

River Redhorse and the Seasonal Snaring Thereof in Alabama

Jim Brown

If, after reading this article on the Alabama tradition of snaring River Redhorse, you'd like to learn more of what science knows about this biggest of American river suckers, you're in luck: Alabama has not one but two great books on fishes of the state. Each is fairly recent, with full-color illustrations, precise range maps, description of size, habits and habitats of the River Redhorse (and hundreds more species of fresh- and brackish-water fish), plus extensive bibliographies.

In 1996 a team of scholars led by Scott Mettee of the State Geological Survey published *Fishes of Alabama and the Mobile Basin*. Their coverage of the River Redhorse on the facing pages 358–359 of the book is typical of their treatment of each of the three hundred fish species covered by the book. On the left-hand page is a large color map of Alabama's river drainage system, with a small black dot placed where each of 111 known scientific collections of this particular species was made, and below that large map is a small black-and-white inset map of the entire U.S. delineating the total range of the fish, from its southernmost occurrence in the very south of Alabama and Mississippi to its radiation way up the Missouri, Mississippi, and Ohio rivers. At the top of the right-hand, facing page is a vivid full-color photograph of what appears to be either a live or very recently preserved River Redhorse, set against a shaded turquoise background. This full side view shows off the beautiful red dorsal (top), caudal (tail) and anal (bottom rear) fins of a breeding adult male; the silvery sheen off the scales makes the image appear almost three-dimensional. The etymology and origin of the binomial nomenclature of genus and species follows: *Moxostoma*, "mouth to suck," and *carinatum*, "keel," as the species was



FIGURE 1

A River Redhorse. (Photo by Jim Brown)

first scientifically named in 1870 by a most famous early ichthyologist named Edward Drinker Cope. From the “habitat and biology” section of the text a reader learns that this fish prefers mid- to large-sized streams, with “moderate to swift currents” over “sand, gravel and cobble,” that it seems to thrive on the little imported Asian clam *Corbicula* that has colonized most Alabama stream bottoms, and that adults in breeding condition were collected or seen spawning in April.

Eight years later, in 2004, Professors Herbert Boschung and Rick Mayden of the University of Alabama, successive curators of its Ichthyological Collection for some forty years, published *Fishes of Alabama*.¹ An even bigger book, it must weigh ten pounds, with each page ten inches tall by a full eleven inches wide. Published by the Smithsonian Institution (and beautifully printed in Italy), its introduction is by biologist and Alabama native E. O. Wilson. The space allotted to the River Redhorse in this book is roughly the same space in

square inches as in the earlier fish book, but instead of a single photograph, two small, hand-drawn and painted images of a juvenile and a female River Redhorse head up the text and are repeated in larger size in the Plates in the middle of the book (Pl. 43). The artist's illustrations are magnificent, equal or superior to anything done in famous birding guides as by Peterson or Sibley. There are state and national range maps similar to those in the earlier fish book. In the text more information is provided on how the species is endangered by siltation which, among other things, kills the mollusks on which it primarily feeds. There is also a much more detailed account of its spawning behavior—especially germane to the later part of this article—including mention of a debate between university ichthyologists and fisheries biologists on whether or not the male River Redhorse “purposefully” builds a nest or courts females at spawning sites.

What a fortunate state, then, is Alabama, in which one can check out both books in a library, open them side-by-side to the *Moxostoma carinatum* sections, and enjoy a comparative literary and visual feast of scientific information. But even the best science has its limitations, of course, and can have no valid comment to make on the belief that the River Redhorse was created to be snared, in due season, by good old boys on the Cahaba River.

That due season, or peak spawning season for the River Redhorse—the only time they are “tame” enough to snare—is about one week that usually falls between April 10 and May 10. If you had to pick one date to be on some proper fast-water gravel shoals of the Cahaba or the Little Cahaba (the Little Cahaba that heads up near Montevallo, not one of the other two Little Cahabas farther north), you should make it April 20. But it changes somewhat year to year, probably because of variations in winter and spring temperature and rainfall. Scientists with thermometers might be able to pinpoint the spawning week by water temperature, but the old tried-and-true folkloric guide is to use markers on the unfolding biological calendar of Spring itself. Fairly recently I heard a Bibb County Redhorse fisherman say that he looked for the flowers of “bush ivy,” as mountain laurel [*Kalmia latifolia*] is colloquially known there, to start to open along the river. But my chief instructor taught me a quarter-century and more ago to watch for the tulip poplar [*Liriodendron tulipifera*] in bloom: not freshly opened but fully, maturely open, as when a spring breeze

can tilt the wide-opened blossoms enough to cause a light drizzle of nectar to fall on you from a hundred feet up.

