



INSTITUTE FOR FISHERIES RESEARCH
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HOW GOOD IS AN EXPERT?

Catching Fish Involves a Lot of Luck But Skill Is
Certainly No Handicap

For ten years our conservation officers have been getting the dope on Michigan fishing. They have recorded information for all kinds of anglers on all kinds of waters. As a result, we have a good picture of average fishing on an average lake or stream on an average fishing day and at every season of the year.

It is readily admitted that fishing involves a lot of luck; in fact angling would not be the interesting sport it is if it were not a gamble. Nor would it be so interesting if it were all luck. A full creel seems generally to be the result of skill and chance combined.

Last year the Department decided to learn how much skill was involved, how the expert compared with the average. Special creel census blanks were given by conservation officers and hatchery supervisors to a small number of anglers who were known to go fishing rather frequently and who presumably knew what angling was all about. Some were ordinary experts; others were expert experts.

All were requested to prepare a report each time they fished, regardless of their success. A total of 1,812 records submitted by 71 anglers

have been analyzed and have been compared with those obtained in the 1936 general census. Data for the fishing in 1937 have not yet been compiled, but as the averages for the state as a whole do not vary much from year to year, it is probably safe to use the 1936 information for comparison.

The experts caught 12,058 fish at the average rate of 1.8 fish per hour. The good trout fishermen took twice as many fish as the average fishermen reporting in the general census. On lakes the expert took 2.2 fish per hour compared with 1.7 for the average, or only about 1/4 again as many fish. The neophyte can undoubtedly recall days when his fishing was very much better than that recorded for experts. The reports are for the entire season though, and those few inevitable "off days" can decidedly lower the average. If the expert had selected only his best days, the figures would be quite different from those given here.

On trout waters 13 per cent of the fishing trips resulted in empty creels. On lakes, too, no fish were caught in 13 per cent of the attempts. This should be very reassuring to the highly superstitious folks. On about one trip in eight the expert can be expected to go home as inconspicuously as possible if the information submitted by the 71 anglers is representative. There is one decided difference though between the expert and the beginner--if you meet the former after an unsuccessful day he will say that the fish didn't happen to be feeding or that he couldn't get them. The beginner will probably reply that there aren't any fish left in that particular lake or stream.

The fish taken by experts in 1937 were slightly larger than those taken by the average angler in 1936.

Both the experienced and the average lake fishermen caught more bluegills than any other fish, but, in proportion, the experts took twice as many bass.

A large percentage of the experts were fly fishermen. Their favorite hour for fishing was from 7 to 8 p.m., but they were out to some extent at all hours. Over thirty of the trout fishing records included the period from 1 to 3 a.m. Lake fishermen were not nearly so ambitious and on only two or three occasions was one of these experts out on a lake when according to non-fishermen he should have been sound asleep. About a third of all fishing was in the morning; the remainder was divided between the afternoon, evening and early night.

An examination of the records suggests that more skill is involved in trout fishing than in lake fishing, at least the expert is farther removed from the average in this branch of the sport.

Only one of the 71 experts was a woman. Her catch per hour was considerably below average for experts, but the fish she caught were much larger than the average taken by the other experienced fishermen.

The limited evidence suggests that experts are about twice as good as the average at trout fishing, but not so much above the average when it comes to other types of fishing.

Anglers have long been regarded as incapable of differentiating between imaginary catches and the real thing, but the records submitted by the 71 individuals were about what one would expect. It seems that after all fishermen are really honest folks and that the expression "fish stories" might better be changed to "golf stories" or something else.

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