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Indiana Pond Fish

Species Identification

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Extension



EXPERT
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Indiana Pond Fish

Species Identification

This guide will help you identify commonly stocked fish and problem fish that may be encountered in Indiana ponds. More information on fish identification and pond management can be found at extension.purdue.edu/pondwildlife

Commonly Stocked Fish: Four fish species are recommended for stocking in Indiana ponds: Bluegill, Redear Sunfish, Largemouth Bass and Channel Catfish. These species provide good fishing opportunities and promote sustainable fish populations.



Bluegill



Redear Sunfish



Largemouth Bass



Channel Catfish

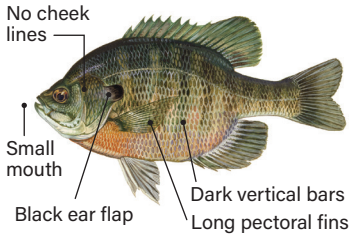
Other Stocked Fish: Three other fish species may be stocked in Indiana ponds under certain situations: Fathead Minnows, Grass Carp and Tilapia. Careful consideration should be made before stocking these species.

Problem Fish Species: Many fish species are not well suited to pond environments and can cause a number of problems, including overpopulation, competition with desirable species, and habitat destruction. Problem pond fish species include some sunfishes, crappie, Yellow Perch, bullheads, Gizzard Shad, carp and suckers.

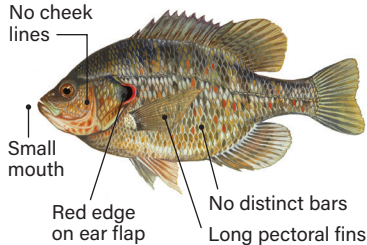


Sunfishes

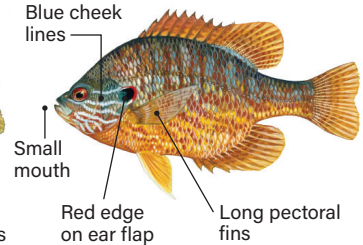
Bluegill



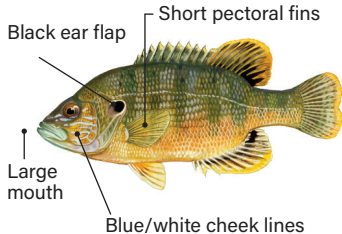
Redear Sunfish



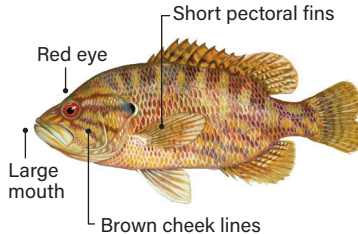
Pumpkinseed



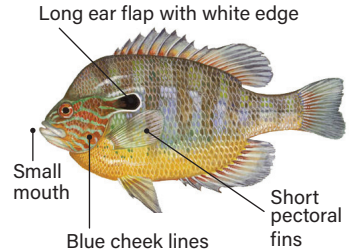
Green Sunfish



Warmouth



Longear Sunfish



Sunfishes

Sunfishes are thin, deep-bodied fishes that typically have an olive-green back that transitions to a yellow-white underside. All species have an “ear flap” that extends off their gill plate. Key features for identification include specific patterns on their sides and cheeks, ear flap color, mouth size and length of the pectoral fins. While size varies by species, sunfishes commonly grow to 6-8 inches in well-managed Indiana ponds.

Bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*) often have dark vertical bars on their sides and blue edges to their gill plate and jaw. They have an entirely black ear flap and a small mouth. They have long pectoral fins that extend past the eye when folded forward.

Green Sunfish (*Lepomis cyanellus*) may have dark vertical bars on their sides and blue or white lines on their cheeks. They have a large mouth and a black ear flap with a white or red edge. They have short pectoral fins that do not extend past the eye when folded forward.

Warmouth (*Lepomis gulosus*) are predominantly brown in color with dark blotches on their sides. They have brown lines on their cheeks and a red eye. Their ear flap is relatively small and can have a white or red edge. They have a large mouth and short pectoral fins similar to green sunfish.

Redear Sunfish (*Lepomis microlophus*) lack dark vertical bars on their sides and blue wavy lines on their cheeks. Their ear flap is black but with a distinct red edge. They have a small mouth. Their long pectoral fins extend past the eye.

