



# Roanoke Hogsucker

*North Carolina Wildlife Profiles*



## Roanoke Hogsucker *Hypentelium roanokense*

The Roanoke hogsucker is often confused with its close relative the northern hogsucker. They are similar in appearance, and both species belong to the sucker family, *Catostomidae*. This large family consists of many subgroups. The hogsuckers belong to the *Moxostoma* group of the *Moxostomatini* tribe. Although hogsuckers are not considered sportfish, many anglers enjoy the fight put up by these somewhat large stream fish. And streams with healthy populations of hogsuckers typically contain healthy populations of bass. Part of the hogsucker's name comes from its ability to attach to a rock or shell with its sucker-like mouth to avoid being swept downstream.

### Description

The Roanoke hogsucker, like the northern hogsucker, is a robust fish with a large, squarish head and large, protruding lips. The head is often concave between the eyes, and the body is cylindrical with dark saddles. The Roanoke hogsucker is generally smaller than the Northern hogsucker, reaching a maximum of just over 6 in. in total length. Adults generally reach 3 to 6 in. in length. The Roanoke hogsucker can also be distinguished from the northern sucker by the following characteristics:

- Distinct light horizontal lines on the sides and back
- Poorly developed darkish saddles between its head and dorsal fin
- A lateral line with approximately 41 scales
- Approximately 31 pectoral fin rays
- Lips that are papillose (covered with tiny protuberances) on the outer surface and semiplicate (partly covered with fan-like folds) on the inner surfaces.

### History and Status

Roanoke hogsuckers are considered nongame fish, which means they are not regulated as fish that people catch to eat. Native to Virginia and North Carolina, the species is considered "significantly rare" by the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program because of its limited distribution and scarcity. In contrast, populations of the northern hogsucker are common and widespread.

### Habitat and Habits

The Roanoke hogsucker is associated with cold-to-warmwater streams having high currents including streams often associated with high-gradient landscapes. It is well-adapted to living on stream bottoms in fast-flowing waters. This species commonly occurs in streams with rocky bottom layers or substrates, but it is also found on sand substrates and mixed substrates including

*For all of you anglers out there,  
streams with hogsuckers  
in them usually have bass!*



### Range and Distribution

The sucker family is widespread throughout North America, but the Roanoke hogsucker has a limited distribution. It occurs only in the Dan River subdrainage of the upper and middle Roanoke River basin, which includes counties in Virginia and North Carolina (Caswell, Stokes and Rockingham counties). Its relative, the northern hogsucker, occurs in the same areas as well as in the Blue Ridge province of western North Carolina, in the upper Neuse and Tar River basins of the state and in other states as well.

### Range Map



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some silt. The Roanoke hogsucker can also be found in riffles, runs and pools, often with overhanging rock ledges or banks.

Common food items include aquatic insects (mostly fly larvae) and some algae and detritus—decaying organic matter. Males mature between 1 and 2 years of age, whereas females typically mature and spawn at 2 to 3 years of age. Females apparently live longer, reaching 4 to 5 years; males reach only 3 to 4 years of age. Little is known about this species' breeding habits but it is known to reproduce during early spring (March through May) in Virginia.

## People Interactions

Many stream anglers are familiar with hogsuckers. They are well-camouflaged and, when surprised, may dart away and cause anglers to lose footing. Additionally, they may take bait when they run and thus provide a good recreational fishing experience. Protecting water quality and habitat in the Dan River drainage basin is the best way to ensure the stability of the Roanoke hogsucker.

## Wild Facts

### Classification

Class: Actinopterygii (rayfinned fishes)

Order: Cypriniformes

### Average Length

2.7 to 6.3 in.

