



1955 - L-R Charles Lewis, Bo Robinson, Juddy Rabun at ramp to dock office - Cabin 5 in background

STEBBONE'S...FISHING ON THE ST. JOHNS RIVER



Large Mouth Bass



Spotted Bass



Striped Bass



White Bass

1-Bass-The St. Johns River is known as the bass capital of the US. Bass are plentiful with good numbers in the five to ten pound range. There are many different kinds of lures for bass fishing from live shiners; soft plastic artificial baits in a multitude of shapes, colors, and scents; and hard swim baits, usually made of wood or molded plastic. These swim baits, or plugs as most fishermen call them, also come in a multitude of colors and shapes and are designed to be fished from on top of the water to the bottom of the river and at all depths in-between. The most popular bass fishing equipment is the level wind casting reel attached to a 6' to 8' medium-heavy rod. These reels are usually filled with 10 to 50 lb. strength fishing line. Again, there are many variables in use manufactured by equally as many manufacturers. Medium to medium-heavy spinning tackle is also preferred by some people. A BASS PRO fishing catalog will give you a great example of the wide variety of equipment and lures used in the pursuit of bass.

2-Bream - This is the common name attached to the sunfish family. There are several different varieties of this species, and they are widely distributed throughout the St. Johns River.

Shellcracker One of the most popular bream is the Red-Eared sunfish, or Shellcracker, usually found in areas covered with shells on the bottom. Small mollusks such as mussels, are a favorite food of the shellcracker, but they also eat insects and worms. Shellcrackers can be caught year round, but most people concentrate on shellcracker fishing in the early spring when the fish are bedding. They gather in large groups in shallow water where the females lay eggs and the males fertilize these eggs. The fish then stay nearby for several days guarding the eggs from other species. These fish readily bite a quietly introduced bait during these times. The most popular equipment used when fishing for all bream, is a 12 to 14 ft. graphite or fiberglass expandable pole, or ultralite, with medium spinning reel. Light fishing line in the 4 to 8 lb. range is usually used. The most popular bait is red worms, wigglers, or any other variable of small live worms. Shellcrackers will also bite crickets and small artificial baits, small spinners, or small plugs, but not as readily as their favorite live bait, the worm.



Copper nose bream



Blue Gill Bream



Stumpknocker Bream



Warmouth Bream



Red Belly Bream

Other members of the Sunfish family include the Copper Nose bream, Blue Gill bream, Stumpknocker bream, War Mouth bream, and the Red Belly bream. There are others in the Sunfish family, but these are the most commonly found in the St. Johns. Bream are found throughout the river system and are usually gathered around some type of structure, i.e.; tree tops and logs that have fallen into the water, sea walls, drop-offs, and any other type structure that provides the bream safety from predatory fish, birds and animals. Bream usually gather in large numbers and usually when you find one there are others nearby. One of the bream's favorite bait is a live cricket, or worm dangled under a float, or cork, near structure. They also bite small artificial lures, small spinners like a beetle spin and are commonly fished for with the equipment explained above, plus fly rods using artificial flies, or live bait. Bream also bed usually on shallow sandy bottoms like the shellcracker throughout the spring of the year. Once a bed is located, usually good concentrations of hungry fish are to be caught.



3-Crappie-These are also widely distributed throughout the St. Johns area, especially in and around Crescent Lake. Crappie usually are located in schools of numerous fish. They also congregate around structure much like the bream. In the heat of the summer, Crappie usually migrate to deeper, cooler water and remain there until the balance of the water cools. Live minnows, bullheads, etc., are excellent bait for Crappie, plus small jigs tipped with artificial plastic jig bodies, or jigs with feathers or marabou animal hair. Basically the same equipment is used to fish for Crappie as explained above with the exception of possibly longer poles and rods. These are also rigged with small diameter fishing line. There are many methods used when fishing for Crappie, they range from casting, anchored while fishing around structure, and one of the most popular is slow trolling multiple poles, or rods, using what is known as spider rigs, which enable the fisherman to fish many rods, covering a wide area of the water in one pass.



Channel catfish



Blue catfish



Flathead catfish



Spotted catfish



Mud catfish

4-Catfish-These also are present in several sub-species, e.g., Channel catfish, Blue catfish, Flathead catfish, Spotted catfish, and Mud cat are the most common. Catfish can grow to very large size, with some fish reaching over 60 lbs. The most common fish caught are usually from 6 inches to 6 or 7 lbs. Most are bottom feeders and can be caught by fishing a bait on or near the bottom of the river. Catfish are not picky about what they eat and can be caught using cut pieces of other fish, live bait, chicken livers or prepared commercial catfish bait. The catfish finds food partially by smell and most baits have a distinct odor. These fish are widely spread throughout the depths of the river ranging from a few feet deep to the deepest holes or drop-offs in the river. Because of this they are usually caught by fishermen using some type of rod and reel. This allows the fisherman to fish on or near the bottom no matter the depth.

5-Boats-There are many different types of boats used by fishermen on the St. Johns. The traditional boat at Stegbone's was a 14.5 ft aluminum or fiberglass v-hull with bench seats, live wells beneath, and a 5 hp 2-stroke Johnson. These were rented here for many years when it was Bob's. Now most everyone brings their own boat—everything from a 14 ft. flat bottomed jon boat with a small tiller-controlled outboard to the largest, fastest bass boat, and even an occasional deck boat. Most of the boats used when fishing out of Stegbone's are mid-range aluminum or fiberglass with 40-90 HP engines, 14 to 18 ft. in length. This type of boat handles the river very well, and is small enough to maneuver the narrow tributaries. Larger boats can not always be accommodated under cover.

