

## Channel Catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*)

### **Do they have any other names?**

Other names for channel catfish are spotted cat, blue cat, fiddler, lady cat, chucklehead cat, and willow cat.

### **Why are they called channel catfish?**

They are called catfish because their barbels resemble the whiskers of a cat. *Ictalurus* is Greek for “fish cat” and *punctatus* is Latin for “spotted,” in reference to the dark spots on the body.

### **What do they look like?**

Channel catfish are slender catfish with a deeply forked tail. The back and sides are olive-brown or slate-blue with few to many round black spots and the belly is silvery-white. The skin is smooth and scaleless and there are four barbels near the mouth that resemble the whiskers of a cat. They have sharp spines at the front of the dorsal (back) fin and two pectoral fins (belly fins closest to head).



Photo Credit: Duane Raver, USFWS

### **Where do they live in Indiana?**

Channel catfish are common throughout Indiana and can be found in the deep pools and runs of rivers and in lakes.

### **What kind of habitat do they need?**

In the river, adults are usually found in the larger pools, in deep water, or about submerged logs or other cover during the day. Then, they move into the riffles or shallow water at night to feed. The young are usually in the riffles or shallower waters.

### **How do they reproduce?**

Channel catfish spawn from the end of May through July. The male finds and cleans out a nest site, which is usually a natural cavity either around piles of drift, logs, undercut banks, or in the burrows of muskrats and beavers. The female deposits the eggs in the nest but does not provide further parental care. The eggs hatch in about a week and the fry stay in the nest for another seven to eight days. The male guards the fry until they leave the nest.

### **How old are they when they reproduce?**

Channel catfish are 4 or 5 years old when they are able to reproduce.

### **How long do they live?**

Channel catfish do not usually live past 6 or 7 years however some live more than 10 years.

### **How fast do they grow in Indiana?**

Channel catfish reach a length of about 2.6 inches in the first year. Adults are usually 12 to 32 inches long and weigh 0.8 to 15 pounds.

### **What do they eat?**

Channel catfish eat a wide variety of foods including fish, insects, crayfish, mollusks, and plant material. The young mainly feed on small insects. Food is mostly located by taste and smell; they have odor sensing organs and taste buds in high concentrations on their bodies which allow them to find food in dark, muddy waters.

### **What eats them?**

Adult channel catfish are eaten by larger fishes like the flathead catfish. Generally only larger fishes can eat them because the chance of getting spined by the channel catfish deters other predators. Young catfish have many predators including other fish and birds.

### **Are they safe to eat?**

Channel catfish are a very popular and good tasting food fish. Wild caught fish are just as healthy for you as most commercially bought fish and in many cases are healthier. You have probably heard about the fish consumption advisories and wonder if any Indiana fish are safe to eat. *The fish consumption advisories that are posted are based on a model that people are consuming 8 oz. of fish on 225 days each year over 70 years.* Most people do not eat fish anywhere close to that amount. However, any meat you consume will have some risk associated with it. If you are in a high risk group such as a pregnant woman or a child please consult the fish consumption advisory at: [www.in.gov/isdh/23650.htm](http://www.in.gov/isdh/23650.htm). You can also see which waterbody has advisories on it (most lakes and reservoirs are lower risk than rivers and streams).

### **How do I fish for them?**

Channel catfish may be caught on set lines, by jugging, or by still-fishing with rod and reel. A variety of live, cut, or prepared baits, including fish, crayfish, chicken entrails, blood, cheese, and commercial concoctions, are used. Sometimes they are caught by spinners, small spoons, and other artificial lures retrieved slowly near the bottom. Fishing is best near dusk and in the early part of the night.

### **How is Indiana managing channel catfish?**

The state of Indiana stocks channel catfish in many reservoirs and lakes. They are stocked on a two year cycle. Fish management surveys are used to observe the population and determine if stocking methods are beneficial for each particular water body.