

longear sunfish

Lepomis megalotis

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Actinopterygii
Order: Perciformes
Family: Centrarchidae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

FEATURES

The longear sunfish has a deep body that is compressed side to side. Its pectoral fins are rounded and short while the black flap on the gill cover is very long and white-edged. The body is green-blue on the sides and back and yellow or orange on the belly. The side of the head is green or light orange with blue markings. The breeding male has a bright red-orange belly. The typical longear sunfish is about six to seven inches in length.

BEHAVIORS

The longear sunfish lives in streams with clear, permanent flow and a sand or rock bottom. This fish spawns May through August. It nests in colonies over gravel. The male acknowledges an approaching female by swimming around her and displaying his bright belly. After the female deposits the eggs, and they are fertilized, the male chases the female from the nest. Several females may spawn in the same nest. The male remains with the nest until the eggs have hatched, and the young have abandoned it, a period of about two weeks. The longear sunfish follows turtles and suckers as they feed on the bottom, eating organisms that have been dislodged from the substrate. Its typical diet includes insects, fishes and crayfish. This fish will also feed on fish eggs from nests of its own and other sunfish species.

ILLINOIS RANGE



© Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2020. *Biodiversity of Illinois*.

Unless otherwise noted, photos and images © Illinois Department of Natural Resources.



adult





Aquatic Habitats

rivers and streams

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie Habitats

none