

PUMPKINSEED

Lepomis gibbosus



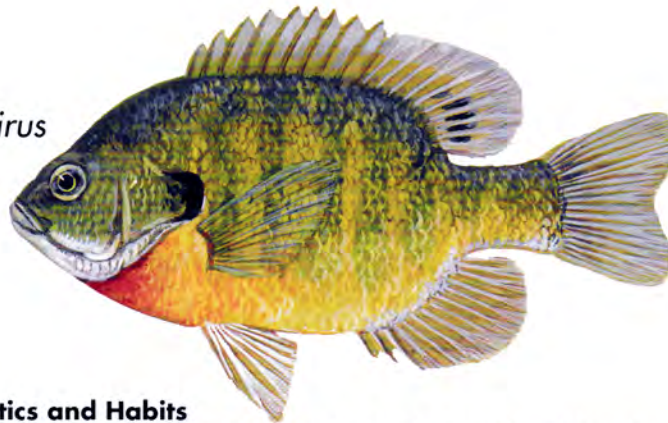
General Characteristics and Habits

The common sunfish, or pumpkinseed, seldom exceeds six to eight inches, but its general popularity more than makes up for any deficiency in size. It inhabits most Wisconsin lakes and warmwater streams. The common sunfish is compact and beautifully colored. Perhaps no other species of freshwater fish presents more variety of colors and markings than do the sunfishes. It is distinguished by the bright orange spot on the gill cover and sometimes, bright blue stripes on the cheek.

Like the bluegill, the common sunfish may provide considerable sport for the angler with a fly rod and a variety of flies. In the early part of ice fishing season, bluegills and sunfish are taken by using various larvae and grubs as bait. After about the first month of ice cover, sunfish seem to hibernate and are seldom taken until open water returns.

BLUEGILL

Lepomis macrochirus



General Characteristics and Habits

The bluegill is properly labeled a panfish for it is almost as deep as it is long. Length sometimes reaches 10 to 12 inches and weights up to 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ pounds. The bluegill inhabits weedy lakes and feeds on insects among the weeds. It has a small mouth that can suck in insects from the water surface with a resounding smack. These little fish are great fighters, offer excellent sport on light tackle, and are highly respected as a food fish.

Plain garden worms are the favorite bait for bluegills. They can also be caught on a number of different types of lures. Anglers can have fun fly-fishing with poppers, especially in spring and early summer when nests are concentrated in shallow water. Most large bluegills are taken in deep water during the summer months by drifting with the wind, using worms. Wintertime jigging in the weed beds with grubs or mousies on ice jigs also produces excellent results.

YELLOW PERCH

Perca flavescens



General Characteristics and Habits

Perch are found everywhere in the state and are very popular. While smaller perch are easily caught, it takes a specialist to consistently catch large ones. The perch eats almost anything, but prefers minnows, insect larvae, plankton and worms. They are tops for eating! Larger members of the species reach a length of over 14 inches in inland waters.

The perch is primarily a bottom feeder and has a slow, deliberate bite. Tackle may range from a simple handline to a fly rod in summer to a short, whippy jigging rod in winter. Since perch prefer cool waters, the best fishing is in deep water.

Perch move about in schools, often numbering in the hundreds. If one spot is unproductive after a few tries it's best to move to other spots until a school is located.

WHITE BASS

Morone chrysops



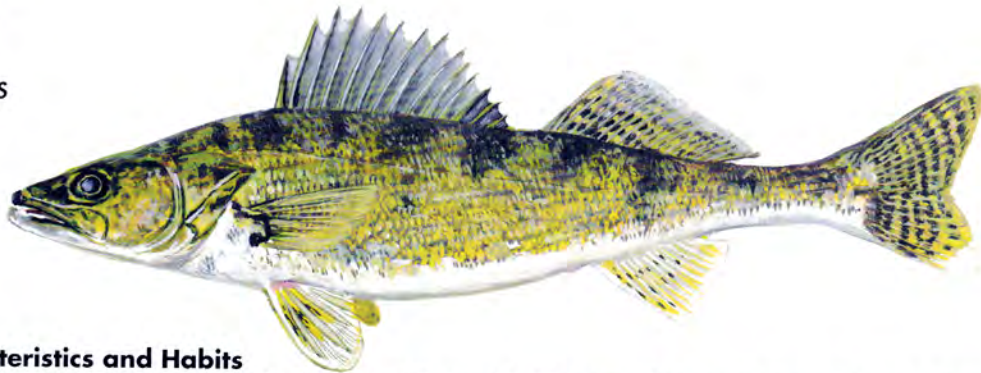
General Characteristics and Habits

White bass like the open water habitat of large lakes and rivers where they migrate to spawn in spring. Large schools of white bass are often seen near the surface when they find a large supply of animal plankton or minnows there. Anglers can fill their stringers when white bass are in such a feeding frenzy by casting minnows, bucktail streamers or spinners into the school.

