOMINGTON, IND., December 18, 1884.