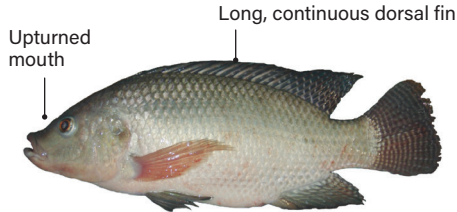
Pumpkinseed (*Lepomis gibbosus*) have blue lines on their cheek and dark blotches on their sides. They have a red edge on their ear flap. They are typically more colorful than redear and their ear flap is shorter than longear sunfish. They have a small mouth and long pectoral fins.

Longear Sunfish (*Lepomis megalotis*) are often the most colorful of the sunfishes, with iridescent blue splotches and lines on their cheeks and sides. They can also have vertical bars. They have an elongated ear flap with a white edge. They have a small mouth and short pectoral fins.

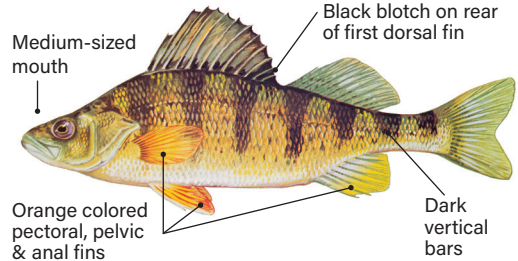


Other Panfish

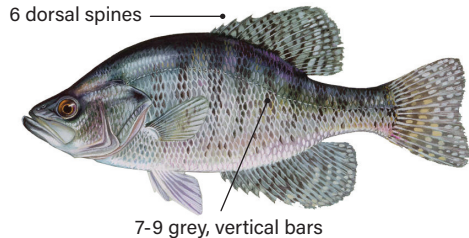
Tilapia



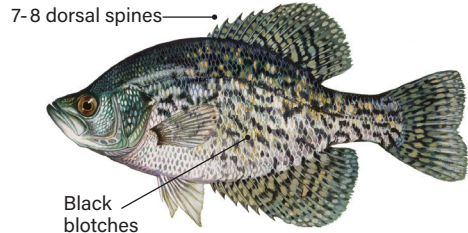
Yellow Perch



White Crappie



Black Crappie



Other Panfish

Other panfish are common in Indiana rivers, lakes and reservoirs. Bluegill and Redear Sunfish are the best panfish for Indiana ponds. However, other panfish may be suitable in some situations. Tilapia can help control algae and provide a good source of food for pond owners; however, they die once water drops below 55°F. Yellow Perch commonly cause competition and overpopulation problems and are not recommended for Indiana ponds. Crappie can cause similar problems to Yellow Perch and should only be considered for ponds larger than 10 acres.

Tilapia (*Oreochromis* spp.) are a deep-bodied fish that range in color from pink to grey with reddish-brown fins. Juveniles may have dark vertical bars, but these disappear in adults. A distinct characteristic of Tilapia is their long, continuous dorsal fin. They also have an upturned mouth. Tilapia can reach 3-4 pounds in one growing season in Indiana ponds, but need to be harvested in the fall to prevent large fish kills.

White Crappie (*Lepomis cyanellus*) are a deep-bodied and very thin fish. They have a grey-green back, silver sides and a white underside. They have 6-9 grey vertical bars that can be broken into blotches. They have a large, paper-thin mouth. They have 6 dorsal spines, with the first spine much shorter than the last spine.

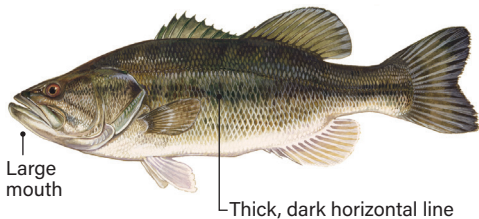
Yellow Perch (*Perca flavescens*) have an olive-green back, yellow sides and a white underside. They have 6-9 dark vertical bars along their sides and a black blotch on the rear of their first dorsal fin. Their pectoral, pelvic and anal fins may be orange. Their mouth is smaller than Largemouth Bass but larger than that of sunfishes. They don't have canine teeth like the related Walleye and Sauger.

Black Crappie (*Pomoxis nigromaculatus*) are similar in appearance to White Crappie. They typically have dark blotches over their body, rather than vertical bars. They have 7-8 dorsal spines, rather than 6 spines displayed by White Crappie. It is important to only count the hard spines, not the soft fin rays.



