

MINNOW TRAPS: A Native-Fish Collector's Best Friend

by John Ben Williams, Carthage, Texas

I discovered, purchased, and tried my first minnow trap several years ago. The minnow trap that I bought then, and continue to use today, is the Gee's Improved Wire Minnow Trap manufactured by Cuba Specialty Manufacturing Co., Fillmore, N.Y. These minnow traps come in two halves which connect in the middle to form an oblong trap measuring approximately 16" long and 9" deep. There are also 18" extensions that are available to fit between the two halves to make a longer trap. On each end of the minnow trap is a funnel to help direct the fish in. This funnel can be enlarged or enclosed, depending on the size of fish a person wishes to catch.

After many years of success and failure in using minnow traps, I would like to pass along the knowledge that I have obtained to those who might be interested in trying this tested method of collecting native fish.

QUESTION: Where can I purchase a minnow trap?

Most sporting-goods and tackle shops carry various kinds of fish traps. Any other store that carries fishing tackle might carry minnow traps too. I have found it best to shop around, for the prices vary greatly from store to store.

QUESTION: How do I anchor my minnow traps?

The fastener, which holds the two halves of the minnow trap together, has a hole in one end to attach a rope. I personally buy 25' polypropylene rope to tie my minnow traps to the bank. I have used shorter roped in the past, and have been unable to check or retrieve the traps for long periods of time when the creeks rise and the water is slow about going down. The 25' rope alleviates the problem and can be tied shorter if the need arises.

QUESTION: What do I use for bait?

The manufacturer suggests that you use dry crackers, dough balls, or meat. I have tried many things, and these three work best for me:

1. earthworms;
2. crawfish tails; and
3. potted meat.

The earthworms are dug on the farm and placed in nylon filter bags obtained at a pet shop. The crawfish are caught in the traps almost daily, and the tails are stripped and placed back in the traps. The potted meat is purchased at a grocery store, and a half-dozen holes are punched with a thumbtack

in each side of the small can. (Small holes are necessary because larger holes will allow the potted meat to wash out too easily. The earthworms are changed every week, the crawfish daily, and the potted meat once a month.

QUESTION: When do I put my minnow traps out?

I keep mine out year-round. A wire minnow trap in continuous use will last approximately one year. Each January I purchase new minnow traps to replace the old ones. The most productive time of year for me in East Texas is January through April. More fish are caught after a good rain and rise in the water level than at any other time.

QUESTION: Where do I place my minnow traps?

The creeks of East Texas are joined by many smaller streams. The fish come upstream in the spring and branch out into these smaller streams. I have found the best location for my minnow traps to be up these smaller streams at natural barriers and congregating areas such as: culverts, slight waterfalls, deep pools, below beaver dams, and in overflow ditches. Minnow traps can also be used in ponds, lakes, and large creeks and rivers.

QUESTION: How often do I check the minnow traps?

As often as possible. I check mine every day that I can. It is important to check the minnow traps often for several reasons:

1. Trapees figure out in time how to get out.
2. Larger fish may eat or kill smaller ones.
3. Large crawfish can cut up and kill the fish.
4. A drop in water level can leave your trap high and dry.

QUESTION: Are there any laws affecting minnow traps?

It is important to check on and abide by the regulations in your state or area. Some species are protected by law and require special permits to collect them. Further, there may well be laws and regulations specifically pertaining to minnow traps--for instance, requiring name-and-address tags on traps remote from the user or left overnight in the water. So, before using your minnow trap, check on the laws and regulations that affect you.

The minnow trap has truly been this native-fish collector's best friend in obtaining a large variety and number of native fish and other underwater life. Minnow traps are easy to maintain, produce good results, and create a great deal of excitement as you check to see what each day's trapping brings.

TABLE FOLLOWS

TABLE I.

FISH TRAP RECORDS

JAN. - APR.

1986

NAME	1986			
	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.
1. Slough darter (<i>Etheostoma gracile</i>)	5	7		2
2. Goldstripe darter (<i>Etheostoma parvipinne</i>)	18	2		2
3. Red-fin darter (<i>Etheostoma whipplei</i>)	5	3		
4. Pirate perch (<i>Aphredoderus sayanus</i>)	35	49	6	5
5. Lake chubsucker (<i>Erimyzon sucetta</i>)		1	3	1
6. Blackspotted topminnow (<i>Fundulus olivaceus</i>)	2	1	2	1
7. Mosquito fish (<i>Gambusia affinis</i>)	2			
8. Golden shiner (<i>Notemigonus crysoleucas</i>)	2			
9. Pugnose minnow (<i>Notropis emiliae</i>)	1			
10. Ribbon shiner (<i>Notropis fumeus</i>)	6	6		
11. Red shiner (<i>Notropis lutrensis</i>)	5	2		
12. Green sunfish (<i>Lepomis cyanellus</i>)	19	8	7	4
3. Goggle-eye Sunfish* (<i>Lepomis gulosus</i>)	1	2		
4. Orange-spotted sunfish (<i>Lepomis humilis</i>)	8	5		
5. Bluegill sunfish (<i>Lepomis macrochirus</i>)	1			
6. Longear sunfish (<i>Lepomis megalotis</i>)		1	2	

*Also called Warmouth.

<u>NAME</u>	<u>Jan.</u>	<u>Feb.</u>	<u>Mar.</u>	<u>Apr.</u>
17. Grass pickerel (<i>Esox americanus vermiculatus</i>)		1		
18. Black bullhead (<i>Ictalurus melas</i>)	2	6	6	2
19. Yellow bullhead (<i>Ictalurus natalis</i>)		3		
20. Tadpole madtom (<i>Noturus gyrinus</i>)		6	1	4
21. Three-toed amphiuma (<i>Amphiuma tridactylum</i>)	2		1	
22. Gulf coast waterdog (<i>Necturus beyeri</i>)	2	1	1	4
23. Lesser siren (<i>Siren intermedia</i>)	2	5		

As mentioned in the article associated with this table, the production of the minnow traps is very much tied to the amount of rainfall which occurs. This spring has been an exceptionally dry one, and has thus limited the production of the traps to a much lower level than has been the case in the past during these same months. Nevertheless, this list clearly shows the great diversity of fishes and other underwater life that can be obtained by using a minnow trap.