

North Carolina Sport Fish Profiles



Bullhead catfish (brown bullhead pictured)

Scientific Name:
Ameiurus species

Other Common Names:
horned pout, creek cat, mudcat

Identification:

In North Carolina, there are five species of catfish listed as bullheads—the brown (pictured above), yellow, black, flat and snail bullhead. Although these catfish are difficult to identify by species, they are easily separated from other catfish by their lack of a forked tail. Color varies depending on species, but all are characterized by a robust, squatty appearance. Fish experts consider the white catfish a bullhead as well, although anglers can identify it by its white appearance and moderately forked tail.



Illustration by Duane Raver

Habitats and Habits:

Bullhead catfish are extremely abundant in many North Carolina streams, rivers, ponds and lakes. They tolerate a wide variety of habitats, including very muddy water and even low oxygen levels. Although their numbers can be extremely high in many bodies of water, they usually don't get the attention of other catfish species because of their smaller size. However, they make excellent table fare and should not be overlooked, especially for anyone that enjoys easy, relaxing fishing.

Fishing Techniques:

Bullhead catfish can be caught by many of the same methods used for other catfish. Worms, minnows, scented baits and hellgrammites fished on or near the bottom work well. Henry David Thoreau probably put it the best when he said, "they will take any kind of bait, from angleworms to a piece of tomato can."

Good Places to Fish:

Practically all of the lakes, rivers and streams in the Piedmont and Coastal Plain contain bullhead catfish. The Yadkin River from W. Kerr Scott Reservoir downstream to Idols Dam in Winston Salem holds excellent numbers. Densities below Idols Dam on the Yadkin River are low, probably because of the introduction of flathead catfish. Good bullhead fishing is often not found in rivers and lakes that have flathead catfish since flatheads favor bullhead catfish as food.

Other Information:

NCARP Minimum Requirements (any species): 2 pounds or 15 inches

State Record: Brown bullhead, 3 lbs., 12 oz., from Buck Hall Creek in Duplin County, April 26, 1997