

Video	Audio
	<p>&gt;&gt;MALE NARRATOR: Catfish can be found all over the state of Georgia and most folks catch them with a rod and reel. But if you dare, you can give a catfish a chance to bite you back. Find out about hand fishing for catfish, also called grabblin' or noodlin', coming up on Georgia Outdoors.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;MALE NARRATOR: If you grew up in the south and someone took you fishing, you probably encountered a catfish. Catfish are fun to catch, good to eat, and an integral part of southern culture.</p> <p>With over 48 species, the Ictaluridae Catfish family is the largest family of freshwater fishes found in North America. Catfish are easy to recognize. They have no scales, 4 pairs of barbells or whiskers around the mouth, an adipose fin, stout spines, and are active mainly at night. The Flathead and Blue Catfishes can reach about 132 lb. and are over 5 ft in length.</p> <p>If 132 pounds sounds large, take a look at one of the catfish cousins from Asia. This record breaker weighs in at 646 pounds and was caught in the Mekong province of Thailand...</p> <p>The largest catfish recorded for Georgia is an 83 pound flathead catfish caught in the Altamaha River in 2005.</p> <p>Though pole and line is by far the most common method for catching catfish, there's another option. Grabblin', also known as noodlin'... both terms describe "hand fishing," a method of catching large catfish that dates back to our native American ancestors. The practice was illegal in Georgia for many years but, a 2005 law recently made Noodling legal in our state. Across the state line in Tennessee, the practice has been legal for years. To find out more about the sport, we turned Tennessee natives, Marty and Fostana Jenkins, two veteran grabblers. When the weather gets warm enough, these two take friends and go noodlin' for flatheads and blue cats on the Tennessee River. In Fact, the Jenkins call themselves "The Catfish Grabblers".</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Marty: I started grabblin' in 1982 with a friend of mine, Robbie Davis. He had heard about catching catfish in holes, you know in rocks and</p>

	<p>asked his daddy about and his daddy said, “Yes,” said “They call it grabblin’.” Robbie said, “Hey, you wanna try this?” I said, “Yea, let’s go.” So I went out, me and him both did and started running hands back in holes.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Marty (to Fostana): Then about what?</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Fostana (to Marty): About seven years ago, yea.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Marty: That’s when me and Fostana started dating and she started going with me.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Marty (to Fostana): Fostana you ready?</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Fostana: I’m ready.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;<b>NARRATOR:</b> <b>The Jenkins love the sport so much they make DVDs of everyone they take grabblin.</b></p> <p><b>If you’re brave enough to take the plunge, a little strategy is useful in getting started...</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Fostana: You usually just start out just kinda blocking the hole and guarding to make sure the fish doesn’t get out.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Marty (to Fostana): Are you blocking with your feet?</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Fostana: Eventually the fish bite ya and you get a fish and then you’re hooked but we joke around and say it was a prerequisite for marriage.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Marty: You just try to run your hand up in there and you hope that fish will come up and bite your hand like that. And then you try to grab its lower jaw or her lower jaw. That’s the true art of grabblin’. Grabblin’ is not knowing a fish is in there, running your hand in, and letting them bite you.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Matthew: Running your arm in a hole is really intimidating because--First of, you don’t know that there’s a fish in there. So, your going,</p>