This scrappy fish is fun to catch on gear ranging from ultra-light spinning tackle to long, whippy cane poles. During the Wolf River spawning run, anglers fish all night. Ravenously hungry white bass seem to be attracted to lantern light. White bass reach lengths of over 17 inches and are more abundant than their cousins, the yellow bass. They usually have seven thin, black stripes along their sides while the yellow bass have five or six wider, darker stripes and a body tinged with yellow.

WALLEYE

Sander vitreus



General Characteristics and Habits

The walleye, the largest member of the perch family, is one of the most highly prized of Wisconsin's game fishes. It is found in clear-water northern lakes as well as large, more turbid river and lake systems including the Mississippi, Wisconsin, Wolf and Fox. Thousands are caught each year during their spring spawning runs. Walleyes are primarily minnow feeders, but leeches, small bullheads, nightcrawlers and various small plugs, cast or trolled, are favorite baits. In clear waters, walleye usually stay in deeper areas during the day, moving into the shallows at night. In more turbid waters, they can be caught throughout the day.

The large, unusual eyes of the walleye are designed to help them easily find their prey. They grow to lengths over 37 inches and weights of up to 25 pounds. The most common catches are 14–17 inches with a weight of about two pounds. The walleye is most easily distinguished from its close relative, the sauger, by its golden color and by the black triangle of membrane on the back portion of the spiny dorsal, or top fin. The lower half of the tail fin has a distinguishing white tip that also helps in identification.

SAUGER

Stizostedion canadense



General Characteristics and Habits

The sauger closely resembles the walleye in body shape, but coloration tends more to shades of black, rust-brown and orange. The best distinguishing mark of the sauger is the "polka-dotted" dorsal, or top fin, which easily separates it from its cousin, the walleye.

Saugers are usually found in silty rivers and large lakes. In Wisconsin, they are found in the Lake Winnebago-Fox River system and the Mississippi River as well as its larger tributaries. Saugers are slower growing than walleyes and seldom reach more than 16 inches total length here in Wisconsin. Saugers are fished the same as walleyes with some of the best fishing occurring during the ice fishing season.

WHITE SUCKER

Catostomus commersoni



GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS AND HABITS

Found in lakes, ponds and both cold- and warmwater streams throughout the state, the white sucker is an abundant fish in Wisconsin. As its name suggests, the mouth is adapted for sucking. The white sucker has numerous small scales, a characteristic that can help distinguish it from the other suckers, which have coarser scales. The flesh is firm, white and lean.

White suckers may be taken by hook and line using live bait, such as worms or nightcrawlers and in certain areas by spear or dip net. Most sport fishing occurs on streams in deep holes, brush piles, or even in the main thread of the stream. Where permitted, dip netting and spearing are most productive during spring spawning migrations when large numbers of suckers group together.

CRAPPIE

Black Crappie

Pomoxis nigromaculatus



White Crappie

Pomoxis annularis



General Characteristics and Habits

Black and white crappie are very similar in appearance. The black crappie is speckled and has seven or eight distinct spines on its dorsal or top fin. The white crappie has more definite bands along the side of the body, is lighter, and has six spines on the dorsal fin.

Crappies are considered excellent game fish when taken on light tackle. Extreme care must be taken in landing these fish since their mouths are very tender. Although called a panfish like the bluegill, they may grow to a length of 18 inches.

Anglers specializing in catching crappies know that to be successful the bait must be kept in constant motion. The best baits are small minnows, small maribou covered jigs, plastic minnows or small streamer flies cast or trolled along the outer edges of weed beds. Crappies live in weed beds in deep water during the day and bite best in early morning or toward evening. In summer, with the abundance of small fish for feed, they are more difficult to catch. Small minnows are used as bait in winter.

LARGEMOUTH BASS

Micropterus salmoides



General Characteristics and Habits

The largemouth is one of Wisconsin's more common game fish. It inhabits weedy lakes, usually in association with the bluegill. This bass has a larger mouth than its cousin the smallmouth. It takes in food as it cruises among weeds or shallows. The largemouth grows to a weight of 11 pounds and a length of 24 inches, but the most common catches are 12–14 inches.

