

2008 Convention Wrap Up

Wayne Heaton

The Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center 5550 F.M. 2495, Athens, Texas 75752
wayne.heaton@tpwd.texas.state.us



Well where to begin. I guess first is to say Thank You to NANFA for giving us the opportunity to host the 2008 convention. It was an honor and a privilege to help out the organization.

Our native fish, along with everything else that makes up our aquatic resource, will always have a voice that will be heard because of NANFA and all of its members. Then secondly I would like to thank everyone who came down and made the convention a success. We had a lot of fun and good food, and for those of you who did not make it here is what you missed.

Thursday was really just a day of traveling and registration. We had people show up through out the day. They would come in and chat for a bit then head up to the visitor center and wetlands trail to look around. Later that evening we had some snacks at the center and just had time to talk about how everyone's trip went and what was on the agenda for the following day. Well there were four brave souls, Michael, James, Phil, and Casper, which decided to head up and check the aquariums out after the sun went down. This proved to be quite interesting because the only lighting we have in the outside aquaria is sunlight. So as we looked into the 25 ft long window off in the distance you could make out some eyes and shadowy figures. Some of the figures were only a few inches, but every once in a while you would see something that stretched over 6 feet long.

Friday was a day of collecting and chili. Everyone meet at the Conservation Center at 7:30 a.m. Yes that was 7:30 a.m., and let me tell you some of you really need that beauty sleep. After people decided where they were going and licenses we taken care of off we went. Dr. Richard Ott and his team came down to give the shocking demonstration. It was a huge success. He talked all about how they shock to deter-

mine how many fish are in the lake, how many fish do they need to put in the lake, and all the equipment that it takes and how to use it. They shocked up several species that included multiple types of sunfish, bowfin, gar, largemouth bass, a few species of top water minnows, and a few others. After that most of the people turned their attention to trying to fish for buffalo, but had no success. I guess that is why they call it fishing and not catching.

Both of the collecting trips caught over 18 species at each site on Friday. Zoe Ann took a group to the secret spot where they caught everything from bullhead catfish and madtom catfish to grass pickerel to various types of sunfish. Jim Matthew's group met up with Wes, one of the wildlife biologists at Gus Engeling Wildlife Management Area, at the Area's front gate to start their day. Both Jim and Wes were not used to the dedication of the NANFA members to collect fish and they called it quits at around 1:00 so they could get something to eat, but the others pushed on. No bowfin here, but they did see a lot of the same things as the other group a long with some crappie, grass pickerel, chub suckers, few species of darters, and some topminnows.

Once everyone had their fill with collecting and fishing they came back to get their fill of some good ol' home cooked Texas Chili. We all meet up back at the conservation center at around 6:30 for the chili cook-off. We had six entries ranging from mild to spicy and from being made with fish to steak. We voted by putting poker chips in a tin in front of your favorite chili. This years winner was Joyce Losey who won a 2008 convention t-shirt along with a \$25.00 gift certificate to Brookshire grocery. I just would like to say one thing about my chili. Mine did not win, but by the end of the night people were scrapping the bottom of my pot to get every last bit of my chili. So WHATS UP WITH THAT?!!!

After everyone had eaten their own body weight in chili guided tours were given of the fisheries center. Juan Martinez, the intensive hatchery biologist, gave tours of the hatchery, and Jim Matthews, our hatchery manager, gave a tour of the aquaria and visitor center. Then at the end of the night to top it off I dove in our dive tank and gave a personal dive show for everyone. Even though I was the diver I was not the star of the show. Apparently our longnose gar, "Fingers", single "handedly" stole the show by playing hide and seek around my head.

