

BLUE CATFISH

Scientific Name:

Ictalurus furcatus

Other Names:

Arkansas cat, fork-tailed catfish, humpback, chucklehead

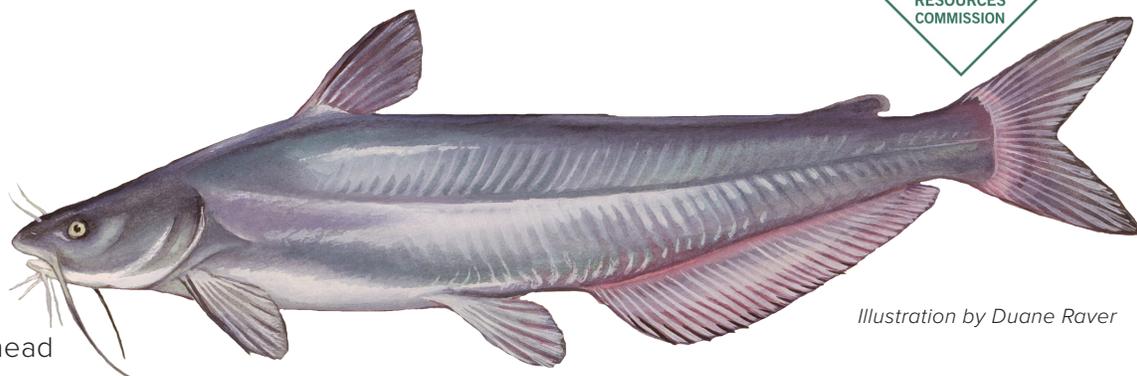


Illustration by Duane Raver

Identification:

The Blue Catfish typically has a bluish-gray body above, fading to white on its sides and belly. Small individuals are sometimes mistaken for Channel Catfish, but Blue Catfish have no spots. To distinguish between a Blue Catfish and a Channel Catfish, look at the anal fin. The anal fin of a Blue Catfish has a straight outer edge and 30 to 36 rays. The anal fin of a Channel Catfish is round with 24 to 29 rays.

Habitats and Habits:

Blue Catfish, like Flathead Catfish, are native to the Mississippi River Basin. They have been introduced to many river basins that flow to the Atlantic Ocean, such as the Cape Fear and Catawba rivers in North Carolina. They are most common in large rivers, where they often favor faster currents than other catfish. Blue Catfish are scavengers, feeding primarily on or near the bottom.

They eat aquatic insects, crayfish, fish, freshwater clams and are also found in lakes, where they spend much of the time in open water searching for shad and other prey fish. Like Flathead Catfish, Blue Catfish have been stocked in many areas outside of their native range. Implications from these stockings are not well known, but problems could arise due to competition with other game fish species, such as Striped Bass, for shad and other prey species. Blue Catfish should not be moved from one waterbody to another.

Fishing Techniques:

Trot lines and set hooks baited with cut fish work well. Experienced hook-and-line anglers prefer cut gizzard shad above all other baits. Live fish, cut bait, crayfish, clams and shrimp are often used. Like Channel Catfish, Blue Catfish will bite stink baits and chicken livers.

Good Places to Fish:

The Cape Fear River, impoundments of the Yadkin River, and Lake Norman are popular fishing spots. Lake Gaston has produced the last several state records for Blue Catfish.

Other Information:

NCARP Minimum Requirements: 30 pounds or 41 inches

State Record: 121 lbs., .9 ounces from Lake Gaston, July 5, 2020

Last updated 2021