Sport Fish

Largemouth Bass



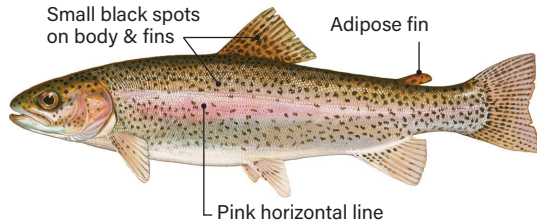
Smallmouth Bass



Hybrid Striped Bass



Rainbow Trout



Sport Fish

Sport fish may be encountered in rivers, lakes and reservoirs. Of these, few are appropriate for Indiana ponds. Largemouth Bass are well-suited to ponds and serve as an important predator of Bluegill. They help keep Bluegill populations in check while also providing good fishing opportunities. Smallmouth Bass prefer larger lakes, rivers and creeks and do not do well in ponds. Hybrid Striped Bass are a large, schooling fish that prefer large lakes and reservoirs. They also rarely eat Bluegill. Rainbow Trout need cool water and typically do not survive through the summer in Indiana ponds.

Largemouth Bass (*Micropterus salmoides*) have an olive-green back that transitions to a white underside. Their green sides have a thick, black, horizontal line that is often broken into blotches. They have a large mouth and the upper jawbone extends back past the eye. Largemouth Bass commonly reach 12-15 inches in Indiana ponds. They can be misidentified with Spotted Bass, although these rarely occur in ponds.

Hybrid Striped Bass (*Lepomis cyanellus*) are a cross between White Bass and Striped Bass. They have blue-green backs, silver sides and a white underside. They have a 6-9 horizontal stripes on their sides that are often broken in some places. They can grow to over 20 pounds but rarely occur in ponds.

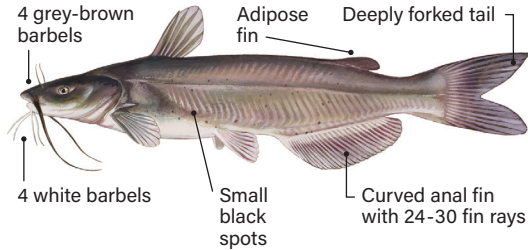
Smallmouth Bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*) have a dark brown-green back that transitions to a yellow-white underside. Their sides have many dark blotches, often arranged in a vertical pattern. They have a distinctive red eye. Smallmouth Bass have a slightly smaller mouth than Largemouth Bass, but their jawbone still extends back past the eye. Smallmouth Bass rarely occur in ponds.

Rainbow Trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) have an elongated body with an olive-green back that transitions to a white underside. They have silver sides with a pink horizontal line. They have small black spots over their body and fins. They have a small fleshy adipose fin. Rainbow Trout are stocked in some reservoirs, but are rare in ponds.

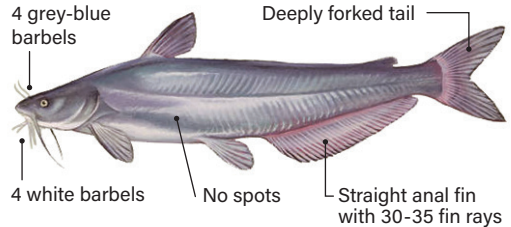


Catfishes & Bullheads

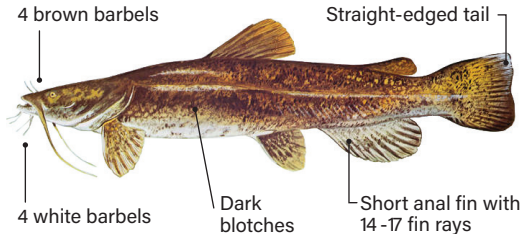
Channel Catfish



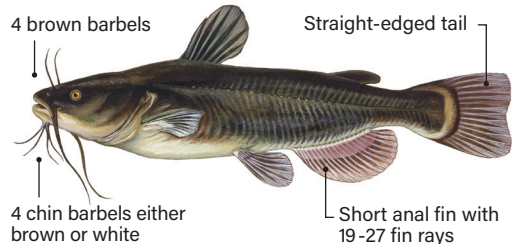
Blue Catfish



Flathead Catfish



Bullheads



Catfishes & Bullheads

Catfishes and bullheads may be encountered in rivers, lakes and reservoirs, as well as Indiana ponds. Channel Catfish are well suited to ponds and can be stocked as a single species put-and-take pond, or in combination with Largemouth Bass, Bluegill and Redear Sunfish. Blue and Flathead Catfish are large catfishes not suitable to ponds. They often predate heavily on Bluegill and Largemouth Bass. Bullheads are small catfishes that seldom grow larger than 12 inches. They can easily overpopulate a pond and outcompete desirable species such as Bluegill and Largemouth Bass. All catfish and bullheads have a small fleshy adipose fin on their back, just in front of their tail.