We also got a look at the Fishes of the Big Muddy playing cards that resulted from the support of the Gerald C. Corcoran Education Grant in 2007. All we can say is they are an excellent investment of NANFA's resources. Saturday started with registration, coffee, and doughnuts. I gave a welcome and introduction about the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center, and then turned it over to the presenters. Boy did they come through. Here are all the GREAT presentations we had this year:

Juan Martinez presented: "Inland Fisheries Overview"

Allen Forshage presented: "The Sharelunker Program"

Barrett Christie presented: "An Overview of Conservation Programs at Dallas Aquarium Fair Park"

Joshuah Perkin presented: "Movement and Microhabitat Associations of Guadalupe Bass in Two Texas Rivers"

Dr. James Wetzel presented: "Protection of Tank Spawning Brood Sunfish Using Partitions and Teasers"

Allison Pease presented: "Ecological Effects of an Introduced Cichlid in the Rio Panuco Basin" This project was partially funded by the NANFA Conservation Research Grant in 2007.

Christine Foley presented: "Educating Children About Native and Introduced Fish Species" This project was a recipient of the Gerald C. Corcoran Education Grant earlier this year. Once again money well distributed.

After the presentations there was an Open Session where we opened the floor to any comments or suggestions from those in attendance. The big issue that was brought up and discussed was a need for a formal convention manual that could

be given out each year to the next host. Also there was talk about having a convention committee to help out with each year's convention. This would be made up of NANFA members along with hosts from previous years. At the afternoon break this year we had a sheet cake made with the NANFA logo on it. And before we had dismissed for cake I told everyone that they were going to be able to cut their own piece of cake, and they could have as much as they wanted. Well after a few minutes of talking with some folks I walked to the cake and much to my surprise no one had cut into it.



The Cake provided by the conference organizers

So I asked, "Does everyone here not like cake?" Come to find out everyone thought the cake was so nice no one wanted to be the first person to cut into it. So being the gracious host I was I cut the first piece, and then madness ensued.

That night we had our fill of some good ol' Texas Bar-B-Que. Piggy's catered for us bringing out some of the most mouth watering brisket, sausage, potato salad, and beans you have ever eaten. Then to finish it off we had some home made hot peach and blackberry cobbler. Well to be honest I finished it off with about 4 pieces peach cobbler. During the end of the meal Dr. Timothy Bonner and Chad Thomas talked to us about the coming about of the book, "Freshwater Fishes of Texas". Dr. Bonner talked to us about the status of a lot of the native fish in Texas and what is the future for some of these species. Then Chad talked to us about all he had to go through with publishing this book. Once the talks had ended Chad and Dr. Bonner signed two copies of the book and put them into the auction.

This brings us to the most confrontational time of the whole convention. The items at this year's conference ranged from collecting back packs to fishing combos to seines

to books to fish to \$100 gift certificates. However the biggest ticket item was a 3.2 Megapixel Underwater Camera. So thank you for everyone who donated items this year to the auction if it was not for all the donations we would not have had some many alliances made and friendships broken. Phil was a trooper this year. He was not only having to battle all the bidding wars but was having to fight a cold as well. So to Phil, a very special thanks go out to you for all the fun we all had even though I think I ended up bidding on some items I did not know about, and by the way how can I bid against myself? The auction was a lot of fun, and by the end of it fingers had been pointed, looks given, pens took flight, laughter filled the room, and money had been given to a good cause.

