Biologist Seeks USL Assistant Professor
Conducts Research Work

Project Goal Is Larger Crustacean

By MARIO MAMALAKIS
(Special to The Times-Picayune)

LAFAYETTE, La. - A hybrid variety of Louisiana crawfish developed from native crawfish and the Australian marron crawfish may be the answer to producing a larger crawfish in Louisiana, according to Dr. Jerome Shireman, University of Southwestern Louisiana assistant professor of biology.

Shireman is currently conducting crawfish and catfish research at USL.

Many tales have developed in Louisiana regarding the native crawfish—how they came to be in Louisiana, the discovery of their delicacy as a food and their bravery. So impressed were the Houma Indians, who roamed what is now Terrebonne Parish, with the bravery of the native crawfish that they adopted the crawfish as their battle symbol.

But this bravery is proving to be a problem in Shireman's project to raise the four-to-six pound Australian marron crawfish in Louisiana.

The Louisiana crawfish stalks the marron and the Australian creatures lose the battle. Their appetites cannot compete with the native crawfish and their growth rate is slow making them economically unprofitable. Also, though a large animal, the marron cannot take the Louisiana heat in summer or the cold in the winter.

‘ONE MORE ATTEMPT’

"I plan to make one more attempt, possibly with the idea of developing a hybrid between the Louisiana crawfish and the Australian marron," Shireman said. "Hopefully, their offspring will have characteristics of both—the bigness of the Australian crawfish and the tolerance of Louisiana's crawfish for the climate. In research negative results are good, too."

Shireman's research on the marron crawfish began last November, when he went with a party of three from USL to Australia under a $10,000 grant from Krantz Lawn & Tree Experts, Inc. to learn more of their natural habitat and to bring back the marron for experimental purposes.

The USL biologist hopes to produce four-to-six pound crawfish in ponds on the USL campus. The Australian crawfish were first housed during the winter in a climate controlled building in a tank with running water. They were fed a diet of aquatic vegetation (alligator weed and elodea), fresh fish, liver, crawfish meat and catfish pellets. Their preference seemed to be for crawfish meat and catfish pellets.

However, their feeding habits were never as voracious as the native crawfish. Several of the marron were placed in an aquarium with Louisiana pond raised crawfish. The native crawfish would constantly stalk the marron and usually, after several days, the marron were found dead.

POND NOTED

Last June the remaining marron were stocked in an earthen pond. Water was pumped periodically through this pond to lower the water temperatures and to insure adequate oxygen levels. Two weeks later two marron were found dead. To date no others have been found dead. The pond will be drained in the near future to determine how many, if any, marron are still alive.

"Although not a factor in their establishment in Louisiana, but a factor that must be considered, are the economics involved," Shireman said. "The marron does not reproduce until it is almost three years old. Also, their growth rate is much lower than Louisiana crawfish. Therefore, it would take longer to raise a commercial crop. They are also density dependent. In Australian ponds they are not found in densities greater than 100 pounds per acre."

Louisiana crawfish can be raised in amounts as great as 1,200 pounds per acre.

Shireman's next step is to continue research in the hope of developing the hybrid variety.

USL has been engaged in other crawfish research in which the departments of biology, microbiology and the School of Home Economics have been involved. Their research deals with the handling, processing and recipe development of the tasty Louisiana crawfish. Funds for this research were provided by the Louisiana Crawfish Industry Development Association.

JOHN B. GASQUET
has been chosen parade marshal for the Grand Parade of Cotton scheduled Oct. 17 in Ville Platte in conjunction with the 18th annual Louisiana Cotton Festival celebration. A retired professional photographer, Gasquet was responsible for the first picture coverage of the Clyde Barrow-Bonnie Parker ambush slaying in Bienville Parish in the 1930s.