

92.—NOTES ON THE NATURAL HISTORY OF THE BUFFALO.

By HENRY DRESSER.

[From a letter to Prof. S. F. Baird.]

I have lived on the banks of the Illinois River, and among fishermen, for more than thirty years, during which time I have had favorable opportunities for observing the habits of fish.

The buffalo is our great food-producing fish, and supplies food for game fish. In draining and reclaiming lakes and overflowed lands I have often observed their peculiarities. When the streams begin to get warm and are swollen by the rains of spring, the buffalo goes up the creek sloughs and runs to deposit its eggs. These eggs are very small but very great in number, and are deposited near the edge of these waters. The gar follows close behind, depositing its eggs in the same locality. Their eggs are much larger but less numerous. By the time the young buffalo is half an inch long the gar is two inches long and able to swallow the young buffalo. The pike and bass having spawned and hatched their young earlier in the season, have also the start in growth and can devour young buffalo. Thus proceeds the life-struggle—millions of young buffalo hovering close to the water's edge in order to keep out of the way of their devourers.

By November the buffalo that has survived is about 4 inches long; the gar about 10 inches, and the pike from 12 to 16 inches, according to the food supply.

If the buffalo survives until the second year he begins to reach out, and by the autumn is too large to be swallowed by the gar or any but an *old* pike. Two or three years later the buffalo is many times larger than the gar of the same age, and has then nothing to fear except from the fishermen. I have seen them take buffalo that would weigh 30 pounds.

The buffalo commence to spawn when two years old, and enter upon their life work—furnishing food for game fish.

Learning that New England waters have been stocked with black bass by the fish commissions, it occurred to me that it would have been better to have first stocked them with buffalo in order that the bass might have plenty of food. But I am not sure that the buffalo would thrive in that latitude, though I intend making the experiment.

NAPLES, SCOTT COUNTY, ILLINOIS,

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