northern pike

Esox lucius

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Osteichthyes
Order:	Salmoniformes
Family:	Esocidae

Features

The body of the northern pike is torpedo shaped with the dorsal and anal fin far back on the body. The fins are rounded and all except the pectoral fins have dark spots. The head is flattened and the jaws are duckbill-shaped and lined with sharp teeth. Scales are present on the cheek and half of the gill cover. There are never more than 10 sensory pores along the underside of the jaw. The eyes are yellow. The body is green with yellow spots on the sides. The belly is white to dark yellow. The state record northern pike weighed over 25 pounds and was 45 inches long. Individuals weighing over 10 pounds or more are fairly common in larger lakes and rivers.

Natural History

The northern pike lives in lakes, rivers, and marshes. It prefers water without strong currents and with many plants. It eats fish, insects, crayfish, frogs, and reptiles. It reaches maturity at three years of age. Spawning occurs in March just after ice-out. The female deposits up to 150,000 adhesive eggs that are scattered in marshy areas or other shallow water areas. Eggs hatch in 12-14 days. The northern pike's average life span is eight to 10 years.

Habitats

natural lakes and prairie marshes; interior rivers and streams; Mississippi River; Missouri River

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

statewide except the lower Missouri, Grand, and Chariton River drainages

Bibliography

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