

DID THE FIVE-METER-LONG LARGETOOTH SAWFISH THAT HANGS FROM THE RAFTERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA ONCE SWIM IN LOUISIANA WATERS?



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The five living members of the sawfish family *Pristidae* are a fascinating lot. Of the over 35,000 species of living fishes, only five have the combination of growing to a huge size and having a saw-like forward projection of the skull for which sawfishes earned their name. Two species of sawfish occur (or occurred) in US waters—the Largetooth Sawfish *Pristis pristis* and the Smalltooth Sawfish *Pristis pectinata* (Faria et al. 2013). Largetooth Sawfish have been reliably documented to reach 705 cm total length (TL) (Devadoss et al. 1989) while Smalltooth Sawfish reach at least 553 cm TL (Bigelow and Schroeder 1953, Weigmann 2016). It can be difficult to distinguish Largetooth Sawfish from Smalltooth Sawfish rostral specimens in museum and private collections due to overlapping rostral tooth counts, with Largetooth Sawfish having 14–24 rostral teeth per side and Smalltooth Sawfish having 20–30 teeth per side (Last et al. 2016). Principal component analysis can be used to determine species for rostra showing cryptic characters (Seitz and Hoover 2017). For complete specimens, characteristics of other parts of the body, such as the placement of the first dorsal fin relative to the pelvic fins and the presence or absence of a ventral lobe on the caudal fin, are used for distinguishing between these two species (Last et al. 2016). In the US, the Smalltooth Sawfish historically occurred along the Gulf of Mexico coast south through the Florida Keys and north along the eastern seaboard to North Carolina, but today the species is confined predominately to southern Florida and the Florida Keys (Waters et al. 2014). The range of the Largetooth Sawfish in the US was not well under-

stood until recently. Although nearly all records of Largetooth Sawfish in the US are from Texas (Table 1), some authors have included states east of Texas as part of its range (e.g., Briggs 1958, Duarte-Bello 1959, Robins and Ray 1986). del Monte-Luna et al. (2009) went so far as to state that the Largetooth Sawfish was “once common and even plentiful in Florida waters,” attributing this idea (erroneously) to Bigelow and Schroeder (1953). The species was never abundant in US waters, and there are no reli-



Figure 1. The 96.5-cm rostrum is the only authentic portion of the 500-cm-long Largetooth Sawfish that hangs from the rafters at the University of Iowa. (Photo courtesy of C. Opitz, UI. © 2020 The University of Iowa Museum of Natural History.)

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Figure 2. The 500-cm-long plaster cast of a sawfish that hangs above office space at the University of Iowa shows all the characteristics of a Largetooth Sawfish. The 96.5-cm rostrum is authentic and is tentatively considered to be specimen SUI-17512, although it lacks a specimen label. (Photo courtesy of C. Opitz, UI. © 2020 The University of Iowa Museum of Natural History.)

able records of it from Florida or even Mississippi or Alabama (Seitz and Waters 2018). But what about Louisiana?

ON THE HUNT FOR TRUTHINESS

While critically reviewing all available sources of information to clarify the US range of this enigmatic species, my coauthor and I came across information on an interesting Largetooth Sawfish specimen housed within the University of Iowa's Museum of Natural History that was purported to be from Louisiana.

A 500 cm TL cast replica of a Largetooth Sawfish hangs from the rafters at the University of Iowa (UI; also known as the State University of Iowa [SUI]) (Figures 1 and 2). An authentic 96.5-cm rostrum, attached to the cast, is thought to be specimen SUI-17512, although no label was found on the rostrum or cast to confirm its identity according to the collections manager, C. Opitz (pers. comm.,

04/07/16). Specimen SUI-17512 was stated by Fernandez-Carvalho et al. (2013) to have been captured in Louisiana waters in 1917 or 1918 and to measure 488 cm TL. These authors cited SUI-17512 as evidence of Largetooth Sawfish having historically occurred in Louisiana waters. We knew we needed to confirm or refute this record, and leave no stone unturned, so that future conservation efforts for potential refugia for any remaining Largetooth Sawfish in the US are not wasted in areas having invalid records.