That chief instructor was Mott Lovejoy, and it took me awhile to find him. I first heard about the snaring of Redhorse sometime in 1978 from the late Joe Grammar, then proprietor of a canoe rental business at Bulldog Bend on the Little Cahaba. He told me about people using a twelve- or fourteen-foot cane pole tipped with a loop made of a guitar string, with a little piece of lead on the bottom of the wire loop, to catch big river sucker by the tail. He said that he had never done it but had watched people doing it from his vantage point on the bridge that crosses the river there at Bulldog Bend. Mr. Grammar said there were just a few around who did it, not the whole community. Most of them were men who went by themselves, though occasionally one would take his wife. He had seen them come back with “washtubs full” from the Little Cahaba and the “Big River” (meaning the main Cahaba). He directed me to Mott Lovejoy and his uncle Morgan Lovejoy a few miles down the road in the community of Six Mile, known practitioners of the sport, warning me in particular about Morgan Lovejoy’s sense of humor and predicting that he

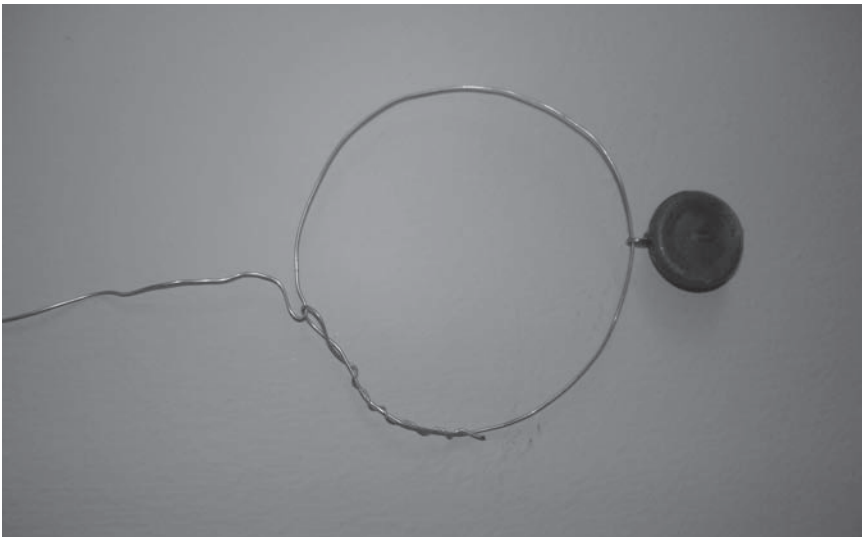


FIGURE 2

A typical wire-loop apparatus for snaring Redhorse on the Little Cahaba. (Photo by Jim Brown)

would “break one off in us” before the end of a conversation.

So I showed up, unannounced, at Morgan Lovejoy’s home in Six Mile the afternoon of December 22, 1978, with a folklore student in tow and a tape recorder in hand. Mr. Lovejoy, a bit unsure who we were and what we wanted, talked to us through the screen door a while, then warmed up when he understood the topic under research. He took us around the house to show us the difference in Asian bamboo and the native cane, one of the latter stand being better than an inch in diameter. He told us he was born in 1895, which made him eighty-three or so at the time of the interview. He said he had last been to the river with his grandson Tommy Campbell, then in his twenties, that past spring; he had watched Tommy snare twelve big Redhorse one after the other and not lose a fish. We walked back up to the house then, and with Mr. Lovejoy’s approval turned on the tape recorder.

Part of what we got were jokes that started out as what we thought were serious stories and on which we were taking notes, to Mr. Lovejoy’s great amusement when the joke broke upon us. He talked about his brother Joe who was once crappie fishing with a small hook and float down on the Big River, along with his wife and young daughter who had a Kodak camera. Joe had already caught a good many crappie when he hung some other sort of fish so big he knew the little crappie rig would never hold it. So Joe said to his daughter, according to Mr. Lovejoy:

C’mere, I got something large here and I’d like to get a picture of it if I could, if I could get it to the top. And says she walked up, and about the time she walked up that thing come up right lengthways, its back, and she snapped a picture, and he give a flounce and broke his line, and sent the negative to Birmingham, and when the picture come back *it* weighed fifteen pounds!

