white sucker

Catostomus commersoni

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

Features

The white sucker is a slender, fine-scaled sucker that is tinted dark greenish along the back. Its sides have a silvery or brassy luster and the belly is white. The fleshy lips have numerous wart-like projections. The distinctive characteristic that separates this species from other suckers and redhorses is a complete lateral line (sensory organ on the side of the fish) containing 55-85 small scales. Adults commonly reach lengths of 10 to 16 inches and weigh up to two pounds.

Natural History

The white sucker is widely distributed in Iowa. It is common in lakes and small rivers and streams and less common in larger rivers. It eats almost any available food, but is principally a bottom feeder, eating aquatic insect larvae, small mollusks, crustaceans, and various terrestrial worms. Spawning starts with migratory spring runs that may be initiated by runoff from early snow melt, but actual spawning occurs in late spring. A large female may broadcast as many as 90,000 adhesive eggs in flowing water over gravel or rocks. The eggs hatch in about five to seven days. Growth of the white sucker ranges from seven inches at age one to 18 1/2 inches at age ten. White suckers are food for northern pike, muskellunge, walleye, sauger, largemouth bass, and smallmouth bass. They also are sold as bait fish.

Habitats

natural lakes and prairie marshes; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs; 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.