SUI-17512 lacks locality data and the date of collection. The specimen is catalogued simply as "Saw of Saw-fish" "Deposited by C. C. Nutting" according to Opitz (pers. comm., 08/30/16).

Charles Cleveland Nutting (1858–1927) was an avid naturalist interested primarily in hydroids and birds (Calder 2004). Legendary ichthyologist David Starr Jordan was among Nutting's teachers and reportedly influenced Nutting as a naturalist. Nutting was curator at the (then-named) Cabinet of Natural History at UI (renamed the Museum of Natural History in 1887) during 1886–1927 (Taylor 1943, Calder 2004). The SUI-



Figure 3. This plaster cast of a Largetooth Sawfish was likely made between 1916 and 1918 under the direction of Louisiana State University curator and supervisor of its taxidermy laboratory, Alfred Bailey, based on information in LSM's Sixth Biennial Report (1918). The cast may have been based on a specimen received from a local fisherman, although the capture locality is not clear. The characteristics of the mount are very different from that of the 500-cm-long cast now hanging from the rafters at the University of Iowa. It may have been re-mounted as shown in Figure 1, or it may represent an entirely different specimen from SUI-17512. (Photo provided by C. Opitz and The University of Iowa Museum of Natural History.)

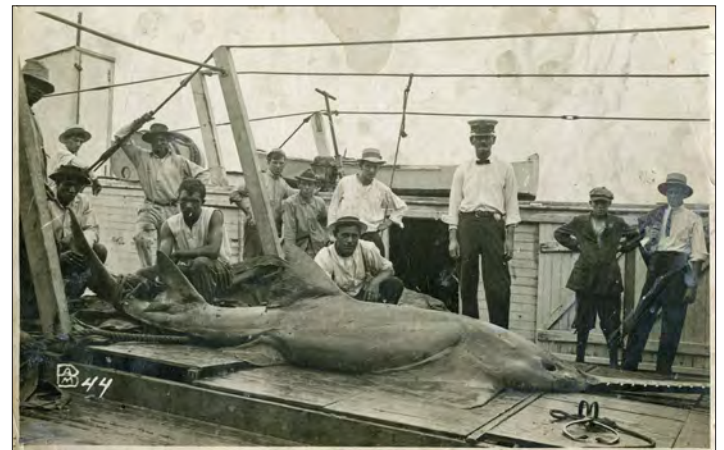


Figure 4. A cropped version of this photo of a Largetooth Sawfish on a boat was included in LSM's Sixth Biennial Report (1918) together with the caption "Fifteen-foot sawfish taken on board the boat." The same report also states that "The most important acquisitions [sic.] [to the Louisiana State Museum] were two immense sawfishes (*Pristis pectinatus*) from Barataria Bay, contributed by Mr. Leo Marrero, of Gretna, La., and Mr. W. G. Fischer, one of which was mounted by the taxidermy department." (Photo provided by C. Opitz and The University of Iowa Museum of Natural History.)



Figure 5. This photo of a Largetooth Sawfish onboard a vessel may or may not be the same specimen as in Figure 4. The fish shown in Figure 4 has a cut across the base of the rostrum, while the fish in this photo has the base of the rostrum still intact. (Photo provided by C. Opitz and The University of Iowa Museum of Natural History.)

17512 specimen may have been captured in the Gulf of Mexico during the period of Nutting's tenure at UI. Indeed, a transcript of an 1888 presentation delivered by Nutting includes mention of a sawfish captured in the Gulf of Mexico (Nutting 1888). However, there are other possible scenarios to consider for the provenance of SUI-17512.

One alternative scenario is that SUI-17512 was obtained from UI alumnus and ex-curator and supervisor of the taxidermy laboratory at the Louisiana State Museum (LSM) (July 1, 1916–September 1, 1919), Alfred M. Bailey, and Professor Homer R. Dill of the LSM through Bailey. This possibility was suggested to the authors by Opitz (pers. comm., 04/07/16) and it would help explain how Fernandez-Carvalho et al. (2013) made a connection between SUI-17512 and Louisiana as well as the date of capture these authors assigned to it (1917 or 1918). However, if this is the case, then there are still several possibilities as to where the specimen had been collected.

