

My momma taught me not to believe everything I'm told. She rightly informed me you can't trust some people to tell the truth, especially about certain kinds of things. Fishermen lie. Some fishermen lie more often than others. Most of them become evasive when asked to reveal specific locations where they've recently been mining the mother lode, even with their "best" buddies.

Others are reluctant to reveal new, productive plugs and presentations they've found, especially if they compete in tournaments regularly. They don't want the whole fishing community to know about these things, so they can use them to gain an edge until the truth becomes more widely known.

Withholding the truth about something isn't really "lying", of course. The level of egregiousness in such a behavior is directly related to the precise nature of the truth being kept from someone. Certainly, a man who neglects to mention a mistress to his wife should be figuratively bludgeoned for his sin. One who opts not to tell the same wife the new dress she bought makes her backside look a little lumpy might be applauded for holding his tongue.

Similarly, a fisherman who lies to a stranger at the boat ramp about where he caught the big one has committed no crime; in fact, the one **asking** the question is in the wrong. However, an angler who lies to a "buddy" about the same thing is betraying a sacred kind of shared confidence.

The most common lies told by fishermen relate to the size and number of fish they landed. I have friends I've caught in these kinds of "lies" over the years, when they retell stories multiple times, and the magnitude of the catching grows each time. We'll go out fishing on the same day, and they'll report catching "about 30 trout, with a couple of 27s".

A week later, forgetting we've already talked about the day, it turns into "probably 40 trout, up to 28". A month later, it's "50 or more, with one pushing 29". A year later, it can morph into something truly epic. In some cases, I don't believe these people are actually in control of their lies; they simply can't help themselves, and might actually believe what they are saying is true.

Doesn't matter to me. Once I know they have this tendency, I automatically whack about 10 to 15% off the top of any fishing report they give, assuming the original tale isn't accurate either. After all, if they stretch the truth later, what's the chance they stick to the facts the first time they recall the events?

The most frequently-fudged detail in any fishing report relates to the weight of the big fish. This is true for a variety of reasons. If a person isn't carrying and using a reliable scale to measure the heft of the specimens, it's foolish to place any faith in the reported weights.

ALL ANGLERS WILL OVERESTIMATE THE WEIGHTS OF FISH THEY CATCH, EITHER PURPOSEFULLY OR ACCIDENTALLY. THIS TRUTH APPLIES MORE READILY TO BIGGER FISH, FOR WHICH ALL ANGLERS HAVE A SMALLER SAMPLE OF REFERENCES.

As I type, a myth about the relationship of the length and weight of speckled trout is alive and thriving in the Lone Star State. Despite the efforts of people like me who've tried to dispel the myth, and despite the existence and widespread use of scales which debunk the myth, many people believe a "27

inch trout weighs 7 pounds”, a “28 weighs 8”, a “29 weighs 9” and a “30 incher weighs 10”.

Though all of these length-to-weight ratios do occur in some fish, none is reliably true, nor is any of them true a majority of the time. Having measured the lengths and weights of between 650-700 trout measuring 27 inches or more, I can make this statement without a trace of doubt or hesitation.

Most of the trout of these dimensions I've caught and weighed were taken south of the JFK Causeway, where long, skinny fish are perhaps more common than in places further north. I believe trout on the Upper Coast weigh more (on average) per inch than those on the Lower Coast. Still, I stand behind the above assertion--average 28 inchers across the state don't weigh 8 pounds.

Some people who carry an accurate measuring device like a Boga Grip and who use it to weigh all their big fish still can't state the truth when telling others about what they've caught. This goes back to the “fishermen lie” thing. It's a tough call to decide who is behaving more badly, one who intentionally fudges on a known weight, or one who operates off an ignorant assumption and assigns bogus weights to all fish, without dangling any of them from the jaws of a scale.

