

fathead minnow

Pimephales promelas

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Actinopterygii
Order: Cypriniformes
Family: Leuciscidae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

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male in breeding season

ILLINOIS RANGE



FEATURES

The fathead minnow grows to an average of one and one-half to three inches in length. It lives about three years. It has a blunt, rounded snout and short, rounded fins. Its body surface in front of the dorsal fin is broad and flat and contains scales that are smaller than those on the other parts of the fish. A dark stripe is present in the middle of the brown or yellow-green back. The sides are silvery, often with a dark stripe. The belly is silver-white. The breeding male is black with a broad, yellow bar around the body behind the head and another beneath the dorsal fin. Large tubercles (bumps) develop on his chin and snout.

BEHAVIORS

The fathead minnow lives in streams of all sizes but is most abundant in small, intermittent prairie creeks. This fish is tolerant of high temperature, turbidity and low oxygen and is thus able to survive in small pools when the rest of its stream dries up. It lives in schools in midwater or near the bottom. Most fathead minnows mature in their second year. Spawning occurs May through early August. The female deposits as many as 12,000 eggs on submerged objects. The male remains with the eggs until they hatch. A female may spawn 12 or more times in a single summer. This fish eats algae, plant materials, aquatic insects and small crustaceans.

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Aquatic Habitats

rivers and streams

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none