	<p>with your eyes closed, running your arm up a place somewhat expecting to get bite but not knowing for sure that you're going to, then when it does happen it's actually scary.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Marty: One thing a guy told me, he said, "Well, one thing about it, if a catfish is in there on bad, they won't let nothing else in that hole. But then somebody said, "Well how do you know a catfish is in there in the first place before you run your hand in there?" If a catfish is in there, mostly what we do is submerge the water. Now if you start going underneath of all these banks with these air pockets you'll probably get in to more snakes and turtles both. But, for the most part what we do is submerge the water in rocks and all these old boat ramps and twenty-something years I've done it, I've never touched anything but a fish underneath there.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Fostana (to Marty): Something is coming right here, I can feel it.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Marty (to Fostana): Oh, this big old hole right here. I wonder if somebody's already been here. All these, there should be a fish here. We haven't even hit these holes this year...Let's go.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Marty: These holes are cleaned out real good. So, There should have been a fish here somewhere. So, I'm thinking somebody has already hit these holes. So, now we're gonna go to another place. We've got them all over, up and down, so we're gonna go hit another.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Fostana: One of the things that we do to make sure you know when you're going into an area you've never been, we actually get out of the boat and feel for a hole with our feet usually first. And so, we usually wear shoes because you don't know if somebody's thrown out a glass bottle or something like that or just anything. So, we usually wear shoes, sandals or tennis shoes or something, just to protect your feet, and also, when you find the hole, you stick your feet in there to block it because a lot of times the fish will try to shoot out. We go down and we put our hands in, and when the hands come out, the feet go in so it kind of nice to have something on your feet in case the fish decides he might want a big toe for supper.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Marty:</p>

	<p>First hole we hit today, it was a deep hole, probably seven foot deep altogether. Could barely get our toes in the hole and keep our mouth above water.</p> <p>Anytime you go into a hole, once you make your presence known, you need to keep it cover from there on out, either your hands or your feet. And like right now, it's so deep, I'm tryin' to keep my toes down in there to keep it cover 'cause if you fool with them, they shoot out on you. So, that's what's tough on a hole like this. So, you gotta try and get them as quick as possible.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Marty: We've hit this whole one time before, last year, and it took us quite awhile, going that deep, and there's several reasons for that. At the very end of that boat ramp, on the corner of it, is a hole that opens up about three foot wide, and it's probably about that high and that fish you have to watch because it have a big area to escape in, And what you want to do, is when you first go down, you want to guard the hole all the time.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Marty: But right now, my toes are barely touching in the bottom of that hole. So, we'll go down there and what you do is—I'll go on – That fish is about where Fostana's at. And I'll try and bring it to her if you, just keep your hands like that.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;<b>NARRATOR:</b> <b>Grabbling isn't something you should try alone. Always take a partner... It can be exhausting to hold your breath underwater this many times.</b></p> <p><b>This sport takes patience. It is not unusual to spend 20 to 30 minutes luring the catfish out of the nest. And after 25 minutes of trying, Marty and Mathew break the water with a flathead catfish. Some call them mudcats or yellow cats, and they've even been called the ugliest catfish! Flatheads are native to the Tennessee River system, and this cat may be older than 20 years.</b></p> <p><b>Some folks complain that the meat from channel cats gets tough as the fish get larger, but even large flatheads are good to eat. The meat is similar to other catfish, but firmer than bream or bass.</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Marty: Last year, there was a thirty-five pound flathead that we took home and it was great. We seasoned it and deep-fried it, and the meat was white and it was good.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Marty:</p>

	<p>There you go. He got a little of me. That's grabblin' right there. Look at her teeth. Them teeth on them big old fish. What there called is maxillary teeth. There called inward curbing barbs. Now did you see right there, the way that fish twisted and rolled, that's usually what happens is you've got—When you first go in, and like pulled that fish up there, and thank goodness Matthew was able to come down there and get with me but, all I could get to him was two fingers and that's the worse thing that could happen with these big fish 'cause they can break a finger. I've had one broke before. But anyway right when you grab em they'll have two hard rolls most of the time. And right when I grabbed a hold of it, he started twisting and rolling, and they'll take your wrist and just roll it all way around. If you can stop that one, you usually got 'em. The next time is when you come out there and usually you break water with them, then you'll have another roll. So, but anyway, that's what its all about right there. It's crazy but we have fun doing it.</p>
	<p><b>&gt;&gt;NARRATOR: Now it's time to see what this fish weighs...</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Matthew: How much was it?</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Marty: Thirty-seven. Alright, we're going to get this big female, look at the belly. We're gonna get her on back in the water. Sometimes we keep fish, just like we have for years you know and somebody might want one, we might want to keep one but if we don't and most of the time these big females we put them back and let them lay these eggs. But, we usually to take care of them, get em' back in the water.</p>
	<p><b>&gt;&gt;NARRATOR: This fish will get a chance to lay her eggs and Marty, Fostana, and Mathew are off to find more fish. Today is turning out to be a great day to grabble!</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Matthew: I guess what I like about grabblin' the most is it's just really an adrenaline rush somewhat. The biggest things is--especially when you get hold of a fairly good size fish is trying to hold on to it. It's a fight to hold on to one that weighs thirty pounds. Really one person cannot hardly handle it. When you're in there all day, they can work you over pretty good.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Fostana: This wish, he was probably eight feet back in the hole underneath the boat ramp. She was hard to get out. You have to actually go</p>

