

BLACKFISHES IN IRISH WATERS

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Blackfishes belong to a relatively large family (*Centrolophidae*) of oceanic fishes which are generally found at the surface and/or in the middle depths of the sea. The majority of species inhabit waters over the outer edge of the continental shelf, but occasionally specimens may stray into shallow waters. Only 3 species of Blackfish have been recorded from Ireland's inshore waters.

The capture of *C. niger* has generally been attributable to commercial methods such as drift nets or trawls but two specimens were taken by rod and line.

Little is actually known about the biology of *C. niger* apart from the fact that the adults are known to feed heavily on deep-water jellyfishes. The young fish are often encountered in association with medusae (small jellyfish) near the surface. This species reaches a



Blackfish (*centrolophus niger*), photo courtesy of Dr. T. Cross.

The Blackfish (*Centrolophus niger*)

C. niger is found throughout the temperate regions of the world's oceans. It inhabits relatively deep water (100 - 600 m) on the edge of the continental shelf. This particular species is the most common of the three recorded in Irish waters. Almost 30 specimens have been recorded within the 100 fathom line in Irish waters since 1892, mainly from the south-west coast. Although *C. niger* is likely to occur almost anywhere in northern European waters, it is generally regarded as scarce in Irish waters. A synopsis of the total recorded catch from each maritime county is given in Table I.

It would appear that *C. niger* migrates into Irish inshore waters during the summer and early autumn, probably as a result of the movement of water masses from the outer continental shelf. Most of the Irish specimens have been recorded in June, July and August.

maximum size of about 1 m. in length.

The Cornish Blackfish or Portrush Barrelfish (*Schedophilus medusophagus*)

The distribution of *S. medusophagus* is restricted to the north-eastern Atlantic Ocean where it inhabits both surface and mid-waters down to depths of 300-900 m. *S. medusophagus* is relatively common on the edge of the continental shelf, but is exceedingly rare in inshore waters. There have only been 2 authenticated records for this species in Irish inshore waters: Portrush in 1878 and Achill in 1971. The species was first described from a specimen taken off Cornwall in 1859 and was originally given the scientific name *Centrolophus britannicus*.

The biology of *S. medusophagus* is also very much incomplete. However, it appears that its feeding habits are similar to *C. niger*, although there is some evidence that

it preys selectively on one particular species of jellyfish, *Atolla*. The young tend to be surface dwellers and are often found in association with medusae, and in some cases with flotsam. This species attains a maximum length of about 50 cm.

The Barrelfish (*Hyperglyphe perciformis*)

H. perciformis is native to the deep continental shelf waters of the eastern coast of America. It is not surprising, therefore, that this species of Blackfish is an extremely rare vagrant in northern European waters. Only 2 specimens have been recorded from Ireland's inshore waters: Dingle Bay in 1871 and Aran Islands in 1901. Most of the specimens recorded in European waters have been young fish which were found accompanying floating wreckage or *Sargassum* weed. These fish had undoubtedly been carried across the Atlantic, aided by winds and currents, (e.g. *Gulf Stream - North Atlantic Drift*).

An amusing account of a large shoal of fishes of this species which followed a barnacle covered log ashore in the Aran Islands in September, 1901, is given by Travis Jenkins in his "*Fishes of the British Isles*" (2nd Ed. 1936, Warne, London)....

"They came after a log of timber covered with barnacles, and were thrown ashore at the north-west corner of the South Island, where the Congested Districts Board is after building a breakwater and clearing the shore. At the time, owing to the tide being low, it was like a horseshoe, so that if the islanders took 20 fathoms of net and put it across the entrance they would save thousands upon thousands of fish; but instead of that, when they saw the fish, from a high ledge on one side, having the barnacles like the calf would have the teat of a cow in its mouth, they all got afraid, and said they were *Sheeogues* (little fairies), and then ran away, except one old man.

At the time the log struck the shore about 400 of the fish jumped on dry land, and were hopping about on the shore, so that some of them got into the water again, while others died and were carried away by the next tide, except two that the old man took home with him.

When the old man came home and his wife and sons saw the fish they would not allow him to take them into

the house, as they 'never saw the like before; they were no fish, but *Sheeogues* resembling fish.'

