

A Great Catch - Giant Bluegill Raised on AquaMax®

This fall, a well-known outdoor writer/angler from Maryland and an ardent bluegill angler from Nebraska held court on a private lake in North Carolina. The results were nothing short of astonishing.

Their mission: to catch a bluegill larger than two pounds. As a reference, a two-pound bluegill is like a 15-pound bass, or a Boone and Crockett white-tailed deer that measures beyond 200 points. It is the epitome of bluegill fishing.

The two anglers caught several hundred quality bluegill while fishing a fraction of the 125-acre Richmond Mill Lake near Laurel Hill, North Carolina (home of the King Fisher Society, a private fishing and hunting preserve).

The two anglers, Jim Gronaw from Maryland and Dr. Bruce Condello from Nebraska, fished for two and a half days. They caught hundreds of fish - more than 100 bluegill were larger than a pound, and two dozen of those pushed past two pounds. The largest was 2 lb 6 oz, a monster-sized bluegill.

What are all of these huge fish doing in one pond? Well, they aren't there by accident. Dr. Jim Morgan, the property owner, made a conscientious decision to try and grow huge fish. Around five years ago, he enlisted the assistance of nationally known fisheries biologist and lake management consultant, Texan Bob Lusk (the "Pond Boss").

Along with property manager Dave Buhler, the team decided to do something far outside the box of traditional thinking. Ray Scott's Legacy Lakes determined lake design and added wildlife habitat. Since the lake is a fast flowing, black water, acid water lake, it struggles to produce its own food chain. The team designed a feeding program using Purina's AquaMax® fish food, a high protein product designed especially for carnivorous fish. The fishermen couldn't believe the amazing results!

"These fish are unreal. I never in my wildest imagination thought someone could grow this many huge, healthy fish – never," Jim Gronaw said.

Condello, a dentist in Lincoln who also prides himself on his ability to grow "the biggest bluegill on the planet" in his farm ponds in Nebraska, agreed with Gronaw. "This lake is the best bluegill lake on the planet. I have never caught so many true trophy bluegill in my life," he commented. That's a strong statement from a man who's equally passionate about both catching and growing fish.

"If people could just realize the possibilities of feeding a high quality product, everyone with a pond of bluegills would do it," Lusk said.

Darren Simon, who markets specialty feeds for Purina Mills said, "I've had the pleasure to fish Richmond Mill Lake. The bluegill are well fed and healthy, and so are the bass. It's fun to work with a landowner who has such passion for his fishery. The results are proof of his dedication."

Richmond Mill Lake, which is steeped in history, was built back in 1835. Normally, old lakes don't produce many fish. This lake is totally different. Property manager Buhler said, "I fished this lake before it was good. It's a beautiful and mature lake, but once we started our feeding program, it's made a complete turnaround. Not only is the fishing phenomenal, so are the fish. The bass are fantastic, but the bluegill are off the charts."

Jim Morgan summed it up. "We decided several years ago to feed the fish in the lake and see what would happen. Now, we have young bluegill pushing over two pounds and feed-trained bass up to seven. I can't wait to see where these fish grow in the next two or three years."

The weekend was a good snapshot of what can happen with good stewardship and good management of private waters.



A double!



Bruce Condello (l) and Jim Gronaw weigh a nice bluegill.



Dr. Bruce Condello with a 2 lb 6 oz coppernose bluegill from Richmond Mill Lake.



Biologist Bob Lusk admires a two pound “gill.”



Jim Gronaw shows off a two pounder.



Two huge bluegill both larger than two pounds.



A few of the best of one day's catch. There's rarely so many large bluegill at any one gathering!



There's a bunch of happy bluegill fans with quality fish.