	<p>back in there and feel for their head and pull them to ya, and she had actually gotten to where her nose facing away from me.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;The fish will actually do like a big crocodile roll in the water. Um, and sometimes when they roll like that you got to either put your arm around them or your legs around them or something to stop them from rolling or else they're gone in a heartbeat.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;That's what'll get you is that rolling it'll twist your arm or your wrist or your finger so a lot of times you don't see us do it together you want to make sure you get the fish to shore because you can actually lock them down and keep them from rolling and then you can hold on to them.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Blue Cots...they're the most notorious for being an aggressive fish in the water and they have a little short jaw so I mean they have a lot of power and they're hard to hold onto.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Man: Whoa! I have another one!</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Man: Good?</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Fostana: I'm gonna go back in with my hand just so I can feel him.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Man: Whoa!</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Fostana: Phew!</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Fostana: [Laughs.] Hey Becky, my butt...</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Man: I would probably guess three hundred people that we've started grappling over the years.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Fostana And we'll go like sixty out of the eighty days during the summer, grappling for catfish</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Fostana: It's not for everybody but a lot of people just say, Well, I'll go watch and once they go and they watch and they see what it's like and it's fun and we catch big fish, then they're like "Alright, well I'll just get in there and I'll try it and then they usually try it, and then, you know, they want to do it again.</p> <p>&gt;&gt;Woman: Phew, doggy!</p> <p>It's taken a bunch of women that enjoy doing it too and kids, I mean, it's good for everybody.</p>

	<p>&gt;&gt;<b>Male Narrator:</b> <b>Folks in Tennessee call it Grabbling In other parts of the country its called hogging or dogging, but here in Georgia we prefer the term Noodling, different Name and slightly different rules Unlike Tennessee and some other states, in Georgia, you can only use your hands. Reggie weaver of Georgia's Department of Natural Resources took us Noodling on Lake Lanier.</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Mr. Reggie Weaver There are some folks that have done this probably more in the middle and south Georgia in the rivers for a good number of years, but Noodling basically defined is actually trying to catch catfish species with your hands. And when this occurs is Springtime when Catfish spawn. They stay in this area for maybe up to a month to six weeks, so readily accessible to anglers who want to try the art of Noodling. Most of the time in our populations an average catfish can be two or three pounds but they can get fairly large twenty-five or thirty pounds is not uncommon to extract from some of these holes. Chris, uh, you know we're talking about Noodling. And I did this many years ago when I was growing up in Tennessee so, thought you might be interested in trying to help. You have never done this before</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Chris: I've never done it, no.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Mr. Weaver: Chris now the lake's way down, you know we're almost in a mini drought again, and it's late June, so a lot of the catfish have already spawned but hopefully we can find a few</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;All of our reservoirs and rivers have some good healthy catfish populations Channel Catfish, Flathead Catfish and Blue Catfish, not all three are found everywhere but they are a good population so Noodling can be in your local reservoir or major reservoir, on a stream bank, on a small river, so just finding the right habitat, the right spawning habitat is probably the key to be successful at Noodling.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;It's a little cool in here.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Chris: Yeah, that's exactly what I was thinking too.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Mr. Weaver: Try to find out all the places that are real good, sometimes the bigger rocks will have a better cavern back under them</p>