But in a serious vein his memories about Redhorsing went back for six decades and more. He had moved from the little community of Randolph (Bibb County) to the vicinity of Bulldog Bend in 1912, and a Charlie Edwards got him started gigging and snaring soon after he arrived. Trying to think back about others who in his earliest recollections fished Redhorse, he named “old man Burns MacGuire; he was a terrible fisherman, Mr. MacGuire was.”

Morgan Lovejoy set us straight on a few other matters that Joe Grammar, an observer from afar, had not clearly understood. He described the spawning of River Redhorse in a swift but smooth-water gravel run, from one to two feet deep, when a “mare” (female) would lean over on one side a little and begin vibrating, against a “horse” (male) on that side “to keep her steady,” and often a third fish, another male, would come in then to press against her other side. As to the snaring of same, a twenty-foot cane pole was sometimes too short; you should cut as long a cane pole as you could find. The “guitar wire” noose described by Mr. Grammar was in reality a brass wire noose, softer and not so springy, with a one-ounce lead weight made to slip along the wire of the noose. The sliding lead weight was to drag along the bottom and so keep the plane of the wire loop at right angles to the current. The overall aim was not to catch the Redhorse by the tail with the noose, or snare, but just behind the gills and in front of the pectoral fins. Too big a loop and it would go completely over the fish without snaring it. When you got the noose positioned just right, you had hold of a strong fish of from three to six or more pounds with head and tail free, and no give in the wire: “They’ll horse, too, they’ll pull. They’re a lot of fun,” said Morgan Lovejoy, probably explaining the origin of the common name of the fish.

Mr. Lovejoy told one story about a time in the distant past (I wish now we had asked exactly when) when the sport became more popular, and whole families would go. He particularly remembered an “old man Turner” and his wife and son-in-law fishing on the shoals at Trot’s Ford:

Well, old man Turner, he’d get out in front, and that’d run them off of the bed, see. And it was real swift there. And there was one extra Redhorse there, and he hung it, and that water was swift. And his son-in-law was right there. And that Redhorse jerked him down, with the help of that swift water, and his son-in-law grabbed the pole and he went down over them shoals. He was bony, they called him Bones, his son-in-law—went down over there and you could see them skinny knees sticking up (laughter) and the Redhorse got loose. See, if you give them slack they’d get loose.

He told another story from the more recent past:

Now this sounds unreasonable. A few years ago, I had a pickup truck here. And my son [and nephew and one other person], we were down below Centreville, down on Big River. And we learned how—we used to put them on a string, you know, staging, trotline or something. And they'd slosh so 'til they'd tear their gills out and then they'd die quick. We learned to get tow sacks and put four or five in each sack and tie them to a sapling somewhere in the water. And we had so many when we come out of there . . . you know, fishermen can tell some big ones, but this is the truth. We got so many that we carried them out in those sacks and poured them in my pickup and that bed was, it was a Chevrolet, that bed was half full, now, of Redhorse. And those eggs was all over them, all slimy, you know, them eggs, slime and all. And I knew the fellow that had charge of the waterworks at Centreville . . . and so I just connected up that big hose, and backed that truck down there over a drain, you know, and washed 'em out, just washed all that slime and eggs off.

As he remembered it, his son and grandson then peddled the still-living fish in an African American neighborhood where live fish were always in high demand, selling them for a dollar apiece, no matter what the size of the fish.

Looking back at our questions on this tape from the point of view of someone who has now snared Redhorse himself, it is clear how fuzzy on the actual art of it we were. Morgan Lovejoy, of course, understood that at the time. Once late in the interview he said, "Oh, I wish you could go one time. You see Mott and tell him you want to go with him."²

I didn't need any more encouragement. A month later, on January 25, 1979, I caught up with J. Winfred ("Mott") Lovejoy at his home not far from Six Mile. He was about forty-eight or forty-nine years old at the time to my thirty-four, a real outdoorsman who lived for the turkey and Redhorse seasons but whose recent heart surgery had made his wife Nellie Ree nervous about him being out alone. He was a big-boned, muscular six-foot-three or six-four with the friendly playfulness of a child, and one of the nicest people I ever met. Years later, I'd sometimes get a phone call at my home in Birmingham that would start out with a deep, gravelly "Hey, boy," and then silence, no names or other introductions. I'd say, "Is that you, Mott? Where are you?"



