

## CARP EGGS: AN "EXOTIC" FISH FOOD

by Konrad Schmidt, St. Paul, Minnesota

In the 1830s, Carp were considered so valuable that the federal government posted armed guards at the hatchery where these "little imports" were to be propagated. At that time, everyone believed the Carp would become one of this country's greatest sport fishes. A century has almost passed and we all know how successful the stocking programs were, but the great expectations of this fish never materialized. Believe it or not, Carp do have one merit going for them that was not originally considered. The female Carp is an incredible egg-producing machine. I have found some females that I would estimate were carrying an egg mass almost half their body weight. If these eggs are processed correctly, they make an excellent frozen food.

Every spring through early summer, Carp congregate and ascend many rivers and creeks to spawn. When they are running at their peak, they will choke a stream from bank to bank. The female Carp can be easily distinguished from the male by her usually larger size and greatly distended belly. I have taken Carp by spear, bow and arrow, and fishing pole, but I prefer the spear because it is the quickest and easiest to use. Regulations vary from state to state governing when and how "rough fish" can be legally speared. This information can be obtained from a conservation officer or state agency responsible for managing the fisheries resource.

There is really no reason why anyone must wage a holy war against these invading infidels from a foreign land. I would hope everyone uses a little restraint and common sense--take only what you intend to use. I have found that four or five large females will supply my needs for three to six months depending on how many fish I have at that time. I have tried repeatedly and unsuccessfully to "milk" the eggs from Carp, but have had to settle for a much less glamorous method. I cut the belly from the anus to just below the gills. The two golden egg sacs can be found along each wall and easily removed. Disposing of the remains can be a problem, and in Minnesota, fisheries regulations prohibit returning Carp to the water or littering them along the banks. This is usually ignored, however. When possible, Carp should be buried, and I have found that they make an excellent garden fertilizer that grows the best sweet corn I have ever eaten.

The eggs must be cleaned correctly or they will remain in large clumps. I freeze the eggs for a couple of days, then allow them to thaw out. This makes separating the eggs from what I would describe as the placenta a great deal easier. I clean the eggs with a large, fine-meshed dip net by running water from a faucet on the eggs and squeezing the ball in the bottom of the net. The eggs quickly separate from the placenta,

which can now be discarded. I package the eggs in "Zip-loc" bags, but prefer to add some water first; that makes the mixture more spreadable. When the eggs are evenly distributed and the bags are sealed, I carefully stack them on a platter and place it in the freezer. I feed the eggs in the same way I do brine shrimp, but sparingly in the first few days to allow the fish time to switch to their new food. Once this adjustment period has passed, the fish accept Carp eggs just as readily and eagerly as they do brine shrimp.

I have so far only tried the eggs from Carp because they are so plentiful and easy to catch. Eggs from many other fishes should work just as well, but I am aware of at least two fish families that will cause problems. First, the milt (sperm) and roe (eggs) of gar are supposedly poisonous. This is a natural defense mechanism that provides protection against egg predators. Second, the eggs from suckers should be thoroughly soaked to assure that they don't swell in the stomachs of fish after ingestion. A friend of mine learned this lesson the hard way by wiping out an entire aquarium in about ten minutes. He later learned that pre-soaking for several minutes before feeding will render the eggs completely harmless. I suggest that only easily replaceable fish--e.g., those purchased from a bait store--be fed the eggs of an unfamiliar species.