

HOOK N' COOK

Silver Bass

*Thars Silver in
Them Thar Creeks*



The Silver Bass, although they rank low on the angler's "take home" list, has actually walked away with awards that should have gone to the Smallmouth Bass. Quite commonly, the two fins on the Drum's back can lead "Joe Angler" to believe they have caught a Bass. Actually the Silver Bass is a member of the Drum family and no relation to the Basses at all.

The identity crisis becomes all the more confusing since the Drum has come to be known by a variety of common names: Silver Bass, Sheepshead, Sunfish, Red River Bass and its official common name Freshwater Drum. This will leave the average angler in somewhat of a quandary when he/she consults their handy-dandy fisherman's encyclopedia, for unless they know the Latin name (*Aplodinotus grunniens*), they may end up reading about the wrong fish.

When it comes to actual appearance though, the Drum is not all that hard to distinguish from other fish which have two fins on their

backs. Their silvery grey colour sets them apart from most of these. Where there is still a possibility of mistaken identity, the anal fin provides the definitive clue. In the Drum, the first ray of the anal fin is unbranched, stiff and thick; in the other species it is stiff but thin.

As common names go, Drum is most appropriate for it puts the spotlight on one of the unique aspects of the Freshwater Drum: the Drum is the only freshwater fish capable of producing sound. It would be nice to say that the sound produced is just like "drumming" but people who have heard the Drum say it is more reminiscent of the sound made when one blows into an empty pop bottle. It is a comparatively loud sound and can become a unique feature of the environment.

Although the sound is not identical to a drumming sound, it is produced in a "drumming" fashion. Muscles of the throat vibrate against the air-inflated swim bladder to produce the sound. The swim bladder is a fish's self-incorporated flotation device. By regulating the amount of air within the bladder, a fish can exert control over their buoyancy. This prevents a fish from drifting to the surface when they want to stay on the bottom. In the Drum, the swim bladder serves a dual purpose: sound and depth control.

Why do Drum "drum"? The answer to this question is not known yet but one astute biologist has noticed that Drum "drum" more frequently in the summer. Summer just happens to be the spawning season for Drum so drumming may well be part of the courting ritual. Recent discoveries have shown that the drumming muscle, though highly developed in the male, is barely developed in the female. Perhaps it is a type of "Tarzan" call that is the exclusive preserve of the male.





Though it is believed that drumming is linked to spawning, very little of the actual logistics of spawning are known. The Drum has managed to avoid the scrutiny of the biologist's eye during this act. A few facts have been discerned. Drum spawn when the water temperatures reach a balmy 23.5°C, definitely a summer act in this part of the world. The eggs of the Drum are buoyant. These eggs are highly saturated with fats and oils, making them less dense than water. The eggs float along with the current to their destiny. They hatch rapidly; within about a days' time.

The Drum can be prepared as you prepare the other sport fish. Since the bone structure of the Drum is much like that of Walleye, Perch and Sauger, table preparation is made easy. Fillet the Drum as you would these fish.

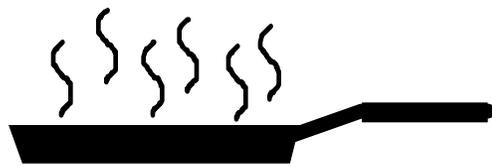
Fish are delicate creatures and their flesh deteriorates rapidly once they are taken from their natural environment. The Drum like other fish needs to be coddled after catching to preserve the sweet nature of their flesh. The Drum should be kept over the side of the boat in a burlap or wire mesh bag or iced down as soon as they are caught. If you are going to place them in a cooler, gut and gill them first. Fish kept in a cooler with crushed ice will be at the peak of freshness for table preparation when you arrive home. All fish benefit from this careful treatment. You too will reap benefits for the flavour of the fish will be at its best when you take a little extra care.

The Drum can be fished for using the techniques you use for other sport fish. Use tackle of medium weight and fish for them on the bottom around gravel bars, mudflats, rocky points, dams and tail waters. The Red, Assiniboine and Winnipeg rivers are ideal spots within the province of Manitoba. Within city limits they can be taken from Sturgeon Creek and the Seine River. Best baits are those which mimic their natural

diet. They will respond to the allure of a minnow, worm or crayfish although anglers have taken them on artificial lures.

A Drum in the range of five kilograms (ten pounds) is a large Drum although historical (hysterical?) reports proclaim a huge fish of over 45 kilograms (100 pounds)!!! On average they are usually less than a kilogram (one pound) in weight, a much nicer size for use in the kitchen.

The Drum is filleted as you would any game fish and can be cooked in the same ways. It is excellent when pan-fried. But here the Drum's lean nature makes necessary a culinary warning. Be careful not to overcook the fish.



"Pan - Fried Fish"

Over-cooking will render the palatable tender flesh into a dry and hard product that no doubt will turn you off Drum forever.

An excellent batter for Drum incorporates an ingredient that is often a part of a fish feed already: beer. The beer batter is made by stirring sufficient flour into a bottle of beer until a proper consistency is achieved. This batter should not be too thin; it should be thick enough to stick to the fish.

In many respects the Drum is unbeatable, so why not give it a try?