FIGURE 3
Mott Lovejoy with River Redhorse he caught in 1956. (Photo courtesy of Jim Brown)

and it would usually be Brookwood Hospital where he came when his blood pressure spiked uncontrollably.

Mott had logged more hours of Redhorse observation than all the experts in fish behavior in all the universities in America put together, I suppose, and could probably have taught Messrs. Boschung and Mettee some things about this species, at least. He had the modesty of a true expert:

These things, we've watched them. Course we don't know that much about it, what goes on—all we know is what we see, you know, watching them bed. And those horses will go there and root this bed out. And maybe that'll go on three or four days before she [the mare] ever shows up.

I asked him if you could snare the males at that time, or if they would be too skittish or “wild,” and he said:

Yeah, you can catch 'em, but they're harder to catch. But whenever they start [spawning], when the mare gets there to lay the eggs, you can watch 'em. She'll come in there and stop—*big* thing—and then one'll come in on both sides of her, just like that [holding hands parallel, thumb sides up] and she'll be right between 'em. And they'll get right on both sides of 'em like that and you'll see 'em just go to working, just like that [hands still parallel, trembling in unison]. And you can see the muddy water just a-flying. And then they'll squirt it [milt or sperm] out on those eggs, and that'll stick it to the rocks and fertilize them. And then they'll hatch in just a few days. And then they'll do that and then she'll drift off.

When I asked if the spawning wasn't continuous, Mott answered:

No, she'll come back afore long, you know, go to drifting back in there. And when she starts in there, you can catch 'em then. I don't care if he is wild, he won't run [laughs].

I asked if they stayed to guard their eggs for awhile, like a bass or bream on the bed, and Mott said:



FIGURE 4

A typical Redhorse spawning bed on the Little Cahaba River. (Photo by Jim Brown)

No, they're gone, and you can see small fish just eating them—minnows and gars just ease up on the bed and you can see them little old suckers eating them, while you're fishing. But it's real interesting.

Later when we fished together—and I'd try to get down at least one day every April, while he was still living—he taught me to look for the “bed horse,” usually one of the smaller males that was a sort of watchman for the beds on the entire gravel bar: if you caught him off his spot, or in some way frightened him away, most of the others would follow his lead and vacate the spawning beds for a good while.

Later I heard of Redhorse fishing on Buck Creek, a tributary of the Cahaba that runs through Helena, and Redhorsing that had gone on on the Cahaba near Caldwell Mill Road just south of Birmingham and even near White's Chapel in the very upper stretch of the river, considerably east and a little north

of Birmingham. When I asked Mott what he thought the limits on Redhorse bedding in the river were, during that first interview, he replied:

They'll bed from one end of this river to the other. But most of the time there's just a bed, maybe, half as big as this room [speaking in a room maybe fourteen feet on a side]. And you can catch, oh man, no telling how many right there. And they just come for, it'll be the onliest place for a mile they'll bed, and they'll come from all, from both ways there, see. And man, they'll just fill it up.

That first April, in 1979, when Mott called me and told me to come down because the Redhorse were on the bed, the river had muddied up from a hard rain before I got there. We sat at Bulldog Bend on a child's metal A-frame swing set, minus the swings, that somebody had carried out onto an underwater gravel bar, and dragged our 3½-inch diameter wire snares in the fast muddy water, fishing blind. We never caught a fish, though Mott assured me if you knew where the beds were you could often catch fish in muddy water or the dark of night by dragging blind. The biggest Redhorse he'd ever seen caught on the Little Cahaba, an estimated nine pounds, had been caught on or just after a night fishing trip:

I was about, I guess, fifteen years old. Daddy and me fished at that thing all night trying to catch him, and we couldn't. Every time we'd start to catch him, he'd back up under some bushes. There was a bunch of people there that night, and Dad and me just give out, and so we laid down to go to sleep, woke up the next morning, and this old boy was laying there about half-sloughed [rhymed with "glued," and meant "drunk"], I call it. When I woke up, he'd been up there and caught him, and was letting the water drip off his tail in my face, you know. He'd slipped up there and caught him. Daddy'n me had fished at him all night, and couldn't catch him.

