

MAIL ORDER COLLECTING GEAR

by Konrad Schmidt, Cottage Grove, Minnesota

Finding a reliable, local supply of seines and minnow traps is sometimes impossible. Bait and sporting-goods stores seem to be in the habit of stocking up on these items only once just prior to each fishing opener. I have experienced the same problem searching for casting nets in the south central states.

I adjusted to this feast-or-famine availability by purchasing everything I thought was needed and usually got by. Recently, however, I have found a much better and convenient substitute--mail order. With the waning of winter, when most "normal" people are waiting for their Burpee seed catalogs, I'm checking my mail box for fishing and outdoor equipment catalogs.

I now do all my shopping at home where I can leisurely compare items and prices. From the six 1988 catalogs received, I have developed a gear and accessories table and provided the company addresses. I have selected sixteen items that I have either used or considered applicable to collecting or observing native fishes. Favorite gear types will receive much more coverage than others I use infrequently or have had no experience with.

SEINES are probably the most common and widely used type of collecting gear. They are made of polyester or nylon. Polyester seines are cheaper, but less durable than nylon. They must be dried after each use to prevent the material from rotting. Nylon's only drawback is that it will break down if exposed for long periods to direct sunlight. Personally, I prefer polyester seines 15 to 20 feet long with an eighth-inch mesh. Anything longer frustratingly snags on logs and rocks or becomes clogged with heavy mats of vegetation. Larger meshes sometimes "gill net" fish and also permit most young of the year to pass through the seine.

MINNOW TRAPS are another popular device and available in metal and plastic. Gander Mountain even goes further by offering two plastic models for running and still water. I prefer metal because the plastic traps I have require weights to keep them on the bottom and are also more difficult to open and close. Traps need to be baited with crackers, bread crumbs, canned cat food, or my "daily special"--Purina Trout Chow.

DIP NETS resemble the long-handled landing nets, but have a quarter-inch mesh or less. Because I mostly collect alone, dip nets have become my favorite and most often used gear type. They simply cannot be beat in riffles where I have

greatly increased my catch of darters and other bottom clinging species. All that is required is keeping the dip net stationary and flush to the bottom while using my foot to probe around boulders and turn over rocks. Most of the fishes flushed from their hiding places flee downstream into the net. In pools, I walk down one side of the stream with the dip net extended toward the other bank. Large schools of fish first begin to move upstream until they hit shallow water at the end of the pool and attempt to circle back along the other bank where my net is waiting for them. I admit most of the school is able to by-pass the net, but I still end up with 50 to 100 fish per pass.

UMBRELLA DROP NETS also require baiting and are set on the bottom off bridges, docks, and piers. Usually in a short time, fish move in over the net which is then quickly lifted to the surface.

CASTING NETS seem to be more popular in the South. I must admit I am far from mastering the technique of correctly throwing this giant fabric frisbee. Nevertheless, I have not given up on this gear type and am convinced they are the best answer for skittish minnows, killifish, and other surface hugging species. Casting nets are available in monofilament and multifilament and diameters of 6 to 16 feet. Being a novice, I prefer the smaller diameters which should be easier to throw; however, I would also like to mention Cabela's casting-net thrower which might be the "training wheels" most of us need to get started.

Cabela's also carries a ONE-MAN SEINE which will stand by itself, allowing the seiner to walk through the water herding fish toward the net. I have a homemade version of this seine which has worked extremely well for me in shallow riffles (2 feet or less) and covers about three times the stream bottom that my dip net does; however, anything deeper with swift current requires another person to help lift it off the bottom. I have also used it as a push seine in streams, but have only found it effective in dead-end channels or small, landlocked pools.

TROLLING BAIT BUCKETS are another gem I have really come to appreciate. For years, I was forced to play "leap frog" with my minnow bucket because it had to be retrieved with each seine haul. Now, I leash the "troller" to my belt and it dutifully follows me where ever I go. When using my dip net, I lock the access door open which permits me to quickly toss fish in with hardly a pause in my "dipping rhythm." The heavy buckets and coolers used to transport fish stay with the car and are only removed to add water or the troller's contents when I'm finished.

BAIT BUCKETS come in several types, but should be insulated to transport fish on very warm days. Some buckets even come equipped with self-contained aeration systems. I rarely if ever use bait buckets for transport anymore, preferring instead food-coolers such as Gott, Thermos, and Coleman. Many have excellent locking tops which keep leaks from splashing water to a minimum. Otherwise, I use bungee straps which work just as well.

