

Bullish about bullheads



Luke Ovgard/Contributed Photo

A brown bullhead catfish hooked in Florida.

Celebrating the diminutive catfish



LUKE OVGARD
CAUGHT OVGARD

Few fish are as overlooked and maligned as the bullhead catfish. These diminutive slimeballs represent a total of seven species concentrated in a native range primarily within the Southeastern United States: black bullhead, brown bullhead, flat bullhead, snail bullhead, spotted bullhead, white catfish and yellow bullhead.

I grew up catching brown and yellow bullhead in Oregon, but I found the other, less widely introduced species over the years. Blacks came first in Utah and then again in Texas. Whites came first from Washington, D.C., and then California, Illinois and Alabama. Spotted came from Florida's panhandle. Finally, flats and snails came from North Carolina to complete my set, and I sort of forgot about them afterward.

After all, they've been introduced far outside their range and

are highly invasive — particularly in Oregon — where they displace the native sculpins that fill a similar ecological niche but reach only a fraction of the size of the bullheads.

Though I spent plenty of summer nights fishing for bullheads in my home waters, it was always because there was nothing better available. It was also more of a social event than serious fishing. We'd make a small fire on the gravel or muddy bank, soak some worms, roast some marshmallows with friends and kill every one of the invasive mudcats we caught to save its weight in native fishes. Some of my friends ate them, but that's a mistake I only made once or twice. In the less-than-pristine waters we always caught them, they tasted muddy, the meat often covered in parasites.

It wasn't until I was 30 years old, fishing in Florida this year, that I realized some people not only seriously pursue them, but actually prize them.

Prize

Mudcats, cat-fish, bullheads, slimers and a host of other local names all offer valid table fare across much of their native range. Though they can tolerate an array of water conditions and even salinities (I've caught brown bull-



Luke Ovgard/Contributed Photo

A juvenile yellow catfish.



Luke Ovgard/Contributed Photo

A bullhead catfish.

head in Miami's primarily salt-water canals, they thrive in other areas, too.

Though most farmed catfish you'll see at the store is channel catfish, many parts of the Amer-

ican Midwest and South have small, wild-caught catfish industries, which often sell bullheads along with the larger channels, flatheads and blues. In most states, it's illegal to sell sport-caught fish, but commercial fishing licenses open up many doors and many more wallets.

In fact, according to the aquaculture tracking site, IntraFish, America's eighth-favorite seafood to consume is catfish.

While traveling through the South — particularly Mississippi, where per capita catfish consumption is the highest in the U.S. — you can find catfish almost everywhere. Every diner and American restaurant offers catfish, many boasting "All You Can Eat Catfish" on a certain day of the week.

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Best day of the year?

Deer hunting season starting Oct. 2

By **JAYSON JACOBY**
Baker City Herald

The Super Bowl?
Just another football game.
Halloween?
No need to don a costume to load up on empty calories.

For no small number of people, Saturday, Oct. 2, 2021, is the date circled on their calendar.

And though you won't find the opening day of buck deer hunting season on most lists of official holidays, it's no less a milestone for hunters.

The arrival of the season is the culmination of a considerable amount of anxiety for many.

They waited for weeks this spring for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to announce the results of the computer lottery that determines who gets to hunt and who has to wait until next year.

Or the year after. And those who drew the coveted tag then had to wait through the summer, through scouting trips and

the frustration of seeing a great buck weeks too early, for Oct. 2 to get here.

The wait is almost over. And although the effects of the devastating winter of 2016-17, when hundreds of deer died in Northeastern Oregon, still linger in some places, deer numbers have risen in others.

The season that opens Oct. 2 continues through Oct. 13 in most units east of the Cascades.

Following are forecasts from around the region based on deer counts from the spring of 2021 conducted by ODFW biologists:

Beulah, Sumpter, Keating, Pine Creek, Lookout Mt. units

Over-winter survival was fair in Baker County with an average fawn ratio of 30 per 100 adults counted in the spring. Animals will be the most active early in the morning and late in the afternoon when temperatures cool off. Hunters should concentrate their efforts in areas of good forage near north slopes that provide good bedding cover.

The Beulah unit is still recovering from the winter of 2016-17 with a fawn ratio of 24/100 adults. The

buck ratio is 14/100 does, which is just below the buck management objective of 15/100 does. As a result, tag numbers will remain at lower levels into the future to allow population to recover. With last year's tag cuts, hunter success was 35%, which was down 10% from the previous year. There will be a few more yearling bucks available for harvest this year, but only a small increase.

Tag numbers for the Sumpter, Lookout Mountain, Pine Creek and Keating units, which were cut by 50% in 2017 following the hard winter, remain at those levels four years later.

Sumpter's 2021 tag allocation is 825. Lookout Mountain is at 161, Pine Creek at 193 and Keating at 275. Beulah, which had a 40% cut in tags for 2017, has 1,155 tags this year, slightly fewer than the 1,188 in 2017.

Murderers Creek, Northside, Desolation, West Beulah units

Deer populations remain below management objectives in all units. Buck ratios were below management objective in all



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

This buck in a Baker City backyard won't be available to hunters when the season starts Oct. 2, but they'll be looking for this sort of animal out in the woods and sage country.

units. Spring fawn ratios were lower than desired but higher than last year. With slightly better fawn ratio expect a few more yearling bucks available for harvest this year.

Last year, archery and rifle hunters had below average success for Northside and Desolation but above average for Murderers Creek. Similar or slightly better results are

expected this year.

Deer hunters should look for areas where fire has occurred in past five to 15 years as deer tend to favor vegetation that occurs following fires. The Shake Table fire on Aldrich Mountain, Canyon Creek Complex, and the Monument Rock burns are starting to show signs of increasing deer and may be a good place to find a buck.

Heppner, Fossil, East Biggs, southern Columbia Basin units

Last year deer survival was much better with a mild winter and decent spring conditions. Mule deer numbers in all of the units should be slightly improved over last year.

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