His favorite memory of night fishing, though, was this:

Oh, I caught, one night Uncle Morgan and Daddy and Uncle Morgan's youngest boy were there, down, well that was down close to the mouth of the

Little River where it runs into the Cahaba. And it was cool that night. And I had an old green pole. You usually tried to fish with a dry pole, you know, on account of the thing, you have to hold it out on the end, and it just gets heavy. And they'd been wild that day and they'd just got right at the right stage, they fished. And a carbide lamp—did you ever see one?

I told him I had, that I knew how you could adjust it to cast a broad beam, and he went on:

Well it's broader, too, but they just blend in the water better, too. They're not as bright a light. And I caught, well I got out there and cut me a pole, you know, green. And them things got so tame there that I was just holding the light with one hand and fishing with one hand, just had my pole choked up, you know, and had part of it sticking back behind me, and it wasn't so heavy then, you know, with it balanced in your hand. And they was on the bank asleep, now, I couldn't get them in there; but it was cool. I'd catch them things like that, and I just threw them out there all night long. I caught one after awhile, and instead of him going up and down the river, or out, he just come right back between my feet with it, you know. Well naturally he just broke my pole when he just doubled it up. Being a green pole, it just, you know, broke it down, but it didn't break it completely off. And when he broke it, I seen what happened, and I just turned and run with him, and just like a mule pulling a wagon or something, and run out on him. Then I had to quit, I just went out there then and went to bed. And then I had them in a—well, I caught thirty-two that night there weighed a hundred and twenty pounds. That'd give you some idea about what they are. Course that was in Little Cahaba, but now they get bigger than that in Big Cahaba.³

The second spring I fished for Redhorse with Mott on the Little Cahaba, in 1980, the water was clear, and we caught them in the classic manner. When visibility was marginal, with silty water or shadows dappling the surface, the first thing you'd see of a fish would be that bright red tail fin, undulating in the water for all the world like a piece of red rag hung on a rock and waving in the current. Then the whole fish would gradually materialize. When you

had one sitting still in a bed, the technique was to lower the wire snare quietly into the current a few feet upstream from the fish, which would be hugging the bottom in its shallow depression in the fast water, and bring your loop down with the current, trying to keep the line and wire as vertical as possible while still letting the lead weight drag bottom a little (so as to keep the wire loop square to the current) and so maneuver the snare over the fish's head. If you missed the fish and it was still tame enough to sit there, you'd gently raise your snare, swing it upstream over the fish, lower it in the water again and make another pass at the fish. Two fishermen in tandem could stand side-by-side and do the same thing, as long as they dragged and then lifted and swung upstream in unison. In clear water you could watch a fish shrug or twist when the noose went around it, and then could pull the cane pole up to tighten the snare yourself. More often the fish would bolt at the touch and tighten the noose itself. If the fish ran upstream or downstream, the cane pole would absorb some of the tremendous pull, but if it darted straight away from you, it



FIGURE 5

River Redhorse swimming (Photo by Jim Brown)

was like being tied to a pickup truck. You, the fisherman, were often knee-deep in fast water, with the current trying to take gravel out from under your feet and you trying to keep tension on the snare as the big fish ran and flopped. As Mott said, on average you were lucky to get about two of every ten you snared to the bank. Most often you missed the fish and your wire snare collapsed, so you had to hand-walk your long cane pole up to the tip while letting the butt of the pole trail downstream in the current, then reset the snare by opening it to the appropriate three and a half-inch diameter and setting a bend in the wire to keep it there, then hand-walk down to the butt of the pole again while trying not to jerk the snare shut again. Mott prided himself on the smallness of his loop, which required more skill to maneuver around the fish but which resulted in more proper hookups; he kept a close eye on me in this regard as well, because after a period of catching no fish, I tended to widen my loop to make up for my lack of skill. Whenever Mott kept fish at all, he only kept the males, or horses. The community conservation ethic, as long as he could remember, had always been to release all females to spawn and spawn again. Here are my field notes verbatim on that day (and night), May 2, 1980:

