

redear sunfish *Lepomis microlophus*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Osteichthyes

Order: Perciformes

Family: Centrarchidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The redear sunfish may attain a length of nine inches. It has a short, black, ear flap with a red or orange spot and a light edge. The long, pointed, pectoral fins reach in front of the eyes when they are pushed forward. The back and sides are yellow-green or gold and have dark blotches. The belly is light yellow to yellow-orange. The fins are mostly clear. The breeding male is gold with dark pelvic fins. This fish may live for about six years.

BEHAVIORS

The redear sunfish may be found naturally in the southern one-half of Illinois, but it has been stocked in ponds and lakes throughout the state. This fish lives in ponds, swamps, lakes and rivers, particularly in areas with abundant plants and/or little current. The redear sunfish spawns in spring. Fish begin spawning when they are one year old. The nest is fanned out on the bottom in a colony of other redear nests. The nests are placed very close together, near aquatic plants, if possible. The male stays with the fertilized eggs, fanning them to increase oxygen flow and remove silt. Eggs hatch in six to 10 days. The young remain in the nest for about a week after hatching with the male guarding them. Once they leave the nest they are on their own. This fish primarily eats snails but will also take insect adults and immatures and crayfish.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; southern Illinois lowlands

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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