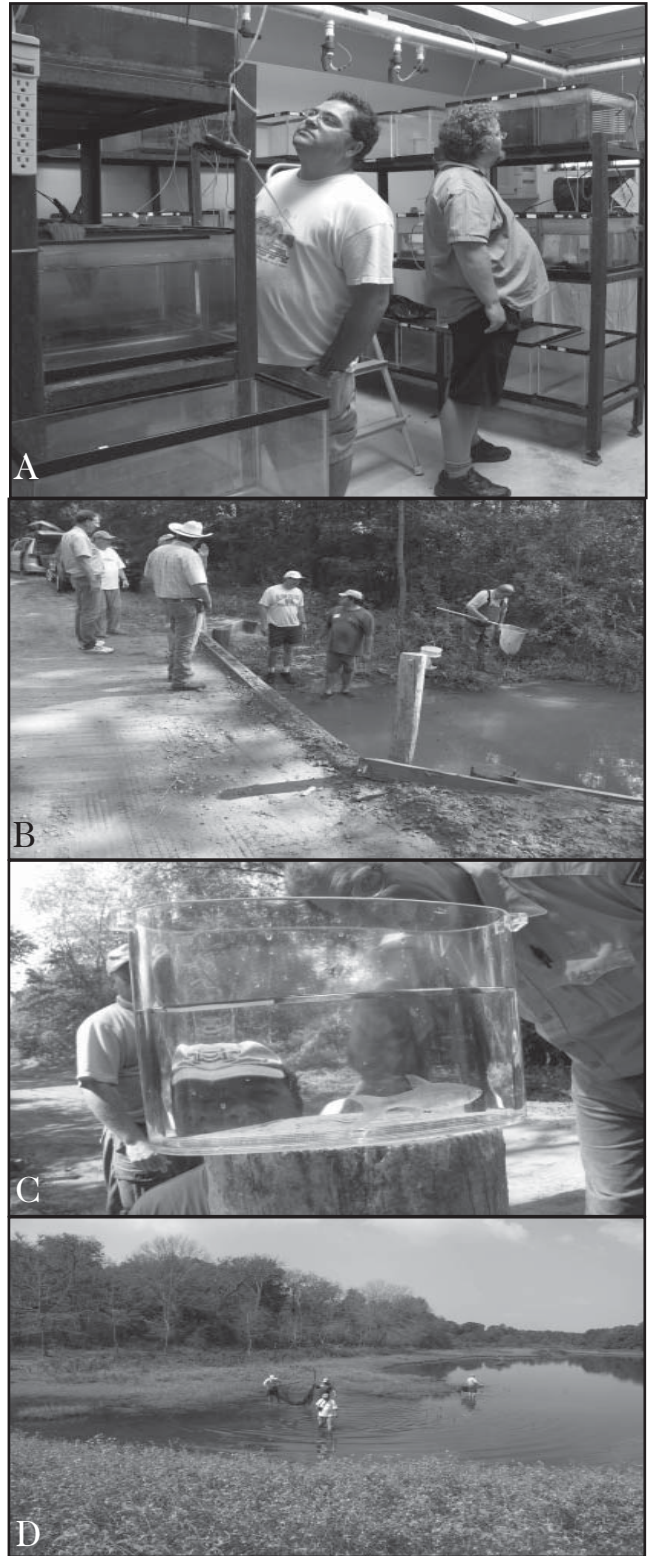
Even though Sunday was the end of the convention it was not the end of all the fun. Everyone went to the collection sites, and most decided to try the other one out they had not gotten to on Friday. Most of the same fish were caught, but everyone had a lot of fun. I will say that the NANFA members left such a good impression on Wes from Gus Engeling he went back out with us on Sunday. He said he learned a lot and had a blast visiting with everyone. He was literally neck deep in water helping us collect.

After the collecting trips were over we meet back up at the Conservation Center where most of y'all had to say good bye. So we bagged up all the fish that were headed back to another home and y'all rode off into the sunset like some old western. Now there were a few who did not have to head back until Monday, so I offered something special for those select few. Out of all of them only Casper was up to the challenge, and we spent a good part of the afternoon snorkeling in the outside exhibits there at the center. Casper found himself face to face with some 6 foot 200 lbs. alligator gar, 50 – 80 lbs. catfish, and even some paddlefish.

Well that is about all that happened during the convention. I hope everyone had a great time. I know I had a great time getting to know everyone and putting this together. I made some life long friends along with getting to support one of the best organizations I belong to. So thanks again everyone for a very memorable convention. Oh before I forget we had someone from the UK come, so this was a world wide convention. But that is a story for another day.

Thanks,

Wayne



A: Michael Wolfe and Casper Cox looking at the Desert Pupfish breeding facility at Dallas Aquarium at Fair Park
 B: Collection site at the Gus Engeling Wildlife Management Area (GEWMA)
 C: Admiring one of the denizens of GEWMA
 D: Another site at GEWMA