	>>And for Catfish, seventy to seventy-five degree water is a temperature range that they spawn. Now south Georgia you may get these temperatures early May to sometimes in North Georgia where it's a little cooler, higher elevation, uh Noodling may be good until the middle of June.
	>>No fish in that hole![Laughs]
	>>Mr. Weaver Chris, yeah we kind of ran out of big rocks here so that's what we need. It's not much place for the catfish to hide so I think we'll go over here and try another little section on the other side. In Georgia, the only way its legal to Noodle is with your hands. You can not use any...accessory devices or anything like a snare, a dip net, scuba equipment is not legal. We feel like that with a hands only...you know, we're giving the catfish its benefit of the doubt of maybe escaping.
	Yeah, Chris, if you know sometimes it's kind of spooky when you reach under there and one grates your hand
	>>Chris: I just think the whole thing is intimidating because you're pulling out fishing line and you know, you see some broken bottles around and stuff like that.
	>>Mr. Weaver: That's uh, yeah...
	>>Chris: ...I don't think it would be for everyone!
	>> Mr. Weaver: ...it won't be. No. Just for the few brave at hearts.
	There's a few things you can do to be safety in that respect is wear long pants, something like blue jeans, a long shirt that will keep your arms covered and gloves. But you can see too with all this fishing line and hook and bottles that...it'd be nice if folks would take their empty containers home and not throw things in the water because it's not good for the environment, for the fish...
	>>Chris: ...or for Noodlers.
	>>Mr.Weaver: Yeah! Or for Noodlers particularly.
	The only fish we got in contact with today was a little small blue gill but that was exciting enough that I wanted to keep going after we...kind of already gotten a little bit tired and...it's fun...it's the...the closest thing to contact fishing... I would say that there is. I'm kind of, you know, banged up a little bit from sliding around on the rocks and stuff. It was fun.

	<p><b>&gt;&gt;Male Narrator:</b> <b>Well, no luck today but Reggie just might talk Chris into another try when the water level and temperature cooperate.</b></p>
	<p><b>&gt;&gt;Man:</b> It won't let go of my hands!</p>
	<p><b>&gt;&gt;Male Narrator:</b> <b>Noodling isn't for everyone but for the most daring it can provide and exciting hands-on fishing experience Those who love it can't get enough as anyone who's ever wrestled a forty-pound flathead into shore can attest, there's truly nothing like it.</b></p>
	<p><b>&gt;&gt;Female Narrator:</b> <b>If sporting tackle is the way you prefer to fish, consider entering a fish in the Georgia Angler Award program All game fish and some other species are eligible for angler awards and fresh water fish state records. And you can win even if you aren't a resident of Georgia. Anglers need an application and a clear sideways photo of the fish witnesses are needed unless the fish is weighed at a Georgia Wildlife Resources Divisional office. Applications must be received no later than January 15<sup>th</sup> at the year following the catch. Fish must be caught in Georgia during the legal angling season for the species taken. In accordance with all fishing laws and regulations. Fish must be caught on sporting tackle and be hooked and landed by the entrant. For more rules and information visit this website.</b></p>
	<p><b>&gt;&gt;Male Narrator:</b> <b>In Georgia there is no limit to the amount of Flathead Catfish you can take home. This is because Flatheads are not native to many of our waterways. At some point after the 1970s, Flathead Catfish were introduced by well-meaning Anglers to some of the rivers in Georgia. Once they arrived in the Satilla? river in the mid 1990s, Flatheads began drastically reducing the numbers of Red-breasted Sunfish and Bald Catfish? Georgia's department of Natural resources is trying to help.</b></p>
	<p><b>&gt;&gt;Mr. Harrison:</b> Flathead Catfish are an exotic species to the Satilla River. They were introduced in the mid-90s. Around 1996v was when we confirmed the presence of Flatheads in the river. Since then DNR initiated a program to remove Flatheads to hopefully limit the impact to the native fish. The units we're using today...it's an electric fishing unit. It is specifically designed for Catfish. It's a low frequency electric fishing unit. And it puts out approximately 15 –18 pulses per second. If you've ever been shocked... by one tannic? it kind of feels like it grabs you but it doesn't really hurt</p>

