



fathead minnow

Pimephales promelas

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Osteichthyes
Order:	Cypriniformes
Family:	Cyprinidae

Features

The average fathead minnow is 1 1/2 to three inches long. 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 other parts of the fish. A dark stripe is present in the middle of the dark olive back. There is a coppery tint behind the head and along the sides. The sides are silvery, often with a dark stripe. The belly is silvery-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 its snout.

Natural History

The fathead minnow lives in streams and lakes. It is considered the most abundant fish in Iowa. It 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. It eats algae, plant material, aquatic insects, and small crustaceans.

Most fathead minnows mature in their second year. Spawning occurs early May through August. The female deposits as many as 12,000 adhesive eggs on the underside of submerged objects. The male remains with the eggs until they hatch. A female may spawn 12 or more times in a single summer. The fathead minnow lives about three years.

Habitats

Interior rivers and streams; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; natural lakes and prairie marshes; Mississippi River; Missouri River

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001. *Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.