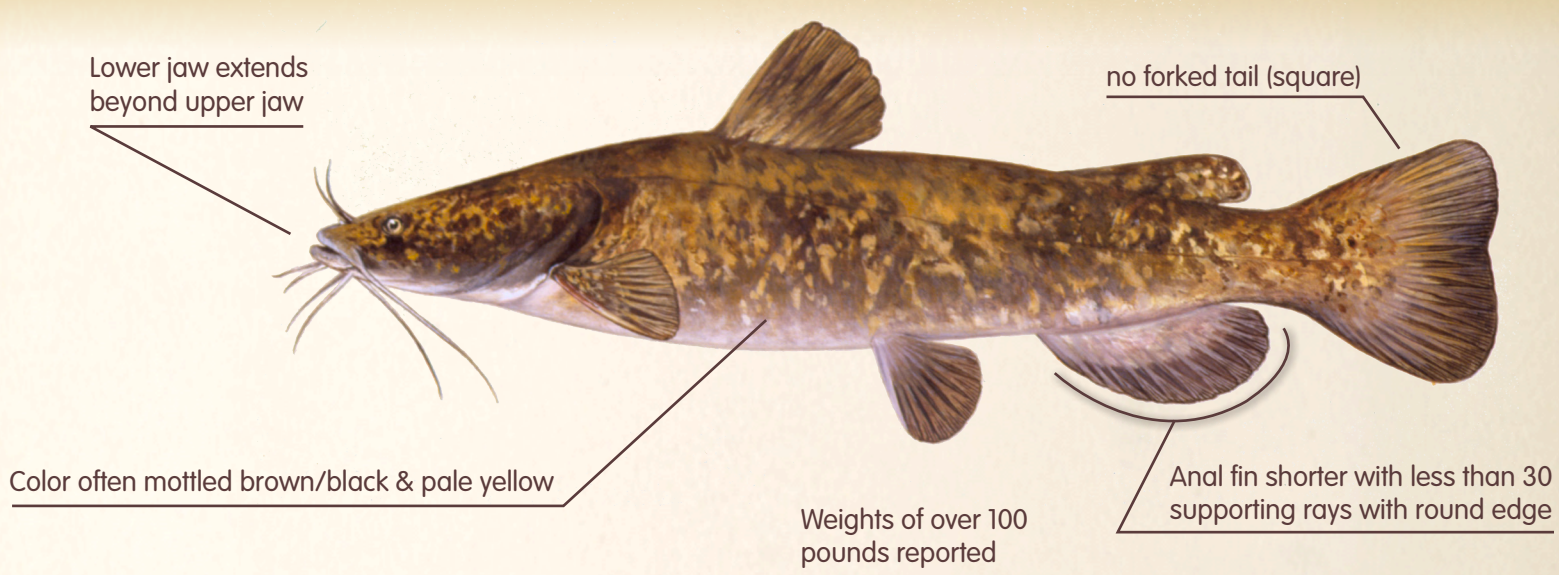
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

IDENTIFICATION OF
Flathead, Channel & Blue Catfish

There are three large catfish species in Iowa. Channel Catfish are one of the most widely distributed fishes in Iowa and are abundant in nearly every lake and moderate sized stream. Flathead Catfish are primarily a "big water" species found commonly in Iowa's border rivers, large interior streams, and occasionally in some lakes. Blue Catfish are another big water species that have always been relatively uncommon in Iowa, occurring at very low densities primarily in the Missouri River and the lower sections of its larger tributaries and occasionally in the Mississippi River below Lock and Dam 19 at Keokuk.

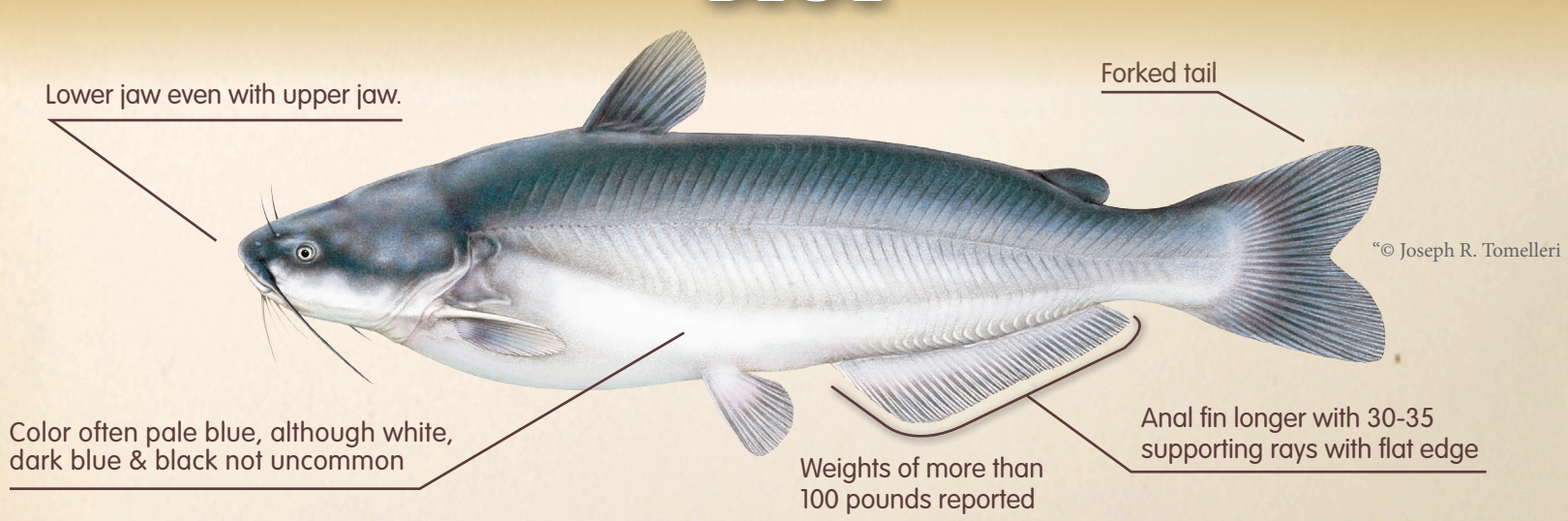
Below is a key to identify these three species. Remember, body color of catfishes varies widely depending on things like sex, maturity, and the micro habitat where the individual spends its time so color should not be used exclusively to identify catfishes. For example, spawning male Channel Catfish are often dark blue and can be confused with Blue Catfish if identification is based solely on color."

FLATHEAD



CHANNEL

BLUE



"© Joseph R. Tomelleri