Channel Catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*) have grey-brown sides that transition to a white underside. Channel Catfish often have small black spots on their sides. They have eight barbels around their mouth – the top four are grey/brown and the bottom four are white. Channel Catfish have a deeply forked tail and an anal fin that has a curved edge and contains 24-32 soft fin rays.

Flathead Catfish (*Pylodictis olivaris*) have brown sides with dark blotches, transitioning to a yellow-white underside. The defining characteristic of Flathead Catfish is a wide, flat head with a lower jaw that protrudes further than the upper jaw. The flathead is the only large catfish with a square tail. They have a short anal fin with 14-17 fin rays.

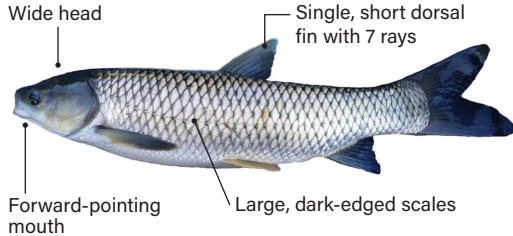
Blue Catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*) have grey-blue sides that transition to a white underside. Their eight barbels match their body color similar to Channel Catfish. Blue Catfish do not have black spots like Channel Catfish. Blue Catfish have a deeply forked tail. Unlike Channel Catfish, the anal fin of Blue Catfish is straight-edged and has 30-35 fin rays.

Bullheads (*Ameiurus* spp.). Three common bullhead species in Indiana are Black Bullhead (pictured), Brown Bullhead and Yellow Bullhead. They are typically much smaller than other catfishes. Barbels can be brown or white depending on the species. They have a square tail and a short anal fin with 19-27 fin rays.

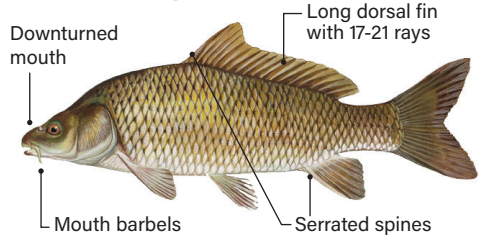


Carp, Suckers & Buffalo

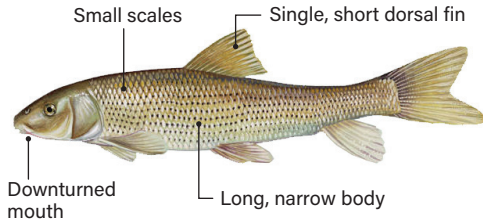
Grass Carp



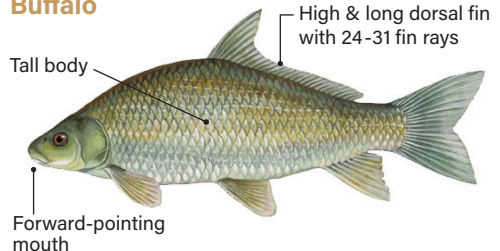
Common Carp



Suckers



Buffalo



Carp, Suckers & Buffalo

Carp, suckers and buffalo are found in rivers, streams and reservoirs across Indiana. These are typically not considered for sport or food, but can be found in some ponds. Grass Carp are originally from Asia but have been adapted for use in controlling aquatic plants in Indiana. Common Carp are invasive from Europe and should be avoided in ponds and other systems. Suckers and buffalo are similar-looking species to carp, but are native to Indiana. They typically feed on small organisms on the bottom of rivers and lakes. Suckers and buffalo are not well-suited to ponds.

Grass Carp (*Ctenopharyngodon idella*) have a long, rounded body and a wide head. They have a grey-green back, silvery sides and a white underside. They have large, dark-edged scales. Their mouth lacks barbels and opens straight off the front of their head. They have a short dorsal fin with 7 fin rays. Grass Carp eat pondweeds, but don't eat floating or emergent plants. In Indiana, Grass Carp must be obtained from a licensed fish hatchery.

Suckers (Family Catostomidae) have a long, fairly narrow body, but can have a wide, square head. They have small scales and a short dorsal fin with 9-16 fin rays. They also have a downturned mouth. There are 19 sucker species in Indiana: Common species are Spotted Sucker (pictured), White Sucker and Golden Redhorse.