It will bite on almost anything. They can be caught on minnows, worms, or other live bait, plus poppers or streamers presented with a fly rod, or plugs thrown with a casting or spinning rod. Since the bass is usually associated with weeds, a weedless bait will often be necessary. Best fishing times are early morning and evening during the warm months. Bass like warm water and warm weather. Few bite in the winter.

SMALLMOUTH BASS

Micropterus dolomieu



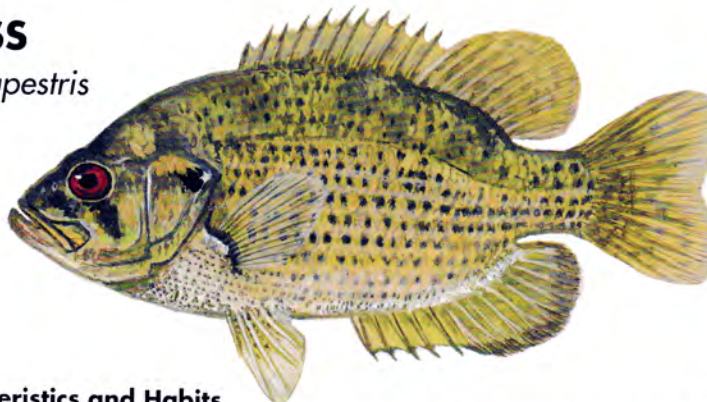
General Characteristics and Habits

Pound for pound the smallmouth is the scrappiest fish of all in Wisconsin. It resembles the largemouth bass, but the corner of its mouth does not extend past the eye. The red eye is another characteristic to look for in the smallmouth, but not always reliable. An average fish weighs between one and two pounds and will measure about 12 inches. It is usually associated with a rocky stream or lake environment where its favorite food, the crayfish, is abundant. Some of the best lake fishing takes place in June during and just after spawning, and in early fall.

Natural baits like hellgrammites, dragonfly larvae and crayfish are especially effective during early morning or late evening. Fish quietly. Light tackle is ideal and probably the best artificial baits are those used on the surface. Cast toward rocks or logs, keeping the rod tip up and the line taut.

ROCK BASS

Ambloplites rupestris



General Characteristics and Habits

Rock bass eat almost anything. The bronzy-colored panfish is most often associated with rocky habitats, but it is found in many other locations as well. It feeds on crayfish, minnows and insects. They grow to lengths of 12 inches and weights of up to 1³/₄ pounds. A more dingy-colored cousin found in Wisconsin is called the warmouth bass. The rock bass can be distinguished by its red eye, five to seven spines on the anal fin and rows of black dots across its body.

They may be caught in a variety of locations by anyone using any kind of bait. Worms, minnows and poppers work well. Rock bass have even been known to bite on a muskellunge plug.

MUSKELLUNGE

Esox masquinongy masquinongy



General Characteristics and Habits

The muskellunge is the premier game fish of Wisconsin's inland waters. A lean, hard-muscled fighter known for its leaping ability and ferocious demeanor, it reaches a maximum length of over five feet and a weight of almost 70 pounds. The muskellunge has the same body form as the northern pike and pickerel, but is the only member of the pike family to have dark vertical bars on a light-colored background that ranges from silvery green to light brown in older fish. When eggs of a female musky are fertilized by a male northern pike, a hybrid "tiger" musky results with light-colored vertical bars ("stripes") on a dark background. Wisconsin has produced more record-sized muskellunge than any other region.

Native to the northern lakes and rivers of North America, muskellunge is a solitary fish that lurks in weed beds or other protective cover. Anglers usually have the best luck fishing during the daytime. Large plugs, spoons and bucktails are the best artificial baits. Live baitfish, 10–12 inches long, are also good.

NORTHERN PIKE

Esox lucius



General Characteristics and Habits

The northern pike is the second largest of Wisconsin's predator fish. One of the most consistent marks for identification of this species is the pattern of its markings: a dark background marked by light-colored horizontal bars. Its tooth-lined mouth admirably equips this predator for a life spent lurking in weed beds hunting for unsuspecting prey. It is most common in lakes with marshy shorelines or incoming marshy streams that provide abundant spawning grounds.

Northern pike attain lengths of 50 inches; the Wisconsin record weighed 38 pounds. A small-sized cousin known as the grass pickerel is sometimes confused with the northern pike.

