



THE GREAT SUNFISH.

An unusual number and variety of tropical fishes and reptiles have visited our coast this season. In the turtle family we have had the green turtle, the shell turtle, the logger-head, and the huge leather turtle.

Of free swimming fishes taken by fishermen there has been the jew fish, gray snapper, tarpon, chaetodons (angel fish), and great numbers of the balloon or porcupine fish, real man-eaters of sharks, and, the most odd-looking of all, the great sunfish (*Orthogoriscus mola*.)

The specimen from which I made the accompanying illustration was captured at Oak Island Beach, about thirty miles from New York, on the Atlantic, last August, and was exhibited at Fulton Market Slip, New York. The color of the sunfish is grayish-brown, darker on the back than on the sides of the abdomen. The skin is rough, it being covered with minute patches of small spines.

One of the curious features of this fish is the structure of the eye, which is embedded in a mass of soft and flexible folds, while behind the eye is a sac filled with a gelatinous fluid.

When the sunfish is alarmed, or is basking on the surface of the water, the eye is pressed against the sac, and the fluid contained therein is forced into the folds of the membrane, which distends them so as to nearly conceal the organ of vision.

The sunfish is armed with two powerful teeth, with which it feeds on the coarser seaweeds found-growing at the bottom of the shallower ocean waters, and also on the gulf-weed of the Gulf Stream. Some years ago I was sent to Greenpoint, L. I., to bring on a large living specimen of the sunfish. This specimen was confined in a pound or trap; when not disturbed it swam near the surface, with its huge dorsal fin entirely out of water. Its favorite food consisted of tubularians, sertularians, and ascidians, on which I constantly fed it.

The sunfish often attains a very great size. One that was

caught in Florida, and sold to the New York Aquarium, measured six feet.

According to Yarrell, the young of the sunfish or head fish are furnished with several dull pearl-like teeth of various sizes situated in the lower jaw, some thin and flat, presenting an edge, others behind being cylindrical, short, and rather pointed. These disappear with age, for we learn from Jenyns that in the adult the lamellated substance is undivided.

Various parasitical animals, such as Pennella, Sagitta, and Tristoma coccineum, are found frequently adhering to the body.

The head of the sunfish is not distinct from the trunk, but suggests that the entire fish consists of a head only, thence the name head-fish. The form of the body is oblong, subtruncated behind, and compressed. The caudal, anal, and dorsal fins are confluent. The body is scaleless and destitute of lateral lines.

The fisherman relates that when trolling not long since for bluefish, he came across a sunfish as large as a hogshead, which was asleep on the surface of the water, with his huge dorsal fin entirely out of the water. At first he was well clubbed with an oar, but he didn't seem to mind it much. Then a couple of bights were made in the sheet rope, which were passed over his head, hoping that his fins would prevent their slipping, but it was no go. He opened his eyes as if awakening out of a sound nap, and went slowly under the water in a vertical direction, apparently only slightly disturbed. This specimen was estimated to weigh at least 800 pounds, and was much larger than the one exhibited at Fulton Market Slip.

The flesh of the sunfish is white, and as well flavored as that of the sturgeon. Its liver is large and yields considerable oil, which is greatly prized by sailors for its supposed medicinal qualities. The specimen from which the accompanying illustration was made measured four feet in length.—*Scientific American*.