

Panel 6 : Estuary heritage

A short history of carrelets

Today, carrelets are one of the most famous features of the Gironde estuary and the banks of the Garonne and Dordogne rivers. You can see many examples of these platforms built on the banks and supporting a set of poles and a net. They are often accompanied by a shed of varying degrees of sophistication.

However, in the 18th century, the term 'carrelet' just referred to the square net. The Encyclopaedia of Diderot and d'Alembert, published in 1751, describes a carrelet as follows. '*It must be 6 feet square (0.55 m²) & the mesh must be wide enough because the larger the mesh, the easier it is to lift the Carrelet out of the water: a convenience which should not be ignored because if the Carrelet is pulled out slowly, the big fish (...) will jump over it.*' The net is attached to the end of a pole and is usually manoeuvred at arm's length. This was noted by the naturalist Duhamel du Monceau in his *Dictionnaire des pêches* (Dictionary of Fishing) in 1769, : a 5.5 m long wooden pole was used to facilitate the raising of the large nets, at the end of which iron struts were attached to hold the nets in place. He added that a wooden block or stones were used as counterweights to assist in raising the net up out of the water.

Although at that time this equipment was mounted on a boat, it has all the characteristics of the carrelets we see today. It is used to catch flatfish (plaice), mullet and eels. In his book, *Traité général des pesches*, published in 1769, this author talks about the use of a carrelet in Saint-Palais-sur-Mer for shrimp fishing.

It is not known when the first carrelets appeared on the banks of the Dordogne and the Isle. Today, about 120 of them line the banks of the Isle for about thirty kilometres. Much like the municipal carrelet in Libourne, the equipment is often limited to a net suspended from a rotating pole fitted with a winch. A temporary occupation permit for the river is required to set up and maintain a carrelet. Its use is also subject to a fishing permit.

Fishing using an 'escave'

Fishing using an 'escave' was another traditional fishing method which, unlike fishing using a 'carrelet', is no longer practised.

In principle, this type of fishing consisted of stretching a net, called an 'escave', across the river and then pulling it back to one of the banks. The fish were then trapped in the pocket formed by the net during this manoeuvre.

This type of fishing required the installation of a capstan on the shore, or a winch to bring in the net, which was very large and heavy. It also required a team of several fishermen, with some operating the boat and others operating the capstan on the shore.

At the beginning of the last century, this fishing technique was practised in Condat at a place called Le Caillou.

The reintroduction of the European sturgeon.

In the early 1980s, the European sturgeon was considered an endangered species. Over the course of the 20th century, the fish was fished excessively for its flesh and eggs (caviar). Its near disappearance was recorded in the 1970s. Since no natural reproduction had been observed since 1994, a reintroduction programme for the species was launched. After the successful artificial reproduction of 23,000 young fish in a hatchery in 1995, most of the specimens were released into the Dordogne and Garonne rivers. Further releases of young fish have taken place since 2007. Ten years later, a 'wild' population is once again being seen, including individuals which are likely to reproduce in the wild.



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HORAIRES :
8h30 > 12h30
13h15 > 17h