

2024 Cayuga County Soil & Water Conservation District Fish Species Available

(Information provided by the NYS Department of Conservation website)

Fathead Minnow

Fathead minnows are small in size, averaging two to three inches in length. They are sturdy, heavy bodied fish with small mouths and a lateral line that stops under the dorsal fin. They are generally dull in color, with dark bodies and a slight brass tint on the sides.

With the exception of Long Island, fathead minnows are found in waters across New York State. They prefer ponds and slow moving water in streams. They can tolerate muddy water, and are occasionally found in roadside ditches. In addition, fathead minnows can tolerate water with salt in it.

While fathead minnows do use nests during spawning, their nests differ from other minnow species. Fathead minnows deposit their eggs on the undersides of logs, roots, rocks, lily pads and even inside beer cans. Several females deposit eggs in the same nest. After spawning, males chase away the females and then remain with and guard the nest until the eggs hatch. Because of their small size, fathead minnows are an important food item for a number of fish and wildlife species. Fishermen also find fathead minnows important. These fish are raised commercially for bait and for stocking in farm ponds as forage for game fish. Fathead minnows are also the most commonly used fish in toxicity studies.

Black Crappie

The black crappie is common in waters across New York State. It is usually found in clear, quiet waters of lakes, ponds, and larger rivers where there is abundant vegetation.

Black crappies average eight to twelve inches in length and are easily recognized by their highly compressed, diamond shaped bodies. They are dark green to golden brown in color, with mottled patches of dark scales.

Typical sunfish, black crappies spawn from May to July. The nests are built in ten to 24 inches of water in sand or gravel areas with some vegetation. Most nests are kept five to six feet apart. Black crappies provide good fishing opportunities. Usually occurring in large schools, they can provide fast and furious action for anglers. This is especially true in early to mid-spring when large numbers gather prior to spawning. And, like the rest of the sunfish family, black crappies make a delicious meal.

Yellow Perch

Yellow perch are important panfish in New York State. They are relatively easy to catch and are often one of the first fish caught by youngsters and beginners.

While yellow perch are found throughout the State in a variety of habitats, they prefer shallow, weedy protected sections of rivers, lakes, and ponds. Ranging in length from six to 12 inches, yellow perch are easily distinguished from other perch by the five to nine black vertical bars on their yellow sides.

Yellow perch spawn in April or May. Adults migrate into shallow weedy sections and randomly release long strings (up to seven feet) of transparent eggs. The egg masses eventually adhere to submerged vegetation, where they remain until hatching.

Yellow perch are most active in the morning and evening. They eat a variety of organisms, including aquatic insects, crayfish, and fish.

Yellow perch are very tasty and are popular year-round, especially with ice fishermen. When handling the fish, care should be taken to avoid their sharp spines and sharp gill plates.

Bluegill

Bluegills are generally found in slow moving or standing water where there is plenty of vegetation or other shelter. They are a pretty fish, green to brown on their backs and upper sides shading into brown, orange, or pink with traces of vertical bars along their bottom sides. The breast is yellow to copper-orange, and the sides of their heads have metallic blue and green overtones. The large, square-shaped, blue black gill flap and conspicuous dark blotch on the back of the soft-rayed portion of their dorsal fins distinguishes bluegills from their close relatives, the pumpkinseed. Bluegills average four to ten inches in length.

Like other true sunfish, the bluegill eats mostly insects and crustaceans. But unlike its cousins, the bluegill will also consume some plant material.

Bluegills spawn from May to July. Nests are usually built close to shore in firm sand or mud in two and one-half feet of water. Bluegills often nest in colonies with nests sometimes right next to each other. Some male bluegills have been known to raise two or three broods during one spawning season.

Bluegills fight hard when hooked, providing good sport for anglers. They bite just about any bait, artificial fly, or small lure dropped in the water. Because of these qualities, they are frequently stocked in farm ponds and other impoundments.

Largemouth Bass

Largemouth bass are another major sportfish in New York State. While they are not the spectacular fighters their cousins the smallmouth are, largemouths can be just as challenging and exciting to land because of the habitat they prefer.

Largemouths thrive best in warm, shallow, well-vegetated areas of ponds and sluggish streams. They are rather solitary fish, preferring to stay among dense aquatic vegetation or close to submerged cover, such as stumps, logs, or dock pilings.

The largemouth bass is the largest member of the sunfish family and has been known to reach weights in excess of ten pounds. It closely resembles the smallmouth, but differs by its long upper jaw which extends well beyond the eye, and its pronounced wide, solid black lateral band. In addition, the largemouth is more of a dark green color than the smallmouth.

Largemouth bass are primarily fish-eating predators. They lie in wait in the cover of weeds and ambush prey as it swims by. Crayfish, frogs, and small animals, such as mice, are also eaten by this large sunfish.

Like smallmouths, largemouths are also late spring to midsummer spawners. Largemouth nests are less elaborate than smallmouth nests. Nests are built near protective cover in a variety of bottom types and are usually located far apart from each other.

Largemouth bass are a popular gamefish with New York anglers. They can be taken in weedy, stumpy areas by still fishing or casting with live bait or a wide variety of lures, including plastic worms and surface plugs. Since largemouths can thrive in small, warmer waters where other game species do not, they play an important role in fishery management by providing a highly desirable fishery in these waters.

Grass Carp

Grass carp are one of the largest members of the minnow family, commonly reaching weights in excess of 25 pounds. Native to the rivers of eastern China and the Soviet Union, grass carp have the unique ability to eat and, therefore, control a wide variety of submergent plants. This behavior has led to grass carp being introduced into waters all over the world for aquatic weed control purposes.

Although grass carp are related to both common carp and goldfish, they differ in appearance and feeding habits. Grass carp lack barbels and spinney dorsal and anal fin rays. In addition, grass carp feed strictly by grazing aquatic vegetation and do not share the bottom feeding habits typical of common carp and goldfish.

Grass carp can be used as a biological form of aquatic weed control. While fertile (able to reproduce) grass carp have been used in many countries, the majority of states in the U.S. (including New York State) prohibit its introduction due to concerns about the fish reproducing and possibly destroying valuable wetland communities. In 1983, creation of a sterile (called triploid) grass carp eliminated reproduction concerns. New York State now allows the use of triploid grass carp on a limited permit basis.

Like any other weed control method, the use of triploid grass carp is effective in some situations and not effective in others. Triploid grass carp are most effective when used in small (less than five acres) weed-choked waters where low numbers of these fish can be stocked. DEC monitors the use of triploid grass carp by a stocking permit program administered through the Bureau of Fisheries office.

It is prohibited to possess grass carp without a permit. Anglers who may by chance catch a grass carp should immediately return it to the water unharmed.