

# North Carolina Sport Fish Profiles



## Bowfin

### Scientific Name:

*Amia calva*

### Other Common Names:

dogfish, mudfish, grindle,  
blackfish



*Illustration by Duane Raver*

### Identification:

A close relative of the gar, the bowfin is a stout-bodied fish with a long, undulating dorsal fin that covers more than half the length of its body. The tail fin is rounded, and adult males have a very prominent black spot with an orange halo at the upper base of the tail. The dorsal and tail fins are light olive with dark mottling. Some bowfin have barbel-like nostrils that project from the head. In addition to gills, the bowfin has a modified air bladder that enables it to use air by gulping at the water's surface. This feature allows it to thrive in North Carolina's back waters and swamps that are often very low in oxygen.

A native fish in North Carolina waters, they are often mistaken for the exotic northern snakehead fish.

### Habitats and Habits:

Bowfin live in lakes and large slow-moving rivers with muddy bottoms and dense vegetation. They tolerate silt and mud and can survive in warm, stagnant water by breathing air. This ability to breathe air allows bowfins to burrow in mud to survive drought. Young bowfin eat phytoplankton, zooplankton and insects. The adults eat fish, crayfish, small rodents, snakes, turtles and leeches.

### Fishing Techniques:

Anglers can catch bowfin using almost any standard bass bait from shiners to topwater plugs to plastic worms. Their value as a food fish is poor so anglers typically do not target them. Anglers catch them occasionally when fishing for crappie, perch or catfish.

### Good Places to Fish:

Anglers wishing to catch bowfin should fish the coastal rivers of North Carolina. Shallow habitats with muddy bottoms and abundant vegetation are good places. Smaller tributaries draining swampy areas also hold numerous bowfin, as do several mill ponds in the Coastal region.

### Other Information:

NCARP Minimum Requirements: 10 pounds or 22 inches

State Record: 17 lbs., 15 oz., from the Black River, June 21, 1997

World Record: 21 lbs., 8 oz., from Forest Lake, Florence, S.C., Jan. 29, 1980\*

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