

black bullhead *Ameiurus melas*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Osteichthyes

Order: Siluriformes

Family: Ictaluridae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The black bullhead has an average life span of four years. The average weight is one-half to one pound. Four pairs of black barbels (whiskerlike projections) are present around the mouth. This fish lacks scales. An adipose fin is located near the tail fin. A spine at the front of the dorsal and pectoral fins aids in protection. The upper jaw sticks out past the lower jaw or is nearly equal with it. The body is olive or brown on the back, green-gold on the sides and yellow or white on the belly. The tail fin has a small notch, but it is definitely not forked.

BEHAVIORS

The black bullhead lives in creeks, rivers, ponds, impoundments, oxbow lakes and swamps that have a silt bottom, turbid water and not much current. This fish is active at night. It reaches maturity at ages one to three years. Spawning in May or June, the female deposits 1,600 to 6,800 eggs in a nest fanned out on the bottom, often under logs or other objects. One of the parent fish remains with the eggs until hatching to keep predators away and to use the fins to "fan" fresh water over them. Eggs hatch in seven to 10 days. The adult remains with the hatchlings until they are about one inch long. The black bullhead feeds on the bottom, eating both plant and animal materials.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

lakes, ponds and reservoirs; rivers and streams; swamps

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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