DC AIR PUMPS are extremely useful when transporting large numbers of fish or when the car is stopped and no longer providing aeration through "sloshing." I have tried Cabela's Deluxe Minnow Aerator; I was not satisfied with the air output, though that pump may have been defective. Another promising possibility is the Mino-Mizer which atomizes water into an oxygen-absorbing mist. It sounds good, anyway.

DC WATER PUMPS are very similar to aquarium powerheads and circulate water through an adjustable spray tube. Some come equipped with built-in filters. I have the "Fish Saver" which works well and is extremely quiet, however, NANFA member Eric Lindberg has developed his own version of Cabela's "Super Fish Saver" by using a much cheaper bilge pump and a homemade PVC spray tube which is mounted to the wall of his Thermos cooler.

Many of the MEDICATIONS listed can be very useful in transporting, keeping, and breeding natives, but are only available in bulk quantities. Smaller quantities of the same or substitute medications should be available at most pet stores.

WADERS make collecting in the spring and fall much more enjoyable and are either insulated or non-insulated. They are usually available in hip, waist, or chest lengths. I primarily use non-insulated hip waders in shallow water, and very reluctantly, chest waders in deep water.

HEAD LAMPS are another specialty item that I use every time I'm collecting at night. My hands are free to work the seine or dip net and the beam is directed exactly where I'm looking. I now take this convenience for granted, but I began with hand-held flashlights--extremely cumbersome and more than one was dropped into the river.

I first learned the value of POLARIZED SUNGLASSES while surveying salmon streams in Oregon. They did help reduce the glare off the water on sunny days, however, they were at their best on cloudy, overcast days. With these glasses, I could easily tell the difference between Coho Salmon and Steelhead, locate spawning redds, and most importantly, read the stream bottom, which helped me avoid some really nasty drop-offs.

Back in the Midwest, I have found them to be a tremendous aid in finding darters and sculpins before they are successful at sneaking around my dip net. There are several lenses and frames to choose from, and for prescription glasses, plastic clip-ons are also available.

Finally, I use a MASK, FINS, AND SNORKEL to observe fish on their own turf, while others have successfully used them in conjunction with nets and suction guns to collect both freshwater and marine fishes. Snorkeling is a simple, fun, and much cheaper substitute to scuba diving which must be tried to fully appreciate. The best equipment is very comfortable to wear and frequently made of surgical silicone.

Hopefully, this should give everyone enough information to find those hard-to-come-by items that will not only improve collection methods and results, but also provide an enjoyable and rewarding experience. Tables, keys, and addresses follow.

Collecting Gear and Accessories

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
Bass Pro	:	:	X:	X:	:	X:	X:	:	X:	X:	X:	:	X:	X:	:	X:	
Cabela's	:	X:	X:	X:	:	X:	X:	X:	X:	X:	X:	:	X:	:	X:	:	
Gander Mt.	:	X:	X:	:	:	:	:	:	X:	X:	X:	X:	:	X:	:	X:	
Memphis Net	:	X:	X:	X:	X:	X:	:	:	:	:	:	:	X:	X:	:	:	
Netcraft	:	X:	X:	X:	X:	:	:	:	X:	X:	X:	X:	:	X:	:	X:	
Nylon Net	:	X:	X:	X:	X:	X:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	X:	:	:	
REI	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	:	X:	X:	X:

Gear Code Key

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| 1. Seines | 9. Bait Buckets |
| 2. Minnow Traps | 10. Air Pumps |
| 3. Dip Nets | 11. Water Pumps |
| 4. Umbrella Drop Nets | 12. Medications |
| 5. Casting Nets | 13. Waders |
| 6. Casting Net Throwers | 14. Head Lamps |
| 7. One Man Seines | 15. Polarized Sunglasses |
| 8. Trolling Bait Buckets | 16. Snorkeling Equipment |

Addresses

*Bass Pro Shops
P.O. Box 4046
Springfield, MO 65808-4046

*Cabela's
812 13th Ave.
Sidney, NE 69160

*Gander Mountain
P.O. Box 248
Wilmot, WI 53192-0248

*Memphis Net & Twine
P.O. Box 8331
Memphis, TN 38108

*Netcraft
2800 Tremainsville Rd.
Toledo, OH 43613

*Nylon Net
P.O. Box 592
Memphis, TN 38101

*REI
P.O. Box 88125
Seattle, WA 98138-0125

* - Items listed generally found only in spring catalog.
