black bullhead

Ameiurus melas

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

Features

The average black bullhead weighs one-half to one pound. Like other catfish, it has four pairs of black barbels (whisker-like projections) around the mouth, no scales, and an adipose (fat) fin located near the tail fin. It also has a spine at the front of the dorsal and pectoral fins. The upper jaw sticks out past the lower jaw or is nearly equal with it. The body is olive or brownish on the back, green-gold on the sides, and yellow or white on the belly. The tail fin has a small notch, but is not forked.

Natural History

The black bullhead lives in creeks, rivers, ponds, impoundments, and oxbow lakes that have a silt bottom, turbid water, and not much current. It feeds on the bottom, eating both plant and animal material. It is active at night. It matures at one to three years of age and spawns in May or June. The female deposits 2,000 to 6,000 eggs in a nest fanned out on the bottom, often under logs or other objects. One of the parent fish remains with the eggs until hatching to keep predators away and to “fan” fresh water over them. Eggs hatch in seven to 10 days. The adult remains with the hatchlings until they are about one inch long. The black bullhead has an average life span of four years.

Habitats

Constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; natural lakes and prairie marshes; interior rivers and streams; 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.