Went down to Mott Lovejoy's in Six Mile, Bibb Co., AL, got there before 2 p.m., we headed down toward the Little Cahaba within a mile or two where it goes into the main Cahaba—or just “little” & “big” river, in local parlance. Drove pickup down by river at a shoal—a gravel bar cut the river in half & a white water rapid maybe 4 ft deep went around it. On the upper part of the gravel bar (upstream), the redhorse were in prime breeding season. The other spot we checked they were gone, apparently finished. This population—you could see 20 at a time working across the river when we stopped the truck—may have been delayed by heavy fishing pressure—remains of last night's bonfire—& sure enough, about dusk some other folks came in. Mott had fished on that same shoal as a kid, & his father & uncle fished it since 1913. We caught 23 fish, the smallest more than 2 pounds, the largest 6 and 7. Caught 6 mares, returned them to water; kept 17 horses. Kept them alive in a burlap sack tied in the current. Bag must have weighed 50 lbs. or more. You could see 3 or 4 in the same hole sometimes, & sometimes a frenzied burst of activity—“the mud'd just fly,” was the way Mott put it; he said that was the climax of the breeding,

a horse coming up on either side of a mare. Mott says they press against her to help the eggs squirt out. All the fish we caught would squirt milt or eggs. Stayed till after midnight. Mott had electric headlamps, though he said carbide would have spooked the fish less.

My finest memory of fishing with Mott is when he, his cousin Tommy and I went in his pickup to a long shoal on the main Cahaba River some miles downstream from Centreville. We went through two locked gates, to which Mott had been given the key by the landowners with whom he had long familiarity, pulled the truck down to the river and found no fish on the nearest shoal. Mott sent the two of us as scouts up and down the river to the next gravel bars, and on the first gravel bar downstream there was a concentration of what must have been a couple of hundred Redhorse, looking like small brown sharks holding in the current all across the yellow gravel bar, occasionally rippling the water with slashing runs at an encroaching rival. Mott said it was one of the biggest and “ripest” concentrations he’d ever seen. We—mainly Mott and Tommy, of course—landed forty-four horses and three mares, the latter returned to the water. That was May 7, 1983, and my field notes say that I’d seen my first tulip poplar bloom a week-and-a-half earlier.

Mott always cut his own cane poles, from twenty to twenty-five feet long. While they were still green, he tied a bundle of three with cord every foot or so along their whole lengths, then tied a rope to the gathered butt ends and threw it up over a tall tree limb, hoisted the butts up until the tips cleared the ground, and then tied a rock to the gathered tip ends as a weight so all three poles would dry and cure absolutely straight from butt to tip. He made his wire snares from #20 brass wire from the hardware store, when he couldn’t get #24 steel wire smuggled out to him from friends who worked at Hays Aircraft in Birmingham: the steel wire would hardly ever break, while the brass wire, especially after it had been bent and re-bent a few times, would sometimes pop under the strain of a big fish. He molded his own lead sinkers around little wire hangers, fairly flat sinkers to keep the wire snare close to the bottom, and with rounded edges so as not to catch on rocks. He tied nylon or cotton cord to his twenty inches or so of wire that made the actual snare, then fixed the cord to the tip of the cane pole with a knot, and finally spiraled the rest of the cord

most of the way down the cane pole and tied it off. This last was to strengthen the cane pole and keep the tip from being broken off in the tremendous strain of trying to lift a thrashing five-pound fish completely clear of the water at the end of a twenty-five-foot lever!

Despite all the nylon, steel, brass, and lead used in this later phase of the sport, Mott was still convinced—as am I—that this noosing or snaring of fish has to be a survival of an Indian fishing technique. John Swanton, for example, in his *Indians of the Southeastern United States*, quoted the English traveler Beverly from 1705 on the Indian snaring of sturgeon:

The Indian way of Catching Sturgeon, when they came into the narrow part of the Rivers, was by a Man's clapping a Noose over their Tail, and by keeping fast his hold. Thus a Fish finding it self intangled, wou'd flounce, and often pull him under Water, and then that Man was counted a Cockarouse, or brave Fellow, that wou'd not let go; till with Swimming, Wading, and Diving, he had tired the Sturgeon, and brought it ashore⁴

Then again, “a wire loop mounted on a stick” to slip over a salmon’s tail was a common poacher’s tool in Wales and probably many other parts of northern Europe, and the idea could well have come in with European pioneers.⁵

Whatever the origins of this snaring, in modern times it seems to be unique to central Alabama, with Bibb County as its epicenter; the author, at least, has found no evidence of surviving counterparts anywhere else in the United States. Through the years Mott Lovejoy and his dwindling band of fellow Redhorse snarers were discovered, celebrated, and rediscovered by journalists and biologists as well as by historians and folklorists. Mott took sportswriters from the Tuscaloosa paper out Redhorsing as early as 1956, and was sent a copy of the black-and-white photo of him with a six-pound Redhorse, a photo they had run in the paper; I borrowed it and made a copy of it on a copy stand and still have it in my files.

