

Introduction

Fish get their oxygen from the water through gills. Most have bodies that are covered by scales and they have a protective mucus layer. All except the most primitive fish move with fins. The body of a fish is divided into head, trunk, and tail. Body size and shape vary depending on where they live and what they eat.

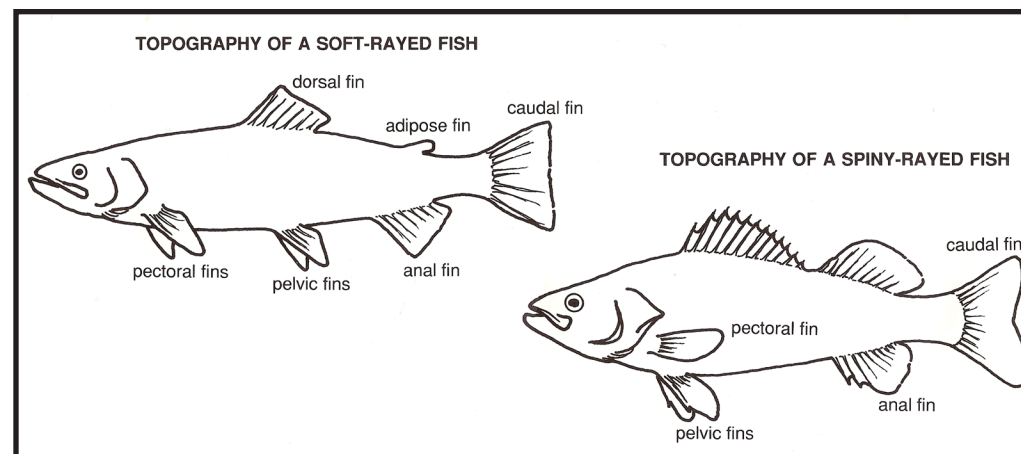
This pamphlet is an introductory guide to Iowa fish. For more information about Iowa fish, check out our website at www.iowadnr.gov/fishing.

A place to fish close to home, a weekly fishing report, trout stocking information and fishing opportunities for kids can be found at www.iowadnr.gov/fishing. For more fishing discussion, join the DNR on social media: [facebook.com/iowadnr](https://www.facebook.com/iowadnr); twitter.com/iowadnr; [pinterest.com/iowadnr](https://www.pinterest.com/iowadnr).



Illustrations

Credits: Duane Raver for the muskellunge illustrations; Pennsylvania Fish Commission for the fish topography illustrations; Maynard Reese for all other fish illustrations



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This information is available in alternative formats upon request by contacting the DNR at 515-725-8200. TYY users - contact Relay Iowa at 800-735-2942.

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Minnow Family

This is a very diverse family with 50 representatives in Iowa; most are small, less than 12 inches long as adults. Introduced species (carp, white amur, and goldfish) may reach large sizes. Native minnows are similar in appearance to suckers, but have fewer than 10 rays in the dorsal fin. Minnows have scaleless heads.

Common Carp

Cyprinus carpio

ID: gray to olive fading to gold on sides & yellow or white on belly; robust body compressed laterally with a long dorsal fin; conspicuous barbell on either side of mouth; large diamond-shaped scales **Foods:** all types of plant & vegetable material



Creek Chub

Semotilus atromaculatus



ID: olive to purplish back fading to silvery-white belly; lateral stripe from tip of snout to base of tail fin; stout body with broad, blunt head; small, flap-like barbell in groove in middle of upper jaw; very large mouth; wedge-shaped spot at base of tail & black spot in first 3 rays of dorsal fin **Foods:** insects & their larvae, other small aquatic animals

Fathead Minnow

Pimephales promelas



ID: dark olive above with coppery tinge behind head & along sides; sides silvery; belly white; back broad & flat in front of dorsal fin; dusky band or blotch in front & rear rays of dorsal fin **Foods:** microscopic plants, small insects & their larvae

Learn More About Iowa Fish/Fishing

www.iowadnr.gov/fishing

Iowa's Online Fishing Atlas

Shows contours for 150 county and state lakes along with 1,000 fish structure locations. Check it out to help you plan your next fishing trip.

How to Fish For...

Easy tricks on how to fish for the most popular species in Iowa.

