

ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

June 2025

Since 2002, the first week of June has officially been National Fishing and Boating Week. In Florida, the state allows fishing without a license on the two weekends it falls on, one for saltwater and one for freshwater fish. Considering this, it is only fitting to look at a fish bone for this month's artifact.

These bones are vertebrae from a Bowfin (Figure 1). The bowfin (*Amia calva*) is a freshwater fish native to eastern North America (Fuller, 2020). They are often called "living fossils" because they have retained the traits of their fossil ancestors. This kind of fish has existed for almost 150 million years, so if someone caught this during National Fishing and Boating Week, it is almost like they caught a dinosaur (NYSM).

Bowfin vertebrae are the most recognizable fish vertebrae that THPO's Collections gets. When we get a full specimen, the identification is very simple. The transverse processes, as seen in Figure 1, along with their distinct round and flat nature, make them instantly recognizable. Transverse processes are what connect the fish's vertebrae to their ribs. Even when the transverse processes are broken off, they are relatively easy to identify. The middle area that funnels inwards, often called the centrum, is usually much shallower than in most other fish that also have them. This can be seen in Figure 3, which compares different species of fish vertebrae. It is truly one of the more unique species that we are fortunate enough to acquire in Collections.



Figure 2



Figure 1



Figure 3 (left to right): Bowfin, Catfish, Garfish



Figure 4 (left to right): Bowfin, Catfish, Garfish

Fuller, P. (2020, March 31). *Amia calva*. USGS.
<https://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/factsheet.aspx?SpeciesID=305>
Ichthyology. The New York State Museum. (n.d.).
<https://www.nysm.nysed.gov/research-collections/biology/ichthyology/news/living-fossils-bowfin>