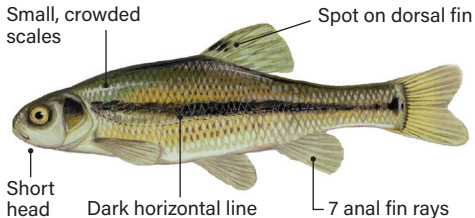
Common Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) have a tall, thick body with a bronze-gold back that transitions to a yellow-white underside. Common Carp have very large scales. They have a downturned mouth with short barbels on either side. Common Carp have a long dorsal fin with 17-21 soft fin rays. The front edges of their dorsal and anal fins have serrated spines. Common Carp can reach more than 50 pounds and can be destructive in ponds.

Buffalo (*Ictiobus* spp.) have tall bodies and large scales similar to Common Carp, but are typically more silver in color. They also lack mouth barbels. Buffalo have a high and long dorsal fin with 24-31 fin rays. There are three species of buffalo in Indiana: Smallmouth Buffalo (pictured), Bigmouth Buffalo and Clack Buffalo.

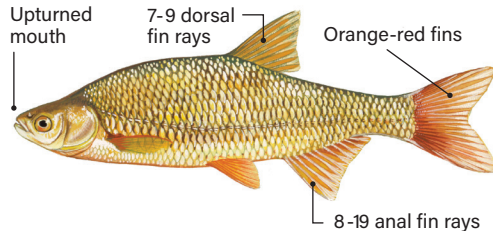


Minnows & Shiners

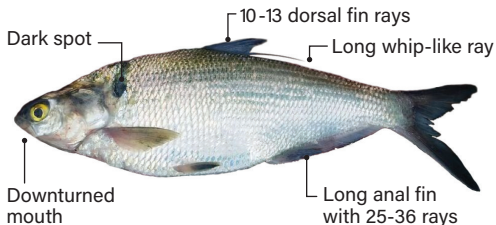
Fathead Minnow



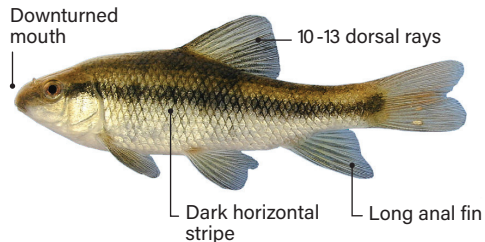
Golden Shiner



Gizzard Shad



Lake Chubsucker



Minnows & Shiners

Minnows and shiners are typically smaller fishes that provide food for larger predators. There are approximately 60 species of minnows, shiners and similar in Indiana. The only minnow recommended for stocking in ponds is the Fathead Minnow. These can be especially useful to kick-start Largemouth Bass growth after initial stocking. Golden Shiner and Gizzard Shad have high reproductive output and can overpopulate a pond. These species can also grow too large to be eaten by bass and cause even more problems. Lake Chubsucker may be sold as live bait or collected from streams, but can also cause problems in ponds.

Fathead Minnow (*Pimephales promelas*) have a small rounded body and a short head. They have small scales that appear "crowded" behind the head. Their color can be olive-brown to silvery-white. Some fish may have a dark horizontal line on their sides and/or a dark spot on their dorsal fin. They have 7 anal fin rays. Fathead Minnows reach about 4 inches in length.

Gizzard Shad (*Dorosoma cepedianum*) have a thin, silvery body, and a dark spot behind the head of smaller fish. They have 10-13 dorsal fin rays, with one long whip-like ray on the back of the dorsal fin. Their long anal fin has 25-36 rays. Gizzard Shad have a downturned mouth and feed on detritus and zooplankton. Gizzard Shad can reach a size of 20 inches and 3.5 pounds.

Golden Shiner (*Notemigonus crysoleucas*) have a thin body, which can be golden to olive-silver in color. Their fins can be golden-orange and even red. Golden Shiner have relatively small scales, 7-9 dorsal fin rays and 8-19 anal fin rays. They have an upturned mouth and feed on zooplankton in the water column. Golden Shiner can reach 12 inches in size.

Lake Chubsucker (*Erimyzon sucetta*) are one of many minnow-like species in Indiana. They have a downturned mouth, a single dorsal fin with 10-13 rays, and a dark horizontal line along each side. Lake Chubsucker (and other Chubs) are often sold as live bait or collected from natural streams. If added to ponds, they may introduce disease or cause other population problems, such as overcrowding and competition.



Acknowledgments

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Courtesy of *Bob Rode*

Hybrid Striped Bass (from *Sport Fish*)
Courtesy of *Scott Koenigbauer*

Grass Carp (from *Carp, Suckers & Buffalo*)
Courtesy of *Mitchell Zischke*

Gizzard Shad (from *Minnows & Shiners*)
Courtesy of *Reuben Goforth*

Lake Chubsucker (from *Minnows & Shiners*)
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