



Trapper Arne's Crayfish Newsletter for January 2009

The CRAYFISH TALE By TRAPPER ARNiE

Crayfish by Thomas Huxley

Ever since I started writing these crayfish newsletters, I have been on the lookout for information of interest to my readers. First I scoured the books on my shelves about crayfish, some in English, some in Swedish.

Then I discovered the great source of information on the Internet. Almost every day I nudge the Google search engine for some new information.

HUXLEY'S CRAYFISH

So one day I ran across a name that surprised me in two ways. Huxley. Most of us know the name Aldous Huxley, the famous English author of, among others, the books 'Point Counter Point', 'Brave New World' and 'Eyeless in Gaza.'

But Aldous Huxley was just one of several famous Huxleys. His brother Julian was a famous biologist and both were the sons of a writer and school-master, Leonard Huxley. But now we come to the object of my Google finding this time, Aldous and Julian's grandfather was the almost equally famous Thomas Henry Huxley, zoologist and ardent defender of Darwin's evolutionary theories. Known by some as Darwin's Bulldog, he was also a noted agnostic. Interestingly, Darwin himself was an ardent Christian, contrary to many people's assumptions.

THE CRAYFISH TOME

So there I was on the Google search engine looking for crayfish information when a huge treatise appeared to my eyes, written by this man with the famous name Huxley. And this book, 371 pages, was published as early as in 1879. What at first amazed me was the age of this book, written not long after Darwin's famous *Origin of the Species* was written. Then I also immediately noticed that this was not an 'old fashioned' treatise, full of the scientific myths of yesteryear. It was an entirely up-to-date publication written in the most scientific mode I could imagine, chock-full of zoological details about this creature that I am so interested in. In this book Huxley discusses just about every major and minor aspect of the life and zoology of the crayfish.

Until Huxley published his tome about crayfish, Americans had known this crustacean as the crayfish after that name was introduced in 1817 by Thomas Say, the first American zoologist to study these animals. Many here in the US still refer to them as crawfish, especially those in the South. But after Huxley's introduction, which was on a larger and more detailed scope, the name of crayfish became the official scientific name for this interesting critter.

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SUMMARIZING THE BOOK

To summarize Huxley's book is difficult without reading the whole complex book from cover to cover. But leafing through the book, if that term can be used for something appearing on the Internet, I found several interesting topics. In his 6 chapters on the crayfish he covers the **History of the Common Crayfish, The Physiology, the Morphology and the Distribution and etiology of the common crayfish**. Lots of complicated words here and some of them you'll only understand after reading his book.

MALES OR FEMALES

One of the first questions Huxley tries to settle is the difference between the male and the female crayfish. Here he enters a subject that I have been interested in for many years. "...compared together it will be seen that [crayfish] fall into two sets; the jointed tail being much broader, especially in the middle, in the one set than the other. The broad-tailed crayfishes are the females, the other the males." This simple statement that females are broader over the rump is a fact that for decades explains why some Swedes have had the curious ability to be able to select the female crayfish from a large dish of cooked crayfish without turning them over. (Those of my readers who may say 'so what?' apparently don't know the added delight of eating crayfish with roe.)

AFRICAN CRAYFISH

Not surprising, Huxley, being an Englishman, is particularly concerned with the appearance of crayfish in waterways of the UK. But he does mention the existence of crays in other countries and continents. Here he is apparently out on slightly thin ice when he mentions that Africa does not have ANY crayfish. If he had added 'native crayfish' he would have been closer to the truth. I have come across several sources that relate that crayfish have been found in certain sections of the Nile River as well as in Ethiopia; Both part of the continent of Africa. Nowadays there are even crayfish in Kenya, but they seem to be later imports from, among other places, Louisiana.

WHERE CRAYFISH?

Huxley also mentions that because crayfish are intolerant of higher water temperatures and strong sunlight, they tend to be more numerous in rivers that flow east and west rather than those flowing north and south as the former offer them more afternoon shade. As I usually catch my crays in lakes, I have not had the opportunity to verify that finding. But maybe so...

During winter cold, says Huxley, crayfish do not go dormant ‘in the strict sense of the word’ but seem to just slow down while they still lurk at the entry of their burrow, hoping that something edible will float by. Even water-rats and voles are said to be occasional victims to its claws. Not going dormant seems to be right as I have actually read about people catching crayfish through the ice. My experience with cold waters, though, tells me that winter catches of crayfish are rather scarce.

That crayfishes are cannibalistic is not news to Huxley, who is morally upset at the idea of a male eating its female partner. Those who have kept crayfish in an aquarium have surely seen that strange mode of affection at close quarters.

How to catch crayfish is covered quickly by mentioning wading in the water and grabbing the crays as they lie in their burrows, or by using hoop-nets baited with frogs, sometimes with the help of fires that are lighted on the banks, thus attracting crayfish. He also emphasizes that night time is the best time for successful cray fishing. Traps are not mentioned.

READ MORE ABOUT HUXLEY’S CRAYFISH

For anyone really interested in the subject of crayfish, this book is a must, as it covers most aspects of this creature. In addition it is for free on the Internet. Just Google it by searching for Huxley’s crayfish or something more intelligent than that. While doing this, you might as well also take a look at my own website *TrapperArne.com* which is now ready to accept orders for a new record breaking year.

Trapper Arne