Unlike many common species of game fish, northern pike are most active when the water is cool. They are quite accommodating to anglers, biting best during the daylight hours. Being a predator, northern prefer live fish baits and wobbling spoons. Northerns are a favorite target of anglers who fish with tip-ups through the ice.

GRASS PICKEREL

Esox americanus vermiculatus



General Characteristics and Habits

Grass pickerel closely resemble northern pike although they are smaller and more slender. They can be identified by the scale pattern on the head and gill cover. Pickerel have both cheek and gill cover fully scaled, while northern pike have a half-scaled gill cover but a fully-scaled cheek.

Like northern pike, adult grass pickerel feed almost exclusively on fish and are found in shallow, weedy locations in lakes and rivers. They are most abundant in southeastern Wisconsin but are present in the Mississippi and Wisconsin rivers as well as scattered lakes in southern and northern areas of the state. The species seldom reaches more than ten inches in length in Wisconsin, although pickerel as large as 14 inches have been observed.

Because of their small size, grass pickerel are seldom pursued; however, anglers seeking northern pike or panfish often catch them. They bite best during daylight hours on live bait or fish lures.

CATFISH

Channel Catfish

Ictalurus punctatus



Flathead Catfish

Pilodictis olivaris



General Characteristics and Habits

Catfish are residents of rivers and lakes associated with rivers. Channel catfish have deeply forked tails and inhabit most streams in the southern half of the state. The huge flathead catfish has a rounded tail like a bullhead and is found in the Mississippi, Fox and Wolf rivers.

The catfish angler's stock-in-trade is pungent bait. Cheese trimmings, rolled oats and hot water are mixed into a paste and applied to large treble hooks. Aromatic additives such as anise or chicken blood are added to make a tempting morsel for hungry channel cats. A strong sense of smell makes them adept at locating edibles. Flathead catfish require live bait. Look for catfish in deep turbid pools with some current during the daytime and on muddy shoals at night. Always fish the bottom.

BULLHEADS

Black Bullhead

Ameiurus melas



Brown Bullhead

Ameiurus nebulosus



Yellow Bullhead

Ameiurus natalis



General Characteristics and Habits

There are three species of bullheads in Wisconsin waters—black, brown and yellow. All have a whiskered chin and sharp spines on their dorsal and pectoral fins. They live on the bottom and average about 10 inches in length.

Bullheads almost never bite during the winter months, but by spring, especially near their spawning time in late April, they're hungry and ready to bite. The preferred bait is a mass of nightcrawlers placed on the bottom of a shallow bay, especially at night. Be sure to have a hook extractor or a supply of extra hooks because the bait will invariably get swallowed. Skin the fish to prepare for eating; a special pair of pliers is available for this task.

BROWN TROUT

Salmo trutta



General Characteristics and Habits

Brown trout are an introduced species of European origin. They adapt to streams with a higher water temperature than our native brook trout. Extremely wary, they are found under overhanging banks, along rocky ledges and in deep pools.

Brown trout feed on a wide variety of insects, worms and other fishes. Early in the season, worms, spinners and wet flies prove most effective in taking brown trout. As the season progresses, anglers use dry flies, grasshoppers and minnows. The mayfly season, from about May 20 to June 20, is a prime dry fly period. Fishing upstream in the evening between 8 and 10 p.m. during the mayfly season, while big browns noisily inhale emerging mayflies, is a thrill few trout anglers ever forget. Try this technique any summer night using a big, light-colored fly.

RAINBOW TROUT

Oncorhynchus mykiss



General Characteristics and Habits

Native to the West Coast, rainbow trout were introduced to Wisconsin from the Rocky Mountains. Naturally reproducing populations have become established in a few spring-fed streams. Migratory runs exist in Lake Superior and Lake Michigan; these fish are referred to as "steelhead." Elsewhere, they are stocked in both streams and lakes. Rainbow trout feed principally on plankton and insects in inland waters, and forage fish in the Great Lakes. Rainbow may be confused with coho and Chinook salmon in the Great Lakes, but can be distinguished by the white interior mouth and numerous spots throughout the tail. The rosy lateral band that gives them their name is usually faint in steelhead, but is prominent on fish in inland waters.

Rainbow can be caught on a variety of baits. Stream anglers catch them on worms, flies or minnows. Migratory trout are most often caught on salmon eggs or metal lures. In lakes, nightcrawlers, worms and minnows work well. Fishing at night is highly productive. Anglers love the rainbow because it is less wary than the brown trout, prefers faster water, and puts up a spectacular fight.