A photo stored at UI of a large Largetooth Sawfish on a boat was included in LSM's Sixth Biennial Report (1918) together with the caption "Fifteen-foot sawfish taken on board the boat" (Figures 3, 4, and 5); however, the stated length of the fish in the photo (457 cm, presumably referring to TL) does not match that of the mounted specimen. The same biennial report states that "two immense sawfishes (*Pristis pectinatus*) from Barataria Bay contributed by Mr. Leo Marrero, of Gretna, La., and Mr. W. G. Fischer, one of which was mounted by the taxidermy department." The species identification in the report is not necessarily reliable so we cannot rule out the Largetooth Sawfish. Mr. Marrero's sawfish is later stated as being 427 cm long and from the Gulf of Mexico, and Mr. Fischer's sawfish was stated as 457 cm long and having been caught in Barataria Bay, Louisiana. In the April 1919 issue of the *Iowa Alumnus*, Bailey (1919) references a 488-cm-long sawfish caught while working with shrimp trawl fishers.

Based on the above information, the capture location for the SUI-17512 specimen could be attributed to the Gulf of Mexico, Barataria Bay, or an unspecified area in the case of the trawler-caught sawfish (LSM 1918, Bailey 1919). Although the first two specimens were reported as Smalltooth Sawfish, the species identifications could not be verified and so we could not rule out the Largetooth Sawfish. In the case of the sawfish captured by trawl, the fish was retained, the meat harvested, and the rostrum was likely added to the LSM collection. The reported TL for the trawler-caught sawfish (488 cm) was closest in size to the 500-cm mounted specimen. Further, this TL agrees with the one attributed to SUI-17512 by Fernandez-Carvalho et al. (2013). However, the capture location for the trawler-caught sawfish was not reported by Bailey (1919).

There is still another scenario to consider. It is even possible that the SUI-17512 rostrum instead refers to one of three rostra that were accessioned into the LSM collection in 1910 from unrecorded localities (LSM 1910). At a minimum, SUI-17512 may have been collected at an unspecified locality in the Gulf of Mexico, from Barataria Bay, or from an entirely unrecorded locality.

It is unclear why Largetooth Sawfish have not been reliably documented in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, or Florida. What is clear is that the lack of reliable records is not due to a lack of people able to observe these big fish along the coastlines of these states. In the words of Bigelow and Schroeder (1953), "This [Port Arthur, Texas] seems to mark the usual limit to its range in that direction [east], for it could hardly have been overlooked if it occurred in any numbers along the northern shore of the Gulf of Mexico."

It is possible that the associated hypoxic zone adjacent to the Mississippi River delta impeded the eastward dispersal of Largetooth Sawfish into the northeastern Gulf of Mexico as it is a somewhat obscure zoogeographic division (Rahel 2007). This massive zone extends far out into the Gulf (Hoese and Moore 1998, Turner et al. 2006) and is known to affect the distribution of some fish species, such as those within the American sole genus *Gymnachirus*, the blenny genus *Chasmodes*, and the puffer genus *Sphoeroides* (Walls 1975). However, if the Mississippi delta represents a barrier to the Largetooth Sawfish, then why doesn't it represent a barrier to the Smalltooth Sawfish in the same way? Further, it seems counterintuitive that this delta

Table 1. List of Largetooth Sawfish records from Texas from the available literature and public and private collections and databases including the International Sawfish Encounter Database (NSED) at the University of Florida. Some total lengths (TLs) are extrapolated from a measured rostrum, or a rostrum-less body, using morphometric data in Whitty et al. (2014).

