

A REPORT ON COLLECTING FISH NEAR ROCKPORT, TEXAS March 1-9, 1984

by Hal Fairfield, Felton, California

On a recent pleasure trip to Rockport, Texas, I combined a family visit with an unexpected and rewarding collecting expedition. What follows are some of the highlights of interest to fishkeepers.

Rockport is a small fishing community located 30 miles northeast of Corpus Christi, Texas on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Most of the Texas coastline is protected from large wave action by a series of long, low islands resembling giant sandbars. The protected bay created by these islands has become the "Intracoastal Waterway," a watery highway for ocean-going ships, barges, and tankers picking up and delivering the cargoes. More importantly, these warm, protected waters are home for vast beds of oysters, shrimp, and fish. The low, flat land surrounding Rockport, coupled with the highly irregular sandy coastline, helps create large salt marshes. These salt marshes act as natural nurseries for shrimp and other shellfish. Inland rivers drain very slowly into these marshes. Because of the very slow tidal action (not more than a foot per day, it seems), brackish water results, in variable degrees of salinity, creating an environmental niche for several species of killifish and live-bearing toothcarp.

One unlikely place where we collected was a roadside ditch next to a salt marsh on Highway 35, about 5 miles northeast of Cavasso Creek bridge. Mollienisia latipinna (Sailfin Molly), Cyprinodon variegatus (Variegated Cyprinodon), Gambusia affinis (Mosquitofish), and an unidentified killifish, possibly Fundulus pulvereus (Bayou Killifish), were caught here. Evidence surrounding this area indicated that the fish were forced here by flooding. Since the land is so flat, and the water table so high, drainage is slow. I caught several of the previously mentioned fish here using only a small aquarium dip net, which indicates the shallow water depth and my totally unprepared condition for collecting fish.

Many of the roadside ditches at this time of the year are filled with fresh water. Nearly every ditch where we stopped contained a population of Gambusia affinis, from  $\frac{1}{2}$ " fry to 1" adults. The larger females invariably evaded my small dip net.

The next day, traveling west of Rockport on Highway 881, and turning north on Highway 136 to upper Copano Bay near Aransas Creek, we stopped at a salt marsh where tidal action had drained most of the shallow pools. In one nearly dried but still muddy pool, I caught four Bayou Killifish hiding inside an old rubber boot! Everyone commented on the living conditions coastal fish have to endure. At a culvert which drains marshes on either side of Highway 136, I collected Cyprinodon variegatus, Fundulus grandis (Gulf Killifish), Adinia xenica (Diamond Killifish),

and Fundulus pulvereus. In addition to these, my net produced many baby shrimp. All of the fish caught thus far were released after preliminary identification. I needed to investigate Texas game laws on collecting and transporting non-game fish.

I found all the people cooperative in and around Rockport, and I received excellent response to my inquiries from Mr. Lee Green and the staff at the Texas State Marine Lab. By calling the toll-free phone number printed on the back of the Texas Fishing Laws Handbook, I found out the legal obligations of removing non-game fish from the state, that is, the possession of a valid Texas fishing license.

After a few days of visiting, sightseeing, and preparing for my return trip, I obtained a Texas state fishing license and proceeded to collect in earnest. We drove back to upper Copano Bay, and in some shallow pools collected Cyprinodon variegatus, Adinia xenica, Fundulus grandis, and Fundulus similis (Longnose Killifish)(the latter two species were rescued from a fisherman's bait bucket). As carry-on luggage, with hand-checking through security, the fish and I made the 1,400-mile air trip home with only one casualty.

An important discovery I made at home was the salinity of Bay water. A sample taken from the Bay at Rockport registered 1.010 @ 68° F on my hydrometer. This is less salty than sea water in the Pacific Ocean.

I would like to conclude by saying that this area of Texas, I am sure, would yield more species of suitable aquarium fish if a more thoroughly equipped and scouted field trip were planned.

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#### DEADLY ILLNESS IN TEXAS RIVER

A boy swimming in the Frio River, Garner St. Park, Uvalde County, Texas, contracted a rare disease known as amoebic meningocephalitis, caused by something called Naegleria fowleri, according to UPI. It is contracted through inhalation, according to the early-August story. Another case was reported in Dallas the same week. Only 40 cases have been reported since discovery of the disease in 1965. State officials have banned swimming in the Garner Park.