

REDEAR SUNFISH

Scientific Name:

Lepomis microlophus

Other Names:

shellcracker, stumpknocker, bream

Identification:

The Redear sunfish is a deep, slab-sided fish with pointed pectoral (side) fins. Its most distinguishing feature is a red or orange edge along the ear flap. With light green-to-gold sides speckled with red or orange flecks, the Redear has a yellowish-orange belly. Unlike Redbreast or Pumpkinseed sunfish, the Redear sunfish does not have blue lines on its cheeks. The Redear sunfish grows faster and larger than other sunfish, often reaching 2 pounds with 1-plus pound fish common.



Habitats and Habits:

Redear sunfish are native to the middle and lower Mississippi River Basin and the Atlantic slope from the central Carolinas to Florida. Redears are found throughout North Carolina, except for cold mountain waters. Redears are opportunistic feeders, foraging mostly on aquatic clams and snails near aquatic vegetation. Snails and clams are crushed by grinding teeth in the redear's throat, hence their nickname "shellcracker." Redears also feed on midge larvae, mayfly and dragonfly nymphs, fish eggs and crayfish.

Fishing Techniques:

Redears rarely approach the surface to take flies or other artificial top baits. They are captured with natural bait, such as earthworms and grubs. They are caught most easily in early spring when they are concentrated on spawning beds. During this time, anglers should use natural baits, along with small spinners and flie.

Good Places to Fish:

Quality Redear sunfish are found throughout North Carolina's coastal rivers. In the northeastern Coastal Plain, the Roanoke, Chowan and Meherrin rivers contain 2-pound fish in many locations. In areas in the central Coastal Plain, such as the Tar River from Rocky Mount to Grimesland, trophy-sized redears can be found in large numbers. The Neuse River just upstream of New Bern provides many great opportunities to catch large Redear sunfish. In the southern Coastal Plain, the northeast Cape Fear River has quality-sized redears from Lane's Ferry to Castle Hayne. The Black River, flowing through Sampson and Pender counties, also has good numbers of quality-sized redears. The Piedmont has fewer opportunities to catch large Redear sunfish, but Lake Tillery, provides great action for decent Redear sunfish, as does Lake Holt in Granville County

Other Information:

NCARP Minimum Requirements: 1 pound or 11 inches

State Record: 4 pounds, 15 ounces from a private pond in Edgecombe County, May 19, 2008

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