



FRESHWATER FISH OF AMERICA

CHANNEL CATFISH

Ictalurus punctatus (Rafinesque, 1818)



Channel catfish. Photo credit: Sam Stukel/USFWS

FACTS AT A GLANCE

Size: Common length for channel catfish is 22 inches with the longest maximum reported length at 52 inches.

Range: The range of channel catfish extends from southern Canada into northern Mexico. They are found within the central drainages of the United States.

Habitat: The adult channel catfish inhabits rivers and streams. They prefer clean, well oxygenated waters, but can also live in ponds and reservoirs.

Diet: They feed primarily on small fish, crustaceans (crayfish), clams and snails, aquatic insects and small mammals. There are even reports of channel catfish eating small birds.

<https://www.fws.gov/fisheries>
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Natural History

Male channel catfish turn dark during spawning season and develop a thick pad on the top of their heads. Female channel catfish require cool water and short day lengths during the winter months for proper egg development. Channel catfish spawn, depending on the latitude, during the months of April through July, when temperatures reach 72 – 73 degrees Fahrenheit.

The spawning catfish pair will dig a depression on the bottom of the river or stream, or find a suitable sub-surface cavity to deposit their eggs, which is then guarded by the male catfish. Egg incubation will take around seven days, depending on the water temperature. Channel catfish larvae will take 12 to 16 days to develop.

Conservation

The channel catfish is neither federally listed nor imperiled. Channel catfish are a popular recreational fish and are managed by state recreational fishing regulations through creel and size limits.

Channel catfish, when introduced to non-native waters, can negatively impact indigenous fish species because they are such opportunistic feeders. They may eventually outcompete native fishes for habitat and food.