Date	County	TL (cm)	Source(s), Notes
1968	Nueces	Not recorded	NSED-05900; "Port Aransas?"
06/24/1961	Nueces	Not recorded	NSED-04108; Big Shell (now called Padre Island). Bob Hall Pier
09/xx/1957	Galveston	Not recorded	NSED-04285; Texas City, ship channel near the turning basin
1951	Galveston	Not recorded	NSED-04098; Beach in Galveston
1951	Galveston	Not recorded	NSED-04063
1948	Not recorded	Not recorded	JCS-894 of JCS private database; Texas
1947	Nueces	Not recorded	NSED-04111; Port Aransas
1947	Kleberg/Kennedy	Not recorded	NSED-04406; Padre Island south jetty
1942 (summer)	Galveston	427–530 ($n = 7$)	Baughman (1943); coll. E.F. Reid; City of Galveston; at least one female and several males; 226–590 kg
06/16/1940	Aransas and Nueces	566	Baughman (1943); Aransas Pass; 544 kg
09/01/1940	Galveston	Not recorded	NSED-04345; Galveston
08/28/1940	Galveston	Not recorded	NSED-04347; Bettison Pier at Galveston North Jetty
08/28/1940	Galveston	Not recorded	NSED-04348; Bettison Pier at Galveston North Jetty
06/16/1940	Aransas	Not recorded	NSED-04019; Aransas Pass
09/08/1938	Nueces	Not recorded	NSED-04152; Port Aransas area
09/04/1938	Galveston	444.5	JCS-XXX (photo and interview records) in private database; J. Richard of Florida Sportsman, pers. comm., 01/14/05; B. Reynolds of International Game Fish Association (IGFA), pers. comm., 04/08/05; fish weighed 333.8 kg; coll. G. Pangarakis; Galveston North Jetty; this fish is an IGFA record (La Monte 1958)
05/14/1938	Galveston	Not recorded	NSED-04099; High Island
10/11/1935	Nueces	Not recorded	NSED-04377; Corpus Christi Bay Channel in Corpus Christi Bay
1929–1930	Galveston	Not recorded	NSED-04369; Galveston North Jetty
1925–1930	Cameron	399 (extrapolated)	JCPP241009 of JCS private collection; rostrum; Brownsville; TL extrapolated from 91.9-cm standard rostral length
1925	Cameron	Not recorded	NSED-04151; Port Isabel
1917	Nueces	467 (extrapolated)	Hoover (2008); coll. E.W. Brown; near Port Aransas; TL extrapolated from 112-cm total rostral length; head of specimen is currently housed at Denver Museum of Nature and Science
Not recorded (< 1943)	Aransas and Nueces	498	Baughman (1943); Aransas Pass area
Not recorded (< 1943)	Aransas and Nueces	601 (extrapolated)	Baughman (1943); Aransas Pass area; rostrum previously removed; fish was previously harpooned and shot; all wounds reported healed; TL based on 457-cm body and predicted total rostral length of 144 cm
Not recorded (< 1943)	Brazoria	Not recorded	Baughman (1943); shrimp trawler out of Freeport
Not recorded (< 1943)	Galveston	427	Baughman (1943); City of Galveston
Not recorded (< 1943)	Galveston	445	Baughman (1943); City of Galveston
Not recorded (< 1943)	Galveston	457	Baughman (1943); City of Galveston
Not recorded ($\leq$ 1925)	Cameron	523	Hoover (2008); Port Isabel, photo postcard postmarked 1925
Not recorded	Galveston	Not recorded	NSED-04104
Not recorded	Galveston	Not recorded	NSED-04065
Not recorded	Not recorded	288 (extrapolated)	JCSPP270103 of JCS private collection; rostrum; Texas; TL extrapolated from 66.4-cm standard rostral length

should represent a barrier to the eastward expansion of such a huge and powerful fish species and one that is known to inhabit rivers and freshwater lakes (Thorson 1976, Compagno and Cook 1995). Still, this possibility is difficult to rule out.

TRUTHINESS REVEALED. KINDA.

The lack of locality data for this Largetooth Sawfish record prevents it from being reliably assigned to Louisiana, or any other state, despite an extensive search of all available data. Baughman (1943) stated that no Largetooth Sawfish have been reported from Louisiana and we agree that none can be attributed to this state.