In 1966 a couple of district fisheries biologists wrote an article called “‘Redhorse Are Shoaling’ Cry Calls Fishermen to Cahaba” in the journal *Alabama Conservation*. In it they talk about the beauty of the River Redhorse and how the Cahaba River is its last main stand in a State whose rivers were at that time

increasingly impounded and polluted. They very briefly discuss snaring, but the accompanying picture shows them with rods and reels, casting weighted treble hooks to foul hook the Redhorse and so snatch them off the beds. Mott would have taken exception to such unsportsmanlike taking of his favorite fish; not only would it have required little in the way of skill, it would have permanently damaged the “mares.”⁶

Clarke Stallworth, then associate editor for the *Birmingham News*, had an article in the paper in May 27, 1984, called “Romance with Red Horse is one family’s tradition.” It is about Charlie and Frank Griffin and their traditional hunt for spawning Redhorse on the Cahaba. The article is poorly informed on fish, calling the Redhorse “vegetarian, nibbling on moss and grass on the bottom,” but insightful on the people and their fascination with this seasonal migration.⁷

Mike Bolton, outdoors writer for that same *Birmingham News*, had a good article in the Sunday edition of May 3, 1987 (note that this too is a May publication date, obviously hard on the heels of the usual late April–early May Redhorse bedding on the Cahaba) on members of this same Griffin family. The article was called “Redhorse roping: Griffin brothers keep tradition alive with three-day vigil on the Cahaba River Shoals.” Accompanying the article is the best action picture of snaring I’ve ever seen, captioned “Helena’s Frank Griffin wrestles a hefty redhorse sucker from the Cahaba River.” One interesting note from the article is on how the sweet-tasting but very bony fish was formerly pressure-cooked and canned, and thus “became a year around meal that would stick to the ribcage when times were hard.”⁸ These days almost no Redhorse fishermen keep fish—horses or mares; it’s all for the sport, or the seasonal ritual.

Mott Lovejoy himself passed away in late March of 1995, just before the yearly Redhorse season he loved so much. I didn’t hear about it until I drove down to Bulldog Bend in mid-April, checking on the condition of the Redhorse, and folks at the canoe rental business there told me about his passing. I remember the shock of the conversation: it was hard for me to imagine that the Redhorse could still shoal without Mott being there to appreciate it. He is buried beside his wife in the cemetery of the beautiful little Baptist Church in Six Mile, may he and Nellie Ree rest in peace. One of the lesser stars in their

crowns has to be their kindnesses shown to a naive and nosy history professor a quarter century ago. ■

Notes

1. Herbert T. Boschung, Jr., and Richard L. Mayden, with illustrations by Joseph R. Tomelleri and foreword by Edward O. Wilson, *Fishes of Alabama* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2004), pp. xviii, 736.
2. Interview with Morgan Lovejoy at his home in Six Mile, by Jim Brown and Bill Finch, December 22, 1978. Tape and transcript in possession of author.
3. Interview with Mott Lovejoy at his home near Six Mile, by Jim Brown, January 25, 1979. Tape and transcript in possession of author.
4. John R. Swanton, *Indians of the Southeastern United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), pp. 333–4.
5. J. Geraint Jenkins, *Boat House and Net House*, pamphlet for the Welsh Folk Museum at St. Fagan's Castle outside Cardiff, Wales, n.d.
6. Peter A. Hackney and Walter M. Tatum, "Redhorse Are Shoaling' Cry Calls Fishermen to Cahaba," *Alabama Conservation*, vol. 36, no. 6 (Oct.–Nov. 1966), pp. 21–24. These same two authors, with the addition of S. L. Spencer, also wrote "Life History Study of the river redhorse, *Moxostoma carinatum* (Cope), in the Cahaba River, Alabama, with notes on the management of the species as a sport fish," in *Proceedings of the 21st Annual Conference of Southeastern Association of Game And Fish Commissions*, pp. 232–249; a map in the article shows the Cahaba River from Centreville downstream.
7. Clarke Stallworth, "Romance with Red Horse is one family's tradition," *Birmingham News*, Sunday May 27, 1984, pp. 1D and 8D.
8. Mike Bolton, "Redhorse roping: Griffin brothers keep tradition alive with three-day vigil on the Cahaba River shoals," *Birmingham News*, Sunday May 3, 1987, p. 20B.