BROOK TROUT

Salvelinus fontinalis



General Characteristics and Habits

This brightly colored fish is Wisconsin's only native stream trout and is closely related to the lake trout. Brook trout, or "speckled trout," feed on stream insect larvae and the emerging adults. This trout usually lies poised at the head of a pool or under logs or alders waiting for an emerging insect or angler's bait to drift overhead. Approach a stream cautiously as brookies are easily spooked. They spawn in fall, digging their nests (redds) in gravel close to spring-fed portions of a stream.

The brook trout angler loves the sport and rates this fish as a prize. Fishing is best during or after a short rain. Many anglers advocate fly-fishing, but the trout will readily take baits such as worms, minnows or spinners. Most brook trout caught average nine inches. The flesh is usually pink and delicious.

LAKE TROUT

Salvelinus namaycush



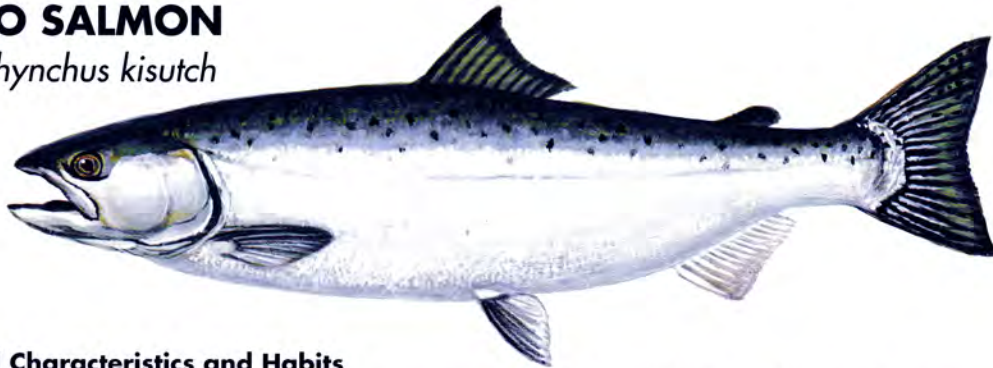
General Characteristics and Habits

Lake trout inhabit large, deep lakes and prefer water temperatures of about 45 °F. They are native to Trout and Black Oak lakes in Vilas County, and lakes Superior and Michigan. They are stocked in Big Green Lake in Green Lake County. Common foods of lake trout are cisco, smelt, emerald shiners, deep-water sculpin and other species common to cold, deep lakes. Lake trout spawn in the fall on rocky bars and are not known to school. They are slow-growing fish, maturing at about seven years of age at which time they are about 24 inches in length.

Lake trout come into shallow water in early spring and return to deep water in the summer. Fishing with live bait or casting in the shallows catches fish early in the season. Trolling deep works well, later. In winter, bobbing (using a handline) and fishing with cut bait are the preferred methods.

COHO SALMON

Oncorhynchus kisutch



General Characteristics and Habits

The coho or silver salmon is a West Coast native, introduced into the Great Lakes in 1966 to devour exotic alewives that were washing up on Lake Michigan beaches. Stocked coho thrive, but do not successfully reproduce on their own in Wisconsin waters; regular stocking programs support this sport fishery.

The silver color, indistinct spots, and whitish gums in a black mouth distinguish the coho salmon from the Chinook. Salmon are found almost anywhere in the open lake although they don't seem to frequent deep water.

After one year in a stream or hatchery, the fish seeks a life in the lake normally returning for spawning two years later. Coho ascend streams in the fall to spawn. As the fish concentrate in spawning streams, anglers experience spectacular fishing. Once spawning is finished, the adults die.

CHINOOK SALMON

Oncorhynchus tshawytscha



General Characteristics and Habits

The Chinook salmon looks much like the coho salmon; the major distinction is an even blacker mouth without a white line along the teeth.

This species is also known as the king salmon. It is one of the largest salmon species with specimens over 40 pounds caught in Wisconsin waters; ocean-run Chinook are easily double that weight. They were introduced into the Great Lakes in 1967 to clean up exotic alewives and produce trophy-fishing opportunities as a bonus. After two to four summers in the lake, they migrate up tributary streams to spawn in the fall, then die. They provide excellent open water fishing during the summer months and nearshore and tributary fishing in the fall.