

Redear sunfish (*Lepomis microlophus*)

Do they have any other names?

Redear sunfish are also called shellcracker, Georgia bream, cherry gill, chinquapin, improved bream, rouge ear sunfish and sun perch.

Why are they called redear?

They are called redear due to the red or orange colored border on the ear flap.

What do they look like?

The redear are a type of sunfish. They are a deep, slab-sided (tall and flat) fish with a small mouth. Back and sides are golden or light olive green with black vertical bars on the sides. The belly is yellow or yellow-orange and colors are brighter in males than females. The dorsal fin (fin on the top of the back) is continuous, with the first part being spiny and the back being soft.



Photo Credit: Duane Raver, USFWS

Where do they live in Indiana?

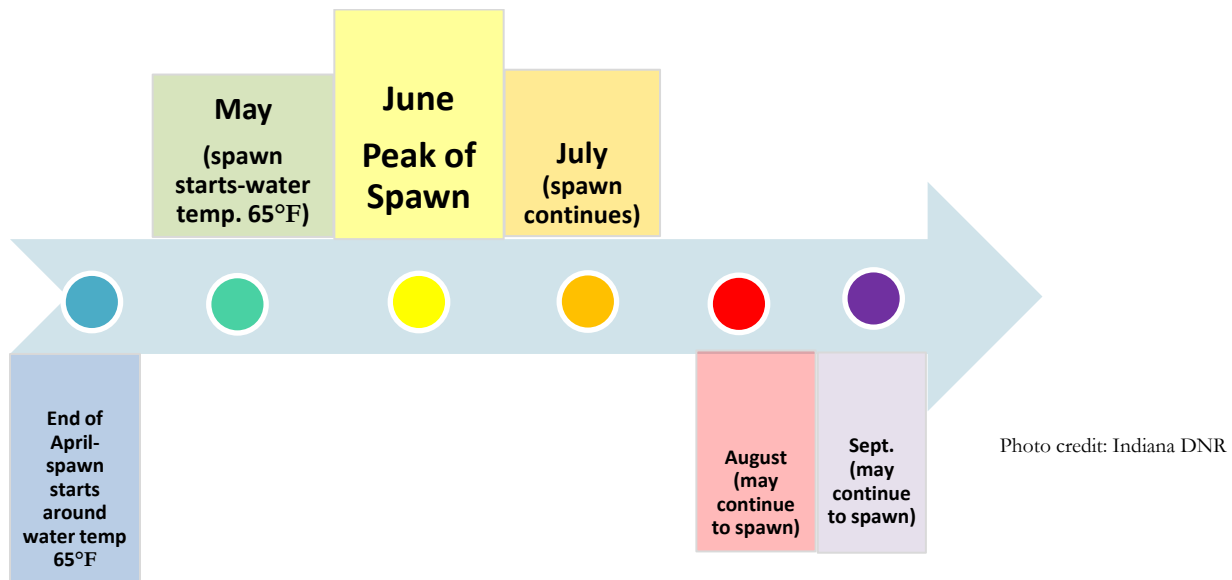
Redear sunfish are found almost everywhere in Indiana from ponds to large rivers. They are most abundant in lakes and man-made impoundments but can also be found in deep, quiet pools of streams.

What kind of habitat do they need?

They are often found in lakes and slow-moving streams. They prefer weed beds for cover. This allows them to hide from predators and find food.

How do they reproduce?

Redear sunfish begin nesting in the spring after the water temperature has reached about 65 °F.



Nests are built by the males in water from one to six feet deep. Almost any type of bottom may be used for nesting but gravel is preferred. The male constructs the nest by fanning away the sediment with his tail to form a shallow depression in the bottom, often known as a bed. Redear sunfish usually bed in colonies, with many nests adjacent to each other in a small area. A female is admitted into the nest once she is ready to lay eggs. The eggs are fertilized by the male as they are deposited onto the floor of the nest. The eggs hatch in three to four days depending on water temperature. After hatching, the fry remain in or near the nest for several days before dispersing and leaving the protective influence of the guardian male.

How old are they when they reproduce?

Redear sunfish can reproduce when they are 2 years old.

How long do they live?

Redear sunfish rarely live past 6 years.

How fast do they grow in Indiana?

Redear sunfish grow more rapidly and larger than bluegill in the same waters. Redear can reach around 4.3 inches in the second year and around 8 inches by the sixth year. They occasionally reach a length of 10.5 inches but seldom exceed 8.9 inches.

What do they eat?

Redear sunfish primarily eat snails, which explains the common name of “shellcracker.” Redear sunfish have hard throat teeth that allow them to crush the shells of the snails.

What eats them?

Redear sunfish are eaten by other fish, herons, osprey, eagles, raccoons, and humans, to name a few.

Are they safe to eat?

Redear sunfish are one of the tastiest fish you can find in Indiana but you may be wondering if they're safe to eat. 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. Redear sunfish are one of the “safest” fish to eat in Indiana as they are small and less fatty. *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 . You can also see which water bodies have advisories on them (most lakes and reservoirs are lower risk than rivers and streams).

How do I fish for them?

Most redear are caught from spawning “beds” in early summer. They may be taken on artificial lures, but natural baits, such as earthworms and grubs, are more effective. Since they have small mouths, the angler should use small hooks (size 8, 10, or even smaller) to catch redear sunfish.

How is Indiana managing redear sunfish?

Both redear sunfish and bluegill reproduce prolifically and can easily overpopulate a lake. Therefore, management strategies focus on increasing predation on these fish. This is done by changing largemouth bass regulations, lake drawdowns, and aquatic vegetation control (to increase visibility of redear and bluegill to predators). Fisheries biologists evaluate data collected during fisheries surveys to determine the type of management a specific body of water needs for good redear fishing. Fisheries research and management reports can be found at: fishing.IN.gov/3352.htm