There's no **real** harm in people thinking or pretending their trout weigh more than they actually do. But I believe people like me who weigh our fish and post their dimensions honestly do pay a price in terms of public perception, since we are compared with the bloated hype of those who make exaggerated claims about their fish.

I've learned to live with this. If one of my clients catches a 29 and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch trout, I'm going to post a picture and call it what it is. I'm not going to call it a 30. I'm not going to pretend an 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ pounder is a 9 either. I'm more comfortable having my clients (and others) know I'm truthful, than I would be having strangers think the fish we catch are slightly bigger.

For me, the issue is one of integrity. Involving my clients in lies like these would indict all other aspects of the way I do things. It would mean I'm just a “typical” fisherman, one who lies to make himself look better. I have many observable flaws; lying and deceiving people isn't one of them.

I try to shoot straight and tell the truth. Sometimes, I'm bluntly honest to a fault. I'd rather be perceived as a thoughtless and inconsiderate knucklehead than a greedy liar who massages egos and tells people what they want to hear.

Apparently, I'm the complete opposite of some people who spread misinformation intentionally. My momma told me not to believe everything I hear. This was way back before the turn of the millennium, when computers were as big as Mack trucks and the only “world wide web” was a ruthless collection of Mafioso and their organized endeavors.

You can't believe everything you hear, and you dang sure can't believe everything you see on the internet! I don't monitor fishing forum websites anymore, because I get sick of all the haters and fakers who ruin the sites for those of us who don't feel the need to take shots at others relentlessly.

Perhaps the worst example of the negative aspects of these web-loving posers is the continual reports they generate and spread about the “pending state-

record trout” caught “[some time recently] in [some specific place]”. Over the last couple of years or so, I’ve received multiple texts and emails with pictures attached, reporting the catches of trout of monstrous proportions, usually in the 34 to 36 inch class, and weighing over 14 pounds, all of which have turned out to be FALSE.

The state certifies Carl “Bud” Rowland’s trout, caught on a fly on May 23, 2002, as the current state record. TP&W lists the length as 37.25 inches, the weight as 15.6 pounds, despite the fact Rowland released the fish and authorities never possessed it or verified its exact dimensions. Fishermen lie, this we know. Maybe Bud’s behemoth wasn’t as big as the record books now show. People in high places believe it was, given the evidence they saw, so I’ll accept the basic truth of it until I’m provided evidence to the contrary.

What I will not believe are a bunch of reports and photos circulating through Cyber-space, pretending to describe and show new record trout. Some of these pictures are old, having been posted time and again to create new waves of excitement among naïve surfers on websites which will remain nameless here.

I think of these photos and threads like they are logs in a river. They rise to the surface and become visible for a time, then slowly sink and disappear, rolling under for a time, before they turn and ascend again, resurfacing further downstream. They can do so repeatedly before disappearing altogether.

In my analogy, the logs are the bogus reports and the river is time. It’s often hard to tell what a log is when it pops up briefly in the middle of a raging current, then fades from view again. Sometimes, said log can appear to be a monster--a living, slithering creature of legendary proportions. Observers might report what they’ve seen, believing OkoPogo exists with all their hearts and souls.

Others receive second-hand accounts of these events and send texts about them as though they are facts. People have argued with me and others I know about the veracity of some of the pictures and reported dimensions of the trout they show, even after we pointed out to them the pictures are old, the reports inaccurate. Some even protested after we showed them threads where anglers who actually caught and landed the fish debunked the myths.

“I got this from a good buddy of mine. He knows the guy and wouldn’t lie,” one of them snipped, ignoring all the hard evidence to the contrary. In the end, people believe what they want to believe. I’m no different. I remember what my momma said, so I’m skeptical about all kinds of things I hear and see.

I do want to believe there’s a 40 inch trout weighing in the high teens swimming around out there. But it’s just a pipe dream until I see it and it’s been verified through some legitimate means. Dreams don’t come true simply because someone tells me a story, sends me a text with a cool-looking picture, or directs me to a thread on the internet.