Taking Kids Fishing

Simple tips to ensure kids have fun and want to go fishing again.

From Hookin' to Cookin'

Step-by-step tips to help you gear up and then clean and cook the fish you catch.



Channel Catfish

Ictalurus punctatus



ID: silvery-gray above fading to lighter shades on the belly; body marked with dark spots (may be obscure in adults); tail fin deeply forked **Foods:** fish, aquatic invertebrates, plant material

Black Bullhead

Ictalurus melas



ID: dark olive to black with a belly of white to bright yellow; slightly notched tail fin with light band at base **Foods:** any available animal or plant materials

Sunfish Family

There are 12 representatives in Iowa. The bodies of sunfish are deeply compressed laterally and the spiny and soft portions of the dorsal fin are connected.

Smallmouth Bass

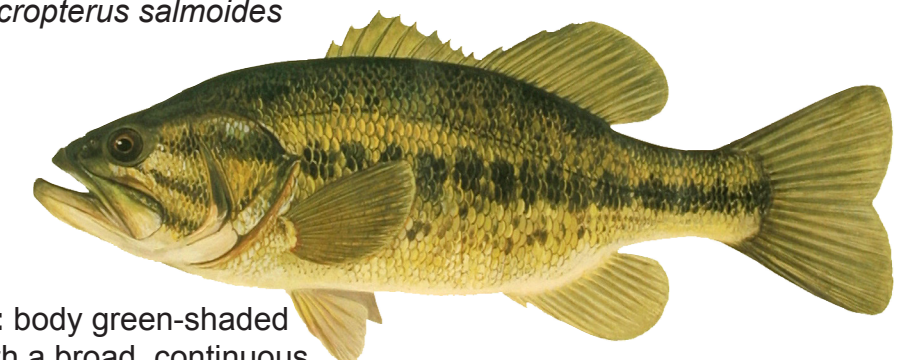
Micropterus dolomieu



ID: golden green sides & back with faint, wavy olive blotches along the sides; 5 olive-green bars radiate back from the red eye & 1 radiates forward; spiny & soft portions of dorsal fin broadly connected **Foods:** fish, crustaceans, larger insects

Largemouth Bass

Micropterus salmoides



ID: body green-shaded with a broad, continuous dark stripe along each side; belly white to yellowish; dorsal fin almost completely separated between spiny & soft portion & lower jaw extends past the gold-colored eye **Foods:** fish, frogs, crayfish, aquatic insects

Catfish Family

Ten species inhabit Iowa's waters. Catfish have rounded, scaleless bodies with flattened bellies. They are further distinguished from other groups by the eight barbells or "whiskers" around their mouths. Strong, sharp spines are located at the insertion of the dorsal and pectoral fins.

Flathead Catfish

Pylodictus olivaris



ID: dark to olive brown with dark brownish mottlings on sides; short anal fin; square or slightly notched tail fin; head broad & flat **Foods:** variety of aquatic animals

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Iowa Fish
ID Guide

Black Crappie

Pomoxis nigromaculatus



ID: silvery with a dark back & green or blackish mottling on sides; “hump-backed” with 7-8 spines in the dorsal fin **Foods:** small fish, aquatic insects & their larvae

White Crappie

Pomoxis annularis



ID: silvery body that shades to green or brown on the back; several (7-9) dark vertical bars on each side & a whitish belly; “hump-backed” with 6 spines in the dorsal fin **Foods:** small fish, aquatic insects

Drum Family

Freshwater Drum

Aplodinotus grunniens



ID: deep bodied, silvery; head & body slope steeply up from the snout & dorsal fin; long dorsal fin divided into two lobes **Foods:** fish, crayfish, immature insects

Muskellunge

Esox masquinongy



ID: olive to dark gray above, sides lighter with dark spots or bars; upper 1/2 of cheeks & opercle lightly scaled, lower 1/2 of both scaleless **Foods:** mostly fish

Bluegill

Lepomis macrochirus



ID: dark olive-green back & sides yellow or reddish orange below; dark vertical bars usually present on sides; chin & gill covers bright blue; black, flexible tip at rear of gill cover **Foods:** aquatic insects, other small aquatic invertebrates

