



the
CRAYFISH TALE

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THE REDCLAW CRAYFISH

Have you been down to your nearby billabong lately? Maybe you should. The Australian redclaw crayfish might want to crawl into your trap for a taste of your attractive bait. By the way, you don't have to go to Aussie Land to catch yourself some redclaws any more. They have now spread rather well all over the globe. In our neck of the woods you may find them in Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Florida and some other closer places. Lately several local sources for redclaw have sprung up, suggesting that raising this new variety of crayfish will be just the right thing for budding entrepreneurs.

But what really is a redclaw crayfish? To start with it is a freshwater crustacean, just like most other so called crayfish. The redclaw hails from Australia, where it is often found under the name of Yabby in the many billabongs that are typical for Australia. A billabong is simply a part of a river or an inundation nearby a river where these, and probably other, crustaceans hang out. Its official biological name is *Cherax quadricarinatus*. The color of this crayfish is anything from dark brown to blue-green and are sometimes even called blueclaw. Redclaw crayfish reproduce rapidly and grow to market size in less than a year. Some say the species is economical to produce, is lobster-like in appearance and

compares favorably in both flavor and quality with other marine crustaceans. Redclaw are often described as having a similar flesh texture and flavor to that of a lobster.

But what turns people on about redclaw is their size. Especially the males tend to get rather sizeable and some specimens have been found of up to 20 oz in weight. Their tail is noticeably longer than that of other crayfish varieties, and while an American crayfish may have 10-20% of their weight in the tail, these redclaw are reputed to go up to about 30% of total weight in the tail. Almost like shrimp.

However, even if some specimens are rather lobster-like, most of those I have seen in YouTube videos showing redclaw catching in Australia, are rather modest in size and more like the ones we are used to here.

But one thing about the redclaws I don't like is their claws. While the claws of 'my' *Orconectes virilis* are rather chunky and filled with fork size morsels of meat, these redclaw claws are instead rather spindly, skinny and just too puny to bother about the meat. And talking about claws, when our friends down under brag about their redclaws they often indicate how 'huge' they are. Although official crayfish length is supposed to be measured from the end

of their tail to the nose of the carapace, most admirers of redclaw include the length of their claws when measuring. That can give you some rather impressive numbers.

Research into the possibilities of farming redclaw has become rather intense lately, and since about twenty years ago, redclaw farms have sprung up in several places in the US, especially in Florida.

For a while there was great hope for this crayfish species that farmed quite well in Australia. It seemed that the redclaw crayfish would be well suited for US captive production. After all, it grows large, is generally hardy under the right conditions and taste tests clearly indicate it is well received by the general public.

But many crayfish farms hopefully planned by budding entrepreneurs have failed to materialize, however, for a number of reasons. Profitability has been the major downfall among redclaw farmers. This does not mean the subject is closed, as many of the failures tend to be simply poor management. There may be good reasons to explore possibilities as methods and circumstances change.

But is it really profitable to farm crayfish? How difficult is it to manage crayfish in an intensive production environment? How do you keep crayfish healthy with food, water temperatures and other environmental conditions in captivity? Some suggest, and have tried raising these crusta-

ceans in aquaponic systems with variable success. But the initial cost setting up such a system is quite high.

The redclaw has many positive attributes that make it suitable for semi-intensive and intensive culture. They exhibit an un-aggressive and nonburrowing behavior in captivity. Redclaws tolerate relatively crowded conditions, with limited cannibalism and exhibit fast growth rates over a broad range of temperatures. They also tolerate a wide range of water qualities.

But having just read articles about the invasive Rusty crayfish in the US and the alleged damage done to some water systems because of its habits of reducing native crayfish species and other fish and even lake vegetation, I wonder: how invasive is this red claw newcomer? Newcomers in the biological arena tend to have fewer enemies and therefore also tend to proliferate at unusual rates. Could that happen with the redclaw as well? Yes, say authorities in Singapore where some of their major reservoirs have become invaded by the redclaws to the detriment of other species and vegetation. Redclaws are scavenging omnivores just like other crayfish, and will eat whatever they can get their claws on. Their primary diet includes plant matter, worms and even certain vegetables. However, they will munch on what ever falls to within their reach. Sounds familiar?

So, let's beware

JAMAICAN JANGA SOUP - crayfish aphrodisiac

Last month I mentioned that some people consider crayfish an aphrodisiac. Here is some more on that issue.

Janga is the name of a Jamaican crayfish that is supposed to help men 'get lucky' or stay on "it" long enough.

Janga is a known aphrodisiac. Another thing, the Janga and shrimp will not cook in the same soup as fish because the soup will not taste the same, according to locals. In other words, only certain individuals will enjoy Janga soup for their “back,” as they usually say.

Janga is the name given by Jamaicans to fresh water crayfish. Janga can be found in many Jamaican rivers – yes even the redclaw - and is cooked in various ways including the famous “Jamaican Peppered Shrimp”. It is also used in Jango soup which allegedly provides long endurance for men.

For much of humanity’s history, man has recognized that certain foods affect the libido. The word aphrodisiac comes from the name of the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite, who, in turn, took her name from the Greek word aphro (*sea foam*)

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