

ShareLunker 2008-2009 a Big Year for Lake Conroe

By: Jeff Henson

Lake Conroe had banner year during the 2008-2009 ShareLunker season with four large-mouth bass over thirteen pounds being donated to the program between December 13, 2008 and February 26, 2009. This is a record number of donations to come from Conroe, and one of those bass was a new water body record. With these four entries, Lake Conroe has now produce 16 ShareLunker bass and has jumped to fourth on the list of reservoirs producing the most fish over 13 pounds. Only Lake Fork, Lake Alan Henry, and Sam Rayburn Reservoir have produced more.

The first ShareLunker of the season was caught December 13, 2008 by Kyle Nitschke of Willis. Kyle's fish weighed 13.07 pounds, 25 inches long, and set a new Junior Angler State Record. Nitschke hooked the big bass while fishing the Ignition Bass Tournament with friend Tyler Goetzman who ironically, a year earlier, had set the Junior Angler State record with a 13.06-pound bass he caught on January 13, 2008. They won the



Kyle Nitschke of Willis shows off his 13.07- pound Junior Angler State Record largemouth bass caught from Lake Conroe on December 13, 2008.

December 2008 Ignition tournament with a bag weighing 32.85 pounds.

Over a month and a half passed before the next lunker made its appearance. On January 30, 2009, Ricky Bearden of Conroe was dragging a plastic worm through 54-degree water when he set the hook on what is now the new Lake Conroe water body record for largemouth bass, a 15.93-pound behemoth taken from two feet of water. The big bass now holds the number 24 spot on the list of the top 50 largemouth bass ever caught in Texas. The fish was 27 inches long and 22 inches in girth. As the Texas resident catching the largest fish of the season, Bearden will receive a lifetime fishing license. According to ShareLunker Program Director David Campbell, Bearden's fish was one of the healthiest they have seen donated to the



Ricky Bearden of Conroe proudly holds his 15.93-pound Lake Conroe water body record bass.

program in a long time. Kudos to Ricky for his amazing catch!

Only two weeks passed, and yet another ShareLunker bass was pulled from Lake Conroe



Mark Goetzman of Willis holds the third ShareLunker to be entered from Lake Conroe in 2008-2009.

by another Willis angler, Mark Goetzman. If that name sounds familiar, it should. Remember Tyler who was fishing with Kyle Nitschke who beat him out of the Junior Angler State Record by 0.01 pounds? Well, Mark Goetzman is Tyler's father. I suppose the old familiar adage that the apple never falls far from the tree applies to fishing too. ShareLunker No. 460 took Mark's Brush Hog about 10 a.m. on Sunday morning, February 15th. The fish weighed 13.13 pounds and was 25 inches long and 20 inches in girth.

Just when we thought it couldn't get any better, Lake Conroe showed that it had not quite played all its cards in the 2008-2009 ShareLunker bonanza. While fishing just south of the F.M. 1097



Renee Linderoth wears a big smile as she holds her 13.8-pound lunker, the sixteenth largemouth bass to be donated from Lake Conroe into the program since its inception.

bridge with guide Ron Higgins, Renee Linderoth of Conroe was in the right place at the right time and pulled a 13.8-pound, 25.1-inch lunker from two feet of water on a Hula Grub. "I have to give credit to my fishing guide, Ron Higgins of Higgy's

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Freshwater Adventures,” Linderoth said. “Without him putting me in the right place and fishing the right way, I would not have caught this fish.” Higgins also gets credit for the bass being entered into the ShareLunker program rather than being immediately released. Linderoth had not fished in recent years and had not heard of the ShareLunker program. She was going to immediately release the fish, but Higgins said ‘No, we have to get it weighed and see if it is a ShareLunker,’” she explained, and the rest, as they say, is history.

That Conroe has become a big bass factory is really no surprise to us as biologists who have been working on the fishery for years. The habitat restoration efforts along with periodic stockings of Florida largemouth bass fingerlings, and the stockings of ShareLunker offspring have contributed to the successful comeback of the this reservoirs largemouth bass fishery. These efforts are ongoing,

and should result in great bass fishing for years to come. For more information, contact Jeff Henson, TPWD Inland Fisheries, 1004 E. 26th Street,

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