	you real bad.
	<b>&gt;&gt;Male Narrator: This electro fishing equipment seems to affect the various catfish species differently.</b>
	>>Mr. Harrison: The flatheads are hit the hardest and they generally just kind of float to the surface and are temporarily stunned for a little while. That allows us to net them and put them in a wide well such as this. And then we can irate them and then hold them in that tank until we are ready to work the fish up. And the Channel Cats and Whites...it doesn't seem to hit them quite as hard, and they tend to just kind of scoot around on the surface.
	<b>&gt;&gt;Male Narrator: After the Flatheads are caught, they're weighed and measured. If local charity food banks have the facilities to process the meat, the fish are sent there. If not, the fish are often marked and released for tracking their population.</b>
	<b>We've had limited success, this the lower section of the river Unfortunately in this section of the river the Flathead Catfish have expanded to extremely large numbers and have had a pretty noticeable impact on the native species in this section of the river.</b>
	<b>The primary species impacted by the Flathead Catfish, in the Satilla river, is the red-breasted sunfish. Our red-breasted sunfishes are in the same family as the Blue Gill or the Bream It is your typical sunfish. The males especially have a real bright red breast on them and that's where they get their name from. The locals call them Rooster Reds. And not only are the Red-breasted sunfish been impacted to quite and extent, the bull-head catfish have also. This is your butter cats, speckle cats, and stuff like that as they are known by locals. In the section of the river below highway 82, their numbers have gone down drastically as well as the red-breasted sunfish. And we've also noticed that pretty precipitous drop decline in the population numbers of the white catfish and channel catfish in this area of the river also.</b>
	>>Mr. Harrison: That's a White Cat. You see he's got a slightly forked tail. And a rounded head We believe the Flatheads were introduced into the Satilla River by some well-meaning Anglers at the time We were doing a population study on the Altamaha river where we were fin-clipping and tagging fish When we first started removing fish from the Satilla River, we found fish that were marked in the Altamaha and the Satilla river. The biggest clue was that Anglers

	<p>were moving them over and also the fish didn't start down at the mouth of the river and work their way up. They were found at a location in the center of the river and expanded out from there. If they had naturally colonized from the Altamaha, they would have had to swim through the inner coastal waterway to the mouth of the river. And they didn't do that in this case.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;<b>Male Narrator:</b> <b>Through sampling of the Sunfish species, DNR has found a seventy-five percent drop in the number of Red-breasted Sunfish in sections of the Satilla river. They have found a similar decrease of the Bull-head, White, and Channel Catfish population. At the same time Flatheads have increased dramatically.</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Mr. Harrison: We believe it's a direct correlation of why these other species have disappeared due to predation. &gt;&gt;<b>Male Narrator:</b> <b>There is a message here for all Anglers.</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;Mr. Harrison: Do not move fish from one water body to the other because there can be a real negative impact to the native system...within that new system that you're stocking that fish. Most of the Anglers that you'll run into on the Satilla River are real upset that Flatheads have gotten into their system and are having a major impact on their native fish, especially the red-breasted sunfish. This is probably the...was Georgia's premiere and probably still Georgia's Premiere Red-breasted river.</p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;<b>Male Narrator:</b> <b>The problem of native species being affected by non-native invasive species will not easily be solved. It will take everyone's cooperation to ensure it doesn't happen with other fish species. Never release pets into the wild. And when fishing, do not release unused bait fish into the water. Whether you choose to angle by line or by hand, Georgia is a great place to fish. When fishing, make sure you have a license, be safe, and have a great time reeling or wrestling your catch.</b></p>
	<p>&gt;&gt;<b>FEMALE NARRATOR:</b> <b>FUNDING FOR GEORGIA OUTDOORS HAS BEEN MADE POSSIBLE BY A GRANT FROM MARY HALL SINGLETON, AND BY THE IMLAY FOUNDATION.</b></p>

