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First-Time Striper Angler Sets State Record

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From Jim Low, Missouri Department of Conservation

Bruce Cunningham was hoping for a “nice” fishing trip. Thanks to Missouri’s world-class fishing, he got a bonus.

GAINESVILLE—*“You’re not going to believe this until you try it.”*

According to Bruce Cunningham, that is what his brothers said when trying to persuade him to go fishing with them in June. Brad and Brock Cunningham had discovered the excitement of catching striped bass at Bull Shoals Lake, and they wanted to share it with their older brother.

Bruce decided to play along, and at 1 a.m. June 18 he found himself holding a new state-record striper weighing in at 60 pounds, 9 ounces. The catch nudged aside the previous pole-and-line record, a 58-pounder caught by John West, of Republic, in July 2010.

Cunningham, 30, of Fordland, was fishing from a boat in the upper reaches of Bull Shoals when the record fish grabbed the large plastic minnow he was casting. He was fishing in about 40 feet of water.

The fish was 47 inches long and had a girth of slightly more than 36 inches.

The two younger Cunningham brothers were rewarded for sharing their discovery. They boated several other stripers that topped 40 pounds the night Bruce caught his.

Striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*) are native to the Atlantic Ocean but make spawning runs up rivers along the East Coast. These ocean-run striped bass can grow to 6 feet long and 125 pounds. Although not native to Missouri, “stripers” have adapted well to fresh-water reservoirs and streams. However, they do not grow as large in fresh water.

Bull Shoals is Missouri’s striped-bass mecca right now, thanks to a one-time stocking by the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission in 1998. That year, a mix-up resulted in the stocking of 19,000 striped bass. Ken Shirley, district fisheries supervisor for the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, said the fish were intended for Norfolk Lake.

“We were expecting a shipment of walleye for Bull Shoals,” said Shirley. “A summer helper called to tell us that a shipment of fish had arrived at the hatchery and asked where they were supposed to go. We thought it was the walleyes, so we told him to take them to Bull Shoals. It turned out they were striped bass.”

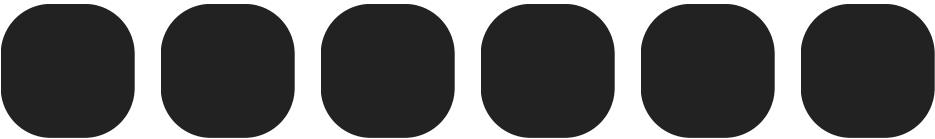
Shirley said the surviving fish from that mistaken stocking now weigh between 30 and 60 pounds and are near the end of their lives. He expects the boom in trophy striper fishing at Bull Shoals to taper off over the next four or five years as fish from the accidental stocking slowly disappear.

More information about Missouri fishing records is available at mdc.mo.gov/fishing/reports/records.

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