

COLLECTING IN EAST TEXAS

by John Ben Williams, Carthage, Texas

It was another hot August afternoon with the temperature hovering around the century mark under the blazing Texas sun. I was inspecting a logging crew harvesting pine trees near Brushy Creek in deep east Texas. Brushy Creek has its origins in the south southwest portion of Panola County. It winds northeast for approximately 11 miles before merging with Murvaul Creek  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles north of FN 999. Murvaul Creek empties into the Sabine River approximately eight miles to the east.

The logging operation was located one mile upstream from FN 999, two miles west of U.S. Highway 59, four miles east of Gary, on property owned by my family.

The creek was nearby, so I decided to walk over and take a look. The water was running steadily, but the water level was low from the dry summer and the high temperatures. The clarity of the water was exceptional, affording a good opportunity to observe any fish that might be swimming around. Sure enough, as I looked down into the water from high up on the bank, there I saw a school of minnows staying close together as they moved back and forth along a narrow stretch of water.

Oh how I wished for my dip net and a bucket! The excitement of seeing a possibly major addition to my native-fish collection was almost overwhelming. Gradually I regained control of myself and decided to investigate the possibility that there were more fish to see. Beginning to make my way upstream, I began to see school after school of minnows swimming in the clear, shallow water. Not wanting to lose this opportunity, and worried about the rains coming and the water rising, I hurried back to the truck and then on to the house to get my dip nets, buckets, and a good drink of water.

Arriving back at the creek, I began to advance methodically upstream, swinging my dip net at every possible target. I began to catch fish almost immediately. Not just one here and one there, but several at a time, and you know what this does to a native-fish collector--you just want more and more. I mean, this was Paradise, all the fish you could dip. This went on and on--dipping fish, putting fish in the bucket, advancing upstream, and dipping more fish. It wasn't long, though, before the hot August afternoon sun got the best of me. I was totally exhausted. Oh, I still had the want-to, but the body, drenched in sweat, was no longer willing to keep going.

Now I began to worry. Here I was a quarter of a mile from the truck, 12 miles from home, with the heat endangering any chance of my making it home with the two buckets of fish still alive. All during the collecting I had taken precautions to keep the fish out of the sun. The creek was deep in the woods, so the trees provided plenty of shade. The water was cool, so I had kept the collecting buckets in the water to

make sure everything stayed cool. Now that it was time to start home, I checked the water and the fish. So far, everything was fine. I knew that to beat the heat, time would be of the essence, so I hurried the best I could. Back at the truck, I quickly loaded up and headed for home. The fish made the trip in fine shape, and this was one happy collector.

I placed the fish in three separate 10-gallon tanks and began to observe what I had caught. I was really amazed at the diversity of fish for just one collecting trip. This is what I had collected:

1. Golden Shiner (Notemigonus crysoleucas), 50+
2. Blackspot Shiner (Notropis atrocaudalis), 3
3. Ribbon Shiner (Notropis fumeus), 3
4. Red Shiner (Notropis lutrensis), 5
5. Blacktail Shiner (Notropis venustus), 23
6. Bullhead Minnow (Pimephales vigilax), 50+
7. Mosquitofish (Gambusia affinis), 15
8. Blackspotted Topminnow (Fundulus olivaceus), 8
9. Slough Darter (Etheostoma gracile), 11
10. Dusky Darter (Percina sciera), 13
11. Freckled Madtom (Noturus nocturnus), 5

As can be seen, the most prevalent species collected in this quarter-mile section of Brushy Creek were the Golden Shiner and the Bullhead Minnow. Some other species and numbers of darters and catfish could probably have been collected if more emphasis had been put into looking for these groups. The Mosquitofish and the Blackspotted Topminnow are both very abundant in Brushy Creek as well as in most other bodies of water in this area, so no particular effort was made to collect these. The Blackspot, Ribbon, and Blacktail Shiners have been hard to come by in the past, so they are highly prized and sought-after. The Red Shiner is very abundant, especially in the spring of the year, but I have had my ups and downs in keeping this fish.

After some observation, and selection of the fishes to be kept, the remaining fish will be returned to the wild.

This was one of my best collecting trips ever. I'm looking forward to my next one.

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