Green Sunfish

Lepomis cyanellus



ID: bluish green back & sides with white to light yellow belly; sides of the head mottled with emerald & yellow streaks; black ear flap has a whitish or yellowish margin; leading edges of the dorsal, anal, & caudal fins typically whitish or yellow-orange **Foods:** aquatic insects, small fish, & crayfish

Primitive Fishes

Paddlefish

Polyodon spathula



ID: slate-colored above, lighter below; greatly elongated snout, long gill covers & shark-like mouth; scaleless with a skeleton of cartilage **Foods:** zooplankton, insect larvae

Trout Family

Three members of the trout family inhabit coldwater streams of northeast Iowa. Trout are covered by tiny scales and their fins have no spines. They have an adipose fin on the back behind the dorsal fin.

Brook Trout

Salvelinus fontinalis



ID: back with lighter “worm-like” markings on darker background; vivid white borders on front edge of lower fins; during fall spawning season, adult males develop vivid red, white & black markings on lower sides & belly, along with yellow, red & blue spots on sides **Foods:** insects & other small aquatic life

Perch Family

Members of the perch family have rather slender, elongated bodies. The dorsal fin is distinctly separated into an anterior spiny portion and a posterior soft portion. They have a large bone on the gill cover that ends in a flat spine.

Johnny Darter

Etheostoma nigrum



ID: olive with numerous “w-shaped” markings along sides; one of 16 species in Iowa **Foods:** chironomids, tiny crustaceans, small insect larvae

Shovelnose Sturgeon

Scaphirhynchus platyrhynchus



ID: buff or olive-drab above, lighter below; covered by heavy, plate-like scales; flattened snout; long, threadlike filament attached to top lobe of tail fin (often missing) **Foods:** insect larvae, small mollusks, & other bottom-dwelling organisms

Shortnose Gar

Lepisosteus platostomus



ID: olive green above to whitish below; diamond-shaped scales; long, beak-like snout with sharp teeth, dorsal fin far back on body **Foods:** smaller fish, insect larvae, crayfish

Rainbow Trout

Oncorhynchus mykiss



ID: prominent pink-red horizontal stripe along each side; sides, backs, dorsal & caudal fins marked with many small black spots **Foods:** aquatic insects & their larvae, small mollusks & fish

Brown Trout

Salmo trutta



ID: brownish, shading to green & yellow; large dark spots on sides surrounded by a yellow “halo” **Foods:** aquatic insects & their larvae, other aquatic life

Yellow Perch

Perca flavescens



ID: sides bright yellow to brassy green with 7 dark vertical bars; lighter belly & dark olive green back **Foods:** small fishes, aquatic insects, small crayfish, snails

Walleye

Stizostedion vitreum



ID: brassy olive buff above, white below; large, white glossy eyes & sharp teeth; caudal fin has white tip on lower lobes **Foods:** mostly fish; other aquatic animals

Pike Family

Members have rounded bodies with flattened heads and duckbill shaped jaws lined with large, sharp teeth. The dorsal fin is far back on the body. They are voracious predators.

Northern Pike

Esox lucius



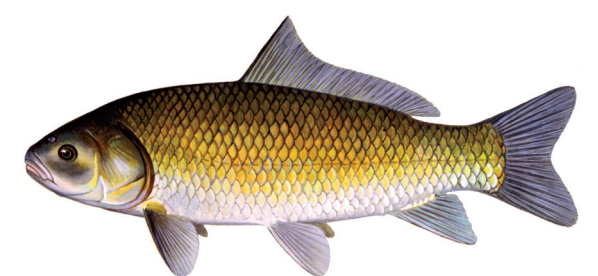
ID: usually bluish-green to gray on back with irregular rows of light yellow or gold spots on sides (color extremely variable); cheek fully scaled, lower 1/2 of opercle scaleless **Foods:** mostly fish as adults

Sucker Family

Sixteen species have been collected from Iowa waters, but several listed as threatened or extirpated. The characteristic mouth is on the underside of the head and surrounded by fleshy lips. The head is scaleless and the fins lack rays.

Bigmouth Buffalo

Ictiobus cyprinellus



ID: bluish-green back shading to coppery-blue sides & light bluish-gray belly; deeply rounded body with large head & mouth; dorsal fin sickle-shaped **Foods:** plankton, copepods, cladocerans