pumpkinseed

Lepomis gibbosus

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Osteichthyes
Family:	Perciformes
Order:	Centrarchidae

Features

The pumpkinseed is a deep-bodied, slab-sided sunfish with a very small mouth -- the upper jaw does not reach the front margin on the eye when the mouth is closed. It is pale olive in color with purplish horizontal bars on the sides. The gill cover is quite small with a light-colored margin. It generally has a bright red semi-circular spot with six or more wavy emerald bars interspersed with gold or copper on the cheeks. It is one of the most colorful sunfish. It often hybridizes with bluegill or green sunfish, making specific identification difficult and sometimes inaccurate. Adults grow to eight to ten inches.

Natural History

The pumpkinseed is not abundant anywhere in Iowa. It is collected occasionally in the natural lakes, rarely in constructed lakes and the Mississippi River, and very rarely in interior rivers. Like all sunfish, it eats zooplankton (microscopic animals) when tiny, but switches to insects, snails, and other small mollusks, along with small fish as it reaches adulthood. The breeding season of the pumpkinseed occurs at about the same time as bluegill in Iowa. Nest preparation begins in May and continues through July. Several thousand eggs are deposited in each nest, after which the male guards the nest until hatching. Pumpkinseeds usually nest nearer to shore and in shallower water than bluegills, and if nesting space permits, they are colonial nesters. Shady spots over thin silt substrates on sand or fine gravel are preferred.

Habitats

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

Iowa Status

uncommon; native

Iowa Range

eastern two-thirds of Iowa

Bibliography

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