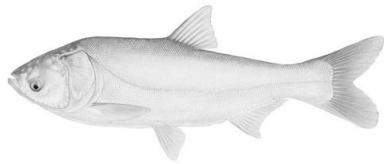


IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM, EAT 'EM: Local chef aims to make 'trash fish' a treasure

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In August 2009, Chef Philippe Parola encountered his first carp when it jumped into his boat.

Since then, Parola has become somewhat of an expert on the fish that many consider dangerous and an invasive species in the U.S. In fact, he has established what is known as the Asian Carp Project.

Carp are often notorious for uprooting vegetation and muddy water through their habit of rooting in the mud for food. They are also said to have detrimental effects on native species.

Parola's answer to the carp conundrum is that if you can't beat them, eat them.

In fact, Parola recently called on his long-time friend Chef Tim Creehan of Destin to help him show the nation that these pesky fish are not only edible, but also tasty, and the nation can use them to feed the hungry.

On Thursday, Parola and Creehan fed between 350 and 400 hungry people who lined up at Christ the King School just outside Chicago, as well as 15 members of the media.

Creehan said he is excited to assist Parola in the charge to rebrand carp as silverfin to promote it as a leading source of affordable, clean, sustainable and great tasting fish. He said the Asian Carp Project will create jobs for the fishing industry, manufacturing and sales while controlling a fish problem and providing a very affordable protein for consumption.

"The government has spent millions trying to get the carp problem under control," said Creehan. "The fish can be poached, steamed, or fried. It's a safe fish, no mercury, and tastes great. The U.S. imports 90 percent of our fish, while carp costs 25 cents a pound. We can put people back to work and feed the hungry with this viable resource."

Creehan said soup kitchens want an affordable fish product to serve.

"It's amazing how many carp are here and people are wanting to kill them. They are a great source of protein and one of cleanest fish," he said.

Even though carp has been labeled "trash fish," Parola found the white carp meat to be excellent eating and has devoted the past two years to the Asian Carp Project. Creehan became involved a year ago and served carp at a Destin Charity Wine Auction event in April.

"It had a great response," he said. "It has a crab meat-like consistency."

Carp is species of fresh water fish native to Europe and Asia that prefer slow or standing water and soft, vegetative sediments. They are typically found in small schools, although larger carp often lead a solitary existence. They natively live in a temperate climate in fresh or brackish water. They can grow to a length of 3.9 feet and the largest recorded was 88.4 pounds. They eat up to three times their own body weight daily, feeding on plankton, which can deplete habitat for other fish.

Carp was introduced in the United States in the 1960s or 1970s to eat algae. These silverfin escaped into our rivers and became a nightmare for our national water sports and recreational and commercial fresh water fishing industries. Silverfin are now virtually everywhere.

Parola said he considers the fish to be an excellent food source for its protein and healthy fats.

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