

Mullet, bay anchovies, and killifish

Mullet, bay anchovies, and killifish are three of the most important fishes of the bays and marshes of Calhoun County, and they often don't get the respectful attention they deserve. These are little guys that make their living off very little, which is the very reason they are so valuable.

Why are they important? Because they play a vital role by turning not much into edible protein for their more fashionable cousins, most notably redfish, speckled trout, and flounder. This alone makes them valuable coastal residents but they serve other functions as well.

Nearly everyone who comes to Calhoun County recognizes the mullet, a handsome, streamlined fellow who lives in small groups or huge schools. Individuals are easily recognizable by their torpedo-like shape, flat head, and distinctive leaps. They shoot out of the water head up at a forty-five degree angle and re-enter in the same position, tail down. There is no arcing or bending in flight.

The variety common in this area is the striped mullet. It is also found worldwide in temperate waters. Schools can number in the thousands in warm weather when they seem to prefer brackish ponds and bayous. Finger mullet, which are simply juveniles of the species, are a favorite redfish and speckled seatrout bait of coastal fishermen and women. Larger striped mullet can approach 20 inches in length.

Bay anchovies and zebra killifish are two additional important but less recognized species of the smaller bay and marsh inhabitants. The little anchovies are better known by their common name of glass minnow, while the killifish is easily recognized as the highly populous mud minnow, an inglorious name for a truly remarkable creature.

How do they make their living? All eat tiny worms and other invertebrates. They also graze on decaying plant life in bays and marshes. The tough little mud minnow, which can literally survive in mud, has a voracious appetite for mosquito larvae. This means that an astonishing number of those wiggle worms never turn into pesky mosquitoes.

All this little stuff -- anything from worms to decaying grass -- at the very bottom of the food chain is turned into masses of protein in a huge, mobile and edible mass in the form of mullet, bay anchovies, and killifish. Find these little protein factories and you will also find redfish, speckled seatrout, and flounder close by.

One final point, an abundance of these "making something out of nothing" fellows underscores another very important aspect of inland marine life. The water has to be clean and well-oxygenated to produce the microorganisms, small animals and plants these fish eat. In other words, lots of these little critters means the bays and marshes are clean and healthy.

For more information, contact:

Rhonda Cummins

Coastal & Marine Resource Agent for Calhoun County

Phone: 361-552-9747

email: rdcummins@ag.tamu.edu