FIRST SASKATCHEWAN RECORD OF CHANNEL CATFISH

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On 13 June 1983, a Channel Catfish *(Ictalurus punctatus)* was captured in the Qu'Appelle River, 5 km west of Tantallon (50°32' N; 101°50' W). The fish was captured on a pickerel bug by Larry Brown, an angler from Tantallon.

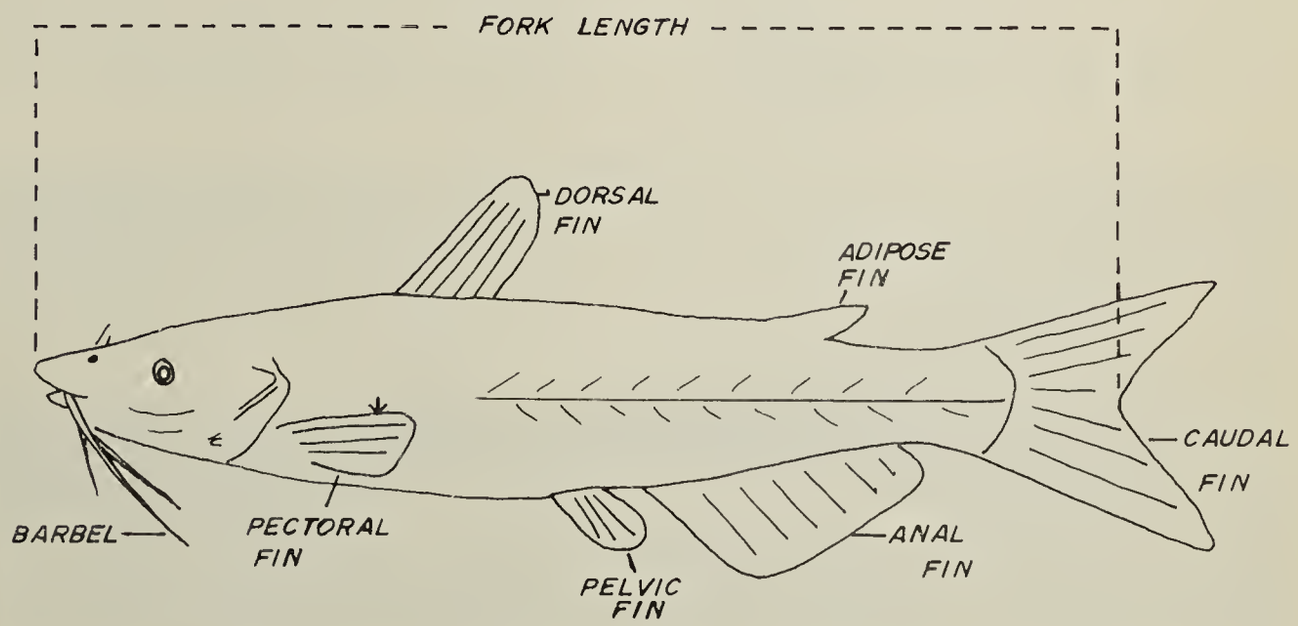
The specimen had a fork length of 68.3 cm (26.9 in) and weighed 5.6 kg(12.3 lb). The age was estimated at 15 yr.

Identification of the specimen was confirmed by F.M. Atton, formerly of the Saskatchewan Fisheries Laboratory, Saskatoon.

Morphological characteristics on which species identification was based are: deeply forked caudal fin; skin naked of scales; adipose fin conspicuous, short, fleshy and free; barbels at corner of mouth more than three times as long as those near nostrils (Fig. 1); strong sharp spines (one at the front of the dorsal and each of the pectoral fins, (Fig. 2).[5]

This species is caught by commercial fishermen in Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair and provides sport for many anglers. The white flaky flesh is highly regarded by many fishermen. It is the largest of the catfishes occurring in Canada. The world record is 26 kg, caught in South Carolina. The largest reported from Canada is 17 kg from Georgian Bay, Lake Huron. While fish of 5 kg are not uncommon, sizes of 1-2 kg are average for inland waters.[4]

Carlander reports the occurrence of this species in Montana, southern Manitoba to southern Quebec, and west of the Appalachians, to Florida and Mexico.[2]



Anatomical features of the Channel Catfish. Arrow indicates first spine of pectoral fin.

Figure 1. *Channel Catfish captured in the Qu'Appelle River near Tantallon.*

Willock mentions two previous records of channel catfish in Saskatchewan: Stegner's and Richardson's.[7 6 3] Both records are unusual and have been questioned in the past.[5 7]

In *Wolf Willow,* a historical account of the last plains frontier (Montana-Saskatchewan), Stegner wrote of "a spent catfish washed in from the Swift Current or some other part of the watershed in the spring flood". The specimen was "two feet long, his whiskers hung down, his fins and tail were limp — a kind of fish no one had seen in the Whitemud". Of the three species of catfish known to exist in the Missouri drainage in Montana, only the Channel Catfish attains a length of two feet.[1] The Whitemud (Frenchman) is part of the Missouri drainage.[7]

In *Fauna boreali — Americana*, Richardson gives the location for a specimen described as a Channel Catfish as "Pine-Island Lake, Latitude 54^0 N" (now Cumberland Lake, Saskatchewan).[3] According to Richardson, "the length of the specimen, excluding the caudal, was 30 inches".

[1] BROWN, C. J. D. 1971. Fishes of Montana. Big Sky Books, Montana State Univ., Bozeman, Montana. 207 p.

[2] CARLANDER, K. D. 1969. Handbook of freshwater fishery biology, Volume 1. Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa. 752 p.

[3] RICHARDSON, J. 1836. Fauna boreali — Americana. John Murray, London. 327 p.

[4] SCOTT, W. B. 1967. Freshwater fishes of Eastern Canada. Ed. II. University of Toronto Press. 137 p.

[5] SCOTT, W. B. and E. J. CROSSMAN. 1973. Freshwater fishes of Canada. Bulletin 184. Fisheries Research Board of Canada, Ottawa. 966 p.

[6] STEGNER, W. 1955. Wolf willow. 1973 Comstock Edition, Viking Press Inc., New York, N.Y. 310 p.

[7] WILLOCK, T. A. 1969. Distributional list of fishes in the Missouri Drainage of Canada. J. Fish. Res. Bd. Can. 26(6): 1439-1449.

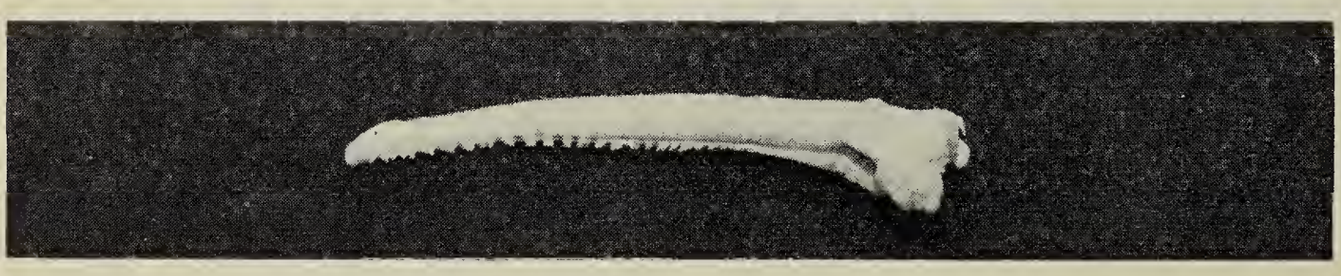


Figure 2. *Anterior spine of pectoral fin taken from Channel Catfish.*