

Beyond dinner: Invasive shrimp mounted for display

August 13 2013, by Janet McConnaughey

Stuffed shrimp are decor rather than dinner for some of the folks who have caught the really big sort—invasive Asian tiger shrimp—in the Gulf of Mexico or along the East Coast.

Sometimes the [shrimp](#) become both food and a wall display. Joe Strange of Joe's Taxidermy in Houma said he mounted three last year, dining on the meat he removed from the two smallest, about 7 and 10 inches (20 and 25 1/2 centimeters) long.

"I just threw them quick in a frying pan with butter, salt and pepper," he said. "That way you get the true taste."

He liked them. "They were better tasting than our shrimp. I would trade them off for our shrimp anytime."

Scientists and others are worried that might happen, with possible devastating effects on native shrimp and the Gulf of Mexico's ecosystem. The invaders could gobble up the tiger's share of native shrimps' diet, not to mention crabs, snails, oysters and other bivalves, and the local shrimp themselves—because all shrimp are carnivores. And, in turn, that could affect the larger animals that eat those critters.

Tiger shrimp are named for their black-and-white or black-and-yellow stripes. They're known from the "slip an extra shrimp on the barbie" line that brought actor Paul Hogan to U.S. fame through an Australian tourism TV ad in the mid-1980s.

The shrimp—native to Indo-Pacific, Asian, and Australian waters—are bigger enough than native species that they could both outcompete and just plain eat their smaller cousins out of existence.

Scientists say there's no evidence of that happening so far. But the numbers of tiger shrimp reported, with more in inshore nursery areas and juveniles caught along both coasts, indicate that they're probably breeding, said Pam Fuller, who keeps a federal invasive species database at the U.S. Geological Survey's Southeast Ecological Science Center in Gainesville, Florida.

Strange said he'd tried taxidermy on native shrimp, but they fell apart—"the legs crumble off." Tiger shrimp seem to have tougher carapaces and legs, he said. "The only thing it lost was its antenna. I made them out of fishing twine."

Pete Miller of Water and Wildlife Studio in Marshallberg, North Carolina, has mounted about a dozen tiger shrimp, freeze-drying them rather than scooping out the meat.

The shrimp have become so numerous in U.S. waters that federal scientists don't have a good handle on just how many are out there, even though the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's fisheries division asked last year for shrimpers to report and freeze them for DNA analysis.

"The number of reports has gone down because people have gotten so used to seeing them they've just stopped reporting them," Fuller said.

Commercial fisherman Kenny Rustick of Gloucester, N.C., said that about three years ago, he reported the first of four tiger shrimp he has caught on the 32-foot (9.75-meter) Mad Lady II. He had that one and a second mounted. He said he'd seen photos on the Internet, so he knew

what he had.

Fuller said limited genetic analysis so far indicates that the shrimp are all from closely related stocks, but their original source hasn't been determined. Possibilities include larvae carried across the ocean in bilge water or fish farms in the Caribbean, coastal South America or West Africa.

Hundreds were caught along South Carolina, Georgia and Florida after a storm hit a South Carolina shrimp farm in 1988, but none was reported in U.S. waters for the next 18 years.

Six were reported in 2006, four in 2007 and fewer than 50 a year until 2011, when 678 were reported. That year saw 329 in North Carolina, 144 in South Carolina and 128 in Louisiana. The next-largest numbers of reports were 28 in Alabama and 25 in Florida.

Last year, the total reported fell to 195, with the largest state total in South Carolina—64.

Trish Murphey, who gets the reports in North Carolina, said shrimpers sometimes ask her, "Do I have to give them to you? I want to get them stuffed."

Long before any was brought in for mounting, said Miller, he'd seen a 16-inch (40 1/2-centimeters) specimen exhibited by an importer at a restaurant show in North Carolina.

"Guys here are telling me they just hope the cooler weather can keep their population down now. I think that's just wishful thinking," Miller said.

He said those he's mounted ranged from 8 inches (20 centimeters) to

about 13 inches (33 centimeters). He hasn't seen one this year.

"I think everybody's waiting to get a real big monster," he said.

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Citation: Beyond dinner: Invasive shrimp mounted for display (2013, August 13) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-08-dinner-invasive-shrimp-mounted.html>

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