WHAT ABOUT THE LONE STAR STATE?

All the Largetooth Sawfish records from Texas that include a TL are for large individuals. Of the 38 records that we know of from Texas, 18 included either a stated TL or we were able to extrapolate the TL from a measured rostrum, or rostrum-less body, using morphometric data from Whitty et al. (2014). These TLs ranged from 288 to 601 cm (Table 1). So, the Texas saying “everything’s bigger in Texas” would seem to fit well here. Although Baughman (1943) thought that Largetooth Sawfish reproduced in Texas waters based on his interviews with shrimp trawl fishers at Galveston and Freeport, we know of no records of very young Largetooth Sawfish from Texas despite a search of all available literature, databases, and museum records (see Seitz and Waters 2018 for methods). It is possible that these shrimp fishers had mistaken Smalltooth Sawfish for what they considered to be gravid Largetooth Sawfish. Eleven of the Texas records listed in Table 1 include the month of the sawfish encounter, and all were recorded during the warmer months of the year (May–September). An additional seven Largetooth Sawfish were reported by Baughman (1943) as having been taken during summer in Galveston. Taken as a whole, the available information suggests that Texas does not represent important habitat to this species during modern times. The occurrence of Largetooth Sawfish there may well have been merely a product of the occasional wanderings of large, particularly mobile individuals from Mexican and Central American waters during the warmer months.

This species has not been recorded from Texas since the 1960s (Table 1) and, to our knowledge, only two individuals have been recorded from southern Gulf waters off Mexico since then (see Bonfil et al. [2017] for records from Mexico). It seems improbable that any additional Largetooth Sawfish will be recorded from US waters until such time that the species is able to re-establish itself in the southern Gulf. It is hoped that this time will come, and when it does, we may even be able to add a reliable record or two from Louisiana, and Sawfish aFishionatos everywhere can collectively rejoice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the following people for their help. C. Opitz (UI) graciously provided photos and information on SUI-17512 and happily answered our many queries regarding the possible provenance of this specimen. The University of Iowa Museum of Natural History granted us permission to publish

their archived photos. T. Bowling (Florida Program for Shark Research, Florida Museum of Natural History, UF) provided records from the International Sawfish Encounter Database. C. Steen (ANAMAR) helped improve and provided helpful suggestions on an earlier draft. Support was provided by Jenny Seitz and Amy Waters.

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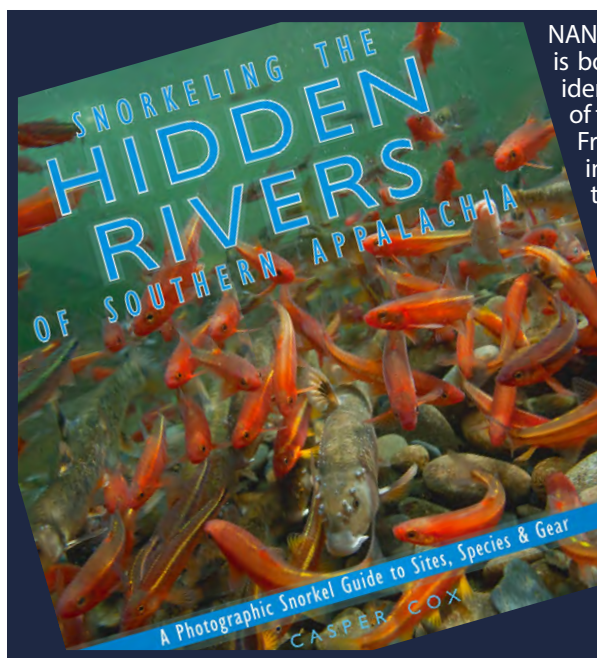
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NANFA's very own Snorkelmeister, Casper Cox, has written a snorkeling guide that is both useful (with maps and information about locations, access, biodiversity, identification, safety and more) and beautiful (with dozens of color photos by some of the best underwater photographers in the world). Written to complement the Freshwaters Illustrated film "Hidden Rivers," the book is a distillation of Casper's interests, experiences and skills, as well as a love letter to his favorite waters and their inhabitants.

