

AMERICA - SAY NO TO THE BOW

By Stephen Buss - August 2008



As I sat watching from the boat, fish topped all around. Playful in communication, some big, some small and a true sight for sore eyes. Stunned into silence, my baited hook sat locked in the butt ring of my rod. An age seemed to have passed as had the shoal of fish but still I looked as they rolled off into the distance.

I sometimes get more pleasure from seeing fish than actually catching them. Paralysed by the firm grip of Mother Nature you do not have to catch fish to go fishing. Trying to understand fish behavior and social movements will always increase my respect and love for this type of living creature.

Some fish will grow to be monster specimens, others just part of the food chain, but with the future in mind, conservation is the key to the longevity of the sport I have grown to love, known as fishing.

I have fished from a young boy, helped along the way by a famous fishing Father and have never harvested a single catch. I have been brought up to catch and release, my only trophy being a photograph and the memory to savour.

Don't get me wrong, I like eating fish

I do not practice any religion but remember reading the Bible with interest as a young boy. The story of the Ten Commandments springs to mind as I write and the "Thou shalt not kill" rings loud in my ears with regard to that of Bow Fishing. To my knowledge Bow fishing is not practiced in Europe. I think if it was it would be opposed by unlawful violent effect. I was first made aware of the senseless slaughter of fish after first setting foot on American soil.

On seeing several pictures of dead 60lb common carp, 100lb+ freshwater Buffalo fish and Alligator gar by the trailer load to over 350lbs a heartfelt low left me staring in disbelief. My initial thoughts were how this could be classified as a sport, as invariably the slain fish are just left on the bank side to rot, very seldom for harvest and if this pass-time was common culture amongst American sportsmen.



Further thoughts were for the specimen indigenous fish and of the future stocks as although smaller fish are deemed a prize target, credit is given to the largest taken by arrow. Additional thinking led to writing this in order to bring about awareness to my fellow Europeans lured to American freshwater in pursuit of specimen fish as travel and costly effort may be in vain the lack of control and authority by those responsible for inland waterway conservation.

I maybe wrong, but bow fishermen must surely be in a minority. If deemed a National pastime then it is a cruel one. If presented as a God given right then hypocrisy does not justify such a statement.

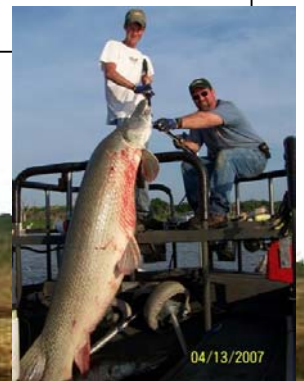
As an Englishman my impression of the Americans is that they like it big and I cannot understand the Bow fishermen's need to kill for the sake of bragging rights.



If you look at the facts, America should have every freshwater fish species record sewn up due to temperance of land mass, but mentality sees high paying European fishing tourism looking to Russia for the thrill of the previously uncaught monster fish.

I feel that, as civilized as the Americans are, they are missing out on a golden opportunity. Regulations and restrictions need to be implemented to save indigenous Carp, Buffalo and Alligator Gar specimen populations as some of these fish are being exported live to parts of South East Asia to claim IGFA (International Game Fish Association) Line Class World records. Although associations like IGFA claim to be non profit making, money needs to be invested to safeguard against the mindless murder of age old fish, from the bow in particular, and I am surprised that certain other societies and groups have not stood to protect certain species as a sport fish.

As a professional angler and former scientist, I am aware of the amount of bad reputation and stigma surrounding the American Carp. I am also aware that blame has been somewhat misplaced on this species of fish for bank side erosion, when more often is the case, the weather and amount of pleasure boat traffic is responsible. Maybe a portion of boating tax is set aside to maintain the inland lake and river bank side and help cover freshwater fisheries management and conservation?





Spring time, as we fishermen know, is the most important time in a fish's calendar; more often than not big females lay in the shallows waiting to spawn the next generation and are more than an easy target for a trophy bow fisherman. Summer sees shoals of fish on the surface, lazy and sunbathing during daylight hours and inquisitive after dark. Bow fishermen tend to satisfy a misplaced lust to kill during the night. They cruise in whisper mode by boat with high powered lamps attached to the fronts. Although the saying goes "don't knock it until you have tried it" I still cannot see the sense of enjoyment from such a game, or is it a thrill of the hunt, I don't know but if you catch it and kill it you only catch it once. Playing a fish on rod and line with a baited hook is a form of Art, whereas shooting a fish in the head with an arrow with high breaking strain line attached is just not fishing in my book.

Not only have I spoken and fished with Americans on home soil, I have entertained some on one of Europe's largest river systems to practice "catch and release" for the Wels Catfish.

This species of catfish outlive that of a human as may an Alligator Gar if given the chance.

I was impressed with their enthusiasm after learning from us the importance of returning specimen fish, not only for another days fishing, but to provide the means of safe guarding through effective management for the next generation of angler of modern day fishing.

We must be more conscientious of not just protecting what we have for as long as we have got it. Subsequent to entertaining American anglers in Spain for catfish in excess of 200lbs, some have expressed an interest in fishing in the United Kingdom which is recognised as the birth place of modern day carp angling. The Carp as a species in England is a much prized possession and fish care and safety, coupled with fisheries management to ensure the sport's multi-billion dollar industry status.



With nearly 10 billions dollars worth of UK carp fishing industry, it thrives on the importance of fish care, safe return and educating for the future with all the latest flash tackle to go with it. Many companies exist to cover the wide range of products that make up carp fishing's rich portfolio that has propelled it to being England's fastest participation sport.

Attitudes have changed regarding the Carp as a food source in England, and research shows they are no longer deemed a pest fish but a excellent opportunity to have some of the best freshwater fishing to be had on rod and line. With over one million active and enthusiastic Carp anglers in England accounting for nearly 30% of the fishing population, we lead the way in the ever increasing popularity of this participation sport.

The British are steeped in Carp fishing history and pay high regard through Public opinion to ECHO (English Carp Heritage Organisation), which was formed to protect English Carp and venues from stocking of illegal foreign fish and subsequent transferable fish disease. Carp fishing in England is as big as Bass fishing is in America. I applaud America's Bass anglers although Bass as a species, in my opinion, does not offer anywhere near the fishing sport of that offered by Carp. The majority of Bass caught in America are returned for another day. As a group of anglers they also safeguard the species' future via the implementation of Bass rearing and re-introduction programmes, and a leaf must be taken from their book before the likes of Buffalo and Alligator Gar are classified as an endangered native freshwater fish of America.



As I sat watching from the boat, that shoal of fish rolled off into the distance it was sad to know of their uncertain fate, especially as that day we had caught and released freshwater fish to over one hundred pounds .

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