### Food

Insect larvae, crustaceans and low vegetation encrusted on rocks

### Spawning

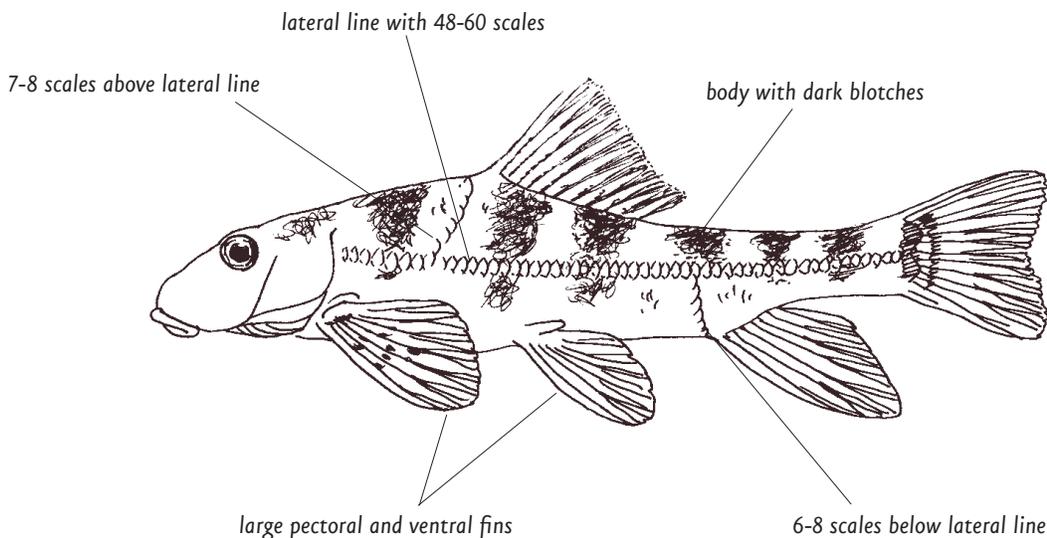
Early to mid-spring. Little is known about the spawning habits of this species.

### Young

Males mature in 1 year but often require 2 years, and the female matures in 3 years.

### Life Expectancy

4 years for males; 5 for females

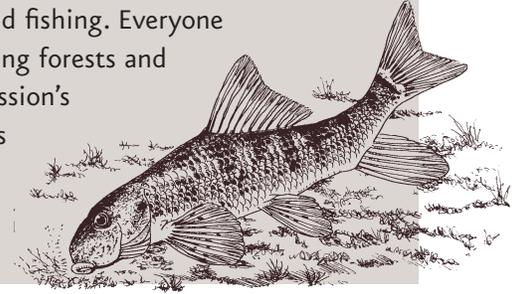


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## NCWRC Interaction

The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission routinely monitors and tracks many endangered, threatened fishes, and rare freshwater mussels, crayfish and snails. Many of these creatures are important to the overall functioning of the ecosystem, and their absence from the rivers are indicators of bad water quality. The Dan River and its streams are home to quite a few rare creatures in peril, but biologists do not know enough about many of these creatures. The Wildlife Resources Commission is committed to protecting, monitoring and researching aquatic resources, not only for the benefit of the creatures, but also for people. Healthy streams with a variety of organisms, means healthy waters for swimming, drinking and fishing. Everyone can help protect the rivers by joining a local watershed organization, protecting forests and buffers alongside streams on private property, and by donating to the Commission's Wildlife Diversity Program (<http://www.ncwildlife.org/give.htm>). These funds help the Commission protect water and land resources, not only for animals but for you, too.



## Q&A

### 1. What do fishermen enjoy most about catching a Roanoke Hogsucker?

They put up quite a fight when caught.

### 2. Since the Roanoke Hogsucker is considered “significantly rare” by the North Carolina Natural Heritage group, why do fishermen catch them?

Streams that contain healthy populations of hogsuckers usually contain bass, which is a popular gamefish. The hogsucker is caught by accident and fishermen are encouraged to release them back into the water alive.

### 3. Where does the Carolina hogsucker occur most frequently?

This species has a limited distribution and occurs most frequently in the Dan River subdrainage areas, Roanoke River.

### 4. What is the most interesting thing about the appearance of the Roanoke hogsucker?

It has lips covered with tiny proturbances and looks like it is pouting.

### 5. What can we do to ensure the continued stability of the Roanoke hogsucker?

Protect water quality and habitat in the Dan River drainage area.

## References

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## Credits

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