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Site 1 Fishes of the Conasauga River

Bronze Darters are the most common darter in the Smoky Mountains. Consider them handsome with their many pronounced bands of bronze. From shiny brassy to muted patinas, they wear their metallic scales proudly. The Latin name for the Bronze Darter is *Percina jessiae*, which means "The Prince." They seem to enjoy feeding in the cypress trees covering the river. Rubbing your hand gently over this river weed gently dislodges more edibles that these handsome darters will promptly feed upon.

Greenbreast Darters are at their most beautiful in the early spring. During the spawning season the males are out and about parading themselves to entice the more bland colored, gravid females. (Being those filled with eggs, these species tend to be and hide beneath the stones located in or

Helibenders, aka Devil Dogs or Snot Otters, are also found in the Hiwassee River. The clean water, large flat stones and an abundance of crayfish provides an excellent watery world for them to live in. If you were to spend a day here you may well see one, especially in the early dawn or dusk hours as they are generally nocturnal hunters. They breathe through the folds of skin running down their sides and remain in the water year round. Some people are afraid of them but you have nothing to fear. They are not venomous as some unknowing people claim. Consider yourself very fortunate to see a Helibender in one of the few remaining rivers they still thrive in. They are North America's largest salamander reaching lengths of 24 inches or more.

David Herasimtschuk was honored with an international first place award in London for this stunning photo. By the way, the Northern Water Snake got away, a bit too much for this Devil Dog.

to a stream named Spring Creek located on the north side of the farm compared to the cold Hiwassee. Though the creek is much siltier run for easy snorkeling. In early spring River Chubs with and here, just as in the shallower runs of the Hiwassee.

Looking Below the Surface

Snorkeling is a wonderful way to experience another aspect of our world. Not only will you see things that most never will, it is a full sensory experience. Your body and senses are fully awakened, you are one with the watery world, floating freely in its space. Your vision is magnified by an optical enhancement raising everything appear larger. Aquatic creatures will come near you, as curious of you as you of them, soon occupying your presence. Unlike on the surface world, where one generally has to view creatures from afar or by the use of binoculars, in the world below the water's surface you can gently approach many aquatic species without fear and even inches for a prolonged period of close observation.

Aquatic Diversity

Fishes come in all types of shapes and sizes with their bodies adorned by marbled patterns, gills, reds, blues, greens and colorful flowing fins. Fishes vary from tiny, scudgy gill sucking little die-backswimmers to little round-bodied fish darting along the gravelly bottom. Schools of silvery shiners for you, shimmering in the sunlight's rays while a flatfishy Bass watches, lurking in the shadows of log gaps. A new world of aquatic life awaits, beckoning your visit from the Earth's surface. Bask the flow and listen for the sounds of freshwater suction pinging microcrustaceans from the life signs of broken twigs. In the cracks and crevices tiny translucent eggs, lined with new life, another generation of hanging fishes taking their place in the aquatic food web. Schools of air-breathing sunfish graze on slippery stones covered with algae, sharing old patches with their towering sharp in the rippling. They are feeding, moving as a herd of aquatic cattle, grazing on the algae. Return in the spring and some of these sleek stone grazers will have morphed into armor-plated rolling stones and pushing deep branches into the clear gravel for the egg-laid females. About her eggs, darters will fertilize and protect the eggs with a cover of poorly rooted stones.

This is a world mostly unseen, yet eager to be witnessed by you. With a mask of transparent glass face, released from gravity's grip, drifting through their watery world with a quiet ease. To appreciate, floating in the world of quiet, but no, you are here in a medium of living water, and to appreciate, exploring new experiences.

Shiners and Sunfish, Trout and Rock Basses, Darters and Hogsuckers, Bluegills and Hog Suckers, Chain Pickerel Bass and their prey, Lampreys and Minnows, Whiskered Catfish, along with their of Redfin, Striped Bass and their prey, Rock Basses and their prey, Catfishes and their prey, and many more.

