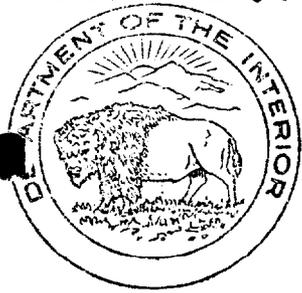


DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE



OFFICE OF COORDINATOR OF FISHERIES

For Advance Release TO THE PAPERS OF
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1944.

In a colorful ceremony which originated centuries ago in Brittany, the shrimp fishery, largest seafood industry of the south, today will observe the traditional blessing of the fleet in Berwick Bay, La. In addition to the Berwick Bay fleet, fishing boats from the surrounding sections will come in some numbers to receive the blessings of the clergy as the new shrimp season gets well under way.

The blessing of the fishing boats probably dates back to the ancient Breton custom of asking the benediction of the Church on any vessel about to make its maiden voyage. Later, many Bretons emigrated to Canada and then to Louisiana, bringing the tradition with them. Today's ceremony in Berwick Bay is the ninth annual celebration of the blessing of the shrimp fleet.

Although some shrimp are caught throughout the year, the fall season is the period of peak production and heavy catches are needed during the next few months to make up a deficit which now amounts to about 30 percent compared with last year. Shrimp production at the principal Gulf coast ports in 1944 totaled 80,671 barrels by the end of July, compared with 117,026 barrels during the same period last year, according to figures released by the Office of Coordinator of Fisheries Harold L. Ickes.

Canned shrimp will be more scarce than for many years, Coordinator of Fisheries Ickes predicted, largely because of the trend toward marketing shrimp fresh or frozen. This year such a small percentage of the catch is being canned that the pack will probably be the smallest in at least 25 years.

The shrimp fishery is the leading seafood industry of the south, furnishing an annual production of about 150,000,000 pounds, and bringing a larger return to fishermen than any other fishery product of the area. Although shrimp are caught commercially all the way from North Carolina to Texas, about 85 percent of the yield comes from the Gulf coast and 66 percent from Louisiana alone. Texas is second in shrimp production, followed by Georgia, Mississippi, and Florida.

The shrimp, a small, lobsterlike creature, has a short life cycle, probably not more than two years. Spawning takes place in ocean waters some distance from the shore, and the young shrimp hatch within the first day after the eggs are deposited. The baby shrimp develop quite rapidly; within a very short time they are able to swim about and find food. They are carried in by ocean currents to the coast line, where they enter river estuaries and bays. By September many of them have reached commercial size. Most shrimp fishing is carried on in bays, sounds, and other inside waters.

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In the winter most of the larger shrimp move out to sea again to find warmer water, and in the spring there is a general offshore movement of shrimp. The places where the large shrimp congregate offshore were discovered only a few years ago, as a result of explorations by the former Bureau of Fisheries, now the Fish and Wildlife Service. Soon after this discovery, a few commercial boats operating out of Morgan City began taking the "jumbo" shrimp, marking the beginning of the Louisiana offshore fishery which now brings in some 20,000,000 pounds annually.

Although the boats first used in the offshore fishery were small and of limited range, the fleet is now composed of about 200 diesel powered trawlers from 50 to 65 feet long, capable of trawling from the Mississippi River to Texas and as far out as shrimp are found.

Since May, 1943, the construction of more than 330 new shrimp trawlers has been authorized on the recommendation of the Office of the Coordinator of Fisheries. When the last of these boats are added to the fleet, it will consist of a larger percentage of new and well equipped vessels than ever before.

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