

North Carolina Sport Fish Profiles



Channel catfish

Scientific Name:

Ictalurus punctatus
(*Rafinesque*)

Other Names:

spotted catfish, silver catfish,
speckled catfish, forked-tail
catfish, fiddler



Illustration by Duane Raver

Identification:

The channel catfish has a deeply forked tail with black spots on its back and sides. Its top and sides vary from gray to slate-blue and are often olive with a yellow sheen. Its body is scaleless, and it has eight barbels (whiskers) around its mouth that serve as taste sensors for locating food. To distinguish between a channel catfish and a blue catfish, look at the anal fin. The anal fin of a channel catfish is round with 24 to 29 rays. The anal fin of a blue catfish has a straight outer edge and 30 to 36 rays.

Habitats and Habits:

Native to the Mississippi Basin, channel catfish have been introduced throughout the United States. Highly adaptable, they are found in ponds, streams, rivers, lakes and reservoirs throughout North Carolina. Channel catfish are an important part of the Commission's Community Fishing Program. Tens of thousands of channel catfish are grown in the agency's state hatcheries annually and stocked at various Community Fishing Program sites to provide angling opportunities in urban settings.

Young channel catfish feed mainly on plankton and aquatic insect larvae. As they grow older, they feed on aquatic invertebrates and small fish. Adults are omnivorous, eating plant material, insect larvae, crayfish, mollusks, small fish and even dead fish. They are bottom feeders and rely on taste buds on their skin and barbels to locate food.

Fishing Techniques:

Channel catfish feed mostly at night and are especially active from sunset to midnight. "Stink" baits (cut fish, chicken livers, cheese, shrimp, crayfish blood baits, etc.) are some of the best natural baits to use. Deep-diving crank baits fished slowly along the bottom, spoons and, occasionally, spinners are popular artificial lures. The best months to fish for channel catfish are April, May, September and October.

Good Places to Fish:

The Black, Cape Fear, Lumber, Neuse and Yadkin/Pee Dee rivers are good places to fish. Community Fishing Program sites are stocked periodically with harvestable-size channel catfish from April through September and offer some of the best catfishing in the state.

Other Information:

NCARP Minimum Requirements: 10 pounds or 30 inches.

State Record: 23 pounds, 4 ounces, City Lake in Rocky Mount, Sept. 1, 1970

World Record: 58 pounds from the Santee-Cooper Reservoir in S.C., July 7, 1964*

* Anglers provide information on their potential world-record catches directly to the International Game Fish Association, which maintains the world records for sport fishing.

N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission
www.ncwildlife.org/fishing
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