

bowfin

Amia calva

FEATURES

The average weight for a bowfin is two pounds, and the average length is 15 to 27 inches. It may live for about 10 years. Small barbels (whiskerlike projections) are present on the upper lip. There is a large, dark spot on the upper tail fin. The body is long and cylindrical with the dorsal fin extending more than half the length of the back. The large mouth has many teeth. The pectoral, pelvic and tail fins are rounded. The dorsal and tail fins have black bands. A large, bony plate is present in the throat. The body is olive-green with a yellow or pale-green belly. The breeding male becomes very colorful. The head does not have scales, and the fins do not have spines.

BEHAVIORS

The bowfin lives in swamps, sloughs and streams, preferring sluggish water with vegetation. This fish is active at night. It reaches maturity at two to three years of age. Spawning occurs from April through June. The female deposits 23,600 to 64,000 sticky eggs that hatch in eight to 10 days. Eggs are placed in a nest that is constructed by the male on the bottom. The male bites, rubs and fans silt and plants away from the site. These actions leave a bed of roots, sand or gravel for the eggs to attach to. The male guards the eggs and young until they reach about four inches in length. The bowfin eats fishes and crayfish.

TAXONOMY

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Actinopterygii
Order: Amiiformes
Family: Amiidae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

ILLINOIS RANGE



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adult

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juvenile

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Aquatic Habitats

rivers and streams; swamps

Woodland Habitats

southern Illinois lowlands

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none