When the log dried it appeared the fish turned away to sea and scattered about. A man named, with another, was fishing half-a-mile from the shore in a canoe, with hand lines, a few days after, and was looking out over

the side, as the day was bright, and saw one of these fish swimming about very near the surface. He pulled ashore, and did not go out again for three days."

| County: | No. of specimens of <i>C. niger</i> . |
|---------|---------------------------------------|
| Kerry | 10 |
| Cork | 6 |

| | |
|-----------|---|
| Mayo | 3 |
| Donegal | 3 |
| Waterford | 2 |
| Galway | 1 |
| Antrim | 1 |
| Derry | 1 |
| Irish Sea | 1 |



Sheepdog Handler Supreme LIONEL PENNEFATHER -

Marjorie Quarton

The 1983 International Sheepdog Trials at Aberystwyth will probably be best remembered as the occasion of "the great storm." On the last of the three days, the proceedings almost had to be cancelled, as a furious gale overnight had wrecked the grandstands, flattened the judges' huts and swept away the giant marquee.

On that September morning, it looked as if the final part of the event must be abandoned, as the storm still persisted, and debris and litter were whirling about everywhere.

Eventually the fifteen competitors in the "final", all voted to carry on, as it would be impossible for all of them to meet again that year. They had come from Scotland, Ireland, England, Wales and the Isle of Man. Reserve on the Irish team was veteran handler, Lionel Pennefather, with his Scottish bred bitch, *Fly*. As all the members of the Irish team were present, he was not asked to take part in the final, but he figured largely in the awards.

The "Wilkinson Sword Trophy" is now a much coveted prize. It excited a great deal of comment and curiosity as it lay on the table among the traditional silver cups, tankards and rosebowls.

The gleaming weapon was presented by the sponsors to the person who - "in the opinion of the Directorate of the International Sheepdog Society has made an

outstanding contribution to the Society, Sheepdogs or Sheepdog Trialling."

Lionel Pennefather, the fourth winner of the award is the first Irishman to take home the sword. (Incidentally, I wonder what the Customs made of it!).

Lionel is indeed a worthy winner. His lean, wiry figure is familiar wherever sheepdogs compete, and, among sheepdog enthusiasts, his name is a household word. In fact, it is quite usual to hear Border Collies referred to simply as "Pennefathers".

Lionel's perseverance and optimism have kept him going when many would have decided to call it a day, especially in recent years when he has had problems with his eyesight and with his health generally.

On one occasion he was asked if he thought of retiring. His reply, "Of course not, why should I?" is typical of the man.

Lionel Pennefather was born near Cashel in Co. Tipperary, and was sent by his father to be a farm pupil in Cumberland at the age of seventeen. It was while he was there, learning how to farm, that he bought his first Border Collie. He cycled fourteen miles to collect his pup. He hasn't changed much. Just over 2 years ago, he drove, alone, a round trip of more than six hundred miles, taking in two sheepdog trials and a demonstration in two-and-a-half days.

Lionel attended his first trial as a spectator in 1926. There he met and

talked to two noted Scottish handlers. From that day on, sheepdogs were more than a hobby with him.

He started mixed farming in his native Co. Tipperary, but always wanted to be a sheep farmer on the hills. With that in view, he moved to Co. Derry, and later to Co. Wicklow. At one time he was running eight hundred sheep on sixteen hundred acres. Here, of course, working dogs were indispensable, but Lionel was also quick to make his mark at sheepdog trials.

He has won the Irish National Trial five times, and was the first Irishman to qualify for the Supreme International Championship. In 1961, he led Ireland into membership of the International Sheepdog Society, and he has never ceased to promote his country's cause at home and abroad.

Among his favourite dogs, Lionel counts *Spy*, his first 'National' winner, and *Bess*. *Spy*, a much travelled dog, was especially good at demonstrations, and was an outstandingly clever dog and a great character.

Bess is probably his best remembered dog. Bred in Wales, she won the Irish 'National' in 1962 and 1966, and was runner-up in 1963 and 1964.

Lionel represented Ireland four times in the Daily Express International Invitation Trial in Hyde Park and Southampton. One delightful photograph shows *Bess* rounding up pigeons in Trafalgar Square.

Bess was a great all-rounder, and a good breeder as well. Her daughter, *Lynn*, produced J. McSwiggan's pair, *Chip* and *Jess*, which won the Brace competition at the 1977 International. *Bess* has many excellent descendants to-day, both on farms and on the trial field.

I once asked Lionel which he thought more important - breeding or